

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES SIX WRITERS SELECTED FOR INAUGURAL PLAYWRIGHTS' ARENA PROGRAM AND DATES FOR THE NEXT KOGOD CRADLE SERIES PERFORMANCES AS PART OF THE AMERICAN VOICES NEW PLAY INSTITUTE

(Washington, D.C.) Six D.C.-area playwrights have been selected to participate in the inaugural Playwrights' Arena as part of the American Voices New Play Institute at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. Playwrights' Arena is a collaborative group of local writers dedicated to the support and development of each other's work and practice. The yearlong program commences in January 2013, and the inaugural members include **Norman Allen, Randy Baker, Jacqueline E. Lawton, Heather McDonald, Danielle Mohlman** and **Shawn Northrip**. Also in January as part of the Institute's programming will be the next installment of the Kogod Cradle Series featuring readings of *The Age of Innocence*, a new adaptation for the stage by Resident Playwright **Karen Zacarias, January 14-16, 2013**.

"Arena's focus on American voices extends beyond the mainstage," comments Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "The unique nature of this program is how it will bring writers together to support each other. We are proud to create a forum for collaboration, process and discovery, to connect these artists to each other as well as to another world of artists as only Arena can."

"I'm thrilled to launch the Playwrights' Arena and to work with these amazing D.C. playwrights," shares Arena Stage Director of Artistic Programming and facilitator of Institute programs **David Snider**. "It is a great group of artists—and another great step in the development of the American Voices New Play Institute."

More than 30 applicants were considered for the program, which will include bimonthly three-hour meetings on a weeknight at the Mead Center to investigate each other's work and develop their dramaturgical practice. They will meet regularly with the Institute's resident playwrights and Arena Stage directors, designers and staff. At least twice during the year actors will read their work in private laboratory rehearsals, giving the playwrights a chance to hear their work and respond to it. The playwrights will be able to attend opening nights and special events and be supported as members of the Arena Stage artistic community.

In regards to the upcoming Kogod Cradle Series selection, **Snider continues**, "We worked on Karen's *The Age of Innocence* for several days in November with a full cast of actors as well as Institute Dramaturg Jocelyn Clarke and I immediately knew we had to dive further into this great new piece. I'm very excited for audiences to see it."

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### ***The Age of Innocence***

**January 14-16, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle**

Newland Archer couldn't be more pleased with his recent engagement to the beautiful debutante May Welland. However, his world is thrown upside down by the sensational arrival of May's cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska. Resident Playwright Karen Zacarías brings Edith Wharton's American masterpiece to the stage in a new adaptation that explores love, loss and longing through the lens of New York's social elite.

Each performance will be followed by a post-show discussion, encouraging audiences to participate in this new play's development with Zacarías and Clarke. Tickets are \$10; to reserve call 202-488-3300.

The Kogod Cradle Series supports the exploration and development of new and emerging work in the Kogod Cradle with visiting companies, artists and ensembles. Focusing on the development of new plays and devised work by artists from throughout Greater Washington and around the country, this series of readings and workshops invites artists and audiences to explore the development process, and allows artists and audiences to participate who otherwise might not be able to easily access Arena Stage. In November 2012, the Kogod Cradle Series featured banished? productions' *Into the Dollhouse* and dog & pony dc's *A Killing Game*. Both productions were presented together in one evening of creative development.

**Karen Zacarías'** plays include *The Book Club Play*, *Legacy of Light*, *Mariela in the Desert*, *The Sins of Sor Juana* and the adaptation of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Karen is currently writing the libretto of *The Sun Also Rises* for the Washington Ballet, adapting the nonfiction book *Just Like Us* about the politics of immigration for the Denver Theater Center New Play Summit, and beginning a Brazilian themed musical for the Kennedy Center. She also has commissions for the American Revolutions Series for Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Cincinnati Playhouse. Her children's musicals include *Jane of the Jungle* (World Premiere at South Coast Rep, May 2012), *Looking for Roberto Clemente*, *Chasing George Washington*, *Ferdinand the Bull*, *Einstein Is a Dummy* and *Cinderella Eats Rice and Beans*. Her plays have been produced at Arena Stage, The Kennedy Center, The Goodman Theater, The Denver Theater Center, Round House Theater, The Arden, Cleveland Playhouse, The Alliance Theater and many more. Her awards include: 2010 Finalist for the Steinberg Award for Best New American Play (*Legacy of Light*), National Francesca Primus Prize (*Mariela in the Desert*), Winner: National Latino Play Award, Winner ATT/TCG First Stages Award, Finalist Susan S. Blackburn Award, New Voices Award and the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play (*The Sins of Sor Juana*). Karen lives in D.C. with her husband and three young children. She is a Resident Playwright at Arena Stage, playwriting professor at Georgetown University and the founding Artistic Director of Young Playwrights' Theater in D.C.

