

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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October 25, 2013

FULL COMPANY ANNOUNCED FOR *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER*  
STARRING MALCOLM-JAMAL WARNER  
DIRECTOR DAVID ESBJORNSON ASSUMES OPPORTUNITY TO DIRECT  
NEW PLAY BY TODD KREIDLER BASED ON THE SCREENPLAY BY WILLIAM ROSE

AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER  
NOVEMBER 29, 2013 – JANUARY 5, 2014

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the full company for *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* starring **Malcolm-Jamal Warner** (*The Cosby Show*, *Malcolm and Eddie*) in his Washington, D.C. theatrical debut as Dr. John Prentice. Under the direction of **David Esbjornson** (Broadway's *Driving Miss Daisy* and Arena's *Red Hot Patriot* starring Kathleen Turner), this heart-warming comedy features many of the same actors who appeared in the world premiere of the play by True Colors Theatre Company in July 2012. Kenny Leon, who collaborated with playwright **Todd Kreidler** on the world premiere and was previously announced to direct for Arena Stage, withdrew from the project due to an unforeseen conflict. The play is adapted from William Rose's screenplay for the 1967 film of the same name starring Sidney Poitier, Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy about a young white woman in the 1960s introducing her family to her charming, accomplished and African-American fiancé. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* runs **November 29, 2013-January 5, 2014 in the Fichandler Stage**.

"We are happy to have David Esbjornson back at Arena after his wonderful production of *Red Hot Patriot* last season," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "He is a real man of the theater. David's work has been seen in major theaters across the country. He is an excellent director and will have strong insight into this American story about love, family, class and race."

The production features veteran actors to Arena Stage and the D.C.-area **Lynda Gravatt** as Matilda Banks; **Eugene Lee** as John Prentice, Sr; **Valerie Leonard** as Hilary St. George; and **Michael Russotto** as Monsignor Ryan, along with Atlanta-based actors, who appeared in the True Colors production, **Andrea Frye** as Mary Prentice (originally as Matilda Banks), **Tom Key** as Matt Drayton, **Tess Malis Kincaid** as Christina Drayton and **Bethany Anne Lind** as Joanna Drayton.

"I am delighted to return to Arena Stage to present Todd Kreidler's exciting, new stage adaptation of what has become a classic American story," adds **Esbjornson**. "It is a privilege to work with this exceptional group of artists who share in the hope that audiences will find the experience of this piece compelling, provocative and perhaps all too relevant."

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## Full company announced for *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*—Page 2

**Todd Kreidler** (*Playwright*) wrote the musical *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, an original story that interweaves the lyrics of Tupac Shakur, aimed for Broadway in 2014. His stage adaptation of the film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* premiered at True Colors Theatre Company. He is also writing a musical based on Nikki Sixx's memoir and music, *The Heroin Diaries*, and a musical adaptation of the film *Drumline*. Currently he is directing August Wilson's one-man show *How I Learned What I Learned* at off-Broadway's Signature Theatre. He originally directed and co-conceived the piece with Mr. Wilson performing at Seattle Repertory Theatre in 2003. On Broadway, Mr. Kreidler was dramaturg on *Radio Golf* and *Gem of the Ocean* as well as associate director of the Tony Award-winning revival of *Fences*. He was associate artistic director of *August Wilson's 20th Century* at the Kennedy Center where he directed *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. Mr. Kreidler worked with August Wilson for six years developing plays on Broadway and in theaters around the country. He also collaborated with Mr. Wilson developing the screenplay adaptation of *Fences*. Mr. Kreidler co-founded the August Wilson Monologue Competition, a national program aimed at integrating August Wilson's work into high school curriculum.

**David Esbjornson** (*Director*) returns to Arena Stage after directing Margaret Engel's and Allison Engel's *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*. David also directed productions of *Red Hot Patriot* at Philadelphia Theatre Company and Geffen Playhouse. Premieres include Edward Albee's *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (Broadway) and *The Play About the Baby* (Century); *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* (Broadway) and *Resurrection Blues* by Arthur Miller (Guthrie); *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and the first staged presentation of *Perestroika* (Eureka); *Homebody/Kabul* (London); Neal Bell's *Therese Raquin* (CSC); *In the Blood* by Suzan-Lori Parks (Public); Albom/Hatcher's *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Minetta Lane); Israel Horowitz' *My Old Lady* (Promenade); Kathleen Tolan's *Memory House* (Playwrights); Ariel Dorfman's *Purgatorio*; Kevin Kling's *How? How? Why? Why? Why? Why?* (SRT) and Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's *Abigail/1702* (NYSF). Recent work includes *Lady from Dubuque* (SRT); *Measure for Measure* (NYSF Delacorte); Moira Buffini's *Gabriel* and Peter Parnell's *Trumpery* (Atlantic). Revivals include *Driving Miss Daisy* (Broadway and West End), *Death of a Salesman* (Gate-Dublin); *Hamlet* (TFNY); *A Few Good Men* (West End); *All My Sons* (Huntington); *Much Ado About Nothing* (NYSF); *The Normal Heart* (Public); *Mud and Drowning* (Signature); *The Entertainer*, *The Maids*, *Endgame* and *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (CSC); *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Summer and Smoke* (Guthrie); and *Farmyard* (NYTW). David has served as Artistic Director of NYC Classic Stage Company and Seattle Repertory Theatre and is the current Chair of Theatre at Rutgers's University.

