



the mead center
for american theater

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 AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER ANNOUNCES COMPANY'S 66TH SEASON

***** Season features five world premieres, three musicals,
three powerful dramas making regional debuts
and collaborations with artists and theaters across America *****

(Washington, D.C.) Artistic Director Molly Smith announces the 2015/16 season lineup for the 66th season at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater.

"Throughout my 17 years at Arena Stage, I have focused on a mission to engage our audiences in the range of complexity and beauty in American theater," comments Smith. "From intimate dramas to lavish musicals, we've re-imagined the works of theatrical giants. We've brought fresh productions of award-winning new plays to Washington. We've mounted world premieres—14 since the opening of the Mead Center—to contribute to the American theater canon."

She continues, "Our 66th season lineup boasts an adventurous balance of work that's bound to get us talking. We'll debut five new projects including a world-premiere musical and participate in a citywide festival that gives a platform to our nation's female playwrights called the Women's Voices Theater Festival. The season runs the gamut from the new to the timeless classic, producing big politically-charged and socially relevant dramas and showcasing partnerships with prominent theaters and artists from around the country."

The season kicks off with the summer engagement of *Dear Evan Hansen*, an original world-premiere musical about connections lost and found by Tony Award-nominated composing duo **Benj Pasek** and **Justin Paul** (*Dogfight*; *A Christmas Story, The Musical*) and Outer Critics Circle Award-winning playwright **Steven Levenson** (*Masters of Sex*), directed by Tony Award nominee **Michael Greif** (*If/Then, Next to Normal, Rent*). Following Arena Stage's 2014/15's record-breaking revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, the gold-standard musical returns in fall 2015 with **Smith** at the helm of *Oliver!*, the poignant musical about a young orphan in 19th-century London that features jubilant songs including "Consider Yourself" and "Food, Glorious Food." Later in the season, music will fill the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle with award-winning singer/songwriter **Benjamin Scheuer** and his intimate one-man musical *The Lion*, a rock 'n' roll journey to discover the redemptive power of music.

Arena Stage will participate in the citywide **Women's Voices Theater Festival** with two projects by three women whose previous work has been embraced by Arena audiences. The first, *Destiny of Desire*, is a theatrical riff on the classic telenovela by American Voices New Play Institute inaugural resident playwright and D.C.-native **Karen Zacarias**. This will be followed by *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End*, a new comedy about the all-American humorist by **Allison Engel** and **Margaret Engel**, the twin-sister writing team behind *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*. The two-month festival, which boasts participation from more than 50 theaters in the nation's capital region, is dedicated to featuring new work by female playwrights and highlighting the scope of plays being written by women. More information on the festival will be announced at a later date.

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Arena Stage announces 2015/16 season—Page 2

Female voices continue to be heard throughout the season, with the Minneapolis Children's Theatre Company's world-premiere adaptation of **Cheryl L. West's *Akeelah and the Bee***, a play based on the moving family film about a girl from the inner city of Chicago competing at the Scripps National Spelling Bee, and ***Sweat***, a new drama from Pulitzer Prize winner and American Voices New Play Institute project resident **Lynn Nottage** (*Ruined*). *Sweat* explores America's industrial decline in a Pennsylvania town at the turn of the millennium, and is a world-premiere co-commission with Oregon Shakespeare Festival as part of their American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle.

The lineup culminates with three powerful, highly-acclaimed social and political dramas making their D.C.-area debuts. These come just in time for primary season, when the city will be buzzing with the exploration of hot-button issues such as the ones found in these plays, including **Anthony Giardina's *The City of Conversation***, in which a Georgetown matriarch attempts to balance polarizing family politics spanning three presidential administrations, as well as in **Robert Schenkkan's 2014 Tony Award-winning *All the Way*** featuring President Lyndon Johnson's impassioned struggle to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Closing out the season is **Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Disgraced***, in which cultural-identity struggles bubble up to a boiling point during a tense dinner party with friends.

Additional programming in the 2015/16 season to be announced at a later date.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater 2015/16 Schedule*

Dear Evan Hansen

World-premiere musical with book by Steven Levenson and music and lyrics by Benj Pasek & Justin Paul

Directed by Michael Greif

Choreographed by Danny Mefford

Musical direction by Alex Lacamoire

In the Kreeger Theater / July 10-August 23, 2015

A letter, a lie, a life he never dreamed he could have. Evan Hansen (*Pitch Perfect's* Ben Platt) is about to get everything he's ever wanted: the girl of his dreams, the perfect family he's always longed for and a chance to finally fit in. He just has to hope that his chance to connect isn't blown by the secrets he has to conceal. Featuring a score by Tony Award nominees Benj Pasek and Justin Paul (*A Christmas Story*, *Dogfight*), a book by Steven Levenson (*Masters of Sex*) and directed by three-time Tony nominee Michael Greif (*Rent*, *Next to Normal*), *Dear Evan Hansen* is a moving and original musical about more than how we share, like or friend; it's about how we love, feel and survive in the modern world.

Destiny of Desire

World-premiere comedy by Karen Zacarias

Directed by José Luis Valenzuela

In the Kreeger Theater / September 11-October 18, 2015

On a stormy night in Bellarica, Mexico, two baby girls are born—one into a life of privilege and one into a life of poverty. When the newborns are swapped by a former beauty queen with an insatiable lust for power the stage is set for two outrageous misfortunes to grow into one remarkable destiny. "A writer of comedic skill" (*Variety*), Helen Hayes Award-winning playwright Karen Zacarias (*The Book Club Play*) infuses the Mexican telenovela genre with music, high drama and burning passion to make for a fast-paced modern comedy. **Part of the Women's Voices Theater Festival.**

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Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End

World-premiere play by Allison Engel and Margaret Engel

Directed by David Esbjornson

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle / October 9-November 8, 2015

From the Engel twins, who created the smash hit *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*, comes a new look at one of our country's most beloved voices, who captured the frustrations of her generation by asking, "If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits?" Erma Bombeck dispensed wit and wisdom for more than 30 years as the most widely syndicated humor columnist in America. Discover the story behind the award-winning humorist who championed women's lives with charm and humor that sprang from the most unexpected place of all—the truth. **Part of the Women's Voices Theater Festival.**

Oliver!

