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## signaturenews

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### **Signature Theatre Feted Musical Theater Master Stephen Sondheim on Monday, Inaugurating the 'Sondheim Award'**

### **Gala Benefit at the Embassy of Italy Exceeds Goal, Raising \$275,000 for Theater, a Record for Signature**

**Evening highlights included musical tributes by Bernadette Peters, Michael Cerveris, Eleasha Gamble, and Will Gartshore**

**Gala Chaired by Kenneth and Bonnie Feld, with Honorary Hosts His Excellency and Mrs. Giovanni Castellaneta, Ambassador of Italy to the United States, and The Honorable James Moran and LuAnn Bennett**

Washington, DC – April 27, 2009 – At a black-tie Gala Benefit on Monday night at the Embassy of Italy, Signature Theatre feted **Stephen Sondheim**, the greatest living composer/lyricist of American musical theatre, with both music and a new award established in the composer's name. The theatre company, nationally known for its Sondheim productions, inaugurated the '**Sondheim Award**' which will be presented annually to individuals for their career contributions in interpreting, supporting, and collaborating on Mr. Sondheim's musical works.

The composer, who usually avoids the spotlight, thanked the Theatre for the tribute of the award following a musical salute by four outstanding interpreters of his work, Broadway stars **Bernadette Peters** and **Michael Cerveris**, and Signature favorites **Will Gartshore** and **Eleasha Gamble**.

More than 320 people attended the dinner and tribute raising \$275,000 in support of artistic, education, and outreach programs of Signature Theatre. The Gala exceeded

the company's goal and is the most successful fundraising gala in the Theatre's history. The Gala was chaired by Signature Trustee **Bonnie Feld** and her husband **Kenneth**, with Honorary Hosts **His Excellency and Mrs. Giovanni Castellaneta**, Ambassador of Italy to the United States, and **The Honorable James Moran and LuAnn Bennett**, Congressman from the 8<sup>th</sup> District of Virginia and his wife.

Eric Schaeffer, Signature's Artistic Director stated, "Signature is so proud to inaugurate the Stephen Sondheim Award with this special celebration in honor of our dear friend Stephen Sondheim. The success of this gala is a sure testament to our collaboration over the past 19 years and the many years to come. It will be an honor to reward an artist each year with this special award. Tonight's celebration featuring Bernadette Peters, Michael Cerveris, Elesha Gamble and Will Gartshore was a great evening toasting Stephen Sondheim. We look forward to next year when we will name the first recipient of this very special award."

**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.

Throughout her illustrious career, Tony Award-winning actress **Bernadette Peters** has dazzled audiences and critics with her performances onstage and television, in concert, and on recordings. In 2003, she received her seventh Tony Award nomination for her electrifying portrayal of Momma Rose in Sam Mendes' record-breaking Broadway revival of *Gypsy*, and her brilliant performance was captured on the Grammy award winning *Gypsy* cast recording. In June 1999, Peters earned her second Tony Award, her third Drama Desk Award, and an Outer Critics Circle Award for her show stopping portrayal of Annie Oakley in one of Broadway's most popular musicals, the smash Tony Award-winning hit Broadway revival of *Annie Get Your Gun*. In 1996, she made her highly-anticipated solo debut at Carnegie Hall in an

exclusive concert benefiting Gay Men's Health Crisis – a performance she repeated in *Bernadette Peters in Concert*, her London solo debut at Royal Festival Hall, which later was telecast on PBS. She garnered the 1986 Tony, Drama Desk, and Drama League Awards for her electrifying performance in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Song and Dance*; earned Tony nominations for her work in Stephen Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George*, Neil Simon's *The Goodbye Girl*, Jerry Herman's *Mack and Mabel*, and Leonard Bernstein's *On the Town*; and earned a Drama Desk Award nomination for her portrayal of the Witch in Sondheim's *Into the Woods*. Some of her other theatre credits include *George M!* (Theatre World Citation Award), *Dames at Sea* (Drama Desk Award), and *Sally and Marsha* at Manhattan Theatre Club. In June 2002, she made her Radio City Music Hall solo debut in a concert entitled *Bernadette Peters Loves Rodgers & Hammerstein*. Her television credits include *Hey, Mr. Producer! The Musical World of Cameron Mackintosh*, the star-studded *Sondheim: A Celebration at Carnegie Hall*, and Terrence McNally's *The Last Mile*, all for PBS's highly acclaimed *Great Performances* series. She has also starred in numerous television movies such as *David*, *Fall from Grace*, *The Odyssey*, *Cinderella*, *What the Deaf Man Heard*, *Bobbie's Girl* (Daytime Emmy Award nomination), *Prince Charming*, and most recently, *Living Proof*. She also received an Emmy nomination for her special guest appearance on the hit TV show *Ally McBeal*. Just recently she appeared on ABC-TV's *Grey's Anatomy* as well as in a recurring role on the network's *Ugly Betty*. Film credits include *Pennies From Heaven* (Golden Globe Award), *Silent Movie*, *The Longest Yard*, *The Jerk*, *Annie*, *Impromptu*, *Alice*, *Let It Snow*, and *It Runs in the Family*, starring opposite Kirk and Michael Douglas. In addition to numerous original Broadway cast recordings, Peters has recorded six solo albums: *Sondheim, Etc., Etc.: Bernadette Peters Live at Carnegie Hall (The Rest of It)*; *Bernadette Peters Loves Rodgers & Hammerstein* (Grammy Nomination); *Sondheim Etc.: Bernadette Peters Live At Carnegie Hall* (Grammy Nomination); *I'll Be Your Baby Tonight* (Grammy Nomination); *Bernadette Peters*, and *Now Playing*. Peters serves on the Board of Directors for Manhattan Theater Club and Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. Peters' "pet project" is *Broadway Barks*, an annual, star-studded dog adoption event, she founded with friend Mary Tyler Moore, benefiting animal shelters throughout New York. In June of 2008, she added author to her list of accomplishments, with her children's book, *Broadway Barks*. The book, which includes a CD with a song written and performed by Peters, landed on the *New York Times* Bestseller list immediately following publication. Her royalties from the sale of the book benefit the organization of the same title. She resides in New York City and Los Angeles.

