

ADDRESS
4200 Campbell Ave.
Arlington, Virginia
22206

BOX OFFICE
703 820 9771
ADMIN OFFICE
571 527 1860

FACSIMILE
703 845 0236
WEBSITE
www.signature-theatre.org

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Eric Schaeffer
MANAGING DIRECTOR
Maggie Boland

signaturenews

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Contact:

Suzanne Stephens

Publicist

stephenss@signature-theatre.org

(571) 527-1833 (office) / (202) 438-6234 (mobile)

SIGNATURE THEATRE ANNOUNCES \$300,000 GRANT FROM THE SHEN FAMILY FOUNDATION TO COMMISSION NEW MUSICAL THEATER WORKS FROM EMERGING COMPOSERS

“THE NEXT GENERATION” EXPANDS THE AMERICAN MUSICAL VOICES PROJECT BEGUN IN 2006

Arlington, VA – June 19, 2008 – Signature Theatre’s Artistic Director **Eric Schaeffer** is pleased to announce a \$300,000, multi-year grant from **The Shen Family Foundation** for **The Next Generation**, a program to help emerging composers create new works for musical theater. An expansion of Signature’s **American Musical Voices Project**, this program will award three commissions in 2008: composers **Matt Conner**, **Adam Gwon**, and **Gabriel Kahane** will each receive a \$25,000 commission to write new musicals for Signature Theatre. The Theatre is also awarding honorees **Peter Foley** and **Marisa Michelson** \$5,000 grants for the development of their musical ideas in preparation for three additional \$25,000 Next Generation commissions to be given in May 2009.

The program also includes a performance component for the new works. The Next Generation commissioned artists will take part in Signature Theatre's new summer performance initiative entitled the “21/24 Signature Lab.” Beginning in July 2009, each commissioned musical will have a three-week rehearsal period and two performances. “21/24” will also feature a cabaret performance highlighting the composers of The Next Generation.

"We're grateful for the continuing support of The Shen Family Foundation toward our new American musical theater initiative. It's an exciting time at Signature Theatre as we provide opportunities for up-and-coming composers to develop and present their new works," stated **Eric Schaeffer**. "The Next Generation grants will help pave the way for the future writers of the theater. Each of these writers has a unique voice and I am thrilled not only to give them the opportunity to write these new musicals but also to present them over the coming years."

Ted and Mary Jo Shen, executive directors of The Shen Family Foundation, released the following statement: “We are very excited about broadening our commissioning collaboration with Signature Theatre to include emerging composers who write with exceptional originality and high artistic aspiration. Eric Schaeffer and his colleagues make ideal partners for us because of their longstanding commitment to excellence and innovation in the musical theater works they produce.”

The American Musical Voices Project began in May 2006. At that time Musical Theater Composer Grants presented to Ricky Ian Gordon, Michael John LaChiusa, and Joseph Thalken awarded each composer \$25,000 a year plus health coverage for four years. Each of those grants was accompanied by a commission to create a new full-length musical that would be produced at Signature Theatre during its 2009-2011 seasons. In addition, Musical Theater Leadership Awards were made to four individuals in recognition of their extraordinary influence on and contribution to the advancement of new musical theater. Those recipients were orchestrator Bruce Coughlin, composer Adam Guettel, singer/actress Audra McDonald, and director/musical director/orchestrator Ted Sperling. Each Leadership Award was presented in conjunction with a one-time grant in the amount of \$25,000 to support the artist’s continued contributions to musical theater.

To experience the music of Signature’s Next Generation composers and get further information, please visit the continually developing microsite signature-theatre.org/american_voices_next_gen.htm.

