

Signature Stories

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**KATORI
HALL**
KATORI IN KIBEHO

**SAM
SHEPARD**
A FASCINATION
WITH FATE

PUBLISHER

Signature Theatre
James Houghton,
Founding Artistic Director
Erika Mallin,
Executive Director

EDITORS

David Hatkoff
Beth Whitaker

EDITORIAL TEAM

Christie Evangelisto
Nathaniel French
Sarah Rose Leonard
Cathy Popowytch

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Christie Evangelisto
Nathaniel French
James Houghton
Sarah Rose Leonard
Beth Whitaker
Ciarán Deane, Field Day

DESIGN

Danielle Speicher
Ninth Circle Productions, LLC

PLAYWRIGHTS-IN-RESIDENCE

Annie Baker
Martha Clarke
Will Eno
Athol Fugard
A.R. Gurney
Katori Hall
Branden Jacobs-Jenkins
Kenneth Lonergan
Charles Mee
Sam Shepard
Regina Taylor
Naomi Wallace

WEBSITE

signaturetheatre.org

MAILING ADDRESS

Signature Theatre at
The Pershing Square Signature Center
480 West 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036

Signature Theatre

SIGNATURE THEATRE and THE PERSHING SQUARE SIGNATURE CENTER

Signature Theatre exists to honor and celebrate the playwright. Founded in 1991 by James Houghton, Signature makes an extended commitment to a playwright's body of work, and during this journey, the writer is engaged in every aspect of the creative process. By championing in-depth explorations of a playwright's body of work, Signature delivers an intimate and immersive journey into the playwright's singular vision. Signature serves its mission through its permanent home at The Pershing Square Signature Center, a three-theatre facility on West 42nd Street designed by Frank Gehry Architects to host Signature's three distinct playwrights' residencies and foster a cultural community. At the Center, opened in January 2012, Signature continues its founding Playwright-in-Residence model as Residency One, a first-of-its-kind, intensive exploration of a single writer's body of work. Residency Five, the only program of its kind, was launched at the Center to support multiple playwrights as they build bodies of work by guaranteeing each writer three productions over a five-year period. The Legacy Program, launched during Signature's 10th Anniversary Season, invites writers from both residencies back for productions of premiere or earlier plays. In 2014 Signature became the first New York City theatre to receive the Regional Theatre Tony Award®.

The Pershing Square Signature Center is a major contribution to New York City's cultural landscape and provides a venue for cultural organizations that supports and encourages collaboration among artists throughout the space. In addition to its three intimate theatres, the Center features a studio theatre, rehearsal studio, and a public café, bar and bookstore. Through the Signature Ticket Initiative: A Generation of Access, Signature has also made an unprecedented commitment to making its productions accessible by underwriting the cost of initial run tickets, currently priced at \$25, through 2031.

Signature Ticket Initiative: A Generation of Access made possible by Lead Partner The Pershing Square Foundation. Additional support for A Generation of Access provided by the Howard Gilman Foundation, Margot Adams and The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

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PHOTO CREDITS

COVER James Houghton and Sam Shepard in Derry, Northern Ireland. Photo by Joyce O'Connor.

CONTENTS (top to bottom) The cast of *A Few Stout Individuals* at Signature Theatre, 2002. Photo by Susan Johann. Stephen Rea in the Field Day production of *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*, 2013. Photo by Ros Kavanagh. Katori Hall photo by Gregory Costanzo. Sam Shepard photo by Lia Chang.

AROUND THE CENTER (page 3) 1. Photo by Steve and Anita Shevett. 2. Photo by Tristan Nash. 3. Photo by Steve and Anita Shevett. 4. Photo by Steve and Anita Shevett. 5. Photo by Steve and Anita Shevett. 6. Photo by Gregory Costanzo. (page 4) All Residency Five playwright photos by Gregory Costanzo; Photo by Steve and Anita Shevett.

KATORI IN KIBEHO (page 6): Photo by Gregory Costanzo. (page 7): Photo by Joan Marcus; Photo by Tristram Kenton; Photo by Gregory Costanzo. (page 8): Photo by Gregory Costanzo. (page 9): Photo by Jessica Katz; Photo by Joan Marcus; Photo by T. Charles Erickson; Photo by Joan Marcus.

BELIEVING IN A BETTER WORLD (page 11) Photo by Gregory Costanzo; Photo by Carol Rosegg; Photo by Joan Marcus.

SAM SHEPARD: A FASCINATION WITH FATE (page 13) Photo by Gregory Costanzo; (page 14) Photo by Carol Rosegg. (page 15) Photo by Joan Marcus; Photo by Carol Rosegg; Photo by Joan Marcus. (page 16) Photo by Carol Rosegg; (page 17) Photo by T Charles Erickson; Photo by Susan Johann.

SHIFTING LANGUAGE (page 19) Photo by Joan Marcus. (page 20) Photo by Ros Kavanagh.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE Photo by Tristan Nash; Photo courtesy of Signature's Development Department.

FROM THE SIGNATURE ARCHIVES Photo by Marianne Szucs.

contents

3 AROUND THE CENTER

AND *I AND SILENCE*, *THE WAYSIDE MOTOR INN*,
WELCOMING THE NEW GROUP, CHECKING IN
WITH RESIDENCY FIVE PLAYWRIGHTS

5 KATORI IN KIBEHO

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATORI HALL

11 BELIEVING IN A BETTER WORLD

SIGNATURE TALKS TO DIRECTOR MICHAEL GREIF

13 A FASCINATION WITH FATE

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAM SHEPARD

18 VARIATIONS ON A THEME

DIRECTOR NANCY MECKLER ON
A PARTICLE OF DREAD (OEDIPUS VARIATIONS)

19 SHIFTING LANGUAGE

AN INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR AND FIELD DAY
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR STEPHEN REA

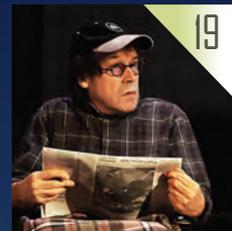
21 YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

3 WAYS TO PARTNER WITH SIGNATURE

22 FROM THE SIGNATURE ARCHIVES



Director Michael Greif talks about his longstanding collaborations with playwrights and his work on *Our Lady of Kibeho*.



Actor and Field Day Theatre Company Artistic Director Stephen Rea discusses the company's roots in Derry, Northern Ireland.