**Michael Cerveris** recently starred on Broadway in *Hedda Gabler*. The Tony Award winner (for his performance as John Wilkes Booth in Sondheim's *Assassins*) has also recently been seen on Broadway in *Cymbeline*, and received Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics, and Drama League award nominations for his acclaimed roles in *LoveMusik* and *Sweeney Todd*. His other Broadway credits include *The Who's Tommy* (Tony and Drama League nominations), and *Titanic*. Off-Broadway, he introduced the role of Wilson Mizner in the Public Theater's production of *Wise Guys* and played opposite Kevin Kline in the Public's production of *King Lear*. He starred in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* in London, Los Angeles and off-Broadway, and in Sondheim's *Passion* both at the Kennedy Center's Sondheim Celebration and at Lincoln Center. He can currently be seen as The Observer on the hit television show "Fringe" and will soon be seen on screen in *Cirque Du Freak* and *Brief Interviews*

*With Hideous Men.* As a guitarist, Mr. Cerveris toured with Bob Mould and has appeared with Pete Townshend, Frank Black, The Breeders, Teenage Fanclub, and others. His solo albums are *Dog Eared* and the forthcoming *hinterlands EPs*.

**Eleasha Gamble** is honored to be a part of this celebration. A native to the Washington area, Eleasha is no stranger to Signature Theatre. In 2007, she played the Witch in Signature's *Into the Woods*, which opened their new space. She was also a part of Signature Theatre's record-breaking production of *Les Misérables*, which garnered 13 Helen Hayes nominations. Her favorite Signature credits include: *Urinetown*, *Follies*, *Grand Hotel*, and *Company*. Eleasha has received two Helen Hayes nominations: one in 2004, for Outstanding Lead Actress in *Ragtime* (Toby's Dinner Theatre), and in 2006, for Outstanding Supporting Actress in *Once on This Island* (Round House Theatre). Eleasha has been seen on the stages of The Kennedy Center (*Broadway: Three Generations*), Olney Theatre (*Joseph...*, and *Oliver*), Ford's Theatre (*Meet John Doe*), and Arena Stage (*The Women of Brewster Place*). Her Off-Broadway debut was in Kathie Lee Gifford's musical *Under the Bridge* at the Zipper Theatre. She has also had the opportunity to perform in Alaska, at Juneau's Perseverance Theatre in their production of *Hair*, and at the Tony Award-winning Alliance Theatre (*The Women of Brewster Place*). Eleasha can currently be seen performing in *The Civil War* at Ford's Theatre now through May 24th.

**Will Gartshore** is one of Washington's preeminent musical theater performers. The winner of two Helen Hayes awards and a seven-time nominee, Will has appeared in Signature's productions of *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Assassins*, *Sex Habits of American Women*, *Urinetown*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Elegies*, *Allegro*, *Twentieth Century*, *Follies*, *Grand Hotel*, *Side Show*, and *Floyd Collins*. He has also appeared in *Orson's Shadow*, *Summer of '42*, *A Year with Frog and Toad*, and *The World Goes 'Round* (Round House); *Passion* (Kennedy Center); *Privates on Parade*, *A New Brain* (Studio); *The Velvet Sky* (Woolly Mammoth); *Monster* (Olney); and *David in Shadow and Light* (Theatre J). He has been seen in concert performances of *Anyone Can Whistle* and *Company* at Signature; a number of cabarets, including his solo shows, *Finding Home: Songs of Going and Staying* (Signature) and *Perfect/Finite* (Round House); and as a featured soloist in celebrations commemorating Stephen Sondheim's 70th Birthday and the 50th Anniversary of *West Side Story* at the Library of Congress. Will has appeared on Broadway in the original cast of *Parade*, Off-Broadway in *The Last Session*, in the *City Center Encores!* production of *Ziegfeld Follies of 1936*, and with many regional theaters around the country, including in Philadelphia and L.A. in the cast of *3hree*, directed by Hal Prince. Mr. Gartshore can be heard on original cast recordings of *3hree*, *Parade*, and *Ziegfeld Follies of 1936*.

Signature Theatre is nationally renowned for its presentations 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 69 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2006, and 2008, and Outstanding Play in 1999.

### **Contact Info**

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