

# HISTORY OF ARENA STAGE: WHERE AMERICAN THEATER LIVES

## 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.

When Zelda and Tom Fichandler and a handful of friends started Arena Stage, there was no regional theater movement in the United States or resources to support a theater committed to providing quality work for its community. It took time for the idea of regional theater to take root, but the Fichandlers, together with the people of the nation's capital, worked patiently to build the fledgling theater into a diverse, multifaceted, internationally renowned institution.

Likewise, there were no professional theaters operating in Washington, D.C. in 1950. Actors' Equity rules did not permit its members to perform in segregated houses, and neither The National nor Ford's Theatre was integrated. From its inception, Arena opened its doors to anyone who wished to buy a ticket, becoming the first integrated theater in this city.

Under Zelda's visionary leadership, Arena's groundbreaking production history reveals a steadfast commitment to her desire "to bring life to life." Doug Wager continued her tradition of producing groundbreaking new plays alongside classic favorites. Now, Smith maintains that tradition by putting an emphasis on American work and celebrating the American playwright, an emphasis that belongs to no other theater company. In 66 years, with the support of countless individuals as well as local and national corporations and foundations, Arena Stage has become a model for American theater companies. Arena's name strives to be a passionate call for the discovery and articulation of American voices, past, present and future.

Arena Stage's pioneering spirit is evident in several significant achievements: it was one of the first American theaters to convert to not-for-profit status; it was the first regional theater to have a production taken to Broadway (*The Great White Hope* in 1968); it was the first American company to tour the Soviet Union (1973); it was the first theater outside New York to receive a Tony Award (1976); and it was the first American company to perform at the Hong Kong Arts Festival (1980).

"The American canon, a rich trove of work mostly written in the last 100 years, makes Arena an essentially modern theater," Smith has said. "We define great theater in many ways: it stirs you, gets you talking, inspires you to think and feel in whole new directions, and it always leaves you wanting more."

In January 2008, Arena Stage broke ground on its 48-year-old D.C. theater campus, and in October 2010, 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 is the largest gift from a single household toward a not-for-profit regional theater.

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 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**.

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 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

## Theater Leadership

### Artistic Leadership

1950–1991 Zelda Fichandler  
1991–1998 Douglas C. Wager  
1998– Molly Smith

### Management Leadership

1950–1986 Thomas C. Fichandler  
1986–1991 William Stewart  
1991–2008 Stephen Richard  
2009– Edgar Dobie

## Board of Trustees Leadership

1959–1968 J. Burke Knapp  
1968–1974 Norman Bernstein  
1974–1978 Curtin Winsor, Jr.  
1978–1986 Lee G. Rubenstein  
1986–1990 Richard W. Snowdon  
1990–1993 Denie S. Weil  
1993–1996 Riley K. Temple

1996–2000 Steven R. Bralove  
2000–2001 Wendy Farrow Raines  
2001–2004 James J. Rouse  
2004–2006 John M. Derrick, Jr.  
2006–2010 Mark Shugoll  
2010–2013 David Shiffrin  
2013–2016 Beth Newburger Schwartz  
2016– Judith N. Batty

## Selected Awards

Washington Theater Awards Society (**Helen Hayes Awards**) (1985–present): **105 Awards**.

**“Theatre Week in Washington”** October, 24–November 4, 1961, is designated as Theatre Week by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia to coincide with the opening of the new Arena Stage in Southwest.

**The Margo Jones Award**, which is given to the regional theater that has made the most significant contribution to the dramatic art through the production of new plays, 1971.

**Tony Award for Artistic Excellence** (first theater outside New York to be given a Tony Award), 1976.

**American Express Award for Outstanding Leadership in Professional Theatre**.

**The Mayor’s Committee on Persons with Disabilities** “for creative and innovative contributions to accessible art programming for people with disabilities by inventing and pioneering Audio Description,” 1996.

**Brand Design Association Award, consumer branding category, for new logo and design**, 1999.

**Mayor’s Arts Award for Excellence in an Artistic Discipline**, 2002.

**The National Multicultural Institute Diversity Award to Arena Stage’s Community Engagement program**. One of three recipients of this annual award, the theater was recognized for its innovative work in theater arts education and outreach to people of all ages, backgrounds and ethnicities in 2004.

***The Washington Post* Award for Innovative Leadership in the Theatre Community**, 2008. Arena Stage shared the

**Award for Innovative Leadership with the Crystal City Business Improvement District**, Vornado/Charles E. Smith Company and Arlington County Economic Development, who helped Arena relocate to Crystal City in 2008.

