

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 BRINGS INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM, VOICES OF NOW, TO COMMUNITIES IN INDIA THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WITH UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

(Washington, D.C.) **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater's Community Engagement department** has been selected to participate in a pilot program with the **United States Department of State** to set up theater education workshops in cities across India this fall. These workshops are based on the **Voices of Now** program, a drama program created 10 years ago at Arena Stage that offers young artists the unique opportunity to devise and perform a piece of theater based on their own writing. Four members of Arena Stage's Community Engagement department will leave October 8 for a two-and-a-half-week journey to four cities in India.

"We have seen the Voices of Now program grow tremendously over the past several years, and now we have the opportunity to share this dynamic program with the people of India," says **Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "I couldn't be more proud of our staff and teaching artists, who have been singled out by the State Department for this unique honor and chance to engage in cultural diplomacy. In Arena Stage's widening role as a center for American theater, this is an exciting next step for the Voices of Now program."

The goal of this trip, called **Voices of India**, is to give voice to the young people in these communities and to expand this beneficial program internationally. The invitation was a result of public speaking workshops that Arena Stage staff members have held with cultural attachés for the State Department in D.C.

The Arena Stage staff will travel to Kolkata, New Delhi, Patna and Hyderabad, spending a few days in each city. In addition to working creatively with young people, teaching artists will blog and livestream performances to help broaden the reach of these workshops to people beyond these Indian communities. The staff will also hold professional development workshops for street artists and employees of local non-governmental organizations.

Arena Stage Director of Community Engagement Anita Maynard-Losh says: "Voices of Now has been a transformational experience for thousands of students in the D.C. metro area, and we are eager to explore how this process works in a different and exciting environment."

Voices of Now (VON), now in its 11th year, is a yearlong, nationally recognized drama program designed by Arena Stage's Director of Education, Programming, Ashley Forman. Through creative writing, improvisation, movement and acting, VON gives young artists the opportunity to learn about theater and performance, with the ultimate goal of devising and performing a piece of theater based on their own writing that poses difficult questions about social, cultural and emotional issues. Past ensembles have explored critical themes such as living in foster care, loss of a loved one, and learning to live with AIDS, through partnerships with

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organizations like Child and Family Services Agency, The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing, and Metro TeenAIDS, along with local schools. VON has been presented at national conferences, including those for Association for Theatre in Higher Education, American Alliance for Theatre and Education, Theatre in Our Schools and most recently, the 2012 International AIDS Conference.

VON is tailored to middle- and high-school groups in the D.C. metro area and has served more than 10,000 students to date, growing exponentially in the past two years with the creation of the annual Voices of Now Festival. More than 75% percent of eligible students return year after year, and in addition to performing at Arena Stage, ensembles perform throughout their own communities. Past ensembles have performed at the Atlas Performing Arts Center's Intersections Festival, Imagination Stage and the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage. For more information, visit arenastage.org/education/education-programs/voices-of-now/.

Voices of Now is supported by generous grants from the MetLife Foundation, the Howard and Geraldine Polinger Family Foundation, The Theodore H. Barth Foundation, and the Share Fund of The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region.

Additional support of Arena Stage's Community Engagement efforts is provided by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, The Weissberg Foundation, the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, the Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc., the Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation, the Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Fund, the Corina Higginson Trust, Toni A. Ritzenberg, the Anthony Lucas-Spindletop Foundation, the Mars Foundation, Friends of Southwest DC, Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela and the Brock Foundation.

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 sixth decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

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