

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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December 3, 2010

ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER  
PRESENTS SECOND STAGE THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF  
*LET ME DOWN EASY*  
CONCEIVED, WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY ANNA DEAVERE SMITH  
DIRECTED BY LEONARD FOGLIA

\*\*\* *Let Me Down Easy* kicks off its national tour in the nation's capital; panel discussions featuring Sally Jenkins and Ruth Katz, among others, on select Sundays during run \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is pleased to announce that it will launch the national tour of **Second Stage Theatre's production *Let Me Down Easy***. This one-woman production, which is conceived, written and performed by **Anna Deavere Smith** (*Nurse Jackie*, *Fires in the Mirror*) and directed by **Leonard Foglia** (Broadway's *Thurgood*) and was named one of *Entertainment Weekly's* Top 10 of 2009, is "a continually engaging and engrossing collection of testimonials" (*The New York Times*) that explores the fragility of the body and the resilience of the spirit. ***Let Me Down Easy* runs December 31, 2010-February 13, 2011 in the Kreeger Theater.**

"To write *Let Me Down Easy*, I interviewed over 300 people on three continents," says Smith, a Baltimore native. "My goal is to learn as much about a person as possible by studying the way they speak. My portrayals of the more than 20 people in this one-woman show are all drawn from the words of people who speak to the vulnerability of the human body, the resilience of the spirit, the price of care. The *Let Me Down Easy* journey began when I was invited to be a Visiting Professor at the Yale School of Medicine. My first thought was, 'Really, me, a clown, to create something in such a serious elite environment?' I walked away from the experience with an increased compassion for doctor and patient alike. The stories stayed in my heart and became the basis of this play."

Called "the most exciting individual in American theater" by *Newsweek* magazine, Anna Deavere Smith uses her unique performance style to examine the depths of human strength in *Let Me Down Easy*. Based on interviews with an eclectic range of people, from a heavyweight boxer to a supermodel, and from Texas Governor Ann Richards to legendary cyclist Lance Armstrong, *Let Me Down Easy* "is a totally vital piece of theater, mixing a standup comic's instincts with a great reporter's keen eye" (*Variety*).

"Anna is an unusually gifted artist," says Arena Stage **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "Her work masterfully blends drama and journalism in a way that gets to the heart of the real people she becomes on stage. *Let Me Down Easy* is a remarkable piece about the complexities of our health care system and the way our bodies carry us through life. This national conversation belongs here at Arena Stage in our nation's capital."

Following *Let Me Down Easy's* run with Arena Stage, the production will continue its national tour at the **Wexner Center for the Arts** in the Lincoln Theatre (February 22-27, 2011), **Philadelphia Theatre Company**

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(March 18-April 10, 2011), and **San Diego Repertory Theater** and **La Jolla Playhouse** in association with **Vantage Theatre** (April 27-May 15, 2011), among other venues that have yet to be announced.

**Anna Deavere Smith** is an actress, playwright and author. It has been said that she created a new form of theater. When granted the prestigious MacArthur Award, her work was described as “a blend of theatrical art, social commentary, journalism and intimate reverie.” She has performed in film and TV as well as on stage. She currently plays Gloria Akalitus on Showtime's hit series *Nurse Jackie*. She's probably most recognizable in popular culture as Nancy McNally, national security advisor on NBC's former hit *The West Wing*.

Ms. Smith also has a vibrant career in the theater. Looking at current events from multiple points of view, Ms. Smith's theater combines the journalistic technique of interviewing her subjects with the art of interpreting their words through performance. These one-woman shows are a part of a series she began in the early 1980s called *On the Road: A Search for American Character*. Her goal has been to learn as much about America as she can, by interviewing individual Americans from diverse backgrounds, and putting herself in other people's words the way you might think of putting yourself in another person's “shoes.” A reviewer for *The New York Times*, writing about her Broadway show *Twilight: Los Angeles*, which depicted the 1992 Los Angeles riots, said of her performance that she's “the ultimate impressionist: she does people's souls.” Jack Kroll of *Newsweek* proclaimed the work “an American masterpiece.” She conducts hundreds of interviews while creating a play. Using verbatim excerpts of interviews, she has performed up to as many as 46 people in the course of an evening.

Ms. Smith performed *Twilight: Los Angeles* around the U.S. and on Broadway. It received two Tony nominations, an Obie, Drama Desk Award, Special Citation from the New York Drama Critics Circle and numerous other honors. President and Mrs. Clinton and Vice President Al Gore attended her Washington performance. She produced, wrote and performed the film version of *Twilight* for PBS. Another of her plays, *Fires in the Mirror*, examined a race riot in Crown Heights, Brooklyn (1991), when age-old racial tensions between black and Jewish neighbors exploded. It received an Obie Award, numerous other awards and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She performed the play around the U.S., in London and in Australia. The film version of *Fires in the Mirror* was also broadcast on PBS.

