

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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MOLLY SMITH CELEBRATES 15 YEARS AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF ARENA STAGE

OPENING OF *THE VELOCITY OF AUTUMN* TONIGHT MARKS 25TH PRODUCTION DIRECTED BY SMITH

(Washington, D.C.) With the official opening of Eric Coble's dangerous new play *The Velocity of Autumn* tonight, September 18 at 8:00 p.m. at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, the occasion marks Artistic Director Molly Smith's 25th project to direct for Arena Stage and is the first of three projects she will direct in the 2013/14 season, including Kathleen Turner in *Mother Courage and Her Children* and the world premiere of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Lawrence Wright's *Camp David*. Building on 15 years with the company, Smith is steadfast in her focus on American plays and artists.

"We continue to be absolutely thrilled to have Molly as Arena's artistic director and visionary leader," comments Arena Stage Board Chair **Beth Newburger Schwartz**. "She is clearly one of the most fabulous directors working in theater today. Her unwavering commitment to artists and our community and her focus on maximizing Arena's ability to contribute to the future of American theater inspires confidence and excitement not only here in Washington but in theaters across the country. We can't wait to see what she does next."

"It has been my pleasure to work with Molly over the last four years," adds Executive Producer **Edgar Dobie**. "I admired her commitment to American writers and new work from afar and have grown even more in awe as we have worked together. Arena Stage is an artistic home for so many artists because of Molly's leadership."

Smith has been instrumental in leading the reinvention of Arena Stage, focusing on the creation of the Mead Center for American Theater and positioning Arena Stage as a center for the production, presentation, development and study of American theater. Smith is a great believer in first, second and third productions of new work and has been a leader in new play development for more than 30 years, during her time at Perseverance Theatre in Alaska—the theater she founded and led for 19 years—and at Arena Stage.

Her focus on American voices has made Arena Stage the largest theater company nationally dedicated to American plays and artists. Smith has a passion for the gold-standard musical and a drive to re-invent them in the theater in-the-round. She helped launch the [American Voices New Play Institute](#) featuring residencies for playwrights including Amy Freed, Katori Hall, Samuel D. Hunter, Lisa Kron, Charles Randolph-Wright and Karen Zacarias, as well as the local writers' initiative Playwrights' Arena and a robust commissioning program.

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During her time with the company, Arena Stage has workshopped well over 100 productions, produced 22 world premieres, staged numerous second and third productions and has been an important part of nurturing six projects that went on to have a life on Broadway. Some of her Arena Stage directing credits include: *My Fair Lady*, *The Music Man*, *Oklahoma!* (top grossing show in Arena's history featuring a return engagement due to popular demand), *South Pacific*, *Moon for the Misbegotten*, *How I Learned to Drive* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

"I remember when I interviewed to become artistic director and I had the inspiration to focus on American work," reflects **Smith**. "Can it have been 15 years ago? Much has happened in our country during that time, which makes this focus even more powerful than it was then. Who are we as a country? What are our passions and obsessions? What is the American personality and how can theater show us who we are today and who we might become? I am thrilled by the wonderful audiences who come to Arena to explore these questions with us and the artists who are drawn to work here."

In regards to his work with Smith on *The Velocity of Autumn*, **Eric Coble** shares, "Molly has brought true insight and courage to our work on this script, taking it to depths it had never attained before. She's a true collaborator, bringing her own sharp instincts to the play while being incredibly open to the ideas and inspirations of myself and the actors. The result is a play that's not only honest and funny, but is going to touch a lot of people, open a lot of conversations. I couldn't be more thrilled."

The Velocity of Autumn stars stage and screen veteran and Academy Award winner **Estelle Parsons** (*Bonnie and Clyde*, *Roseanne*) and two-time Tony Award winner **Stephen Spinella** (*Angels in America*, HBO's upcoming film *The Normal Heart*) in their Arena Stage debuts. The play, produced by special arrangement with HOP Theatricals, LLC., introduces us to Alexandra, a 79-year-old woman living a solitary existence in her Brooklyn brownstone with her fleeting memories and enough explosives to take down most of the block. At an impasse with her family over how she should spend her autumn years, her long-absent son enters as an unlikely mediator. ***The Velocity of Autumn* runs through October 20, 2013 in the Kreeger Theater.**

To visit the online press room for *The Velocity of Autumn*, featuring high-resolution press images and production information including biographies, visit: arenastage.org/news-press/press-room/press-kits-photos/productions/the-velocity-of-autumn (username: arenapress/password: arena1314). HD production b-roll available upon request.

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

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