

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 ANNOUNCES SIX D.C.-AREA WRITERS SELECTED FOR THE SECOND ROUND OF PLAYWRIGHTS' ARENA AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER

(Washington, D.C.) Six D.C.-area playwrights have been selected to participate in the second installment of Playwrights' Arena, as part of the American Voices New Play Institute at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. Playwrights' Arena, a yearlong program which commences this month, is a collaborative group of local writers dedicated to the support and development of each other's work and practice. The new group includes **Steven A. Butler, Jr., Patricia Davis, Joshua Ford, Mary Stone Hanley, Liz Maestri** and **David Mitchell Robinson**.

"Core to Arena's mission is providing a home for artists," shares Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "This is through the work on the main stages, absolutely, and small, intimate groups like Playwrights' Arena are equally important to the artistic health of our community. I love how the first Playwrights' Arena group shared a unique bond, and believe this new talented group will enjoy the same support and learning."

Members of Playwrights' Arena will meet once a month over the course of the year to investigate each other's work and practice, and will meet regularly with Resident Dramaturg **Jocelyn Clarke**. Playwrights' Arena activities include convenings with visiting artists, creative team members, Arena Stage resident playwrights and staff on topics related and relevant to their playwriting practice. Actors will periodically read their work in private laboratory rehearsals, giving the playwrights a chance to hear and respond to their work. Playwrights will be supported as members of the Arena Stage artistic community and will have access to opening nights and special events.

"We're welcoming six dynamic writers with fierce and unique voices to the second cohort of Playwrights' Arena," continues Director of Artistic Programming **Robert Barry Fleming**. "Their proposals ranged from dance-theater hybrids, to absurdist comedies to astutely observed political dramas. Their work is marked by an incisive, imaginative and poetic use of language combined with bold subject matter and a common thread of great ambition and risk that is sure to excite and inspire audiences."

Playwrights' Arena launched at Arena Stage in January 2013 with Norman Allen, Randy Baker, Jacqueline E. Lawton, Heather McDonald, Danielle Mohlman and Shawn Northrip. Five of the original playwrights (Allen, Baker, McDonald, Mohlman and Northrip) resumed meeting for a second year in October 2014 and will continue to meet through June 2015.

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Biographies and statements from the members of the 2015 Playwrights' Arena:

Steven A. Butler, Jr. is a playwright, actor and the co-founder of Restoration Stage, Inc., which he launched with partner Courtney Baker-Oliver in 2005. His plays include *Chocolate Covered Ants*, *The Truth (About the Down Low)*, *All That Glitters*, *Drag On!*, *The Katrina Project* and *The First Lady*. His plays have been produced at Restoration Stage, Gusman Center for the Performing Arts (Miami), Bowie Center for the Performing Arts (Maryland) and Greensboro Coliseum (North Carolina). He has had readings and workshops at Howard University and Prince George's Community College. His work has been commissioned by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). He is a graduate of Howard University and a veteran of the United States Air Force.

"Arena Stage has a storied history of developing important works from emerging artists. I am delighted at the opportunity to continue my journey as a playwright at an institution where my gift is sure to be cultivated, nurtured, sharpened and appreciated."

Patricia Davis writes plays, poetry and nonfiction. Her first play, *Alternative Methods*, was produced in the 2010 New York International Fringe Festival, winning a Pick of the Fringe recommendation from *New York Theater Review* and a Best Director award. It was selected for readings at Urban Stages, Georgia College & State University and Catholic University, and also included in the Beltway Drama Series. Her newest play *After the Blood* recently received a reading at La MaMa Experimental Theatre. Her short play *Cleared* was selected by Theater Alliance for presentation in the Kennedy Center's 2013 Page-to-Stage Festival. With Dianna Ortiz, she co-authored *The Blindfold's Eyes*, winning Best First-Time Author and Best History/Biography awards from the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada and a Best Book of the Year Award from *Spirituality and Health* magazine. She published a collection of poetry, *The Water that Broke You*, in 2014. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She has published articles in *The Nation*, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, *Counterpunch* and *Common Dreams* and writes regularly for *HowlRound*. Former director of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission, she earned an MFA from American University and a BA from Carleton College.

"I'm thrilled to be participating in Playwrights' Arena. The opportunity to support other writers and learn from them as we embark on ambitious projects together is priceless, and having access to the fabulous Arena artistic staff will make a huge difference in my writing. Arena is truly leading the way in terms of new play development, and I am honored to be included in this group of hardworking, diverse and dynamic playwrights."

