

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES SIX D.C.-AREA PLAYMAKERS SELECTED FOR 2017 PLAYWRIGHTS' ARENA

*** Third installment of year-long program focuses on
reflecting, studying and strengthening the new frontier of playmaking ***

(Washington, D.C.) Six D.C.-area playwrights have been selected to participate in the third installment of **Playwrights' Arena**, a year-long program that invites a small group of local theater makers to investigate their artistic process and develop their dramaturgical practice. The program is co-facilitated by Arena Stage Deputy Artistic Director **Seema Sueko** and Dramaturg **Jocelyn Clarke**, and participants convene once per month at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater.

Playwrights' Arena 2017 is experimenting with the definition of playmaking and invited actors, directors or designers, who also write their own work, to apply for the program. The new group includes **Kelly Renee Armstrong**, **Jennifer Barclay**, **J. Shawn Durham**, **Jennie Berman Eng**, **Marian Licha** and **Mary Hall Surface**.

"It is indeed exciting to encourage playmaking from this talented range of actors, directors and playwrights," says Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "In musical theater, we talk of the triple-threat: actor, singer, dancer. Plays are made by such talented artists as well, actor-director-educators, and this cohort of Playwrights' Arena will provide unique support and resources to this cross-disciplinary adventure."

"Arena Stage is committed not just to producing, presenting and developing but also to the study and advancement of American theater," shares **Sueko**. "My hope is that our participants' involvement with the program provides them with a deeper understanding of, a robust toolkit for, and a keen vocabulary to describe their respective dramaturgical processes and practice. Likewise, we at Arena will learn from the participants the variety of ways local artists are making new work. Each of these artists work not only as writers, but also as directors, actors and producers. I am excited to see how they will share, teach and receive from one another their respective methodologies for playmaking."

The 2017 cohort will meet once per month, from January to May and September to December, and will have one-on-one sessions with Clarke outside of these meetings. Artists have the opportunity to engage with Arena Stage resident playwrights, directors, designers and staff about their work, the production process at a regional theater and other topics pertinent to their interests. Participants will have access to opening nights and special events and be supported as members of the Arena Stage artistic community.

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“Playwrights' Arena 2017 plans to investigate new ways of making plays with a group of local theater artists whose practice combines acting, writing, directing and producing and offers exciting new challenges to making theater in the 21st century,” adds **Clarke**. “I am excited to explore new dramaturgical processes with this unique cohort of artists, which will inform both how they will create and develop new work and how Arena Stage will support and present different kinds of playmaking now and in the future.”

Playwrights' Arena launched at Arena Stage in January 2013 with Norman Allen, Randy Baker, Jacqueline E. Lawton, Heather McDonald, Danielle Mohlman and Shawn Northrip. The second group of Playwrights' Arena included Steven A. Butler, Jr., Patricia Davis, Joshua Ford, Mary Stone Hanley, Liz Maestri and David Mitchell Robinson.

Biographies (in alphabetic order)

Kelly Renee Armstrong is an actor, playwright and educator. She has had the great pleasure of working with a number of wonderful organizations, including Arena Stage, Rep Stage, Studio Theatre, Theater J, Theater Alliance and National Black Theatre Festival. She is a proud graduate of Bowie State University and earned her M.F.A. in performance from Catholic University of America. While at Catholic University, she began working on her solo show *Testify*, for which she received the Individual Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council. Kelly also takes every opportunity to enhance her craft as an adjunct instructor. She works with bright students each semester to explore characters through the prism of self. “For it is here, in this secret place, that we can discover one another—in the folds where my pain mingles with your jubilation and creates an aria.”

Jennifer Barclay is an actor-turned playwright, recently relocated to the D.C. area. She is the winner of the 2016 Smith Prize for Political Theatre from the National New Play Network for *Ripe Frenzy*, which will be workshopped at Woolly Mammoth in November 2016. Jennifer's plays have been produced and developed by Steppenwolf, La Jolla Playhouse, The Old Globe, RedCat, Kennedy Center, Center Stage, International Theatre of Vienna and Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Awards include the Goldwyn Writing Award, Kennedy Center National Science Playwriting Award, Pinter Review, Princess Grace finalist, O'Neill National Playwrights Conference finalist, two-time Heideman Award finalist and Northwestern University's Mary Margaret Linn Theatre Award. Fellowships include MacDowell Colony, VCCA and Hawthornden International Writers Retreat. Residencies include 2009 Shank Playwright in Residence at South Coast Repertory and 2015/16 Playwrights Collective at Center Stage. Education, Northwestern University and UC San Diego (M.F.A. with Naomi Iizuka). Jennifer is an assistant professor of playwriting and performance at the University of Maryland. www.barclaystudios.com

