

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For additional press materials, visit the online press room:  
[arenastage.org/about/press-room/press-kits-photos/productions/smart-people/](http://arenastage.org/about/press-room/press-kits-photos/productions/smart-people/)  
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FULL COMPANY ANNOUNCED FOR D.C. PREMIERE OF  
LYDIA R. DIAMOND'S *SMART PEOPLE*  
APRIL 14-MAY 21, 2017 AT ARENA STAGE

**\*\*\* Deputy Artistic Director Seema Sueko makes Arena Stage directorial debut with provocative and funny play exploring the unavoidable nature of cultural bias \*\*\***

(Washington, D.C.) 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 **Lydia R. Diamond's comedy-drama *Smart People***, which makes its D.C. debut at Arena Stage. Set against the backdrop of Obama's 2008 election, Diamond's fiercely funny play explores the unavoidable nature of cultural bias. Deputy Artistic Director **Seema Sueko** makes her Arena Stage directorial debut with this “sexy, serious and very, very funny modern-day comedy of manners” (*Variety*). ***Smart People* runs April 14-May 21, 2017 in the Kreeger Theater.**

The four-person cast features **Lorene Chesley** (La Jolla Playhouse's *Memphis*) as Valerie Johnston, **Gregory Perri** (Broadway's *Good People*) as Brian White, **Sue Jin Song** (Manhattan Theatre Club's *The World of Extreme Happiness*) as Ginny Yang and **Jaysen Wright** (Studio Theatre's *Choir Boy*) as Jackson Moore.

“I am a big fan of Lydia Diamond, and *Smart People* is one of the smartest plays I've encountered in recent years,” says Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. “What a fascinating play to produce now, a few months into a new administration that is quite the opposite of the one featured in this play. Lydia's play will take on new meaning in the current era of fake news. Seema Sueko will definitely lead this talented cast to an insightful performance.”

“*Smart People* is a smart, complex, nuanced play that explores the science and psychology of racism and implicit bias through the lens of four smart people who are fighting to be seen and seeking to be loved,” shares **Sueko**. “At times this play is explosive and at other times it's laugh out loud funny. As you can imagine, casting actors who have the depth, range, humor and passion is critical to the success of this show. I have found that in Gregory, Sue Jin, Jaysen and Lorene. I am excited to dive into the rehearsal room with these excellent artists.”

“I am honored that Arena Stage is producing *Smart People*,” adds **Diamond**. “Arena has made itself an artistic home for me again and again, from play development, a commission, residency and now two productions—this sort of long-term investment is the key to empowering writers to do what we do, as well and prolifically as possible. Seema's sophisticated and culturally relevant voice is perfect for the stewardship of this play, a story that wants desperately to be in conversation with this city, in this country, at this time.”

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**Lydia R. Diamond** (*Playwright*) is a 2013/14 Arena Stage resident playwright. Award-winning plays include *Smart People*, *Stick Fly*, *Voyeurs de Venus*, *The Bluest Eye*, *The Gift Horse*, *Harriet Jacobs*, *The Inside* and *Stage Black*. Theaters include Broadway's Cort Theatre, The Arden, Chicago Dramatists, Company One, Congo Square, Goodman, Guthrie, Hartford Stage, Huntington, Jubilee, Kansas City Repertory, Long Wharf, Lorraine Hansberry, McCarter, Mo`olelo, MPAACT, New Vic, Playmakers Repertory, Plowshares, Second Stage, Steppenwolf and True Colors. Commissions from Arena Stage, Steppenwolf, McCarter, Huntington, Center Stage, Victory Gardens and Roundabout. Lydia was a W.E.B. Du Bois Institute non-resident fellow, TCG/NEA playwright-in-residence at Steppenwolf, Huntington playwright fellow, Sundance Institute Playwright Lab creative advisor, Radcliffe Institute fellow and serves on the Dramatists Guild Legal Defense Fund Board of Directors. She is a Northwestern University graduate and has an honorary doctorate of arts from Pine Manor College.

