

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LYNN NOTTAGE'S PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING DRAMA *RUINED*,
DIRECTED BY CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT,
TAKES THE FICHANDLER STAGE FOR ITS FIRST IN-THE-ROUND PRODUCTION

*** Humanities Council's Live to Read literacy program chooses *Ruined* as citywide reading selection;
Arena Stage hosts discussion panels to examine themes in *Ruined* ***

(Washington, D.C.) **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater** will produce the first in-the-round staging of *Ruined*, the 2009 Pulitzer Prize winner for drama by Arena Stage Project Resident **Lynn Nottage** and directed by Resident Playwright **Charles Randolph-Wright** (Director of Arena Stage's *Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies*). *Ruined* is the stirring tale of Mama Nadi, a mother figure loosely based on Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, who provides refuge for women affected by civil war ravaging the Democratic Republic of Congo. The production features an expanded company with cast members playing live music and additional ensemble roles featuring University of Maryland students. ***Ruined* runs April 22-June 5, 2011 in the Fichandler Stage.**

"Lynn Nottage is one of this country's fiercest playwrights, and we are so fortunate to work with her on this and future productions," says **Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "*Ruined* takes us into the heart of the Congo, and the heart of Mama Nadi, and will resonate in the hearts of our audiences. I am especially pleased that the gifted Charles Randolph-Wright will direct this stunning play."

In war-torn Congo, Mama Nadi keeps the peace between customers on both sides of the civil war by serving everything from cold beers to warm beds. This shrewd matriarch both protects and profits from the women whose bodies have become battlegrounds "ruined" by the brutality of government soldiers and rebel forces alike. Inspired by interviews conducted in Africa, this searing play is an engrossing and uncommonly human story told with humor and song, revealing the immeasurable loss and hopelessness of war, yet finding affirmation in life and hope. Winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for drama, *Ruined* has been hailed as "a remarkable theatrical accomplishment ... sincere, passionate, courageous!" (*Chicago Tribune*).

"To me, *Ruined* is the greatest play of the decade," says **Randolph-Wright**. "Lynn's words take you on a journey that is surprising, important, funny, devastating and joyous. I am eager to stage this play in the Fichandler because one cannot hide in the round—it's raw and in-your-face, and the audience will be right there in Mama Nadi's place."

"When I was interviewing the Congolese women, they could easily access their smiles," recalls **Nottage**. "One moment they could tell these absolutely horrific stories, but then they resurrected themselves by finding happiness and accessing their resilience. Hopefully the play will get people to do something to help the Congo."

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Randolph-Wright has assembled a strong team of designers for *Ruined*, several of whom he has worked with on previous productions. Lighting Designer **Michael Gilliam** has collaborated on nearly every production with Randolph-Wright, and Set Designer **Alexander V. Nichols** returns after designing the set for *Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies*. Costume Designer **ESosa**, best known as a finalist from Season 7 of *Project Runway* and who last designed *Cuttin' Up* for Arena Stage, is simultaneously designing costumes for Nottage's upcoming play in New York, *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*.

Arena Stage continues its commitment to outreach in the community by exploring the issues and themes raised in *Ruined* through a series of partnerships and discussion panels. The Humanities Council of Washington, D.C., has selected *Ruined* as the reading material for **Live to Read** this spring, a citywide celebration of literature and literacy. More than 200 11th graders are reading the play through Live to Read, and many of them will see the production at Arena Stage. See below for more information, or visit <http://wdchumanities.org/>. Arena Stage is also hosting weekly **panel discussions** on Fridays during the run of the show to further explore the topics addressed in *Ruined*, such as women's advocacy, refugees, sex trafficking and playwriting. See below for the schedule.