THE NEXT GENERATION Composer Biographies

Matt Conner has been performing, composing, teaching, and music directing in the Washington, DC metropolitan area for the last eleven years. Mr. Conner’s world premiere musical, *Nevermore*, was produced at Signature Theatre in 2006 (directed by Eric Schaeffer with orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick). He recently wrote the book/lyrics/music to *A Carol Christmas* for the Gay Men’s Chorus of Washington DC, produced in December 2007, as well as a new commissioned work for Signature Theatre entitled *Crossing*, which had its first reading in October 2007. Among Mr. Conner’s stage credits are: Aurelio/Ensemble in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Scotty in *Merrily We Roll Along*, Toby in *Witches of Eastwick*, Steward in *Into the Woods*, John Hinckley in *Assassins*, and Tamate in *Pacific Overtures* (all at Signature Theatre), Riff in *West Side Story* (Olney Theatre Center) and The Page of Herodias in Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* (Synetic Theatre). Mr. Conner received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Music Theatre from Shenandoah Conservatory of Music and has been the music director on numerous shows including *Brigadoon*, *Grease*, *Crazy for You*, *Shenandoah*, and his original score, *A Christmas Carol*. Mr. Conner is currently writing *Senior Moments/Silver*, a Signature Theatre commissioned musical still in the pre-workshop phase, and *Partial Eclipse*, a world premiere song cycle to be produced at Signature Theatre in June 2009. Mr. Conner is also working on a children’s show called *The King of Pizza*, about diversity and working together, which will be produced in the fall of 2008. Mr. Conner is a proud voice on the Grammy Award®-winning recording of Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*, a teaching artist with Creative Cauldron, Inc., and a

member of the Actors Equity Association. For more information on Matt Conner, visit www.mattconner.org.

Adam Gwon is a composer and lyricist recently named one of “50 to Watch” by *The Dramatist* magazine. His latest musical, *Ordinary Days*, will receive its world premiere at Pennsylvania Centre Stage in the summer of 2008, and its UK premiere at the Finborough Theatre in London in fall 2008. His other musicals include the upcoming *Bernice Bobs Her Hair*, with librettist Julia Jordan and director Joe Calarco; *Ethan Frome*, with bookwriter Michael Ruby; and *Lulu*. His work has been seen at Primary Stages, the York Theatre, New Dramatists, NYMF, NAMT, American Music Theatre Project, the ASCAP/Disney Musical Theatre Workshop, HERE, the Flea Theater, Tribeca Performing Arts Center, and many others. He has scored more than 25 productions across the country, and also writes for film and advertising. Adam is a graduate of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, was a 2006-2007 musical theater fellow at the Dramatists Guild, and is currently a teaching artist with Roundabout Theatre Company, where he helps 8th graders write musicals about paintings, presidents, and pajamas. For more information visit www.adamgwon.com.

Composer/performer **Gabriel Kahane** defies classification through his sonically challenging, emotionally resonant, and deeply accessible works. Kahane’s most well-known work is his *Craigslitlieder*, an eight-movement song cycle comprised of settings of anonymous classified ads from craigslist.org. In addition to its many performances throughout the US by the composer, *Craigslitlieder* was heard in excerpt at Carnegie Hall this season in a recital by critically-acclaimed baritone Thomas Meglitoranza. The summer of 2008 will witness the premiere of Kahane’s *For The Union Dead*, a new song cycle on poems by Robert Lowell for small ensemble, at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. Among his varied credits as a performer, Gabriel has appeared in recital with Grammy winning bass-baritone Thomas Quasthoff throughout Europe, toured the Schumann Piano Quintet with the Mark Morris Dance Group, and accompanied violinist Hilary Hahn in the slow movement of the Sibelius Violin Concerto in a dirty bar. He has shared the stage with indie-rock luminaries My Brightest Diamond and Luke Temple, and has recorded with Sufjan Stevens and former Nickel Creek front-man Chris Thile. Kahane’s sprawling self-titled debut LP to be released in October 2008, features twenty-odd musicians while deftly marrying dense harmony and counterpoint to tasty melodic hooks. Much in demand as a composer of chamber music, Gabriel is currently completing solo piano commissions for pianists Natasha Paremski as well as for his father, Jeffrey Kahane. An evening-length work exploring his family’s genealogy and journey from Germany to the United States will premiere in the fall of 2009. An avid theater artist, Kahane has collaborated extensively with the Obie-winning New York City-based downtown theater company Les Frères Corbusier, serving as musical director for a number of their productions including *Hell House*, *A Very Merry Unauthorized Scientology Pageant*, and the Los Angeles production of *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*. Visit www.gabrielkahane.com.

