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artistic director

stephen richard
executive director

zelda fichandler
founding director

MEDIA RELEASE

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ARENA STAGE BOARD VOTES YES TO START CONSTRUCTION ON \$125 MILLION RENOVATION OF HISTORIC D.C. THEATER COMPLEX

***** Theater to break ground in January of 2008, and announces plans
for programming during two-year timeline of construction *****



(Washington, D.C.) The Arena Stage Board of Trustees voted today to commence construction on the \$125 million plan to renovate and expand the historic theater campus in Southwest, D.C. The theater will break ground in January of 2008, followed by two years of continuous on-site construction, and anticipates the new *Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater* will open for the 2010/2011 season. The theater has currently raised \$104 million of its \$125 million fundraising goal since the Next Stage Campaign was launched in 2002.

"We are so thrilled to be putting a shovel in the ground this January," said Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith. "Arena and its remarkable artists and audience deserve this new complex, where all of our aspirations to be a center for the American theater will soar. It is time to bring the Mead Center to life, and we are ready."

Arena Stage Executive Director Stephen Richard said, "This renovation will generate a theater complex that provides our community with access to Arena as never before. All of the necessary approvals have lined up in our favor, and now – with the board's support and our loyal audience – we can move forward and make it happen."

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is named in honor of Life Trustee Jaylee Mead and her husband and longtime Arena Stage Trustee Gilbert Mead, who passed away in May, for their extraordinary gift of \$35 million to the campaign. The Meads' gift is the largest ever made to an American regional theater. The Center will be a breathtaking expansion of the current campus, allowing Arena Stage to focus on the strengths of the two existing spaces – The Fichandler Stage and the Kreeger Theater – while reinventing the surrounding building and adding a 200-seat space dedicated to premiering American theater, The Cradle.

"The Board's decision to 'greenlight' the renovation is an historic decision at a theater already rich with history, and it is the result of the hard work and strategic vision of Molly Smith, Stephen Richard and the entire Board of Trustees," said Chairman of the Board Mark Shugoll.

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Arena Stage Board of Trustees votes yes to commence renovation plans

Page 2

"The project preserves the two existing theaters and in doing so honors the legacy of Arena's co-founders, Zelda and Thomas Fichandler. With the addition of The Cradle, it allows Arena to fulfill the vision of its current leadership to become a birthplace for great, new American plays."

"I am so excited that the Board of Trustees voted to move forward and break ground on this incredible building," said Jaylee Mead. "Molly Smith's vision and Bing Thom's design are very special to Gil and me, and I look forward to experiencing the impact Arena has on the American Theater movement. It was a dream of Gil's to see this building realized, and I celebrate that we are moving ahead after this important Board meeting."

To allow for a timely and cost-effective renovation, Arena Stage will move to a temporary home in Crystal City, Virginia at the Crystal Forum. A five-minute drive from the current location in Southwest D.C., the Crystal Forum is close to Reagan National Airport and one block from the Crystal City Metro station, which is serviced by both the Blue and Yellow Metro lines. The Crystal City area boasts many well-known restaurants and has free evening and weekend parking within walking distance to the theater. Arena Stage is currently renovating the Forum to accommodate patrons and productions for the next two and a half seasons while the Mead Center is being built. The theater is roughly the same size as the Kreeger, and seats 460 patrons. Crystal City will also house the Arena Stage administrative offices in a nearby building.

In addition, starting in 2008/2009 Arena Stage plans to have a substantial presence at the Lincoln Theatre in Northwest, D.C. Details on the programming at the Lincoln will be shared at a later date. Throughout the renovation, Arena Stage's current downtown 14th and T location will be actively used to house rehearsals, the Community Engagement staff, student programming and the operations of the costume shop.

"Just as legions of theater-goers followed Zelda and Tom Fichandler from the Hippodrome to the Old Heurich Brewery before settling in Southwest D.C., I trust our audiences will continue the adventure and travel with us to Crystal City while our new home is being built," said Smith.

Arena Stage will begin productions in Crystal City with *Ella* starting December 28, 2007 and does not anticipate changing any existing performance dates for the rest of the 2007/2008 season except for *The Mystery of Irma Vep* and possibly *Kiki & Herb: Alive on Broadway*. Current ticket-holders will be receiving information about their reservations and further information about Crystal City in the mail during November. As information changes and/or becomes available throughout the transition, Arena Stage plans to keep its website at www.arenastage.org as up to date as possible with Frequently Asked Questions, directions and other relevant information.

Audience Forums:

Monday, October 29 and Tuesday, November 6 at 7:00 p.m. in the Kreeger Theater

As Arena Stage embarks on this adventure over the next couple years, the theater will hold *Audience Forums* so that community and audience members may ask questions about the building, their tickets, the temporary home at Crystal City and more. These events will include presentations about the design of the Mead Center and information about Crystal City. To R.S.V.P your attendance, call (202) 488-3300 at least three days before the event of your choice. For media interested in attending please contact press@arenastage.org or (202) 554-9066 ext. 715.

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