**International Ticketing Association (INTIX) selected Arena Stage as the recipient for the 2009 Outstanding Box Office Award**. INTIX represents over 1,200 members from 23 countries. This yearly honor recognizes only one box office. Arena Stage’s nomination focused on the yearlong challenges of moving mid-season to Crystal City in Arlington, VA from the theater’s home in Southwest D.C.

# Important Events in Arena Stage's History

- 1950** Arena Stage opens in the 247-seat Hippodrome, a converted movie house on New York Avenue, with Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, directed by Edward Mangum. Arena produces 17 plays during the first season.
- 1952** Edward Mangum leaves Arena Stage and Zelda and Thomas Fichandler become sole leadership.
- 1955** Arena Stage moves to a new 500-seat home nicknamed "The Old Vat," formerly the Heurich Brewery, in the Foggy Bottom section of Washington, D.C.
- 1959** Recognizing that producing the highest quality theater at affordable prices is impossible in the current economy, Arena Stage assumes not-for-profit status. Freed from the necessity of relying totally on box office income, Arena can concentrate on the art of theater and, like universities, libraries and museums, serve as "an instrument of civilization."
- 1961** The new 800-plus-seat Arena Stage, designed by Chicago architect Harry Weese as the first theater-in-the-round tailored specifically for the needs of an existing resident acting company, is completed and opens October 30 with the American premiere of Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, directed by Alan Schneider.
- 1966** Robert Alexander joins Arena Stage with his mixture of social outreach and improvisation theater, Living Stage. Living Stage's mission is to inspire creativity, strengthen individual purpose and promote a positive view of one's self and the world.
- Arena Stage produced the world premiere of Howard Sackler's *The Great White Hope*, directed by Edwin Sherin, which was taken to Broadway, won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and launched the careers of actors James Earl Jones and Jane Alexander.
- The success of that production in New York meant that the members of the acting company who went on to Broadway left Arena Stage, and Zelda had to rebuild the company. Arena Stage received no remunerations from the Broadway production. An important change that Zelda and Tom worked to prevent from happening again by the time that the productions *Indians* went from Arena Stage to Broadway, therefore, creating the contract framework for other resident theaters to follow when regional productions were taken to commercial productions in New York.
- 1971** The Kreeger Theater, a 514-seat fan-shaped auditorium with a proscenium stage, also designed by Harry Weese, opens with the American premiere of Peter Barnes' *The Ruling Class*, directed by David William.
- 1973** Arena Stage is the first American theater selected by the State Department to tour the Soviet Union, presenting Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, directed by Alan Schneider, and Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's *Inherit the Wind*, directed by Zelda Fichandler.
- 1975** Arena Stage presents Elie Wiesel's *Zalmen, or The Madness of God*, directed by Alan Schneider, for national television broadcast as part of the PBS series Theater in America.
- 1976** Arena Stage wins a Tony Award for artistic excellence, becoming the first theater outside New York to win a Tony Award.
- Arena Stage opens the "Old Vat Room," a 130-seat cabaret beneath the Kreeger Theater.
- 1980** Arena Stage is the first American theater company invited to the prestigious international Hong Kong Arts Festival, presenting Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*, directed by Zelda Fichandler, and George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart's *You Can't Take it with You*, directed by Douglas C. Wager.
- 1981** Audio description, a service used internationally to provide visually impaired individuals with live narration of the performing arts, television and exhibits, is developed by Arena Stage in conjunction with The Washington Ear.
- 1982** Arena Stage presents the world premiere of Patrick Meyers' *K2*, directed by Jacques Levy. The production goes on to Broadway, and the set, which was commissioned for the Arena Stage production, wins a Tony Award for its designer, Ming Cho Lee.
- 1983** Arena Stage joins with the Brooklyn Academy of Music to co-produce the fusion of gospel music and Greek tragedy in *The Gospel at Colonus*, adapted and directed by Lee Breuer, with music by Bob Telson.

Arena Stage's presentation of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Happy End*, directed by Garland Wright, is filmed for broadcast on PBS's American Musical Theater series.

**1985** Arena Stage is awarded an Ongoing Ensemble Grant by the National Endowment for the Arts, enabling the theater to expand the resident acting company and employ the company on a year-round basis for the first time in the theater's history.