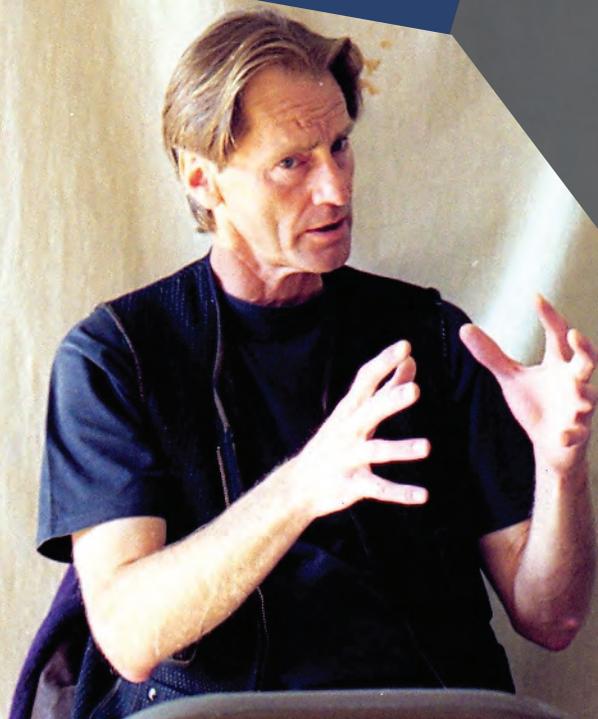
5

KATORI HALL
re-lives the epic tale of how her latest play, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, came to be.



13

Signature talks with **SAM SHEPARD** about his newest play *A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations)*, and his reunion with long-time collaborators Stephen Rea and Nancy Meckler.



AROUND THE CENTER



Naomi Wallace and A.R. Gurney Join Signature as Residency One Playwrights

Signature kicked off the 2014-15 Season with plays by two new Residency One playwrights, Naomi Wallace and A.R. Gurney. Wallace's *And I and Silence*, about the unlikely friendship of two incarcerated women in 1950s America, posed powerful questions about race, gender, and power.

Gurney's rarely-seen play *The Wayside Motor Inn* gave audiences a glimpse into the lives of ten strangers in a 1970s Boston motel, and the unexpected connections between them. It's a unique and exciting opportunity to have these two essential writers in conversation with each other this season.



1. James Houghton and A.R. Gurney at the Opening Night of Gurney's *The Wayside Motor Inn*. 2. The World of the Play: *Women Prisoners* and America's Incarceration Crisis panel discussion. 3. Andrew Lieberman and Lila Neugebauer at the Opening Night of *The Wayside Motor Inn*. 4. Amanda Michaels, Naomi Wallace, Caitlin McLeod and guests at the Opening Night of *And I and Silence*. 5. Naomi Wallace, Caitlin McLeod, and the cast at the Opening Night of *And I and Silence*. 6. Lizbeth Mackay, Will Pullen and David McElwee in rehearsal for *The Wayside Motor Inn*.

WHAT'S NEW WITH THE RESIDENCY FIVE PLAYWRIGHTS



...

ANNIE BAKER

was awarded the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for her play *The Flick*. She developed her new play, *The Last of the Little Hours*, at the Sundance Institute's 2014 Theatre Lab this summer.



...

KATORI HALL's

The world premiere of *Our Lady of Kibeho* opens at Signature this November. Her new play *Blood Quilt* will be produced at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage in 2015.



...

MARTHA CLARKE's

Chéri, which premiered at Signature last season, is currently on an international tour and will be seen this fall at the Kennedy Center and in Argentina, where it will feature Academy Award-winning actress Norma Aleandro.



...

WILL ENO's

new play *The Realistic Joneses* recently concluded a Broadway run featuring Michael C. Hall, Toni Collette, Tracy Letts, and Marisa Tomei.



...

Steppenwolf Theatre's production of **KENNETH LONERGAN's**

1996 play *This Is Our Youth* opened on Broadway this September featuring Michael Cera, Kieran Culkin, and Tavi Gevinson.



...

This May, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago will be producing **REGINA TAYLOR's**

stop. reset., which premiered at Signature last season.



...

BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS's

War will premiere at Yale Repertory Theatre this November. Vineyard Theatre will produce his play *Gloria; Or Ambition* next spring.



WELCOME TO THE NEW GROUP



Executive Director Adam Bernstein and Artistic Director Scott Elliott of The New Group.

When The Pershing Square Signature Center opened in 2012, Signature envisioned it one day providing a home to some of New York's most dynamic and impactful theatre companies. Today, Signature is thrilled to welcome The New Group to the Center, where it will celebrate its 20th Anniversary Season with three exciting new productions. An award-winning, artist-driven institution, The New Group has a distinguished record of producing contemporary, emotionally immediate works. This season, the company will offer David Rabe's 1971 drama *Sticks and Bones*, Joel Drake Johnson's *Rasheeda Speaking*, and the world premiere of Jesse Eisenberg's *The Spoils*. Signature looks forward to having this important company around the Center.

KATORI IN KIBEHO

AN INTERVIEW WITH RESIDENCY FIVE PLAYWRIGHT KATORI HALL

Residency Five playwright Katori Hall returns to Signature Theatre this October for the world premiere of her rich, daring new play *Our Lady of Kibeho*. Set in Kibeho, Rwanda in 1981 and based on actual events, the play follows three Catholic school girls who claim to speak to the Virgin Mary, and the young priest tasked with uncovering the truth. The product of five years of research, three trips to Rwanda, and a long-time awareness of the Rwandan genocide, *Our Lady of Kibeho* is the second of Katori's three plays with Signature, and a thrilling new addition to her diverse body of work. A few days before the start of rehearsals, Katori and Literary Director Christie Evangelisto re-lived the epic tale of how this play came to be, and the many incredible stories woven into its fabric.

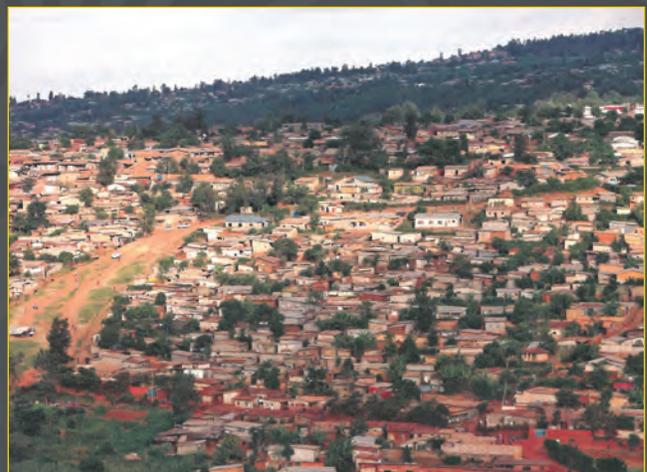
Signature: What's been happening in your life since *Hurt Village*?

