

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
(571) 527-1833 (office) / (202) 438-6234 (mobile)
stephenss@signature-theatre.org

Signature Theatre to Honor Stephen Sondheim at Gala Benefit April 27 at the Embassy of Italy

**Theatre to pay tribute to composer by establishing annual
'Sondheim Award'**

**Gala is Chaired by Kenneth and Bonnie Feld, with Honorary Hosts
His Excellency and Mrs. Giovanni Castellaneta, Ambassador of
Italy to the United States**

Arlington, VA – Signature Theatre will honor **Stephen Sondheim**, America's most influential contemporary musical theater composer, at a black-tie Gala Benefit on Monday, April 27, 2009 at 7:00 pm at the Embassy of Italy. The highlight of the evening, which includes musical tributes and dinner, will be the acceptance of the first annual **'Sondheim Award'** by the very man who inspired it, Stephen Sondheim. The Gala is chaired by Kenneth and Bonnie Feld, with Honorary Hosts His Excellency and Mrs. Giovanni Castellaneta, Ambassador of Italy to the United States. Proceeds from the Sondheim Gala will benefit the non-profit Signature Theatre.

"As Signature prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary season, we have decided that it is very fitting and appropriate to honor Stephen Sondheim, the composer whose musicals mean so much to us. Through his long collaboration with our company and the 18 Sondheim productions we have presented over the years, Steve's works have come to be our 'signature.' Steve has been a great friend to Signature over the past two decades and we look forward to doing many more presentations of his musicals in the future. I'm thrilled that Steve has agreed to accept this tribute and inaugurate 'The Sondheim Award'," stated Schaeffer.

Stephen Sondheim said, "When Signature approached me about creating an award in my name, I was simultaneously flattered, honored and embarrassed – flattered that Signature should think so highly of me, honored because I think so highly of Signature, and embarrassed because I'm pathetically neurotic about being in the spotlight. The fact is that Signature has done me proud over the years, not merely in the frequency with which they have produced musicals I worked on but because the

quality of the productions has been so consistently high and inventive. I look forward to being embarrassed when I inaugurate the award this spring.”

For information on tickets and sponsorships for The Sondheim Gala, ranging from \$650 to \$25,000, please visit www.signature-theatre.org or contact Signature Theatre at (571) 527-1828.

Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for *Road Show* (2008), earlier produced as *Bounce* (2003), *Passion* (1994), *Assassins* (1991), *Into the Woods* (1987), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *The Frogs* (1974), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Follies* (1971, revised in London 1987 and in New York 2001), *Company* (1970), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964) and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962); as well as lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), *Do I Hear a Waltz* (1965), and additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me a Little* (1981), *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), and *Putting it Together* (1992, 2000) are anthologies of his work. For film he composed the scores for *Stravinsky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981) and songs for *Dick Tracy* (Academy Award, 1990). He wrote the songs for television's *Evening Primrose* (1966), co-authored the film *The Last of Sheila* (1973) and the play *Getting Away With Murder* (1966), and provided incidental music for the plays *The Girls of Summer* (1956), *Invitation to a March* (1961), *Twigs* (1971), and *King Lear* (2007). He won Tony® Awards for Best Score of a Musical for *Passion*, *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music*, *Follies* (1971 version), and *Company*. All of these shows won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, as did *Pacific Overtures* and *Sunday in the Park with George*, the latter also receiving the Pulitzer Prize for Drama (1985). Mr. Sondheim is on the Council of the Dramatists Guild, having served as its president from 1973 to 1981, and in 1983 was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1990, he was appointed the first Visiting Professor of Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University, and in 1993 was the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors.

Signature Theatre is nationally renowned for its presentation of Stephen Sondheim's musicals. Since the 1991-1992 season when the company first mounted *Sweeney Todd*, Signature has performed *Assassins* (1992-1993), *Company* (1993-1994), *Into the Woods* (1994-1995), *Passion* (1995-1996), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1996-1997), *A Stephen Sondheim Evening* (1997-1998), *A Little Night Music* (1998-1999), *Sweeney Todd* (1999-2000), *Gypsy* (2000-2001), *Putting It Together* (2000-2001), *Company* (2000-2001), *Follies* (2002-2003), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (2003-2004), *Pacific Overtures* (2004-2005), *Assassins* (2005-2006), *Into the Woods* (2006-2007), *Merrily We Roll Along* (2007-2008), and *Anyone Can Whistle* (2008-2009). Signature's Eric Schaeffer was the Artistic Director of the Sondheim Celebration at the Kennedy Center in 2002.

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, as well as Stephen Sondheim. 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.

Contact Info

Ticketmaster (703) 573-SEAT (7328)
Signature Administration (571) 527-1860
Signature Theatre
4200 Campbell Avenue
Arlington, VA 22206
<http://www.signature-theatre.org>

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