**1986** The Arena Stage Campaign, an ambitious three-year drive to establish an endowment, comes to a successful close, raising more than \$6 million in endowment funds.

Thomas Fichandler retires at the end of the 1985/86 season.

**1987** Arena Stage is selected to attend the Israel Festival in Jerusalem, presenting Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, directed by Zelda Fichandler.

Exiled Russian director Yuri Lyubimov makes his American directorial debut with his adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, which garners widespread critical attention and draws enormous patron attendance.

**1988** The Ford Motor Company awards Arena Stage a \$350,000 grant to inaugurate the new STAGE FOUR series and to support it during its first three years. STAGE FOUR was intended to foster the development of new works by young authors and established playwrights through production and commissions and to broaden the existing audience base of Arena.

**1989** Arena Stage is awarded a grant of \$1 million by the National Endowment for the Arts to support a groundbreaking cultural diversity program to be matched by \$3 million donated by major foundations and corporations over a four-year period.

**1990** Arena Stage inaugurates its 40th anniversary season with Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the first play presented in the new Arena building in 1961.

**1991** Zelda Fichandler relinquishes her position as producing director at the end of the 1990/91 season to become artistic director of the Acting Company in New York City and chair of the graduate acting program at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

Associate Producing Director Douglas C. Wager, a 17-year veteran of Arena Stage, is named artistic director. The Board of Trustees appoints Stephen Richard as Executive Director.

Banjo player and storyteller Stephen Wade ends his 10-year run in the Old Vat Room, having given more than 2,300 performances of *Banjo Dancing* and its sequel *On the Way Home*. Originally scheduled for a three-week engagement in 1981, Wade's one-man show was extended and became Arena's longest-running hit.

**1992** The 816-seat arena space is renamed the Fichandler Stage to honor co-founders Thomas C. and Zelda Fichandler.

**1993** Arena inaugurates PlayQuest, a mini-season of workshop presentations of commissioned and submitted plays presented in the Old Vat.

**1994** Arena Stage is awarded one of only 10 National Theatre Artist Residency grants to support an artistic collaboration with acclaimed actress and dramatist Anna Deavere Smith. Smith was in residence at Arena developing *HOUSE ARREST: First Edition*, a new performance piece focusing on the image of the American presidency and its effect on our national character.

*The Price*, by Arthur Miller and featuring Stanley Anderson and Bob Prosky, breaks existing box office records and plays to sold-out houses throughout its run.

**1995** Arena launches a broad-sweeping Arts-in-Education program called Theater as Discovery, targeted toward the public schools in the District of Columbia.

**1996** Douglas C. Wager announces his resignation as artistic director effective following the 1997/98 season.

**1997** Founding Executive Director Thomas C. Fichandler dies at age 81.

**1998** Molly Smith, founder and artistic director of Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska, is named artistic director.

Molly Smith launches downstairs in the Old Vat Room, a program focused on readings and workshops of new plays.

**1999** More than 60 plays are read through this series, with half going on to full productions at theaters around the country.

**2000** Arena Stage celebrates 50 years with a revival of *The Great White Hope* directed by Molly Smith.

Another record-breaking year in tickets sales, the 1999/2000 season saw two immensely successful shows, *Guys and Dolls* and a new play by Charles Randolph Wright, *Blue*, break box office records and ignite interest from New York and national producers. In 2001, *Blue* went on to an Off-Broadway run at the Roundabout Theatre Company in New York City, and *Guys and Dolls* went on a national 10-month tour.

Arena hires Bing Thom Architects of Vancouver to begin planning and designing a major renovation and expansion of the historic Southwest, D.C. campus after vetting over 50 potential architecture firms. Molly Smith, Guy Bergquist and Stephen Richard begin a three-year planning process for the new center with Bing Thom and his company.

**2001** Arena Stage launches its revitalized website, [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org), which enables patrons to purchase tickets, subscriptions and make donations online.

**2002** Arena Stage retires the Living Stage program and inaugurates the Community Engagement program, which serves thousands of young people annually in the metropolitan area.

**2003** The theater continues to break box office records with its production of the critically acclaimed *South Pacific*, which became the most financially successful show in Arena Stage history.

**2004** 40,000 people-including more than 6,000 new patrons-make *Crowns* the most successful show ever produced in the Kreeger Theater.

**2005** Arena Stage inaugurates the Writer's Council, a group of playwrights including Sarah Ruhl, Paula Vogel, David Henry Hwang, Nilo Cruz and Moises Kaufman to advise Arena on the needs of writers.

