

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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FULL COMPANY ANNOUNCED FOR CHRISTOPHER DURANG'S  
TONY AWARD-WINNING *VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE*  
SERVING UP FAMILY DRAMA WITH COMIC SAVAGERY  
UNDER DIRECTION OF AARON POSNER

AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER  
APRIL 3-MAY 3, 2015

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the full company for the Washington, D.C. premiere of **Christopher Durang's** Tony Award-winning comedy *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*. Helen Hayes Award-winning director and playwright **Aaron Posner**, known for his Chekhov-inspired plays *Stupid Fucking Bird* and *Life Sucks (Or the Present Ridiculous)*, lends his hand to this riotous sendup, which satirizes characters and themes from Anton Chekhov's classics. In this "sunny new play about gloomy people" (*New York Times*), siblings Vanya and Sonia live out their days in an endless, bleak tableau in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. All seems numbingly mundane until in sweeps hurricane Masha, their fading movie star sister, with her shiny new boy toy and a big announcement. *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* runs April 3-May 3, 2015 in the Fichandler Stage.

The unforgettable cast of characters features long-time Posner collaborators **Eric Hissom** (Theater J's *Life Sucks (Or the Present Ridiculous)*) as Vanya and Philadelphia native **Grace Gonglewski**, a frequent performer with Arden Theatre Company, as the glamorous and self-absorbed Masha. Joining Hissom and Gonglewski are D.C. natives **Sherri L. Edelen** (Arena Stage's *My Fair Lady*, Signature Theatre's *Gypsy*) as Sonia and **Jefferson Farber** (Signature Theatre's *Shakespeare's R&J*) as Masha's newest boy-toy Spike. **Jessica Frances Dukes**, most recently seen at Arena Stage as Tonya in *King Hedley II*, plays housekeeper and soothsayer Cassandra. As the aspiring actress Nina, Arena Stage introduces **Rachel Esther Tate** (Off-Broadway's *Hamlet* and *Saint Joan*) in her area debut.

"Christopher Durang is in the top tier of our contemporary playwrights and he creates plays that are intelligent comedy," shares Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "This one is a true mash-up. Aaron Posner is well-experienced with this genre as both a writer and director, and I know he will handle Christopher's play in just the right way. I love this play because it recalls theater of the past but is very rooted in the present."

"As someone who has spent the last several years exploring Chekhov variations through my own plays, it is a total joy to have the opportunity to splash around in Christopher Durang's hilarious, playful and intelligent pool," says **Posner**. "This wildly popular play is both delightfully funny and deeply human. Mr. Durang has the skill and

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deliciously skewed perspective to make it maybe funnier and more absurd than Chekhov ever intended, while keeping the essential humanity and underlying pain that gives the play enough ballast to add up to more than just laughs. It is certainly an honor to be directing for the first time at Arena Stage, a theater I have admired for so long.”

**Christopher Durang** (*Playwright*) is one of our most beloved and widely produced contemporary American playwrights. He has received multiple Obies, a Tony Award nomination and a Tony win for his work, among many other accolades. Christopher is the recipient of the 2012 PEN Master American Dramatist Award and is a 2013 inductee to the Theater Hall of Fame. Among his best known plays are *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*, *Beyond Therapy*, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, *Laughing Wild*, *Betty's Summer Vacation*, the Pulitzer Prize-finalist *Miss Witherspoon* and *Why Torture Is Wrong*. Characterized by a combination of absurdist humor and raging satire, his style has influenced an entire generation of writers. But even the anger of an *enfant terrible* must recede and he has now given us what is arguably his most enjoyable and commercially viable comedy to date: *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* was the winner of the 2013 Tony Award for Best Play, Best Play from the New York Drama Critics Circle, the Drama Desk Award, the Outer Critics Circle, the Drama League Award and the Off-Broadway Alliance Award.

**Aaron Posner** (*Director*) makes his Arena Stage debut. Aaron is a freelance director and playwright, the founding Artistic Director of The Arden Theatre Company and an Associate Artist at the Folger Theatre. He has won numerous awards as both a director and playwright including an Outer Circle Critics Award, The John Gassner Award, a Theatre Bay Area Award, three Barrymore Awards and Helen Hayes Awards as director or playwright four of the last 10 years. His published and produced plays include *Stupid Fucking Bird*, *Life Sucks (Or the Present Ridiculous)*, *My Name Is Asher Lev*, *The Chosen*, *Who Am I This Time? (And Other Conundrums of Love)*, *Sometimes A Great Notion*, *A Murder*, *A Mystery & A Marriage* and others. Aaron has directed more than 150 productions at major regional theaters across the country including Actor's Theatre of Louisville, The Alliance, American Players Theatre, The American Repertory Theatre, Cal Shakes, Folger Theatre, Milwaukee Rep, Portland Center Stage, Seattle Rep, Signature Theatre, Studio Theatre, Theatre J, Woolly Mammoth and more. Aaron is an Eisenhower Fellow, a graduate of Northwestern University, is from Eugene, Oregon and lives locally with his wife, the excellent actress Erin Weaver, and his amazing daughter, Maisie.

