

# MEDIA RELEASE

MOLLY SMITH ARTISTIC DIRECTOR EDGAR DOBIE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ZELDA FICHANDLER FOUNDING DIRECTOR



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CONTACT:

Anastasia St. Hilaire

[asthilaire@arenastage.org](mailto:asthilaire@arenastage.org)

Mauricio Pita, Community Engagement

[mpita@arenastage.org](mailto:mpita@arenastage.org), 202-600-4065

## ARENA STAGE'S VOICES OF NOW FESTIVAL RETURNS FOR 18<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL PRODUCTION, MAY 17-20, 2023

**\*\*\*The four-night event features new plays written and performed by nine D.C.-area ensembles comprised of young and emerging artists\*\*\***

(Washington D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announced today the dates for its annual **Voices of Now Festival (VON)**, a four-night showcase of new plays written and performed by nine ensembles of young and emerging artists from D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Led by Arena Stage's Community Engagement Department, more than 70 VON artists, ages 11 to 28, will raise important questions about their communities through evenings of original, autobiographical theater. The **2023 VON Ensembles** will come together to perform and discuss their work **May 17 through 20, 2023**, on stage in Arena's **Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle**.

Founded 20 years ago, Voices of Now is a year-long, after-school drama program in which student artists gain devised theater skills by working with professional theater artists to create original work. Through creative writing, poetry, movement, and acting, VON gives ensembles of middle-school, high-school, and adult artists an artistic experience that challenges them to recount stories that shaped their lives through fast-paced and collaboratively written autobiographical plays.

"In devised theater, we start with a title," explains **Ashley Forman**, Arena Stage Director of Education and Voices of Now Artistic Director. "We then explore the title through writing, movement, and discussion. Slowly a script is compiled with the words, ideas, and personal stories of the artists."

"Voices of Now aims to train artists to be thoughtful, generous, and brave. Some of them are poets, some are playwrights, other actors, but all are gaining mastery over their personal experiences—change, loss, identity, and equality—by transforming them into art."

The 2023 Voices of Now Festival features the return of the program's flagship and inaugural ensemble, **Jefferson Middle School Ensemble**, as well as four other school-based ensembles in partnership with the Fairfax County Public School System, including **Kilmer Middle School Ensemble**, **Luther Jackson Middle School Ensemble**, **Robinson Middle School Ensemble**, and **Holmes Middle School Ensemble**.

This year's festival also includes plays devised by the **Pre-Professional Ensemble**, **Mentor Ensemble**, **Mead Ensemble**, and **The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing Ensemble**.

## **2023 Voices of Now Festival Schedule**

### **Wednesday, May 17 at 7:30 p.m.**

“Fault Line” by the Jefferson Middle School Academy Ensemble

“Life Form” by the Pre-Professional Ensemble

“Lift-Off” by the Mentor Ensemble

### **Thursday, May 18 at 7:30 p.m.**

“Sideline” by the Mead Ensemble

“Inside Out” by the Luther Jackson Middle School Ensemble

“Beneath the Surface” by the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing Ensemble

### **Friday, May 19 at 7:30 p.m.**

“Time Limit” by the Kilmer Middle School Ensemble

“Flight Path” by the Holmes Middle School Ensemble

“Life Form” by the Pre-Professional Ensemble

### **Saturday, May 20 at 7:30 p.m.**

“Lift-Off” by the Mentor Ensemble

“Look Out” by the Robinson Secondary School Ensemble

“Sideline” by the Mead Ensemble

All performances will be held in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle at Arena Stage the Mead Center for American Theater. Tickets are free, but reservations are recommended. Reserve your tickets at [arenastage.org/voicesofnow](http://arenastage.org/voicesofnow).

## **About Voices of Now**

Arena Stage’s Community Engagement Department would like to recognize the supporters and partners of the Voices of Now program. Without their extraordinary efforts and support, Voices of Now and our other Community Engagement program offerings would not be possible.

Thanks to partnerships with U.S. Embassies around the world, VON has grown from a program devoted to D.C.-area artists to working with communities across the globe. VON has worked with ensembles in Zagreb, Croatia; Lima, Peru; Bosnia and Herzegovina, and six cities in India: Kolkata, Patna, New Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Chennai.

Most recently, 15 participants, ages 18 to 24, from Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with online participation from Ukraine, gathered in Zagreb, Croatia to explore the past and future of their countries—which were once at war—and build connections with one another by making and performing an original, autobiographical play.

Voices of Now is made possible by support from **Global Medical REIT, The Lois & Richard England Family Foundation, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, and Friends of Southwest D.C.**

Arena Stage’s community engagement efforts are generously sponsored by Denie and Frank Weil; The Estate of Ms. Toni A. Ritzenberg; Joanne Barker; The Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Foundation; The Hearst Foundations; AT&T; Comcast; The National Endowment for the Arts; Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.; Global Medical REIT; Alice Shaver Foundation; Venable Foundation; Theater Forward;

GEICO; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; The Lois & Richard England Family Foundation; Friends of Southwest D.C.; and Actors' Equity Foundation.

For more information on Voices of Now, please visit [arenastage.org/voicesofnow](https://arenastage.org/voicesofnow).

*Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer 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 impacting the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its eighth decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. [arenastage.org](https://arenastage.org)*

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