Camp Arena Stage launches, giving young people ages 8–15 the chance to explore the arts.

**2006** Arena Stage reaches a milestone of over \$100 million raised towards the campaign goal for the renovation of its facilities and the creation of a state-of-the-art theater campus. Arena honors the exceptional generosity of Gilbert and Jaylee Mead, who donated close to \$35 million toward the project, by naming the new complex Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. The Meads' gift is the largest ever made to an American regional theater and one of the top 10 largest gifts to a non-profit arts organization in the U.S. at the time.

**2008** Construction begins on Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater in January, a design by Bing Thom Architects (Vancouver, B.C.), which will renovate the Fichandler Stage and Kreeger Theater and add a new 200-seat flexible space called the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle, as well as improve amenities such as generous lobby, shop and office space.

Administrative offices temporarily move to Crystal City, in Arlington, VA; the scene and prop shop move nearby to Shirlington in Arlington, VA; and Community Engagement, the costume shop and rehearsals combine to work out of Arena Stage's Northwest, D.C. location at 14th and T. Performances begin to take place in Crystal City (1800 South Bell Street, Arlington, VA) and The Lincoln Theatre (1215 U Street NW | Washington, D.C.).

This is the first time a theater the size of Arena Stage has performed off-site, spreading the company into five locations while a new center is being built. It takes almost military precision to accomplish the move, including moving over 100 staff members, 200,000+ audience members, 16 productions and 20,000 pairs of shoes.

The new musical *Next to Normal*, featuring music by Tom Kitt, book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey and direction by Michael Greif, receives a critical second production at Arena Stage before a Broadway run is announced for March 2009.

**2009** The International Ticketing Association (INTIX) selects Arena Stage as the recipient for the 2009 Outstanding Box Office Award. INTIX represents over 1,200 members from 23 countries, and this yearly honor recognizes only one box office. Arena Stage's nomination focuses on the yearlong challenges of moving mid-season to Crystal City in Arlington, VA from the theater's home in Southwest D.C.

The Arena Stage Board of Trustees appoints Edgar Dobie as the new managing director of the theater in March 2009.

Dobie, now Executive Producer (in 2013), succeeds Interim Managing Director Guy Bergquist, who led the theater after former Executive Director Stephen Richard left in spring 2008.

For the first time since the 1970s, two productions that were recently produced by Arena Stage are on Broadway at the same time: Moises Kaufman's *33 Variations* starring Jane Fonda and *Next to Normal* featuring the entire Arena Stage cast. *33 Variations* is nominated for five Tony Awards, winning for Best Scenic Design of a Play. *Next to Normal* receives 11 nominations and takes home three awards including Best Score, Best Performance of a Leading Actress in a Musical and Best Orchestrations.

Arena Stage launches the American Voices New Play Institute with a \$1.1 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, hosting five inaugural resident playwrights-Amy Freed, Katori Hall, Lisa Kron, Charles Randolph-Wright and Karen Zacarf as-over several years and providing them with resources and benefits to write and develop new or unfinished plays.

- 2010** October 23, 2010: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater opens to the public, positioning Arena Stage as a national center dedicated to the production, presentation, development and study of American Theater. For the first time in the company's history all artistic and administrative departments are united under one roof.

*Oklahoma!*, directed by Molly Smith, opens as the first production in the Mead Center for American Theater and goes on to become the highest grossing production in Arena Stage history, a record previously held by Duke Ellington's *Sophisticated Ladies* during the 2009/10 season.

*Next to Normal* by Brian Yorkey and Tom Kitt wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

- 2011** Following its success in the fall of 2010, where it shattered box office records and rounded up four Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Resident Musical, *Oklahoma!* returns to the Fichandler Stage for a 12- week summer run.

- 2012** Arena Stage produces the 2011 Tony Award-winning production of Larry Kramer's *The Normal Heart*, directed by George C. Wolfe and featuring several of the Broadway cast members. The production coincides with the 2012 International AIDS Conference in Washington, D.C. and serves as an Affiliated Independent Event of the biennial conference.

Arena Stage's community engagement program is selected to participate in a pilot program with the United States Department of State to set up theater education workshops in cities across India based on the Voices of Now program. Four members of Arena Stage's Community Engagement department embark on a two-and-a-half week journey to Kolkata, Patna, New Delhi and Hyderabad, India.

