

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FULL COMPANY ANNOUNCED FOR KAREN ZACARIÁS' COMEDY  
*THE BOOK CLUB PLAY*  
AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER  
DIRECTED BY MOLLY SMITH

\*\*\* The first work to be produced as part of the  
American Voices New Play Institute Playwright Residencies \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) In her smart comedy *The Book Club Play*, D.C.-area playwright **Karen Zacariás** examines the intricacies of book clubs, with their unspoken rules, high-spirited debates and strong bonds formed when least expected. With an ensemble cast featuring **Fred Arsenault, Ashlie Atkinson, Rachael Holmes, Eric Messner, Kate Eastwood Norris** and **Tom Story**, this is Zacariás' second collaboration with Director **Molly Smith** at Arena Stage and is the first work of a Resident Playwright to be produced as part of their three-year residencies through the **American Voices New Play Institute**. *The Book Club Play* runs **October 7-November 6, 2011 in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle**.

"*The Book Club Play* is a 'Chinese box' of a play within a piece of literature, within a documentary, within people's lives," says Director Molly Smith. "Karen has managed to mention or utilize more than 30 books. This play is a crafty comedy about a book club that implodes; crafty because book clubs are almost a secret society—many people belong to them but you rarely know it about their lives. In some ways the theater is just one big book club."

In *The Book Club Play*, Ana is a type "A" personality living in a letter-perfect world: a husband who adores her, the perfect job and her greatest passion, Book Club. But when bizarre circumstances put her ideal book club under a magnifying glass, things begin to heat up and more truths are told than anyone bargained for. Zacariás brings Arena Stage the latest chapter of her comedy about life, love, literature and the side-splitting results when friends start reading between the lines.

"It's challenging to re-examine a comedy that you love, especially one like *The Book Club Play* that had a great popular response when it was first produced," says Zacariás. "Why mess with something that works for many people? But I knew there was something in the older script that did not fully capture the rich experience of being part of a good book club—the friendship, the food and the pleasure of talking about books."

*The Book Club Play* first opened at Bethesda's Round House Theatre and later played at the Berkshire Summer Festival in 2008. When Zacariás became an American Voices New Play Institute Resident Playwright in 2010, she decided to use some of the resources allocated to her through the Institute to continue working on the play. For more information about the Institute's playwright residencies, visit [here](#).

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Zacarias continues, “My residency at Arena gave me time and space to revisit, rethink and rewrite the entire play. With the support of Director Molly Smith and Dramaturg Jocelyn Clarke, I took the leap and made exciting and dramatic changes while keeping the original premise and inspiration intact. My goal is to make *The Book Club Play* more engaging by making it funnier, deeper and more resonant.”

**Karen Zacarias** (Playwright) is working again with Molly Smith at Arena Stage, where she is a resident playwright. Other plays include *Legacy of Light* (world premiere at Arena Stage), *Mariela in the Desert*, *The Sins of Sor Juana*, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (world premiere at Round House Theater) and several TYA musicals with music by Debbie Wicks La Puma. Her awards include a Steinberg citation for Best New Play (*Legacy of Light*), Primus Prize (*Mariela in the Desert*), New Voices Award, National Latino Play Award, ATT/TCG First Stages Award, Blackburn Award finalist and Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play (*The Sins of Sor Juana*). She teaches at Georgetown Univ. and is founder of the award-winning Young Playwrights' Theater.

**Molly Smith** (Director). Over the past 13 seasons, Molly Smith 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*; *Passion Play*, a cycle by Sarah Ruhl; and *every tongue confess* by Marcus Gardley, 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.

### **The Cast of *The Book Club Play* (in alphabetical order)**

**Fred Arsenault** (Alex/Wal-Mart Guy). Broadway: *Born Yesterday*, *The Royal Family*. Off-Broadway: *Henry V*, *The Spy* (Guthrie Theater/The Acting Company); *Blue Man Group*. Regional: Guthrie Theater, Virginia Stage Company, American Shakespeare Center, Hangar Theater, Bard Summerscape. Mr. Arsenault has performed with Continuum Company in Florence, Italy. Baryshnikov Fellow. Film: *Shadows & Lies*, *Still on the Road*. TV: *The Good Wife* (CBS), *Person of Interest* (CBS). Training: M.F.A., NYU graduate acting program.

**Ashlie Atkinson** (Jen/Candy) makes her Arena Stage and Washington debut. A native of Arkansas, Ms. Atkinson won a Theatre World Award for Outstanding Debut (as well as Lucille Lortel and Outer Critics Circle noms) for originating the role of Helen in Neil LaBute's Off-Broadway hit *Fat Pig*. She has performed on Broadway in *The Ritz* (Roundabout, 2007), Off-Broadway in *The Butcher of Baraboo* (Second Stage, 2007), and internationally as Pheobe in *As You Like It* and Juno in *The Tempest* for The Bridge Project (dir. Sam Mendes). Film and TV credits include *Rescue Me*, *Inside Man*, *Louie*, *Eat Pray Love*, *The Invention of Lying*, *All Good Things*, *Bored to Death* and the *Law & Order* “trifecta” (Classic, CI and SVU).

