

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES 11 ENSEMBLES SET FOR INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED VOICES OF NOW
DEVISED THEATER PROGRAM'S 2014/15 SEASON
WITH TWO ENSEMBLES STILL OPEN FOR D.C.-AREA YOUTH TO JOIN

NOW IN ITS 12TH YEAR, PROGRAM WILL WORK WITH NEW ENSEMBLES INCLUDING
FAIR GIRLS OF D.C. AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN FAIRFAX, VA

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces 11 ensembles set for the 2014/15 Voices of Now season, including seven returning ensembles, two new community-partnership ensembles and two opportunities for young D.C.-area artists to become participants of the internationally recognized devised theater program.

Currently in its 12th year, [Voices of Now](#) (VON) is a year-long drama program that utilizes writing and movement to devise autobiographical theater pieces with ensembles of middle school, high school and adult artists in the D.C. area and internationally. Each ensemble's play poses questions relevant to the artists' communities and investigates those questions by recounting the artists' personal stories; with the primary goal of empowering the artists to create positive change.

Thanks in part to the support of the **Harman Family Foundation**, this season Arena Stage will partner with [FAIR Girls](#), a not-for-profit focused on preventing the exploitation of girls worldwide, to create a play that explores the issue of sex-trafficking in the D.C. metro area. The **Virginia Department of Education** has also supported the inaugural Key World Ensemble at Key Middle School, which will create a play exploring the experience of ELL (English Language Learner) students in Fairfax, VA.

"We're thrilled to continue be a home for emerging artists who are interested in creating collaborative theater that explores the issues they are passionate about," shares Director of Education and Voices of Now Designer **Ashley Forman**. "This season we have the opportunity to create plays with new populations, as well as deepen our connection to our current community of ensembles. The ability to further the reach of this program—and by extension our artists' voices—is a gift that we are immensely proud of and grateful for."

VON formed its first partnership 11 years ago with Jefferson Middle School in Southwest D.C. In addition to the Jefferson Ensemble and the previously mentioned FAIR Girls and Key World Ensembles, this season will mark the return of Fairfax County Public Schools, including Glasgow Middle School, Robinson Secondary School, Key Middle School and Burke School, which serves middle school students with emotional and/or behavioral needs. Returning for its fourth year is an ensemble in partnership with the [Wendt Center for Loss and Healing](#), which is made up of young artists who have experienced the death of a loved one.

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All ensembles will benefit from the guidance of the **Mentor Ensemble**, which is comprised of alumni from previous VON ensembles whose job is to mentor new VON artists, serve as artistic role models by creating and performing their own one-act play and act as ambassadors for the VON program at local and national events.

Ensembles Open for Enrollment:

The **Mead Ensemble** is a prestigious training program open to student artists who are interested in studying the Voices of Now devising process. In addition to developing writing and performance skills, students will grow as an ensemble through the art of collaboration. Students are expected to approach the program with creativity, discipline, focus and commitment. No audition or previous performance experience is required. Ensemble meets Saturdays at the Mead Center November 8, 2014 – May 16, 2015 from 1:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m. **For registration details, visit <http://arenastage.org/education/arena-stage-academy/voices-of-now-mead-ensemble/index.shtml>.**

The **Advocacy Ensemble** is a fully sponsored, audition-based group made up of artists and activists in their teens and twenties who are interested in exploring theater as a tool for advocacy and to ignite productive dialogue around issues the artists are passionate about. Past Advocacy Ensembles included participants from a variety of community organizations and not-for-profits such as D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (DCFS), Metro TeenAIDS, Promising Futures, Next Step Public Charter School and Teens Against the Spread of AIDS (TASA). **Since the Advocacy Ensemble is underwritten by support from Arena Stage and our community sponsors, it is entirely FREE for individual participants. For more information on the Advocacy Ensemble, visit arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now/washington/index.shtml.**

For the D.C. ensembles, in addition to performing at the Mead Center as part of the program's cumulative **Voices of Now Festival (May 13-16, 2014)**, they also have an opportunity to perform their plays in their communities. Past VON plays have been featured at the Atlas Performing Arts Center's INTERSECTIONS Festival, George Washington University, Imagination Stage, the American Alliance for Theater Educators' National Conference, the Association of Theater in Higher Education Conference, the 2013 International AIDS Conference and the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage.

Voices of Now International: Following a successful partnership with the U.S. Department of State in 2012, which sent four teaching artists from Arena Stage's Community Engagement (CE) department to India, VON continued its international expansion with three additional partnerships during the 2013/14 season. In December 2013, four staff members traveled to **Zagreb, Croatia** to create a play with young adults with physical disabilities. In January 2014, all nine staff members of the Arena Stage CE team traveled 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 took place. In June 2014, the **United States Embassy in Lima, Peru** brought two CE staff members to partner with **Arena y Esteras**, a local organization comprised of artists, educators and leaders committed to using art as a tool to contribute to human development and social transformation. **For more information about Voices of Now International, including photos, video and personal accounts, visit arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now/international/index.shtml.**

Voices of Now is made possible by support from AT&T, the Pitts Family Foundation, Harman Family Foundation, Virginia Department of Education, GEICO, Rockwell Collins, Mark & Carol Hyman Fund, Friends of Southwest D.C. and Toni R. Ritzenberg. Additional support for the program is provided by the U.S. Department of State.

Additional support of Arena Stage's Community Engagement efforts is provided by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.; Alice Shaver Foundation; Robert & Natalie Mandel Family Fund; Dimick Foundation; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; Corina Higginson Trust; Nora Roberts Foundation; Venable

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Foundation; Toni A. Ritzenberg; Friends of Southwest D.C.; Anthony Lucas-Spindletop Foundation; Edington, Peel & Associates; Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela; and Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc. VON and our other Community Engagement program offerings would not be possible without the extraordinary support of all our benefactors.

For more information on Voices of Now, visit arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now.

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 thousands of 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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