

## ARENA STAGE FACT SHEET

A pioneer of the regional theater movement, Arena Stage was founded on August 16, 1950, in Washington, D.C., by Zelda Fichandler, Tom Fichandler, and Edward Mangum. Today—nearly 75 years later—Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. We produce plays of all that is passionate, profound, entertaining, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit, and present diverse and ground-breaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Consistently contributing to the American theatrical lexicon by commissioning and developing new plays, Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement and serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000.

With a reputation for artistic excellence, Arena Stage has a longstanding commitment to building an audience that mirrors the diverse communities of the Washington, D.C., region.

### Arena Stage was the first:

- Racially integrated theater in Washington
- Theater with an integrated acting company
- Regional theater to have a production transfer to Broadway, with *The Great White Hope* in 1968
- Theater to receive the coveted Regional Theatre Tony Award in 1976
- American resident company to tour behind the Iron Curtain in 1973 and at the Hong Kong Arts Festival in 1980
- Theater to establish a training program for individuals of color through the Allen Lee Hughes BIPOC Fellowship Program
- Theater to create audio-described performances for visually impaired patrons

Arena Stage has nurtured and produced 22 productions that have had a life on Broadway, including *Dear Evan Hansen* (winner of the 2017 Tony Award for Best Musical); *Sweat* (winner of the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Drama); *The Velocity of Autumn* (directed by Molly Smith); *A Night with Janis Joplin*; *A Time to Kill*; Steppenwolf Theatre Company's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (a co-production with Arena Stage); *Looped*; *Next to Normal* (winner of the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama); *33 Variations*; *Execution of Justice*; *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*; *K2*; *Tintypes*; *The 1940's Radio Hour*; *Loose Ends*; *A History of the American Film*; *Zalmen, or the Madness of God*; *Boccaccio*; *Moonchildren*; *Raisin*; *Indians*; and *The Great White Hope*.

### The Mead Center for American Theater

In October 2010, Arena Stage opened its current home, **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater**, which has since emerged as a national center for American theater. Designed by **Bing Thom Architects**, the Mead Center covers 200,000 square feet and features a dramatic and sweeping cantilevered roof that is an architectural landmark for Southwest D.C.'s revitalized waterfront.

The Mead Center was a breathtaking expansion of the company's former campus, allowing Arena Stage to focus on the strengths of its then existing theater spaces: the in-the-round **Fichandler Stage** (680 seats), which was completed in 1961 as the first of its kind, and the modified-thrust **Kreeger Theater** (510 seats), completed 10 years later in 1971. Both these theaters were designed by Harry Weese, designer of the Washington, D.C., Metro system. With the opening of the Mead Center came a third theater: the **Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle**, an intimate, versatile 202-seat theater. With the project costs totaling \$135 million, the Mead Center also houses state-of-the-art scene shops, costume shops, rehearsal halls, and education spaces and, for the first time in Arena Stage history, all artistic and administrative departments are united under one roof.

Arena Stage's home is named for the late visionary benefactors and Life Trustees Dr. Jaylee Montague Mead and Dr. Gilbert Mead, who pledged \$35 million toward the project's \$125 million campaign goal. Their contribution was at the time the largest gift from a single household toward a not-for-profit regional theater.

### Arena Stage—Where American Theater Lives

With Artistic Director Emeritus Molly Smith's arrival in 1998, Arena Stage refocused its mission to produce American Voices—past, present, and future—an emphasis that belongs to no other major theater company. Today, Arena places new-play development at its artistic center by commissioning playwrights, holding

readings and workshops, and staging world premieres as well as second and third productions, a mission that Hana S. Sharif, Smith's successor, holds near and dear to her heart.

From 2010-2019, Arena Stage hosted numerous resident artists, including playwrights **Amy Freed, Katori Hall, Lisa Kron, Charles Randolph-Wright, Karen Zacarias, Samuel D. Hunter, Lydia R. Diamond, John Strand, Ayad Akhtar**, mixed reality artist **Patty Rangel**, and movement director and intimacy instructor **Samantha Egle**. In 2013, Arena Stage launched the **Playwrights' Arena** specifically for local playwrights, aiming to provide a collaborative, collegial, and nurturing laboratory environment.

In 2016, Arena Stage launched **Power Plays**, an ambitious initiative to produce one new work per decade of United States history, beginning with 1776—the founding of the nation. With a commitment to commission and develop 25 new plays and musicals over the course of 10 years, told through the lens of politics and power, **Power Plays** marks Arena Stage's largest commissioning project yet.

Arena Stage has produced 10 world-premiere projects as part of the initiative—**Lawrence Wright's *Camp David***, which explored the 1978 Camp David Accords; **John Strand's *The Originalist***, about the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia; **Jacqueline E. Lawton's *Intelligence***, focused on the consequences of speaking truth to power; **Mary Kathryn Nagle's *Sovereignty***, which told the story of a young Cherokee lawyer fighting to restore her Nation's jurisdiction; **John Strand, Bob Banghart, and Georgia Stitt's *Snow Child***, a magical musical that featured a score based in both Alaskan string-band traditions and contemporary musical theater; **Aaron Posner's *JQA***, which focused on the sixth president of the United States, John Quincy Adams; **Eduardo Machado's *Celia and Fidel***, which told the story of Fidel Castro and his most trusted confidant and political partner, Celia Sánchez; **Craig Lucas' *Change Agent***, which explored the effect of Mary Pinchot Meyer's relationship with John F. Kennedy on America's volatile 1960s politics; **Nathan Alan Davis' *The High Ground***, a play in conversation with the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921; and **Kenneth Lin's *Exclusion***, a dark comedy examining the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 through the lens of present-day Hollywood politics. The 2023/24 Season will feature the eleventh production to debut as part of the initiative—**Kia Corthron's *Tempestuous Elements***.

Additional currently commissioned playwrights include **The Bengsons, Lee Cataluna, Noah Diaz, Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi, Emily Feldman, Idris Goodwin, Caleen Sinette Jennings, Deepak Kumar, Taylor Mac, Octavio Solis, Vera Starbard, Cheryl West, Lauren Yee, Karen Zacarias, and Zack Zadek**.

#### **Investment in the Next Generation of Artists**

Arena Stage operates educational programs throughout the Washington metropolitan region that reach over 10,000 students each year, with much of the programming targeted specifically to the D.C. public school system. These educational experiences increase competencies in a variety of subjects, build basic skills of written and verbal communication, improve problem solving and critical thinking abilities, and encourage teamwork. Arena Stage's community engagement department has also participated in seven partnerships abroad, using the Voices of Now devised theater model to work with communities in Zagreb, Croatia; Lima, Peru; Bosnia and Herzegovina; and six cities in India: Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi, and Patna.

For more information, including current productions and programming, visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org).

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