

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

*****PLEASE NOTE:** this release has been amended to include 10/25/2010 casting update of Eleasha Gamble replacing Valisia LeKae in the role of Laurey.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE INAUGURAL SEASON OF ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER BEGINS WITH RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN'S OKLAHOMA! DIRECTED BY MOLLY SMITH

***** Arena Stage favorites return, including E. Faye Butler and Nicholas Rodriguez,
with the professional debut of Arena Stage Academy graduate June Schreiner *****

(Washington, D.C.) As Arena Stage begins a new life in its renovated home at the Mead Center for American Theater in Southwest D.C., it opens its inaugural season with a classic American musical that similarly embraces life on a new frontier. **Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*** is the first production at the Mead Center and features an all-star cast under the direction of **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. **Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*** runs **October 22-December 26, 2010 in the Fichandler Stage**.

Inspired by the toughness of the prairie, Smith sets her production in the robust world of territory life filled with a dynamic cast as rich and complex as the tapestry of America itself. D.C. area favorite **E. Faye Butler** (Arena Stage's *Crowns*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*) stars as Aunt Eller, with **Eleasha Gamble** (Arena Stage's *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Signature's Chess*) as Laurey, **Aaron Ramey** (Broadway's *Curtains*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*) as Jud and **Nicholas Rodriguez** (Broadway's *Tarzan*) as Curly, who played Fabrizio last season in *The Light in the Piazza*, also directed by Smith. **Cody Williams** makes his Arena Stage debut as Will Parker alongside **June Schreiner** as Ado Annie Carnes, a high school junior at The Madeira School in McLean, VA, who was discovered in last summer's Arena Stage Academy Musical Theater Training Company. With Rodgers and Hammerstein's timeless music, Smith's *Oklahoma!* celebrates the vigor of America's pioneering spirit with athletic dance and boot-stomping energy.

"Arena is in the midst of her own harvest," says Smith. "This is a moment of great joy and optimism for the new Arena Stage, and so too it was for *Oklahoma*, a frontier on the cusp of becoming a state. My idea is simple: I want to create an *Oklahoma* that looks and feels like it's 1907 on the frontier—a place in the middle of becoming. Our production of *Oklahoma!* reflects Arena and America today: modern, diverse and cross-cultural."

As the first modern musical to use music and dance as an integral part of the plot, Smith's *Oklahoma!* is also a collaboration between **Music Director George Fulginiti-Shakar** and **Choreographer Parker Esse**. "The sound of our production will be a cross between the lushness of a symphonic orchestra and the plain-folkiness of a western string band," says Fulginiti-Shakar, who celebrates his 15th production with Arena Stage. "We are using a restored score just released with the addition of a fiddle, banjo, harmonica and rhythm."

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“My goal is to capture the ‘modern times’ of the early American frontier,” says Esse. “I hope to infuse these movements to reflect not only the hardships these settlers had to endure but also the wishes, dreams and romantic desires that would have filled their heads and distracted them from their harsh everyday realities.”

Further complimenting the production, Smith has commissioned **Tony Award-winning designers Eugene Lee and Martin Pakledinaz** to develop dynamic sets and costumes respectively that bring the rough-hewn *Oklahoma* to life.

Richard Rodgers (Music) & **Oscar Hammerstein II** (Book & Lyrics), after distinguished careers with other collaborators, joined forces to create the most consistently fruitful and successful partnership in musical theater. Before Hammerstein, Rodgers (1902-79) collaborated with lyricist Lorenz Hart on musical comedies that epitomized the wit and sophistication of Broadway’s heyday. From the ‘20s into the ‘40s, Rodgers & Hart wrote more than 40 shows and film scores, including *On Your Toes*, *Babes in Arms*, *The Boys from Syracuse*, *I Married an Angel* and *Pal Joey*. In the same era, Hammerstein (1895-1960) brought new life to the operetta. His collaborations with composers Rudolf Friml, Sigmund Romberg and Vincent Youmans resulted in such classics as *The Desert Song*, *Rose-Marie* and *The New Moon*. With Jerome Kern he wrote *Show Boat*, the 1927 operetta that changed the course of musical theater. His last musical before his exclusive partnership with Rodgers was *Carmen Jones*, the acclaimed 1943 all-black revision of *Carmen*. *Oklahoma!*, the first Rodgers & Hammerstein musical, was also the first of a new genre: the musical play, a unique fusion of musical comedy and operetta. A milestone in the development of the musical, it also marked the beginning of the most successful partnership in Broadway musical history and was followed by *Carousel*, *Allegro*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Me and Juliet*, *Pipe Dream*, *Flower Drum Song* and *The Sound of Music*. Rodgers & Hammerstein wrote one musical for film, *State Fair*, and one for TV, *Cinderella*. Collectively, their musicals earned 35 Tonys, 15 Oscars, two Pulitzers, two Grammys and two Emmys. After Hammerstein’s death, Rodgers continued to write. His first solo entry, *No Strings*, earned him two Tonys for music and lyrics and was followed by *Do I Hear a Waltz?*, *Two by Two*, *Rex* and *I Remember Mama*. Rodgers died less than eight months after his last musical opened on Broadway, and in March 1990, Broadway’s 46th St. Theater was renamed in his honor.

