

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Greta Hays/Kirstin M. Franko
press@arenastage.org, 202-600-4056

September 11, 2013

ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES FULL COMPANY FOR WORLD PREMIERE OF RESIDENT PLAYWRIGHT CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT'S *LOVE IN AFGHANISTAN* OCTOBER 11-NOVEMBER 17, 2013

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the full company for **Charles Randolph-Wright's** world premiere drama *Love in Afghanistan*. Randolph-Wright, a Resident Playwright through Arena Stage's American Voices New Play Institute and director of *Motown the Musical* currently on Broadway, joins forces with director **Lucie Tiberghien** (MCC Theater's *Don't Go Gentle*) to bring to life the tale of two fantastically different people discovering love in the most unlikely of places: war-torn Afghanistan. One, an emerging hip-hop artist, the other, a high-level Afghan interpreter, both fight to navigate the pitfalls of romance, religious differences and political unrest. *Love in Afghanistan* runs **October 11-November 17, 2013 in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle**.

Arena Stage introduces **Melis Aker** as young interpreter Roya and **Khris Davis** as American music star Duke. Aker, a recent graduate of Tufts University and native of Turkey, and Davis, a Philadelphia-based actor, make their D.C.-area debuts. They are joined by **Joseph Kamal** (last seen at Arena Stage in *Anthems: Culture Clash in the District* directed by Randolph-Wright) as Roya's father Sayeed and D.C.-area actress **Dawn Ursula** (Woolly Mammoth's *The Convert*) in her Arena Stage debut as Duke's mother Desiree.

"Arena Stage is a home for American voices, and it is exhilarating to see Charles' remarkable new play come to fruition here as part of his playwright residency," says **Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "Charles has established himself both as a strong playwright and terrific director, and we're thrilled to share this unique depiction of Afghanistan as his ninth production at Arena Stage."

"I could not be more thrilled to have embarked on this journey with Charles at Arena Stage," adds **Tiberghien**. "The story he is telling in *Love in Afghanistan*, as well as the themes he is exploring, are exhilarating and uniquely thought-provoking. They will undoubtedly generate most extraordinary conversations with Arena's audience. What does it take to thrive as a young woman in Afghanistan today? What does it mean to be a rap star in the United States? How do these two compare? These are only a few of the questions we will be asking and discussing in this play and I am honored to be a part of the conversation."

Randolph-Wright began his three-year residency with Arena Stage in January 2011, and through his research for *Love in Afghanistan* took the opportunity to connect with numerous individuals and organizations to deepen the authenticity of the script. To further explore themes in the play, Arena Stage will host panel discussions focused on Afghan women's issues, the potential effect of U.S. troops pulling out of Afghanistan and Afghan culture beyond what is portrayed in the media. **Details for these events are included in the Public Arena section below.**

—continued—

Full company announced for *Love in Afghanistan*—Page 2

“Over the years, Arena Stage has given me an amazing gift—the gift of possibility,” shares **Randolph-Wright**. “There have been no limits to what I could try, as a director and now as a resident playwright. I read stories about families in Afghanistan that stunned, fascinated and inspired me, and immediately knew that inspiration would weave somehow into a play. The resulting *Love in Afghanistan* is a surprising love story in the midst of war. I’m elated to premiere it in the Kogod Cradle—a thrilling space with incredible energy where I’ve wanted to work since I first saw it.”

Charles Randolph-Wright (*Playwright*) is a resident playwright at Arena Stage where his plays *Blue* and *Cuttin’ Up* premiered prior to productions all over the U.S. Charles directed *Sophisticated Ladies*, *Guys and Dolls* (both starring Maurice Hines), *Oak and Ivy*, *Anthem*, *Senor Discretion Himself* and *Ruined* at Arena Stage. Charles most recently directed the smash hit *Motown the Musical* on Broadway. Other directing credits include *Porgy and Bess* (75th anniversary international tour), *Through the Night* (with Daniel Beaty in NYC and LA), *They’re Playing Our Song* (in Portuguese in Brazil), *Love/Life* (starring Brian Stokes Mitchell, Lincoln Center), *The Diva is Dismissed* (starring Jenifer Lewis, NYSF Public Theatre) and *Blood Knot* (featuring music by Tracy Chapman, ACT). Other playwriting credits include *The Night is a Child* (starring JoBeth Williams, Pasadena Playhouse), *Homework* (with Kim Coles, Crossroads) and *Just Between Friends* (Bea Arthur on Broadway). Charles directed the award-winning film *Preaching to the Choir*. His TV directing credits include *Lincoln Heights*, *South of Nowhere* and the European *Freestyle* campaign for Nike. Charles has written screenplays for HBO, Showtime, Disney and Fox, and produced and wrote the series *Linc’s*. Charles is an honors graduate of Duke University where he was an A.B. Duke Scholar.

