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SIGNATURE THEATRE ANNOUNCES CASTING FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE PRODUCTION OF MICHAEL JOHN LaCHIUSA'S *GIANT*

**World Premiere to be Directed by Jonathan Butterell, Starring Lewis Cleale,
Betsy Morgan, Ashley Robinson, Judy Blazer, and John Dossett**

First Production of Signature's American Musical Voices Project

**Performances Run April 28 through May 31
All Evening Performances to Start at 7:00 pm, Matinees at 1:00 pm**

Arlington, VA – Eric Schaeffer, Artistic Director of Signature Theatre, today announced casting for the world premiere production of the musical *Giant* by composer **Michael John LaChiusa** and playwright **Sybille Pearson**. Epic in vision and scope, *Giant* chronicles the life and times of cattleman Jordan “Bick” Benedict, his naïve young society wife, and their family in the sweeping panorama of Texas, the land that brings them together and almost splits them apart. A sensational story of power, love, lust, and bigotry among the wealthy Anglo cattle barons and oil tycoons, and the downtrodden Mexican-Americans who work for them, *Giant* is based on the classic novel by Pulitzer Prize-winning author **Edna Ferber**, which also inspired the film starring James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor, and Rock Hudson. Written by Michael John LaChiusa, considered one of today’s most intelligent and innovative musical theater composers, *Giant* is the first work produced through Signature’s multi-year **American Musical Voices Project**. *Giant* will run April 28 through May 31, 2009 in Signature’s MAX Theatre.

Schaeffer stated, “Signature is very fortunate to inaugurate our American Musical Voices Project with the world premiere of *Giant* by Michael John LaChiusa and Sybille Pearson. Director Jonathan Butterell has assembled a terrific cast for this premiere and it promises to get this special series off to an amazing start. We’ve been working on the show for over three years and it is exciting to bring it to fruition. Ambitious, enthralling and yes, even giant – *Giant* promises to be a ground-breaking new musical for America.”

The 21-member cast is led by **Lewis Cleale** as Jordan “Bick” Benedict. Most recently in *The Fantasticks* Off-Broadway and *Spamalot* on Broadway, Cleale earned

a Helen Hayes Award for his interpretation of Giorgio in *Passion* at Signature Theatre. **Betsy Morgan** of Broadway's *The Little Mermaid* and *High Fidelity* plays the role of Leslie, Bick's wife. **Ashley Robinson**, who performed in the original Chicago company of *Wicked* and the Irish Rep's production of *Take Me Along*, is Jett. **Judy Blazer**, a frequent performer on and off Broadway known for her work in LaChiusa's musicals, is Luz. Acclaimed Broadway veteran **John Dossett** who received a Tony® nomination for his role in the 2003 revival of *Gypsy*, is Bawley.

The cast also includes **Enrique Acevedo** (Ensemble), **Raul Aranas** (Polo), **Marisa Echeverria** (Juana), **Jessica Grové** (Lil' Luz), **Michael Thomas Holmes** (Pinky), **Jordon Nichols** (Jordy), **Andres Quintero** (Angel, Sr. and Jr.), **Michelle Rios** (Lupe) **Isabel Santiago** (Angel Jr.'s mother), **Paul A. Schaefer** (Mike), **Martin Sola** (Dimodeo), **Nick Spangler** (Bob, Sr. and Jr., Lord Karfrey), **Katie Thompson** (Vashti), **Julie Tolivar** (Lady Karfrey), **Mariand Torres** (Analita), and **Lori Wilner** (Adarine).

Jonathan Butterell, known for his musical staging of the Tony Award®-winning shows *The Light in the Piazza*, *Assassins*, and revival of *Nine*, directs. The creative team also includes set designer **Dane Laffrey**, costume designer Tony Award®-winning **Susan Hilferty**, lighting designer **Japhy Weideman**, and sound designer **Matt Rowe**, and choreographer **Ernesto Alonso Palma**. The music director is **Chris Fenwick** and orchestrations are by **Bruce Couglin**.

In 2006, Signature Theatre was the recipient of a one million dollar grant from **The Shen Family Foundation**. The funding allowed Signature to launch the **American Musical Voices Project**, which is commissioning and developing three brand new musicals from three of the country's most exciting emerging composers: **Michael John LaChiusa**, **Ricky Ian Gordon**, and **Joseph Thalken**. Eric Schaeffer will oversee each composer's project and the Theatre will present a full production on Signature's stage in coming seasons.