Over the past 12 seasons, **Molly Smith** (Director, Artistic Director) has been instrumental in leading the re-invention of Arena Stage. From the programming for the architecture to the envisioning of the Kogod Cradle, Smith has focused her creative life on the building of this new Center for American Theater. This re-invention has been part of a major artistic change as well, into the production, presentation, development and study of American Theater which leads Arena into the 21st Century. Ms. Smith has been a passionate leader in new play development for the past 30 years while at Arena Stage as well as at Perseverance Theatre in Alaska, the theater she founded and led for 19 years. She has commissioned or championed numerous world premieres, including Paula Vogel’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *How I Learned to Drive* and *Mineola Twins*; Tim Acito’s *The Women of Brewster Place*; Moisés Kaufman’s *33 Variations*; Charles Randolph-Wright’s *Blue*; Zora Neale Hurston’s lost American play, *Polk County*; Karen Zacarias’ *Legacy of Light*; and *Passion Play*, a cycle by Sarah Ruhl; some of which she has directed. She founded Arena’s downstairs series, which has read or workshopped some 60 plays, half of which have gone on to full productions. In 2009, two shows nurtured at Arena Stage (*33 Variations* and *Next to Normal*) moved to Broadway. Ms. Smith’s directorial work has also been seen at the Shaw Festival in Canada, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Trinity Repertory Company, Tarragon Theatre in Toronto, and Centaur Theatre in Montreal and includes classics such as *South Pacific*, *Mack and Mabel*, *Anna Christie* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Smith has served as literary advisor to Sundance Theatre Lab and formed the Arena Stage Writers Council, composed of leading American playwrights. An avid traveler, Ms. Smith brings artists of international renown to work at Arena Stage and has served as a member of the board of the Theatre Communications Group as well as the Center for International Theatre Development. She directed two feature films, *Raven’s Blood* and *Making Contact*, and received honorary doctorates from both Towson and American Universities.

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The Cast of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*

E. Faye Butler (Aunt Eller)'s previous Arena Stage productions include: *Crowns*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Polk County* and *Dinah Was*. Other D.C. Metro: *Gospel According to Fishman*, *Saving Aimee* (Signature); *Take Joy* (Strathmore); *The Great Gatsby*, *Moon Until June* (Washington Ballet at Kennedy Center). Regional credits include: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Once on This Island*, *Caroline, or Change*, *Trouble in Mind* (CenterStage); *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* (Steppenwolf); *Christmas Carol*, *Purlie* (Goodman); *The Wiz* (La Jolla). National Tours: *Dinah Was*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope*, *Nunsense*, *Nunsense 2*. Recently Ms. Butler released her CD *Circle of Firsts* and has a cabaret act, *Just in Time*, which travels around the country. Ms. Butler has been honored with several awards: Helen Hayes, John Barrymore, six Joseph Jefferson, three Black Theater Alliance, Ovation, Excellence in the Arts, After Dark.

Eleasha Gamble (Laurey)'s Arena Stage credits include the *The Women of Brewster Place*. D.C. AREA: Signature: *Chess*, *First You Dream*, *Les Misérables* (Helen Hayes Award Winner, Best Ensemble), *Into the Woods*, *My Fair Lady*, *Urinetown*, *Follies*, *Grand Hotel*, *Gospel According to Fishman*, *The Christmas Carol Rag*, *The Rink*, *Company*; Ford's: *Civil War* (Helen Hayes Award Winner, Outstanding Supporting Actress), *Little Shop Of Horrors*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Meet John Doe*; Kennedy Center: *Broadway: Three Generations*; Round House: *Once On This Island* (Helen Hayes nomination); Toby's: *Ragtime* (Helen Hayes nomination). OFF-BROADWAY: Zipper Theatre: *Under the Bridge*. REGIONAL: Alliance Theatre: *The Women of Brewster Place*; Perseverance Theatre: *Hair*. CABARET: *Partial Eclipse*, *Ebony & Ivory*. RECORDINGS: Euan Morton's *New Clear*. EDUCATION: Catholic University.

Nicholas Rodriguez (Curly) last appeared at Arena Stage in *The Light in the Piazza*. On Broadway, he performed the title role in *Tarzan*; and Off-Broadway he's appeared in *The Toxic Avenger*, *Almost Heaven* and *Bajour*. He's toured in *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Jesus), *Evita* (Che) and *Hair* (Claude). His regional credits include originating the role of Aaron and understudying Val Kilmer's Moses in *The Ten Commandments* (Kodak); *JCS* (Jesus); *Oklahoma!* (Curly); *Damn Yankees* (Joe); *Cinderella* (Prince); *South Pacific* (Cable); *Master Class* (Tony); *Love, Valour, Compassion!* (Ramon) and *The King & I* (Lun Tha). Last summer, he was seen in the film *Sex and the City 2*. Most recently, Mr. Rodriguez portrayed Nick Chavez on ABC's *One Life to Live*. He holds a B.M. and M.M. in vocal performance from Univ. of Texas at Austin.

