



MEDIA RELEASE

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SIGNAL PRESENTS ITS FIRST MUSICAL: TONY-WINNING 1776

CHICAGO, December 28, 2007 — Signal Ensemble Theatre (Ronan Marra, Christopher Prentice and Joseph Stearns, artistic directors) culminates its fifth season, comprised of 20th-century American works, with **1776**, the Tony Award-winning musical by Sherman Edwards and Peter Stone. Directed by **Ronan Marra** with musical direction by **Andra Velis Simon** and featuring a 26-member award-winning ensemble, the production runs January 25 through March 1, 2008 at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division. **Opening night is Sunday, January 27, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.**

Set during a "hot as hell" summer in Philadelphia, **1776** is the Tony Award-winning musical about the seminal act in American history: the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Sectional differences, pride and fear threaten the Declaration and the fledgling nation. The score features hits such as "Sit Down, John," "He Plays the Violin" and "Momma Look Sharp."

Commenting on the production, director **Ronan Marra**, the general artistic director of Signal, said:

"I've been in love with **1776** since I first saw it a decade ago at a regional theater. The libretto is one of my favorite pieces of writing, period. The show is usually described as being 'about the signing of the Declaration of Independence,' but it's truly about how the Declaration almost wasn't adopted. What's amazing about the script is how it actually makes you sweat.

"Doing a musical is a natural progression for us, as the majority of the company are musicians, and, in fitting with our mission, the show offers great roles for actors. Doing a production with this big of a cast gave us the opportunity to bring in a ton of new talent and mix it with company members.

"Despite the size of the cast and working with many new elements, this is a very stripped-down production. A minimalist setting will be used to complement and put the focus on the actors. The goal here is to fill the space with people and sound, putting the event right up in front of the audience."

Christopher Prentice, the producing artistic director of Signal, commented:

"**1776** is extremely salient during this very important election year. In depicting the struggles our Founders endured to create our country, we are reminded that compromise and compassion are essential to the governing process."

Ensemble member **Philip Winston** as John Adams leads a 26-strong cast that includes ensemble members **Vincent L. Lonergan** (Benjamin Franklin) and **Joseph Stearns** (Richard Henry Lee), with **Larry Baldacci** (John Hancock), **Kevin Bishop** (Robert Livingston), **John Blick** (Dr. Josiah Bartlett), **Scott Danielson** (Col. Thomas McKean), **Matthew Erickson** (Charles Thompson), **Dan Granata** (Andrew McNair), **Ryan Guhde** (George Read), **Michael Herschberg** (Joseph Hewes), **Ted Hoerl** (Stephen Hopkins), **Tim Howard** (Thomas Jefferson), **Andrew Lambertson** (Dr. Lyman Hall), **Eric Lindahl** (Courier), **Paul G. Miller** (James Wilson), **Lindsay Naas** (Martha Jefferson), **Colby Sellers** (Rev. John Witherspoon), **Thomas M. Shea** (Samuel Chase), **Anne Sheridan Smith** (Abigail Adams), **Eric Damon Smith** (Lewis Morris), **Jon Steinhagen** (John Dickinson), **Danny Taylor** (Roger Sherman), **Jeremy Trager** (Edward Rutledge), **Steve Welsh** (Caesar Rodney) and **Matt Whalen** (Leather Apron/Painter).

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Directed by ensemble member **Ronan Marra** with musical direction by **Andra Velis Simon** and choreography by **Danny Taylor**, *1776* features scenic design by **Melania Lancy** (Jeff nomination, *The Weir*), costume design by **Laura M. Dana** (Jeff Citation and After Dark awards, *Seascape*), lighting design by **Julie E. Ballard** and **Price Johnston**, sound design by ensemble member **Anthony Ingram**, wig design by **Ora Jewell-Busche** and properties design by **Noel Henke**. Ensemble member **Stephanie Ehemann** is the production stage manager and **Kristen Barrett** is the assistant stage manager.

Ronan Marra (Director) is co-founder and general artistic director of Signal. Directing credits with the company include Jeff-recommended productions of *Seascape* (Jeff Citation winner, Best Costume Design), *Waiting for Godot* and his own *Landslide* (Jeff Citation nomination, New Work), as well as *Fool for Love*, *Hamlet*, *Closer*, *The Zoo Story*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and his own *Learning to Fly*. He has also directed for Sansculottes Theatre Company and The Gallery Players (New York) as well as several productions at his alma mater, Kent State University. As a playwright, Marra's plays have been produced in Chicago and abroad, and he has received awards for New Work at ITN Theatre and Neverland Productions in New York. Marra is a recipient of the 2006 Illinois Arts Council Finalist Award in Scriptworks.

