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## **SIGNATURE THEATRE ANNOUNCES THREE NEW MUSICAL COMMISSIONS AND TWO AWARDS AS PART OF “AMERICAN MUSICAL VOICES PROJECT”**

### **Composer Adam Guettel Joins Roster with LaChiusa, Gordon, and Thalken**

### **Signature’s “American Musical Voices Project” is Largest Single Musical Theatre Commissioning and Producing Initiative at Any Non-Profit Theater in U.S.**

Arlington, VA – July 17, 2009 – **Eric Schaeffer**, Artistic Director of the Tony Award®-winning Signature Theatre, today announced that Signature Theatre is expanding its **American Musical Voices Project (AMVP)** for a fourth year with the commission and production of a new musical by **Adam Guettel** for its 2011-2012 season. Also announced as part of **The Next Generation** segment of the AMVP were two additional musical commissions awarded to **Peter Foley** and **Marisa Michelson** as well as honoree grants given to **Chris Miller** and **Scott Davenport Richards** for the development of future musical ideas. Signature, with the support of The Shen Family Foundation, has awarded \$595,000 to artists in honors and commissions in the past three years. The American Musical Voices Project is the largest single musical theater commissioning and producing initiative at any non-profit theater in America.

Schaeffer stated, “Signature is proud to add Adam Guettel to our roster of composers to expand the American Musical Voices Project. Adam received a Musical Theater Leadership Award from us in 2006 and his original voice in musical theater is admired by artists across the country. Adding him to the list of commissioned composers with Michael John LaChiusa, Ricky Ian Gordon, and Joseph Thalken makes this the most exciting group of creators working on a project in American musical theater today. With commissions for Marisa Michelson and Peter Foley, we are also supporting The Next Generation of talented writers rising in the ranks. We look forward to working with honorees Chris Miller and Scott Davenport Richards on future projects as well. The continued support of The Shen Family Foundation makes the American Musical Voices Project one of the most ambitious initiatives in musical theater today and I’m proud that it has its home at Signature Theatre.”

Maggie Boland, Signature's Managing Director, stated, "Ted and Mary Jo Shen of The Shen Family Foundation are genuine visionaries in the field of musical theater. Their knowledge, insight, and creativity have led them to support composers and projects that are truly original and innovative. Their passion is a wonderful fit with Signature. We applaud the Shens for their generosity and are immensely grateful for their vision and support for the American Musical Voices Project."

**Ted and Mary Jo Shen**, executive directors of The Shen Family Foundation, released the following statement: "We are very excited about continuing to broaden our commissioning collaboration with Signature Theatre to support the work of musical theater 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 develop and produce."

### **BACKGROUND OF THE AMERICAN MUSICAL VOICES PROJECT**

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 will premiere 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 2008, 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. In July 2009, the Theater launched "21/24 Signature Lab," three weeks of rehearsal and performances of new works by The Next Generation composers.

### **AMERICAN MUSICAL VOICES PROJECT Composer Biography**

#### **Adam Guettel**

Adam Guettel is a composer/lyricist living in New York City. His newest musical, *The Light in the Piazza* (cast album on Nonesuch Records), with a book by Craig Lucas, premiered on Broadway at Lincoln Center Theater's Vivian Beaumont Theater in April 2005, following a world premiere at Seattle's Intiman Theater in the summer of 2003 and a second engagement at Chicago's Goodman Theater in early 2004 (where it received three Joseph Jefferson Awards including Best Musical). *The Light in the Piazza* received six Tony Awards in 2005 including two for Guettel – Best Original Score, and Best Orchestrations. *Piazza* also received five Drama Desk Awards, including two for Guettel – Best Music and Best Orchestrations. He wrote music and lyrics for *Floyd Collins* (cast album on Nonesuch Records), which received the 1996 Lucille Lortel Award for Best Musical and earned Guettel the Obie Award for Best Music. *Floyd Collins* has been presented at Playwrights Horizons, New York; Prince Theatre, Philadelphia; Goodman Theatre, Chicago; Old Globe, San Diego; Bridewell, London; and elsewhere. His other works include *Love's Fire*, collaboration with John Guare for The Acting Company, and *Saturn Returns*, a concert at Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York

Shakespeare Festival. *Saturn Returns* was recorded by Nonesuch Records under the title *Myths and Hymns*. Four of Guettel's songs were featured on Audra McDonald's album, *Way Back to Paradise* (1998, Nonesuch Records), and Guettel himself performed a concert evening of his work at New York's Town Hall in 1999. Film scores include *Arguing the World*, a feature documentary by Joe Dorman and the score for *Jack*, a two-hour documentary for CBS by Peter Davis (1994). Accolades for Guettel include the Stephen Sondheim Award (from the American Music Theater Festival, 1990), the ASCAP New Horizons Award (1997), and the American Composers Orchestra Award (2005).