Music and lyrics by Lionel Bart

Directed by Molly Smith

In the Fichandler Stage / October 30, 2015-January 3, 2016

Consider yourself invited to the theatrical event of the holiday season. Charles Dickens' unforgettable characters burst to life in this Tony Award-winning musical. Artistic Director Molly Smith's new in-the-round staging blends the chaotic worlds of 19th-century Victorian London with 2015 London and infuses a modern edge to the classic story about an innocent orphan thrown into the dark world of double-dealing thieves and conmen. Bursting with jubilant songs, including "You've Got to Pick a Pocket or Two," "Consider Yourself," "Where is Love?" and the scrumptious "Food, Glorious Food," director Molly Smith (*Fiddler on the Roof, Oklahoma!*) will serve up a musical feast for the eyes and ears that will have every theater-lover calling out for "More!"

Children's Theatre Company's world-premiere adaptation

Akeelah and the Bee

Adapted for the stage by Cheryl L. West

Based on the original screenplay by Doug Atchison

Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright

In the Kreeger Theater / November 13-December 27, 2015

Based on the beloved film, *Akeelah and the Bee* tells the story of an independent 11-year-old from the Chicago projects whose razor-sharp mind keeps her one step ahead of the game in the neighborhood ... but is it enough to get her to the top? Akeelah must turn to family, friends and a few unlikely mentors if she's going to survive the final round of the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Playwright Cheryl L. West (*Pullman Porter Blues*) and director Charles Randolph-Wright (*Ruined*) bring this spirited adaptation to life this holiday season.

Oregon Shakespeare Festival's world premiere

Sweat

By Lynn Nottage

Directed by Kate Whoriskey

In the Kreeger Theater / January 15-February 21, 2016

A group of close friends shares everything: drinks, secrets and laughs. But when rumors of layoffs shake up the local steel mill, the fragile bonds of their community begin to fray and a horrific crime sends shock waves across two generations. This gripping world premiere by acclaimed Pulitzer Prize winner Lynn Nottage (*Ruined*) explores America's industrial decline at the turn of the millennium by examining the inhabitants of one Pennsylvania town who still struggle to reclaim what's lost, find redemption and redefine themselves in a new century. Co-commissioned with Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

The City of Conversation

By Anthony Giardina

In the Fichandler Stage / January 29-March 6, 2016

Politics and family make for polarizing bedfellows in *this* juicy new play and recent Off-Broadway triumph. Georgetown hostess, Hester Ferris, runs in an elite circle, opening her home for political foes to lay down arms and raise a glass. When her son's formidable, conservative wife comes on the scene, the parlor pleasantries of D.C.'s past descend into entrenched posturing and an ultimatum that could implode the family. Follow the Ferris clan from the end of Carter's presidency through the Reagan era and into Obama's game-changing inauguration in this "smart, literate and funny" (*New York Times*) inside look at the theater of politics and the politics of conversation.

The Lion

Written and performed by Benjamin Scheuer

Directed by Sean Daniels

In association with Eva Price

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle / February 26-April 10, 2016

Some stories have to be sung. Writer/performer Benjamin Scheuer uses his guitar—actually, six guitars—in this wholly original musical experience that tells a coming-of-age story that "lifts the spirit" (*Time Out New York*). The award-winning songwriter inspires and disarms with his raw wit and emotional depth as he leads you on a rock 'n' roll journey from boyhood to manhood, through pain and healing, to discover the redemptive power of music. Don't miss the show the *New York Daily News* calls "an irresistible winner." Much like its hero, *The Lion* roars.

All the Way

By Robert Schenkkan

Directed by Kyle Donnelly

In the Fichandler Stage / April 1-May 8, 2016

It's not personal, it's politics in this 2014 Tony Award-winning drama. President Lyndon Baines Johnson had a way about him. He could massage a victory with one hand and sell you down the river with the other, but brokering a deal is like playing with dynamite. With the country still reeling from President Kennedy's assassination and a rising tide of bitterness over Civil Rights, it'll take more than politicking to hold America together—it'll take red, white and blue-blooded leadership. Go *all the way* with LBJ, Martin Luther King, J. Edgar Hoover and more in this "sure-fire, action-packed hit" (*Huffington Post*) where the line between compromise and compromising your principles is as sharp as a knife.

All The Way is generously sponsored by Altria Group. Additional support for All the Way is provided by the David Bruce Smith Foundation.

Disgraced

By Ayad Akhtar

Directed by Timothy Douglas

In the Kreeger Theater / April 22-May 29, 2016

From Ayad Akhtar comes the "breathtaking, raw and blistering" (*AP*), Pulitzer Prize-winning play about the clash between modern culture and ancient faiths. The son of South-Asian immigrants, Amir has worked hard to achieve the American Dream—complete with a successful career, a beautiful wife and \$600 custom-tailored shirts. But has he removed himself too far from his roots? And when a friendly dinner party conversation rockets out of control, will the internal battle between his culture and his identity raze all that he's worked so hard to achieve? Hailed as "terrific, turbulent, with fresh currents of dramatic electricity" (*New York Times*), this incendiary examination of one's self and one's beliefs will leave you breathless.

**Plays, artists and dates are subject to change.*

Subscription packages are now on sale and may be purchased by calling the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300 or by visiting arenastage.org.

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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