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March 22, 2012

Show Opens Thursday, March 29

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.— The Gardner-Webb School of Performing and Visual Arts is proud to present "A Stephen Sondheim Cabaret: A Dessert and Coffee Musical Theatre Extravaganza," with performances March 29 – March 31 at 7 p.m. and a special matinee performance on March 31 at 2 p.m. in Gardner-Webb's Millennium Playhouse. Tickets are \$10 for faculty, staff and community guests, and free for Gardner-Webb undergraduate students. Due to limited seating, guests should make reservations.

The Cabaret features songs and vignettes from Sondheim's most popular and influential plays, including "Sweeney Todd," "A Little Night Music," "Into the Woods," and "Company." Unlike a traditional house set-up with stadium seating, guests will sit around small cabaret tables and enjoy dessert and coffee along with the entertainment.

The Cabaret's director is Dr. Susan Ali, professor of music and vocal performance at Gardner-Webb. The cast features a blend of Gardner-Webb students, professors and community performers, including Crest High School's music director Michael Martinez. Gardner-Webb communications professor Dr. Joseph Webb, a veteran performer of Sondheim on the Chicago stage, could not be more excited about his role.

"When I found out Dr. Ali was planning to do Sondheim, I showed up at her office door with my music in hand, and asked, 'May I sing my song in your Sondheim show?'" said Webb. "Now I'm up to around eight songs, and I'm having the time of my life."

Frank Rich of the New York Times has called Sondheim "Broadway's musical theatre Shakespeare." No other composer has won more Tony Awards than Sondheim's eight, including the Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre. He has also won an Academy Award, multiple Grammy Awards, a Pulitzer Prize and the Laurence Olivier Award.

Sondheim is especially known for his witty lyricism, sophisticated scores, and another quality that, according to Webb, he shares with the Cabaret's director—fresh perspective.

"Dr. Ali's vision for this extravaganza is just brilliant," Webb said, laughing. "Because it's a cabaret, the spectacle spills off the stage and surrounds the audience, and before they know it, they're swept up into her perspective on Sondheim's world. This is unlike anything

anybody has ever seen at Gardner-Webb.”

Ali said the decision to stage a cabaret instead of a traditional show came to her gradually, as she pondered how to pay tribute to Sondheim’s creativity. “I like that the cabaret idea is unique. It might surprise people.”

“I have adored Sondheim since I first discovered him in college,” Ali said. “I really appreciate what he’s done for the world of musical theatre. I think this show will be a wonderful, challenging experience for our student performers, and a lot of fun for our guests.”

Due to limited seating, reservations are recommended for all students and guests planning to attend. For more information or to make reservations, call Ali at 704-406-3937, or 949-202-6777.