

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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Contact: Greta Hays/Kirstin Franko
press@arenastage.org, 202-600-4056

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES 2015/16 PROGRAMMING FOR SEVENTH YEAR OF ACTORS ARENA

A FORUM CREATED BY ACTORS, FOR ACTORS IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. THEATER COMMUNITY

***** Anna Deavere Smith, Kyle Donnelly, Timothy Douglas, Edward Gero, Rachel Grossman, David S. Leong and Howard Shalwitz confirmed as guest artists for upcoming season *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage announces the 2015/16 programming for [Actors Arena](#), a professional development and community-building forum for experienced D.C.-area actors. Now entering its seventh year, the program connects local, professional actors by hosting monthly workshops, master classes and roundtable conversations featuring nationally renowned theater artists at the Mead Center for American Theater, providing artists with the opportunity to hone and develop skills, facilitate substantive artistic exploration and nourish the artistic spirit.

The programming for the upcoming year focuses on finding new approaches for crafting richer characterizations. Featured presenters include MacArthur “Genius Grant” recipient, actress and playwright **Anna Deavere Smith**, director and faculty member for the MFA Actor Training Program at the University of California San Diego **Kyle Donnelly**, director and Associate Artist at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park **Timothy Douglas**, four-time Helen Hayes Award-winning actor **Edward Gero**, dog & pony dc Co-Founder **Rachel Grossman**, former Theatre Department Chair at Virginia Commonwealth University **David S. Leong** and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company Artistic Director **Howard Shalwitz**.

“Actors Arena has come a long way from its beginning,” says Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. “When we opened the Mead Center for American Theater, we wanted to be a part of the Washington theater community and open our doors to artists as well as audiences. This program is completely driven by actors in our community. The program has grown by leaps and bounds, giving actors what they want—they decide the direction and where they would like to improve. It’s exciting to have that energy in our artistic home. I know most of these talented artists personally and am proud that we can offer this professional development to our local acting community.”

Local actress Naomi Jacobson, Director of Community Engagement Anita Maynard-Losh and Smith conceived the initiative as a way to address the needs of the D.C. artistic community, specifically addressing what actors wanted in terms of resources and connecting with other local artists. Actors Arena held its first meeting in 2009 and has continued to provide a space for dialogue and artistic growth, with current participation from more than 500 professional D.C.-area actors. The current steering committee consists of Jacobson, Joy Jones, Larry Redmond, Jefferson Russell, Stephen F. Schmidt and Kimberly Schraf.

Previous events hosted by Actors Arena have covered topics including on-camera techniques, classical acting, hip-hop theater, filmed auditions, musical theater, writing and improvisation, Actors’ Equity, body image, surviving technical rehearsals and artistic stamina, the Alexander Technique and stage combat, as well as sessions with artistic and casting directors from the area’s leading theaters and guest visits from Double Edge Theatre, Synthetic Theater, Tectonic Theater Project and theatreWashington.

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Actors Arena 2015/16 Schedule

*All times are 6:30-9:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted

Whether it comes in a flash or late in the process, character is the essential lens through which actors shine, illuminating recognizable, fascinating, potentially outrageous, three-dimensional human beings with memories, experiences, tensions, opinions and a unique perspective and point of view. Some of us grind this lens from outside ourselves; others find the lens within. Join us to investigate, create and develop character.

October 19, 2015

Playing Animal Characters with David S. Leong

At first glance, playing an animal character doesn't seem hard to do. The real challenge lies in having enough skill to protect yourself from vocal and physical injury and avoid stereotypes and clichés while creating three-dimensional animal characters that walk, talk, sing and dance. How “realistic” or stylized do you make the characters? Should the roles be played as animals with “human qualities” or humans with “animal qualities?” How do you make choices that you can sustain over a long run? Dive into these topics with movement coach and fight choreographer David S. Leong.

November 2015 (date TBD)

Roundtable character discussion

December 7, 2015

Developing Character with Anna Deavere Smith

Actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith guides participants through her unique perspective and the interview techniques she uses to develop a character, as well as how research and the examination of topical social issues can combine to form a theatrical experience.

January 25, 2016

Characters as Facilitators with Rachel Grossman

How does this particular character engage audience in a task or exercise? With [dog & pony dc](#) Co-Founder Rachel Grossman, explore techniques for inventing and executing in-show facilitations, grounded in dog & pony dc's audience integration principle and utilizing approaches adapted from educators, community activists and corporate consultants.

February 29, 2016

Getting out of Caricature: A Thousand Faces, One Story with Edward Gero

Carl Jung's theory of dreams, the collective unconscious and archetypes speaks to an idea of a communal human experience that transcends cultural boundaries. Joseph Campbell, Jung's philosophical offspring, speaks of how these same patterns and shared experiences exist in the waking realm of mythology. In a candid and freewheeling conversation, actor Edward Gero discusses the impact of Jung and Campbell on his work as a source of energy and inspiration in creating character and identifying the dramatic journey common to great texts.

March 14, 2016

Preparation and Improvisation with Kyle Donnelly

Examine the two basic tenets of great acting in the context of both new and established texts with director Kyle Donnelly. How do you fulfill the needs of the text while bringing your own uniqueness to the role?

April 4, 2016

Freeing the Natural Actor (based on the work of Kristin Linklater) with Timothy Douglas

Director Timothy Douglas provides a movement-based lecture and demonstration culminating in two or three participants working on several lines of Shakespearean verse.

May 23, 2016 (6-8 p.m.)

A Conversation with Howard Shalwitz

Join Artistic Director of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company Howard Shalwitz as he shares his insight on creating and portraying character.

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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 more than 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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