

# 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 11/29/2011 casting update of Jeff McCarthy replacing Marc Vietor in the role of Scribonius.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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October 26, 2011

FULL COMPANY ANNOUNCED FOR EAST-COAST PREMIERE OF AMY FREED'S *YOU, NERO*  
AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER  
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF NICHOLAS MARTIN

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the full company of *You, Nero* by American Voices New Play Institute resident playwright and Pulitzer Prize finalist Amy Freed. This is the second project of a resident playwright to be produced at Arena Stage as part of the three-year residencies through the Institute. Making his Arena Stage debut is director Nicholas Martin (Broadway's *Present Laughter*, *Butley*). *You, Nero* runs November 25, 2011-January 1, 2012 in the Fichandler Stage.

"Arena is a home for playwrights, where they can experiment, soar and fail," says Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith. "We have the unique opportunity to showcase Amy Freed's play as one of our resident writers, under the guidance of Broadway director Nicholas Martin. We are pleased to welcome Nicholas, who is joining us for the first time, as he works on this wild comedy full of Amy's sharp, piercing language and ability to radically bring the past to the immediate moment."

Danny Scheie, hailed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "a tour de force of murderously comic, canny and catty derangement," returns to play Nero, a role Freed created just for him. Joining Scheie and also reprising his role from the South Coast Repertory world premiere and Berkeley Repertory co-production is Kasey Mahaffy as Fabiolo. Susannah Schulman as Poppaea and Jeff McCarthy as Scribonius reprise their roles from Berkeley Repertory.

Returning Arena favorites include Helen Hayes Award winner Nancy Robinette (Arena's *Death of a Salesman*, Shakespeare Theatre Company's *The Heir Apparent*) as Agrippina, Laurence O'Dwyer (Arena's *Trouble in Mind*, Helen Hayes Award winner for Arena's *The Fantasticks*) as Burrus and John C. Vennema (Arena's *A Time to Kill*) as Seneca. The Arena Stage production will also feature an expanded ensemble including Jonathan W. Colby, Leigh Marshall, Philip McLeod, Sarah Moser, Marlon Russ and Nicholas Yenson.

"I'm so excited to be working on a new production of this play here at Arena," says Freed. "It is a great opportunity to be able put *You, Nero* in the round – it offers a completely different angle on the world of it, and I think the script will lend itself very well to that fantastic space."

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As Rome collapses beneath Nero's outrageous narcissism, a forgotten playwright tries to restore order through the art of theater in this farce. Amid the chaos of crime, lust and politics, convincing the world's most famous debaucher to choose virtue over vice proves to be a Herculean task. Amy Freed's wild romp questions whether well-crafted drama and intellect are any match for decadence and good old-fashioned bloodshed. As *Bloomberg* said, it "takes the bloody goings-on of Rome's imperial family...and turns them into a series of clever one-liners."

"I'm delighted to have this opportunity to collaborate with Amy Freed at Arena Stage, a writer and a theater that I much admire," says **Martin**. "With her signature wit and depth, Amy takes us to a world of laughter as she finds in the Roman Empire the ancient equivalent of the current state of pop culture, right up to *American Idol*. An original and colorfully gifted cast and design team bring the panorama to life."

**Amy Freed** (*Playwright*) is the author of *Restoration Comedy*, *The Beard of Avon*, *Freedomland*, *Safe in Hell*, *The Psychic Life of Savages* and other plays. Her work has been produced at South Coast Rep, NYTW, Seattle Rep, ACT, Yale Rep, California Shakespeare, Berkeley Rep, Goodman, Playwrights Horizons, Woolly Mammoth and other theaters. Her latest play, *Right to the Top*, had its first reading at Pacific Playwrights Festival in April 2010. Amy has won the Joseph Kesselring Award, Charles MacArthur Playwriting Award, several L.A. Drama Critics Circle awards and was a Pulitzer finalist for *Freedomland*. She is artist-in-residence in Stanford Univ.'s drama dept., has been playwright-in-residence at South Coast Rep, and was playwright-in-residence at Old Globe Theater.