Lynn Nottage's (Playwright) Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Ruined* has also received Obie, Lucille Lortel, N.Y. Drama Critics' Circle, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards for Best Play (MTC, Goodman). Other plays include *Intimate Apparel* (N.Y. Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play; Roundabout, CenterStage, South Coast Rep); *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine* (Obie Award; Playwrights Horizons, London's Tricycle); *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*; *Las Meninas*; *Mud, River, Stone*; *Por'knockers* and *Poof!* Ms. Nottage is recipient of numerous awards, including the 2007 MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant," National Black Theatre Festival's August Wilson Playwriting Award, 2004 PEN/Laura Pels Award for drama, 2005 Guggenheim Grant for playwriting, as well as fellowships from the Lucille Lortel Foundation, MTC, New Dramatists and N.Y. Foundation for the Arts. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild, alumna of New Dramatists and graduate of Brown Univ. and Yale School of Drama, where she is a visiting lecturer.

Charles Randolph-Wright (Director) directed *Sophisticated Ladies*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Oak and Ivy*, *Anthems*, and *Señor Discretion Himself* and wrote *Blue* and *Cuttin' Up* at Arena Stage. Other theater credits include productions at Roundabout Theatre, Lincoln Center, Williamstown, New York Shakespeare Festival, New York Theater Workshop, Manhattan Theatre Club, Carnegie Hall, Mark Taper Forum, Geffen Playhouse, Pasadena Playhouse and ACT. Charles directed the award-winning film *Preaching to the Choir* and has written screenplays for HBO, Showtime, Disney, Castle Rock and Fox. Television credits include directing the series *Lincoln Heights* (ABC Family) and *South of Nowhere* (The N), the "Freestyle" soccer campaign for Nike and producing and writing the series *Linc's* (Showtime). A Duke University honors graduate, Charles is honored to be a resident playwright at Arena and this year's recipient of the Paul Robeson Award from Actors' Equity.

The Cast of *Ruined*:

Segun Akande (Soldier) is making his debut at Arena Stage. He has appeared Off-Broadway in *Blue Eyed Cats Are Always Deaf*, *Chakalaka* and earned Honorable Mention distinctions for Outstanding Actor for his performance in *The Poet*. Other regional credits include Arkansas Repertory Theatre (Asagai in *A Raisin in the Sun*) and Florida Studio Theatre (Simon in *Ruined*). Mr. Akande was recently seen on film in the blockbuster *Sex and the City 2* with Sarah Jessica Parker. In addition, he is currently featured in national commercial roles for Under Armour, BET and as the voice for a Gatorade campaign.

Jeremiah W. Birkett (Christian) is a veteran of the stage, screen and TV, whose notable performances include *Grapes of Wrath* and *Topdog/Underdog* on Broadway, as well as several appearances at regional theaters across the country. His screen and TV credits include *L.A. Confidential*, *Evan Almighty*, *Seinfeld* (as the Jamaican marathon runner), *Monk* and many others.

Clifton Duncan (Jerome Kisembe) is making his Arena Stage debut. Locally, he cut his teeth working at Signature Theatre, Washington Shakespeare Company and Shakespeare Theatre Company. He's appeared Off-Broadway at City Center (*Lost in the Stars*), the Public Theater (*Twelfth Night*) and as a featured artist in

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Ars Nova's 2010 ANT Fest (*the uniVERSE project*, his hip-hop solo piece). Regional credits include Williamstown, Shakespeare Theater of New Jersey, O'Neill, Kansas City Rep, Hangar Theater, Chautauqua and Georgia Shakespeare Festival. Mr. Duncan has an M.F.A. from NYU's Graduate Acting Program, under the tutelage of Zelda Fichandler.

JaBen A. Early (Simon) is a Washington, D.C., native and has been performing for local audiences for the past three years. This is his first performance at Arena, though he grew up watching theater here. He trained at both Morehouse College and Sarah Lawrence, where he received his M.F.A. Among his favorite roles: Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* and Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*. He would like to thank his parents and extended family for their support.

