

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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March 18, 2015

ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES FULL COMPANY FOR
WORLD PREMIERE OF KATORI HALL'S *THE BLOOD QUILT*
STITCHING TOGETHER COMEDY AND FAMILY DRAMA
UNDER DIRECTION OF KAMILAH FORBES
APRIL 24-JUNE 7, 2015

*** All-female cast features Tonye Patano from Showtime's *Weeds*
with Afi Bijou, Caroline Clay, Meeya Davis and Nikiya Mathis ***

(Washington, D.C.) Olivier Award-winning playwright **Katori Hall** returns to Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater with the world premiere of her most personal project to date—the fierce comedy-drama *The Blood Quilt*. Hall is an inaugural resident playwright of Arena Stage's American Voices New Play Institute, and *The Blood Quilt* is one of three plays from Hall receiving world premieres around the country this season. Hall reunites with director and Howard University alumna **Kamilah Forbes** (artistic director of the Hip-Hop Theater Festival) following their Broadway collaboration on *The Mountaintop*. *The Blood Quilt* runs April 24–June 7, 2015 in the Kreeger Theater.

Gathering at their childhood island home off the coast of Georgia, four disconnected sisters meet to create a family quilt to honor their recently deceased mother. When their reunion turns into a reading of their mother's will, everyone must grapple with a troubling inheritance. Stitched with history and ritual, laughter and tears, will their “blood quilt” bind the family together or tear them apart forever?

The Jernigan sisters will be played by **Tonye Patano** (Heylia James on Showtime's *Weeds*, recently The Public Theater/American Repertory Theater's *Father Comes Home From The Wars*) as Clementine, the eldest sister; **Caroline Clay** (Broadway's *The Royal Family*) as Gio, the second sister; **Nikiya Mathis** (The Public Theater's *Fidelis*) as Cassan, the third sister and **Meeya Davis** (a recent graduate of Rutgers University) as Amber, the youngest sister. **Afi Bijou** (Broadway's *Holler If Ya Hear Me* and *Fela!*) will play Cassan's teenage daughter Zambia.

“In this moment in time, baby boomers are experiencing the slow dance of death in the older generation as well as the shock of the unexpected death of a parent,” reflects Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. “Katori's story of four complex sisters delves into this issue and all its implications fearlessly and beautifully. This is a very personal play—personal for Arena as well, as the very first reading was held here and now we have the distinct pleasure to produce its world premiere.”

“I am so thrilled to be working with such an amazing ensemble of women. This is an invaluable opportunity to illuminate the voices, stories and folklore of such a rich and lush culture,” shares **Forbes**. “I am also thrilled to

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be collaborating with blues/folk/rock musician Toshi Reagon (daughter of Sweet Honey in the Rock Founder Bernice Johnson Reagon), as her knowledge of Geechee/Gullah history is only going to elevate the authenticity of the world that we will weave at Arena.”

“I'm honored that *The Blood Quilt* is premiering at Arena Stage as part of the 65th anniversary season,” says **Hall**. “Writing the play was a transformative experience for me, driving me to learn about the rich, cultural heritage of African-American quilters that extends even throughout my own family. I love each and every one of the Jernigan sisters as if they were my own, and I'm excited to share this new piece with D.C.-area audiences.”

Tony Award winner **Phylicia Rashad** will serve as Honorary Chair for *The Blood Quilt* World Premiere Celebration on May 7, 2015, joining Event Chair and Arena Stage Board member **Shawna Watley** (Senior Policy Advisor with Holland & Knight). For additional details, please see the Special Events section below.

Katori Hall (*Playwright*) is a writer-performer hailing from Memphis, Tennessee. Hall's plays include *The Mountaintop* (2010 Olivier Award for Best New Play), which ran on Broadway in 2011 starring Angela Bassett and Samuel L. Jackson, *Hurt Village* (2011 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize), *Children of Killers*, *Hoodoo Love*, *Saturday Night/Sunday Morning*, *WHADDABLOODCLOT!!!*, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, *Pussy Valley* and *The Blood Quilt*. She is an inaugural resident playwright through Arena Stage's American Voices New Play Institute. Her additional awards include the Lark Play Development Center Playwrights of New York (PoNY) Fellowship, Fellowship of Southern Writers Bryan Family Award in Drama, Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award and Columbia University John Jay Award for Distinguished Professional Achievement. She was a participant of the Sundance Screenwriters' Lab, where her play *Hurt Village* was developed into a film, and also Sundance's inaugural Episodic Story Lab, where she developed her television show *The Dial*. Katori is currently developing Stephen L. Carter's number one national best-seller *The Emperor of Ocean Park* into a television series for John Wells Productions. *The Mountaintop* and *Katori Hall: Plays One* are published by Methuen Drama. Katori is an alumna of the Lark Playwrights' Workshop, where she developed *The Mountaintop* and *Our Lady of Kibeho*, and a graduate of Columbia University, the American Repertory Theater Institute at Harvard University and the Juilliard School. She is a proud member of the Ron Brown Scholar Program, the Coca-Cola Scholar Program, the Dramatists Guild and the Fellowship of Southern Writers. She is currently a member of the Residency Five at Signature Theatre in New York City. Katori will make her directing debut this fall with a film adaptation of *Hurt Village*, which received its world premiere at Signature in 2012.