KH: Honey, I had a baby. That's all I've been doing. Creating a life form, cells, bringing them into the world. Mommyhood has been amazing. It's changed me—I don't know how yet, but we'll see. The stakes are higher in my life now. It's funny; I've become more focused as a writer in terms of what I want to write about, but at the same time very relaxed about it. Before it felt like life or death. I think because my priorities have shifted I'm having more fun as a writer than ever before.

Signature: What inspired you to write *Our Lady of Kibeho*?

KH: I went to Rwanda for the first time in 2009. Erik Ehn, an amazing playwright, makes a pilgrimage there every year. He takes theatre artists, visual artists, photographers and musicians to attend a genocide studies conference, and to tour all the memorial sites. I had wanted to go to Rwanda since I was 13 years old. That was when I first got a glimpse of the 1994 genocide; I remember seeing all these bodies on TV floating in a river, and I was like "How, why, did this happen?" So this question had been percolating in my soul for many, many years.

When I finally got there in 2009 I was overwhelmed, to the point where I almost became desensitized to the horror. I went to so many different memorials where I saw lime covered bodies, and the clothes from the bodies piled onto church pews, because people had been killed in churches. It got to the point where I couldn't even cry anymore. I went there wanting to write about Rwanda and the genocide, but I was trying to figure out a way to avoid being like everybody else, to avoid



(top): Kigali City, Rwanda. (bottom): Visionary Alphonsine Mumureke. (right): Katori Hall, 2014.

going through the front door. I wanted to go through another door—a side door, a back door. I wanted to have a different perspective. I think it was the second week that I went to the village of Kibeho. There was a beautiful shrine called “Our Lady of Kibeho,” a huge church in the middle of seemingly nowhere, and it was awe-inspiring. We took a tour of the shrine, and one of the priests told us this incredible story about a young woman named Alphonsine, who at that very spot we were standing in, had spoken to the Virgin Mary. I thought, “What is he talking about, this is crazy!” But the more he told of this remarkable story, I knew it was the door I had to walk through. I learned not only of Alphonsine, but of Anathalie and Marie-Claire, three women who eventually became confirmed by the local diocese as actual visionaries in 2001. I thought the story was a gem in the midst of all this horror and terror I was experiencing—a beautiful light I had stumbled into.

After doing more research, I found out that the young women actually had a premonition of Rwanda descending into chaos and murder and hell. I think that is one of the main reasons why the women were confirmed as visionaries. So when I went back to Rwanda in 2010, I decided to track down one of the visionaries who I heard was living in Kibeho. I got to Kigali and hired a driver. It took 6 hours to get to Kibeho,

I thought the story was a gem in the midst of all this horror and terror I was experiencing—a beautiful light I had stumbled into.





(background): Nyungwe Forest, Rwanda. (top left): Marsha Stephanie Blake and Joaquina Kalukango in *Hurt Village* at Signature Theatre, 2012. (bottom left): Kambi Gathesha, Danaya Esperanza, and Jade Eshete at the first rehearsal for *Our Lady of Kibeho*. (below): David Harewood in *The Mountaintop* at Theatre 503 in London, 2007. (far right): Michael Greif and Katori Hall speak at the first rehearsal for *Our Lady of Kibeho*.



I'm not sure exactly why *Our Lady* picked her to talk to, but she's definitely a vessel of light and love. Even if she has a little attitude.



up many, many, hills, on unpaved roads, red dust everywhere. We finally made it up the hill, and I saw this woman ushering kids out of choir practice and I remember she had Jesus floating all over her clothes. I went up to her and said, "I'm Katori Hall, I'm a playwright from America and I want to meet the visionary!" And she was like, "You have to go down the hill and talk to the priest to find her." When I found the priest I explained to him that I was in Kibeho to write this play about Rwanda and *Our Lady* and that I wanted to talk to the visionary. So we went up the hill and he said, "That's her right there." It was the woman with the Jesus-es floating all over her clothes! She had misled me because she was tired of talking to people. That moment changed my approach to the story. Because these people are visionaries, yes, but they're also just regular people who get tired. It allowed me to add more texture and flavor to my characterizations of them. I eventually found out that Marie-Claire, the third visionary, was killed during the genocide, so that added another layer as I continued working on the piece.

Anyway, Anathalie kept telling me she was "too busy" to talk to me, so I asked the priest to give me her cell number. Yes, visionaries have cell phones too! When I called her, she picked up and told me she was praying—and I'm like "How you prayin' and you just picked up your cell phone??" So I asked a friend of mine who

I went there wanting to write about Rwanda and the genocide, but I was trying to figure out a way to avoid being like everybody else, to avoid going through the front door. I wanted to go through another door—a side door, a back door. I wanted to have a different perspective.

knows Kinyarwanda fluently to convince Anathalie to meet with me. In a few days I show up at her place with my translator (and a blind man), and she takes a long time to answer the door. She opens the door, blesses the blind man first (which I totally get), and then goes “Ugh, it’s you” in Kinyarwanda. But, Anathalie welcomed us in, we prayed with her, and it was a beautiful experience. I’m not sure exactly why Our Lady picked her to talk to, but she’s definitely a vessel of light and love. Even if she has a little attitude.

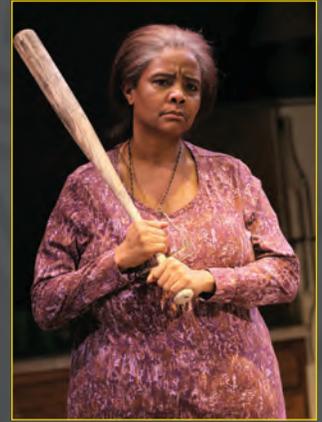
Signature: Did she tell you what it was like to speak with the Virgin Mary?

KH: Well, there’s absolutely a narrative that’s been constructed surrounding the legend of Kibeho, and she reiterated that. The interesting moments were when she allowed me in to her humanity and how she survived the genocide, how she prayed through it. I thought sharing that with me was very brave. I asked her too about where the conflict started and if in 1981 people were calling themselves Hutu and Tutsi. She told me, “Those terms, those categories, do not exist. I’m Rwandan.” I remember she kept on saying “I’m Rwandan,” and so I didn’t find out if she was Hutu or Tutsi. A lot of people in Rwanda refuse to name themselves. People are on the edge even now.





