

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

High-resolution photos available upon request.

Contact: Kirstin M. Franko/Julia Suszynski
press@arenastage.org, 202-600-4056

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**ALICE CHILDRESS' GROUNDBREAKING COMEDY-DRAMA *TROUBLE IN MIND*
OPENS THE 2011/12 SEASON AT
ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER
DIRECTED BY IRENE LEWIS AND FEATURING E. FAYE BUTLER**

(Washington, D.C.) After a memorable and record-breaking inaugural year, **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater** celebrates its 61st anniversary season with *Trouble in Mind* by **Alice Childress**, who was the first African-American woman to have her plays professionally produced in New York. Making her directorial debut with Arena Stage, **Irene Lewis** helms the comedy-drama in collaboration with many of the cast and crew from CenterStage's successful 2007 production, which was hailed by *Variety* as "bracingly prophetic" and "movingly effective."

E. Faye Butler (Arena's *Oklahoma!*, *Crowns*) leads the returning ensemble as Wiletta Mayer, along with **Starla Benford** as Millie Davis, Tony Award nominee **Thomas Jefferson Byrd** as Sheldon Forrester, **Daren Kelly** as Bill O'Wray, **Garrett Neergaard** as Eddie Fenton and **Laurence O'Dwyer** (Helen Hayes Award winner for Arena's *The Fantasticks*) as Henry. For Arena Stage's production they are joined by **Brandon J. Dirden** as John Nevins, **Gretchen Hall** as Judy Sears, **Marty Lodge** as Al Manners and **T. Anthony Quinn** as Stagehand. *Trouble in Mind* runs from **September 9-October 23, 2011 in the Kreeger Theater.**

In *Trouble in Mind*, battle lines are drawn within a newly integrated theater company preparing to open a misguided race play on the Great White Way in the 1950s. As personalities and prejudices collide, lead actress Wiletta Mayer has the chance to achieve her most glorious dream, but at what cost?

Though it was intended for Broadway after the success of its Off-Broadway run, *Trouble in Mind's* controversial themes made producers request rewrites—a situation ironically similar to what the characters in *Trouble in Mind* face. By standing her ground and not making the requested changes she sacrificed the opportunity to become the first African-American female playwright produced on Broadway. *A Raisin in the Sun* would later garner that distinction for Lorraine Hansberry in 1959.

"Theater is all about taking risks, and Alice Childress certainly took a risk in writing a piece like *Trouble in Mind* at such a turbulent point in our nation's history," says **Arena Stage Managing Director Edgar Dobie**. "Childress was ahead of her time, but the messages in the show are still just as meaningful today. We are excited to begin our season with this brilliant work by one of America's trailblazing playwrights."

"I am delighted that Molly has brought this groundbreaking play to Arena Stage," shares Director **Irene Lewis**. "This is a very special piece, and D.C. is a great place to do it."

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Alice Childress (1916-94) (Playwright) Raised during the Harlem Renaissance under the watchful eye of her beloved maternal grandmother, Childress became first an actress then a playwright and novelist. A founding member of American Negro Theatre, she wrote her first play, *Florence*, in one night in 1949 on a dare from close friend Sidney Poitier, who told Alice he didn't think a great play could be written overnight. She proved him wrong, and the play was produced Off-Broadway in 1950. In 1952, she became the first African-American woman to see her play (*Gold Through the Trees*) professionally produced in New York. In 1955, her play *Trouble in Mind* was a critical and popular success from the beginning of its run Off-Broadway at Greenwich Mews Theatre. *Trouble in Mind* received a well-reviewed Off-Broadway revival in 1998 by Negro Ensemble Company and has since been produced by Yale Rep, CenterStage, and Milwaukee Rep. Childress is perhaps best known today for *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich*, her 1973 novel about a 13-year-old black boy addicted to heroin, subsequently made into a movie in 1978. Her other plays include *Just a Little Simple* (1950), *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* (1966) and *Gullah* (1984). Throughout her career, she examined the true meaning of being black, and especially of being black and female. As she herself once said, "I concentrate on portraying have-nots in a have society."