Aaron Ramey (Jud Fry)'s Broadway credits include *Curtains*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (Original Cast); National Tours: *Sweet Charity* (Vittorio Vidal), *Disney's Beauty & the Beast* (Beast); NYC: *A Tale of Two Cities* (Charles Darnay, workshop), *Take Flight* (Charles Lindbergh, workshop), *The Woman Upstairs* (NYMF); Regional: *Carousel* (Barrington Stage), *Shenandoah* (Ford's Theatre), *Songs for a New World* (Alpine Theatre Project), *A Little Night Music*, *Oklahoma!* (Pittsburgh CLO), *Sweeney Todd* (CenterStage), *Miss Saigon*, *1776* (Paper Mill Playhouse), *West Side Story* (AMTSJ), *Baby Case* (World Premiere, Arden Theatre Co.), *SNEAUX!* (World Premiere, Matrix Theatre, LA). TV: *Kings*, *New Amsterdam*, *Guiding Light*, *All My Children*, *As The World Turns*.

June Schreiner (Ado Annie Carnes) is a junior at The Madeira School in McLean, VA, and is a two-year graduate of the Arena Stage Academy Musical Theater Training Company. She has performed with Synetic Family Theater in *The Snow Queen* and *Hansel and Gretel* and understudied Jacqueline Bouvier in Studio Theatre's *Grey Gardens*. Ms. Schreiner was last seen with the McLean Community Players as Amy March in *Little Women* and has done several productions with Reston Community Players.

Cody Williams (Will Parker) has performed in numerous shows with Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, Casa Mañana and West Virginia Public. He's also been guest artist with Atlanta Ballet. Mr. Williams is very proud to have earned his B.F.A. this past spring from Univ. of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music.

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Nehal Joshi (Ali Hakim) returns to Arena Stage after last performing in *Señor Discretion Himself*. D.C. credits include *Mister Roberts* (Kennedy Center); *Recent Tragic Events* (Woolly Mammoth); *The Mad Dancers* (Theater J) and *Carousel* (Olney). Broadway: *Les Misérables* (original revival cast) and *Threepenny Opera* (Roundabout). Off-Broadway: *Falling for Eve* (York). Regional credits include: *Working* (2008 revision; Old Globe, Asolo Rep); *Tommy* (Dallas Theater Center); *Mother Teresa Is Dead* (City Theater Company); the 25th & 26th annual Humana Festival of New American Plays (Actors Theater of Louisville). His film/TV credits include: HBO's *The Wire*; *Blackout* and *New York, I Love You*. He will be heard in the next edition of the *World of Warcraft* videogame.

The Cast of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* also includes **Philip Michael Baskerville** (Cord Elam), **Andrew Hodge** (Slim), **Shane Rhoades** (Fred), **Vincent Rodriguez III** (Sam), **Anton Harrison LaMon** (Jess), **Cara Massey** (Gertie), **Emilee Dupre** (Vivian), **Annie Petersmeyer** (Virginia), **Jessica Wu** (Kate), **Cyana Cook** (Ellen), **Semhar Ghedremichael** (Aggie), **Hollie E. Wright** (Sylvie/Dream Laurey), **Kyle Vaughn** (Mike/Dream Curly), **Kurt Boehm** (Male Swing) and **Jessica Hartman** (Female Swing).

The Creative Team of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* includes Assistant Director **Anita Maynard-Losh**, Music Director **George Fulginiti-Shakar**, Assistant Musical Director **Mary Sugar**, Set Designer **Eugene Lee**, Assistant Scenic Designer **Tristan Jeffers**, Costume Designer **Martin Pakledinaz**, Choreographer **Parker Esse**, Assistant Choreographer **Ashley Yeater**, Fight Choreographer **David Leong**, Lighting Designer **Michael Gilliam**, Sound Designer **Tim Thompson**, New York Casting Director **Paul Hardt**, Arena Stage Casting Director **Daniel Pruksarnukul**, Stage Manager **Susan R. White**, Assistant Stage Manager **Jenna Henderson**, Production Assistant **Alexandria Wood** and Dramaturg **Janine Sobeck**.

Full bios and images available upon request. Please e-mail press@arenastage.org.

The 2010/11 Fichandler Stage season is sponsored by Life Trustee Jaylee Mead.

Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* Special Events, Ticket Information and Performance Calendar
Southwest Night—Friday, December 24, 2010 at noon

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 Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* start at \$45 plus applicable fees. 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 90 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, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 6th St., SW, D.C.**

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

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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 11/10, 11/16, 11/24, 12/1, 12/21 & 12/24.

Sign-interpreted performances: 11/18 at 8:00 p.m. & 11/28 at 7:30 p.m.

Audio-described performances: 11/17 at 7:30 p.m. & 11/20 at 2:00 p.m.

Open-captioned performance: 12/22 at 8:00 p.m.

Post-show discussions: 11/9 & 11/11 after the evening show; 11/10, 11/16, 12/1, and 12/21 after the noon show.

METRO: The Waterfront-SEU station (Green Line) is the closest Metro station to Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. 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 up to 24 hours prior to a performance. 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

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