This season, in addition to *Giant*, Signature is presenting LaChiusa's *See What I Wanna See* from April 7 through May 31. The company produced the world premiere of LaChiusa's *The Highest Yellow* in 2004 and performed his *First Lady Suite* in 1995.

Performances of *Giant* run April 28 through May 31 in Signature's MAX Theatre. Tickets, ranging in price from \$49 - \$77, are available by calling Ticketmaster at (703) 573-SEAT (7328) or visiting www.signature-theatre.org.

In a change from the standard Signature Theatre performance schedule, show times are Tuesdays through Fridays at 7:00 pm, Saturdays at 1:00 pm and 7:00 pm, and Sundays at 1:00 pm and 7:00 pm. On Sunday, May 10, there will be a 3:00 pm matinee with no evening performance. Performances will start promptly for this three-act musical.

Giant is sponsored by The Shen Family Foundation with additional support provided by the HRH Foundation. The play is produced with the assistance of The Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays. *Giant* is a Meet The Composer Commissioning Music/USA commission. *Giant* was commissioned as part of a national series of works from Meet The Composer's Commissioning Music/USA program, which is made possible by generous support from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the

Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Helen F. Whitaker Fund. Additional support provided by Exxon Mobil.

Giant

Music and lyrics by Michael John LaChiusa
Book by Sybille Pearson
Based on a novel by Edna Ferber

Bick	Lewis Cleale
Leslie	Betsy Morgan
Jett	Ashley Robinson
Luz	Judy Blazer
Bawley	John Dossett
Ensemble	Enrique Acevedo
Polo	Raul Aranas
Juana	Marisa Echeverria
Lil' Luz	Jessica Grové
Pinky	Michael Thomas Holmes
Jordy	Jordon Nichols
Angel, Sr. and Jr.	Andres Quintero
Lupe	Michelle Rios
Angel's mother	Isabel Santiago
Mike	Paul A. Schaefer
Dimodeo	Martin Sola
Bob, Sr. and Jr., Lord Karfrey	Nick Spangler
Vashti	Katie Thompson
Lady Karfrey	Julie Tolivar
Analita	Mariand Torres
Adarine	Lori Wilner

Scenic Designer	Dane Laffrey
Costume Designer	Susan Hilferty
Lighting Designer	Japhy Weideman
Sound Designer	Matt Rowe
Choreographer	Ernesto Alonso Palma
Orchestrator	Bruce Coughlin
Music Director	Chris Fenwick
Director	Jonathan Butterell

BIOS

Cast

Lewis Cleale (Bick) Broadway: Sir Galahad and others in *Spamalot, Amour*, Sir Harry in *Once Upon a Mattress* (with Sarah Jessica Parker), *Swinging on a Star* (Drama Desk nomination). Off-Broadway: The Narrator/El Gallo in *The Fantasticks, Time and Again* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *A New Brain* (Lincoln Center), *Call Me Madam*

(opposite Tyne Daly at Encores!), *Big City Rhythm*. National Tours: Joe Gillis in *Sunset Boulevard* (opposite Petula Clark), Lt. Cable in *South Pacific* (with Robert Goulet). Regional: more than 30 leading roles including Giorgio in Signature Theatre's *Passion* (Helen Hayes Award) and John Adams in Ford's Theatre's *1776* (Helen Hayes nomination). Recordings include William Finn's *Infinite Joy, Myths and Hymns, Sara Zahn: Witchcraft* and four original cast albums.

Betsy Morgan (Leslie) Broadway: *The Little Mermaid, High Fidelity* (Original Cast Recordings). New York Theatre and Workshops: *Sea Change, The Addams Family* (With Nathan Lane and Bebe Neuwirth), *Prairie* (With Patrick Swayze and Melissa Gilbert, Dir. Francesca Zambello), *Leap of Faith* (Dir. Taylor Hackford), *Memphis* (Dir. Chris Ashley), *The Fantasticks* 2006 revival (Dir. Tom Jones), *Bernarda Alba* at Lincoln Center (Dir. Graciela Daniele). National Tour: *Mamma Mia!* Regional: *The Light in the Piazza* at Pioneer Theatre Co. and *Of Mice and Men* (Dir. Mark Lamos), a tribute to Paul Newman, at the Westport Country Playhouse. TV: "Flight of the Conchords" (HBO) "Cupid" (ABC).