Irene Lewis (Director) was artistic director of Baltimore's CenterStage for 20 seasons where she directed a wide range of material: musicals from *Sweeney Todd* to *H.M.S. Pinafore*; classic plays from Shakespeare and Chekhov to Schiller and Shaw; undervalued modern works like *The Investigation* to *Trouble in Mind*; and premieres by David Feldshuh, Motti Lerner, George Walker and Elizabeth Egloff. She also commissioned and produced works that went on to further life, including *Intimate Apparel*, *Elmina's Kitchen*, *Police Boys* and *Thunder Knocking on the Door*. Her productions earned many Best of Baltimore citations in the *Baltimore Sun*, *Baltimore Magazine* and *City Paper*. Her proudest achievement at CenterStage was the racial diversification of her board, staff, repertory and, most importantly, the audience. Before coming to CenterStage, she was associate director of Hartford Stage Company, where she helmed an equally wide range of work. Her TV film *Ives!*, a play about Charles Ives commissioned by Hartford Symphony, won a PBS award. She has freelanced at many theaters around the country including Mark Taper, Berkeley Rep (her productions of *The Misanthrope* and *Man and Superman* being nominated for Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards), Williamstown Theatre Festival, Seattle Rep, Sundance Festival, Glimmerglass Opera Festival, Yale Rep and N.Y. Shakespeare Festival, as well as the National Theatre of Yugoslavia in Macedonia. She has degrees in theater from Hofstra Univ. and Yale School of Drama and has taught and directed at NYU, Cornell and Juilliard. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from McDaniel College in 2011.

The Cast of *Trouble in Mind* (in alphabetical order):

Starla Benford (Millie Davis) makes her Arena Stage debut. Other D.C.: *Antony and Cleopatra* (Shakespeare). Broadway/Off-Broadway: *Macbeth* (Music Box), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Music Box), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Roundabout), *Vagina Monologues* (Westside Arts), *Macbeth* (TFANA), *Stonewall Jackson's House* (American Place; Obie, Outer Critics Circle noms). Regional/Tours: *The Oresteia*, *Slaughter City*, Christopher Durang's *Media Amok* (ART); *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Cleveland); *From the Mississippi Delta* (Stamford TheatreWorks; Conn. Critics' Circle Award); *The Venetian Twins* (Guthrie); *Death of a Salesman* (Yale Rep); *Trouble in Mind* (CenterStage), *Hold Please* (Old Globe), *Vagina Monologues* (1st national; League of Broadway Theatres nom). International: *Doubt* (Irish premiere, Abbey). Film/TV: *United 93*; *Half Nelson*; *13*; *A Perfect Murder*; *Nurse Jackie*; *Law & Order: SVU/Ci*; *3 lbs.*; *Third Watch*; *Rescue Me*; and numerous daytime dramas. Grad of ART at Harvard.

E. Faye Butler (Willetta Mayer) is returning home to Arena. Previously at Arena: *Oklahoma!*, *Crowns*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Polk County* and *Dinah Was*. Other D.C.: *Gospel According to Fishman*, *Saving Aimee* (Signature); *Take Joy* (Strathmore); *The Great Gatsby*, *Moon Until June* (Washington Ballet/Kennedy Center). Regional: *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). Tours: *Dinah Was*, *Mamma Mia*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope*, *Nonsense*, *Nonsense 2*. Awards: Helen Hayes, John Barrymore, nine Joseph Jefferson, three Black Theater Alliance, Ovation, Excellence in the Arts, After Dark.

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Thomas Jefferson Byrd (Sheldon Forrester). Broadway: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Theatre World Award, Tony nom). Regional: *Crowns* (Arizona Theatre, ATL, Portland Center Stage); *Gem of the Ocean* (ATL); *Spunk* (San Diego Rep); *Two Trains Running*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Flyin' West*, *Hamlet*, *Miss Evers' Boys* (Indiana Rep); *Good Boys* (ACT); *The Darker Face of the Earth* (Oregon Shakespeare). Film/TV: *Ray*; *X*, *Y*; *Bamboozled*; *Bulworth*; *Clockers*; *Get on the Bus*; *He Got Game*; *Set It Off*; *MacArthur Park* (Sundance nom); *Lackawanna Blues* (HBO); *Living Single*; *Mama Flora's Family*; *Passing Glory*; *Boycott*; *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*.

