



MEDIA RELEASE

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Signal Sings Jon Marans' 'Old Wicked Songs'

CHICAGO, October 8, 2007 — Signal Ensemble Theatre (Ronan Marra, Christopher Prentice and Joseph Stearns, artistic directors) continues its fifth season, comprised of 20th-century American plays, with ***Old Wicked Songs*** by Jon Marans. Directed by ensemble member **Christopher Prentice** and featuring ensemble member **Vincent L. Lonergan** and The House Theatre of Chicago's **Shawn Pfautsch**, the production runs November 18 through December 15, 2007 in the studio at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division. **Press opening is Monday, November 19 at 7:30 p.m.**

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 who is battling his own demons. The music of Robert Schumann weaves throughout and 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.

Ensemble member **Vincent L. Lonergan** plays Professor Josef Mashkan. His Signal credits include Polonius in *Hamlet*, Mr. Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* and Leonato in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Other Chicago credits include Merlin in *The People's Sword in the Stone* (Quest Theatre); *A Wonderful Life* (Porchlight); *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Anna Karenina*, *King Lear* (Vitalist Theatre); *The People's Pinocchio* (Quest Theatre); *Any One Can Whistle* (Pegasus); *The Christmas Schooner* (Bailiwick); *City of Angels* (onetheatre), *Firebugs* (Boxer Rebellion); *Don Juan in Chicago*, *Empress of China*, *Jacques and His Master*, and *Shadow Box* (TinFish); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A Christmas Carol* (Metropolis). He understudied the role of Robert Wilson in Victory Gardens' production of *Free Man of Color*. Lonergan holds a B.M.E. and an M.M. from Indiana University.

Shawn Pfautsch makes his Signal debut as Stephen Hoffman. A co-founder of The House Theatre of Chicago, he has appeared in *Hope Springs Infernal*, *The Boy Detective Fails*, the *Valentine* trilogy, *Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe*, *Cave With Man*, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and *Death & Harry Houdini*. As a playwright, his play *Hatfield & McCoy* won two Jeff Citation nominations and his new play *The Attempters* will open at The House this season. Pfautsch has also performed at Emerald City Children's Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre (*Theatrical Essays*) and Strawdog Theatre Company (*Strawdog Radio Theatre VI*). He is a graduate of Southern Methodist University's Meadows School of the Arts.

Old Wicked Songs features designs by **R. Brad Criswell** (scenic), **Laura M. Dana** (costumes), **Sue Ragusa** (lights) and ensemble member **Anthony Ingram** (sound). **Deanna M. Keefe** is the stage manager.

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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 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 and James Callis. 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.

Ensemble member **Christopher Prentice**, Signal's producing artistic director, made his Chicago directorial debut with Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (three Jeff Citation nominations) last season. His work as an actor for the company includes the title role in *Hamlet*, *The Zoo Story*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Landslide*, *Catch-22* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. He was most recently seen in the title role in *Robin Hood* with the Oak Park Festival Theatre. His Chicago credits include *The Three Musketeers* (Chicago Shakespeare); *The Tempest* (First Folio); *Practical Anatomy* (Sansculottes); *Pride and Prejudice* (Northlight); the title roles in *Hamlet* (Velvet Willies) and *Macbeth* (Chase Park); as well as work with Stage Left, Irish Rep, Next, and New Leaf. Regional credits include Milwaukee Rep, American Players Theatre, Dallas Theater Center and Illinois Shakespeare Festival. A native Texan, he holds a B.F.A. in acting from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Old Wicked Songs runs November 18 through December 15, 2007 in the studio at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division. The preview is November 18 at 7:30 p.m. **Press opening is Monday, November 19 at 7:30 p.m.** The regular run will continue through December 15 with the following schedule: Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. NOTE: There will be no performance Thanksgiving Day, November 22. There are three additional performances: Monday, November 26, Monday, December 3 and Wednesday, December 12 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$20 on Fridays and Saturdays and \$15 on Mondays (except Opening, \$20), Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Preview tickets are \$10. Student and senior tickets are \$10. Tickets may be purchased at signalensemble.com or reserved at 773-347-1350. The Chopin Theatre is accessible by the CTA Blue Line train (Division) and buses (70-Division, 56-Milwaukee, 18-Ashland).

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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.

The Season Continues

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 "Momma Look Sharp."

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OLD WICKED SONGS

FACT SHEET

- WHAT:** Signal Ensemble Theatre presents *Old Wicked Songs* by Jon Marans
- LOCATION:** Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division Ave., Chicago, in the Studio
- DATES/TIMES:** SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18 – SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2007
PREVIEW: 11/18 7:30 pm
PRESS OPENING: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19 7:30 pm
Monday (11/26 & 12/3 only) 7:30 pm
Wednesday (12/12 only) 7:30 pm
Thursday, Friday & Saturday eves 8:00 pm
Sunday mats 3:00 pm
No performance Thanksgiving Day, 11/22
- DESCRIPTION:** *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 who is battling his own demons. The music of Robert Schumann weaves throughout and 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.
- WHO:** Written by Jon Marans
Directed by Christopher Prentice
Cast: Vincent L. Lonergan (Professor Josef Mashkan) and Shawn Pfautsch (Stephen Hoffman)
Production: R. Brad Criswell (setting), Laura M. Dana (costumes), Sue Ragusa (lighting), Anthony Ingram (sound), and Deanna M. Keefe (stage manager)
- PRICES:** Fridays and Saturdays: \$20
Mondays (except 11/19), Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays: \$15
Opening: Monday, 11/19: \$20
Preview: \$10
Students and Seniors: \$10
- TICKETS:** INFORMATION/RESERVATIONS: 773-347-1350 or online at signalensemble.com

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