Donnetta Lavinia Grays (Salima). Broadway: *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play*; *Well*. Off-Broadway: *Shipwrecked!* (Primary Stages). Regional: *No Child* (Hartford TheaterWorks), *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Baltimore CenterStage), *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Royal Family* (Oregon Shakespeare), *Well* (Arena Stage), *Twelfth Night* (L.A. Women's Shakespeare), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Charleston Shakespeare) and *Well* (Huntington Theatre). Film: *The Wrestler*. TV: *Mercy*, *The Sopranos*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Law & Order: SVU*. B.A., College of Charleston; M.F.A., UC Irvine. Artistic director of New York-based Coyote Rep, founded in 2005.

Rachael Holmes (Sophie) is making her Arena Stage debut. Ms. Holmes was most recently seen playing Osha in *Marcus, or The Secret of Sweet* at Studio Theatre. She made her D.C. debut last season as Queen Isabel and Princess Katharine in *Richard II* and *Henry V* at Shakespeare Theatre. Other stage credits include the MTC production of *Ruined*, *Widowers' Houses* with Epic Theatre Ensemble (AUDELCO nom for best lead actress) and *No Child...* at both the Hangar and Capital Rep theaters. Her TV credits include *The Good Wife*, *Dirt*, *Guiding Light*, *All My Children* and national commercials. A master teaching artist, Ms. Holmes works for New Victory Theatre in New York and just joined Shakespeare Theatre's education team. M.F.A.: NYU.

James J. Johnson (Soldier; Aid Worker) is making his Arena Stage debut. Mr. Johnson's D.C. performances include Honey Brown in *A Member of the Wedding* (Ford's Theatre), Soldier in *The Unmentionables* (Woolly Mammoth Theatre), James in *Teddy Roosevelt and the Ghostly Mistletoe* (Kennedy Center) and Ricky-Trey in the world premiere of *Kingdom* (African Continuum Theatre Company). He also appeared in the premiere of *Zomo the Rabbit* (Imagination Stage/D.C. and N.Y. Hip-Hop Theater Festivals), which was written and directed by fellow cast member Psalmayene 24 (Helen Hayes Award nom, Outstanding Production, Theatre for Young Audiences). Mr. Johnson has also appeared in regional productions of *Anna Lucasta* (Rep Stage), *Macbeth* (Theatre at Lime Kiln), *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night* (Maryland Shakespeare Festival).

Jenny Jules (Mama Nadi) is an English actress closely linked with Tricycle Theatre, appearing there in August Wilson's *Two Trains Running* and *Gem of the Ocean* (both dir. Paulette Randall), Richard Norton-Taylor's reconstruction of Stephen Lawrence Enquiry's *The Colour of Justice* and Lynn Nottage's *Fabulation* (dir. Indhu Rubasingham). She appeared in Debbie Tucker Green's *Born Bad* (dir. Kathy Burke) at Hampstead Theatre and in Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* over 100 times in the West End and elsewhere. She's performed leading roles at Manchester Royal Exchange, National Theatre and Almeida Theatre, notably in Theodore Ward's *Big White Fog* and Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* (both dir. Michael Attenborough). In 2010, Ms. Rubasingham directed her in *Ruined*, earning her the 2011 Critics' Circle Theatre Award for best actress. She's also won the *Manchester Evening News*' best supporting actress award for *A Raisin in the Sun* (Manchester Royal Exchange) and a Time Out Award for *Pecong* (Tricycle). Her screen work includes dramas such as *Skins* and *Prime Suspect* and films such as *A Short Stay in Switzerland* (BBC) and *Wit* (HBO).

Jamairais Malone (Josephine) making her Arena Stage debut. Some of her credits include *In The Red and Brown Water* at Studio Theatre, *Cymbeline* at Shakespeare's Globe in London, *Junkanoo* at the Lincoln Theatre and *Antigone* at the Levin Theatre. She trained under the late Israel Hicks at Rutgers Univ., where she received her B.F.A. in theater arts. She also received classical training at Shakespeare's Globe in London.

