

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MOLLY SMITH DIRECTS ERIC COBLE'S *THE VELOCITY OF AUTUMN*  
AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER  
SEPTEMBER 6-OCTOBER 20, 2013

\*\*\* Starring Academy Award winner Estelle Parsons and  
two-time Tony Award winner Stephen Spinella \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) *The Velocity of Autumn*, a new two-character play from Cleveland-based playwright **Eric Coble**, opens at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater under the direction of **Artistic Director Molly Smith** and by special arrangement with HOP Theatricals, LLC. Stage and screen veteran and Academy Award winner **Estelle Parsons** (*Bonnie and Clyde*, *Roseanne*), whose illustrious career spans over 50 years, stars along with two-time Tony Award winner **Stephen Spinella** (*Angels in America*, HBO's upcoming film *The Normal Heart*) in their Arena Stage debuts. The play 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 **September 6-October 20, 2013 in the Kreeger Theater**.

"I find myself in the middle of some of the most powerful questions we face as human beings," comments **Smith**, who directs *The Velocity of Autumn* as her first of three productions this season. "This story is being played out in living rooms all over America as the elderly grapple with the loss of who they are—the gracelessness of old age.' What is this thing we call control and how long do we get to hold onto it? Eric Coble's powerful play asks these questions (and more) through two specific lives, and to tell our story we have two of the finest actors working in America today: Estelle Parsons and Stephen Spinella."

"As I was writing the play I suddenly saw Estelle Parsons in the role," shares **Coble**. "Nice fantasy, but unlikely to ever happen. Then when she said 'yes' and suggested Stephen Spinella for the other role, I thought 'Wow, what an electric evening that would be.' And now it's all going to happen. Molly clearly understands this story on a deep, deep level, and one of the real joys has been our year-long conversation about these characters and what they're capable of. The whole process has been head-spinningly thrilling."

Coble will be present during rehearsals surrounding this production as he continues to finalize the script for this new play. The show received its world premiere at Boise Contemporary Theater in Idaho in 2011 followed by a run at Beck Center for the Arts in Ohio in 2012, and conversations about the future of this production, including a potential run on Broadway, are ongoing. *The Velocity of Autumn* is the third in a trilogy of plays from Coble, known as the "Alexandra Plays," that also includes *A Girl's Guide to Coffee* and *Stranded on Earth*.

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**Eric Coble** (*Playwright*) makes his Arena Stage debut. Previous Washington projects include developing *The Lake of Panthers* and *Sacagawea* at The Kennedy Center's New Visions/New Voices and *Strange Intelligence* with Imagination Stage. Off-Broadway, Eric's play *Bright Ideas* was produced by Manhattan Class Company directed by John Rando. Other plays include *A Girl's Guide to Coffee*, *Stranded on Earth*, *Southern Rapture* and *My Barking Dog*. His plays have been performed in all 50 states as well as on five continents, including productions at Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival, Denver Center Theatre Company, New York and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals, Alliance Theatre, Cleveland Play House, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, South Coast Repertory, Asolo Repertory, Indiana Repertory, Coterie Theatre and The Contemporary American Theatre Festival. Awards include an Emmy nomination, the AT&T Onstage Award, National Theatre Conference Playwriting Award, AATE Distinguished Play Award for Best Adaptation, Chorpenning Playwright Award for *Body of Work*, Cleveland Arts Prize and four Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Grants. Eric has also written the screenplays *Isolated Incidents* and *Jones*, radio plays, ghost-written autobiographies, comic books for Marvel, a British pantomime and a commercial for Ford Automobiles.

**Molly Smith** (*Director*) has been instrumental in leading the reinvention of Arena Stage, focusing on the creation of the new Mead Center for American Theater as well as major artistic changes. Arena Stage is a center for the production, presentation, development and study of American theater. Molly has been a leader in new play development for more than 30 years, while at Arena Stage for the past 15 years and at Perseverance Theatre in Alaska, the theater she founded and led for 19 years. She is a great believer in first, second and third productions of new work and has championed projects including *Next to Normal*; *How I Learned to Drive* and *Passion Play*, a cycle. She has directed for Arena Stage *My Fair Lady*; *The Music Man*; *The Book Club Play*; *Oklahoma!*; *The Light in the Piazza*; *Legacy of Light*; *Christmas Carol 1941*; *The Women of Brewster Place*; *Cabaret*; *Damn Yankees*; *Passion Play*, a cycle; *Anna Christie*; *Orpheus Descending*; *Camelot*; *An American Daughter*; *South Pacific*; *A Moon for the Misbegotten*; *Agamemnon and His Daughters*; *Coyote Builds North America*; *The Great White Hope*; *All My Sons*; *Hot 'N' Throbbing*; *How I Learned to Drive* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. She has worked alongside playwrights Sarah Ruhl, Paula Vogel, Tim Acito, Karen Zacarias, Lawrence Wright, Eric Coble, John Murrell, James Magruder, Barry Lopez and many others. Molly's directorial work has also been seen at the Shaw Festival in Canada, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Trinity Repertory Company, Tarragon Theatre in Toronto and Centaur Theatre in Montreal.

