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Fact Sheet

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

Designed by Bing Thom Architects (BTA), the new Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater features a dramatic and sweeping glass roof that is sure to become an architectural landmark for Southwest D.C.'s revitalized waterfront.

The extraordinary facility exemplifies a central commitment to art: three theaters serve as the architectural focal points, with a range of other activities swirling in constant motion around them under a magnificent, unifying roof.

- **The Fichandler Stage** will continue to stand as an extraordinarily unique theater space, with its epic, four-sided auditorium, steeply raked seating tiers and bold, earthy exterior design. Ideally suited to large scale classic dramas and musicals, this 650-seat main stage will be updated with modern technical equipment and elegant décor – but the spirit of the theater will be absolutely preserved. Perhaps the most important change will be in the acoustics of the space: ambient street noise will be eliminated and various vehicles to conduct sound throughout the interior of the space will be implemented.
- **The Kreeger Theater**, a 500-seat, fan-shaped space with a modified thrust stage, will also be updated with current technology and amenities while retaining the qualities that make it one of the most artist- and audience-friendly spaces in the country: extraordinary flexibility, excellent acoustics, flawless sightlines and remarkably intimate interaction between actor and audience.
- **The Cradle**, a 200-seat “black box” theater with flexible seating and the latest technical capabilities, will be added to complement the two larger theaters. Built to support the birth and nurturing of new and developing plays in a comfortable, technically sophisticated venue, the Cradle will enable Arena to continue building the canon of American work and cultivating the next generation of great writers.

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Supporting all three theaters will be state-of-the-art technology and spacious workspace for rehearsals, set design, construction and administrative services – all sorely lacking in the current facility. In addition, comfortable on-site housing and a large space for artists to congregate will promote community within the organization and enhance Arena's reputation among theater artists.

The Next Stage Campaign will add an Education Center, complete with classroom and rehearsal spaces, allowing the nation's best artists and artisans to directly interact with the young people from our Nation's capital, both informally and in existing and expanded programs. The addition of onsite instructional spaces will only enhance the ties Arena has to its community. But more than that, placing classroom space next to rehearsal areas affords young people participating in Arena's various programs a unique opportunity to interact with artists at the earliest stages of the creative process. This will imbue a special luster to programs that illuminate the creative process and are unlike most spaces of other theaters in the country.

The new Arena Stage will address audience needs, as well. Ensclosed in the extraordinary design is a large, common lobby with grand staircase that helps link all three theater spaces both visually and geographically. In addition, the new facility will feature a vastly increased number of restrooms in several locations; a single, efficient Box Office serving all audiences; readily available concessions and an onsite café; and easy access to all areas of the building for persons with disabilities.

The design has won praise from architectural critics and preservationists alike. Tersh Boarsberg, Chairman of Washington's Historic Preservation Review Board, noted: "This is a wonderful design that adds so much to our city. It's exemplary...the architecture is unique and different, and imaginative and forceful...and there's special merit because of the importance of this building and this complex to the Southwest and to our city."

Ben Forgey, former architectural critic for *The Washington Post*, noted: "People will come to look at, as well as be in, this building. Its transparency will be compelling day or night. Striking structural elements, such as towering mast-like wood columns, fit the setting perfectly. The assortment of buildings will form an enticing little cityscape. And then there is the astonishing roof with its impossible-seeming 170-foot cantilever, hovering cloudlike over the whole."

The new complex will be both theater and campus; a center for artistic enterprise and development – a grand new evolution of Arena Stage as we head into the future.

With approval of the design by the Commission of Fine Arts in 2002 and the Board of Zoning Adjustments in 2003, Arena Stage is set to begin the construction bid process in the coming months.

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In addition to creating the Arena Stage design, architect Bing Thom is also provided guidance to the leaders of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) for architectural improvements to other projects within the Southwest D.C. Waterfront. Arena Stage will be the first phase in an overall revitalization effort that will make Southwest D.C. an arts and entertainment community and spectacular gateway to our nation's capital.

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About The Architects

BING THOM ARCHITECTS

Bing Thom Architects (BTA) was selected from an international pool of more than 150 candidates to design the new Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. An architectural firm that has collaborated with and advised cultural institutions, corporations, universities, governments, developers and communities around the world for more than 20 years, BTA has significant experience in building design for performing arts and cultural complexes, as well as historical preservation and waterfront projects.

Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, Bing Thom Architects undertakes selectively few projects at any given time to ensure that founder Bing Thom and at least one director are personally involved in all stages of every project. The core team of 45 experienced staff members provides the foundation for larger teams that are assembled on a project-by-project basis.

The firm has an impressive worldwide resume of buildings that include: the Canada Pavilion for Expo '92 in Seville, Spain; the Master Plans for the City of Dalian and Yuxi in China; and now the Arena Stage theater campus in Washington, D.C. Some of the firm's recent Canadian accomplishments are the Central City project, a 1.7 million-square-foot mixed-use development that integrates an existing regional shopping mall with a major new university and office development to create a new city center; the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at the University of British Columbia, considered to be the finest medium-sized concert hall on the continent; and the Pacific Canada Pavilion at the Vancouver Aquarium and Marine Science Centre.

About Bing Thom, Architect

With a distinguished 40-year career to date, Bing Thom (CM, MArch, FRAIC, AIA) is BTA's principal and lead designer of the new Arena Stage campus. Thom has gained an outstandingly positive reputation for his innovation and holistic approach to design and his range of projects appear worldwide.

A Hong Kong native, Thom received his bachelor's degree from the University of British Columbia in 1966 and his Master of Architecture degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1970. He worked in the offices of Fumihiko Maki and Arthur Erickson before starting his own firm in 1980. His successful and thriving practice is a testament to his achievement, as are his scores of awards including the Golden Jubilee Medal for services to his country and the Order of Canada, the country's highest honor, for his contribution to architecture.

Dedicated to helping the next generation of architects, Thom is a popular lecturer in Canada and abroad. He was also the privileged recipient of an Honorary Degree of Laws from Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada, for his major commitment to architecture and community.

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