

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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October 18, 2012

WORLD-PREMIERE CO-PRODUCTION OF CHERYL L. WEST'S  
*PULLMAN PORTER BLUES* PULLS INTO  
ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER  
DIRECTED BY LISA PETERSON

\*\*\* Jam-packed with 12 classic blues songs backed by a live band on stage \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Following its celebrated opening at Seattle Repertory Theatre, *Pullman Porter Blues* travels across the country to sweep D.C. audiences along for a ride in its world-premiere co-production at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. Inspired by her grandfather's work on the postal trains, playwright **Cheryl L. West**, whose work at Arena Stage includes *Jar the Floor* and *Play On!*, returns with the tale of three Pullman train porters whose journey is underscored by Midwest blues songs, including "Sweet Home Chicago" and "This Train." Directed by **Lisa Peterson** (Arena's *The Rainmaker* and *The Quality of Life*), *Pullman Porter Blues* runs **November 23, 2012 – January 6, 2013 in the Kreeger Theater.**

**E. Faye Butler** (*Oklahoma!*, *Trouble in Mind*), whose performance in Seattle has been praised as "a bravura turn by diesel strength singer-actor" (*Seattle Times*), returns to Arena as traveling blues singer Sister Juba. Butler's Juba joins three generations of Sykes men working the rails, portrayed by Broadway veteran **Larry Marshall** (*The Color Purple*) as proud grand patriarch Monroe, Tony Award winner **Cleavant Derricks** (*Dreamgirls*) as his troubled son Sylvester and **Warner Miller** (premiere of Danai Gurira's *The Convert*) as the young and ambitious Cephas. Rounding out the cast are **Emily Chisholm** as Lutie, **Richard Ziman** as Tex, **Felicia Loud** as Sister Juba Understudy, **James Patrick Hill** as Twist, **Jmichael** as Keys, **Lamar Lofton** as Shorty and **Chic Street Man** as Slick.

"With its powerful focus on this moment in history, *Pullman Porter Blues* gives us a glimpse into the lives of train porters in 1937," says **Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "Not much is known about the early days of the Pullman porters, because the great Chicago fire destroyed nearly all of the early records, so I am thrilled to have Cheryl back at Arena to bring this vital story to life. I'm pleased to welcome back Lisa Peterson with her directorial vision."

She continues, "This show is a homecoming for Jerry Manning, Artistic Director of Seattle Repertory Theatre, who started his theatrical career 25 years ago at Arena Stage. This co-production launches Seattle Repertory Theatre's wonderful 50th anniversary season."

**About *Pullman Porter Blues*:** *Pullman Porter Blues* reveals the true hero hidden within every man. It's June 1937 and the *Panama Limited*, bound from Chicago to New Orleans, is bouncing to the beat of the rollicking Midwest blues. Most folks are tuned in to the Joe Louis/James Braddock championship bout, but the men of the Sykes family—three generations of porters—know there's more at stake than just a boxing title, as they battle each other, racial tensions and an uncertain future. Will the hope they get from the Brown Bomber be the fuel this family needs to make a better life, or will progress tear them apart?

—continued—

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“The play is inspired by my late grandfather and his many tales of working on the postal trains as well as my first train ride as a young girl,” shares **West**. “I remember, quite vividly, being utterly enamored with the train’s compulsively smiling Pullman porters. Now, decades later, I have the incredible opportunity through my play to illuminate the world behind the smiles of the free blacks working in one of the first occupations open to them after the Civil War.”

In honor of Cheryl’s play, the Seattle City Council officially recognized October as “Pullman Porter Month,” celebrating Pullman porters for their public service and leadership in the Civil Rights Movement.

“Cheryl has written a new classic,” adds **Peterson**. “By telling the story of three generations of Pullman porters, she’s brought this important chapter in American history to the stage, where it rightfully belongs. And by setting it on a moving train, Cheryl has captured the rhythm of these people’s lives and combined it with the presence of glorious blues music to create a very unique and compelling night in the theater. I feel incredibly lucky to be able to help bring *Pullman Porter Blues* to life on the stage.”