Ashley Robinson (Jett) Off-Broadway/Regional: *Wicked* - Original Chicago Company - with Ana Gasteyer (Fiyero u/s, Ensemble), Irish Rep: *Take Me Along* (Richard), *Meet Me In St. Louis* (Lon), *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, *Hair* (Claude, Prince Music Theatre), *Floyd Collins* (Floyd - Gerald Freedman, dir.), *The Good War* (Maltz-Jupiter), *Twelfth Night* (Feste) *Waiting for Godot* (Lucky) *Cripple of Inishmaan* (Billy) **Developmental:** *A Minister's Wife* (a new musical by Joshua Schmidt and Austin Pendleton - Marchbanks), *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (Aggie Boy - Joe Mantello, dir./ Roundabout Theatre), *Equus* (Alan - with Austin Pendleton), *Total Eclipse* (Rimbaud - with Austin Pendleton and Micky Dolenz). **Film/TV:** "Hate" (Showtime with Marica Gay Harden), "Fallen Souls" (the Villain), "The Accident." **Education:** University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

Judith Blazer (Luz) Broadway: *LoveMusik*, Neil Simon's *45 Seconds from Broadway* (Cindy), *Titanic* (Lady Caroline), *Me and My Girl* (Sally), *A Change in the Heir* (Prince Conrad). Off Broadway: *Candide* (The Old Lady) with New York City Opera, *Bernarda Alba* (Lincoln Center Theater), *Sweeny Todd* (The Beggar Woman) with New York City Opera, *Thomashefsky* (with Michael Tilson Thomas, Carnegie Hall), *The Torch Bearers* (Florence) with The Drama Dept., *Hurrah at Last*, by Richard Greenberg (Gia) with the Roundabout Theatre, *Hello Again* by Michael John LaChiusa (the Nurse) at Lincoln Center, *Connecticut Yankee* (Alice/Sandy) with New York City Encores at City Center, vocal soloist in Twyla Tharpe's *Everlast* at the Met. Regional: Title roles in: *Funny Girl* (Sundance), *The Night Governess* (McCarter), *The Miracle Worker* (George St. Playhouse), *Peter Pan* (Artpark), *My Fair Lady* (Paper Mill Playhouse), *Twelfth Night* (Maria), Long Wharf Theatre, *On the Twentieth Century* (Lily), Musical Theatre of San Jose. TV: "Law and Order," "As The World Turns," "Guiding Light," "Bernstein's New York" (PBS), "In Performance at the White House" (PBS). Recordings: featured on over 20 CDs. Education: The Manhattan School of Music, New York University Faculty Member, founder and president of The Artist's Crossing Theatre Co. & School.

John Dossett (Bawley) has been in 13 Broadway productions, including: *Fifth of July, Mastergate, A Prelude to a Kiss, Ragtime, Dinner at Eight, Gypsy* (Tony Award® Nomination), *Democracy*, and *The Constant Wife*. Off-Broadway and

Regionally: *White People* (Atlantic Stages 2), *Saved* (Playwrights Horizons), *The Clean House* and *Hello Again* (Lincoln Center Theatre), *Captains Courageous* and *Elmer Gantry* (Ford's Theatre), *A Little Night Music* (Kennedy Center), *Dinner With Friends*, the first national tour of *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *Trudy Blue* (MCC Theater). Member of Circle Rep. for 14 years: *Reckless*, *The Diviners*, *Childe Byron*, *Dalton's Back*, *Sunshine*, *El Salvador*, among many others. TV/Film credits include: "Gossip Girl," "Hack," all the "Law & Orders," "Sex and the City," "Homicide," "That Night," "Longtime Companion" and the HBO miniseries "John Adams" (Benjamin Rush).

