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ZACH ANNOUNCES \$500,000 CHALLENGE GRANT FOR NEW TOPFER THEATRE

Topfer's Juliet Balcony Named in Honor of Deanna and Jeff Serra's New Challenge Grant to ZACH Theatre

AUSTIN, Texas — May 9, 2011 — The **Juliet Balcony** of the new [Topfer Theatre](#), now under construction on the [ZACH Theatre](#) campus, is the latest scene for Austin's love affair with the performing arts. The balcony, which will host a series of free community performances when the Topfer Theatre opens in the fall of 2012, will be named "The Serra Family Juliet Balcony." ZACH Theatre Board Member and ABE Charitable Foundation, Inc. President Deanna Serra and her husband Vida Capital, Inc. President and CEO Jeff Serra **are contributing \$500,000 as a challenge grant** to continue fueling ZACH's fundraising efforts.

"We've attended ZACH performances since moving to Austin in 1999 and, after enjoying many memorable productions, we asked how we could be more involved," said the Serras. "We feel ZACH is a tremendous community resource and asset. It's one of the rare opportunities to see a public/private partnership work so well and it's something that people in Austin are all proud of. We're thrilled to support ZACH's new facility – one that matches the quality of the performances audiences see on ZACH's stages and provides the 300+ Austin actors employed by ZACH each year a first-class theatre to call home. We're excited to have a theatre where even more Austinites and visitors to our city can enjoy ZACH's unique productions."

ZACH and its Board of Directors are pursuing other leadership gifts for the new theatre's remaining naming opportunities from ZACH's major donors and key community funders to honor the Serra's challenge grant. A broad-based public campaign is planned for later this year. Anyone interested in learning more about the Topfer Theatre project should contact ZACH Managing Director Elisbeth Challener at (512) 417-2236 or email elisbeth@zachtheatre.org.



An artist rendering of the new Topfer Theatre at ZACH looking south from Lamar Boulevard at Riverside Drive. Image courtesy Andersson•Wise Architects.

“We’re dedicating the balcony to our children,” said Deanna Serra. “The ABE Charitable Foundation, Inc. is named for the initials of our beautiful children: Amanda, 21, a soon-to-be senior at NYU pursuing a vocal performance music theatre major; Benjamin, 20, a sound design major and DJ at the Art Institute Austin; and Eliza, 12, a singer, dancer, actor and athlete still to find her passion.”

“We’re so honored to have the support and trust of Deanna and Jeff, who continue to roll up their sleeves and demonstrate time and again their commitment to Austin and to helping fundraise for worthy efforts,” said Challenger. “ZACH is proud of the fundraising efforts we’ve achieved so far, especially in a challenging economic environment, but we have more to raise, and we’re grateful to community leaders like the Serras who are helping us achieve our financial goal.”

The Topfer Theatre Campaign has raised nearly \$18 million of its \$22 million goal. The current Capital Campaign Chair is ZACH Theatre Board Member Donna Snyder.

The Topfer Theatre, at 26,000 square feet and with 420 comfortable theatre seats, will nearly double the seating capacity at ZACH while retaining the intimate theatre-going experience for which ZACH is known. With larger audience capacity, more patrons will experience the original works at each performance, which allows shorter runs and reduced running costs. This, in turn, frees up ZACH’s schedule to present more original productions on its stages, and to rent the facility to Austin music and dance companies that have been clamoring for a mid-sized theatre for decades.

The Topfer Theatre will feature the 80-foot-wide Kuykendall Stage, (named for Austin acting legend Karen Kuykendall), which is 3.5 times larger than what is currently available at ZACH. The new theatre will also include a fly tower; 20-foot wings; a trapped stage/orchestra pit; adjustable acoustics; a fully equipped backstage with larger dressing rooms, a green room and loading facilities; and advanced lighting, sound and video equipment that will create the place in Austin where the community gathers for a collective, imaginative journey.

“The Topfer Theatre will be the heart and home for ZACH to fulfill its mission of igniting the imagination, lifting the spirit and engaging our community with great artistic performances every day,” said [ZACH Producing Artistic Director Dave Steakley](#). “This new theatre allows us to improve and expand, in every way, on what we can deliver for the people of Austin.”

ZACH is commissioning a series of short works called “The Balcony Plays” designed to be performed on ZACH’s Serra Family Juliet Balcony on the façade of the entrance to the Topfer Theatre and on the plaza below the balcony. Famous balcony scenes from classic works like *Evita*, *West Side Story*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Romeo and Juliet* and others will be performed alongside brand new short plays and musicals in this site-specific locale.

These plays will be performed prior to Mainstage performances free of charge, to encourage patrons to gather early on the plaza for a rotating repertory of surprise balcony plays throughout the entire season. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks is the first artist signed up to contribute plays to this on-going series.

Designed by [Andersson – Wise Architects](#), ZACH will achieve LEED® Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for numerous sustainable features ranging from educational rain gardens and 37 new native trees to the use of recycled building materials and LED lighting. The Topfer Theatre’s opening is anticipated for the fall of 2012.

About ZACH Theatre:

ZACH Theatre, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit arts organization, is one of Austin’s most vibrant and innovative performing arts organizations, creating intimate theatre that ignites the imagination, lifts the spirit and engages the community. ZACH is celebrated by audiences in the Central Texas region and beyond for producing innovative, dramatic, musical and comedic entertainment of the highest quality. Founded in 1933, the theatre is currently in its 78th season. As Texas’ longest running theatre company and Austin’s leading professional theatre, ZACH features the best and brightest talent from Austin and nationwide. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Dave Steakley and Managing Director Elisabeth Challener, ZACH’s unique productions have been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts, The Shubert Foundation, National Public Radio and *The New York Times*, as well as with numerous theatrical awards. ZACH serves more than 170,000 Central Texas adults and youth each year at its two — soon-to-be three — theatre homes in the heart of Austin. In February ZACH broke ground on its new Topfer Theatre and is in the midst of a public fundraising initiative to raise \$22 million to complete the new space, which will nearly double the seating capacity with 420 seats while retaining the intimate theatre-going experience for which it is known. To date, ZACH has raised nearly \$18 million, including \$10 million raised through the Community and Cultural Bond Program approved by Austin citizens in 2006, and now — with less than \$5 million to go — ZACH has begun construction on the New Topfer Theatre. For more information, visit <http://www.zachtheatre.org>.