### **Cast Biographies**

**Jessica Frances Dukes** (*Cassandra*) returns to Arena Stage after making her debut in *King Hedley II*. D.C. credits include *Bootycandy*, *In the Next Room*, *Full Circle*, *Eclipsed*, *Fever/Dream*, *Antebellum* and *Starving* (Woolly Mammoth Theatre, company member); *The Conference of The Birds* (Folger Theatre); *The Piano Lesson* (Olney Theatre); *Passing Strange* and *Caroline, or Change* (Studio Theatre); *Trip to Bountiful* and *Permanent Collection* (Round House); *Jitney* (Ford's Theatre); *Spunk* (Tribute Productions, Helen Hayes nomination); *The Bluest Eye* and *Insurrection: Holding History* (Theater Alliance) and more. Regional credits include *Beneatha's Place* and *Clybourne Park* (Centerstage); *Spoiler Alert: Everybody Dies* (The Second City); *Stick Fly* (Arden Theatre); *A Raisin in the Sun* and *The Piano Lesson* (Geva Theatre); *The Piano Lesson* (Indiana Rep); *Trip to Bountiful* (Cleveland Playhouse) and more. Off-Broadway credits include *Bootycandy* (Playwrights Horizons). TV credits include *The Good Wife* (CBS) and *A Raisin in the Sun Revisited* (PBS). MFA from Catholic University of America.

**Sherri L. Edelen** (*Sonia*) returns to Arena Stage after performing in *My Fair Lady* and *Cabaret*. Other local appearances include Momma Rose in *Gypsy* (Signature Theatre) and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* (Folger Theatre). Both performances earned her Helen Hayes Award nominations. She received two Helen Hayes Awards for *Side Show* and *Les Misérables* at Signature Theatre and the Barrymore Award for Margaret Johnson in *The Light in the Piazza* at the Philadelphia Theatre Company. Regional appearances include the Shakespeare Theatre Company (*Design for Living*); Olney Theatre (*How to Succeed...*), Fusion Theatre (*Outside Mullingar*), Stages St.

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Louis (*Annie Get Your Gun*); Arden Theatre Company (*Caroline, or Change*) and the Kennedy Center Sondheim Celebration (*Sunday in the Park with George* and *Merrily We Roll Along*).

**Jefferson Farber** (*Spike*) is thrilled to be making his Arena Stage debut. Other Washington area credits include *Shakespeare's R&J* at Signature Theatre (adapted and directed by Joe Calarco), *Metamorphoses* at Constellation Theatre Company, *All's Well that Ends Well* at Shakespeare Theatre Company and *Genesis Reboot* at Synetic Theatre. He has also performed regionally in *Breaking the Code* at Barrington Stage Company. Jefferson spent three seasons with the Colorado Festival of World Theatre studying and working alongside such Tony Award winners as Stephen Sondheim, Sir Peter Shaffer, Zoe Caldwell and Patti LuPone. His TV credits include *Killing Kennedy* and the Netflix series *House of Cards* (dir: Robin Wright).

**Grace Gonglewski** (*Masha*) is thrilled to be making her D.C. debut at the renowned Arena Stage. Off-Broadway she played Joan in *The Guys* opposite Tom Wopat at The Flea Theatre, directed by Tommy Kail. Grace hails from Philadelphia where she works regularly. Favorite Arden Theatre roles (among 25 played) include Hedda Gabler, Maggie the Cat, Candida and Josie Hogan. Other highlights include *The Heiress* at Walnut Street Theatre; *Body Awareness* at Wilma Theatre; *Laramie Project* at Philadelphia Theatre Company; *Design for Living* at Delaware Theatre Company; *Private Lives* at Cape May Stage; 9 seasons with The Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival; and a tour of Ireland with Interact Theatre. Grace garnered four Barrymore Awards, including the F. Otto Haas Award for an emerging Philadelphia Theatre Artist, and several Barrymore nominations. She is the voice of America's Best Eyewear, Alex's Lemonade Stand and many banks, casinos, politicians and hospitals around the country.

