

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARENA STAGE KICKS OFF 2013-14 KOGOD CRADLE SERIES WITH DOG & PONY DC'S TOAST AND ELEASHA GAMBLE AND NICHOLAS RODRIGUEZ IN *THE POWER OF TWO*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater ushers in the 2013/14 Kogod Cradle Series with workshop performances of the local ensemble-driven company [dog & pony dc](#)'s newest show *Toast*, a participatory theatrical performance that asks the question: how is devising a play like developing new technology? [dog & pony dc](#) returns to Arena Stage following the successful 2012 workshop of their critically acclaimed *A Killing Game*. The following week, the series continues with a special new cabaret presentation directed by Signature Theatre's Associate Artistic Director **Matthew Gardiner** entitled *The Power of Two*, which reunites Arena Stage favorites **Nicholas Rodriguez** and **Eleasha Gamble**, who were last seen performing together as Curley and Laurey in Arena Stage's hit production *Oklahoma!*. *Toast* runs **December 5-8, 2013** and *The Power of Two* runs **December 11-15, 2013** in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle.

"When the Kogod Cradle was envisioned, we imagined a space filled with first, second and third productions of new plays and audiences eager for new voices," shares **Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "I am excited that the Kogod Cradle Series has emerged as a way to share this intimate theater with local companies and with artists near and dear to Arena's heart. We love to connect with [dog & pony dc](#), whose method of devised work is admirable and always playful. It will be lovely to have Nick and Eleasha together again under the Mead Center roof after their extended run of *Oklahoma!*"

"[dog & pony dc](#) is committed to devising and premiering our new work in D.C., our home community," comments **Rachel Grossman**, *Toast* project co-director and [dog & pony dc](#) ring leader. "We couldn't be more honored to return to the Mead Center to release the prototype of our newest show *Toast*. Workshoping *A Killing Game* last season through the Kogod Cradle Series was instrumental to the completion of that show's 'version 1.0.' *Toast* is being presented much, much earlier in the creation process. As [dog & pony dc](#) grows artistically, it's vital we test the boundaries of our participatory approach to theatrical performance. We're handicapping ourselves if we only imagine and devise our productions for small environments and limited audience capacity. Participating in the Series this season provides a necessary canvas on which to sketch and experiment."

"Long before *Oklahoma!* ended, Nick and I knew we wanted to work together again and had already started thinking about the idea for a cabaret. It was really about finding the perfect fit for this to come together. We are so grateful that the Kogod Cradle Series has made it possible and the fact that it is a reunion for us at Arena could not be more fitting," says **Gamble**. "I can't wait to perform *The Power of Two* with one of my best friends in the intimacy of the Kogod Cradle," adds **Rodriguez**. "I sang in the Cradle for a gala dinner before

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the Mead Center officially opened, and the acoustics are incredible! I'm thrilled to be part of creating an evening of musical theater in such a special space."

Focused on the development of new and emerging work by artists from throughout Greater Washington and around the country, Arena Stage's Kogod Cradle Series invites artists and audiences to actively explore the development process through a series of workshops, readings and performances. For more information on the 2013/14 Kogod Cradle Series visit arenastage.org/artistic-development/new-play-institute/the-cradle-series.

ABOUT TOAST: Before electricity, how did people make toast? It's not a trick question. Think about it for a moment. Go look it up. The invention of the electric toaster and its widespread adoption wasn't as easy as sliding sliced bread between heated coils. It was a complex, non-linear process, a beautiful confluence of conditions, opportunities, discoveries and intensity. Piqued? Back after their hit show *A Killing Game* thrilled audiences in last season's Kogod Cradle Series, dog & pony dc returns for a workshop of their newest show *Toast*—a participatory theatrical performance meets science experiment exploring technological innovation, discovery, invention, consequences and the intricate networks that weave us all together.

With *Toast*, dog & pony dc is exploring a wholly new expression of "audience integration," its participatory approach to creating and performing theater. The company's previous shows, including *Beertown* and *A Killing Game*, cast the audience within the story of the performance, providing them agency to engage "in character" and positing their activity as necessary to the narrative arc. For *Toast*, the company is vitally interested in extending the boundaries of audience integration, aiming to fully and transparently harness the audience as a resource, integral for the creation and completion of the show.

In March 2013, dog & pony dc began actively devising *Toast* and invited the general public to join them. For the last nine months, 85% of dog & pony dc's devising meetings and rehearsals have been open to citizens across the area. More than 100 people have participated as "co-devisers," some attending once or twice and others attending every single event. A corps of science and technology scholars also joined in the process, including Dr. David LaCroix (education and learning strategist), Dr. Robert Friedel (technological historian, UMD) and Joe Palca (science correspondent, NPR).

Project Directors: Rachel Grossman and Ivania Stack

Assistant Directors: Wyckham Avery and J. Argyl Plath

Devising Ensemble: Ellys Abrams, Colin K. Bills, Jordan Beck, Melanie Harker, Jessica Lefkow, Shannon Davies Mancus, Elaine Yuko Qualter, Lorraine Ressegger-Slone, Jon Reynolds, Rebecca Sheir and Adelaide Waldrop

Co-Conspirators: David LaCroix, Robert Friedel and Joe Palca

Artistic Collaborators: Kate Ahern Loveric and Jared Mezzocchi

Following their participation in the Kogod Cradle Series, dog & pony dc will hold additional workshop performances at Capitol Hill Arts Workshop December 12-14, 2013.

For insight into the show's creation and a growing digital record of the devising process visit ToastLabNotebook.com. Find dog & pony dc on Twitter @dogandponydc and mention *Toast* with #TOASTdpdc. Watch video highlighting the [Toast Incubator Salon](#) at the Kennedy Center's Page-To-Stage Festival in August of 2013. For more information on *Toast* and dog & pony dc visit dogandponydc.com/toast.

