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## signaturenews

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### **Signature Theatre to Honor Angela Lansbury with Sondheim Award at Gala Benefit April 12 at the Embassy of Italy (Please note change of date)**

**C. Daniel and Juliann Clemente to Chair Gala**

**Actresses Catherine Zeta-Jones and Bernadette Peters,  
philanthropists Ted and Mary Jo Shen, and Helen  
Henderson, and Congressman James Moran and LuAnn  
Bennett to Serve as Honorary Hosts**

Arlington, VA, December 11, 2009 – On April 12, 2010 (please note change of date), the Tony Award®-winning Signature Theatre will honor beloved stage, screen, and television actress **Angela Lansbury** with the company's first **Stephen Sondheim Award**. The award, established last year in honor of America's most influential contemporary musical theater writer and composer, will be presented at a black-tie Gala Benefit at the Embassy of Italy. The 2010 Sondheim Award Gala is chaired by **C. Daniel and Juliann Clemente**; Honorary Hosts include actresses **Catherine Zeta-Jones** and **Bernadette Peters**, philanthropists **Helen Henderson** and **Ted and Mary Jo Shen**, and **Congressman James Moran and LuAnn Bennett**. The Sondheim Award Gala will benefit Signature Theatre's artistic, education, and community outreach programs.

To date, Platinum Level Sponsors are **C. Daniel and Juliann Clemente** and **Bonnie and Kenneth Feld**, and Gold Level Sponsors are **A+ Government Solutions, Maxine Isaacs and James A. Johnson, Wesley C. Pickard and Jeanette Studley, Victor Shargai, Patti and Jerry Sowalsky, and Target**.

Stephen Sondheim stated, "Angela Lansbury's first appearance on the musical stage was in a show called *Anyone Can Whistle*, for which I wrote the score. That appearance was a gift to the musical theater, although perhaps not such a gift to her, since the show only ran for nine performances. I am thrilled that Signature

Theatre is helping me make it up to her by giving her the first Stephen Sondheim Award.”

Eric Schaeffer said, “I’m thrilled that Angela will be the first recipient of the Stephen Sondheim Award, having appeared aurally on our stage as The Giant in *Into the Woods*. She is a major force in the American musical theater and we look forward to saluting her endless talents.”

**Angela Lansbury** has enjoyed a career without precedent. Her professional life spans more than a half-century during which she flourished, first as a star of motion pictures, then as a five-time Tony Award-winning Broadway musical star. Two of Ms. Lansbury’s Tonys are for Stephen Sondheim musicals: the role of Mama Rose in the 1974 revival of *Gypsy* and Mrs. Lovett in *Sweeney Todd* in 1979. This fall, she will return to Broadway in the role of Madame Armfeldt in the revival of Sondheim’s *A Little Night Music*, co-starring Catherine Zeta-Jones.

Ms. Lansbury appeared most recently on Broadway as Madame Arcati in the 2009 revival of Noël Coward’s *Blithe Spirit*, for which she received her fifth Tony Award, as well as Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards; and in 2006 in Terrence McNally’s *Deuce*, for which she was nominated for a Tony Award. She made her Broadway debut in 1957 starring as Bert Lahr’s wife in the French farce, *Hotel Paradiso*.

In 1960, she came back to Broadway as Joan Plowright’s mother in the season’s most acclaimed drama, *A Taste of Honey*, by Shelagh Delaney. Ms. Lansbury returned to New York in triumph in 1966 as *Mame*, for which she won the first of her unprecedented four Tony Awards as Best Actress in a Musical; her second was for the *Madwoman of Chaillot* in *Dear World* (1968).

From 1984-1996 she starred as Jessica Fletcher, mystery-writing amateur sleuth, on “Murder, She Wrote,” the longest-running detective drama series in the history of television, for which she won four Golden Globe Awards.

## **THE SONDHEIM AWARD**

In 2009 Signature Theatre inaugurated The Stephen Sondheim Award in recognition of the importance of Sondheim’s work to Signature and to theater in general. The Award is given on a yearly basis to an individual for his or her career contributions to interpreting, supporting, and collaborating on Stephen Sondheim’s music works. Signature has produced 18 productions of the works of Stephen Sondheim, more than any other theater in the United States. In 2002, Signature’s Eric Schaeffer was the Artistic Director of “The Sondheim Celebration” at the Kennedy Center.

Sponsorship packages for the 2010 Sondheim Award Gala range from \$1,000 to \$50,000 and include rewarding, year-long visibility and entertainment benefits. Individual tickets and ticket packages range from \$650 to \$5,000. For more information about sponsorship and tickets contact Emily Hill, Development Manager, at (571) 527-1828 or [events@signature-theatre.org](mailto:events@signature-theatre.org).

## **ABOUT SIGNATURE**

Recipient of the 2009 Regional Theater Tony Award®, Signature Theatre is a non-profit professional theater company dedicated to producing contemporary musicals and plays, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. Under the leadership of co-founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer and Managing Director Maggie Boland, Signature has presented 26 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, and of course, Stephen Sondheim. Since its founding in 1989, 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.

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. In the 2008-2009 season Signature received national attention for its highly successful, revamped version of *Les Misérables*.

Administering the million-dollar American Musical Voices Project funded by the Shen Family Foundation, Signature has given awards and commissions to Bruce Coughlin, Ricky Ian Gordon, Peter Foley, Adam Guettel, Michael John LaChiusa, Audra McDonald, Marisa Michelson, Ted Sperling, Joseph Thalken, and other musical theater innovators. The April 2009 production of Michael John LaChiusa's *Giant* was the first of seven musical commissions; the next is the May 2010 production of Ricky Ian Gordon's *Sycamore Trees*.

Signature Theatre is currently celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary season with productions of *Dirty Blonde*, *Show Boat*, *I Am My Own Wife*, *Sweeney Todd*, [title of show], and the world premieres of *Sycamore Trees* and "*First You Dream*": *The Music of Kander & Ebb*,

Signature is partially supported by a grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts and by a gift from Arlington County through the Arlington Commission for the Arts and the Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources.

### **Contact Information**

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