

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Greta Hays/Kirstin Franko  
[press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org); 202-600-4056

April 3, 2015

**ARENA STAGE HOLDS THE VOICES OF NOW FESTIVAL,  
A FOUR-DAY EVENT SHOWCASING ORIGINAL PLAYS WRITTEN AND PERFORMED  
BY MORE THAN 100 YOUNG ARTISTS FROM THE D.C. AREA  
MAY 13-16, 2015 AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER**

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will host the **Voices of Now Festival**, a four-day event featuring original works of theater written and performed by 11 different youth ensembles from the internationally renowned Community Engagement program. The festival will bring together more than 100 artists, ages 11-25, from D.C., Maryland and Virginia who have been working with professional theater artists from Arena Stage this season to devise original one-act plays. **The 2015 ensembles will come together May 13-16, 2015 to perform and discuss their work in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle at the Mead Center.** An additional forum hosted by the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing will take place on May 17, 2015.

Currently in its 12th year, [Voices of Now](#) (VON) is a season-long drama program that utilizes creative writing, improvisation, collaboration, movement and performance to devise autobiographical theater pieces with ensembles of middle-school, high-school and adult artists locally and internationally. Each ensemble's play poses challenging social questions relevant to the artists' communities and investigates those questions by recounting the artists' personal stories. This year's plays examine topics including education equality, sex trafficking in the D.C. metro area, mental health, school culture, the experience of moving to the U.S. from another country and the questions that emerge when grieving a loss. All performances will be followed by a talkback.

"The most powerful gift we can give to our youth is the confidence to express themselves," shares Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "To give voice to their thoughts, fears, ambitions, joys, heartaches and triumphs. Voices of Now provides a platform for young people who may not otherwise find that voice. The annual festival is a wonderful opportunity for people to hear what is going on in their lives and in their minds. By giving them voice, we give ourselves the gift of understanding and the opportunity to watch them grow as human beings."

This year's program features two new ensembles, including a partnership with **FAIR Girls**, a not-for-profit focused on preventing the exploitation of girls worldwide, to explore the issue of sex-trafficking in the D.C. metro area, and the **Key World Ensemble** at Key Middle School, to explore the experience of ELL (English Language Learner) students in Fairfax, VA.

VON formed its first partnership 12 years ago with **Jefferson Middle School Academy** in Southwest D.C. In addition to the Jefferson Ensemble, 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 fifth year is an ensemble in

—continued—

## Voices of Now Festival May 13-16 to feature new works from young artists—Page 2

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.

Additional ensembles include the **Mead Ensemble**, a program located at the Mead Center that is designed for students in grades 7-11 interested in devised theater, as well as the **Mentor Ensemble**, which is made up of alumni from previous Voices of Now ensembles whose role is to mentor the younger artists in the program. The **Advocacy Ensemble**, which is made up of emerging artists who are interested in using theater as a tool for advocacy, includes select participants from a variety of community organizations including D.C. Child and Family Services Agency's Office of Youth Empowerment, Promising Futures, First Star and SEED Public Charter School.

### **2015 Voices of Now Festival Schedule**

All performances take place in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle in the Mead Center, 1101 Sixth St., S.W.

#### **Wednesday, May 13—7:30 p.m.**

*Balancing Act* by the Key Middle School Ensemble  
*Growing Roots/Cultivando Raíces* by the Key World Ensemble  
*Undercurrent* by the Mentor Ensemble

#### **Thursday, May 14—7:30 p.m.**

*Safety Net* by the Glasgow Middle School Ensemble  
*Honor Code* by the Jefferson Middle School Ensemble  
*Undercurrent* by the Mentor Ensemble

#### **Friday, May 15—7:30 p.m.**

*Push & Pull* by the Burke School Ensemble  
*Break Through* by the Robinson Secondary School Ensemble  
*Memory Loss* by the Wendt Center Ensemble

#### **Saturday, May 16—7:30 p.m.**

*The Space Between* by the Mead Ensemble  
*Cost of Living* by the Advocacy Ensemble  
*D.C. Traffic* by the FAIR Girls Ensemble

**TICKETS:** Tickets for the Voices of Now Festival are **FREE**, though reservations are required through the Arena Stage Sales Office at **202-488-3300** or at [tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=20196](http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=20196).

**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](http://arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now/international/index.shtml), 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](http://arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now/international/index.shtml).**

## Voices of Now Festival May 13-16 to feature new works from young artists—Page 3

**Voices of Now** is an internationally recognized drama program designed by Arena Stage's Director of Education Ashley Forman. In addition to performing at Arena Stage, ensembles perform throughout their own communities. Past ensembles have performed at Atlas Performing Arts Center's Intersections Festival, Imagination Stage, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education's National Conference, the Association of Theatre in Higher Education Conference, the 2013 International AIDS Conference and the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage.

For more information on Voices of Now, visit [arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now](http://arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now).

### **2015 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**

Burke School, Burke, VA (FCPS)

Child and Family Services Agency's Office of Youth Empowerment, Washington, D.C.

FAIR Girls, Washington, D.C.

First Star, Washington, D.C.

Glasgow Middle School, Alexandria, VA (FCPS)

Jefferson Middle School Academy, Washington, D.C. (DCPS)

Key Middle School, Springfield, VA (FCPS)

Promising Futures, Washington, D.C.

Robinson Secondary School, Fairfax, VA (FCPS)

SEED Public Charter School, Washington, D.C. (DCPS)

The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing, Washington, D.C.

Voices of Now is made possible by support from Pitts Family Foundation, D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, Harman Family Foundation, Virginia Department of Education, GEICO, Rockwell Collins, Mark & Carol Hyman Fund, Friends of Southwest D.C. and Toni A. 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 made possible by Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; AT&T; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.; The JBG Companies; Alice Shaver Foundation; Robert & Natalie Mandel Family Fund; Dimick Foundation; Rockwell Collins; Corina Higginson Trust; Nora Roberts Foundation; Venable 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.

***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).

###

### **Connect with us:**

**Arena Stage app:** [itunes.apple.com/app/id673334921](https://itunes.apple.com/app/id673334921)

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

**Twitter:** @arenastage, mention Voices of Now with #VoicesofNow

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

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

**Flickr:** [flickr.com/photos/arena\\_stage](https://flickr.com/photos/arena_stage)

**Blog:** [blog.arenastage.org](https://blog.arenastage.org)