### **The Cast of *The Velocity of Autumn***

**Estelle Parsons** (*Alexandra*) is most widely known for her Academy Award-winning performance in *Bonnie and Clyde* and her 10 years as Mother Bev on the hit sitcom *Roseanne*. In the theater, she is best known for her portrayal of the tyrannical eighth grade teacher in Roberto Athayde's classic about totalitarian power, *Miss Margarida's Way*, which she performed on Broadway, all over the United States and in London, Dublin, Turkey and Australia. She has appeared in plays by the great writers of our time, including Edward Albee, Tennessee Williams, Dario Fo, Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett, Paul Zindel and Horton Foote. Estelle starred in *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts on Broadway for a year and on the road for a year. Most recently Estelle was seen in *Good People* by David Lindsay-Abaire and the George & Ira Gershwin musical *Nice Work If You Can Get It* with Matthew Broderick. In 2012, she was directed by Neil LaBute in Marco Calvani's *Things of This World*. As a director, she created the New York Shakespeare Festival Players for Joseph Papp in the 1980s. For two seasons they performed *Shakespeare on Broadway* for New York City school students and their families in an effort to develop a multicultural audience for New York. She also directed Al Pacino in Oscar Wilde's *Salome: the Reading* on Broadway. Estelle is a member of The Actors Studio and was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 2004.

**Stephen Spinella** (*Chris*) won two Tony and Drama Desk Awards for the original Broadway productions of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* plays, directed by George C. Wolfe; he was honored for playing the role of Prior Walter in both the first part (*Millennium Approaches*) and the second (*Perestroika*), which marked his Broadway debut(s). Stephen has since starred on Broadway in the Tony Award-winning musical *Spring*

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*Awakening*; revivals of *A View from the Bridge*, *Electra* and *Our Town* (with Paul Newman); and James Joyce's *The Dead* (with Christopher Walken), for which he won a third Drama Desk Award, as well as an Outer Critics Circle Award, and was again a Tony nominee. Off-Broadway, Stephen originated his role and won an Obie in *Love! Valour! Compassion!* with Nathan Lane. He also appeared in *A Question of Mercy*; and alongside Meryl Streep and Natalie Portman in *The Seagull*. Most recently he starred in Tony Kushner's new play *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*. His feature credits include *And the Band Played On*; *Virtuosity*; *Love! Valour! Compassion!*; *What the Deaf Man Heard*; *The Jackel*; *Great Expectations*; *Ravenous*; *Cradle Will Rock*; *Bubble Boy*; *Connie and Carla*; *And Then Came Love*; *Milk*; and *Rubber*. Stephen has guest-starred on television series such as *Frasier*, *Heroes*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Nip/Tuck* and *Alias*. He was a series regular on *The Education of Max Bickford* and was seen in a guest arc on the Emmy Award-winning fifth season of *24*.

**The creative team for *The Velocity of Autumn*** includes Set Designer **Eugene Lee**, Costume Designer **Linda Cho**, Lighting Designer **Rui Rita**, Sound Designer **Darron L. West**, Stage Manager **Susan R. White** 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).

*The Velocity of Autumn* is generously sponsored by Beth Newburger Schwartz & Richard Schwartz.

**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/](http://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/). The Catwalk Café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended.

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *The Velocity of Autumn* 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/](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.

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

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, 10/8; Wednesday, 10/9; and Wednesday, 10/16.

Full calendar: [tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=15885](http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=15885)

**Open-captioned performances:** 10/2 at 7:30 p.m. & 10/10 at 8:00 p.m.

**Audio-described performance:** 10/5 at 2:00 p.m.

**Post-show discussion:** 9/24 after the 7:30 p.m. show; 10/3 after the 8:00 p.m. show; 10/8, 10/9 & 10/16 after the noon matinee.

**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.

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**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](http://arenastage.org)*

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