A lot of people
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(this page, clockwise from top right): Tonya Pinkins in *Hurt Village* at Signature Theatre, 2012; Kathy Searle in *Whaddabloodclot!!!* at Williamstown Theatre Festival, 2012; Lake Kivu, Rwanda; Katori Hall at Julliard, 2007; Saycon Sengbloh in *Hurt Village* at Signature Theatre, 2012. (right page): Kigali City, Rwanda.

Signature: What are children taught in school about the history of Hutu-Tutsi relations?

KH: They're taught the narrative of "The Belgians came in and created this class system that favored Tutsis because they seemed 'more like Belgians'"—Tutsis were considered taller, smarter, prettier. All of this hatred fomented over years, over generations, until 1994 happened and Hutu extremists decided to use a political moment, the assassination of President Habyarimana, as the jumping off point to the slaughter of Tutsi people. There have been pops of violence against the Tutsi people for many years—in 1959, in the '60s, in 1973, but this was the biggest. A million people were killed, in a hundred days.

Signature: Talk me through some of the research you've done.

KH: My top three sources are Philip Gourevitch's book *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families*, *Machete Season* by Jean Hatzfeld, and then a documentary called *My Neighbor, My Killer* by Anne Aghion. *Machete Season* in particular brings home how the killers enjoyed it. It just makes you realize how close humanity is to the nastiness within. We're capable of such good, and of such, such evil. I got to meet perpetrators in Rwanda and they looked like my dad. They were joking and laughing... it was really chilling. You know how some people are afraid to go into graveyards? Well it's not dead people we need to be scared of. It's the people who look just like you and are capable of killing you.

In the documentary, you learn about the process of forgiveness in Rwanda. In my opinion, there has been a huge act of *performing* forgiveness, and I think it's taking a lot of time for it to actually resonate with people and for forgiveness to actually happen. I think that can be applied to a lot of moments in history when it comes to atrocities—from Bosnia to the Holocaust.

Signature: How do you feel about "illusion" or magic onstage?

KH: I am a huge, huge fan of illusion. Being African American and growing up in the South, there is an acceptance of spirituality that I don't think a lot of people necessarily understand. For us it is real. Our ancestors are always with us,

If you grow up in a world where the dead walk with you and curtains flutter and fly, it bleeds into your work. So I'm constantly pushing my directors to realize, visually, that reality.

so if the curtain blows and I'm talking to my Auntie, she's like "Oh, that's my dead husband Walter, he just walkin' past." If you grow up in a world where the dead walk with you and curtains flutter and fly, it bleeds into your work. So I'm constantly pushing my directors to realize, visually, that reality. I have really enjoyed the conversations surrounding how we're going to pull off effects I haven't seen before onstage. In movies you can do it with CGI, but onstage is a hell of a challenge. If we do pull it off, then you'll have to believe, and this is a play about belief. You need to step into that reality in order to go on the roller coaster ride of the play.

Signature: Why did you want *Kibeho* to be the second play of your residency with us?

KH: You know, I love epic plays. I love lots of people on stage. To be given the opportunity—as a woman, as a black playwright—to see such a grandiose vision on the biggest stage at Signature, is such a blessing. I thank Jim [Houghton] for giving us this opportunity because plays like this don't happen in New York. It's also very different from what people know of my work. Even though *Hurt Village* has an epic nature to it too, the style is totally different. I think *Kibeho* probably has some overlap with *The Mountaintop* in terms of dealing with spirituality and magical realism on stage, but it's another level. I think these huge, multi-character, layered plays are what I do best. That's what I want to see on stage! ■



BELIEVING IN A BETTER WORLD

(clockwise from top): Lily Taylor in *Landscape of the Body* at Signature Theatre, 2006; Robin Weigert and Christian Borle in *Angels in America* at Signature Theatre, 2010; Michael Greif speaks at the first rehearsal for *Angels in America* at Signature Theatre, 2010.



An Interview with Michael Greif



Obie Award-winning director Michael Greif is known for bringing new plays and musicals to life both on and off Broadway, in London, and in major regional theatres across the country. At the center of his process are long-term collaborations with writers—such as Tony Kushner, Scott Frankel & Michael Korie, and Tom Kitt & Brian Yorkey, among others—and with institutions such as The Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, and Signature Theatre. We are thrilled to have Michael back at Signature this fall directing Katori Hall's new play *Our Lady of Kibeho*, his fifth play for Signature and his first project at The Pershing Square Signature Center. Before diving into rehearsals this past September, Michael had a chat with Literary Director Christie Evangelisto about the work to come and the wise ways of playwrights.

Signature: What is your history with Signature?

MG: I first worked here in 2002 doing a wonderful John Guare play called *A Few Stout Individuals*. John and I knew each other from Williamstown but hadn't worked together before. I was an extraordinary fan of his writing—working with him was one of those dreams you never think will come to fruition. But I got the call and was knocked out by the play, then was really happy with how everyone at Signature found the resources the play needed.

I returned to Signature in 2006 for a revival of John's play *Landscape of the Body*. It was a great reunion with John, and after a very good production at Williamstown, I got a call from Jim [Houghton]. It was a large, complicated show, and once again, John and I felt beautifully supported by this institution. Then in 2010 I had been working with Tony Kushner on a premiere of a play called *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide...*, and soon after we closed I got another call from Jim. I was thrilled to hear that he was reviving *Angels in America* and asking me to direct it. It was an extraordinary opportunity to do those plays in an intimate setting.

Signature: What is your history with Residency Five playwright Katori Hall?

MG: I had seen things she had written! I saw *The Mountaintop* and was really impressed, like so many, with her imagination, ambition, and craft. Then I saw *Hurt Village* at Signature, which took me places I didn't expect to go. I was given a very brave and truthful account of a young life struggling in a very tough place, and was impressed with her ability to depict a fascinating, complicated community. I'm always attracted to writers like Katori who use language richly rather than sparsely.

Signature: How did you feel when you first read *Our Lady of Kibeho*?

MG: I thought it was a thrilling subject for a play. What a wise and sly way of getting at a terrible moment in history. I love plays that examine the years before an explosion, the cataclysms you don't see but should be able to recognize.

Signature: How much did you know about Rwanda?

MG: Probably as much as most interested Americans. I knew of the genocide. I knew about it in relation to a series of cataclysmic genocides occurring at the end of the 20th century. The story of the visionaries was completely new to me, and a fantastic thing about preparing for the play has been reading about visitations and visionaries and the validation process. In Rwanda, but also around the world. It's interesting that there's a confluence of "visits" around this time in other regions (such

...a fantastic thing about preparing for the play has been reading about visitations and visionaries and the validation process. In Rwanda, but also around the world.

as Bosnia-Herzegovina) where horrific civil wars and genocides took place.