Andra Velis Simon (Music Director) makes her Signal debut with *1776*. Most recently, she music directed the critically acclaimed production of *Songs for a New World* at Bohemian Theatre Ensemble. Also in Chicago, Andra has served as music director, vocal director and/or pianist for About Face, Brown Couch, City Lit, Columbia College, Defiant, Emerald City, Hell in a Handbag, The Hypocrites, Lifeline, Noble Fool, Open Eye, Rivendell, Stage Left, Theatre Building Chicago, and others.

Previews are January 25 and 26, 2008 at 8 p.m. **The opening press performance is January 27, 2008 at 7 p.m.** The production continues through March 1, 2008 with the following schedule: Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m.

Ticket prices are \$15 for preview performances; \$20 for Thursdays and Sundays; and \$25 for Fridays and Saturdays. Discounts for students, seniors and groups are available. Tickets may be purchased online at www.signalensemble.com or reserved at 773-347-1350.

Special event: Signal offers a \$5 discount to patrons who bring their voter registration cards to the Thursday, Feb. 7 performance.

The Chopin Theatre is accessible by the CTA Blue Line train (Division) and buses (70-Division, 56-Milwaukee, 18-Ashland).

Productions Plus is the Exclusive Corporate Sponsor of Signal's 5th Season.

About Signal Ensemble Theatre

Known for its ensemble acting and producing a diverse slate of plays that range from classics to new works, Signal Ensemble Theatre uses the actor as focal point to clearly execute the playwright's vision. Founded by its three artistic directors (Ronan Marra, Christopher Prentice, Joseph Stearns), the company began producing in 2003.

Jon Marans's *Old Wicked Songs*

Signal's Jeff-recommended production of *Old Wicked Songs*, currently running in the Chopin studio, has been extended through Dec. 30. The production is directed by ensemble member Christopher Prentice and features critically lauded performances by ensemble member Vincent L. Lonergan and The House Theatre's Shawn Pfautsch.

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1776 Fact Sheet

Set during a "hot as hell" summer in Philadelphia, *1776* is the Tony Award-winning musical about the seminal act in American history: the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Sectional differences, pride and fear threaten the Declaration and the fledgling nation. The score features hits such as "Sit Down, John," "He Plays the Violin" and "Momma Look Sharp."

Title: **1776**
Playwright: Music & Lyrics by **Sherman Edwards**, Book by **Peter Stone**
Directed by: General Artistic Director **Ronan Marra**
Featuring: Ensemble members **Vincent L. Lonergan** (Benjamin Franklin), **Joseph Stearns** (Richard Henry Lee) and **Philip Winston** (John Adams) with **Larry Baldacci** (John Hancock), **Kevin Bishop** (Robert Livingston), **John Blick** (Dr. Josiah Bartlett), **Scott Danielson** (Col. Thomas McKean), **Matthew Erickson** (Charles Thompson), **Dan Granata** (Andrew McNair), **Ryan Guhde** (George Read), **Michael Herschberg** (Joseph Hewes), **Ted Hoerl** (Stephen Hopkins), **Tim Howard** (Thomas Jefferson), **Andrew Lambertson** (Dr. Lyman Hall), **Eric Lindhal** (Courier), **Paul G. Miller** (James Wilson), **Lindsay Naas** (Martha Jefferson), **Colby Sellers** (Rev. John Witherspoon), **Thomas M. Shea** (Samuel Chase), **Anne Sheridan Smith** (Abigail Adams), **Eric Damon Smith** (Lewis Morris), **Jon Steinhagen** (John Dickinson), **Danny Taylor** (Roger Sherman), **Jeremy Trager** (Edward Rutledge), **Steve Welsh** (Caesar Rodney) and **Matt Whalen** (Leather Apron/Painter).

Dates/Times: **January 25-March 1, 2008**
Previews: January 25 & 26, at 8:00 p.m.
Press opening: January 27, 2008, at 7:00 p.m.
Regular run: Thursday, Friday & Saturday eves, at 8:00 p.m.
Sunday mats, at 3:00 p.m.

Location: **Signal Ensemble Theatre at Chopin Theatre**, 1543 W. Division

Ticket prices: Fridays and Saturdays, \$25
Thursdays and Sundays, \$20
Preview performances, \$15
Students and Seniors, \$10
Group rates are available.

Box Office: **Buy online at www.signalensemble.com**
or call 773-347-1350

Notes of Interest:

- *1776* is Signal's first musical production, which follows *Old Wicked Songs*, a play with music.
- *1776* marks the Signal debuts of several many of Chicago's acclaimed musical-theater artists.
- Signal will offer \$5 off the Thursday, Feb. 7 performance to patrons that bring their voter registration cards.

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