



the mead center  
for american theater

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April 18, 2018

## ARENA STAGE HOLDS FOUR-DAY VOICES OF NOW FESTIVAL MAY 16-19, 2018 AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER

\*\*\* Festival showcases original plays written and performed by nearly 100 young artists from the D.C.-area  
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(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will host the **Voices of Now Festival**, a four-day event featuring original works of theater written and performed by nine different youth ensembles. The Festival will bring together nearly 100 artists, ages 11-18, from D.C., Maryland and Virginia who have been working with professional theater artists from Arena Stage to devise original one-act plays. **The 2018 ensembles will come together May 16-19, 2018 to perform and discuss their work in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle at the Mead Center.** Please see below for the full event schedule.

Celebrating its 15th anniversary, [Voices of Now](#) (VON) is an internationally renowned, season-long drama program that works with ensembles of middle, high school and adult artists to devise autobiographical theater pieces. Each ensemble's play poses challenging social questions relevant to the artists' communities and investigates those questions by recounting the artists' personal stories. This year's plays examine topics including issues of gun violence, multi-cultural experience, self-image, and the experience of grief from losing a loved one. All performances will be followed by a talkback led by an Arena Stage staff member.

"Silent waters run deep—Voices of Now gets to the heart of the story and breaks young people out of their silence," shares **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "For the teenagers in Parkland, Florida, a school shooting brought out their voices. I'm proud that Arena Stage has Voices of Now to bring out these important—critical, essential—voices in a supportive setting. The results of these student artists' year of work is stunning."

VON formed its first partnership 15 years ago with **Jefferson Middle School Academy** in Southwest D.C. In addition to Jefferson, several Fairfax County Public Schools will again take part in the festival, including **Glasgow Middle School, Holmes Middle School, Key Middle School** and **Robinson Secondary School**. Returning for its eighth year is an ensemble in partnership with the **Wendt Center for Loss and Healing**, which is made up of young artists who have experienced the death of a loved one.

This year's program features the return of the **Key World Ensemble** at Key Middle School, which was formed to explore the experience of ELL (English Language Learner) students in Fairfax. This will be Key's fourth year at the festival.

Additional ensembles include the **Mead Ensemble**, a program located at the Mead Center designed for students in grades 7-11, the **Mentor Ensemble**, which is made up of alumni from previous ensembles whose role is to mentor the younger artists in the program, and the **Advocacy Ensemble**, which features emerging artists from throughout the D.C.-metro area who are interested in using theater as a tool for social advocacy.

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This year's Voices of Now Festival is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Beryl Rice. A community activist, youth advocate and long-time member of the Community Engagement Committee at Arena Stage, Dr. Beryl Rice was integral in working with Arena through the Southwest Youth Task Force to develop Arena's programming for neighborhood youth including Voices of Now in its early stages.

### 2018 Voices of Now Festival Schedule

All performances take place in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle in the Mead Center, 1101 Sixth St., S.W.

#### **Wednesday, May 16 — 7:30 p.m.**

*Alien/Nation* by the Mentor Ensemble

*Safe and Sound* by the Advocacy Ensemble

*Face Time* by the Jefferson Ensemble

#### **Thursday, May 17 — 7:30 p.m.**

*Crash Course* by the Holmes Ensemble

*Running Free* by the Key World Ensemble

*Safe and Sound* by the Advocacy Ensemble

#### **Friday, May 18 — 7:30 p.m.**

*Map Quest* by the Glasgow Ensemble

*Alien/Nation* by the Mentors Ensemble

#### **Saturday, May 19 — 7:30 p.m.**

*Force of Nature* by the Mead Ensemble

*Right of Way* by the Robinson Ensemble

*Piece of My Mind* by the Wendt Ensemble

**TICKETS:** Tickets for the Voices of Now Festival are **FREE**, though reservations are required through the Arena Stage Sales Office at **202-488-3300** or at [tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=26077](http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=26077).

Voices of Now was designed by Arena Stage's Director of Education Ashley Forman. In addition to performing at Arena Stage, ensembles perform throughout their own communities. Past ensembles have performed at Atlas Performing Arts Center's Intersections Festival, Imagination Stage, American Alliance for Theatre and Education's National Conference, Association of Theatre in Higher Education Conference, 2013 International AIDS Conference and the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage.

**Voices of Now International:** Arena Stage has partnered with the U.S. Department of State and foreign embassies to coordinate five Voices of Now international trips. Following an initial trip to India in 2012, the program has continued its international expansion by sending staff members to Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi and Patna, India; Zagreb, Croatia; and Lima, Peru to work with a variety of communities, including local participants, artists, educators, leaders, college-age youth from vulnerable communities and young adults with physical disabilities.

For more information on Voices of Now, visit [arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now](http://arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now).

Voices of Now is made possible by support from the Coca-Cola Foundation, Exelon Corporation, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, Rockwell Collins, Friends of Southwest D.C., Washington Nationals Dream Foundation, Eileen Fisher, Raytheon, GEICO, the Weissberg Foundation and Wells Fargo & Company.

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Arena Stage's community engagement efforts are generously sponsored by Denie and Frank Weil; the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities; Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; AT&T; The Coca-Cola Foundation; Arthur and Barbara Bushkin; Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.; JBG Smith; Alice Shaver Foundation; Dimick Foundation; Friends of Southwest D.C.; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; Exelon Corporation; Venable Foundation; Washington Nationals Dream Foundation; Weissberg Foundation; Eileen Fisher; Raytheon; GEICO; Wells Fargo & Company; Rockwell Collins; Edington, Peel & Associates; Foley & Lardner LLP; Joanne Barker; Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela; Actors' Equity Foundation; The Albert & Lillian Small Foundation; Theatre Forward; Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Foundation; and Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc.

***Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater***, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Director Edgar Dobie, is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. Arena Stage produces plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep and dangerous in the American spirit, and presents diverse and ground-breaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Arena Stage is committed to commissioning and developing new plays and impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. [arenastage.org](http://arenastage.org)

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