Signature: The play has a lot of design challenges/opportunities. How have you and your team tackled them?

MG: Yes. There are supernatural events in the play, events that defy the natural world—that's always challenging to depict theatrically. The first thing I talked to Katori about was the level of theatricality. How much did we want to let the audience in on the illusions? Because certainly there's a way to depict supernatural events in a language that allows the audience to see how they're happening. We decided instead to put the audience in the same position as the characters, so the audience sees the same things these young girls are seeing. Since then we've gone about working with illusionists and magicians to try and make those things work.

Signature: What, in your words, is *Kibeho* about?

MG: I've been describing it as being about three convent girls who are visited by the Virgin Mary, who ultimately, surprisingly, begins to warn them about the impending genocide. I'm hoping to direct the play in a way in which people see that it is also about how necessary it is for people to believe in a future. To believe that their children will live in a better world. I think that our lead character is struggling to believe that a better world is to come on Earth, and not in a heavenly sphere. It's remarkable that in this religious setting in which most of the characters believe that the rewards of this life are in the next, he's looking for a world in which the rewards are earthly.

Signature: This is your first time directing at the Center. What has that been like for you?

MG: I've come to many, many productions here. It's fantastic that Jim's been able to make the place he wanted to make. There is a great energy in the audiences mingling in that fantastic lobby. And it's wonderful to know that you're coming back here multiple times a month, to know that you will run into folks having great theatre experiences. It's quite amazing. ■

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SAM SHEPARD
A FASCINATION WITH
FATE

LEGACY PLAYWRIGHT SAM SHEPARD RETURNS TO SIGNATURE WITH HIS NEWEST PLAY, *A PARTICLE OF DREAD* (OEDIPUS VARIATIONS), A FRAGMENTED RE-TELLING OF THE OEDIPUS MYTH.

A Particle of Dread (Oedipus Variations) was created in partnership with Field Day Theatre Company, a renowned Northern Irish theatre and publishing company from the city of Derry/Londonderry, where Shepard's longtime collaborator, the actor Stephen Rea, is the Artistic Director. *Particle* also reunites Shepard and Rea with director Nancy Meckler, who directed Rea in Shepard's *Action* and *Buried Child* in England in the 1970s and '80s. Signature is excited to be a part of deepening the trio's longtime artistic exchange for this important new work.

Shepard began his collaboration with Signature Theatre in 1996 as Signature's sixth Playwright-in-Residence. That season saw productions of *When the World Was Green (A Chef's Fable)*, a collaboration with director Joseph Chaikin, *The Tooth of Crime (Second Dance)* (1972), *Curse of the Starving Class* (1976), and four of Shepard's earlier one-acts: *Chicago*, *The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife*, *Killer's Head*, and *Action*. Shepard returned to Signature for the 2001-02 Tenth Anniversary Season for the New York premiere of *The Late Henry Moss*, and in 2012 helped usher in the first year in The Pershing Square Signature Center with his play *Heartless*.

Shepard spoke on the phone with Signature's Associate Artistic Director Beth Whitaker a couple of weeks before rehearsals about his time in Derry, building a story based on variations, and notions of fate.

Signature: Why did you decide to take on the Oedipus story for your collaboration with Stephen Rea and Field Day?

SS: I've been working on the piece for years. Simultaneously, I've been working with Stephen on other things, and he had this company called Field Day, up in Derry, in the north of Ireland, in that little town that had so much duress during the time that they call "the Troubles."¹ When Derry became the 2013 UK City of Culture, Field Day was given some money to develop a project. Stephen asked if I would be interested in doing something, and I said, "Well, I've been working on this Oedipus piece for quite some time," and I'd give it a whirl. I had a bunch of sketches that were loosely based on *Oedipus*, and I was really having a hard time adapting it, and finally I decided I didn't want to adapt it, I just wanted to do variations on the themes that were in the play. Nancy Meckler, who I'd worked with years before, became available to direct the piece, and we all agreed that it would be this improvisational thing. We started working on it from that point of view, and lo and behold it turned into a script.

Signature: Were you thinking about the history of Northern Ireland as you were writing it?

SS: It was accidentally corresponding, you know what I mean? I didn't push the theme that way, it just—it was set up that way. And set up that way in the sense that Derry is what it is. It's hard to believe that such horrors happened in Derry, because when you walk the streets, the people are extremely friendly, and it just seems like a very

THE SITUATIONS
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SO, THAN THE
ANCIENT ONES.

(left): Sam Shepard, 2012; (below): Debbon Ayre, Tanya Gingerich, John Diehl, and Bruce MacVittie in *Action* at Signature Theatre, 1997.

¹ A sectarian conflict about national identity that lasted from 1969 to 1998 in which over 3,600 citizens of Northern Ireland were killed.

congenial place. And then you go down to the Bogside neighborhood, and you go around the Catholic areas and you realize that some awful stuff has happened. Yet at the same time I wasn't trying to push this thing toward a political conclusion. I think the themes speak for themselves and correspond to a lot of the stuff that happened there.



Signature: You've collaborated with Stephen for a long time now. How did you two meet?

SS: I left New York in the early '70s. I left for the same reasons I don't hang out there now, the commercial parts of theatre were just not interesting. I still have a hard time getting plays done commercially, even though there are great reviews, etc., because they don't have movie stars. I went to London because the fringe theatre was happening at that time. It was very eclectic and very exciting, in the way that the original off-off-Broadway was, and that's exactly what I was looking for. Stephen and I met at the Hampstead Theatre, which is also where Nancy originated, and she happens to be directing, so the whole thing was incredible, almost accidental. I'm very grateful.

Signature: You use the word "Variations" in the title, which makes it sound like a piece of music with a theme and variations. And Nancy has described it as your "jazz riff" on *Oedipus*. Can you talk a little bit about the structure of the play?

SS: The play has so many submerged and overt themes that have to do with family, fathers and sons, and murder. All of these thematic things in it speak to themselves in a way, and they're



TO CONTINUE TO PROMOTE THE WRITER AS BEING THE REAL SPINAL CORD OF THEATRE, TO SEE REALLY GREAT WRITING AND TO PROMOTE REALLY GOOD WRITING IS WHAT THE THEATRE'S ALL ABOUT TO ME.

very ancient. If you strip it away in a certain way it's very American. It's very much about murder and rape and pillage—it's not a pretty play—but it certainly speaks to the horror of contemporary life. And that's what I was trying to get at, improvisationally. Not so much jazz music, which I think has kind of seen its day.

