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Signature Theatre Launches “21/24 Signature Lab” for “The Next Generation” of Composers

Public Performances on July 23 and 24

Cabaret of Next Generation Composers on July 22

Arlington, VA – This summer the Tony Award®-winning Signature Theatre, one of the nation’s leading forces in musical theater, launches **21/24 Signature Lab**, a new initiative for the creation of musical theatre works by emerging young composers which gives audiences a first look at new musicals.

For a three-week period from July 6 through 24, two commissioned musicals, *The Hollow* by composer Matt Conner and writer Hunter Foster, directed by Eric Schaeffer, and *The Boy Detective Fails* by composer Adam Gwon and writer Joe Meno, directed by Joe Calarco, will be rehearsed in preparation for public performances on July 23 and 24. 21/24 Signature Lab is an expansion of Signature’s American Musical Voices Program – The Next Generation, funded by The Shen Family Foundation.

Signature Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer stated, “It’s an exciting time at Signature Theatre as we provide opportunities for up-and-coming composers to develop and present their new works. Matt Conner and Adam Gwon have unique voices and I’m proud to have their new pieces begin at Signature. Our collaboration with The Shen Family Foundation and the creation of the American Musical Voices Project has provided a creative home for exciting new works for the American musical theater. We look forward to sharing these works with our audiences.”

The 21/24 acting company includes **Danny Binstock, Christopher Bloch, Michael Bunce, Michael Cafarelli, Sherri L. Edelen, Darin Ellis, Eleasha Gamble, James Gardiner, Sam Ludwig, Channez McQuay, Amy McWilliams, Chris Mueller, Jordi Parry, Autumn Seavey, Margo Seibert, Thomas Adrian Simpson, Chris Sizemore, Stephen Gregory Smith, Russell Sunday, Stephanie Waters, and Bayla Whitten.**

On Wednesday, July 22, Signature will also present a cabaret of new songs by The Next Generation composers Gabriel Kahane, Peter Foley, and Marisa Michelson, as well as Matt Conner and Adam Gwon in The MAX Theatre.

The performance schedule is:

July 22 8:30	Next Generation Composer Cabaret
July 23 6:00	21/24: <i>The Hollow</i>
8:15	21/24: <i>The Boy Detective Fails</i>
July 24 6:00	21/24: <i>The Boy Detective Fails</i>
8:15	21/24: <i>The Hollow</i>

Tickets for 21/24 Signature Lab performances are \$20 general admission and a pass for both 21/24 shows costs \$30. The Next Generation Composer Cabaret tickets are \$20 general admission. Tickets can be purchased at the box office or by calling Ticketmaster at (703) 573-SEAT (7328) or visiting www.signature-theatre.org.

Signature's American Musical Voices Project, funded by The Shen Family Foundation, started in May 2006. Though the AMVP, Musical Theater Composer Grants have been awarded to Ricky Ian Gordon, Michael John LaChiusa, and Joseph Thalken, providing each composer \$25,000 a year plus health coverage for four years. Each of the grants includes a commission to create a new full-length musical to be produced at Signature Theatre during its 2009-2011 seasons. In April and May 2009 *Giant* by Michael John LaChiusa received its premiere at Signature Theatre. Ricky Ian Gordon's *Sycamore Trees* will premiere in May 2010, and Joseph Thalken's musical the following season. In addition, Musical Theater Leadership Awards have been made to four individuals in recognition of their extraordinary influence on and contribution to the advancement of new musical theater, orchestrator Bruce Coughlin, composer Adam Guettel, singer/actress Audra McDonald, and director/musical director/orchestrator Ted Sperling.

In June 2007, the American Musical Voices Project was expanded with The Next Generation program. That year emerging composers Matt Conner, Adam Gwon, and Gabriel Kahane each received a commission to write new musicals for Signature Theatre and honorees Peter Foley and Marisa Michelson were given grants for the development of their musical ideas. Additional grants to another team of young writers will be announced in July.

COMPOSERS AND WRITERS

Composer **Matt Conner** has been performing, composing, teaching, and music directing in the Washington, DC metropolitan area for the last 12 years. His 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 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: Thenardier/Ensemble in *Les Misérables*, 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*,

Tamate in *Pacific Overtures* (all for 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 music director for 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. Mr. Conner is also working on a children's show called *The King of Pizza*, about diversity and working together. 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.

Hunter Foster is a musical theater actor/singer, librettist, and playwright. He wrote the book for the off-Broadway musical, *Summer of '42*, (music and lyrics by David Kirshenbaum) which premiered at the Variety Arts Theatre in 2001. *Summer of '42* also received an Outer Critic award nomination for outstanding new musical. He also wrote the book for the musical, *Bonnie and Clyde: A Folktale*, which premiered at the New York Musical Theatre Festival and was named "Most Promising New Musical". Foster was a writer on the "Rosie Live" NBC variety show, and writes annually for both the Gypsy of the Year and Easter Bonnet competitions, which benefit Broadway Cares Equity Fights AIDS. Other projects include the musical, *Fearless*, based on the 1994 film that starred Jeff Bridges and Rosie Perez, and his new play, *Cribbers*, which deals with plagiarism in the theatre. As an actor, Foster has appeared on Broadway in *Little Shop of Horrors* (Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critic nominations), *Urinetown* (Outer Critic nomination), *The Producers*, *Les Misérables*, *Footloose*, *Grease*, and *King David*, and Off-Broadway in *Happiness* (Drama Desk nomination), *Frankenstein*, *Dust*, and *Modern Orthodox*. Hunter is a graduate of the University of Michigan. At Signature Theatre he starred as Molina in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* as part of the 2008 Kander & Ebb Celebration.

Adam Gwon is a composer and lyricist recently named one of "50 to Watch" by The Dramatist magazine. His latest musical *Ordinary Days* received its world premiere at Pennsylvania Centre Stage in the summer of 2008, and its UK premiere at the Finborough Theatre in London in the fall of 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 2006-07 musical theater fellow at the Dramatists Guild, and is a teaching artist with Roundabout Theatre Company, where he helps 8th graders write musicals about paintings, presidents, and pajamas.

Joe Meno is a novelist, writer of short fiction, playwright, and music journalist based in Chicago. After attending Columbia College Chicago, Meno spent time working as a flower delivery truck driver and art therapy teacher at a juvenile detention center. His first novel *Tender as Hellfire* was published when he was only 24 and received strong reviews from sources like Library Journal. His short fiction has appeared in

literary magazines like *Tri-Quarterly*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Other Voices*. Meno's work is known for the use of natural language and realistic dialogue, as well as frequent forays into absurdity. He currently teaches fiction writing at Columbia College Chicago. He is a frequent contributor to *Punk Planet* magazine, where his comic strip "Iceberg Town" is featured.

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. Recipient of the 2009 Regional Theatre Tony Award®, Signature has presented over 25 world premiere productions in the past 19 years 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 been nominated for 276 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theater and has been honored with 69 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2008, and 2009, and Outstanding Play in 1999. Signature will mark its 20th anniversary season this fall.

Signature Theatre is partially supported by grants from the Arlington Commission for the Arts and the Virginia Commission 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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