### **Biographies and statements from the members of the 2013 Playwrights' Arena:**

#### **Norman Allen**

Norman Allen's work has been commissioned and produced by the Kennedy Center (*The Light of Excalibur*), the Shakespeare Theatre Company (*On the Eve of Friday Morning*) and the Karlin Music Theatre in Prague, where his contemporary *Carmen* (score by Wildhorn and Murphy) ran for four years. While playwright-in-residence at Signature Theatre, Allen premiered *Melville Slept Here*, *Nijinsky's Last Dance* (Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Play) and *In the Garden* (Charles MacArthur Award, Outstanding New Play), with subsequent productions across the United States and Europe. Current and upcoming projects include an adaptation of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, funded by a grant from the D.C. Commission on the Arts; productions of *Carmen* in Japan and Korea; and the premiere of *Once Wild: Isadora Duncan* in Russia with Word Dance Theatre, directed by Derek Goldman. In addition to his work for the stage, Allen has provided essays and commentary for WAMU-FM (NPR), and for leading national publications, including Smithsonian and *The Washington Post*.

*"David Snider has become the Dolly Levi of the Washington playwrights' set. He's put together a group of writers with very different styles, from very different backgrounds. Like any self-respecting matchmaker, he's made sure that we'll make life interesting for each other. The make-up of this group means that each of us will be challenged significantly in the year ahead. What could be more important to the work than that?"*

### **Randy Baker**

Randy Baker is a playwright, director and the co-Artistic Director of Rorschach Theatre which he founded with Jenny McConnell Frederick in the summer of 1999. Plays he has written include *Forgotten Kingdoms*, *The Burning Road*, *The First Disobedience*, *The Gate* and *Dream Sailors*. His plays have been produced at Rorschach Theatre, Source Theatre, Forum Theatre (re)acts, Extreme Exchange, Three Leaches Theatre (Colorado), George Washington University and The National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts. He has had readings and workshops at National New Play Network, Inkwell Theatre, Theater J, The Arts Club of Washington, Wordsmyth Theater, MTWorks, Primary Stages, American University, Theater Alliance and Rorschach Theatre. As a director with Rorschach Theatre he has directed *The Minotaur*, *After the Quake*, *1001*, *Rhinoceros*, *JB*, *Behold!*, *Fair Ladies at a Game of Poem Cards* and *Monster*. He has also directed for Source Theatre, Inkwell Theatre, First Draft, NCDA's Actors Repertory Theatre, Wayward Theatre, Cherry Red Productions and Young Playwrights Theater where he is a company member.

*"I'm honored and humbled to be included among such talented writers—writers that are a testament to the vitality of D.C.'s large playwriting community. Becoming a part of the Playwrights' Arena and this community of artists is going to be thrilling, allowing me to be a part of something bigger than my own battered laptop."*

### **Jacqueline E. Lawton**

Jacqueline E. Lawton received her MFA in Playwriting from the University of Texas at Austin, where she was a James A. Michener Fellow. She participated in the Kennedy Center's Playwrights' Intensive (2002) and World Interplay (2003). Her plays include *Anna K*; *Blood-bound and Tongue-tied*; *Deep Belly Beautiful*; *The Devil's Sweet Water*; *The Hampton Years*; *Ira Aldridge: the African Roscius*; *Lions of Industry*, *Mothers of Invention*; *Love Brothers Serenade*, *Mad Breed* and *Our Man Beverly Snow*. She has received commissions from Active Cultures Theater, Discovery Theater, National Portrait Gallery, National Museum of American History, Round House Theatre and Theater J. Her play, *Cinder Blocks*, was published in *Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: Art, Activism, Academia*, and the *Austin Project* (University of Texas Press). A 2012 TCG Young Leaders of Color, she has been nominated for the Wendy Wasserstein Prize and a PONY Fellowship from the Lark New Play Development Center.