**Rachael Holmes** (Lily/Octogenarian/Librarian/Sky Diver). Arena: Sophie in *Ruined*. Shakespeare Theatre Company: Portia in *Julius Caesar*, Queen Isabel in *Richard II* and Princess Katharine in *Henry V*. Studio

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Theatre: Osha in *Marcus, or The Secret of Sweet*. Other credits include: Manhattan Theatre Club production of *Ruined*, *Widowers' Houses* with Epic Theatre Ensemble (Audelco nom for best lead actress) and *No Child...* at both the Hangar and Capital Repertory 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 Shakespeare Theatre Company. M.F.A, NYU.

**Eric Messner** (Rob/Shark Bite Survivor) makes his Arena Stage debut. Notable Washington appearances include Mr. Scary in *Junie B. Jones*, *Jingle Bells*, *Batman Smells* (Imagination), Chicago in *Is He Dead?* (Olney), Justin Timberlake and Harrison Ford in *Crumble ... Lay Me Down Justin Timberlake* (Catalyst) and Paul Foggarty in *Scenes from the Big Picture* (Solas Nua; Helen Hayes nom). He toured nationally as Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* (National Players) and in Ireland as Howard in *Death of a Salesman* (Keegan Theatre). Mr. Messner can be seen on TV on *The Wire* and *West Wing* and has done many commercials and several independent films. He is also the voice of Green Lantern for DC Comics' *Justice League* series.

**Kate Eastwood Norris** (Ana/Jaded Literary Agent) makes her Arena Stage debut with this production. Other Washington highlights include her appearances at Woolly Mammoth Theatre, where she is also a company member, in roles such as Kay/Jane in *She Stoops to Comedy* (Helen Hayes Award), and at the Folger Theatre in over 10 shows, including Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Helen Hayes Award) and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Kate has performed regionally at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Florida Stage, Two River Theatre, Wilma Theatre and Arden Theatre, among many others. She has also received Philadelphia's Barrymore Award for acting and is currently nominated for another.

**Tom Story** (Will/Former Secret Service Agent) makes his Arena Stage debut. In D.C., he's appeared in *A Number* (Hayes nom), *The Invention of Love* (Hayes nom) and recently as Andy Warhol in *Pop!* at Studio; *Twelfth Night* (Hayes nom), *Design for Living* and *Major Barbara* at Shakespeare; and *Henry IV, Part 1* at Folger. In New York, he's appeared at Mint Theater, Town Hall, York Theater and Project 400. Regional credits include *Twelfth Night*, *Loot* and *Tartuffe* (McCarter, Yale Rep); *Romeo and Juliet* (Seattle Rep); *Gross Indecency* (Missouri Rep); and *A Girl Called Dusty* (Provincetown Rep). Tom spent nine seasons at Berkshire Theatre Festival, appearing in *The Heidi Chronicles* (Eagle Award) and *The Book Club Play* (also at O'Neill Center). He's a graduate of Duke Univ. and Juilliard.

**The Creative Team of *The Book Club Play*** also includes Set Designer **Donald Eastman**, Costume Designer **Linda Cho**, Lighting Designer **Nancy Schertler**, Sound Designer **Cricket S. Myers**, Projection Designer **Adam Larsen**, Dramaturg **Jocelyn Clarke**, Line Producer **Polly Carl**, Literary Manager **Amrita Ramanan**, Arena Stage Casting Director **Daniel Pruksarnukul** and Stage Manager **Susan R. White**.

For further information please e-mail [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).

*The Book Club Play* is sponsored by Susan and Steven R. Bralove, Linda and John M. Derrick, Jr., Wendy Farrow, and Dick and Katie Snowdon.

The 2011/12 Kogod Cradle Season is sponsored by Arlene and Robert Kogod.

### ***The Book Club Play* Special Events, Ticket information and Performance Calendar**

#### **DC LEARNs—ongoing**

See *The Book Club Play* and bring a book to donate to DC LEARNs, Washington, D.C.'s Literacy, Education, Advocacy and Resource Network. Patrons are invited to drop off new or gently used fiction books outside the Kogod Cradle when they come to see *The Book Club Play*. Donated books benefit children, teens and adults in the D.C. area who have limited access to literature or are in need of literacy assistance. To learn more, visit [www.dclearns.org](http://www.dclearns.org).

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### Theater 101—ongoing

Theater 101 is an extended seminar for audiences interested in deepening their understanding of the process of new play development. Theater 101 participants will have unprecedented access to observe and learn about the new play development process. Participants are invited to attend first rehearsal, weekly rehearsals, technical rehearsals, invited dress rehearsal and the show itself, and will become a book club of their own. Each event will be followed by a discussion moderated by Arena artistic staff. For a complete calendar of Theater 101 events for *The Book Club Play*, visit [here](#).

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *The Book Club Play* are \$45-\$85 subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. **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 Sixth St., SW, D.C.** For information on savings programs such as student discounts, Southwest Nights, Pay-Your-Age tickets, Family Fun Packs, HOTTIX and Hero's Discounts, visit [here](#).

**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 matinee at noon on Tuesday, 11/1.

Click [here](#) for a full calendar.

**Open-captioned performance:** Wednesday, 11/2 at 7:30 p.m.

**Sign-interpreted performance:** Thursday, 11/3 at 8:00 p.m.

**Audio-described performance:** Saturday, 11/5 at 2:00 p.m.

**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 \$15. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$18 or on the day of the performance for \$20 on a first-come, first-served basis. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets. Patrons can also park at the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, one block from the Mead Center, for \$11. Street parking is also available along Maine Avenue and Water Street.

*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](http://www.arenastage.org)*

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