## **THE NEXT GENERATION Composer Biographies**

### **Peter Foley**

**Peter Foley** wrote music and lyrics for *The Hidden Sky*, which earned him an NEA grant, the Richard Rodgers Award (from the American Academy of Arts and Letters), the Stephen Sondheim Award (from the American Music Theater Festival), and a Jonathan Larson Foundation grant. *The Hidden Sky* premiered at the Prince Music Theater in Philadelphia, where it received a Barrymore Awards nomination for Outstanding Original Score; it was subsequently produced at the Spirit of Broadway Theater in Norwich, Connecticut, earning a Spirit Award for Best Original Score. Concert versions have been performed at Ars Nova and Joe's Pub in NYC. His other stage works include *The Bear* (Golden Fleece, Triangle Theater Co., Opera Unlimited), music for "To Sing" in *Songs From An Unmade Bed* (New York Theatre Workshop) and scores for several plays, including *Newton's Universe* (St. Ann's Warehouse), and *Henry V* (New Jersey Shakespeare Festival). His songs have been performed at Lincoln Center's American Songbook, Town Hall, Symphony Space, and LaMaMa, among other venues. In addition to a new work for Signature Theatre, Foley's upcoming theater projects include an untitled collaboration with playwright Ellen McLaughlin and director Michael Greif, an original musical comedy, *Bloom*, and a new production of *The Hidden Sky* at Prospect Theater Company in NYC.

Foley 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 has also composed scores and themes for numerous television documentaries, including "Listening To America with Bill Moyers" and the Emmy-nominated PBS series, "Art:21." He has received 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. A member of ASCAP, alumnus of the BMI and New Dramatists workshops and resident artist in the American Lyric Theater's Composer/Librettist lab, 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](http://hellagoodmusic.com).

### **Marisa Michelson**

**Marisa Michelson's** work is inspired by the limitless possibilities singing offers to express the authenticity of the human experience. *Still Life With Toe Shoes*, her original musical written with Joshua H. Cohen, had its world premiere last summer at Deerfield Academy. Michelson has been commissioned by NYC'S Prospect Theatre Company, first to write a short piece based on Rene Magritte's painting, *The Lovers*, and in 2008, as composer and co-lyricist with playwright Rinne Groff, for the "Hey Baby" storyline in *The Dome*. Michelson's full-length musical, *Hotel Sarajevo*, which she co-conceived with Stephanie Johnstone and for which she wrote book, music and lyrics, has received readings at CAP 21/NYU and Smith College. She has collaborated with playwright Jason Grote (also for *The Dome*), and with Nautilus Theatre Company in Minnesota.

Michelson was an American Musical Voices Honoree in 2008, and the winner of the St. Botolph Award for composition in 2006. She participated in the New Dramatist Composer-Librettist Studio, won a fellowship to study Indian Hindustani Singing in 2007, and is currently in Vienna studying singing and teaching with the Libero Canto School. She graduated with a B.F.A in Musical Theater from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, participated in the Young Artist's Vocal Program at Tanglewood, and studied composition with Adam Guettel. Michelson currently lives in NYC where she teaches singing and piano to children and adults both privately and through Soyulla artists. [www.MarisaMichelson.com](http://www.MarisaMichelson.com).

## **THE NEXT GENERATION Honoree Biographies**

### **Chris Miller**

**Chris Miller** studied piano and voice at Elon University and Musical Theater Writing at New York University. With Nathan Tysen, he wrote the musical *The Burnt Part Boys* (Mariana Elder, book), which had an extended, sold out run at Barrington Stage Company in the summer of 2006. *The Burnt Part Boys* had a lab production at the Vineyard Theatre in May 2009, a production at New York Stage & Film (summer 2009), and an upcoming full co-production at Playwrights Horizons (spring 2010). Their musical *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, based on the book by Chris Van Allsburg (Joe Calarco, book), has had readings at Lincoln Center Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Mercury Musical Developments in London, a workshop with TheatreMasters in Aspen, Colorado, and a critically acclaimed full production at Barrington Stage Company in the summer of 2008.

Miller is a contributing composer (Mark Campbell, lyrics) to the song cycle *Songs From an Unmade Bed* produced at the New York Theatre Workshop in the spring of 2005 (cast album on Sh-K-Boom Records). His string quartet *Moment of Weakness* premiered at Symphony Space in May 2007. He recently wrote incidental music for the Two River Theatre Co.'s production of *Mary's Wedding*, directed by Daniel Goldstein. His song cycle with Tysen, *Fugitive Songs*, premiered off-Broadway in March 2008 at the 45<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre, and was subsequently nominated for a Drama Desk Award (Outstanding Revue). Currently he is collaborating with Tysen on a commission for Lincoln Center Theatre, a Playwrights Horizons/TheatreWorks Palo Alto co-commission with playwright Craig Wright (creator and executive producer of ABC's *Dirty Sexy Money*, as well as writer/producer of *Lost*, and *Six Feet Under*), a musical of *Tuck Everlasting* for Broadway Across America/Barry Brown, and an original musical.