Toast is funded in part by the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, an agency supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support is from Humanities Council of Washington, DC; Maryland Humanities Council; Capitol Hill Community Foundation and Victor Shargai.

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ABOUT THE POWER OF TWO: Two powerhouse singers—Nicholas Rodriguez and Eleasha Gamble (Curly and Laurey in Arena's *Oklahoma!*)—return to harmonize again in this limited-engagement cabaret about the powerful bonds of friendship and relationships. Highlighting their favorite Top 40 hits and the best of Broadway, Nicholas and Eleasha create sweet music with a set of crowd-pleasers from Rodgers & Hammerstein and Sondheim to Joni Mitchell, Roberta Flack and more. Signature Theatre's Associate Artistic Director Matthew Gardiner (*Dreamgirls*) has directed this special event to be presented in the intimate Kogod Cradle.

Creators/Performers: Nicholas Rodriguez and Eleasha Gamble

Director: Matthew Gardiner

Musical Director: Gabe Mangiante

Eleasha Gamble returns to Arena Stage after appearing as Laurey in *Oklahoma!*, which earned her a Helen Hayes nomination. In the spring of 2010, she was awarded a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Musical for her performance in *Civil War* at Ford's Theatre. She's worked extensively at many of the theaters in the Washington, D.C. area, including Signature Theatre (*Chess*, *Les Miserables*, *Into the Woods*, *Urinetown*, *First You Dream*), The Kennedy Center (*Broadway Three Generations*, *First You Dream*), Ford's Theatre (*Little Shop of Horrors*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Meet John Doe*), Shakespeare Theatre (*Two Gentlemen of Verona: The Musical*), Round House Theatre (*Once on This Island*, Helen Hayes Nomination), Toby's Dinner Theatre (*Ragtime*, Helen Hayes Nomination) and *The Women of Brewster Place* at Arena Stage. Eleasha made her New York debut off-Broadway in the Kathie Lee Gifford musical *Under the Bridge* at The Zipper Theatre. Regional credits include *Dreamgirls* and *Hair*. She is currently a member of *The Lion King* national tour, which will be coming to The Kennedy Center in June 2014.

Nicholas Rodriguez will appear in Arena Stage's upcoming *Mother Courage and her Children* and was recently seen at Arena Stage as Freddy in *My Fair Lady* and Curly in *Oklahoma!*, for which he received a 2011 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Actor in a Musical and was named one of the "Top 10 Performers of 2010" by Hilton Als of *The New Yorker*. He also appeared as Fabrizio Nacarelli in *The Light in the Piazza* at Arena Stage. On Broadway, he performed the title role in *Tarzan* and off-Broadway has appeared in *The Toxic Avenger*, *Almost Heaven*, *Bajour* and *Collete Collage*. Tours include *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Jesus), *Evita* (Che) and *Hair* (Claude). Regional credits include *The Ten Commandments* (Kodak Theatre), *JCS* (Jesus), *Beauty and the Beast* (Gaston), *Damn Yankees* (Joe), *Cinderella* (Prince), *South Pacific* (Cable), *Master Class* (Tony), *Love, Valour, Compassion!* (Ramon) and *The King & I* (Lun Tha). Nicholas recently participated in the Sundance Theatre Lab to develop the musical adaptation of *Like Water for Chocolate*, playing Pedro opposite Chita Rivera and Lila Downs. He was in the film *Sex and the City 2*, and featured on the film's soundtrack. Nicholas is perhaps best known for his portrayal of Nick Chavez on ABC's *One Life to Live* for which he received a GLAAD Media Award. Nicholas is the Artistic Director of the Broadway Dreams Foundation faculty (www.mybroadwaydreams.com) and volunteers for The Harvey Milk School in New York City and SMYAL in Washington, D.C., for which he received the 2011 Outstanding Community Ally Award. A native Texan, he holds a BM and MM in Vocal Performance from the University of Texas at Austin.

Matthew Gardiner Signature: Director: *Dreamgirls*, *Dying City*, *Xanadu*, *Really Really*, *The Hollow*, *Side by Side by Sondheim*, *Art*, [title of show], *See What I Wanna See*; Choreographer: *Company*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Dirty Blonde*; Assistant Director and Choreographer: over 20 productions at Signature Theatre. Associate Artistic Director (2011-present), Resident Director (2010-2011), Resident Assistant Director (2006-2010). New York: Director: NYMF: *The Greenwood Tree*; Assistant Director: Circle in the Square: *Glory Days*. D.C. area: Director/Choreographer: Kennedy Center: *Snow White*, *Rose Red (and Fred!)*; Everyman Theatre: *Let Me Sing And I'm Happy*; MetroStage: *tick, tick...BOOM!*; Catholic University of America: *La Boheme*, *Candide*; Co-Director/Choreographer: Studio Theatre: *Jerry Springer: The Opera*; *Reefer Madness* (2008 Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Musical and Direction of a Musical); Choreographer: MetroStage: *Jacques Brel is Alive And Well...*; Studio Theatre: *Grey Gardens*, *Adding Machine*. Education: Carnegie Mellon University.

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Find Gamble and Rodriguez on Twitter @EleashaGamble and @thenickrod and mention *The Power of Two* with #PowerofTwo.

TICKETS: Tickets for *Toast* are \$10 and tickets for *The Power of Two* are \$25-\$40, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. **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.**

PERFORMANCE DATES:

Toast: Thursday, Friday, Saturday at 8:00 p.m. & Sunday at 7:30 p.m.

The Power of Two: Wednesday at 7:30 p.m., Thursday at 8:00 p.m., Friday at 6:00 p.m. & 8:00 p.m., Saturday at 2:00 p.m. & 8:00 p.m. and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.

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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