**Nicholas Martin** (*Director*). Broadway: *Present Laughter*, *The Rehearsal*, *Butley*, *Match*, *Hedda Gabler*. Off-Broadway: *You Never Can Tell*, *Why Torture Is Wrong*, and *the People Who Love Them* (Public); *Saturn Returns*, *The New Century*, *Observe the Sons of Ulster* (Drama Desk nom), *The Time of the Cuckoo* and *Chaucer in Rome* (Lincoln Center); *Fully Committed* (Vineyard; Cherry Lane); *Full Gallop* (MTC; West Side Arts; London); *Betty's Summer Vacation* (Obie Award, Drama Desk nom) and *Sophistry* (Playwrights Horizons); *Bosoms and Neglect* (Signature). Regional: *The House of Blue Leaves*, *Dead End* (Center Theatre Group) and many more. Mr. Martin was formerly the artistic director of the Huntington Theatre in Boston and the Williamstown Theatre Festival, where his credits include *Knickerbocker*, *She Loves Me*, *The Corn Is Green*, *Where's Charley?*, *Camino Real* and *The Royal Family*, among others.

### The Cast of *You, Nero* (in alphabetical order)

**Kasey Mahaffy** (*Fabiolo*) appeared at South Coast Rep and Berkeley Rep in *You, Nero*. Other theater credits include *Crimes of the Heart*, *An Italian Straw Hat: A Vaudeville* and *Taking Steps* at South Coast Rep; *The Violet Hour* at Ensemble Theatre Company; *Metamorphoses* at Pioneer Theatre Company; *Little Women* at Kansas City Rep; *The Miracle Worker* and *Assassins* at Berkshire Theatre Festival; *Tartuffe* and *Much Ado About Nothing* at Sonnet Rep in NYC; *The Merchant of Venice* at Portland Center Stage; *Life Is a Dream* and *Trip to Bountiful* at Oregon Shakespeare Festival; *The Laramie Project*, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Servant of Two Masters* at Pacific Conservatory. Film and TV credits include *Oceans 13*, *Law & Order: Los Angeles*, *Nathan vs. Nurture* (pilot), *Castle*, *Bones*, *ER*, *Medium*, *Crossing Jordan* and *Veronica Mars*.

**Jeff McCarthy** (*Scribonius*). Broadway: *Chicago*, *Pirate Queen*, *Urinetown*, *Side Show*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Smile, Zorba*. Off-Broadway: *Sympathetic Magic*, *Dream True*, *On the 20th Century*. Regional: *Fox on the Fairway* (Signature); *You, Nero* (Berkeley); *The Price*, *Front Page* (Long Wharf); *Sweeney Todd*, *Follies* (Barrington); *Beggar's Opera* (Santa Fe Opera); *Bed and Sofa* (Wilma); *Arms and the Man* (Huntington); *Bedroom Farce* (Center Stage); *Misanthrope* (Guthrie); *Buried Child*, *Pantegleize* (ACT); *Henry IV* (Indiana Rep); *Sunday in the Park* (Seattle Rep); *A Lie of the Mind* (Denver Center). TV: *The Good Wife*, *Schweitzer* (title role), *Love Monkey*. Film: *Starting Out in the Evening*, *Consent*, *RoboCop 2*, *Eve of Destruction*, *Rapid Fire*, *Cliffhanger*. Jeff is the voice of the great Chuck Jones' creation Michigan J. Frog.

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**Laurence O'Dwyer** (*Burrus*) recently appeared at Arena in *Trouble in Mind* and *The Fantasticks* (Helen Hayes Award). He is an associate artist at CenterStage, where he's been 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 Theatre Center); *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.

