

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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December 9, 2013

**AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT/PERFORMER DANIEL BEATY RETURNS TO ARENA STAGE
IN *THE TALLEST TREE IN THE FOREST* DIRECTED BY MOISÉS KAUFMAN
JANUARY 10-FEBRUARY 16, 2014**

***** New music-infused play from Tectonic Theater Project incorporates 14 songs and a live band to shine light on legendary artist and activist Paul Robeson *****

(Washington, D.C.) Following the world premiere co-production at Kansas City Repertory Theatre and La Jolla Playhouse, playwright and performer **Daniel Beaty** brings *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* to Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. Beaty, whose work has been seen at Arena Stage as a playwright with his play *Resurrection* and as a performer in his award-winning solo play *Emergency* channels close to 40 characters in *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* in a “tour de force” (*San Diego Reader*) performance, giving audiences an intimate look at one of the most dynamic and controversial figures in history—artist and activist Paul Robeson. Tony Award nominee **Moisés Kaufman** (playwright and director for Broadway’s *33 Variations*, which received its world premiere at Arena Stage in 2007) directs this music-infused new play that features 14 songs and an onstage band. Developed and produced by Tectonic Theater Project, *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* runs **January 10-February 16, 2014 in the Kreeger Theater** and will play the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles following the Arena Stage run.

“Daniel Beaty is a quadruple threat: artist, scholar, activist and humanitarian,” says **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. “It is by presenting important historical figures like Robeson and remembering our past that we know our present. Daniel inspires me and I am grateful to have his artistry at Arena Stage this season.”

“Working with Moisés on this project has been an extraordinary process of experimenting with form, asking challenging questions and being relentless in our efforts to create a theatrical experience that endeavors to mirror the complexity and richness of its subject,” shares **Beaty**. “Moisés and the entire Tectonic family have been amazing collaborators. I first met Moisés while performing at Arena, and am so pleased that has led to this remarkable collaboration and my return to D.C.”

Tectonic Theater Project, Beaty and Kaufman have been developing this piece since 2011. During that period the play received multiple workshops and was selected by the Guggenheim for its “Works & Process” series. Employing multi-character transformation, monologues, narrative scenes, heightened poetry and video footage of the era, this theatrical work explores the evolution of Robeson as an artist/activist, his humanity, his courage, his contradictions and why many call him the “tallest tree in the forest.” Robeson was a scholar, an athlete, an activist, a vocalist and an actor on stage and screen. Born the son of a slave, he was celebrated by the elite and rose to the heights of fame as the voice of the everyman around the world. Then, he saw it all put into question during the McCarthy era, as questions of his Communist leanings plagued his reputation and career.

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“Daniel is one of the most brilliant artists working today in American theater and I was thrilled when he approached me about *The Tallest Tree in the Forest*,” adds Kaufman. “As a writer and performer he gets to the heart of his characters through fearless exploration. Collaborating with Daniel for over two years has allowed us to envelop ourselves into Robeson's immense world.”

Daniel Beaty (*Playwright/Performer*) last appeared at Arena Stage in *Emergence-See!* (now re-titled *Emergency*). His play *Resurrection* was performed as part of Arena's 2008/09 season. Daniel is an award-winning actor, singer, writer and motivational speaker. His critically acclaimed plays *Through the Night*, *Emergency*, *Mr. Joy* and *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* have been performed at venues ranging from Lincoln Center to the White House, and have garnered numerous awards, including an Obie Award for writing and performance and two NAACP Theater Awards. A highly requested keynote speaker and thought leader, Daniel has worked throughout the U.S., Europe and Africa, speaking and performing on programs with luminaries such as Bill Cosby, Deepak Chopra, Hill Harper, Jill Scott, Donnie McClurkin and Ruby Dee. An adjunct professor at Columbia University, diversity trainer and youth development specialist, Daniel has spoken at staff retreats and led leadership training for a myriad of non-profits and corporations. In fall 2013, Daniel launched a nationwide initiative, funded by W.K. Kellogg and Ford Foundations, among others, to use the tools of storytelling to help individuals and communities heal from trauma. He holds a BA with Honors in English and Music from Yale University and an MFA in Acting from the American Conservatory Theater. His poem *Knock Knock* became an internet sensation receiving millions of views, and has been transformed into a children's book, also titled *Knock Knock*, published by Little Brown Books. Penguin-Random House will publish his empowerment book *Transforming Pain to Power* in March 2014.