### **The cast of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (in alphabetical order)**

**Andrea Frye** (*Mary Prentice*) most recently appeared as Tilly in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* for True Colors in Atlanta and as Mama Nadi in *Ruined* at the St. Louis Black Repertory for which she won "Best Actress in a Play" from the River Front Times and was nominated in the same category by the Kevin Kline Awards. Also in Atlanta, she appeared in *The Ladies' Man* at Theatre in the Square, Pearl Cleage's *The Nacarema Society...* at the Alliance Theatre and Alabama Shakespeare, and *Shakin' the Mess Otta Misery* at the Horizon Theatre Company. Other credits include *Intimate Apparel* at the Alliance Theatre, and *Oo Bla Dee*, *Pericles*, *Night of the Iguana*, *Stop Kiss*, *Seven Guitars*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Playboy of the West Indies* and *Martha* in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Andrea serves as an Artistic Associate for the Youth Ensemble of Atlanta and Theatre Consultant for the National Black Arts Festival.

**Lynda Gravatt** (*Matilda Banks*) returns to Arena Stage, where she played Mabel in *Crowns* (Helen Hayes Award). Other D.C. appearances include the Kennedy Center (*August Wilson's 20th Century*), Ford's (*Member of the Wedding*) and Studio Theatre (*The Old Settler*; Helen Hayes nomination). She has directed award-winning productions of *Hair*, *The Wiz* and *Dreamgirls* at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Regional highlights include Lena in *A Raisin in the Sun* (Westport, Hartford Stage, Connecticut Critics Award), Bunch in *Polk County* (Berkeley, McCarter) and Jesus Christ in *Miss Witherspoon* (McCarter). Off-Broadway credits

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include *Zooman and the Sign*, *King Hedley II*, *The Little Foxes*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Dividing the Estate* and *The Old Settler*. Broadway credits include *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Doubt*, *King Hedley II* and *45 Seconds from Broadway*. TV credits include *Person of Interest*, *30 Rock*, *Elementary*, *Good Wife*, *Sex and the City*, *Hoop Life* and *Law & Order*. Film credits include *Bounty Hunter*, *I Hate Valentine's Day*, *Unanswered Questions* and upcoming *Delivery Man*. Lynda is a recipient of a Theatre World Award and three Audelco Awards, a proud graduate of Howard University and a member of Actor's Equity.

**Tom Key** (*Matt Drayton*) makes his Arena Stage debut with *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, having originated this role for Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre Company. Since 1995, Tom has served as Executive Artistic Director of Atlanta's Theatrical Outfit where performances include *Red* (Mark Rothko, Suzi Bass Award Best Production), *The Young Man From Atlanta* (Will, Suzi Bass nomination), *Big River* (Pap, Duke, Suzi Bass Award, Featured Actor, Suzi Bass Award Best Musical) and *Blood Knot* (with Kenny Leon). Directing credits include Horton Foote's *The Chase* and *Dividing the Estate*; and adaptations produced include Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces* and Walker Percy's *Lost in the Cosmos* and *The Moviegoer*. Off-Broadway, he performed at The Alliance Theatre and Dallas Theatre Center in *Cotton Patch Gospel* that he co-authored with Russell Treyz and Harry Chapin. Alliance Theatre appearances include *Grapes of Wrath* (Casey), *Art*, *Woody Guthrie's American Song* and *A Christmas Carol* (Scrooge).

**Tess Malis Kincaid** (*Christina Drayton*) makes her Arena debut with this production. She has appeared frequently on Atlanta stages in roles including Barbara in *August: Osage County* and Liz Eliason in *Broke* at the Alliance Theatre (Suzi Bass Awards for Outstanding Leading Actress for both); Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, and others at Georgia Shakespeare (where she is an Associate Artist); Emma in *Betrayal* at Aurora Theatre; Blanche Yurka in *Swell Party* at Georgia Ensemble; and Christina Drayton in the world premiere of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* with Phylicia Rashad at Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre. Regional work includes the world premiere Libby Appel's adaptation of *Seagull* at Marin Theatre. Film and TV includes *House of Payne* (two episodes) and *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*. Tess lives in Atlanta with her husband, actor Mark Kincaid, and their beautiful daughter, Barbara Rose.