**Cheryl L. West** (*Playwright*) is the librettist for *Play On!* (which ran on Broadway) and the author of several plays, including the adaptation *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy*; *Motherhood Out Loud* (co-author); *Addie, American Girl Story* (21-city tour); *Birdie Blue*; *Rejoice*; *Holiday Heart*; *Puddin’ n’ Pete*; *Jar the Floor*; and *Before It Hits Home*. The latter earned Ms. West several awards including the Helen Hayes/Charles McArthur Award for Outstanding New Play and the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, an international award given to a woman who has written a work of outstanding quality for the English-speaking theater. She is also a recipient of the National Endowment Playwriting Award and the Beverly Hills/Hollywood NAACP Best Playwright Award. Her plays have been produced in England, New York and in numerous regional theaters including Minneapolis Children’s Theatre, Seattle Children’s Theatre, Seattle Rep, Arena Stage, Old Globe, The Goodman, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Bay Street Theatre Festival, Syracuse Stage, Cleveland Play House, South Coast Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Manhattan Theatre Club and Off-Broadway’s Second Stage. Ms. West adapted her play *Holiday Heart* for Showtime/MGM and Robert De Niro’s *Tribeca Productions*, which earned her a GLADD nomination and a Golden Globe nomination for Alfre Woodard. She has worked in TV and film projects at Paramount, MTV Films, Showtime, TNT, HBO and CBS. She is currently the Webby-nominated writer for the web series *Diary of a Single Mom* starring Monica Calhoun, Billie Dee Williams and Diahann Carroll, and is the screenwriter of the recently wrapped movie *In the Hive*, which was directed by Robert Townsend and seen at several film festivals (Atlanta, Miami, Memphis, LA).

**Lisa Peterson** (*Director*) is happy to return to Arena Stage, where she directed *The Quality of Life* and *The Rainmaker*. Other recent credits include *An Iliad*, written with Denis O’Hare, which premiered at Seattle Rep and then went on to an acclaimed production this spring at New York Theatre Workshop, where it won a Lortel and an Obie Award. Other credits in NY include: *Motherhood Out Loud*, *Shipwrecked*, *The Model Apartment* (Primary Stages); *The Poor Itch*, *Tongue of a Bird*, *The Square* (Public Theatre); *The Fourth Sister*, *The Batting Cage* (Vineyard); *Birdy*, *Chemistry of Change* (WPP/Playwright’s Horizons); *Collected Stories* (MTC); *Sueno* (MCC); *Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Slavs!*, *Traps*, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (Obie Award), *The Waves* (NYTW). Regional: Mark Taper Forum (Resident Director 1995-2005), La Jolla Playhouse (Associate Artistic Director 1992-1995), Berkeley Rep, Intiman, South Coast Rep, Cal Shakes, OSF, The Guthrie, Dallas Theater Center, Arena Stage, McCarter, Center Stage, Yale Rep, Hartford Stage, Long Wharf, The Huntington, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Philadelphia Theater Co, O’Neill Playwrights Conference, Midwest PlayLabs, NY Stage & Film and Sundance Theatre Lab.

### **The Cast of *Pullman Porter Blues* (in alphabetical order)**

**E. Faye Butler** (*Sister Juba*) recently appeared in *Crowns* (10th anniversary) at the Goodman Theatre, as well as *A Christmas Carol*, *Purlie* (co-pro with Pasadena Playhouse) and *Ain’t Misbehavin*. National and regional tours: *Mamma Mia*, *Dinah Was*, *Ain’t Misbehavin*, *Nunsense*, *Don’t Bother Me...* Regional: *Trouble in Mind*, *Oklahoma!*, *Crowns*, *Polk County* (Arena Stage); *Saving Aimee*, *Gospel According to Fishman* (Signature); *The*

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*Wiz* (La Jolla Playhouse); *Little Foxes*, *La Bête*, *Caroline or Change*, *Once in a Lifetime* (Court Theatre); *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* (Steppenwolf); *Seussical* (Chicago Shakes); *Hairspray*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Little Shop of Horrors* (Marriott's Lincolnshire Theatre); *Black Pearl Sings!*, *Ella* (Dallas Theatre Company/Northlight Theatre); *Once on This Island*, *Caroline or Change*, *Ma Rainey* (Philadelphia Theatre Company), *Trouble in Mind* (Yale Rep/Centerstage). Ms. Butler performed with The Washington Ballet in *The Great Gatsby* and *Blues* until June at The Kennedy Center and performs around the country with her own orchestra. Awards: Six Jeff Awards, three Black Theatre Alliance Awards, After Dark Award, John Barrymore Award, R.A.M.I. Award, Helen Hayes Award, Excellence in the Arts Award, Ovation Award and 2011 Sarah Siddons Society Leading Lady Award. Ms. Butler was named a 2012 Lunt-Fontaine Fellow and will be inducted into the National Women in the Arts Museum in D.C. in 2012.