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Babs (Babatunde) Olusanmokun (Commander Osembenga) has performed at New York theaters such as La MaMa, La Mama Annex, Ensemble Studio Theater, HERE Arts Center and the New York Fringe Festival. He was last seen on stage in Mike Batistick's critically acclaimed *Ponies* (opposite Michael Imperioli of *The Sopranos*) at Michael Imperioli's Studio Dante. TV credits include *Law & Order: SVU*, *Life on Mars*, *The Unit*, multiple episodes of *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* and *Veronica Mars*. Mr. Olusanmokun can be seen in director Andrew Dosunmu's debut feature film *Restless City* (Official Sundance Selection 2011).

Psalmayene 24 (Fortune), a.k.a. Greg Morrison, is an actor, playwright and director. His one-man show *Free Jujube Brown!* is published in the anthology *Plays from the Boom-Box Galaxy* (TCG). He has received playwriting commissions from African Continuum Theater Company, Arena Stage and Imagination Stage. Mr. 24 wrote and directed *Zomo the Rabbit: A Hip-Hop Creation Myth* (Helen Hayes nom, Outstanding Production, Theatre for Young Audiences) and has appeared on HBO's critically acclaimed series *The Wire*. His adaptation of Pinocchio, *P.Nokio*, will receive its world premiere production at Imagination Stage during the 2011/12 season. Also a singer-songwriter, his music with the band PS24 is available on iTunes.

Lawrence Redmond (Mr. Harari). At Arena Stage: *Christmas Carol 1941*; *Damn Yankees*; *Passion Play, a cycle*; *South Pacific*; *The Misanthrope*; *A Streetcar Named Desire*; *The Great White Hope*; *Guys & Dolls*; *Animal Crackers*; *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*; *Sunday in the Park with George*; *Of Thee I Sing*; *Merrily We Roll Along*. Previously this season: *The Trip to Bountiful* (Round House Theatre/Cleveland Play House), *Henry VIII* (Folger Theatre) and *Travels with My Aunt* (Rep Stage). Other D.C. area credits include: *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard III* (Shakespeare Theatre Company); *Rock 'n' Roll* (The Studio Theatre); *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, *Reefer Madness: The Musical* (Studio 2ndstage); *Permanent Collection*, *A Lesson Before Dying*, *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (Round House Theatre). Mr. Redmond is an 11-time nominee and two-time recipient of the Helen Hayes Award.

Jude Tibeau (Soldier) is making his Arena Stage debut. His recent theatre credits include Jackie Robinson in *Black Diamond* at Discovery Theatre, Pepper White in *Golden Boy* at Keegan Theatre, and a part of the ensemble in *Twelfth Night* at Shakespeare Theatre. He also has had the opportunity to work on HBO's *The Wire* as an extra.

The Cast of *Ruined* also includes cast members playing live music with **David Foreman** (Percussionist), **Mongezi Chris Ntaka** (Guitarist 1), **Waldo** (Guitarist 2) and **Daniel Ssuuna** (Traditional African Instrumentalist); and student ensemble members from the University of Maryland **Jamar Brown**, **Ellentina I. Dodd**, **Thony Mena**, **David Samuel**, **Anastasia Stewart** and **Hectorlyne P. Wuor**, with student coordinator **Renee Nyack**.

The Creative Team of *Ruined* includes Set Designer **Alexander V. Nichols**, Costume Designer **Esosa**, Lighting Designer **Michael Gilliam**, Original Music Composer **Dominic James**, Sound Designer **Lindsay Jones**, Dramaturg **Amrita Mangus**, Musical Coordinator **Mongezi Chris Ntaka**, Fight Director **Robb Hunter**, Movement Consultant **Keith Lamelle Thomas**, Dialect Coach **Kim James Bey**, Stage Manager **Kurt Hall** and Assistant Stage Manager **Jenna Henderson**.

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

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

Major production support provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Women for Women International and Shugoll Research.

WAMU 88.5FM is the official media partner for *Ruined*.

Ruined Special Events, Ticket Information and Performance Calendar:

Live to Read: D.C.'s Citywide Celebration of Literature

The Humanities Council of Washington, D.C., has selected *Ruined* as the reading material for Live to Read this spring, a citywide celebration of literature and literacy. More than 200 11th graders across D.C. are reading the play, and many of them will see *Ruined* at Arena Stage. The Humanities Council, with partners across the city including Arena Stage, is hosting events for adults including film screenings, lectures, poetry workshops and a community art show. Pick up a copy and join the celebration! For more information on Live to Read, visit <http://wdchumanities.org/>.

