

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 ANNOUNCES VOICES OF NOW PARTNERSHIP WITH
U.S. EMBASSIES IN ZAGREB, CROATIA AND LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA
TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY BUILDING AND ACCEPTANCE THROUGH THEATER
SEPTEMBER 12-18, 2015**

***** Trip marks Arena Stage's fifth trip abroad with Voices of Now
through partnerships with the U.S. Department of State and foreign embassies *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, in partnership with the **U.S. Embassies in Zagreb, Croatia and Ljubljana, Slovenia**, will send three Arena Stage Voices of Now artists to **Zagreb, September 12-18, 2015**. The U.S. Embassies will invite 25 college-age youth from vulnerable communities across the region for a seven-day workshop, culminating in an original play performed at the Tresnja Theater in Zagreb.

Arena Stage's Director of Community Engagement Anita Maynard-Losh along with Rebecca Campana and Fareed Mastoufi will work with students from Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania to create a unique theater piece that will focus on community building, cultural diversity and acceptance. The program aims to counter extremist messaging by offering an alternative message to young people; build positive relationships across ethnic, national and religious lines; and teach and practice non-violent forms of communication and advocacy in participants' home communities.

"Voices of Now is the little program that could—and does," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "From simple beginnings with our neighborhood middle school, Voices of Now has grown to be a program which promotes international peace. To see Voices of Now used as an essential tool in spreading cultural understanding is humbling and only further underscores the importance of allowing young people to find their inner voices. Arena Stage is proud to work to empower young people in southeastern Europe in support of peaceful dialogue and debate."

"We're delighted to be able to bring the Voices of Now program back to Croatia after a great experience with them in 2013," says Cultural Affairs Officer **Elizabeth Blumenthal** at the U.S. Embassy in Zagreb. "The play they created with young people with disabilities continues to move audiences at events and festivals around Croatia and we look forward to collaborating with them again on this new, multi-country project."

"We know that making art together creates a special bond," adds **Maynard-Losh**. "We are thrilled to return to Croatia to work with artists from a variety of countries and points of view in order to discover what issues unite them and what conversations they want to start in their communities through theater."

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This marks Arena Stage's fifth Voices of Now trip abroad through partnerships with the U.S. Department of State and foreign embassies. Following an initial partnership in 2012, which sent four artists from Arena Stage's Community Engagement department to India, the program 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 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 Arena Stage artists to partner with Arena y Esteras, a professional theater company comprised of artists, educators and leaders committed to using art as a tool for 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.

Currently in its 13th year, [Voices of Now](#) 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. One of the primary goals of the Voices of Now program is to create positive change within the artists' community by giving voice to—and sparking dialogue about—issues of relevancy for the artists involved.

Voices of Now is made possible by support from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Harman Family Foundation, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, GEICO, Rockwell Collins, Friends of Southwest D.C. and Toni A. Ritzenberg. Additional support for the program is provided by the U.S. Department of State.

***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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