

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kirstin Franko
press@arenastage.org, 202-600-4055

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**ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
TO SEND NINE STAFF MEMBERS TO FOUR CITIES IN INDIA
TO CREATE ORIGINAL NEW PLAYS THROUGH VOICES OF NOW
DEvised THEATER PROGRAM IN JANUARY 2014**

***** Trip will be following theater's partnership with U.S. Department of State in Zagreb, Croatia
to work with artists with physical disabilities for three weeks in December 2013 *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces its Voices of Now devised theater program has been selected from a competitive proposal process with the United States Department of State to send all nine members of the theater's community engagement department to **Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad, India** to create original plays, based on the lives of the local participants and inspired by the cities in which they take place. The three-week program, **January 13-29, 2014**, becomes the third international partnership with the U.S. Department of State and Arena Stage, following a successful two-and-a-half week program in India in October 2012 and a three-week residency in December 2013 in Zagreb, Croatia.

Now in its 11th year, Voices of Now equips participants to write and perform autobiographical theater that poses questions about social, cultural and emotional issues, with a focus on creating projects that give voice to—and spark dialogue about—issues of relevancy for the artists involved.

The Arena Stage arts-educators will send teams to each city and will devise plays with their varied partner organizations in each community. They will use Voices of Now program techniques to build performance skills, link populations that do not normally interact and increase a sense of community among participants. Using writing, discourse and movement they will devise plays that will be performed for audiences on each city's final day of workshops, and will be followed by a post-performance discussion. Final performances and discussions will be livestreamed publicly.

The Arena Stage team, which includes Arena Stage Director of Community Engagement **Anita Maynard-Losh** and Director of Education and designer of the Voices of Now process **Ashley Forman**, along with **Rebecca Campana, Raymond Caldwell, Anthony Jackson, Sean-Maurice Lynch, Fared Mostoufi, Psalmayene 24** and **Ariel Warmflash**, will also conduct professional development training seminars in each city.

Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith** shares "We are so grateful to have forged this partnership with the State Department, and can build on the success of our time in India last year. It is meaningful to see this locally-grown program, which reaches hundreds of youth annually in the D.C. area, extend its scope and impact to our participating artists and audiences in India.

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Arena Stage partners with the U.S. State Department for three-week program in India in 2014—Page 2

Forman adds, “With the additional resources of time and staff, we are incredibly eager to delve deeper into dialogue with our participants as they create plays that are dynamic and nuanced. It is such an honor to use the tools of Voices of Now to facilitate the transformation of these brave artists’ stories into theater.”

Voices of Now first partnered with the U.S. Department of State to go international in October 2012 when four Arena Stage artists went to Kolkata, Patna, New Delhi and Hyderabad, India to create original plays inspired by the cities in which they took place. Last year the performances created were fast-paced, physical theater pieces that included poetry, movement, music, dialogue, monologue and collaborative storytelling in English, Hindi, Bengali and Urdu. Participants used the plays to celebrate their cities and raise questions about significant social issues including power and how it relates to gender, pollution, lack of accessible health care, poverty and how to maintain positive cultural traditions in a new world. The various ensembles included professional theater artists, activists, trafficking victims, orphans, street children, high school and college students, among others.

Communication with the participants of the 2012 trip to India and Arena Stage has continued through social media as well as through a digital video conference at the Mead Center with the D.C.-based Voices of Now mentor ensemble and participants of the Kolkata ensemble surrounding the May 2013 Voices of Now Festival. The Kolkata ensemble has also continued to create Voices of Now plays using their training, including a recent play performed at the U.S. Consulate in Kolkata last month entitled *Circles of Life*, which focused on the issue of violence against women in India.

For additional information on last year’s visit to India, including photos and video, visit <http://www.arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now/international/india/index.shtml>.

In separate partnership with the U.S. Department of State, four Arena Stage teaching artists are currently in **Zagreb, Croatia** working with young adults with physical disabilities **December 1-20, 2013**. Using the Voices of Now devised theater method, the group is creating a production entitled *Disable(d) Prejudice*. Following the final performance of the play, there will be a moderated talkback with the audience centered around the complications and prejudices physically disabled individuals face in Croatia. ***Disable(d) Prejudice* will be livestreamed from Zagreb, Croatia on the global, commons based, peer produced HowlRound TV network at howlround.tv on Thursday, December 19 at 1:00 p.m. EST.**

Locally in the D.C.-area, Voices of Now is working with ten ensembles throughout the school year towards final plays for the Voices of Now Festival at the Mead Center for American Theater in May 2014. Participating organizations currently include Burke School in Virginia, CFSA’s (Child and Family Services Agency) Office of Youth Empowerment, Children’s Adolescent Prevention Education Programs, Children’s National Medical Center, D.C. Creative Writing Workshop, First Star Greater Washington Academy, Glasgow Middle School, Jefferson Middle School, Key Middle School, Metro TeenAIDS, Promising Futures, Robinson Secondary School and the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing.

For more information on Voices of Now, including photos and video, visit <http://www.arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now>.

Voices of Now is made possible by support from the U.S. Department of State, AT&T, Share Fund, Friends of Southwest DC, GEICO, the Mark & Carol Hyman Fund and Toni R. Ritzenberg.

Additional support of Arena Stage's Community Engagement efforts is provided by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, the Weissberg Foundation, the D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities, Max & Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc., The Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation, Robert & Natalie Mandel Family Fund, Alice Shaver Foundation, Dorothy G. Bender Foundation, Corina Higginson Trust, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, Toni A. Ritzenberg, Friends of Southwest D.C., the Anthony Lucas-Spindletop Foundation, Mars Foundation, Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela and the Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc. Without the extraordinary support of all our supporters, Voices of Now and our other Community Engagement program offerings would not be possible.

Arena Stage partners with the U.S. State Department for three-week program in India in 2014—Page 3

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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