**Emily Chisholm** (*Lutie*) Stage credits include: *This Wide Night*, *Tryst*, *The 13th of Paris* (Seattle Public Theatre); *Twelfth Night* and *The Servant of Two Masters* (Seattle Shakespeare Company/Wooden O); *Torso* (Printer's Devil Theatre); *Inherit the Wind* (Strawberry Theatre Workshop); *The Borrowers*, *In the Northern Lands*, *Peter Pan*, *Bluenose* and *The Neverending Story* (Seattle Children's Theatre), along with several productions with Washington Ensemble Theatre, Book-It Repertory Theatre and Ian Bell's *Seattle Confidential* at ACT. Chisholm is a graduate of Cornish College.

**Cleavant Derricks** (*Sylvester*) created the role of James Thunder Early in *Dreamgirls* (Tony and Drama Desk Awards, LA Drama Circle Award for vocal arrangements). Starring in Bob Fosse's *Big Deal* on Broadway, Cleavant was nominated for Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Best Actor. Other Broadway credits: *Hair*, Vinette Carroll's *Your Arms Too Short to Box with God*, *But Never Jam Today* and *Brooklyn the Musical*. Awards: NAACP Theatre Award for Best Male Performance for his portrayal of Horse in *The Full Monty* national tour, Heroes and Legends Award for Outstanding Achievement in Theatre. Other credits: Composer/musical director/featured actor for the musical *When Hell Freezes Over*, *I'll Skate* (PBS special) and Cy Coleman's *Like Jazz* (Mark Taper Forum). Film: *Moscow on the Hudson*, *The Slugger's Wife*, *Offbeat*, *Carnival of Souls*, *Bluffing It*, *Miami Magma*, *Basilisk* and *World Traveler*. TV series regular: *Sliders*, *Thea*, *Drexell's Class*, *Good Sports* and *Whoops!*. TV guest appearances: *Touched by an Angel*, *Charmed*, *The Practice*, *The Bernie Mac Show*, *Cold Case* and David E. Kelly's *Wedding Bells*.

**James Patrick Hill** (*Twist*) started playing the drums at age four. His talents span genres from gospel, rock, folk, Latin, R&B, reggae, Brazilian, country and swing, and he has played with a host of nationally renowned artists, including Darren Motamony, Jeff Kashuwa, Sandra Couch, The Winans, Fred Hammond, Gary Oliver, Phil Curry, Steve Oliver, Crystal Murden, Greta Montasa, Michael Powers, Robi Duke and the Colorado Mass Choir. The versatility, power and passion that he illustrates for every performance have gained him the title "The Volcano."

**Jmichael** (*Musical Director/Keys*) received his BA from Alabama State University and his Master of Arts Degree from the University of Michigan. He then moved to L.A., where he was hired to perform with the legal group *The Platters*. For two years, he toured the U.S., Europe and Israel singing with the group. Capitol, Motown, Warner Brothers and Atlantic recording labels, along with Kroger Stores and the Disney Corporation, are among the many companies that have utilized his services. He has produced corporate shows at Caesar's Palace and the Mirage Hotels in Las Vegas, and with his Jmichael Trio or Big Band, has provided entertainment for four-star Hilton and Nikko Hotels, AT&T, Bell South, Xerox and numerous exclusive private affairs, including the wedding for Backstreet Boys' Brian Littrell. He has been a featured performer for Disneyland and Disney Cruise Lines and has produced and performed a special concept show of *The Platters'* music with the Alabama and Pueblo Colorado Symphonies, along with six shows with the Pittsburgh Symphony at Heinz Hall (conductor Marvin Hamlisch). He recently made his professional acting debut as Wining Boy in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*.

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**Lamar Lofton** (*Shorty*) hails from Seattle. After attending the prestigious Garfield High School, he attended Cornish College of the Arts, where he received his BFA in Music Performance. Since then, he has performed locally and around the world in various musical settings, from musical theater to collaborating with international reggae and jazz artists including Clinton Fearon, Eek-a-Mouse, John Hicks, Ernestine Anderson, The Abbysinians, Julian Priestler, Hadley Caliman, Renee' Strange, Cedric Brooks and many others. Adept at both string and electric bass, his versatility in instruments and musical settings continues to keep him in demand as an accompanist and leader.