Brandon J. Dirden (John Nevins) makes his Arena Stage and D.C. area debut. On Broadway, Brandon was seen in *Enron* and the revival of *Prelude to a Kiss*. Off-Broadway, Brandon has appeared in *Peter and the Starcatchers* at N.Y. Theater Workshop, *The First Breeze of Summer* and *Day of Absence* at Signature Theatre, and *Bottom of the World* at Atlantic Theater. Regional theater credits include *Magnolia* (Goodman); *Fences* (Huntington; South Coast Rep); *Topdog/Underdog* (PlayMakers Rep); *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men* (Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre); *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *Metamorphoses*, *Comedy of Errors* and others (Georgia Shakespeare Festival); *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It* (North Carolina Shakespeare Festival). Brandon earned a B.A. in mathematics and drama from Morehouse College and an M.F.A. in acting from Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Gretchen Hall (Judy Sears) was most recently seen at Arena Stage in the Edward Albee Festival. She was also seen last season as Imogen in Shakespeare Theatre Company's *Cymbeline*. She has performed regionally at Westport Country Playhouse (Elizabeth in *The Circle*), CenterStage (Gwendolyn in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, directed by Irene Lewis, and Maria in the American premiere of *Let There Be Love*), Hartford Stage (Brand New Festival's *The Sprott Cycle*), Shakespeare on the Sound (Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Courtesan in *Comedy of Errors*) and Hangar Theater (Pegeen in *Playboy of the Western World*). Internationally, she performed in a three-person *Pericles* with Continuum Company in Florence, Italy. Her TV credits include *Louie*, *Law & Order*, *Gossip Girl* and *Lipstick Jungle*. She earned her M.F.A. in acting from New York Univ. and her B.A. in acting from Fordham Univ.

Daren Kelly (Bill O'Wray). Broadway: *South Pacific* (NYCO); *Woman of the Year*; *Deathtrap*; *Crazy for You*. Tours: *42nd Street*; *Ah, Wilderness!*; *Children*; *Footloose*; *Crazy for You* (also international). Regional: *La Cage aux Folles* (Gateway); *Ghosts* (Arizona Theatre); *Long Island Sound* (world premiere, TACT); *Gypsy* (Paper Mill); *Radium Girls* (Playwrights Theatre of N.J.); *Scrooge in A Christmas Carol* (Theatre IV); *Barrymore in I Hate Hamlet* (TheatreVirginia); and the title role in *Ivanov* (Jewish Rep); *Malvolio in Twelfth Night* (Porthouse). Film/TV: *Love Hurts* with Jeff Daniels; *Law & Order*; *M*A*S*H*; *Kate & Allie*; *Tales from the Darkside*; *All My Children*; *As the World Turns*.

Marty Lodge (Al Manners) returns to Arena and his hometown of Washington, where he was last seen in *The Heidi Chronicles*. Other Arena shows include *M. Butterfly*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Streetcar* and *You Can't Take It with You*, to name a few. He performed extensively in the D.C. area for 13 years at Shakespeare Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Studio and over 30 shows at Round House Theatre, where he was an associate artist. On Broadway he stood by for Bill Pullman in *Oleanna*. Film and TV credits include *Zodiac*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Cold Case*, *Criminal Minds*, *Private Practice*, *Boston Legal*, *Numb3rs* and *The Gilmore Girls*, among many others.

Garrett Neergaard (Eddie) is making his Arena Stage debut. He recently understudied on Broadway in the play *Good People* at Manhattan Theatre Club. Other notable New York credits include *The Germ Project* (New Georges), *Apparition* (Connelly Theater) and *Spin Moves* (SPF '04). He has also appeared regionally at Baltimore CenterStage (*Trouble in Mind*, *The Matchmaker* and *Working It Out*), Yale Rep (*Trouble in Mind*), Geva (*House in Hydesville*), Two Rivers (Wilbur in *Charlotte's Web*), Dorset Theatre Festival (*Fallen Angels*) and La Jolla Playhouse (*Fraulein Else*). Mr. Neergaard's film credits include *Goldstar Ohio* with Mercedes Ruehl, *After You Left* (Sundance 2011) and as Russel Henderson in *The Laramie Project* (HBO, Sundance 2002). Mr. Neergaard has also appeared on TV in NBC's *Law and Order*.

