



MEDIA RELEASE

Christopher Prentice
773.347.1350 / 773.991.5446 cell
chris@signalensemble.com

Signal Announces 5th Season

**2007/2008 Season, in residence at Chopin,
features 20th-century American works by Shepard, Marans and Edwards & Stone**

CHICAGO, June 15, 2007 — **Signal Ensemble Theatre** artistic directors **Ronan Marra**, **Christopher Prentice** and **Joseph Stearns** today announced the line-up for its 2007-08 Season in residence at the Chopin Theatre. The company's fifth year, featuring a 20th-Century American playbill, includes an iconic American drama, a Pulitzer Prize finalist and the company's first musical.

The season opens in August in the studio with Sam Shepard's Obie Award-winning story of love, yearning and abandonment, ***Fool for Love***, directed by General Artistic Director Ronan Marra. In November, Producing Artistic Director Christopher Prentice stages Jon Marans's Pulitzer-nominated play about the redemptive power of music, ***Old Wicked Songs***. In January, Marra directs the company's first musical, ***1776***, a telling of the seminal act in American history, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, on the mainstage.

"In our fifth season we will delve further into the American canon, examining not only how we view ourselves but how others in the world see us," said Christopher Prentice, Signal's producing artistic director. "*Fool for Love* is a distinctly American piece and contrasts with *Old Wicked Songs*, which offers a European observation. *1776* will be extremely salient in this very important election year as we seek to rethink our American values."

Signal Ensemble Theatre's 2007-08 Season at the Chopin will include:

Fool for Love

by **Sam Shepard**

directed by ensemble member **Ronan Marra**

in the Studio

August 3 – September 2, 2007

Press opening: August 5, 2007

Set in a stark motel room at the edge of the Mojave Desert, *Fool for Love* tells the story of troubled lovers Eddie and May. Caught in a vicious cycle of yearning and abandonment, they long to be together but find no real solace in each other's arms. Vicious, erotic and funny, *Fool for Love* is Signal's first production of one of America's most celebrated living playwrights.

(more)

Old Wicked Songs

by **Jon Marans**

directed by ensemble member **Christopher Prentice**

in the Studio

November 16 – December 16, 2007

Press opening: November 18, 2007

Old Wicked Songs depicts a clash of cultures and attitudes as a brash American piano prodigy travels to Vienna to combat an artistic block that threatens his career. A technically brilliant performer, he studies with a passionate master teacher. The music of Robert Schumann binds these men together, melting the stubbornness and denial that surrounds them. *Old Wicked Songs* was a finalist for the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

1776

Music and Lyrics by **Sherman Edwards**, Book by **Peter Stone** based upon a concept by Sherman Edwards

directed by ensemble member **Ronan Marra**

on the Mainstage

January 25 – March 1, 2008

Press opening: January 27, 2008

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 "Mama Look Sharp."

Signal Ensemble Theatre's fifth season will be performed at the Chopin Theatre (1543 W. Division) in Chicago. **Subscription packages** and single tickets will go on sale July 1 at signalensemble.com.

Sam Shepard is one of America's most celebrated living playwrights. Eleven of his plays have won Obie Awards including *Chicago* and *Icarus's Mother* (1965); *Red Cross and la Turista* (1966); *Forensic and the Navigators* and *Melodrama Play* (1967); *The Tooth of Crime* (1972); *Action* (1974) and *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976). Shepard was awarded a Pulitzer Prize as well as an Obie Award for his play *Buried Child* (1979). The critically acclaimed production of *True West*, starring John Malkovich and Gary Sinise, opened in New York in 1984. *Fool for Love* (1982) received the Obie for Best Play as well as for Direction. *A Lie of the Mind* (1985) won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award in 1986, the 1986 Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding New Play. A revived *Buried Child* under the direction of Gary Sinise opened on Broadway in April 1996 and won a Tony Award nomination. New York's Signature Theatre Company devoted its '96-'97 season to his work. Shepard wrote the screenplays for *Zabriskie Point*, Wim Wender's *Paris, Texas*; Robert Altman's *Fool for Love*, a film version of his play of the same title. As writer/director, Mr. Shepard filmed *Far North* and *Silent Tongue*. As an actor he has appeared in the films *Days of Heaven*, *Resurrection*, *Raggedy Man*, *The Right Stuff*, *Frances*, *Country*, *Fool for Love*, *Crimes of the Heart*, *Baby Boom*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Bright Angel*, *Defenseless*, *Voyager*, *Thunderheart*, *The Pelican Brief*, *Hamlet* and *Safe Passage*. In 1986, Shepard was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1992, he received the Gold Medal for Drama from the Academy and in 1994 he was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame.