**Eric Hissom** (*Vanya*) is honored to be making his Arena Stage debut. His previous appearances in D.C.-area theater includes the Tiger in *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* at Round House, Doctor Givings in *The Vibrator Play* at Woolly Mammoth and several roles at the Folger, including *Cyrano* and *Bernard Nightingale* in *Arcadia*, for which he won a Helen Hayes Award. Eric did the national tour of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, playing one of the schizophrenic clowns. He has worked in regional theaters all over the country and was a company member for many years at the Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, where he also directed, taught and ran the new play festival, Playfest. Eric has done a little film work, including an appearance as the hapless hotel clerk who gets knocked out by Denzel Washington in *Out of Time*. He has an MFA from the Florida State/Asolo Conservatory.

**Rachel Esther Tate** (*Nina*) performs at Arena Stage for the first time. Rachel worked most recently with Bedlam Off-Broadway in the critically acclaimed *Saint Joan* and *Hamlet*. Other New York credits include the world premiere of *Blood Privilege* and the New York premiere of *Elephant's Graveyard*. She has worked regionally with The Mirror Repertory (Emily in *Our Town*) and Actor's Theatre of Charlotte (*Rocky Horror Show*).

The creative team for *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* includes set designer **Daniel Conway**, costume designer **Paloma Young**, lighting designer **Robert Perry**, original composition and sound design by **James Sugg**, wig designer **Anne Nesmith**, New York casting by **Tara Rubin Casting**, **Lindsay Levine, CSA**, stage manager **Amber Dickerson** and assistant stage manager **Michael D. Ward**.

**Full company bios and images available upon request. Please e-mail [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).**

*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is generously sponsored by Susan & Steven Bralove.

#### ***Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* Post-Show Conversations**

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff. April 15, 21 & 29 following the noon performance; April 23 following the 8:00 p.m. performance and April 28 following the 7:30 p.m. performance.

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### Production Information

#### ***Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike***

By Christopher Durang

Directed by Aaron Posner

April 3-May 3, 2015 in the Fichandler Stage

**ABOUT:** Winner of the 2013 Tony Award for Best Play (*and* the Outer Critics Circle *and* the Drama League *and* the Drama Desk), *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is a “sunny new play about gloomy people” (*New York Times*). Siblings Vanya and Sonia live out their days in an endless, bleak tableau in Bucks County, PA. All seems numbingly mundane until in sweeps hurricane Masha, their fading movie star sister, with her shiny new boy toy and a big announcement. Satirizing characters and themes from Chekhov’s classics, Christopher Durang’s latest madcap masterpiece serves up family drama with comic savagery and poses the question: if you could choose your family, would you necessarily choose *your* family?

#### **CAST:**

Cassandra: Jessica Frances Dukes

Sonia: Sherri L. Edelen

Spike: Jefferson Farber

Masha: Grace Gonglewski

Vanya: Eric Hissom

Nina: Rachel Esther Tate

#### **CREATIVE TEAM:**

Director: Aaron Posner

Set Designer: Daniel Conway

Costume Designer: Paloma Young

Lighting Designer: Robert Perry

Original Composition and Sound Design: James Sugg

Wig Designer: Anne Nesmith

New York Casting Director: Tara Rubin Casting, Lindsay Levine, CSA

Stage Manager: Amber Dickerson

Assistant Stage Manager: Michael D. Ward

#### **Plan Your Visit**

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* 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/](http://arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs/). Tickets may be purchased online at [arenastage.org](http://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.

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Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday, 4/15; Tuesday, 4/21 & Wednesday, 4/29

Full calendar: <http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=18341>

**ACCESSIBILITY:** In an effort to broaden theater access to potential patrons who are blind or vision impaired, the American Council of the Blind through its Audio Description Project has partnered with Arena Stage to make **live audio description** available at every performance of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* from April 10-May 3, 2015. **Open-captioned performances** will be offered April 22 at 7:30 p.m. and April 30 at 8:00 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/](http://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](http://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.

*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](http://arenastage.org).*

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**Facebook:** [facebook.com/arenastage](https://facebook.com/arenastage)

**Twitter:** @arenastage, mention *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* with #VanyaSoniaMashaSpike

**YouTube:** [youtube.com/arenastage1](https://youtube.com/arenastage1)

**Pinterest:** [pinterest.com/arenastage](https://pinterest.com/arenastage)

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