Signature: There is music in the play, however. Can you talk a little bit about the music in the first production and the role it plays?

SS: Well, Stephen knew [composer] Neil [Martin] very well, and he's a very accomplished cello musician, in the classic style. Neil's done a wonderful job of taking that classical substructure and turning it into very interesting segues. And I think we're going to use some slide guitar and other instrumentation along with it, so, you know, it should be a little rougher than it was.

Signature: The visual world in which the play takes place is abstract. Can you talk about what that world is?

SS: Well, it's difficult because it's internalized, you know? It's sort of like the environment of a mind rather than necessarily taking place in a place. It's not taking place in a castle, it's not taking place in a temple or a Greek setting of any kind. It's taking place in the mind of Oedipus, I suppose, is the best way of explaining that. However, I'm not trying to enforce that on the audience. I'm not trying to present a cranium for them to—you know what I mean? It's not taking place in the cerebellum [laughs].

Signature: Is there a relationship between the classical characters as represented in the traditional Oedipus story and the contemporary characters?

SS: Yes, there is. I mean, with that, again, it's something that the audience has to find, I suppose. But the situations of the contemporary characters are as horrific, if not more so, than the ancient ones. You know, the situation, to me, is a murder play. Who created this crime? And an incredible thing in the play is that the murderer doesn't know it's him. The one who's done the killing



(left page, top to bottom): Kirk Acevedo in *The Tooth of Crime (Second Dance)* at Signature Theatre, 1997; Gretchen Cleavelly and Joe Ciccolella in *Curse of the Starving Class* at Signature Theatre, 1997; Lois Smith in *Heartless* at Signature Theatre, 2012.

(this page): Bruce MacVittie and John Diehl in *Action* at Signature Theatre, 1997.



has no idea until the very end that it's him who's responsible for the horror that's all around him. Many people who are responsible for murders and deaths would absolutely deny it. That's the real fascination of the play.

Signature: Do you think that the notion of fate speaks to our relationship to the past?

SS: I think it's a much deeper question about how we don't accept our fate. We don't see destiny, we don't see that this is fated, we don't see that we're living in a situation that's terminable. We spend all our time denying it, in fact. So...now whether a play can educate people into that or not, to accepting...maybe it can. Maybe that's what the Greeks were all about, I don't know.

Signature: At Signature, we've had the pleasure of doing your work in a full season, and several new plays in the years since, and I wonder if you could talk about how your relationship to the theatre has changed.

SS: I'm very disappointed in the current state of theatre, especially in New York, about this whole business of not

being able to move a play. You know, you have to have a movie star in your play in order to be able to sell tickets. People don't come to see plays, they come to see movie stars. And as a writer, it kind of turns your stomach. And I think places like Signature, which are dedicated to the writer, are really the most extraordinary places, not just in the United States, but in Europe. Everywhere. To continue to promote the writer as being the real spinal cord of theatre, to see really great writing and to promote really good writing is what the theatre's all about to me. Of course, I'm speaking from the point of view of a playwright. But I think it is! When you look at Beckett's work, when you look at Shakespeare's work, they were creating extraordinary theatre. To find places that promote that sort of work, it's getting scarcer and scarcer. So what Jim [Houghton] has done really is an extraordinary feat. ■



(top): Sam Rockwell and Gordon Joseph Weiss in *Fool for Love* at Williamstown Theatre Festival, 2014;
(bottom): Ethan Hawke and Arliss Howard in *The Late Henry Moss* at Signature Theatre, 2001.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

DIRECTOR NANCY MECKLER ON A PARTICLE OF DREAD

Director Nancy Meckler began collaborating with Legacy Playwright Sam Shepard in the early 1970s, when she directed the world premieres of his plays *Action* and *Killer's Head*. She went on to direct the premiere of *Curse of the Starving Class* at the Royal Court Theatre, the London premiere of *Buried Child* at the Hampstead Theatre, and *True West* for Shared Experience, where Meckler was Artistic Director for many years. Literary Associate Sarah Rose Leonard spoke to Meckler hours before the first preview of her production of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *Play Strindberg* at the Bath Theatre Royal in England.

Signature: Many of us know how the story of Oedipus ends, but *Particle* disorients our knowledge through its use of fragmentary structure. How do you think Shepard's chosen form for this story influences our understanding of the classic myth?

NM: Shepard subtitles his play *Oedipus Variations* and for me that's the key. He takes the original *Oedipus Rex* play and explores its themes just the way musicians might explore themes in a jazz improvisation. At first Shepard was working with the Sophocles characters, and then he created these modern alternate characters of Otto and Jocelyn and Annalee, who were the counterparts of Oedipus and Jocasta and Antigone. So we learn that the infant Oedipus was left to die on a hillside because his father was told the child was going to grow up to murder him, and then we get the modern character of Annalee (Antigone) who has decided to leave her baby to die on a hillside because she's afraid he will be tainted by the violence he has seen. So that's not exactly the same story, it's a variation. The story of Annalee and her baby has huge resonance in Northern Ireland. A city that wants to forget the terrible violence in its past. I think that Sam was strongly influenced by the fact that he was writing it for Northern Ireland, specifically for the city of Derry.

Signature: How do you think Derry influenced the play?

NM: Derry is the city where most of the hunger strikers came from during the Troubles. It was also the site of

the Bloody Sunday massacre of civilians. We were rehearsing right near the walls of the city where you could look down on the Bogside neighborhood and you'd see these enormous murals on the sides of buildings that were painted during and after the Troubles. Some have images of violence, some are images of people. The murals are now a major tourist attraction. I met some Derry locals who disliked the murals as they felt they were celebrating the past. They were saying, "We should be forgetting the past, we want to think about peace now." I mentioned this to Sam, and he said, "That's it of course. Everybody wants to forget the past, but you can't."

Signature: There is a lot of duality in *Particle*—as we've mentioned, many of the actors play characters that echo each other through time. What do you think is the effect of doubling in this story?

NM: It's a surprising idea, to have the Oedipus story running in parallel with a modern version of the events and modern counterparts of the characters. After we had workshopped the piece, Sam made the decision to have the actors double their Ancient Greek selves with their modern American selves. And because we were rehearsing in Northern Ireland with Northern Irish actors we made a decision to play all the Ancient Greek scenes in an Irish accent and all the modern American scenes in American accents. I think it adds to the experience in that Shepard is interested in the themes and the dilemmas and the situations which are timeless and not rooted to any one place or moment. ■

Derry, Northern Ireland.