Other works in the *On the Road* series include *House Arrest*, which was developed at Arena Stage and deals with the American presidency, and *Hymn*, a collaboration with world-famous choreographer and dancer Judith Jamison, for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

The latest play in the series is *Let Me Down Easy*, which was inspired by work she did at Yale School of Medicine, where she was visiting professor. While at Yale, she created a performance for medical grand rounds called *Rounding It Out* (2000). *Let Me Down Easy* has been performed at the Long Wharf Theatre, The American Repertory Theater, and last year completed a successful run in New York at the Second Stage Theatre. Bill Moyers dedicated a full hour segment to profiling Ms. Smith and *Let Me Down Easy*.

She has been featured in several films, among them *The American President*, where she played the press secretary to Michael Douglas's president and Robert Benton's film *The Human Stain*. She also appeared in *Dave* and *Rent*. She was a regular on the CBS series *Presidio Med* and had a recurring role on *The Practice*. She co-starred in HBO's 2007 film *Life Support*, which starred Queen Latifah, and was also in *Rachel Getting Married*, a film by Jonathan Demme starring Anne Hathaway.

She founded and directed the Institute on the Arts and Civic Dialogue, originally funded in large part by the Ford Foundation, and was the Ford Foundation's first artist in residence (1997). The Institute was launched at Harvard University and ran for three summers there. The work which was launched there is now housed at New York University, in Anna Deavere Smith Works, Inc, a non-profit dedicated to convening artists whose work deals with some of the world's most pressing problems.

She was artist in residence at MTV Networks from 2001 to 2004 and was the inaugural Harmon/Eisner artist in residence at Aspen Institute in July 2006. She's currently artist in residence at Center for American Progress, a Washington think tank.

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Her latest book is *Letters to a Young Artist* (Vintage Random House). Her book *Talk to Me: Listening Between the Lines* is based on her observations of the time she spent in Washington. To prepare for that book, she followed both President Clinton and Bob Dole on their 1996 campaign trails. Other books include publications of her plays *Fires in the Mirror*, *Twilight*, *House Arrest* and *Piano*. Her articles and writings have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *O Magazine*, *O Home*, *Elle*, *The Atlantic*, *A Public Space*, *Essence*, *Fortune* and *The Drama Review*. She's a university professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. She was Ann O'Day Maples Professor of the Arts at Stanford University, where she taught from 1990 to 2000. She also taught at Carnegie Mellon and USC. At the invitation of Oprah Winfrey, she taught at Oprah Winfrey's Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa.

She has been awarded the 2009 Social Justice Award by the Urban Justice Center and the USA Susan V. Berresford Fellowship from United States Artists. In 2007, Americans for the Arts presented her with the Kitty Carlisle Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Arts. She also received the Mayor's Award for Art and Culture from the Mayor of New York City in 2007. In 2006, she received the Alphonse Fletcher Fellowship, which recognizes work by scholars, writers and artists who address and carry out the broad social goals of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision of 1954. She was twice nominated for the NAACP Image Award and received the prestigious New York Women in Communication's Matrix Award for her remarkable achievements and outstanding leadership role in her field in spring 2008. She has several honorary degrees and medals of recognition, among them from Juilliard, Barnard, Northwestern, Smith, Bates, Bryn Mawr, Wesleyan, Holy Cross, Cooper Union, Radcliffe College, and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. She serves on the boards of the Aspen Institute and the Museum of Modern Art, where she chairs the Committee on Film, and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

**Leonard Foglia** (Director). Broadway: *Thurgood* (also Kennedy Center, Geffen Playhouse), *On Golden Pond* (also Kennedy Center, national tour), *Wait Until Dark*, *Master Class* (also Kennedy Center, national tour, London's West End). Off-Broadway: *Let Me Down Easy* (Second Stage), *The Stendhal Syndrome* (Primary Stages), *One Touch of Venus* (City Center), *If Memory Serves* (Promenade, Pasadena Playhouse), *By the Sea* (MTC, Bay St.), *Lonely Planet* (Circle Rep). Regional: *Unusual Acts of Devotion* (Philadelphia Theater Company); *Distracted* (Mark Taper); *Paper Doll*, *The Secret Letters of Jackie and Marilyn* (Pittsburgh Public); *The Subject Was Roses* (Kennedy Center); *Things Being What They Are*, *Seascape*, *A Coffin in Egypt*, *The Woman in Black* (Bay St.); *God's Man in Texas*, *Dinner with Friends* (Old Globe). Opera: *Moby Dick* (Dallas), *Dead Man Walking* (NYC Opera, Opera Pacific, Cincinnati, Detroit, etc.), *The End of the Affair* (Houston Grand, Seattle, Madison), *Three Decembers* (Houston Grand, San Francisco, Chicago Opera Theater), *To Cross the Face of the Moon* (librettist and director: Houston Grand). He is co-author with David Richards of the mystery novels *1 Ragged Ridge Road*, *Face Down in the Park* and *El Sudario* and its sequel, *La Sangre del Sudario*.

