

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April 12, 2013

**ARENA STAGE HOLDS THE VOICES OF NOW FESTIVAL
A FIVE-DAY EVENT SHOWCASING ORIGINAL PLAYS WRITTEN AND PERFORMED
BY MORE THAN 175 YOUNG ARTISTS FROM THE D.C. AREA
MAY 15-19, 2013 AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER**

***** Thirteen youth ensembles will participate in public performances including a special evening featuring a livestreamed performance to Kolkata, India *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the Voices of Now Festival, a five-day event featuring original works of theater written and performed by 13 different youth ensembles from the internationally renowned Community Engagement program. The festival will bring together more than 175 young artists, ages 11-23, from D.C., Maryland and Virginia who have been working with professional theater artists from Arena Stage for the past year to devise original one-act plays. **The 2013 ensembles will come together May 15-19, 2013 to perform and discuss their work in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle at the Mead Center.** This year's festival will also feature a special performance Saturday, May 18 connecting the 2013 participants in the U.S. with Voices of Now artists in Kolkata, India.

Voices of Now (VON)—currently in its 10th year—gives young artists the opportunity to devise and perform autobiographical theater that poses difficult questions about social, cultural and emotional issues. Through VON there is always a focus on creating works of theater that bring voice to issues of social change and relevancy for the young participants, and this year's plays examine topics including gender equality, sexual identity, emotional well-being, ancestry, how we handle loss, what it means to be an American, the meaning of a home and violence in schools, among others.

"Participants in VON learn they have a voice," shares **Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "They realize through their teaching mentors that they are artists, and most importantly, they believe in what they are saying and doing. When you can get to that level of authenticity, of saying what you need to say—especially with artists so young—it is the ideal form of self-expression. I cannot wait to see the 13 original works this year and yet again be inspired by these emerging talents' genuine capacity to tell their stories."

In Fall 2012, Arena Stage's Community Engagement department embarked on a two-and-a-half week journey through India with the United States Department of State, traveling to Kolkata, New Delhi, Patna and Hyderabad. There they forged relationships with students, ages six and up, and professional artists across India, introducing them to the style, methods and social impact of the Voices of Now program in a growing effort to expand the program internationally. The performance Saturday, May 18 at the Mead Center will be livestreamed via Skype to ensemble members in Kolkata so that participants abroad, who have continued to create work using the Voices of Now program method, can experience a performance by their U.S. counterparts. There will also be further opportunity for engagement between U.S. and India participants with a livestreamed rehearsal taking place on Saturday, May 11 at 10 a.m. EST between the D.C.-based Mentor Ensemble and the Kolkata Ensemble. For more information about Voices of India, including photos, video and personal accounts, visit arenastage.org/education/education-programs.

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“The rapid growth of VON has given us the opportunity to expand this program internationally and raise a community of brave, young artists around the world who are able to transform their life experiences into art and engage in meaningful artistic dialogue with their communities,” adds **Director of Education Ashley Forman**. “When we traveled to India this past fall to implement the program in four different cities, it was amazing to see the VON model at work within multiple communities, languages and cultures, and to see the profound impact that creating and performing autobiographical theater in this fashion can have on young artists and audiences alike.”

“Working with Arena Stage I experienced a different take on theater than I have seen,” says **Kolkata student Arani Acharya**, who participated in the Voices of Now workshops in India. “The use of acting to communicate a message and an abstract concept is something that has greatly inspired me. I am very excited about meeting Arena’s artist-educators again, even if it is not in person, because I really miss their interesting artistic ways, approachability and general awesomeness.”

2013 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Burke School, Burke, VA (FCPS)

Child and Family Services Agency’s Office of Youth Empowerment, Washington, D.C.

Children’s National Medical Center: Teens Against the Spread of AIDS (TASA), Washington, D.C.

Creative Writing Workshop, Washington, D.C.

First Star: Putting Children First

Jefferson Middle School, Washington, D.C. (DCPS)

Key Middle School, Springfield, VA (FCPS)

Kilmer Middle School, Vienna, VA (FCPS)

KIPP D.C. Public Charter School, Washington, D.C.

Metro TeenAIDS, Washington, D.C.

Rachel Carson Middle School, Herndon, VA (FCPS)

Robinson Secondary School, Fairfax, VA (FCPS)

SMYAL House, Washington, D.C.

The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing, Washington, D.C.

Whitman Middle School, Alexandria, VA (FCPS)

Additional ensembles include the Mead Ensemble, a program for students in grades 7-11 that meets at the Mead Center, and the Mentor Ensemble, which is made up of alumni from the various Voices of Now ensembles whose role is to mentor the younger artists in the program.

2013 Voices of Now Performance Schedule

All performances take place in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle

Wednesday, May 15–7:30 p.m.

KIPP D.C. Ensemble, Advocacy Ensemble and Mentor Ensemble

*The Wednesday evening performance will contain mature content.

Thursday, May 16–7:30 p.m.

Jefferson Ensemble, Burke Ensemble and Whitman Ensemble

Friday, May 17–7:30 p.m.

Kilmer Ensemble, Key Ensemble and Youth Empowerment Ensemble (Child and Family Services Agency)

Saturday, May 18–7:30 p.m.

Jefferson Ensemble, Mead Ensemble and Mentor Ensemble

*The Saturday evening performance will be livestreamed to Kolkata, India.

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Sunday, May 19—7:30 p.m.

Robinson Ensemble, Rachel Carson Ensemble and Wendt Center Ensemble

Each ensemble will also have an additional performance for their particular communities. The Wendt Center Ensemble will participate in a forum at the Mead Center on Monday, May 20 at 6:00 p.m., which will include a performance of their play *Present Tense*, a post-show discussion featuring the performers and then a panel of experienced professionals—facilitated by the Wendt Center’s child and family therapist Stephanie Handel, LGSW—will explore the integration of grief supportive services within the school setting. The conversation will also be focused on the benefits and challenges of addressing the needs of grieving students using expressive arts and talk therapy.

Voices of Now (VON) is a yearlong, nationally recognized drama program designed by Arena Stage’s Director of Education 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. VON is tailored to middle and high school groups and is available to schools and various community groups throughout the D.C. metro area. 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 on Voices of Now, visit arenastage.org/education/education-programs/voices-of-now.

Arena Stage’s Community Engagement Department would like to recognize the MetLife Foundation as a supporter of Arena Stage and the Lead Sponsor of Voices of Now. Additionally, Voices of Now Ensembles are supported by the Fairfax County Public Schools, the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing, the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency, the District of Columbia Public Schools and generous grants from The Share Fund of The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, the Howard & Geraldine Polinger Family Foundation, The Theodore H. Barth Foundation, Inc., National Corporate Theatre Fund’s Impact Creativity, GEICO, AT&T and the Mark & Carol Hyman Fund.

Additional support of Arena Stage’s Community Engagement efforts is provided by the U.S. Department of State, the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, the Weissberg Foundation, the D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities, Max & Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc., The Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation, Robert & Natalie Mandel Family Fund, Alice Shaver Foundation, Dorothy G. Bender Foundation, Corina Higginson Trust, Toni A. Ritzenberg, Friends of Southwest D.C., the Anthony Lucas-Spindletop Foundation, Mars Foundation, Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela and the Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc. Without the extraordinary support of all our supporters, VON and our other Community Engagement program offerings would not be possible.



TICKETS: Tickets for the Voices of Now Festival are **FREE**, though reservations are required through the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300.

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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.

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