

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER ANNOUNCES COMPANY'S 67TH SEASON

\*\*\* Seven of the 10 titles in the 2016/17 season are by female playwrights in a diverse lineup featuring leading ladies E. Faye Butler, Marg Helgenberger, Marsha Mason and Kathleen Turner and a festival dedicated to the work of Lillian Hellman \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie announce a 2016/17 season that showcases the theater's mission of American voices and artists. Spurred by its role as one of the seven originating theaters of D.C.'s Women's Voices Theater Festival, Arena Stage has embraced a commitment to inclusion with a season featuring seven titles by women, six playwrights of color and six female directors.

On assembling the lineup Smith shares, "Arena has such a smart and diverse audience, so it is always a challenge to ensure everyone is energized. This season we leaned into that challenge and are welcoming a host of extremely talented artists both returning and new. This season is a celebration of Arena's broad shoulders, from our Lillian Hellman Festival, a Lorraine Hansberry classic and the gold-standard musical to world-premiere political dramas, a comedy and a new musical. The Mead Center was designed to have these different audiences unite in our flowing lobby, and I'm eager to experience this throughout our dynamic season."

The season kicks off in July with the original world-premiere musical *Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story* by six-time Grammy Award winner **BeBe Winans** and veteran Arena Stage playwright/director **Charles Randolph-Wright**. Featuring new music by BeBe, the musical chronicles the early days of his career with sister CeCe and will star their niece and nephew, siblings **Deborah Joy Winans** and **Juan Winans**. The season's other powerhouse musical features the return of the thrilling partnership between Smith, Choreographer **Parker Esse** and Music Director **Paul Sportelli** to mount Rodgers and Hammerstein's beloved *Carousel* starring Arena favorites **Nicholas Rodriguez** and **E. Faye Butler**.

In Arena Stage's tradition of showcasing the work of American Giants in the theater (following festivals for Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and Eugene O'Neill), the **Lillian Hellman Festival** will be comprised of two full productions, *The Little Foxes* starring Emmy Award winner **Marg Helgenberger** (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*) and *Watch on the Rhine* featuring Broadway veteran, four-time Academy Award nominee and Golden Globe Award winner **Marsha Mason** (*The Goodbye Girl*), as well as staged readings, film screenings, panel discussions and more during the year to explore the works of one of America's most daring, polarizing and memorable writers.

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The 10-play season features four works from daring contemporary female voices including **Joan Didion's** adaptation of her memoir ***The Year of Magical Thinking*** starring Academy Award and Tony Award nominee **Kathleen Turner** in the one-woman play; **Jacqueline E. Lawton's** world-premiere political thriller ***Intelligence***; **Lydia Diamond's** provocative and funny comedy ***Smart People***; and **Lisa Loomer's** world-premiere drama ***Roe*** about the landmark Supreme Court decision, in a co-production with Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Berkeley Repertory Theatre, under the direction of OSF Artistic Director **Bill Rauch**.

Two other quintessential American stories complete the season: **Lookingglass Theatre Company's** production of ***Moby Dick*** adapted and directed by **David Catlin** and—for the first time in Arena Stage's history—**Lorraine Hansberry's** ***A Raisin in the Sun*** under the direction of longtime Arena Stage veteran **Tazewell Thompson**.

### **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater 2016/17 Schedule\***

#### ***Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story***

**Book by Charles Randolph-Wright and BeBe Winans**

**Featuring original music and lyrics by BeBe Winans**

**Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright**

**World-premiere co-production with the Alliance Theatre**

**In association with Daniel Chilewich and Todd Gershwin**

**In the Kreeger Theater | July 1-August 28, 2016**

Detroit natives BeBe and CeCe Winans, youngest siblings of the Winans family dynasty, experience the ultimate in culture shocks when invited to join Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's *Praise the Lord* television show. The Winans teenagers have the opportunity to become more than just television celebrities, but to integrate TV evangelism. As BeBe and CeCe encounter fame, fortune and even a young Whitney Houston, BeBe must learn to balance his desire for success with his true calling. Combining classic Winans hits with brand-new songs, this inspirational musical features Juan and Deborah Joy Winans in their Arena Stage debuts as BeBe and CeCe Winans.

#### ***The Little Foxes***

**By Lillian Hellman**

**Directed by Kyle Donnelly**

**In the Kreeger Theater | September 23-October 30, 2016**

There are people who eat and there are those that get eaten. First in line to be served is Regina Hubbard, clawing her way to wealth with her equally calculating brothers. When their plan to control the local cotton mill is thwarted, they'll turn to ever more devious schemes, even as it further divides their family. Starring Emmy Award winner Marg Helgenberger (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*), Lillian Hellman's classic tale of greed, betrayal and all the sordid ties that bind takes sibling rivalry to unimaginable heights and reveals how far a ruthless family can bend the rules before they break each other. **Part of the Lillian Hellman Festival.**

#### ***The Year of Magical Thinking***

**By Joan Didion based on her memoir**

**Directed by Gaye Taylor Upchurch**

**In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | October 7-November 20, 2016**

There is no way to avoid tragedy, loss or their aftermath. Yet we still hope that when faced with inescapable grief, something miraculous can emerge to ease our pain and guide us back to the joy of life. Few writers have experienced loss so suddenly and profoundly—or chronicled it as beautifully—as Joan Didion. Based on her award-winning memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking* follows the iconic American author, portrayed by Academy Award and Tony Award nominee Kathleen Turner (Arena's *Mother Courage and Her Children*), as she learns to reconcile the natural instincts that drive us to bargain with the universal forces that giveth and taketh away.