Lucie Tiberghien (*Director*) *Don’t Go Gentle*, Stephen Belber (world premiere, MCC at The Lucille Lortel Theater), *Blood and Gifts*, JT Rogers (La Jolla Playhouse), *Blind*, Craig Wright (world premiere, Rattlestick), *Geometry of Fire*, Stephen Belber (world premiere, Rattlestick and New York Stage and Film), *Hoodoo Love*, Katori Hall (world premiere, Cherry Lane), *A Small Melodramatic Story*, Stephen Belber (world premiere, LAByrinth), *Great Falls*, Lee Blessing (world premiere, Humana Festival), *We Are Here*, Tracy Thorne (CATF), *The Winning Streak*, Lee Blessing (George Street Playhouse), *The Pavilion*, Craig Wright (Rattlestick and CATF), *Flag Day*, Lee Blessing (world premiere, CATF), *Augusta*, Richard Dresser (world premiere, CATF), *The Last Schwartz*, Deborah Laufer (CATF), *Quand j’avais cinq ans je m’ai tué*, Howard Buten (Théâtre Jean Vilar, Paris). At Julliard: *Boston Marriage*, David Mamet; *Mine*, Laura Marks (Playwright’s Festival); *Hurt Village*, Katori Hall (Playwright’s Festival); *The Misanthrope*, Molière; *Air Conditioning*, Tommy Smith (Playwright’s Festival). Translations into English: *An Ordinary Day*, Eric Assous; *Only the End of the World*, Jean Luc Lagarce. Into French: Stephen Belber’s *Tape* and *Match* (three month run at Le Théâtre de la Madeleine in Paris in 2010 and a four month tour throughout France and Switzerland in 2011/12). Lucie is French and was a dancer in Paris until she moved to New York in 1995.

The Cast of *Love in Afghanistan* (in alphabetical order)

Melis Aker (*Roya*) makes her Arena Stage debut. Previous regional credits include *I Capture the Castle* (Cassandra), *Double Indemnity* (Lola), *These Shining Lives* (Pearl) at Stoneham Theatre and *Vinegar Tom* (Betty) with Whistler in the Dark Theatre. Melis is from Turkey, holds a BA in Drama and minor in Philosophy from Tufts University and a summer certificate from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Tufts highlights include *Oedipus & Antigone* (Antigone), *Macbeth* (Lady Macbeth), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Lady Bracknell) and *Elektra* (Elektra). Melis also attended the 2012 Edinburgh Fringe Festival in *Proof* (Catherine) and appeared in Simon Studio’s *Bard at the Bar* at the Players Club in New York.

Khris Davis (*Duke*) makes his D.C.-area debut. He has worked primarily out of Philadelphia at theaters including the Quintessence Theatre Group (*Othello*, *Antigone* and various other classics) and the Adrienne Theater (*First Breeze of Summer*). Khris has worked regionally at The Philadelphia Theatre Company (*Ruined*), The Walnut Street Theatre and the Arden Theatre Company and has also appeared in an episode of HBO’s *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

—continued—

Full company announced for *Love in Afghanistan*—Page 3

Joseph Kamal (Sayeed) returns to Arena Stage where he was last seen in *Anthems: Culture Clash* directed by Charles Randolph-Wright. He has also worked at Shakespeare Theatre Company and at Center Stage in Baltimore. He recently completed a production of *Prometheus Bound* at The Getty Villa in Los Angeles. He has appeared on Broadway in *Dinner at Eight* at Lincoln Center and off-Broadway at several theaters including New York Theater Workshop, The New Group, The Atlantic Theater and The Culture Project; regionally at La Jolla Playhouse, Berkeley Rep, The Huntington Theater and ACT Seattle, among others. Film and television credits include *Preaching to the Choir* (directed by Charles) and guest star appearances on *NCIS*, *24*, *Law & Order*, *The Unit* and *Lincoln Heights* (directed by Charles). He currently resides in Los Angeles, California.

Dawn Ursula (Desiree) makes her first appearance at Arena Stage. Other Washington area appearances include Prudence in *The Convert* at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, where she is a company member, and Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun* at Everyman Theatre, where she is also a company member. She earned a 2011 Helen Hayes nomination for Outstanding Supporting Actress (and Ensemble) and a 2011 Baltimore City Paper Best Actress Award for the aforementioned roles, respectively. Dawn has performed locally and regionally with such theatres as Hangar, True Colors, The Kennedy Center, Rep Stage, Imagination Stage, Round House and African Continuum. TV credits include HBO's *The Wire* and PBS' *Prince Among Slaves*. She is a founding member of Galvanize.