*"I'm proud and quite amazed to be part of the inaugural Playwrights' Arena. Arena Stage was one of my first theater homes as an arts administrator and educator, so it's wonderful to return as a playwright. I feel fortunate to be able to spend a year dedicated to communing with such exceptionally talented and diverse playwrights, to working with everyone at Arena Stage and to discovering new depths and dimensions of my own writing."*

### **Heather McDonald**

Heather McDonald's plays include *An Almost Holy Picture*, *When Grace Comes In*, *Dream of a Common Language*, *Available Light*, *The Rivers and Ravines*, *Faulkner's Bicycle*, *The Two Marys*, *Rain and Darkness* and, upcoming, *The Suppressed-Desire Ball* (developed at Sundance Ucross Writers Retreat). Her work has been produced on Broadway and Off and at such theaters as The Roundabout Theatre, Arena Stage, The McCarter Theatre, Center Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Indiana Rep, California Shakespeare Theatre, Round House Theatre, Signature Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, The Actors Theatre of Louisville – Humana Festival of New Plays, The La Jolla Playhouse and internationally in Italy, Spain,

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Portugal, England and Mexico. Her work has been honored with a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize, three NEA Playwriting Fellowships, The First Prize Kesselring Award and was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Her plays are published by Dramatists Play Service, Samuel French, Inc. and in several collections. She has written and sold two screenplays, *Rocket 88* and *Walking After Midnight*, and is at work on a new project for television, *GOLD*. She received her MFA from NYU Tisch School of the Arts and is Professor of Theater at George Mason University.

*"The Olympic champion swimmer Dara Torres said that a race is lost in the middle. That really struck me. As an artist, I relate to that. A part of what is wonderful for me to be in this writer's group is to have some comrades for the middle part of the 'race.' Some encouragement to 'keep swimming' and the joy that comes from looking over to the right and seeing a friendly face 'paddling along next to you.'"*

### Danielle Mohlman

Danielle Mohlman holds an MA in Theatre Studies from Emerson College. Recent credits include *Followed by a Sometime Cowboy* at Forum Theatre's Re(Acts); and *Jim and Paul Meet in Dreams* (Field Trip Theatre) and *The Crow* (Artists' Bloc), both at the Kennedy Center's Page-to-Stage Festival. Other credits include *Stopgap* at the Capital Fringe Festival and *The Bed* at DC SWAN Day. In 2012, the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities awarded Danielle a Larry Neal Writers' Award for Dramatic Writing. Upcoming productions include *Apocalypse*, part of 360° of America at the Atlas Intersections Festival, and *John. John. John.* at Station Nation—a festival honoring the victims of the Station nightclub fire in West Warwick, Rhode Island. Danielle is a co-moderator of DC-Area Playwrights and Artistic Director of Field Trip Theatre.

*"There's something very exciting about being part of the first class of playwrights. David Snider is so clearly passionate about this project and the individual playwrights involved. He's set up a real playground for process work and is very open to my ideas about experimenting with language in the piece I'm working on this coming year."*

### Shawn Northrip

Shawn Northrip is a playwright and composer with an MFA in Musical Theatre Writing from New York University and BA from Catholic University. His punk musical adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* appeared at Source Theatre Company and Off-Off Broadway at Chashama and the Tank and is anthologized by New York Theatre Experience. *Lunch*, a musical about love in the eighth grade, was developed with support from the Kennedy Center's Kenan Foundation, earned the Anna Sosenko Assist Trust Grant, premiered at the New York Musical Festival and is published by Playscripts. *Cautionary Tales for Adults and the Many Adventures of Trixie Tickle*, his parody of children's shows, earned the Audience Choice: Best Musical at the Second Capital Fringe Festival, appeared in Round House's Silver Spring Series and was *Spank!ed* by Upright Citizens Brigade. When he is not writing, Shawn teaches Theater Arts at George Mason High School in Falls Church City, VA.

*"I'm looking forward to refining my writing voice, to maturing as a playwright, to showing that I'm not just a 'Fringy' writer, that I'm capable of writing more than fart jokes and the theatrical equivalent of B-grade horror movies, but can create compelling stories, with well-rounded witty characters, comedic on the surface but with heart underneath. But mostly, I look forward to learning how to write better endings... I never know how to end things."*

For more information on the American Voices New Play Institute at Arena Stage visit: [arenastage.org/artistic-development/new-play-institute](http://arenastage.org/artistic-development/new-play-institute).

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**Support for the Kogod Cradle Series provided by: The Barbara R. Walton Endowment Fund for New Playwrights.** Barbara R. Walton (1920-2003) was very active in the Washington theater community, serving as President of the Little Theatre of Alexandria and Secretary of the Board of Trustees at Arena Stage (Board member from 1957-65). In addition to directing community theater productions for the Montgomery Players and The Children's Theatre of Richmond, she wrote six full-length plays and numerous one-acts that were produced throughout the Capital region. Her most notable works include: *Hallowe'en Time*, *The Wonderful Idababa*, *Lost*, *The Gin-Gin Trade* and *The Red Hat*. Her musical, *The Sing Ling Circus* (book and lyrics), was presented on the Fichandler Stage by the Arena Stage repertory company in 1962 to wide audience and critical acclaim.

*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 Executive 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 seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. [arenastage.org](http://arenastage.org)*

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