

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AYAD AKHTAR JOINS ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER AS AMERICAN VOICES NEW PLAY INSTITUTE RESIDENT PLAYWRIGHT THROUGH JUNE 2017

(Washington, D.C.) Artistic Director Molly Smith announces Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and author **Ayad Akhtar** as Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater's next resident playwright as part of the American Voices New Play Institute, effective July 2016 through June 2017. Akhtar's emotionally-charged drama *Disgraced*, which won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, completes Arena Stage's 2015/16 season. Now in previews, the production officially opens April 28 and runs through May 29, 2016.

Through the Arena Stage residency Akhtar will receive a salary; health benefits; a budget to be used at his discretion to cover collaborator fees, workshop costs and research expenses to support his new play development process; and a commitment from Arena Stage to produce a new work in a future season and to continue cultivating an ongoing, long-term relationship.

"Ayad is an inspiration. His work is immediate, muscular, bitingly funny, thought-provoking and vital to the American theater," shares **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "His masterful use of language creates complex characters wrestling with the major issues of our day—identity, family, love, religion, race and politics. I expect this residency will challenge us both and I embrace it!"

Akhtar, who was listed by *American Theatre* as the most produced playwright for the 2015/16 season, adds, "Molly Smith's vision of a theater for and about America, situated at the heart of American political life, is not only deeply inspiring, but also aligns with the preoccupations of my next series of works. I couldn't be more thrilled to be joining Arena for the coming year, and spending time with the theater's staff and artists at the Mead Center."

Along with residency guidance from Arena Stage Director of Artistic Programming **Robert Barry Fleming**, Akhtar will also receive support from Institute Dramaturg **Jocelyn Clarke**. Clarke is an acclaimed dramaturg and writer, currently a theater advisor to the Arts Council of Ireland and an associate artist with The Civilians. Clarke was previously the Commissioning and Literary Manager of the Abbey Theatre.

Akhtar joins an acclaimed group of writers who have benefited through the Institute, including the original resident writers **Amy Freed**, **Katori Hall**, **Lisa Kron**, **Charles Randolph-Wright** and **Karen Zacarias**, as well as **Samuel D. Hunter**, **Lydia R. Diamond** and most recently **John Strand**, who completes his residency in June 2016. The inaugural cohort of resident playwrights was funded through a multi-year pilot grant by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which The Foundation has since developed into a national program.

For biographies for all of the resident writers, visit: arenastage.org/artistic-development/new-play-institute/residencies.

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Akhtar is a novelist and author of *American Dervish*, published in over 20 languages worldwide and named a 2012 Best Book of the Year by *Kirkus Reviews*, Toronto's *Globe and Mail*, *Shelf Awareness* and *O, The Oprah Magazine*. His play *Disgraced* won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, ran on Broadway at the Lyceum Theatre and is currently the most produced play in the country. In addition to *Disgraced*, his plays *The Who & the What* and *The Invisible Hand* received Off-Broadway runs and are currently being produced nationwide. Ayad was listed as the most produced playwright for the 2015/16 season by *American Theatre* magazine. As a screenwriter, he was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award for Best Screenplay for *The War Within*. He has been the recipient of fellowships from MacDowell, Djerassi, the Sundance Institute, Ucross and Yaddo.

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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