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MEDIA RELEASE

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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MOLLY SMITH GIVES OPENING SPEECH FOR 2007 ANNUAL THEATER COMMUNICATIONS GROUP CONFERENCE

*****Approaching her 10th season with Arena Stage, Smith focuses
on opportunities to further the future of American Theater*****



(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith will give the opening plenary speech for the Theater Communications Group (TCG)'s annual conference on the topic of "Artistry in a New Century" at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis today. This invitation recognizes Smith's long and deep commitment to the American theater and its artists. Moving into her 10th season as Arena Stage's artistic director, Smith reflects on this opportunity and the work she has contributed to Arena Stage and American theater.

"The opportunity to speak to my colleagues about the direction of theater in America is an honor and a privilege," Smith said. "Never have the challenges – and the opportunities – facing our field been greater. We are at the dawn of a new American Dream, and I plan to address the need for evolution as individual artists and as an industry in this fast-moving, technologically driven world."

In celebration of Smith's 10th season as artistic director, Arena Stage explores new initiatives and reinforces the theater's commitment to the cultivation of American theater. The theater's 57th season includes plans to incorporate three world premieres, multiple co-productions, a new "Arena Presents" series and an Arthur Miller Festival. All of these things are in addition to Arena Stage's moving forward with huge plans to renovate the historic theater campus in Southwest D.C.

Smith's unwavering vision to nurture the future of American theater began more than 30 years ago, and was ignited during the 19 years she founded and led Perseverance Theatre in Alaska. Building on that experience, her passionate dedication to regional theater and the relationships and projects she has pursued have flourished during the past nine seasons with Arena Stage. During this time Smith has:

- Focused Arena Stage's programming on the canon of American voices, making Arena Stage the largest theater in North America committed to American writers.

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- Commissioned and/or championed 11 world premieres – *Expecting Isabel* by Lisa Loomer; *Blue* and *Cuttin' Up* by Charles Randolph-Wright; *Tom Walker* by John Strand; *Agamemnon and His Daughters* adapted by Kenneth Cavander; *Polk County* by Zora Neale Hurston and Dorothy Waring; *Anthems: Culture Clash in the District* by Richard Montoya and Culture Clash; *Shakespeare in Hollywood* by Ken Ludwig; *Señor Discretion Himself*, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser and book by Frank Loesser with Culture Clash; *Intimations for Saxophone* by Sophie Treadwell; and *Passion Play, a cycle* by Sarah Ruhl – many of which have gone on to additional productions across the country.
- Created the Writer's Council – a group of American playwrights brought together by Arena to discuss issues facing contemporary writers, to point the way to emerging, lost or forgotten writers and to support the Cradle, Arena's planned new theater that is designed for the development and mounting of world premieres. The playwrights include Nilo Cruz, David Henry Hwang, Moisés Kaufman, Eric Overmeyer, Charles Randolph-Wright, Sarah Ruhl, Robert Schenkkan, Tazewell Thompson, Paula Vogel and in memoriam Wendy Wasserstein (1950-2006).
- Founded the "downstairs New Play Reading Series," which has read and workshopped more than 60 plays, half of which have gone on to full productions at Arena Stage and/or other theaters across the country.
- Consistently developed and programmed projects featuring African-American artists, resulting in marked growth among audiences of color, who comprise more than 25% of Arena Stage's total audience.
- Worked with Executive Director Stephen Richard and Arena's Board of Trustees to raise more than \$100 million for the Next Stage Campaign to renovate and expand the existing theater complex.
- Formed university partnerships through workshops, internships and seminars to provide mutually beneficial opportunities of artistic growth for students and Arena Stage's artists at Georgetown University, Howard University and the Virginia Tech Department of Theatre Arts.
- Established herself as a major director of American musicals, with a particular emphasis on reinventing major musicals in the round.
- Furthered the original impulses of Arena Stage Co-Founder Zelda Fichandler to form relationships with international artists and incorporate their work and cultures into American theater.
- Deepened Arena Stage's relationship as literary advisor with the Sundance Theater Institute through participation in annual Sundance Festival in Utah and the White Oak Theatre Lab, including her recent 2007 role as director for the workshop of Tim Acito's *The Women of Brewster Place*.
- Increased Arena Stage's international visibility when she revisited her Canadian theater roots and directed *Mack and Mabel* for the 2007 Shaw Festival.
- Received honorary doctorates at American University and Towson University.

Arena Stage plans to commemorate Smith's accomplishments and decade with the theater through a full scale celebration surrounding the 2007 Arena premiere of *The Women of Brewster Place*, which Smith will direct. A text of the speech Smith is giving at the TCG conference will be made available by Monday, June 11, 2007 at www.arenastage.org.

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