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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

December 11, 2015

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES FULL COMPANY FOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. PREMIERE OF
ANTHONY GIARDINA'S *THE CITY OF CONVERSATION*
DIRECTED BY DOUG HUGHES
JANUARY 29-MARCH 6, 2016

*** Polarizing family politics take center stage in gripping political drama spanning three presidential administrations; starring *Gossip Girl*'s Margaret Colin as Georgetown hostess Hester Ferris ***

(Washington, D.C.) Anthony Giardina's Off-Broadway smash hit *The City of Conversation*, about a Georgetown political hostess, makes its Washington, D.C. debut at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. Following his direction of the 2014 world premiere at Lincoln Center Theater, Tony Award winner **Doug Hughes** returns to direct this political drama spanning three decades, from Carter's presidency through the Reagan era and ending with Obama's inauguration. Hailed as a "terrific new play" that's "juicy...smart, literate and funny" (*The New York Times*) and "pointed and provocative...stirring and entertaining" (*Entertainment Weekly*), *The City of Conversation* runs **January 29-March 6, 2016 in the Fichandler Stage.**

As previously announced, stage and screen actress **Margaret Colin** (Eleanor Waldorf on CW's *Gossip Girl*, Broadway's *The Columnist* and *Arcadia*) stars as Washington hostess and social lioness Hester Ferris. The cast features **Michael Simpson** reprising his roles as Colin Ferris and Ethan Ferris, which he originated in the New York premiere, **Caroline Hewitt** (Center Stage's *Twelfth Night*) as Anna Fitzgerald, **Ann McDonough** (Broadway's *Dinner at Eight*) as Jean Swift and **Tom Wiggan** (CBS' *As the World Turns*, Broadway's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*) as Chandler Harris.

The cast also includes **Freddie Bennett** as Donald Logan, **Todd Scofield** as George Mallonee, **Jjana Valentiner** as Carolyn Mallonee and nine-year-old **Tyler Smallwood** as Young Ethan Ferris, with **Caedan White** as understudy for Young Ethan.

The Arena Stage production reunites the original Off-Broadway creative team—Set Designer **John Lee Beatty**, Costume Designer **Catherine Zuber**, Lighting Designer **Tyler Micoleau** and Original Music and Sound Designer **Mark Bennett**—who reimagine the production for an intimate in-the-round staging set in the living room of a Georgetown townhouse.

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Full company announced for *The City of Conversation*—Page 2

“Over the past 18 years I have searched fiercely for D.C.’s voice in theater, and I’ve become convinced that our unique voice is political,” says **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. “You only have to hear the synopsis to know that *The City of Conversation* is a Washington story through and through. We are the city that loves to talk politics from the first moment of waking up to when our heads hit the pillow. After I saw his wonderful new play in New York, I got Tony Giardina, the playwright, on the phone right away. Tony, who has a wonderful history with Arena, agreed to the idea of producing the play at Arena. We are incredibly fortunate to have Doug Hughes as the director and I know the show will have deep meaning for our astute Washington audiences who know Georgetown and its culture intimately.”

“I am thrilled that Molly Smith has given me a chance to revisit *The City of Conversation* in D.C.,” shares **Hughes**. “Tony Giardina’s play is a feat of dramatic time travel. It lashes the personal to the political and fashions powerful theater from the raw material of our nation’s recent past. It’s hard to imagine a better home for it than Arena’s legendary Fichandler Stage.”

“Ever since some of the Washington figures who are offstage characters in the play—people like Sally Quinn and Ralph Neas—began making the trek up to Lincoln Center, I knew we had to bring the play to D.C.,” adds **Giardina**. “There’s nothing more thrilling for a playwright than to have a conversation with the people who actually made the history he’s tried to imagine his way into.”

The City of Conversation is part of a powerful lineup of social and political dramas at Arena Stage this spring and opens immediately following Lynn Nottage’s new drama *Sweat*. The socio-political themes continue with Robert Schenkkan’s 2014 Tony Award-winning *All the Way* and Ayad Akhtar’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Disgraced*.

