

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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November 6, 2013

**ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
TO CREATE A PLAY WITH YOUNG ADULTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES
THROUGH THREE-WEEK VOICES OF NOW INSPIRED PROGRAM IN ZAGREB, CROATIA
DECEMBER 1-20, 2013**

(Washington, D.C.) **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater** in partnership with the **United States Department of State** will send four Arena Stage teaching artists to **Zagreb, Croatia December 1-20, 2013** to work with students and young adults with physical disabilities to create a play entitled *Disable(d) Prejudice* and provide professional development training seminars, based on Arena Stage's Voices of Now devised theater program. 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 bring voice to issues of relevancy for the young artists involved.

"Voices of Now is home grown and designed here at Arena Stage through Director of Education and Voices of Now Founder Ashley Forman's creativity and intelligence," remarks Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "That it is now finding homes to inspire artists around the world is a testament to the entire community engagement team at Arena and the United States State Department for their belief in the transformative power of the arts across cultures. This is the finest form of cultural diplomacy that we can do as a theater company."

Arena Stage teaching artists Rebecca Campana, Ashley Forman, Anthony Jackson and Ariel Warmflash will work with participants to create a production that will tour to schools and performance venues. Each performance will be followed by a moderated talkback with the audience centered around the complications and prejudices physically disabled individuals face in Croatia.

"People with disabilities are marginalized in Croatian society. Through the Arena Stage program, we hope that the participants will learn skills that empower them to advocate for themselves and we also hope that the performance piece they create will help raise awareness among the larger population and break down stereotypes about people with disabilities." – **Public Affairs Office, U.S. Embassy Zagreb**

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. The plays asked vital questions about significant social issues: 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. Conversations are ongoing for a future partnership in India.

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For additional information on last year's Voices of Now program in India, including photos and video, visit arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now/international.

In the D.C.-area, Voices of Now is working with ten ensembles throughout the current 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, visit 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, VON and our other Community Engagement program offerings would not be possible.

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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