Shifting Language

An Interview with Stephen Rea

The longstanding collaboration between Stephen Rea, the renowned actor and Artistic Director of Field Day Theatre Company, and Legacy Playwright Sam Shepard dates back to 1974, when Rea starred in Shepard's play *Geography of a Horse Dreamer* at the Royal Court Theatre. Rea spoke with Literary Associate Sarah Rose Leonard a few days after the opening of Irish playwright Enda Walsh's *Ballyturk* at the National Theatre in London, in which he starred.

Signature: Could you tell us about how Field Day came about?

SR: In 1980 I went to Brian Friel and asked him if he would write a play that we could tour with. He happened to be writing *Translations*, so we formed the company to do that play. But then it had such an impact, and released so much energy in the both of us, that we gathered some of the finest creative minds in Ireland around us—Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Tom Paulin, David Hammond, and Tom Kilroy—and went on doing more plays and publications, and really pushing the discourse.

Signature: Field Day's productions have always started in the city of Derry. How do you think Derry finds its way into the work?

SR: I always think of Derry as a live theatre space. The audience there engages completely with what it sees, and feels a real connection with Field Day. That gives us an opportunity to be freer in what we do, and that feeling is unique in Ireland. It's partly because Derry, although it's technically in the northern jurisdiction, really doesn't belong in either jurisdiction. It's not so polluted with the discourse of either so it has an openness somehow. I find that very liberating. Sam was with us throughout rehearsals in Derry last year, and I know that he absorbed the history of the city as he walked its ancient walls each day.

Sam was with us throughout rehearsals in Derry last year, and I know that he absorbed the history of the city as he walked its ancient walls each day.

Signature: How do you feel the current political situation affects the context of *A Particle of Dread*?

SR: It's very hard to imagine that [the Troubles] never happened, but basically that's what people are trying to do. They are trying to ignore the legacy of thirty, forty years of murder and political turmoil rather than dealing with it. Sam is such a great writer, he couldn't be in a place and have that not enter the play.

The current peace process in the north of Ireland is predicated on two separate groups of people looking at each other with resentment and insisting on their own particular rights and belief in their own integrity, but something has to give a bit. And I'm not sure what. But I do think, ultimately, theatre can help. For instance, when we started doing plays in Derry it altered the language somehow. People were offered a new language. I believe theatre can have that impact. In any post-conflict situation people don't just put down their weapons and rush into each other's arms, but something happens to



(left): Stephen Rea in Shepard's *Kicking a Dead Horse* at The Public Theater in 2008.

(right page, top): Judith Roddy and Lloyd Hutchinson in *A Particle of Dread* (*Oedipus Variations*), Field Day Theatre Company, 2013.

(right page, bottom): A mural commemorating the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

the collective imagination. And of course, *A Particle of Dread* is about collective guilt. The thing is that everybody has that sense of guilt, even the noncombatants. You're in kind of an emotional shutdown during times of conflict, because it's impossible to be engaged all the time with it, with so many terrible, terrible things happening.



Signature: Field Day has done two other Greek adaptations, *The Cure at Troy* and *The Riot Act*, making this your third. What do you think draws you to these ancient stories?

SR: These stories have lasted because they deal with human and political situations that recur throughout history. What the Greeks do is to elevate the discourse to a very high level where you're not talking only about parochial little squabbles, and offer us the questions that we need to ask of ourselves in these awful situations. Our recourse to Greek plays is not just a theatrical action, but a deep need to understand what has happened to us. This was a revelation to me when I was working in theatre in the 1980s—that in a world of distorted languages, we were able to ask complex questions in this shared space, and that's what theatre does so well. And that's why we need theatre, particularly in these conflict and post-conflict situations.

Signature: Has playing *Oedipus* given you a different perspective?

SR: In the aftermath of something like the Troubles, you're constantly questioning. Some deaths upset you more than others. Why should that be? I think it's extraordinarily painful to live like that, and to defend a position in it. It's also very hard to change it. We just need to keep offering language. Brian Friel said, "It's all about language." I said, "What, theatre?" And he said, "No, the whole thing. The whole thing. It's all about language." ■



Field Day Theatre Company

Signature is presenting Sam Shepard's *A Particle of Dread* (*Oedipus Variations*) with Field Day, a renowned theatre and publishing company that was founded in 1980 in the then war-torn city of Derry, Northern Ireland, by Academy Award Nominee Stephen Rea and Tony Award-winning playwright Brian Friel for the purposes of staging Friel's play *Translations*. Following the huge success of that play, Field Day quickly grew to incorporate Irish intellectuals of international stature and outlook, including the late poet and Nobel Prize Winner Seamus Heaney, author and critic Seamus Deane, poet Tom Paulin, musician and filmmaker Davy Hammond, and playwright Tom Kilroy. Field Day sought to make a cultural intervention into the political and cultural discourse in Ireland and was particularly motivated by the breakdown of the society in Northern Ireland, which, since 1969, had descended into a seemingly unbreakable pattern of rebellion and repression, a pattern that lasted until the mid-1990s. In 1979, Friel had stated in an interview: "I think that out of [a] cultural state, a possibility of a political state follows. That is always the sequence." He also declared that political conflict is "all about language." Thus, from the outset, and for over thirty years, Field Day has sought to present an alternative analysis of Irish cultural history that highlights the shortcomings of the official narrative. The company has maintained a two-pronged approach to

its cultural redefinition of Ireland, comprising theatre and publishing. It is a mission without end, and though the focus is on Ireland, the implication is global. As the schoolmaster Hugh says in Friel's *Translations*:

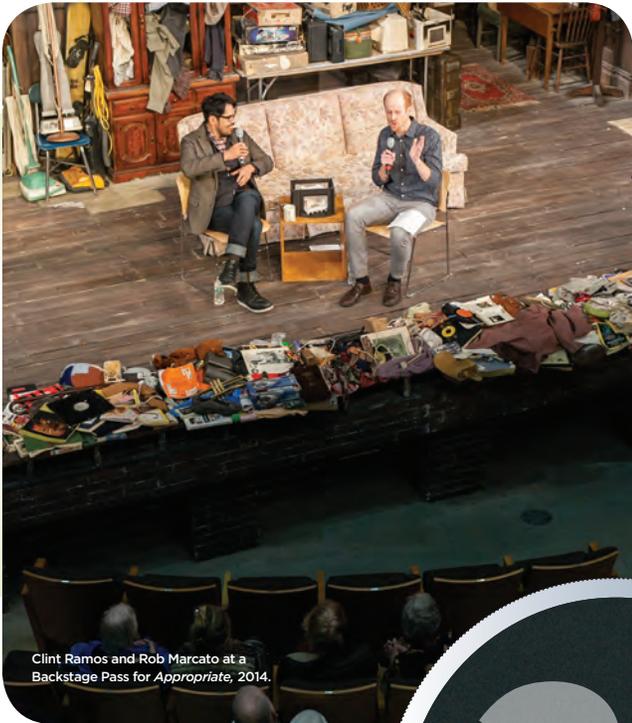
"It is not the literal past, the facts of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language...we must never cease renewing those images, because once we do, we fossilize."