**Felicia Loud** (*Understudy for Sister Juba*) In addition to her active singing career around Seattle, her stage roles include Yolanda in *Crowns* (Intiman Theatre's Philadelphia tour), Narrator in *Black Nativity* (Intiman), Billie Holliday in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* (University Of Washington Cultural Arts Theatre), Ruth in *Raisin in the Sun* (Oberlin Summer Theater Festival), Spirit in *Sankofa* (The Moore Theatre), Resa in *Two Trains Running* (Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center), Bessie in *Native Son* (Intiman) and Bessie Smith in *A Night in the Life of Bessie Smith* (Langston Hughes Theatre).

**Chic Street Man** (*Slick*) Regional Theater: *Spunk* (OSF, Portland), *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Seattle Repertory), *Lost Highway* (Mark Taper Forum), *Native Son* (Intiman Theatre), *Spunk* (New York Shakespeare Festival, New Jersey Crossroads Theatre, Mark Taper Forum), *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre), *Touch the Names—Letters to The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial* (Cleveland Playhouse), *A Lesson before Dying* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival), *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* (Denver Theatre Company) and *Polk County* (McCarter Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theater). Music festivals: Paleo Festival, Montreux Jazz Festival and Bern Jazz Festival. Seven albums, including the latest *Lullablues*. Founder of Chic Street Man's School of Performing Arts; featured performer at various U.N. events; and composer of *Permutations* (PBS Great Performances). Film: *Triple Bogey*, *Hangin' with the Home Boys*. Awards: Audelco Award, NAACP Theatre Arts Award, San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critic's Circle Award for Musical Direction. Teaching: Heifetz International School of Music, Seattle Conservatory of Music. Education: UC Santa Cruz.

**Larry Marshall** (*Monroe*) recently appeared as the Mayor in Harbor Light's production of *The Music Man* and has appeared as Danny in the national tour of *Xanadu*. He was last seen on Broadway in *The Color Purple* as Ole Mister. In the summer of 2006, he appeared with Meryl Streep as The General and The Farmer in *Mother Courage* at the Delacorte in Central Park. Some of his other Broadway credits include *Hair*, *Inner City*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Rock-A-Bye Hamlet*, *Comin' Uptown*, *A Broadway Musical*, *Oh Brother!*, *Big Deal*, *Play On!*, *The Full Monty* and *Sportin' Life in Porgy and Bess*, for which he was nominated for Tony and Drama Desk Awards. His movie credits include *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Cotton Club*, *Showtime's Keep the Faith* and the Showtime series *Soul Food*.

**Warner Miller** (*Cephas*) recently appeared in *The Brothers Size* at Seattle Rep. He recently appeared on both coasts in the award-winning premiere of Danai Gurira's *The Convert* directed by Emily Mann at LA's Kirk Douglas Theatre, Chicago's Goodman Theatre and the McCarter Theatre. Selected credits include the world premieres of Dominique Morisseau's *Follow Me to Nellie's* and Tammy Ryan's *Lost Boy Found in Whole Foods* at Premier Stages; August Wilson's *Fences*, directed by Kenny Leon at Huntington Theatre Company; *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* at Syracuse Stage; *The Piano Lesson* at Geva Theatre and Indiana Repertory Theatre; *Paradox of the Urban Cliché* at the LAByrinth Theater Company; the Old Globe Theater's premiere production of *Since Africa*; *False Creeds* at the Alliance Theatre; and *A Raisin in the Sun* at Hartford Stage. Film credits include the role of Melvin Lucas in *American Gangster*; Nicky Lolo in HBO Film's *Wyclef Jean in America*; and Beadle in HBO Film's *Everyday People*. TV credits include *Law & Order* and *CSI: NY*.