J. Shawn Durham is an actor, novelist and playwright. He plays the leading man in the short films *Southern Hustle* and *This Is Not A Love Story*, and supporting actor in films *Simply Sylvio*, *Water* and *Tomorrow Isn't Guaranteed*. He can be seen in commercials for Volkswagen, Walden University, Sam Adams and more. His writing credits include his novel *The Broke Brothers' Revolution* and his play *The Missionaries*, which will be featured in the University of Georgia's Athens Playwrights Festival. He played four characters in his one-man show *Four Broke Guys: LIVE!* and performed at the 2015 DC Black Theatre Festival and 2015 International Cherry Blossom Festival. Shawn has also penned special projects such as *Ode To Hockey* featuring the GEICO Caveman mascot, *Hardest Word* music video and a film for Atlanta's Murry Law Group. Onstage acting credits include Rorschach Theater's *The Electric Baby* and the Washington Rogues' *Agents of Azeroth*. Shawn is a Macon, Georgia native and a University of Georgia alum.

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Jennie Berman Eng is a 2014 and 2016 Theater J Locally Grown Playwright. She wrote and directed *Whenever You're Near Me I Feel Sick*, which was produced as part of the 2016 Women's Voices Theater Festival. Recent plays include *Don Q*, adapted from *Don Quixote* for young audiences, commissioned by University of Colorado-Boulder, *Bethesda* (Capital Fringe 2014), *Spectacular Women (In Their Natural Habitat)* at Theater J, *H is for Holy* (Intersections Festival, Atlas Performing Arts Center), *A Family of Lobsters* (LiveArt DC's Play in A Day), *Exit Carolyn* at The Drilling Company in New York and *Cherry* (Naked Angels' First Monday reading series, New York.) Jennie was a founding member, performer and head writer for the all-girl comedy group, The Greasy Girlz, which toured New York and Los Angeles. She is currently the Lead teaching artist at Ford's Theatre. Jennie lives in Northern Virginia with her husband, Chris, and the two cutest kids on the planet, Lily and Jasper. She received her M.F.A. from The New School for Drama and is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

Marian Licha is an award-winning actor and playwright. In 2010 she received an MCAC Theatre Fellowship Award, and a Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Award for her performance of her co-written work *Frida Vice-Versa*, which has been performed at Provincetown Playhouse, Round House, The Chautauqua Festival and many other venues. She has been performing her original storytelling program entitled *A Magical Journey into Latin America* for 20 years throughout Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C. and New York City. She has written several one-act plays about cultural clashes among Hispanics in the United States. Her latest addition is a one-woman show entitled *Kiki: A Girl With Loud Shoes*, which is written as a magical realism piece infused with over the top humor and fantasy. She has written several 10-minute plays about mother/daughter situations, middle-age marriage, friendship betrayals and more. Her work is infused with humor and life-giving situations. She has studied with Karen Zacarias, Ernie Joselovitz, Allison Pruitt, Matt Hoverman, Emma Goldman Sherman and Gabrielle Maisels and is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and Playwright's Forum.

Mary Hall Surface is a playwright, director, producer and teaching artist devoted to intergenerational audiences and multidisciplinary collaborations. Nominated for nine Helen Hayes Awards, she received the 2002 Outstanding Director, Resident Musical Award for her *Perseus Bayou*, which along with *Sing Down the Moon*, *Mississippi Pinocchio* and *Lift: Icarus and Me* (with composer David Maddox), were nominated for the Charles McArthur Award. Other D.C. projects include *Who's in the Hopper*, *Framed!* and *Forward 54th* (National Gallery of Art), *Miranda's Waltz* (National Symphony Orchestra), *Preludes: Duncan, Sand and Chopin* (Word Dance Theatre), *The Second Shepherds' Play* (Folger Shakespeare Theatre) and 12 productions with the Kennedy Center's Theatre for Young Audiences, including *The Nightingale*, *A Light in the Storm* and *Prodigy*. She is a national Kennedy Center teaching artist and on the faculty of Harvard's Project Zero Classroom. As the founding artistic director of the Atlas INTERSECTIONS Festival, she curated over 600 performances and community engagements from 2009-2015. www.maryhallsurface.com

For additional information on Playwrights' Arena visit: arenastage.org/artistic-development/new-playwrights-institute/playwrights-arena/.

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

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