Field Day has been concerned not to tie itself to any ideological mast. Dismantling stereotypes through art and analysis has been a key objective, alongside the conviction that theatre in Ireland—or indeed anywhere—can originate outside the metropolis. Every Field Day play has premiered in the small regional city of Derry, and the repertoire contains versions of the ancient classics adapted for local audiences, including Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*—a version of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, and Tom Paulin's *The Riot Act*—a version of Sophocles's *Antigone*. In common with previous Field Day plays, *A Particle of Dread* explores a core idea: that understanding language is the essence of understanding competing histories. Whether read in ancient Greek, or in the contemporary American and Irish vernaculars of Shepard's new version, the Oedipus story addresses the idea of collective guilt arising from unresolved historical trauma—it's an idea that particularly resonated with the original Derry audience in 2013, though the message is timeless and universal.

—Ciarán Deane, Field Day ■

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THERE ARE A NUMBER OF WAYS YOU CAN TAKE YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH SIGNATURE TO THE NEXT LEVEL. For more information about how you can show your support, contact the Development Department at 646.388.8128 or via email at development@signaturetheatre.org.



Clint Ramos and Rob Marcato at a Backstage Pass for *Appropriate*, 2014.

Patron Program

Signature Theatre Patrons are a core group of supporters, whose financial commitment to Signature each year represents a direct investment in our artists, productions, and programs, and champions our extended commitment to making theatre accessible to all through the Signature Ticket Initiative.

As a token of thanks for their generous support of our work, Signature Patrons receive a host of exclusive opportunities to interact with our artists and leadership throughout the year, as well as complimentary tickets for every Signature production, insider access to our programs, and much more.

Signature Ticket Initiative

The Signature Ticket Initiative exists to combat the price barrier to experiencing live theatre. Since its inception, this program has given access to hundreds of first-time theatregoers who wouldn't normally be able to experience live art. Signature Theatre is committed to fundraising half the cost of this program year over year, shared with our Lead Sponsor The Pershing Square Foundation. Our commitment to this program will provide subsidized tickets to the initial run of all productions through 2031! We rely on the generosity of our donors to support this program.



Corporate Partnerships

Corporate partnerships offer the opportunity for your organization to meet your business and entertaining needs while engaging with Signature's audiences throughout the performance season. From tailored Membership benefits, including tickets to produc-

tions and access to exclusive events, to customized sponsorship packages offering opportunities for prominent visibility, Signature provides unique platforms to align with our Playwrights-in-Residence and our iconic Frank Gehry-designed Pershing Square Signature Center space.



Delta representatives at Delta Night.



Peter Norton and James Houghton

“I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK WITH YOU ABOUT MY INTEREST IN YOUR THEATRE NAMING OPPORTUNITY.”

This sentence was the only message on an elegantly embossed note that arrived at Signature's office back in 1997. It was from the inimitable Peter Norton, whom I had just met a few days before at a reception at our newly constructed, but not yet fully funded, 160-seat theatre on 42nd Street and 11th Avenue. Peter, now a longtime Signature trustee and dear friend, soon gave us the first of many gifts, this initial one enabling us to not only finish paying for the theatre's construction, but also to add a marquee, proudly naming Signature's new home “The Peter Norton Space.”

On the evening of our dedication ceremony, Peter visited my apartment prior to the event, saying he wanted to perform a short “ritual.” He gave me a blindfold to put on, and then put a jacket on me. When I could see again, Peter's next incredible gift was revealed: the jacket and a matching tie were made from plaid fabric identical to the theatre's carpeting! He also had a set for himself, and we wore them all night, laughing throughout the celebration. Thank you, Peter, for your tremendous contributions to Signature then and now, and for being one of the company's truest—and wittiest—friends. — JAMES HOUGHTON

UPCOMING PRODUCTIONS IN THE 2014-15 SEASON



NAOMI
WALLACE

RESIDENCY ONE

THE LIQUID PLAIN

BY NAOMI WALLACE

DIRECTED BY KWAME KWEI-ARMAH

New York Premiere

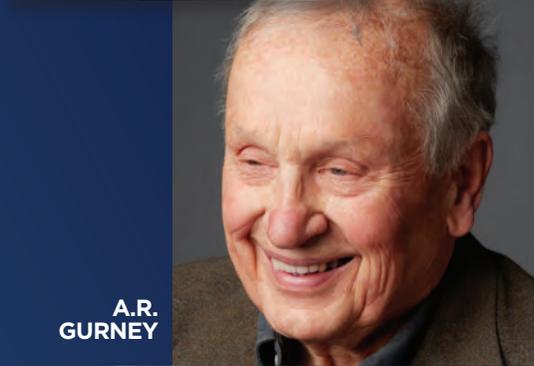
FEBRUARY - MARCH 2015

WHAT I DID LAST SUMMER

BY A.R. GURNEY

DIRECTED BY JIM SIMPSON

MAY - JUNE 2015



A.R.
GURNEY

LEGACY PROGRAM

BIG LOVE

BY CHARLES MEE

DIRECTED BY TINA LANDAU

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2015

A NEW PLAY

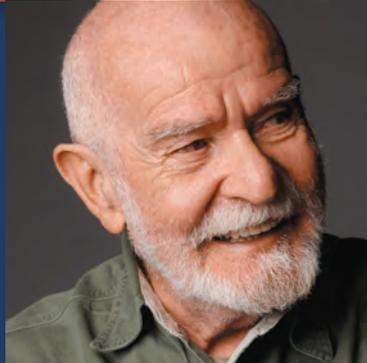
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY

ATHOL FUGARD

APRIL - MAY 2015



CHARLES
MEE



ATHOL
FUGARD

Photos by Gregory Costanzo.

Dates and programming subject to change.

Call Ticket Services at (212) 244-7529 or visit signaturetheatre.org for more information.