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***Carousel***

**Music by Richard Rodgers**

**Book and Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II**

**Directed by Molly Smith**

**Choreographed by Parker Esse**

**Music direction by Paul Sportelli**

**In the Fichandler Stage | October 28-December 24, 2016**

Dazzling lights, swinging songs and a bad boy to melt your heart—see why *Carousel* was named the best musical of the 20th century by *Time* magazine. When Billy Bigelow and Julie Jordan fall in love, little do they realize that his rebellious ways will lead to tragedy. Given a chance to make good, will a lucky star save Billy and those he loves? Director Molly Smith reunites with both Nicholas Rodriguez and E. Faye Butler for the first time since 2011's *Oklahoma!* in this epic production bursting with classic songs like “June Is Bustin’ Out all Over” and “You’ll Never Walk Alone.”

**Lookingglass Theatre Company’s**

***Moby Dick***

**Adapted and directed by David Catlin from the book by Herman Melville**

**Co-production with the Alliance Theatre and South Coast Repertory**

**In the Kreeger Theater | November 18-December 24, 2016**

Set sail on the holiday season’s biggest adventure! Melville’s classic tale of man’s obsessive battle against nature comes to life in “a triumph of grand theatrical imagination, deep thought, superb acting and eye-popping, ingeniously deployed physical daring” (*Chicago Sun-Times*). Innovative staging fused with bold trapeze and acrobatic work turn this seafaring classic into a death-defying experiment in aerial storytelling. Climb aboard with Captain Ahab and the crew of the good ship Pequod in this harrowing and intoxicating quest for the great white whale.

***Roe***

**By Lisa Loomer**

**World-premiere co-production with Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Berkeley Repertory Theatre**

**Directed by Bill Rauch**

**In the Kreeger Theater | January 12-February 19, 2017**

The lawyer: a young, brilliant, courageous woman who argued *Roe v. Wade* before the Supreme Court. The plaintiff: a complex, single woman seeking to end an unwanted pregnancy. After the landmark 1973 case that legalized abortion, it’s their divergent journeys after the victory that best reflect the subsequent polarization in American culture. With shocking turns and surprising humor, *Roe* illuminates the difficult choices women make and the passion each side has for its cause.

***Watch on the Rhine***

**By Lillian Hellman**

**Directed by Jackie Maxwell**

**In the Fichandler Stage | February 3-March 5, 2017**

Golden Globe Award winner Marsha Mason (*The Goodbye Girl*) leads an ensemble cast as Fanny Farrelly in Lillian Hellman’s suspenseful masterpiece *Watch on the Rhine*. With America on the brink of entering World War II, Fanny’s daughter escapes to the D.C. suburbs with her German husband, a man deeply involved in anti-fascist movements. But with an Eastern European guest with ulterior motives also living in their midst, tensions rise as it becomes clear that no one’s safety can be guaranteed—at home or abroad. **Part of the Lillian Hellman Festival.**

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### ***Intelligence***

World premiere by Jacqueline E. Lawton

Directed by Daniella Topol

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | February 24-April 2, 2017

A covert operative is racing to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq when the unthinkable happens. With the country at war, her cover is blown and she must navigate a media frenzy, the CIA's search for answers and her diplomat husband's dogged pursuit of the truth. Inspired by true events, *Intelligence* is a political thriller that explores the cost of deception and the consequences of speaking truth to power.

### ***A Raisin in the Sun***

By Lorraine Hansberry

Directed by Tazewell Thompson

In the Fichandler Stage | March 31-April 30, 2017

The “play that changed American theater forever” (*New York Times*) finally comes to Arena Stage. Lorraine Hansberry's groundbreaking masterpiece follows the Younger family yearning for a better life far from the cramped confines of their Chicago tenement. Hope arrives in the form of an unexpected financial windfall, but family ties are strained when they realize they have differing definitions of the American dream—but which dreams get realized and which deferred? *A Raisin in the Sun* paints the African-American experience in brilliant and powerful strokes, as vibrant and vital today as it was in 1959.

### ***Smart People***

By Lydia R. Diamond

Directed by Seema Sueko

In the Kreeger Theater | April 14-May 21, 2017

Do our belief systems stem from our environment, or are some prejudices hard-wired into us? With barbed wit, Lydia R. Diamond (*Stick Fly*) explores the unavoidable nature of racism and other sticky subjects in the controversial and fiercely funny new play *Smart People*. Four intellectuals—a doctor, an actress, a psychologist and a neurobiologist studying the human brain's response to race—search for love, acceptance and identity in a complex world where political correctness comes face-to-face with cold hard data.

*\*Plays, artists and dates are subject to change.*

Subscription packages are now on sale and may be purchased by calling the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300 or by visiting [arenastage.org](http://arenastage.org).

*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 through the American Voices New Play Institute. Arena Stage 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](http://arenastage.org)*

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