As part of the American Voices New Play Institute, Arena Stage launches the Kogod Cradle Series, which supports the exploration and development of new and emerging work in the intimate 200-seat Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle.

- 2013** Arena Stage partnered with Steppenwolf Theatre Company in 2011 on Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, which opens on Broadway in fall 2012 and earns three Tony Awards, including Best Revival of a Play.

Arena Stage launches the Playwrights' Arena specifically for local playwrights, selecting Norman Allen, Randy Baker, Jacqueline E. Lawton, Heather McDonald, Danielle Mahlman and Shawn Northrip to participate in this year-long program, which aims to provide a collaborative and collegial working laboratory environment for playwrights.

Obie Award-winning playwright Samuel D. Hunter joins the American Voices New Play Institute as a yearlong resident playwright in 2013, followed by playwright Lydia R. Diamond during the 2013/14 seasons.

*One Night with Janis Joplin* returns to Arena Stage after a critically acclaimed run in fall 2012. *A Night with Janis Joplin* with star Mary Bridget Davies (who played Janis Joplin in both Arena Stage productions) goes on to open on Broadway in fall 2013.

*A Time to Kill*, which received its world premiere at Arena Stage in spring 2011, opens on Broadway in fall 2013 featuring Sebastian Arcelus, who appeared in the Arena Stage production.

Four staff members from Arena Stage's community engagement department travel to Zagreb, Croatia to work with young adults with physical disabilities.

**2014** Molly Smith makes her Broadway directorial debut in spring 2014 with *The Velocity of Autumn*, which ran at Arena Stage in fall 2013.

All nine staff members from Arena Stage's community engagement department travel to Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad, India. Two staff members also travel to Lima, Peru to partner with Arena y Esteras, a local organization comprised of artists, educators and leaders committed to using art as a tool to contribute to human development and social transformation.

D.C.-area based playwright John Strand joins Arena Stage for a two-year playwright residency.

*Fiddler on the Roof*, directed by Molly Smith, celebrates its 50th anniversary and becomes the highest grossing production in Arena Stage's 65-year history.

**2015** Arena Stage is one of seven originating theaters of the Women's Voices Theater Festival, a two-month, citywide effort that uniting more than 50 professional theater companies in the nation's capital region.

Participating companies presented world-premiere productions of a work by one or more female playwrights.

Arena Stage produces Karen Zacarias' telenovela-inspired comedy *Destiny of Desire* and *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End* by sisters Allison Engel and Margaret Engel.

In partnership with the U.S. Embassies in Zagreb, Croatia and Ljubljana, Slovenia, Arena Stage sends three Voices of Now artists to Zagreb to work with 25 college-age youth from vulnerable communities across the region in a seven-day workshop, culminating in an original play performed at the Tresnja Theater in Zagreb.

*Dear Evan Hansen* receives its world premiere at Arena Stage during the 2015/16 season. The critically acclaimed production plays to sold-out houses at Second Stage Theatre the following spring, resulting in an announcement for a Broadway run beginning November 2016. The musical features a book by Steven Levenson, music & lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul and direction by Michael Grief.

More than 100 former fellows and interns gather at Arena Stage to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Allen Lee Hughes Fellowship Program.

**2016** 2016 Pulitzer Prize winner Ayad Akhtar is announced as Arena Stage's 2016/17 resident playwright.

*Dear Evan Hansen* opens on Broadway, featuring seven of the eight cast members who originated their roles at Arena Stage, including Ben Platt, Rachel Bay Jones and Mike Faist, each of whom are nominated for Tony Awards.

Arena Stage launches Power Plays, an ambitious initiative that will commission and develop 25 new plays and musicals over the course of the next 10 years, focused on stories of politics and power. This marks the largest commissioning project in the company's history.

**2017** Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, a co-commission from Arena Stage and Oregon Shakespeare Festival that ran at Arena Stage in 2016, opens on Broadway and receives the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Two productions featured at Arena Stage during the 2015/16 season, the musical phenomenon *Dear Evan Hansen* and Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, garner a total of 12 nominations for the 2017 Tony Awards, including nominations in the Best Musical and Best Play categories.

*Dear Evan Hansen*, which received its world premiere at Arena Stage 2015, wins six Tony Awards including the top prize for Best Musical at the 71st Annual Tony Awards.

Mixed reality artist Patty Rangel is announced as Arena Stage's 2017/18 resident artist.

With the start of the 2017/18 season, Molly Smith enters her 20th anniversary season at Arena Stage.

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