THE NEXT GENERATION Honoree Biographies

Peter Foley's music and lyrics for *The Hidden Sky* earned him an NEA grant, the Richard Rodgers Award, the Stephen Sondheim Award, and a Jonathan Larson Foundation grant. *The Hidden Sky* premiered at the Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia, where it was nominated for seven Barrymore Awards including Outstanding Original Score and Outstanding Production; it was subsequently produced at the Spirit of Broadway Theater in Norwich, Connecticut, where it received the Spirit Award for Best Original Score. Concert versions have been performed at Ars Nova and Joe's Pub in NYC. Peter's other stage works include *The Bear* (Golden Fleece, Triangle Theater Co., Opera Unlimited), music for "To Sing" from *Songs from an Unmade Bed* (New York Theatre Workshop) and scores for several plays, including *Newton's Universe* (Arts at St. Ann's), *Henry V* (New Jersey Shakespeare Festival), W.B. Yeats's *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (Playwrights Horizons Theater School), Andre Gregory's *Alice in Wonderland* (Berkeley Theater Project), and *The Mildred Piece* (InCoAct, NYC). Upcoming theater projects include a music-theater piece with playwright Ellen McLaughlin and the new musical comedy, *Bloom*. Peter's songs have been performed at Lincoln Center, Town Hall, Symphony Space and LaMaMa, among other venues. He has also composed scores and themes for numerous television documentaries, including "Listening To America with Bill Moyers" and the award-winning PBS series "Art:21." Peter has served as musical director/keyboardist for the premieres of Rinde Eckert's *Highway Ulysses* (American Repertory Theater, dir. Robert Woodruff), Kenneth Vega's *Heartfield* (Baltimore Theater Project), and for several concerts by actor/singer-songwriter Manoel Felciano. He is the recipient of fellowships and residencies from the MacDowell and Millay colonies, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Music Theater Conference, and the Sundance Playwrights Retreat at Ucross. He lives outside New York City with his wife, writer/director Kate Chisholm, and their daughter. For more information on Peter Foley visit hellagoodmusic.com.

Marisa Michelson currently lives in New York City, where she teaches singing and piano to children and adults both privately and through Soyulla artists. Her original musical *Still Life With Toe Shoes* (written with Joshua H. Cohen) will have its world premiere this July with Old Deerfield Productions in western Massachusetts, before traveling to Macedonia in November as part of the Albanian National Theatre Festival. Marisa and Joshua were also recently commissioned by the Prospect Theater Company to create a short musical based on Rene Magritte's painting "The Lovers." Marisa's full-length musical, *Hotel Sarajevo*, for which she wrote the book, music, and lyrics, has received readings at CAP 21/NYU and Smith College, and is currently being developed for education and outreach with the New York based QuoVadimus Theatre. This past March, Marisa was selected to participate in the New Dramatists Guild's Composer-Librettist studio (where she collaborated with such writers as Rinne Groff and such performers as Manoel Felciano). In 2006 and 2007 Marisa traveled to India on a fellowship to compose music and study Indian Hindustani singing in the Global Arts Village, an international artists' colony. Marisa graduated with a BFA in Drama from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Winner of the 2006 St. Botolph Award for Excellence in Composition, she has studied composition with Adam Guettel as well as classical voice at Tanglewood Young Artists' Institute. Visit www.marisamichelson.com.

THE AMERICAN MUSICAL VOICES PROJECT Partners

Founded in 1990, **Signature Theatre** is a non-profit professional theater company dedicated to producing contemporary musicals and plays, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. Signature is renowned for combining Broadway-quality productions in intimate playing spaces. In addition to the finest talent from the DC metropolitan area and New York, Signature has been home to such theater luminaries as Cameron Mackintosh, Terrence McNally, John Kander and Fred Ebb, and the company's signature, Stephen Sondheim.

Under Co-Founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, Signature has been nominated for 234 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theater and has been honored with 59 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, and 2006, and Outstanding Play in 1999. Signature has also been honored by the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation for "its artistic vision and commitment to the support and development of musical theatre artists."

A committed and intrepid producer of new work, Signature has presented over 25 world premiere productions and currently has ten world premiere commissions. These include Michael John LaChiusa's *Giant* (2009); *Glory Days* by Nick Blaemire and James Gardiner (2008); *The Word Begins* by Steve Connell and Sekou (Tha misfit) (2007); *Saving Aimee* by Kathie Lee Gifford, David Pomerance and David Friedman (2007); *Nevermore* by Matt Conner and Grace Barnes (2006); Michael John LaChiusa's *The Highest Yellow* (2004); *The Gospel According to Fishman* by Michael Lazar and Richard Oberacker (2002); *The Rhythm Club* by Chad Bequelin and Matt Sklar (2000); and Kander and Ebb's *Over & Over* (1999). Other theater works developed at Signature include the American premiere of *The Witches of Eastwick* by John Dempsey and Dana P. Rowe (2007), the rarely seen Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro* with a new book adaptation by Joe DiPietro (2004), *110 in the Shade* by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt with new orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick (2003), the American premiere of *The Fix* by John Dempsey and Dana Rowe (1998), and a revised version of *The Rink* by Kander, Ebb, and McNally (1996).