Kamilah Forbes (*Director*)'s most recent credits include *Detroit 67* (True Colors Theater), *Fences* (Peoples Light Theater), *Sunset Baby* (Labyrinth Theater Company, *New York Times* Critics Pick), *Circle Unbroken* by Sekou Sundiata (651 Arts), *Billy and the ZooLoos* (Summer Stage), NAS and the National Symphony Orchestra Tribute (Kennedy Center), Marvin Gaye Tribute with John Legend, (Kennedy Center), *Wanted* (PS122), *And Her Hair Went With Her* (New Jersey Repertory Company) and *Scourge* (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 14-city international tour). Broadway credits (associate director) include *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, Tony Award-winning *Raisin in the Sun*, *Lucky Guy*, *Stick Fly*, *The Mountaintop* and *Def Poetry Jam* on tour (tour director). She has also worked at Lincoln Center Theater, Public Theater, Lark Play Development, Two River Theater Company and Arena Stage. She is the producing artistic director of Hi-ARTS NYC/Hip-Hop Theater Festival, producer of HBO's Peabody Award-winning *Def Poetry Jam* and executive producer of HBO's *Brave New Voices*. She most recently was nominated for an Audelco Award and is a Sundance Institute Fellow and League of Women in Theater Josephine Abady Award recipient. She studied at the British American Drama Academy in Oxford, England and received her BFA from Howard University.

Cast Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Afi Bijou (*Zambia*) was last seen at Arena Stage in Gilbert McCauley's version of *Holiday Heart*, where she received a Helen Hayes Award Nomination for Outstanding Lead Actress. Since then she has performed regionally at Yale Rep (*Good Goods*, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*), MTC (*Breath Boom*) and the Ahmanson

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Theatre (*Fela!* tour). Other Off-Broadway appearances include New World Stages (*Bullet for Adolf*) and Playwrights Horizons (*Taking Control*). In the spring of 2014 she was blessed to return to Broadway at the Palace Theatre in *Holler If Ya Hear Me*. Her Broadway credits also include the Tony Award-winning *Fela!* and *Once on This Island* (original cast member). This fall she will appear on the new HBO miniseries *Crime* starring John Turturro and Michael K. Williams.

Caroline Clay (*Gio*)'s D.C. appearances include *Clementine in the Lower Nine* and *Gidion's Knot* (2015 Helen Hayes Nominee for Best Actress in a Play) with Forum/Next Stop Theatre, the national tour of *Doubt* (Helen Hayes Award for Best Featured Actress) and productions at Woolly Mammoth and Shakespeare Theatre. Her Broadway credits include *Doubt* and *The Royal Family*. She has been seen Off-Broadway at New York Theatre Workshop, Signature and Playwrights Horizons. Regionally she has performed with Yale Rep, McCarter, Long Wharf and Goodman. Her TV credits include *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *House of Cards* (seasons 2 & 3) and *The Knick*. Her film credits include *Everybody's Fine*, *Sherrybaby* and *Morning Glory*. Caroline is a native Washingtonian and a graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and UMD (MFA, Specialization in Voice & Dialect '13). She is proudly on faculty at both.

Meeya Davis (*Amber*) is from Detroit, MI and makes her Arena Stage debut. Her credits include *Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare's Globe Theater), *House for Sale* (Rutgers Theater Company) and *Cyrano* (Mile Square Theater). Ms. Davis holds a BFA from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University.

Nikiya Mathis (*Cassan*)'s makes her Arena Stage debut. Her Off-Broadway credits include *In the Red and Brown Water*, *Marcus or the Secret of Sweet* and *Fidelis* (The Public Theater); *Milk Like Sugar* (Playwright's Horizons) and *Seed* (Classical Theater of Harlem). Her regional credits include *By the Way Meet Vera Stark* (Alliance Theater); *The Mountaintop* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater); *Intimate Apparel* (Two Rivers Theater); *Eclipsed*, *The Brother Sister Plays* and *A Christmas Carol* (McCarter Theatre); *Milk Like Sugar* (La Jolla Playhouse) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Villa La Pietra, Florence Italy). Her television credits include *Elementary* (CBS), *Person of Interest* (CBS), *Madam Secretary* (CBS), and *Crime* (HBO). Her film credits include *Compliance* (dir. Craig Zobel) and *Knucklehead* (dir. Ben Bowman). Her commercial credits include Diet Coke "Capture the Flag" (national) and Kraft Macaroni and Cheese "Pregnant" (national). Nikiya is a proud graduate of Temple University and NYU's Graduate Acting Program.