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Laurence O'Dwyer (Sam) last appeared at Arena Stage in *The Fantasticks* (Helen Hayes Award). He is an associate artist at CenterStage, where he's been seen in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *The Matchmaker*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern*, *Trouble in Mind* and many others. Regional: *Cherry Orchard*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Goodman); *Trouble in Mind* (Yale); *Don Juan* (Shakespeare); *Don Juan, As You Like It* (Old Globe); *A Christmas Carol*, *Temptation* (Dallas); *Changes of Heart*, *Mirandolina*, *The Game of Love and Chance* (McCarter); *Changes of Heart* (Berkeley); *Changes of Heart* (Taper); *A Quarrel of Sparrows* (Court, Drama-Logue Award). Former chair of Bennington College's drama dept. Awards: *Baltimore Magazine's* Best Actor in 2009 Best of Baltimore.

T. Anthony Quinn (Stagehand) is making his Arena Stage debut. Other Washington appearances include Falstaff in *Henry V* at Shakespeare Theatre Company, Postman/Butler in *Out at Sea* at Ambassador Theater, Jimmy in *Executive Order 10450* and Sir Francis Drake in *Ice Holes* at the Source Festival. He performed regionally at Weston Playhouse (Mitch in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Norman in *The Star-Spangled Girl*) and at Atlanta Shakespeare Company (Verges in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Snug in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Mr. Quinn was seen on film in *The Six Wives of Henry Lefay* with Tim Allen. TV credits include *The Boy King*, *America's Most Wanted*, *Monsters and Mysteries of Alaska* and *Who the (Bleep) Did I Marry?*

The **Creative Team of *Trouble in Mind*** also includes Set Designer **David Korins**, Costume Designer **Catherine Zuber**, Wig Designer **Jon Carter**, Lighting Designers **Rui Rita** and **Carl Faber**, Sound Designer **David Budries**, Dramaturg **Amrita Mangus**, Casting Director **Daniel Pruksarnukul**, Associate Set Designer **Rod Lemmond**, Associate Costume Designer **David Burdick**, Associate Sound Designer **Mike Skinner**, Directing Fellow **Melanie Farmer**, Stage Manager **Amber Dickerson** and Assistant Stage Manager **Kurt Hall**.

For further information please e-mail press@arenastage.org.

***Trouble in Mind* Special Events, Ticket information and Performance Calendar**

For up-to-date event production information visit [here](#).

Equality and Theater in D.C. – Thursday, August 25 from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. in the Kogod Cradle

Join Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith** and **E. Faye Butler** for a FREE discussion about Arena Stage's diverse production of *Oklahoma!*, the decision to open Arena's 2011/12 season with Alice Childress's dark Civil Rights era comedy *Trouble in Mind*, and how both works of theater address questions of race, gender and equality head on. To attend RSVP by calling 202-488-4380.

2011/12 Season Opening Celebration – Thursday, September 15, 2011

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater kicks off the second year of programming in the company's new home with a special evening including cocktails and dinner—featuring the presentation of the American Artist Award to Tony and Emmy award-winning actress **Leslie Uggams**—followed by the highly anticipated opening of *Trouble in Mind* and a lavish dessert reception. For details visit [here](#).

Making Trouble: Women and Minorities in the Arts – Saturday, September 24 from 2:00 – 3:00 p.m.

A discussion about gender and minorities in the arts, from Childress' *Trouble in Mind* to present day. Further information to come. Visit [here](#) for details.

No Business like Show Business: Producing on Broadway – Tuesday, September 27 from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. in the Mead Center's Molly Smith Study

A FREE discussion led by Arena Stage Managing Director **Edgar Dobie** on what it takes to get a play to Broadway. Featuring a reading of selections from the never produced third act for *Trouble in Mind*, which Childress wrote to please Broadway producers, who were considering a transfer of her work. To attend RSVP by calling 202-488-3300.

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Black face in the Media – Wednesday, October 12 from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m.

In celebration of Alice Childress' birthday, October 12, there will be a conversation surrounding the influence of media in the fight for racial equality in the United States from the late-1940s onward. Further information to come. Visit [here](#) for details.

TICKETS: Tickets for *Trouble in Mind* are \$45-85 subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. 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.

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 matinees at noon on 10/12, 10/18 and 10/19.

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

Sign-interpreted performance: Thursday 10/20 at 8:00

Audio-described performance: Saturday 10/8 at 2:00

Open-captioned performance Wednesday 10/5 at 7:30

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

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