

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

Molly Smith Artistic Director Edgar Dobie Managing Director Zelda Fichandler Founding Director

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August 10, 2010

ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES CASTING FOR THE INAUGURAL PRODUCTIONS TO OPEN THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER

Phylicia Rashad, Anna Deavere Smith and E. Faye Butler lead the casts of the first productions in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle, Kreeger Theater and Fichandler Stage

(Washington, D.C.) **Arena Stage's** inaugural season at the Mead Center for American Theater opens with three productions featuring three powerful leading ladies – **E. Faye Butler** in *Rodgers & Hammerstein's Oklahoma!* in the company's renovated, iconic **Fichandler Stage**; **Phylicia Rashad** in playwright Marcus Gardley's world premiere of *Every Tongue Confess* in the brand new 200-seat **Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle**; and **Anna Deavere Smith** in her one-woman play, Second Stage's production of *Let Me Down Easy*, which begins its national tour in the freshly refurbished **Kreeger Theater**.

"To open the Mead Center with amazing casts including actors like Phylicia, Anna and E. Faye is just one of the many ways we're introducing audiences to the breadth and strength of this new center for American theater," says Artistic Director Molly Smith. "These distinguished African-American women, whose illustrious careers precede them, along with the cast members joining them, embody the diversity that is integral to Arena's mission."

Oklahoma!, directed by **Molly Smith** **October 22-December 26, 2010**, will feature award-winning D.C.-area favorite **E. Faye Butler** as Aunt Eller, who among many credits has performed in the national tours of *Mamma Mia!* and *Ain't Misbehavin'*. She is joined by **Valisia LeKae** as Laurey, whose Broadway credits include *Ragtime*, *110 in the Shade* and *The Threepenny Opera*; **Nicholas Rodriguez** as Curly, who last performed at Arena Stage as Fabrizio in *The Light in the Piazza* and who has appeared on Broadway in *Tarzan*; **Cody Williams** as Will Parker, a rising young performer who will make his professional debut along with 16-year-old D.C.-area native **June Schreiner** as Ado Annie, who was discovered in last summer's Arena Stage Academy Musical Theater Training Company. Additional casting as of August 10, 2010 is listed on the production Fact Sheet below.

Every Tongue Confess, directed by **Kenny Leon** (Broadway's *Fences*, Arena Stage's *Stick Fly*) **November 9, 2010-January 2, 2011**, will feature Tony Award winner **Phylicia Rashad** as Mother Sister/Sophia, who was last seen at Arena Stage in *Blue*. Rashad is best known as Claire Huxtable from *The Cosby Show* and has performed on Broadway in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Gem of the Ocean* and *A Raisin in the Sun*, among others. The ensemble cast for *Every Tongue Confess* as of August 10, 2010 also includes **Jason Dirden** as Shadrack, **Crystal Fox** as Sister/Reporter, **Autumn Hurlbert** as Benny Pride, **Jim Ireland** as Stocker Pride, **John Earl Jelks** as Blacksmith/Bobb, **Eugene Lee** as Brother/Jeremiah, **E. Roger Mitchell** as Deacon/Tidings and the role of Bernadette will be announced at a later date.

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Arena Stage announces casting for the inaugural productions to open the Mead Center for American Theater – Page 2

Let Me Down Easy, directed by **Leonard Foglia** **December 31, 2010-February 13, 2011**, stars Baltimore native **Anna Deavere Smith**, whose film credits include *Philadelphia*, *The American President* and *Rachel Getting Married*. Her television credits include *The West Wing* and the current *Nurse Jackie*. Smith's documentary-style stage productions also include *Fires in the Mirror*, *Twilight: Los Angeles* and *House Arrest*.

Full casting and creative teams to be announced at a later date. For further information please e-mail press@arenastage.org.

*Under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Managing Director Edgar Dobie, Washington, D.C.-based **Arena Stage** has become the largest theater in the country dedicated to American plays and playwrights. Founded in 1950 by Zelda Fichandler, Thomas Fichandler and Edward Mangum, Arena Stage was one of the nation's original resident theaters and has a distinguished record of leadership and innovation in the field. With the opening of the new Mead Center for American Theater in 2010, Arena Stage becomes a center for the production, presentation, development and study of American theater. Now in its sixth decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 200,000. For more information please visit www.arenastage.org.*

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**FACT SHEET FOR ARENA STAGE'S
RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S OKLAHOMA!**

Rodgers & Hammerstein's Oklahoma!

Music by Richard Rodgers
Book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II
Based on the play by *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs
Original choreography by Agnes de Mille
Directed by Molly Smith
Choreography by Parker Esse
Musical Direction by George Fulginiti-Shakar

Partial casting for *Rodgers & Hammerstein's Oklahoma!* as of August 10, 2010:

Aunt Eller.....E. Faye Butler
Curly.....Nicholas Rodriguez
Laurey.....Valisia LeKae
Ike Skidmore.....TBA
Fred/Ensemble.....Stephen Carrasco
Slim/Ensemble.....TBA
Will Parker.....Cody Williams
Jud Fry.....TBA
Ado Annie Carnes.....June Schreiner
Ali Hakim.....Nehal Joshi
Gertie Cummings/Ensemble...Cara Massey
Ellen/Ensemble.....Cyana Cook
Kate/Ensemble.....Jessical Wu
Andrew Carnes.....Hugh Nees
Virginia.....Annie Petersmeyer
Vivian/Ensemble.....Emilee Dupre
Ensemble.....Vincent Rodriguez III
Ensemble.....Anton Harrison LaMon
Ensemble.....Semhar Ghebremichael
Ballet Laurey.....Hollie E. Wright
Ballet Curley.....Kyle Vaughn
Female Swing.....Jessica Hartman
Male Swing.....Kurt Boehm

STORY: This is not your mother's *Oklahoma!* Inspired by the toughness of the prairie, Artistic Director Molly Smith sets her production in the robust world of territory life filled with a dynamic cast as rich and complex as the great tapestry of America itself. With Rodgers and Hammerstein's timeless music, *Oklahoma!* celebrates the vigor of America's pioneering spirit with athletic dance and boot-stomping energy. Chock full of classic tunes such as "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" and "People Will Say We're in Love," this muscular production will thrill audiences young and old.

WHERE: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

In the Fichandler
1101 Sixth St., SW
Washington, DC 20024

WHEN: October 22 – December 26, 2010

Press Opening Night is November 4, 2010

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Friday & Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m.
Check calendar for exceptions and weekday matinees.

Fact Sheet for Arena Stage's Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*
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TICKETS: Tickets for *Rodgers & Hammerstein's Oklahoma!* start at \$45 plus applicable fees. Discount tickets are available for patrons purchasing tickets for multiple shows, students and groups. A limited number of \$15 tickets for patrons ages 30 and under go on sale each Monday for performances that week. (All patrons must present valid ID.) HOTTIX, a limited number of half-price, day-of-performance tickets, are available 30 minutes before curtain prior to every performance. **Tickets may be purchased online at www.arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Arena Stage Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.**

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**FACT SHEET FOR ARENA STAGE'S
EVERY TONGUE CONFESS**

Every Tongue Confess

Written by Marcus Gardley

Directed by Kenny Leon

STORY: In the backwater town of Boligee, Alabama, the summer heat is rising higher, driving the townsfolk to distraction and conjuring the spirits of the past to walk the earth. Wrapped in the combustible music of a Deep South juke joint and the sweat-soaked gospel of a revivalist church tent, intergenerational stories of loss and redemption collide. Playwright Gardley blends ancient myth with magical realism, Biblical allegory with the local TV news to create a fiery theatrical furnace in which some will be saved, some will be purged and the truth cannot escape.

Partial casting for *Every Tongue Confess* as of August 10, 2010:

Mother Sister/Sophia.....Phylicia Rashad
Shadrack.....Jason Dirden
Stocker Pride.....Jim Ireland
Benny Pride.....Autumn Hurlbert
Bernadette.....TBA
Deacon/Tidings.....E. Roger Mitchell
Sister/Reporter.....Crystal Fox
Brother/Jeremiah.....Eugene Lee
Blacksmith/Bobby.....John Earl Jelks

WHERE: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

In the Kogod Cradle

1101 Sixth St., SW

Washington, DC 20024

WHEN: November 9, 2010 – January 2, 2011

Press Opening Night is November 18, 2010

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Friday & Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m.

Check calendar for exceptions and weekday matinees.

TICKETS: Tickets for *Every Tongue Confess* start at \$40 plus applicable fees. Discount tickets are available for patrons purchasing tickets for multiple shows, students and groups. A limited number of \$15 tickets for patrons ages 30 and under go on sale each Monday for performances that week. (All patrons must present valid ID.) HOTTIX, a limited number of half-price, day-of-performance tickets, are available 30 minutes before curtain prior to every performance. **Tickets may be purchased online at www.arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Arena Stage Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.**

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**FACT SHEET FOR ARENA STAGE'S
LET ME DOWN EASY**

Second Stage's production of
Let Me Down Easy

Conceived, written and performed by Anna Deavere Smith
Directed by Leonard Foglia

STORY: Called "the most exciting individual in American theater" by *Newsweek* magazine, Anna Deavere Smith (*Fires in the Mirror*, *Twilight: Los Angeles*) explores the power of the body, the price of health and the resilience of the spirit. Based on interviews with an eclectic range of people, from a heavyweight boxer to a supermodel, and from Texas Governor Ann Richards to legendary cyclist Lance Armstrong, *Let Me Down Easy* "is a totally vital piece of theater, mixing a standup comic's instincts with a great reporter's keen eye" (*Variety*).

WHERE: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

In the Kreeger
1101 Sixth St., SW
Washington, DC 20024

WHEN: December 31, 2010 – February 13, 2011

Press Opening Night is January 6, 2011

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday evenings at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Friday & Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m.
Check calendar for exceptions and weekday matinees.

TICKETS: Tickets for *Let Me Down Easy* start at \$40 plus applicable fees. Discount tickets are available for patrons purchasing tickets for multiple shows, students and groups. A limited number of \$15 tickets for patrons ages 30 and under go on sale each Monday for performances that week. (All patrons must present valid ID.) HOTTIX, a limited number of half-price, day-of-performance tickets, are available 30 minutes before curtain prior to every performance. **Tickets may be purchased online at www.arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Arena Stage Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.**

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