Tonye Patano (*Clementine*) makes her Arena Stage debut. Tonye appeared on Broadway in Neil Simon's *45 Seconds from Broadway*. Recent Off-Broadway and regional credits include *Father Comes Home from the Wars* (The Public & ART) and *The Last Goodbye* (Old Globe). Tonye starred in the national tour of *Legends* (The National Theatre) and the award-winning play *Ruined* as Mama Nadi (recognized by multiple critics Associations for Best Lead Actress). Her film work includes roles in *Diving Normal*, *Ponies*, *The Hurricane*, *The Savages*, *Little Manhattan*, *The Taking of Pelham 123*, *Company Men*, *Every Secret Thing*, *Time Out of Mind* and the upcoming *Jack of the Red Hearts*. Her TV credits include recurring and guest star roles on *One Life to Live*, *Sex and the City*, *Eli Stone*, *Monk*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Americans* and most notably as series regular Heylia James on Showtime's critically acclaimed *Weeds*.

The creative team for *The Blood Quilt* includes set designer **Michael Carnahan**, costume designer **Dede Ayite**, lighting designer **Michael Gilliam**, sound designer **Timothy M. Thompson**, composer and vocal consultant **Toshi Reagon**, New York casting director **Geoff Josselson**, stage manager **Kurt Hall** and assistant stage manager **Kristen Mary Harris**.

For full company bios and additional production information visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/the-blood-quilt/.

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The Blood Quilt is generously sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts' Art Works and is the recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award. Additional support is provided by the David Bruce Smith Foundation.

The Blood Quilt Special Events

***The Blood Quilt* World Premiere Celebration—May 7, 2015**

Tony Award winner **Phylicia Rashad** will serve as Honorary Chair for *The Blood Quilt* World Premiere Celebration on May 7, 2015, joining Event Chair and Arena Stage Board member **Shawna Watley** (Senior Policy Advisor with Holland & Knight). The evening includes a pre-show cocktail reception, three-course seated dinner and the official opening night performance of *The Blood Quilt*, followed by a dessert reception with the production's cast and artistic team. For further information and to secure tickets, contact Maria Corso at 202-600-4176 or email rsvp@arenastage.org. For additional details, visit arenastage.org/donate/special-events/blood-quilt-opening-night/index.shtml.

Post-Show Conversations

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff. May 5, 6 & 13 following the noon performance; May 14 following the 8:00 p.m. performance and May 26 following the 7:30 p.m. performance.

Production Information

The Blood Quilt

By Katori Hall

Directed by Kamilah Forbes

April 24-June 7 in the Kreeger Theater

ABOUT: Inaugural resident playwright Katori Hall (*The Mountaintop*) is once again “fearlessly redefining theater” (*Washington Post*) with this funny and fierce world premiere. Welcome to the Jernigan Gals' Quilting Corner. Gathering at their childhood island home off the coast of Georgia, four disconnected sisters meet to create a family quilt to honor their recently deceased mother. When their reunion turns into a reading of their mother's will, everyone must grapple with a troubling inheritance. Stitched with history and ritual, laughter and tears, will their “blood quilt” bind the family together or tear them apart forever?

CAST:

Zambia: Afi Bijou

Gio: Caroline Clay

Amber: Meeya Davis

Cassan: Nikiya Mathis

Clementine: Tonye Patano

CREATIVE TEAM:

Director: Kamilah Forbes

Set Designer: Michael Carnahan

Costume Designer: Dede Ayite

Lighting Designer: Michael Gilliam

Sound Designer: Timothy M. Thompson

Composer and Vocal Consultant: Toshi Reagon

New York Casting Director: Geoff Josselson

Stage Manager: Kurt Hall

Assistant Stage Manager: Kristen Mary Harris

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Plan Your Visit

TICKETS: Tickets for *The Blood Quilt* are \$45-\$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.
Weekday matinees at noon on Tuesday, 5/5; Wednesday, 5/6 & Wednesday, 5/13
Full calendar: <http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=18382>

Open-captioned performances: 5/21 at 8:00 p.m. & 5/27 at 7:30 p.m.

Audio-described performance: 5/9 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 \$22 (\$25 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 (\$6 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.

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Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. Arena Stage produces plays of all that is passionate, 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. Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org.

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