**Seema Sueko** (*Director*) joined the Arena Stage staff in July 2016 as deputy artistic director. She previously served as associate artistic director at The Pasadena Playhouse and executive artistic director of Mo`olelo Performing Arts Company in San Diego. Her directing and acting credits include The Pasadena Playhouse, People's Light, The Old Globe, San Diego Repertory, La Jolla Playhouse, Yale Repertory, 5th Avenue Theatre, Native Voices and Mo`olelo, among others. As a playwright, she received commissions from Mixed Blood Theatre and Center Stage. Her work has been recognized by the California State Assembly, NAACP San Diego Branch, San Diego Theatre Critics Circle, Chicago Jeff Awards, American Theatre Wing and *American Theatre* magazine. Seema serves on the Diversity Committee of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

### **Cast Biographies**

**Lorene Chesley** (*Valerie Johnston*) makes her Arena Stage debut. A native of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, Lorene grew up studying ballet and tap but quickly segued her love for performance into acting. Stage credits include Cassandra in *The American Women* (Pasadena Playhouse), Delilah in *Memphis* (La Jolla Playhouse) and Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* (Mo'olelo/Moxie Theatre). TV credits include *Perception* (TNT), *Shameless* (Showtime) and *The Fosters* (Freeform). She recently wrapped the first season of her YouTube talk show *Looks, Lunch, Love with Lorene*. She studied theater at Temple University and earned an M.F.A. in acting at UCSD. Lorene would like to thank her family and friends for their love, support and nurturing her passion for theater.

**Gregory Perri** (*Brian White*) is thrilled to be making his Arena Stage debut. Notable New York credits include *Good People* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *A Loss of Roses* (Peccadillo Theater Company), *Lovers* (T.A.C.T) and *The Idea of Me* (Cherry Lane Theatre). Regional credits include performances at *The Whipping Man* (Syracuse Stage), *Macbeth* and *The Comedy of Errors* (Shakespeare on the Sound), *Othello* (The Stratford Summer Festival) and *The Most Happy Fella* (The Cider Mill Playhouse), among others. Film/TV credits include *Not Fade Away*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*, *All is Bright*, *Market Trip*, *Bastards of Young*, *The Good Wife*, *The Jack and Triumph Show* and the upcoming independent feature *Thinking with Richard*, among others. He received his M.F.A. from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.

**Sue Jin Song** (*Ginny Yang*) returns to Arena Stage after appearing in *Hot 'n' Throbbing*. Off-Broadway credits include *The World of Extreme Happiness* (Manhattan Theatre Club) and *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Exit the King* (Pearl Theater). D.C. theater credits include *Marie Antoinette* (Woolly Mammoth), *Yellow Face* (Theater J) and *36 Views* (Constellation Theatre Company). Regional theater credits include *A Christmas Carol* (McCarter); *Waiting for Tadashi* (George Street Playhouse); *Shedding the Tiger* (Sacramento Theatre Company); and *Burn This* (Syracuse Stage). Film/TV credits include *Steel Town*, *Pipe Dream*, *Someone Like You*, *24*, *ER* and *Law & Order*. She earned her M.F.A in acting from NYU Tisch School of the Arts. She received The Best of Fringe Award for her one-woman show, *Children of Medea*, at the D.C. Fringe Festival and is a Usual Suspect at NYTW.

**Jaysen Wright** (*Jackson Moore*) makes his Arena Stage debut. D.C. credits include *A Christmas Carol* (Ford's Theatre); *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* and *Looking for Roberto Clemente* (Imagination Stage); *Sons of the Prophet* (Theater J); *Now Comes the Night* and *Take Me Out* (1<sup>st</sup> Stage); *Choir Boy* and *The Rocky Horror Show*

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(Studio Theatre); *Pinkalicious* and *12 Days of Christmas* (Adventure Theatre); *Carolina Layaway Grail* (The Welders); and *Measure for Measure*, *Wallenstein* and *Coriolanus* (Shakespeare Theatre Company). Upcoming productions include Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Wig Out!* (Studio Theatre) and *The Wiz* (Ford's Theatre). Instagram: @thejayceface. [www.jaysenwright.com](http://www.jaysenwright.com)

The creative team for *Smart People* includes Set Designer **Misha Kachman**, Costume Designer **Dede M. Ayite**, Lighting Designer **Xavier Pierce**, Sound Designer **Andre Pluess**, Projection Designer **Jared Mezzocchi**, Wig Designer **Anne Nesmith**, Vocal Coach **Zach Campion**, Dramaturg **Paul Adolphsen**, Stage Manager **Kurt Hall** and Assistant Stage Manager **Kristen Mary Harris**.