Miller's awards include the 2003 Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation Grant, the 2003 Frederick Lowe Foundation Grant, the 2004 Daryl Roth Creative Spirit Award, the 2006 Richard Rodgers Award, the 2007 Kitty Carlisle Hart Musical Theatre Award from the Vineyard Theatre, and the ASCAP PLUS Awards 2005-08. In 2007 the Dramatists Guild Magazine's (*The Dramatist*, July/August issue) named him one of the "50 To Watch."

### **Scott Davenport Richards**

Working in many capacities at the intersection of music and drama, **Scott Davenport Richards** often tries to bridge disparate genres and forms. Last season, *Charlie Crosses the Nation an opera in a Jazz idiom* (music, libretto, orchestrations) was performed by the New York City Opera as part of the VOX festival of new opera. *A Thousand Words Come to Mind*, written with playwright Michele Lowe was commissioned by Paulette Haupt and opened last May at The Zipper Theatre and starred Tony® nominee Barbara Walsh. *A Star Across the Ocean*, a work for four voices and symphony orchestra, was premiered by the Montclair State University Symphony and featured Tony Award-winner Chuck Cooper. Current projects include a musical adaptation of the classic Jean Shepherd film *A Christmas Story*, with a book by Joe Robinette, which is scheduled to open at Kansas City Rep this November. The musical will be directed by Artistic Director and produced by Eric Rosen in partnership with

Gerald Goehring and Michael Jenkins. *Dance of the Holy Ghosts*, a play with music by Marcus Gardley, premiered in 2006 at the Yale Repertory Theatre.

Richard's other musical theater works include music for *Coyote Goes Salmon Fishing* (with Deborah Brevoort), directed by Molly Smith at Perseverance Theatre and produced by Stuart Ostrow in Houston; and *Sanctuary D.C.*, a rap musical about the homeless in Washington (Helen Hayes Award nomination). His works for children include a number of commissions from Theatreworks U.S.A.: *Corduroy* (music, lyrics, orchestrations), *Sundiata! The Lion King of Mali* (music, lyrics, orchestrations), *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (orchestrations) and *Junie B. Jones* (orchestrations). Richard's play-scores have been heard at resident theaters around the country including The Public, The Old Globe, The Alliance, and Madison Repertory Theatre. Highlights include the world premiere of Lee Blessing's *Cobb*, featuring Oscar winner Chris Cooper and Delroy Lindo at The Yale Repertory, and the U.S. premiere of Nikos Kazantzakis's *Christopher Columbus* at the New Federal Theater.

As an actor, Richards originated the role of Sylvester in the original Broadway production of August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Frank Rich's review of that production was recently included in Ben Brantley's compilation of *The New York Times* reviews of 25 productions which defined the 20th century. Mr. Richards also assisted his father, Lloyd Richards, in the origination of three other Wilson works.

Richards is Assistant Professor of Musical Theatre/Composition at Montclair State University's Cali School of Music and has been a member of the faculty at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program since 1997. From 1995-2005, he was a teaching artist with Lincoln Center Institute, where he also authored publications for the Heckscher Foundation Research Center on such various subjects as *The Blues*, *Margaret Leng Tan (The Art of the Toy Piano)*, and the tangos of Astor Piazzolla. Richards earned a B.A. from Yale University and M.F.A. from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Musical Theater Writing Program. He is a recipient of the Jonathan Larson and the Frederick Loewe awards.

### **THE AMERICAN MUSICAL VOICES PROJECT Partners**

Under the leadership of co-founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer and Managing Director Maggie Boland, Signature is a non-profit professional theater company in Arlington, Virginia, dedicated to producing contemporary musicals and plays, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. Celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary season this fall, Signature has become renowned for combining Broadway-quality productions with intimate playing spaces and has just received the 2009 Regional Theater Tony Award. 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 composer, 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 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. Productions 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 Kander and Ebb's *The Visit* (2008), 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 Terrence McNally (1996).

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.

**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), *Road Show* (The Public Theater, 2008), *A Little Night Music* (staged concert, Roundabout, 2009); 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 *Sycamore Trees* (Signature Theatre commission, 2010); Adam Guettel's *The Light in the Piazza* (Lincoln Center Theater, 2005 and Weston Playhouse, 2008) and new commission (Signature Theatre, 2012); 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), *Giant* (Signature Theatre commission, 2009), *See What I Wanna See* (Blank Theatre, 2010), *Hello Again* (Transport Group, 2010), and *Queen of the Mist* (Transport Group commission, 2011); 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), and new commission (Signature Theatre, 2011).

The Foundation has also provided separate major funding for the cast recordings of Stephen Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures* (2005) and *Road Show* (2009); 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, and McCarter Theatre, 2010). For information about The Shen Family Foundation visit [www.shenfamilyfoundation.org](http://www.shenfamilyfoundation.org).

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