Stephen Sondheim is central to Signature Theatre's identity, beginning in 1991 with *Sweeney Todd*, which earned five Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical. The upstart young company followed its breakout triumph with the first regional staging of *Assassins* outside of New York and earned a second consecutive Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Musical. Subsequent productions include *Company*, *Into the Woods*, *Passion*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *A Stephen Sondheim Evening*, *A Little Night Music*, *Gypsy*, *Putting It Together*, *Follies*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Pacific Overtures*, and *Merrily We Roll Along*.

In 2007, Signature moved into a new two-theater complex in Arlington, Virginia. Of Signature Theatre's new space, Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times* wrote "the company must find the sleek, new campus — with a large bar, two lobbies and two theaters — positively swanky" and *The Washington Post* called the new theater "a signature space to match its reputation." For more information on Signature Theatre visit www.signature-theatre.org.

The Shen Family Foundation is committed to supporting and encouraging excellence, originality, and high aspiration in musical theater music-writing through its Musical Theater Composers Project. Inspired by the extraordinary, innovative musical theater works of Stephen Sondheim, the Foundation has engaged with non-profit theater organizations to help fund more than 40 projects since 2002 involving the creation, development, production, and cast recordings of works by Mr. Sondheim, and the next generation of innovative musical theater composers including Ricky Ian Gordon, Adam Guettel, Michael John LaChiusa, and Joseph Thalken.

Productions for which the Foundation has provided or committed major funding include: the Kennedy Center's *Sondheim Celebration* (2002); Stephen Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along* Reunion Concert (Musical Theatre Works, 2002), *Assassins* (Roundabout Theatre, 2004), *The Frogs* (Lincoln Center Theater, 2004), *Pacific Overtures* (Roundabout, 2004), *Follies* (Encores!, 2007), *Merrily We Roll Along* (Signature Theatre, 2007), *Sunday in the Park with George* (Roundabout, 2008) and *Bounce* (The Public Theater, 2008); Symphony Space's *Wall to Wall Sondheim* (2005); Ricky Ian Gordon's *My Life with Albertine* (Playwrights Horizons, 2003), *Orpheus and Euridice* (Lincoln Center, 2005), *The Grapes of Wrath* (Minnesota Opera, 2007, and Utah Symphony & Opera, 2007), and *States of Independence* (Northwestern University, 2009); Adam Guettel's *The Light in the Piazza* (Lincoln Center Theater, 2005); Michael John LaChiusa's *R Shomon* (Williamstown Theatre Festival, 2004), *The Highest Yellow* (Signature Theatre, 2004), *See What I Wanna See* (Public Theater, 2005), *Bernarda Alba* (Lincoln Center Theater, 2006), *Send (who are you? I love you)* (Houston Grand Opera, 2006), *Hotel C'Est L'Amour* (Blank Theatre Company, 2006), *Little Fish* (Blank Theatre, 2007), and *Queen of the Mist* (Transport Group, 2009); Joseph Thalken's *Was* (Human Race Theater, 2004, and Northwestern University, 2005), and *Harold and Maude* (Paper Mill Playhouse, 2005, TheatreWorks, 2005, and Human Race Theater, 2007).

The Foundation has also provided separate major funding for the cast recordings of: Stephen Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures* (2005); Ricky Ian Gordon's *Only Heaven* (2002), *My Life with Albertine* (2003), *Dream True* (2006), *Orpheus and Euridice* (2006), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (2008); Michael John LaChiusa's *See What I Wanna See* (2006), *Bernarda Alba* (2006), and *Little Fish* (2008).

Other productions funded by the Foundation include *Meet John Doe* (Andrew Gerle/Eddie Sugarman, Ford's Theatre, 2007) and *Take Flight* (David Shire/Richard Maltby, Menier Chocolate Factory, 2007). For information about The Shen Family Foundation visit www.shenfamilyfoundation.org.

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