The creative team for *Love in Afghanistan* includes Set Designer **Daniel Conway**, Costume Designer **Kathleen Geldard**, Lighting Designer **Mark Lanks**, Sound Designer **Elisheba Ittoop**, Institute Dramaturg **Jocelyn Clarke** and Stage Manager **Christi Spann**.

Full company bios and images available upon request. Please e-mail press@arenastage.org.

Love in Afghanistan is a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award.

[The Public Arena: Love in Afghanistan](#)

For complete, up-to-date information, visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/love-in-afghanistan/events/.

Post-Show Discussions with Artists and Staff

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation. November 5 and 6 following the noon matinee; November 7 following the 8:00 p.m. performance and November 12 following the 7:30 p.m. performance.

Engage@ArenaStage Panel Series

Panel discussions feature experts in the content/ideas presented by the performance.

What's It Like to Be a Woman in Afghanistan?

October 26, 2013 following 2:00 p.m. matinee

From education to voting rights to physical safety, Afghanistan is one of the most challenging places in the world to be a woman right now. Join us for a post-show discussion exploring women's rights in Afghanistan—the peril, the progress and the potential. Panelists include **Anita McBride**, former chief of staff to First Lady Laura Bush and a member of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council, Aschiana Foundation Board Member **Homira Nassery** and **Faheema Eissar**, volunteer administrator with the Initiative to Educate Afghan Women.

—continued—

Full company announced for *Love in Afghanistan*—Page 4

Afghanistan—What's Going to Happen After We Leave?

November 16, 2013 following 2:00 p.m. matinee

Love in Afghanistan raises many questions, including: What's going to happen after American military presence withdraws? What does the U.S. exit strategy mean for Afghanistan, and for the men and women who have worked closely with U.S. forces? Join us for an in-depth discussion with Afghan journalist **Shafi Sharifi** and U.S. Army Reserve Captain **Matt Zeller**, who served as a combat adviser in Afghanistan, exploring the current climate and the future, including issues affecting Afghan translators, security, elections, women's rights and youth activism.

Beyond the Headlines: Discovering Afghanistan

November 17, 2013 following 1:00 p.m. matinee

Most Americans know little about Afghan culture, which is rarely covered by the media focused on conflict. Go beyond the headlines with authors **Stephen Landrigan** and **Qais Akbar Omar** to explore the heart of Afghan culture that remains unknown to most Americans and discover what it takes to build a future for this vibrant country. Landrigan and Omar are co-authors of *Shakespeare in Kabul*, and Omar recently released the memoir *A Fort of Nine Towers*.

Production Information

Love in Afghanistan

By Charles Randolph-Wright

October 11-November 17, 2013 in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle

ABOUT: From resident playwright Charles Randolph-Wright (*Blue, Cuttin' Up*) comes a daring world premiere drama set to take audiences on a thrilling, romantic adventure in a chaotic land. Meet Duke and Roya, two fantastically different people discovering love in the most unlikely of places: war-torn Afghanistan. One, an emerging hip-hop artist, the other, a high-level Afghan interpreter, both fight to navigate the pitfalls of romance, religious differences and political unrest.

CAST:

Roya: Melis Aker

Duke: Khris Davis

Sayeed: Joseph Kamal

Desiree: Dawn Ursula

CREATIVE TEAM:

Director: Lucie Tiberghien

Set Designer: Daniel Conway

Costume Designer: Kathleen Geldard

Lighting Designer: Mark Lanks

Sound Designer: Elisheba Ittoop

Stage Manager: Christi Spann

Plan Your Visit

TICKETS: Tickets for *Love in Afghanistan* 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, HOTTIX and Hero's Discounts, visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs/. Tickets may be purchased online at arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.

—continued—

Full company announced for *Love in Afghanistan*—Page 5

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, 11/5 & Wednesday, 11/6
Full calendar: tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=15907

Open-captioned performances: 10/30 at 7:30 p.m. & 11/14 at 8:00 p.m.

Audio-described performance: 11/16 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/. 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.

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

Follow Arena Stage on **Twitter** @arenastage or twitter.com/arenastage and mention *Love in Afghanistan* with #LoveinAfghanistan. Find us on **Facebook** at facebook.com/arenastage.

###