Anthony Giardina (Playwright)’s first play, *Living at Home*, was produced in Arena Stage’s “In the Process” series in the Old Vat Room in 1977, before moving on to its New York premiere at Playwrights Horizons. Arena Stage subsequently produced two more of his plays—a commissioned adaptation of *An American Tragedy* and *The Child*. His other plays, including *Scenes from La Vie de Boheme*, *The Beach*, *Black Forest* and *Custody of the Eyes*, have been produced at Manhattan Theatre Club, Long Wharf Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre and Cleveland Play House. *The City of Conversation*, which premiered at the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater at Lincoln Center in May 2014, was nominated for both the Outer Critics Circle and Drama Desk Awards for Best Play of the 2014/15 season. The play is now being developed as a three-part mini-series on FX. In addition to his work as a playwright, Anthony has published five novels and a book of short stories. His most recent novels, “White Guys” and “Norumbega Park,” were published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He is a regular visiting professor at the Michener Center for Writers at The University of Texas at Austin.

Doug Hughes (Director) makes his Arena Stage debut. His previous D.C. productions are *Hughie* and *The Little Foxes* (Helen Hayes Award nomination, Best Director), both with Shakespeare Theatre Company. Broadway productions include *Outside Mullingar*, *The Big Knife*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Born Yesterday*, *Elling*, *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, *Oleanna*, *The Royal Family* (Tony Award-nominated revival), *A Man for All Seasons*, *Mauritius*, *Inherit the Wind* (Tony Award-nominated revival), *A Touch of the Poet*, *Frozen* (Tony Award nomination, Best Director) and *Doubt*, for which he won the Tony Award for Best Director. Off-Broadway productions include *The City of Conversation*, *Death Takes a Holiday* (Drama Desk Award nomination, Best Director of a Musical), *The Whipping Man*, *Engaged*, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, *Flesh and Blood* and *Defiance*. Additional awards include Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, Lucille Lortel, Obie and Callaway Awards.

Cast Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Freddie Bennett (*Donald Logan*) is thrilled to make his Arena Stage debut. Past credits include Mosaic Theater Company (*Unexplored Interior*), Shakespeare Theatre Company (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Dunsinane*, *The Tempest*), Anacostia Playhouse (*Occupied Territories*), Florida Studio Theatre (*Ruined*, *Shotgun*), Hartford Stage (*Antony and Cleopatra*) and Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival (*Julius Caesar*). Film credits include *Delusions of Guinevere*. He attended the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and trained with Circle in the Square Theatre School.

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Margaret Colin (*Hester Ferris*) lives in NYC, where she first began acting at age 19 on the TV series *The Edge of Night*. This marks her first time at Arena Stage and working in D.C. Broadway has welcomed her in *The Columnist*, *Arcadia*, *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, *Old Acquaintance* and *Jackie: An American Life* (which was her Broadway debut). She toured China in *The Pentagon Papers* playing Katharine Graham. She has had series leads on several TV shows, including *Gossip Girl*, *Leg Work*, *Now and Again*, *Chicago Hope*, *Foley Square* and others. She saved the world in *Independence Day* and rocked it in *Something Wild* in addition to appearing in many other feature, indie and cable films. Very grateful.

Caroline Hewitt (*Anna Fitzgerald*) makes her Arena Stage debut. In the Greater D.C. area she appeared at Baltimore's Center Stage in *Twelfth Night* and *The Rivals*. Other recent favorites include *Tamburlaine the Great* (Theatre for a New Audience), *Warrior Class* (Alley Theater), John Doyle's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (American Conservatory Theater) and *Arcadia* and *The Winter's Tale* (Chautauqua Theater Company). She was also seen on video as Mary Lou in the David Bowie musical *Lazarus* at New York Theatre Workshop. Caroline majored in French at Vassar College and received her M.F.A. in acting at American Conservatory Theater. Her translations and adaptations include *Rose: The Australian Night* and *Howards End*. She is a founding member of The (Blank) Space acting collective.

