

ARENA FACT SHEET

The Mead Center for American Theater

Arena Stage was founded August 16, 1950 in Washington, D.C. by **Zelda Fichandler**, **Tom Fichandler** and **Edward Mangum**. Over 65 years later, 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 groundbreaking 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.

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:

- Regional theater to have a production go to Broadway, with *The Great White Hope* in 1968
- Theater to receive the coveted Regional Theatre Tony Award in 1976
- Racially integrated theater in Washington
- Theater with an integrated acting company
- American resident company to tour behind the Iron Curtain and at the Hong Kong Arts Festival
- Theater to establish a training program for individuals of color through the Allen Lee Hughes 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*.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

In October 2010, Arena Stage opened its new home, **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater**, which has emerged as a national center focused on 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 is a breathtaking expansion of the former campus, allowing Arena Stage to focus on the strengths of the two existing theater spaces: the in-the-round **Fichandler Stage** (680 seats) and the proscenium **Kreeger Theater** (510 seats). These two theaters are joined by the **Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle**, a versatile 200-seat theater. With the project cost 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 new 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 the largest gift from a single household toward a not-for-profit regional theater at the time.

Arena Stage — Where American Theater Lives

With Artistic Director Molly Smith's arrival 19 years ago, Arena Stage refocused its mission to produce American Voices, past, present and future, an emphasis that belongs to no other major theater company. Today Smith places new-play development at Arena Stage's artistic center by commissioning playwrights, holding readings and workshops and staging world premieres as well as second and third productions.

Under Smith's tenure, Arena Stage has 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** and **Ayad Akhtar** and mixed reality artist **Patty Rangel**. In 2013, Arena Stage launched the **Playwrights' Arena** specifically for local playwrights, aiming to provide a collaborative and collegial working laboratory environment for playwrights.

In 2016, Arena Stage launched **Power Plays**, an ambitious initiative commissioning and developing 25 new plays and musicals over the course of the next 10 years, focused on stories of politics and power. Power Plays marks the largest commissioning project in Arena Stage's history and will feature one story per decade, beginning with 1776 through today.

Arena Stage has produced three 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; and **Jacqueline E. Lawton's *Intelligence***, focused on the consequences of speaking truth to power. The 2017/18 season featured the fourth production to debut as part of the initiative-**Mary Kathryn Nagle's *Sovereignty***, which tells the story of a young Cherokee lawyer fighting to restore her Nation's jurisdiction. Six additional commissioned projects are currently in development, with playwrights Nathan Alan Davis, Eve Ensler, Rajiv Joseph, Aaron Posner, Sarah Ruhl and John Strand.

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 five partnerships abroad, using the Voices of Now devised theater model to work with communities in Zagreb, Croatia; Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi and Patna, India; Lima, Peru; and Ljubljana, Slovenia.

For more information, including current productions and programming, visit www.arenastage.org

Media Contact: Lauren Alexander, press@arenastage.org, 202-600-4055