**Nancy Robinette** (*Agrippina*) most recently appeared at Arena Stage in *Death of a Salesman*, *Well* and *Christmas Carol 1941*. She has also been seen recently at Studio Theatre in *The New Electric Ballroom*, *Souvenir* and *Frozen*; *The Carpetbagger's Children* at Ford's Theatre; *Twelfth Night* and *The Heir Apparent* at Shakespeare Theatre; and at Woolly Mammoth some time ago in Amy Freed's *Freedomland*. She has appeared at Old Globe, Paper Mill, Williamstown, New York Theatre Workshop, Roundabout and McCarter theaters. TV includes *Louie* and *Homicide*. Films: *Serial Mom*, *Soldier Jack*, *The Hunley* and *The Day Lincoln Was Shot*.

**Danny Scheie** (*Nero*) comes to the Arena after creating the role at South Coast Rep and Berkeley Rep, where he also appeared in *Cloud Nine* and the world premiere of Chuck Mee's *Fêtes de la Nuit*. His theater credits include Amy Freed's *Restoration Comedy* at Old Globe and California Shakespeare Theater, where he has also played Bottom, Feste, Mercutio and Dogberry among many others over eight seasons. This year he played Valère in *La Bête* at Asolo Rep and the world premiere of Peter Nachtrieb's *Bob* in the Humana Festival at Actors Theater of Louisville. Other theaters as actor include Trinity Rep, Yale Rep, Two River, Pasadena Playhouse, A Noise Within, the Zephyr and, in San Francisco, the Magic, Aurora, Marin, TheatreWorks, San Jose Rep, Campo Santo, Theater Rhinoceros and 14 seasons at Shakespeare Santa Cruz, three as artistic director. He holds a Ph.D. in dramatic art from the University of California Berkeley.

**Susannah Schulman** (*Poppaea*) is thrilled to return to Arena Stage after participating in the Albee Festival this past spring. Theater credits include Yale Repertory Theatre, Roundabout Theatre, Hudson Stage Company, Huntington Theatre, Geva Theatre, Syracuse Stage, South Coast Repertory, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Marin Theatre Company, Aurora Theatre, Zephyr Theatre, Barbican Theatre (David Edgar's *Continental Divide*) and the national tour of Steve Martin's *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*.

**John C. Vennema** (*Seneca*) last appeared at Arena in *A Time to Kill*. He originated the role of Tom in the Broadway production of Arthur Miller's *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan*. Originally from Houston, John graduated from Princeton and attended the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. He has also been seen on Broadway in *Bells Are Ringing* (Encores), *The Royal Family*, *Otherwise Engaged*, *The Elephant Man* and *Racing Demon* (dir. Richard Eyre). Off-Broadway: *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (Drama Desk Award), *House and Garden*, *The Illusion* and *Later Life*. Film: *Love Comes Lately*, *Marci X*, *The Producers*, *City Hall*, *Subway Stories*, *Sabrina*, *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, *Kiss of Death*, *Basketball Diaries* and *Separate but Equal*.

**The Creative Team of *You, Nero*** also includes Set Designer **James Noone**, Costume Designer **Gabriel Berry**, Lighting Designer **Matthew Richards**, Sound Designer **Drew Levy**, Original Music by **Mark Bennett**, Assistant to the Director **Bryan Hunt**, Casting Director **Daniel Pruksarnukul**, Dramaturg **Aaron Malkin**, Stage Manager **Jenna Henderson** and Assistant Stage Manager **Christi B. Spann**.

For further information including bios and high-resolution images e-mail [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).

**Dr. Jaylee Montague Mead is the sponsor of the Fichandler Stage Season.**

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *You, Nero* are \$40-\$85, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable

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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, HOTTIX and Hero's Discounts, visit <http://www.arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs/>.

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

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

Saturday & Sunday at 2:00 p.m.

Weekdays at noon on Wednesday, 12/7; Tuesday, 12/20 and Wednesday, 12/21

Full calendar: <http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=13295>.

**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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