Ann McDonough (*Jean Swift*) is happy to be making her Arena Stage debut, having grown up in Baltimore. At Lincoln Center Theater, she performed in *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* and *Dinner at Eight*. She was in the original production of A.R. Gurney's *The Dining Room* and performed in the show again 25 years later when the cast won a Drama Desk Award for Best Ensemble. Also in New York, she appeared in the original productions of *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You*, *What I Did Last Summer*, *Mastergate*, *Uncommon Women and Others* and *Fables for Friends*. At Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven she performed in 12 productions, most recently *Our Town* (Mrs. Soames). On TV she appeared on *Law & Order*, *The Good Wife* and *All My Children* (Esther).

Todd Scofield (*George Mallonee*) is happy to be making his Arena Stage debut. Over the past 13 years, he has worked with Shakespeare Theatre Company (*As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Twelfth Night*), Folger Theatre (*The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure*, *Henry VIII*, *Mary Stuart*), Round House Theatre (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *NSFW*, *Stage Kiss*), Theater J (C.S. Lewis in *Freud's Last Session*, *Bal Masque*), Adventure Theatre (*Winnie the Pooh*), Olney Theatre Center and Ford's Theatre. Outside of the D.C. area, Todd worked at Arden Theatre Company and spent four seasons at the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival. On TV, he was seen in recurring roles on seasons three and five of *The Wire*.

Michael Simpson (*Colin Ferris/Ethan Ferris*) is happy and humbled to be making his Arena Stage debut. He most recently performed as Colin/Ethan in *The City of Conversation* at Lincoln Center Theater. He last performed in D.C. as an understudy in *The Guardsman* at the Kennedy Center. Additional credits include *The Glass Menagerie* at The Old Globe in San Diego, *Electra* at Pittsburgh Public Theater, *Tennis in Nablus* at Alliance Theatre in Atlanta and *The Whipping Man* at Dorset Theatre Festival. Film credits include the upcoming *Liv* and TV credits include *The O.C.*, *House* and *The Cleaner*.

Tyler Smallwood (*Young Ethan Ferris*) is 9 years old and excited to make his professional theater debut! He has previously performed with Adventure Theatre MTC in *Aladdin*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Rats! The Musical*. He also studies drama at Georgetown Day School. When he's not on stage, Tyler is usually playing some kind of sport (most often, baseball!). Tyler thanks his parents, sister, grandparents and teachers for making this experience possible.

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Jjana Valentiner (*Carolyn Mallonee*) is delighted to make her Arena Stage debut. Other D.C. appearances include originating the role of Stage Manager in *Our Suburb* at Theater J (director Judith Ivey), Sandra in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* at Round House Theatre, Audrey in *As You Like It* at Folger Theatre, First Lady in *F*cking A* at Studio Theatre, *Coriolanus* at Shakespeare Theatre Company, Leopard in *Zomo the Rabbit* at Imagination Stage, Zookeeper in *Birds of a Feather* at Hub Theatre (Helen Hayes Award nomination, Best Ensemble), Electra in *The Oresteia* at Constellation Theatre Company and Sabina in *The Skin of Our Teeth* at Rorschach Theatre. Jjana premiered her one woman show, *Funeral Potatoes*, in D.C. to sold-out audiences in 2009 and also works as professional makeup artist.

Caeden White (*Young Ethan Ferris u/s*) is honored to be a part of *The City of Conversation* as his first collaboration with Arena Stage. A protégé of Linda Townsend Management, Caeden loves to act both onstage and on-camera. He enjoys modeling and has done catalogue work for Magic Cabin in addition to appearing in *Weddings Unveiled*. When he is not performing, Caeden enjoys studying dinosaurs and building his own Lego creations. He is thankful for the opportunity to work with such talented individuals at Arena Stage and would like to thank his family for their love and enthusiastic support.

Tom Wiggin (*Chandler Harris*)'s D.C. credits include *The Intelligent Homosexuals' Guide...* (Gus) at Theater J and *Ella Fitzgerald, First Lady of Song* at MetroStage. His Broadway credits include *Grease*, *Bobbi Boland* and the Lincoln Center Theater production of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*. Off-Broadway credits include *Living Dolls*, *The Foreigner* and *Class Enemy*. Prime time TV credits include *Breaking Away* (Mike), *Izzy and Moe*, *The Bronx Is Burning*, *Iron Jawed Angels* and *Law & Order*. Daytime TV credits include a 10-year run on *As the World Turns* as Kirk Anderson. Film credits include *Digger*, *Exposed* and *Brother to Brother*. Tom plays Kent Turner in an upcoming episode of *Person of Interest* on CBS and recently filmed the role of Phillip Gordon in the movie *Secrets*.