**The Creative Team of *Let Me Down Easy*** includes Scenic Designer **Riccardo Hernandez**, Costume Designer **Ann Hould-Ward**, Lighting Designer **Dan Ozminkowski**, based on the original by Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer, Sound Designer **Ryan Rumery**, Projection Designer **Zachary Borovay**, Original Music Elements by **Joshua Redman**, Dialect Coach **Amy Stoller**, Movement Coach **Elizabeth Roxas**, Assistant Director **Keturah Stickann**, Assistant Set Designer **Maruti Evans**, Associate Sound Designer **Veronika Vorel**, Stage Manager **Joe Smelser** and Assistant Stage Manager **Ronee Penoi**.

Further information and images available upon request. Please e-mail [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).

### **Let Me Down Easy Special Events, Ticket Information and Performance Calendar**

#### **Panel Discussions**

Arena Stage will present a weekly series of guest speakers connected with its production of *Let Me Down Easy*. The series is free and open to the public, and will take place on Sundays, January 16, 23, 30 and February 6 and Saturday, January 29 at 3:45 p.m. (immediately following the 2:00 p.m. matinee performance). During each event, Arena Stage will welcome a guest speaker whose work in the world resonates with the issues at play in *Let Me Down Easy*—whether in healthcare policy, sports, medicine or theology. Reservations can be made by calling the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300.

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**January 16:** Three experts in the field of palliative and end-of-life care.

**January 23:** Ruth J. Katz, Chief Public Health Counsel with the Committee on Energy and Commerce in the U.S. House of Representatives.

**January 29:** Franmarie Kennedy, Ph.D. of the Aspen Health, Biomedical Science and Society Initiative.

**January 30:** Washington Post sports columnist and feature writer Sally Jenkins.

**February 6:** Vanessa Northington Gamble, M.D., Ph.D., University Professor of Medical Humanities at George Washington University.

**Southwest Night—Saturday, January 1, 2011 at 8:00 p.m.**

An invitation is extended to our Southwest D.C. neighbors to buy \$25 tickets, plus applicable fees, for one designated Friday evening performance of each production. Proof of Southwest D.C. residency—or continued employment—for each audience member of each party must be presented at the time of purchase. Tickets are limited to four per person and are based on availability. To purchase tickets, call 202-488-3300 or stop by the Arena Stage Sales Office. Plays and dates are subject to change.

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Let Me Down Easy* start at \$40, plus applicable fees, based on availability. Discount tickets are available for patrons purchasing tickets for multiple shows, students and groups. A limited number of **\$15 tickets for patrons age 30 and under** go on sale each Monday for performances that week. (All patrons must present valid ID.) **HOTTIX**, a limited number of half-price, day-of-performance tickets, are available 30 minutes before curtain prior to every performance. With **Metro Mondays**, patrons who present a SmarTrip or Metro card can purchase half-price tickets for the week's performances after noon on Mondays while supplies last. **Tickets may be purchased online at [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org), by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 6th St., SW, D.C.**

<b>Sales Office/Subscriptions</b>	<b>202-488-3300</b>
<b>TTY for deaf patrons</b>	<b>202-484-0247</b>
<b>Group Sales Hotline</b>	<b>202-488-4380</b>
<b>Info for patrons with disabilities</b>	<b>202-488-3300</b>

Tuesday, Wednesday & Sunday at 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Friday & Saturday at 8:00 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday matinees at 2:00 p.m.

Weekday matinees at noon on 1/12, 1/26 & 2/1.

**Sign-interpreted performances:** 1/16 at 2:00 p.m. & 1/27 at 8:00 p.m.

**Audio-described performances:** 1/12 at 7:30 p.m. & 2/12 at 2:00 p.m.

**Open-captioned performance:** 2/9 at 7:30 p.m.

**Post-show discussions:** 1/11 & 1/20 after the evening performance; 1/12, 1/26 & 2/1 after the noon performance.

**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 6th Street, and the main entrance to the Mead Center is on the right.

**PARKING:** Discounted parking in the Mead Center garage is available by reservation to full-season subscribers for \$18 per show. The entrance for the Mead Center garage is on Maine Ave. SW. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation, and the proper sticker is required. Remaining spaces are \$20 for non-subscribers. Patrons can also park at either of Central Parking's garages on 4th St. between I and M Streets for \$10.

*Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to the production, presentation, development and study of American theater. Arena Stage produces huge plays of all that is passionate, exuberant, 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. Now in its sixth decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 200,000. [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org)*