**Richard Ziman** (*Tex*) recently returned from Shakespeare Santa Cruz. In two seasons there: Sir John Falstaff in *Henry IV, Parts 1 & 2*; Baisemeaux in *The Man in the Iron Mask*; Richelieu in *The Three Musketeers*. Recent local work: *Damn Yankees* (5th Ave); *Double Indemnity* (ACT Theatre/ San Jose Rep); *Hamlet* (SSC). Broadway:

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*Henry IV, Not About Nightingales, Epic Proportions, Laughter on the 23rd Floor, Lost in Yonkers.* New York Shakespeare Festival: *Twelfth Night, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Julius Caesar, Kit Marlowe, The Normal Heart.* Off Broadway: MTC, Roundabout. Regional: Long Wharf, Huntington, South Coast Rep, Hartford Stage, Intiman, Shakespeare Theater, Portland Stage, Alley, Wilma. Film/TV: *Leverage, The Sopranos, Law & Order, Third Watch, 100 Center Street, Private Parts, Clockers, Hackers.* A native New Yorker and graduate of Juilliard, Richard resides in Seattle with actress Leslie Law.

The **Pullman Porter Blues** creative team also includes Set Designer **Riccardo Hernandez**, Costume Designer **Constanza Romero**, Lighting and Projection Designer **Alexander V. Nichols**, Sound Designer **Leon Rothenberg**, Movement Staging Consultant **Sonia Dawkins**, Stage Manager **Amber Dickerson** and Assistant Stage Manager **Mark Johnson**.

For high-resolution images and video please e-mail [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).

**Pullman Porter Blues** is sponsored by GEICO. Amtrak is the official railway of Arena Stage.

### **Pullman Porter Blues Special Events, Ticket Information and Performance Calendar**

**Bread & Roses** series about work and workers—December 4, 2012 at 6:00 PM  
Join cast members from *Pullman Porter Blues*, local historians and community organizers for *Bread & Roses*, a monthly Busboys and Poets labor series focused on workers and organized labor. Delve into the monumental history of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters - the first African-American union established in America - and its lasting effect on transportation labor unions today. This event will take place on Tuesday, December 4 from 6:00-8:00 p.m. at Busboys and Poet's 5<sup>th</sup> and K Street location and is free and open to the public. For more information, visit [busboysandpoets.com/events/info/bread-roses](http://busboysandpoets.com/events/info/bread-roses).

### **Piano Bar—December 19, 2012**

Following the success of last season's post-show piano bars, Arena Stage continues the popular piano bar tradition this season by hosting a free event during the run of *Pullman Porter Blues*. Grab a drink and gather 'round the piano for show tunes with host Joshua Morgan.

**CATWALK CAFÉ: Prix fixe meals** are now available at the Catwalk Café and include a choice of soup or salad, main entrée and dessert. Pre-ordered meals are only \$19 (\$29 if purchased that day). To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit [arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/prix-fixe/](http://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/prix-fixe/). The Catwalk Café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended.

The Catwalk Café is also offering a special **holiday brunch buffet** on December 2, where audiences can enjoy a meal prior to the 2:00 p.m. matinee of *Pullman Porter Blues*, and also on December 9 and 16 during the holiday season. The brunch buffet begins at 11:00 a.m. and is only \$39 per person (price includes up to two mimosas or Bloody Mary's per person). For a complete menu or to order in advance, visit [arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/winter-buffet](http://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/winter-buffet).

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Pullman Porter Blues* are \$45-\$94, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as student discounts, Southwest Nights, Pay-Your-Page tickets, Family Fun Packs, HOTTIX and Hero's Discounts, visit [arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs](http://arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs). Tickets may be purchased online at [arenastage.org](http://arenastage.org), by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.

<b>Sales Office/Subscriptions</b>	<b>202-488-3300</b>
<b>Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets</b>	<b>202-488-4380</b>
<b>TTY for deaf patrons</b>	<b>202-484-0247</b>
<b>Info for patrons with disabilities</b>	<b>202-488-3300</b>

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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.

Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday, 12/5; Wednesday, 12/12; Tuesday, 12/18; & Wednesday, 12/26.

Full calendar: [tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=14306](https://tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=14306)

**Open-captioned performances:** 12/19 at 7:30 p.m. & 12/27 at 8:00 p.m.

**Audio-described performance:** 12/22 at 2:00 p.m.

**Post-show discussions:** 12/5, 12/12 & 12/18 after the noon show; 12/11 & 12/20 after the evening show.

**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 \$16. 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. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets, and the garage closes one hour after the day's last performance ends. 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.

**VALET PARKING:** Arena Stage offers valet service at no additional cost to patrons with accessibility needs who call 202-488-3300 in advance to request valet parking. On days when valet parking is being used for accessibility, it is also available to general patrons one hour prior to show time for \$25, based on availability. To use valet parking, pull up to the main entrance on Sixth 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 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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