The creative team for *The City of Conversation* also includes Stage Manager **Amber Dickerson** and Assistant Stage Manager **Rachael Danielle Albert**.

For full company bios please visit <http://www.arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/the-city-of-conversation/>,

***The City of Conversation* is generously sponsored by Andrew R. Ammerman and the David Bruce Smith Foundation.**

Special Events

American Dream/American Identity

Join Arena Stage in a three-part conversation around identity and the American Dream, as featured in Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, Anthony Giardina's *The City of Conversation* and Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*. Explore how these three unique voices are wrestling with what it means to be American in the 21st century. Giardina's "juicy" (*The New York Times*) play tracks the rise and fall of American political discourse through the rise and fall of one family. When our political identity has become so polarizing, how do we bridge the divide and reach across the aisle, even when politics gets personal? Dates and times will be announced on Arena Stage's website.

Post-Show Conversations

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff—February 10, February 24 and March 1 following the noon performance, February 11 following the 8:00 p.m. performance and March 3 following the 7:30 p.m. performance.

Production Information

[The City of Conversation](#)

By Anthony Giardina

Directed by Doug Hughes

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

ABOUT: 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" (*The New York Times*) inside look at the theater of politics and the politics of conversation.

CAST:

Donald Logan: Freddie Bennett

Hester Ferris: Margaret Colin

Anna Fitzgerald: Caroline Hewitt

Jean Swift: Ann McDonough

George Mallonee: Todd Scofield

Colin Ferris/Ethan Ferris: Michael Simpson

Young Ethan Ferris: Tyler Smallwood

Carolyn Mallonee: Jjana Valentiner

Young Ethan Ferris u/s: Caeden White

Chandler Harris: Tom Wiggin

CREATIVE TEAM:

Playwright: Anthony Giardina

Director: Doug Hughes

Set Designer: John Lee Beatty

Costume Designer: Catherine Zuber

Lighting Designer: Tyler Micoleau

Original Music and Sound Designer: Mark Bennett

Stage Manager: Amber Dickerson

Assistant Stage Manager: Rachael Danielle Albert

Plan Your Visit

TICKETS: Tickets for *The City of Conversation* are \$40-\$90, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as pay-your-age tickets, student discounts, family fun packs, Southwest Nights and hero's discounts, visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs.

Tickets may be purchased online at arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.

Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300

Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380

TTY for deaf patrons: 202-484-0247

Info for patrons with disabilities: 202-488-3300

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PERFORMANCE DATES:

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Friday & Saturday at 8:00 p.m.

Saturday & Sunday at 2:00 p.m.

Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday, 2/10; Wednesday, 2/24; and Tuesday, 3/1

Full calendar: tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=20717

Open-captioned performances: 2/24 at 7:30 p.m. & 2/25 at 8:00 p.m.

Audio-described performances: 2/13 at 2:00 p.m.

CATWALK CAFÉ: **Prix fixe meals** are now available at the Catwalk Café and include a choice of soup or salad, main entrée and dessert. Pre-ordered meals are only \$22 (\$25 if purchased that day). To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-café/. The Catwalk Café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended.

To **pre-order drinks** from the Catwalk Café for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007.

METRO: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is only one block from the Waterfront-SEU Metro station (Green Line). When exiting the station, walk west on M Street toward Sixth Street, and the main entrance to the Mead Center is on the right.

PARKING: Parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage. Subscribers may purchase parking in advance for \$16. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$19 or on the day of the performance for \$22 on a first-come, first-served basis. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets, and the garage closes one hour after the day's last performance ends. Patrons can also park at the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, one block from the Mead Center, for \$11. Street parking is also available along Maine Avenue.

VALET PARKING: Arena Stage offers valet service at no additional cost to patrons with accessibility needs who call 202-488-3300 in advance to request valet parking. On days when valet parking is being used for accessibility, it is also available to general patrons one hour prior to show time for \$25, based on availability. To use valet parking, pull up to the main entrance on Sixth Street.

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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