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Signature Theatre Receives the Regional Theater Tony Award®

Signature Theatre in Arlington, Virginia has been awarded the 2009 Regional Theater Tony Award®, it was announced today by the Broadway League and the American Theatre Wing. The Tony committee stated, "For 20 years, Signature has broadened and brightened the region's cultural landscape with its bold productions of challenging new and established works....[Signature] has established a national reputation for giving some of the nation's most talented artists a place to do their best work before appreciative, knowledgeable audiences." The award is given annually to one of the nation's leading regional theaters and comes with a \$25,000 prize from VISA, USA. The award will be presented at Radio City Music Hall in New York City on June 7.

Signature Theatre co-founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer stated, "We're thrilled to bring a Tony Award to Washington, this great theatre town. We share it with all the artists, donors, and audience members who continue to support our work. It's been an amazing week with 'The Sondheim Award,' our world premiere of *Giant* and now a Tony Award — it doesn't get better than this!"

Signature's Board Chair Sarah Valente said, "Over the past 20 years, Signature has meant so much to so many artists and it's been very exciting to watch Washington audiences marvel over what Eric Schaeffer has been able to create in this sandbox that is Signature Theatre."

Under the leadership of Schaeffer and Managing Director Maggie Boland, Signature Theatre is a non-profit professional theater company dedicated to producing contemporary plays and musicals, reinventing classic shows, and developing new work. In the 19 years since the Theatre was founded, Signature has presented over 25 world premiere productions and has become 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 received 276 Helen

Hayes Award nominations and 69 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in Washington, DC area professional theater.

Signature has produced 18 productions of the works of Stephen Sondheim, more than any other theater in the United States. It recently inaugurated 'The Stephen Sondheim Award' in recognition of the importance of Sondheim's work to Signature and to theater in general. The Award will be given on a yearly basis to an artist who has furthered the development of Sondheim's work, and will be shared with a younger artist of the recipient's choosing, in order to encourage new musical theater talents.

In the 2007-2008 season, Signature celebrated the work of John Kander and Fred Ebb in a festival that included their musicals *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *The Happy Time*, and their last project *The Visit*, starring Chita Rivera and George Hearn. This season Signature received national attention for its highly successful, revamped version of *Les Misérables*.

Administering the million-dollar American Musical Voices Project of the Shen Family Foundation, Signature has given grants and commissions to the likes of Ricky Ian Gordon, Michael John LaChiusa, Bruce Coughlin, Adam Guettel, Audra McDonald and Ted Sperling. This season's production of Michael John LaChiusa's *Giant* is the first of three new musical commissions.

Signature will celebrate its 20th anniversary later this year with a roster that includes *Dirty Blonde*, *Show Boat*, *I Am My Own Wife*, *Sweeney Todd*, [title of show], and *Sycamore Trees*.

EDITORS: Photos of Signature Theatre and its productions are available for downloading from http://www.signature-theatre.org/photo_downloads.htm. (Link for press only: please do not publish).

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