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Angela Lansbury, Star of Stage, Film, and Television, Saluted with ‘The Stephen Sondheim Award’ Given by Virginia’s Signature Theatre

Gala Benefit at the Embassy of Italy Exceeded Goal, Raising \$350,000, a Record for Signature’s Annual Gala

Evening highlights included musical tributes by Broadway stars Victor Garber, Marin Mazzie, and Jason Danieley, and Signature favorite Sherri L. Edelen

Washington, DC – April 12, 2010, 10 pm – **Angela Lansbury**, the great star of stage, film, and television, was honored tonight with the first annual **Stephen Sondheim Award**, given by Virginia’s Signature Theatre at a black-tie Gala Benefit at the Embassy of Italy. The Sondheim Award, established by Signature last year in the name of America’s most influential contemporary musical theater writer and composer, was presented to the actress by Mr. Sondheim himself.

The presentation followed a dinner and tribute performance to Ms. Lansbury by Broadway stars **Victor Garber**, **Marin Mazzie** and **Jason Danieley**, and Washington favorite **Sherri L. Edelen**, staged by Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, co-founder of Signature Theatre. Signature, the 2009 recipient of the Tony Award® for Regional Theatre, is internationally renowned for its productions of Sondheim works.

When Ms. Lansbury’s award was announced Mr. 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.”

More than 350 guests attended the black-tie dinner and tribute raising \$350,000 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 C. Daniel and Juliann Clemente with Honorary Hosts actors Catherine Zeta-Jones, Bernadette Peters, and Michael Cerveris; philanthropists Helen Henderson and Ted and Mary Jo Shen; political leaders Italian Ambassador Giulio Terzi, Virginia Senator Jim Webb and Mrs. Webb, and Virginia Congressman James Moran and LuAnn Bennett; and Platinum Level Sponsors Bonnie and Kenneth Feld.

Signature Theatre also recognized an exciting emerging artist **Patrick Thomas Cragin**, with the 2010 Sondheim Award Gala "Young Artist Citation." The encouragement of an exceptionally talented young person in the field of musical theater was made part of "The Stephen Sondheim Award" at the request of Mr. Sondheim, who has been generous throughout his career in giving his time and insights to young artists. Mr. Cragin, a senior at The Catholic University of America, has appeared on Signature's stage as an understudy in two productions, *Giant* and *Show Boat*, as well as on various stages throughout the Washington area. After graduation he plans to relocate to New York City and make his career as a performer in musical theater. Signature presented him with a certificate and a round trip train ticket to New York for his next audition, and will continue to support his efforts.

Music for the tribute included songs significant to both Ms. Lansbury and Mr. Sondheim. Patrick Thomas Cragin sang a song written by Oscar Hammerstein II, one of Mr. Sondheim's mentors: "Younger Than Springtime" from Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*. Sherri L. Edelen sang the Styne/Sondheim song "Some People" from *Gypsy*—a Lansbury triumph—as well as George and Ira Gershwin's "A Foggy Day (in London Town)" which was Ms. Lansbury's first audition song for Mr. Sondheim. From Ms. Lansbury's most lauded Sondheim show *Sweeney Todd*, Jason Danieley sang "Not While I'm Around" and was joined by Victor Garber for the duet "Pretty Women." From Mr. Sondheim's and Ms. Lansbury's first musical collaboration *Anyone Can Whistle*, Mr. Garber sang the title song and Marin Mazzie sang "There Won't Be Trumpets." Ms. Mazzie also sang the sentimental favorite of the evening: "All the Things You Are" from *Very Warm for May* by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II. It is Ms. Lansbury's most favorite song and is from the very first musical that Mr. Sondheim saw as a child.

BIOGRAPHY

Angela Lansbury has enjoyed a career without precedent. Her professional life spans more sixty years during which she has 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. She is currently playing the role of Madame Armfeldt on Broadway 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. Her first musical role there was Stephen Sondheim's 1964 *Anyone Can Whistle*. 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 Chailot* 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 tribute performers have many connections to Stephen Sondheim. **Victor Garber** originated two Sondheim roles, the young sailor Anthony in *Sweeney Todd* and John Wilkes Booth in *Assassins*. **Marin Mazzie** created the role of Clara in *Passion*, then interpreted it for television on PBS's Great Performances. Ms. Mazzie has also performed Beth in *Merrily We Roll Along*, and the roles of Rapunzel, The Witch, and Cinderella from *Into the Woods*. For "Live at Carnegie Hall," she performed and recorded *Anyone Can Whistle* – the musical that started Ms. Lansbury's work with Stephen Sondheim. Ms. Mazzie's husband, **Jason Danieley**, who won a Helen Hayes Award for his Signature Theatre performance of *The Highest Yellow*, is considered one of leading tenors on Broadway – with roles in *Curtains*, *Candide*, and *The Full Monty* – and joins his wife and frequent co-performer in saluting Ms. Lansbury. **Sherri L. Edelen**, an outstanding Washington-based actress, is coming to the Gala after performing Ms. Lansbury's all time favorite role this spring, Mrs. Lovett, in Signature's 20th anniversary production of *Sweeney Todd*.

THE STEPHEN 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 and will direct *Follies* there next season.

Sponsorship packages for the 2010 Sondheim Award Gala ranged from \$1,000 to \$50,000 and included rewarding, year-long visibility and entertainment benefits. Individual tickets and ticket packages ranged from \$650 to \$5,000.

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 27 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 284 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theater and has been honored with 70 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 20th anniversary with a season consisting of 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*,

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