Moisés Kaufman (*Director*) returns to Arena Stage where he previously directed his plays *33 Variations* and *The Laramie Project Cycle*. Moisés is a Tony- and Emmy-nominated director and award-winning playwright. He most recently directed the Broadway revival of *The Heiress* with Jessica Chastain and wrote and directed *33 Variations* on Broadway, starring Jane Fonda, which received five Tony nominations. Moisés also directed Rajiv Joseph's Pulitzer Prize finalist *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* with Robin Williams on Broadway in spring 2011. Previous to that, Moisés directed the Pulitzer and Tony Award-winning play *I Am My Own Wife*. His plays *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* and *The Laramie Project* have been among the most performed plays in America over the last decade. He recently directed his first opera, *El Gato con Botas* (*Puss in Boots*). Other credits include *The Nightingale* (La Jolla Playhouse), *A Common Pursuit* (Roundabout), *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (Mark Taper Forum), *Macbeth* with Liev Schreiber (Public Theater), *This Is How It Goes* (Donmar Warehouse), *One Arm* by Tennessee Williams (New Group and Steppenwolf Theater Company), *Master Class* with Rita Moreno (Berkeley Repertory Theater) and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (Williamstown Theater Festival). Moisés also co-wrote and directed the film adaptation of *The Laramie Project* for HBO, which received two Emmy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Writer. He is the Artistic Director of Tectonic Theater Project, creator of Moment Work (Tectonic's method for creating theater) and a Guggenheim Fellow in Playwriting.

The creative team for *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* includes Music Director **Kenny J. Seymour**, Set Designer **Derek McLane**, Costume Designer **Clint Ramos**, Lighting Designer **David Lander**, Sound Designer **Lindsay Jones**, Projection Designer **John Narun** and Stage Manager **Craig Campbell**.

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

***The Tallest Tree in the Forest* Special Events**

Piano Bar—Wednesday, January 22, 2013 following the 7:30 p.m. performance

Following the success of last season's post-show piano bars, Arena Stage continues the popular piano bar tradition this season by hosting a free event during the run of *The Tallest Tree in the Forest*. Grab a drink and gather 'round the piano for show tunes hosted by Joshua Morgan with special guests in the Grand Lobby. No ticket necessary.

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Post-Show Discussions with Artists and Staff

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation. Following the noon matinee on January 22 with playwright & performer Daniel Beaty, January 28 with Soyica Colbert, Associate Professor of African American and Theater and Performance Studies at Georgetown University, and February 5 with a guest speaker; following the 8:00 p.m. performance on January 30 with Beaty and following the 7:30 p.m. performance on February 4 with Beaty.

Production Information

The Tallest Tree in the Forest

Written and performed by Daniel Beaty

Directed by Moisés Kaufman

World premiere presentation of the Kansas City Repertory Theatre/La Jolla Playhouse production

In association with Tectonic Theater Project

January 10-February 16, 2014 in the Kreeger Theater

ABOUT: Bursting with poetic storytelling and 14 songs, including “Ol’ Man River” and “Happy Days Are Here Again,” *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* combines the talents of award-winning playwright/performer Daniel Beaty (*Emergency*) with acclaimed director Moisés Kaufman (*33 Variations*, *The Laramie Project*). Discover the true story of Paul Robeson, hailed as the “best-known black man in the world” for his incomparable singing and acting, brought low by accusations of disloyalty to America. Beaty brings “his signature wit, grit and piercing lyricism” (*New York Times*) to close to 40 characters, asking the question, how does a man remain an artist when his soul cries out to be an activist?

CAST:

Daniel Beaty

CREATIVE TEAM:

Director: Moisés Kaufman

Music Director: Kenny J. Seymour

Set Designer: Derek McLane

Costume Designer: Clint Ramos

Lighting Designer: David Lander

Sound Designer: Lindsay Jones

Projection Designer: John Narun

Stage Manager: Craig Campbell

Plan Your Visit

TICKETS: Tickets for *The Tallest Tree in the Forest* 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 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.

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.

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Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday, 1/22; Tuesday, 1/28 & Wednesday, 2/5

*Please note that Saturday & Sunday performance times differ each week, please refer to full calendar
Full calendar: tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=16274

Open-captioned performance: 2/6 at 8:00 p.m.

Audio-described performance: 2/8 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

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