Culture, Context and the Congo: A Panel Discussion Series on *Ruined*

Arena Stage will present several panel discussions connected with the production of *Ruined*. The series is free and open to the public and will take place on select Fridays following the evening performance of *Ruined*. During each event, Arena Stage will welcome at least one guest speaker whose work resonates with the issues explored in *Ruined*, including women's advocacy, refugees, sex trafficking and playwriting. Reservations can be made by calling the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300. Panelists and dates are subject to change.

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| April 29 | Hear Her Speak: Advocacy for Women's Rights
Judithe Registre, Outreach and Development Director for Women for Women International |
| May 6 | Project Backstage: The Clothing in <i>Ruined</i>
Guest Panelist: Joe Salasovich, Arena Stage Costume Director |
| May 13 | Out from the Margins: Exploring the Refugee Experience
Guest Panelist: Maurice Carney, Executive Director of Friends of the Congo; Lindsey M. Harris, Immigration Staff Attorney with Tahirih Justice Center |
| May 20 | Parlez Vous Swahili?: Language and Storytelling in the Democratic Republic of Congo
Guest Moderator: Kim J. Bey, Dialect Coach for <i>Ruined</i> at Arena Stage |
| May 27 | "Your Battles on My Body": Violence Against Women
Guest Panelist: Karen Stauss, Program Director with Free the Slaves and a guest speaker from Enough!, a project to end genocide and crimes against humanity |
| June 3 | A Pen and a Passport: A Playwright's Journey Writing Abroad
Have an opportunity to discuss international themes in playwriting with Arena Stage Resident Playwrights |

Black Professionals Night—Wednesday, May 18, 2011

Following that evening's performance of *Ruined*, audiences can attend the panel discussion **Ethical Business Practices: American Businesses Working Positively with the Democratic Republic of Congo**. The guest moderator is Melvin P. Foote, President and CEO of Constituency for Africa.

The *Ruined* Salon—Monday, May 23, 2011 at 7:00 p.m.

In the spirit of artistic and literary salons of the past, the Arena Stage Salon offers a place for our audiences to engage and discuss the material presented on stage. Each salon features a panel of exciting and knowledgeable individuals—from academics and community leaders to our talented casts and artistic teams. These panels address a topic pertinent to the content of the current production and offer a space for lively, in-depth conversation. The *Ruined* Salon will take place from 7:00-7:45 p.m. Monday, May 23 in the Fichandler Stage and is open to the public. Reservations and more information can be obtained through the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300.

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Out at Arena—Thursday, May 26, 2011

Out at Arena is an evening dedicated to celebrating members of the Metro-D.C. LGBT community and its allies and includes discount tickets to that evening's performance of *Ruined*.

Southwest Night—Sunday, May 29, 2011 at 1:00 p.m.

An invitation is extended to our Southwest D.C. neighbors to buy \$25 tickets, plus applicable fees, for one designated 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 *Ruined* are \$55 plus applicable fees; subject to change, based on availability.

Discount tickets are available for patrons purchasing tickets for multiple shows, students and groups of 10 or more. 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 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

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 5/3, 5/4 and 5/11.

Sign-interpreted performances: 5/19 at 8:00 p.m. & 5/22 at 7:30 p.m.

Audio-described performances: 5/21 at 2:00 p.m. & 5/25 at 7:30 p.m.

Open-captioned performance: 6/1 at 7:30 p.m.

Post-show discussions: 5/3, 5/4 & 5/11 after the noon performances; 5/12 & 5/17 after the evening performances.

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: 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 nonsubscribers. Patrons can also park at either of Central Parking's garages on Fourth 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. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Managing Director Edgar Dobie, Arena Stage is the largest company in the country dedicated to American plays and playwrights. 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 300,000. www.arenastage.org.