CREATORS

Five-time Tony Award® nominee **Michael John LaChiusa** (Composer and Lyricist), is a powerful presence on the American musical theater scene. LaChiusa first came to national attention by winning Off-Broadway's 1993 Obie Award for his musicals *First Lady Suite* and *Hello, Again*. Six years later LaChiusa was represented on Broadway during the 1999-2000 season by two more musicals, *The Wild Party* and *Marie Christine*, which together received 12 Tony Award® nominations for the season — garnering LaChiusa two nominations for each production Best Score and Best Book (along with George C. Wolfe on *The Wild Party*). He received his first Tony Award® nomination for Best Book (co-written with Graciela Daniele and Jim Lewis) for *Chronicle of Death Foretold*, produced on Broadway by Lincoln Center Theater Company in 1996. LaChiusa's works also include *Send (who are you? I love you)*, written for Audra McDonald and commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera; *Tres Niñas* (written with Ellen Fitzhugh); *Bernarda Alba* (Lincoln Center Theater); *Lovers and Friends: Chautauqua Variations* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *Little Fish* (Second Stage); and *Break/Agnes/Eulogy for Mister Hamm* (Playwrights Horizons). He is a recipient of the Gilman-Gonzalez-Falla Musical Theatre Award.

Sybil Pearson (Book) wrote the book for the musical *Baby*. She is the author of the plays *Sally and Marsha*, *Phantasie*, *Watching The Dog*, *Unfinished Stories*, and *True History and Real Adventure*, a play with music (composer Mel Marvin). She and Michael John LaChiusa have recently started work on a commission for the Metropolitan Opera Company. She has won the Berrilla Kerr Award for Playwriting, the Darryl Roth Creative Spirit Award, has been a recipient of a Rockefeller Playwrights Fellowship, a participant at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, the Sundance Playwrights Conference, is a founding member of The Playwrights Circle at The New York Theatre Workshop and an Artistic Resident at the Vineyard Theater in New York City. She is on the faculty for The Graduate Program For Musical Theater Writing at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University.

Edna Ferber (Original novel) (1885 – 1968) was the original author of such screen classics as *Show Boat*, *Cimarron*, and *Saratoga*, and coauthor with George S. Kaufman of *Dinner at Eight* and *Stage Door*. She was among the most popular and acclaimed American novelists between World War I and World War II, as well as a noted playwright, short-story writer, and charter member of the Algonquin Round Table. She is also the author of *So Big*, for which she won a Pulitzer Prize in 1924.

Jonathan Butterell (Director) most recently directed *Tres Niñas* by Ellen Fitzhugh and Michael John LaChiusa as part of *Inner Voices: Solo Musicals* at New York's Zipper Factory Theatre. He created the musical staging for the 2005 Tony Award®-winning *The Light in the Piazza* at Lincoln Center and on the US tour, and the 2004 Tony Award®-winning production of Sondheim's *Assassins* for Roundabout at Studio 54. He choreographed the 2003 Tony Award®-winning revival of Maury Yeston's *Nine* for Roundabout on Broadway, starring Antonio Banderas & Chita Rivera, as well as the London Donmar Warehouse, Buenos Aires, and Tokyo productions. Other Broadway credits include the recent revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Additional US work includes musical staging for the original workshop of Sondheim's *Wise Guys* at New York Theater Workshop, and Ahrens and Flaherty's *A Man of No Importance* for Lincoln Center Theatre. He contributed musical staging to Michael John LaChiusa's *See What I Wanna See* both at Williamstown Theatre Festival and at the Public Theatre in New York City. Additional international credits include *Company*, *Habeas Corpus*, *Into the Woods*, *How I Learned to Drive*, *The Maids*, and *Electra* all at London's Donmar Warehouse and *Orpheus Descending* and Strindberg's *Creditors* at Theatre Project Tokyo.

ABOUT SIGNATURE

Under the leadership of co-founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer and Managing Director Maggie Boland, Signature is a non-profit professional theater company dedicated to producing contemporary musicals and plays, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. To date, Signature has presented over 25 world premiere productions and is renowned for combining Broadway-quality productions with intimate playing spaces. In addition to the finest talent from the DC metropolitan area and New York, Signature has been a home to such theater luminaries as John Kander and Fred Ebb, Cameron Mackintosh, Terrence McNally, and the company's signature, Stephen Sondheim. Signature has been nominated for 276 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 Theatre is supported by a grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Directions

Signature Theatre is just nine minutes from downtown Washington, DC in Arlington's Shirlington Village. The new theater complex is located at 4200 Campbell Avenue (22206) off I-395 at the Shirlington exit. After the exit, blue Signature signs mark the way to the Theatre. Free parking is available in two adjacent public garages. Please note that Campbell Avenue is a new street and some GPS online mapping systems do not yet recognize Signature Theatre's address. For directions visit www.signature-theatre.org.

Contact Information

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Signature Theatre

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