For full company bios please visit [arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/smart-people/](http://arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/smart-people/).

*Smart People* is generously sponsored by R. Lucia Riddle. Additional support is provided in memory of Toni A. Ritzenberg.

#### **Post-Show Conversations**

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff—April 26, May 9 and May 10 following the noon performance; May 2 following the 7:30 p.m. performance; and May 18 following the 8:00 p.m. performance.

#### **Production Information**

***Smart People***

**By Lydia R. Diamond**

**Directed by Seema Sueko**

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

**ABOUT:** 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 cultural bias 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.

#### **CAST:**

Valerie Johnston: Lorene Chesley

Brian White: Gregory Perri

Ginny Yang: Sue Jin Song

Jackson Moore: Jaysen Wright

#### **CREATIVE TEAM:**

Director: Seema Sueko

Set Designer: Misha Kachman

Costume Designer: Dede M. Ayite

Lighting Designer: Xavier Pierce

Sound Designer: Andre Pluess

Projection Designer: Jared Mezzocchi

Wig Designer: Anne Nesmith

Vocal Coach: Zach Campion

Dramaturg: Paul Adolphsen

Stage Manager: Kurt Hall

Assistant Stage Manager: Kristen Mary Harris

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## Page 4—Full company announced for *Smart People* directed by Seema Sueko

### Plan Your Visit

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Smart People* are \$40-90, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as pay-your-age tickets, student discounts, Southwest Nights and hero's discounts, visit [arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs](http://arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs).

Tickets may be purchased online at [arenastage.org](http://arenastage.org) by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.

Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300  
Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380  
TTY for deaf patrons: 202-484-0247  
Info for patrons with disabilities: 202-488-3300

### PERFORMANCE DATES:

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.  
Thursday, Friday & Saturday at 8:00 p.m.  
Saturday & Sunday at 2:00 p.m.  
Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday, 4/26; Tuesday, 5/9; & Wednesday, 5/10

Full calendar: [tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=23107](http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=23107)

**Audio-described performances:** 5/20 at 2:00 p.m.

**Open-captioned performances:** 5/11 at 8:00 p.m., 5/13 at 2:00 p.m. & 5/17 at 7:30 p.m.

**ARENA STAGE CAFÉ: Prix fixe meals** are available at Richard's Place, Arena Stage's casual dining café, and include a choice of soup or salad, main entrée and dessert. Pre-ordered meals are only \$22 (\$25 if purchased that day). To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit [arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-café/](http://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-café/). The café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended. To **pre-order drinks** for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit [tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007](http://tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007).

To **pre-order drinks** from the Catwalk Café for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit [tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007](http://tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007).

**METRO:** Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is only one block from the Waterfront-SEU Metro station (Green Line). When exiting the station, walk west on M Street toward Sixth Street, and the main entrance to the Mead Center is on the right.

**PARKING:** Parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage. Subscribers may purchase parking in advance for \$16. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$19 or on the day of the performance for \$22 on a first-come, first-served basis. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets, and the garage closes one hour after the day's last performance ends. Patrons can also park at the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, one block from the Mead Center, for \$14. Street parking is also available along Maine Avenue.

**VALET PARKING:** Arena Stage offers valet service at no additional cost to patrons with accessibility needs who call 202-488-3300 in advance to request valet parking. On days when valet parking is being used for accessibility, it is also available to general patrons one hour prior to show time for \$25, based on availability. To use valet parking, pull up to the main entrance on Sixth Street.

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*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](http://arenastage.org)

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