Jon Marans is the author of *Old Wicked Songs*, which was a 1996 Pulitzer Prize Finalist for Drama, winner of the L.A. Drama Logue Award, and included in "Otis Guernsey's Best Plays of 1996-97." It was first

(more)

presented by the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, then in New York by Daryl Roth at Playhouse 91, subsequently moving to the Promenade Theater. In England, *Old Wicked Songs* started at the Bristol Old Vic, then transferred to London's West End at the Gielgud Theater, and starred Bob Hoskins. The play has been translated and produced in a dozen countries around the world and was the second most performed new play in the United States in the 1997-98 season. Other produced shows include: a musical based on Studs Terkel's "Coming of Age" entitled *Legacy of the Dragonslayers* (book by Jon Marans) at San Jose Repertory Theatre; *Jumping for Joy* at the Laguna Playhouse and Independent Theater in Australia, the musical *Irrationals* (book & lyrics Jon Marans, music by Edward Thomas) at the Village Theater in Seattle and in NYC; *A Strange & Separate People* at the Penguin Rep in N.Y. In film, Marans was a story editor/script doctor for Stonebridge, Michael Douglas' production company at Columbia Pictures, instrumental in the development of numerous films. And in TV he was a staff writer/lyricist for the 1991 "New Carol Burnett Show" on CBS and has written for "Cookin' in Brooklyn," a "comedy-reality" show on the Discovery Channel. Marans is a graduate of Duke University in mathematics and music.

Sherman Edwards was born in New York and taught American history at James Monroe High School. After earning an undergraduate degree in history at New York University, he did graduate work in history at Cornell University. He appeared as an actor in *My Sister Eileen* and the Broadway revue *Pins and Needles*. He began working as a pianist, playing for performers Lisa Kirk, Eddie Fisher and Mindy Carson. Later, he played in the bands of Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman and Louis Armstrong. In the late 1950s, he began writing popular music, including the hit songs "Broken-Hearted Melody" (lyrics by Hal David), "See You in September" (music and lyrics co-written by Sid Wayne) and "Wonderful, Wonderful" (lyrics by Ben Raleigh). *1776* (for which he won a 1969 Tony Award) was his only Broadway score.

Peter Stone: One of the most accomplished Broadway bookwriters, Stone graduated from Bard College and earned an M.F.A. from the Yale School of Drama. He began writing for CBS Radio and soon moved to writing for television, including the shows *Studio One*, *The Defenders* (for which he won an Emmy Award); *Asphalt Jungle* and *Espionage*. He has written the plays *Friend of the Family* and *Full Circle*. In addition to *1776*, his Broadway bookwriting credits include the musicals *Kean*; *Skyscraper*, *Two by Two*; *Sugar*, *Woman of the Year* (for which he won a 1981 Tony Award); *My One and Only*, *Grand Hotel* and *The Will Rogers Follies* (1991 Tony Award for Best Musical). Stone also wrote the screenplay for the film version of *1776*. His other screenplays include *Charade*; *Father Goose* (for which he won a 1964 Academy Award); *Mirage*; *Arabesque*; *Sweet Charity*; *The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3* and *Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?*.

Ronan Marra is co-founder and General Artistic Director of Signal Ensemble Theatre. Directing credits with the company include *Hamlet*, *Closer*, *The Zoo Story*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Seascape* (one Jeff Citation award), *Waiting for Godot*, his own *Landslide* (two Jeff nominations, including New Work), *Much Ado About Nothing* and his own *Learning to Fly*. He has also directed for Sansculottes, The Gallery Players (NYC) and several productions at his alma mater, Kent State University. As a playwright, Marra's plays have been produced or workshopped in Chicago, NYC, LA and Cleveland, and he has received awards for New Work at ITN Theatre and Neverland Productions in NYC. Marra is a recipient of the 2006 Illinois Arts Council Finalist Award in Scriptworks.

Christopher Prentice is co-founder and Producing Artistic Director of Signal Ensemble Theatre. Last season he directed *The Weir* (three Jeff Citation nominations) for the company. His Signal acting credits include *Hamlet*, *The Zoo Story*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Landslide*, *Catch-22* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. He will appear this summer in the title role of Robin Hood at the Oak Park Festival Theatre. Other Chicago acting credits include *The Three Musketeers* (Chicago Shakespeare), *The Tempest* (First Folio), *Practical Anatomy* (Sansculottes), and work with Stage Left, Chicago Dramatists, Northlight, Next, Irish Rep, Boxer Rebellion and New Leaf. Regional credits include Dallas Theater Center and seasons with Milwaukee Rep, American Players Theatre and Illinois Shakespeare Festival. A native Texan, he holds a B.F.A. in acting from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

(more)

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.

#