Joshua Ford is the Helen Hayes Award-nominated playwright of *Miklat*, which received its world premiere at Theater J in 2002 and was nominated for the Charles MacArthur Award for Best New Play. *Miklat* went on to subsequent productions at Florida Stage, Jewish Theatre of the South and several other regional theaters. His new play, *To Kill a King*, has been recognized as a "Top Ten Play" by the 2015 Jewish Plays Project, was a semifinalist for the 2014 Eugene O'Neill National Playwright's Conference and has received workshop readings as part of the 2014 Locally Grown Festival at Theater J and at the Baltimore Playwrights Festival in February 2015. For many years he oversaw the arts programs at the Washington D.C. Jewish Community Center, where, among other positions, he was an associate producer at Theater J, directed the Washington Jewish Film Festival, served as chief program officer and worked on bringing artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians to D.C. audiences. Born in New Jersey and educated at Grinnell College in Iowa, he lives in Montgomery County, MD with his wife, the writer and blogger Melissa Ford, and their boy-girl twins. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

"I feel incredibly fortunate to join this community of writers under the aegis of a theater that has played such an important role in the lives of so many playwrights. Arena Stage is a company with a national and

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international reach, so the fact that they have chosen to nurture the dramatists in their own backyard is a phenomenal opportunity. It provides even more evidence that D.C. is an important hub of the #newplay movement."

Mary Stone Hanley, Ph.D. is a playwright, poet, educator, scholar and researcher. As a playwright she has written nine plays for young people and two screenplays produced as films. She wrote and produced *The Name Game* in the 2013 DC Black Theater Festival and a revised version in the 2014 Capital Fringe Festival facilitated by grants from the D.C. Arts and Humanities Commission. Her plays, *Street Life* and *Sunshine and Rain*, have been chosen for readings by The African Continuum Theatre, Black Theatre Festival, Inkwell Theater and Spooky Action Theater. She has also been a member of the Black Women Playwrights' Group. She began her theater life as an adolescent at Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio; attended Syracuse University, majoring in Drama; and received a B.A. in Children's Drama at the University of Washington. She has a M.Ed. in Educational Communications (emphasis in television and film) and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction in Multicultural Education and Drama from the University of Washington in Seattle, WA. Presently she is a graduate student in creative writing at American University in D.C., with a focus on poetry, a form and language she often uses in playwrighting.

"There have been a few times in my life when I felt like I stood in a field of riches, abundance at my fingertips. Playwrights' Arena is one such moment. I have plowed this field for a very long time, now I'll have readings, feedback, discussion and interaction with other playwrights, a community in which to deepen my understanding of the craft and learn how to navigate the contemporary theater world! What a longed-for harvest!"

Liz Maestri's full-length plays include *Sinner-Man*, *House Beautiful*, *Fallbeil*, *Condo Condo Condoland*, *Somersaulting* and *Owl Moon* (Original Works Publishing). Her work has been commissioned, produced and developed at The Artists' Bloc, Capital Fringe Festival, CENTERSTAGE 50Fest, E.M.P. Collective, Field Trip Theatre, Forum Theatre, Glass Mind Theatre, Great Plains Theatre Conference (PlayLab), INTERSECTIONS Festival, One-Minute Play Festival, The Kennedy Center's Page-to-Stage Festival, Primary Stages/ESPA, Sewanee Writers' Conference, Source Festival, SWAN Day, Taffety Punk Theatre Company, Theater Alliance and Theater J. She was awarded a D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities Artist Fellowship, Horton Foote Scholarship, Weissberg Foundation Award and a D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities Young Artist Program Award. She has been a finalist for the Larry Neal Writer's Award and a semifinalist for the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. She studied playwrighting with the 24 With 5 Collective at New Dramatists and is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild of America.

"I am thrilled beyond thrilled to be joining the second cohort of Playwrights' Arena. PA is an incredible shot in the arm—it provides both the process-based structure I've been hungry for and the kind of multipronged support system that is so difficult to find."

David Mitchell Robinson's goal to write a play about every place he's ever lived has resulted in *Carapace* (Minneapolis), *The Imaginary Music Critic Who Doesn't Exist* (Chicago), *Animals Nobody Loves* (Southeast Ohio), *Olympic Village* (Atlanta) and *Terminals* (airplanes). These and other plays have been produced, developed or commissioned by the Alliance Theatre, Center Theatre Group, the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, Primary Stages, the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, Actor's Express, Theater J, B Street Theatre, the Inkwell, Rep Stage, Field Trip Theatre, the Source Festival and Ohio University, where he received his MFA. David is a past winner of the Keneda Graduate Playwriting Competition and the Scott McPherson Playwriting Award. He has also been a nominee for the PoNY Fellowship, the Lanford Wilson Award, the Terrence McNally Award and a Suzi Bass Award.

"I think the playwright's temperament is a social one—if we didn't think that being around other theater-makers made us better at what we do, we'd be writing in another medium. So I'm delighted to be joining—continued—"

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Playwrights' Arena and developing a relationship with these other writers and their work.”

For more information on Playwrights' Arena and the American Voices New Play Institute at Arena Stage visit: arenastage.org/artistic-development/new-play-institute/playwrights-arena/.

The American Voices New Play Institute is sponsored by Robert and Arlene Kogod with generous support from the Barbara R Walton Endowment Fund for New Playwrights.

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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