**Eugene Lee** (*John Prentice, Sr.*) returns to Arena for the third time after first being here in the early 90's as a playwright with his play, *East Texas Hot Links* and recently onstage in Marcus Garvey's, *every tongue confess*. He has worked on stage in the D.C. area at Ford's Theatre on tour with *A Soldier's Play* and recently in the *August Wilson's 20th Century* at the Kennedy Center. On Broadway he appeared in August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. Off-Broadway and regionally he has performed with the Negro Ensemble Company, Crossroads Theatre Company, WPA Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, Goodman Theatre, Walnut Street Theatre and Alliance Theatre. Film credits include *Parkland*, *Coach Carter* and the title role in the soon to be released independent feature, *Wolf*. TV credits include *Good Times*, *The White Shadow* and *The Women of Brewster Place* as Oprah Winfrey's son, Basil.

**Valerie Leonard** (*Hilary St. George*) returns to Arena Stage, where she previously appeared in *A Man's A Man* and *Theophilus North*. A multiple Helen Hayes Award nominee, her DC area credits include Shakespeare Theatre Company (*Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Titus Andronicus*), Signature Theatre (*A Fox on the Fairway*), Olney Theatre Center (more than 20 productions including *Therese Raquin*, *Copenhagen*, *Night of the Iguana* and *Jacques Brel*), Rep Stage (*A Lie of the Mind*, *Hamlet*), Catalyst (*The Elephant Man*), The Studio Theatre, Theater J and Bay Theatre (Associate Artist). On Broadway, Valerie appeared in Sir Peter Hall's *An Ideal Husband* and in two national tours as Gwendolyn Pigeon in *The Odd Couple* (with Tony Randall and Jack Klugman) and as Maggie in *Lend Me a Tenor*. Off-Broadway, she has performed at Signature Theatre Company, The Pearl Theatre Company and Mirror Repertory. Some of her regional credits include American Conservatory Theatre, McCarter Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Two River Theatre Company, Fulton Opera House and Missouri Repertory Theatre. Valerie is a proud member of Actors' Equity.

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**Bethany Anne Lind** (*Joanna Drayton*) makes her Arena debut, last appearing in D.C. as Leigh in the critically acclaimed world premiere of *Really, Really* at Signature Theatre. She has originated many roles in world premieres including *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* at Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre, *Carapace* and *26 Miles* at Alliance Theatre, *Night Blooms* at Horizon Theatre and *The Storytelling Ability of a Boy* at Florida Stage. Other regional work includes La Jolla Playhouse (*His Girl Friday*), Alliance Theatre (*August: Osage County*), True Colors (*Our Town*) and Georgia Shakespeare (*Metamorphoses* and *The Glass Menagerie*). Recent film work includes *Flight* with Denzel Washington, *Mean Girls 2* and the recently released *Crackerjack* produced by Jeff Foxworthy. Bethany has also appeared on the small screen in *Army Wives* and *Drop Dead Diva*.

**Michael Russotto** (*Monsignor Ryan*) returns to Arena Stage, where he has previously appeared in *Legacy of Light*, *On the Jump* and *The Wild Duck*. He is a member of the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Acting Company where he has performed in many productions including *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* (Helen Hayes Award nomination for Outstanding Ensemble), *A Bright New Boise* (Helen Hayes Award nomination for Outstanding Lead Actor) and *She Stoops to Comedy* (Helen Hayes Award nomination for Outstanding Lead Actor). Other D.C. credits include *Rancho Mirage* and *Neville's Island* at Olney Theatre Center, *Art* at Signature Theatre, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado About Nothing* at Folger Theatre, *The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg* at the Kennedy Center and *Lonely Planet* at MetroStage. Michael has also worked at Rep Stage, Theater Alliance, Washington Stage Guild, Adventure Theatre and Studio Theatre. Film credits include *Playing Through* and *Death of a Nation*. Radio credits include *Seven Days in May* for L.A. Theatre Works. He has narrated hundreds of recorded books for Books on Tape and the Library of Congress.

**Malcolm-Jamal Warner** (*Dr. John Prentice*) is not only a seasoned actor, but an accomplished musician, director and producer. Malcolm first rose to national prominence appearing in the television series *The Cosby Show*. His work on the show garnered him an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series. Other television credits include NBC's hit show *Community*, TNT's *Hawthorne*, CBS' *The Cleaner*, Showtime's *Dexter* and BET's original series *Reed Between the Lines*. As a director, Malcolm has worked on television series including *Malcolm & Eddie*, *The Cosby Show*, *All That*, *Keenan & Kel*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Sesame Street*, *Reed Between the Lines* and the AIDS awareness video *Timeout: The Truth about HIV, AIDS, and YOU* (NAACP Key of Life Image Award). His short film, *This Old Man*, received critical acclaim on the theater festival circuit. Malcolm made his feature film debut in Paramount Pictures' *Drop Zone* and was also seen in Warner Bros' Pictures *Fools Gold*. He also co-starred in the independent films *Restaurant* with Adrien Brody, *A Fare to Remember* and *The List* with Wayne Brady. Theater credits include *Three Ways Home*, *Cryin' Shame* (NAACP Theater Award for Best Supporting Actor) and *Freefall* at the Victory Gardens Theater in Chicago; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the La Jolla Playhouse in California; and the West Coast debut of his one-man theatrical production of *Love and Other Social Issues*. Malcolm plays bass guitar in his jazz-funk band Miles Long. The band has performed in several major jazz festivals and recently performed at the historic Apollo Theater. Malcolm's CD's are available on iTunes.

The creative team for *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* includes Set Designer **Kat Conley**, Costume Designer **Paul Tazewell**, Lighting Designer **Allen Lee Hughes**, Sound Designer **Timothy M. Thompson**, Wig Designer **Anne Nesmith**, Stage Manager **William E. Cruttenden III** and Assistant Stage Manager **Michael D. Ward**.

Full company bios and images available upon request. Please e-mail [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).

### **Guess Who's Coming to Dinner Special Events**

#### **Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Dinners—November 16, 2013**

In the spirit of Arena Stage's upcoming *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, Arena Stage will host several dinners throughout D.C., Maryland and Virginia with surprise notable guests at each dinner. All venues will begin with cocktails at 7:00 p.m., followed by dinner. For further details and to RSVP, please contact Maria Corso at 202-600-4025 or [mcorso@ArenaStage.org](mailto:mcorso@ArenaStage.org).

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### Third Annual Military Thanksgiving—November 29, 2013

Every year, hundreds of D.C.-area military families are forced to spend the Thanksgiving holiday away from loved ones. In gratitude for their service, Arena Stage is inviting wounded warriors, their families and military families with deployed service members to an elegant Thanksgiving dinner and a performance of the heartwarming comedy *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* at Arena Stage Friday, November 29. For more information about the Military Thanksgiving event and how you can get involved, please contact Maria Corso at 202-600-4025 or [mcorso@ArenaStage.org](mailto:mcorso@ArenaStage.org).

### Post-Show Discussions with Artists and Staff

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation. December 10, 11 and 18 following the noon matinee; December 17 following the 7:30 p.m. performance and December 19 following the 8:00 p.m. performance.

### Production Information

#### ***Guess Who's Coming to Dinner***

By Todd Kreidler

Based on the screenplay by William Rose

November 29, 2013-January 5, 2014 in the Fichandler Stage

**ABOUT:** Television actor Malcolm-Jamal Warner (*The Cosby Show*, *Malcolm & Eddie*) makes his Arena Stage debut in a new adaptation of the beloved film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. A progressive white couple's proud liberal sensibilities are put to the test when their daughter, fresh from an overseas romance, brings her African-American fiancé home to meet them. Personal beliefs clash with the mores of the late 60's in this warm and witty exploration of family and culture and knowing which of them has the greater hold on our hearts.

#### **CAST:**

Mary Prentice: Andrea Frye

Matilda Binks: Lynda Gravátt

Matt Drayton: Tom Key

Christina Drayton: Tess Malis Kincaid

John Prentice Sr.: Eugene Lee

Hilary St. George: Valerie Leonard

Joanna Drayton: Bethany Anne Lind

Monsignor Ryan: Michael Russotto

Dr. John Prentice: Malcolm-Jamal Warner

#### **CREATIVE TEAM:**

Director: David Esbjornson

Set Designer: Kat Conley

Costume Designer: Paul Tazewell

Lighting Designer: Allen Lee Hughes

Sound Designer: Timothy M. Thompson

Stage Manager: William E. Cruttenden III

Assistant Stage Manager: Michael D. Ward

### **Plan Your Visit**

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* are \$40-\$90, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as student discounts, Southwest Nights, Pay-Your-Age tickets, Family Fun Packs 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.

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

### PERFORMANCE DATES:

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 Tuesday, 12/10; Wednesday 12/11 & Wednesday, 12/18  
Full calendar: [tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=16211](https://tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=16211)

**Open-captioned performances:** 12/11 at 7:30 p.m. & 12/12 at 8:00 p.m.

**Audio-described performance:** 12/28 at 2:00 p.m. & 1/4 at 2:00 p.m.

**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 \$21 (\$23 if purchased that day). To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit [arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/](https://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/). The Catwalk Café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended.

To **pre-order drinks** from the Catwalk Café for up to 50% savings (\$5 house wine and beer), visit [tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007](https://tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007).

**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 Producer 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](https://arenastage.org)*

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