

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For additional press materials, visit the online press room:  
[arenastage.org/about/press-room/press-kits-photos/productions/nina-simone-four-women/](http://arenastage.org/about/press-room/press-kits-photos/productions/nina-simone-four-women/)  
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FULL COMPANY ANNOUNCED FOR D.C. PREMIERE OF  
CHRISTINA HAM'S *NINA SIMONE: FOUR WOMEN*  
NOVEMBER 10-DECEMBER 24, 2017 AT ARENA STAGE

\*\*\* Reimagined tribute to Nina Simone directed by Timothy Douglas makes East Coast debut \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Celebrating the life and music of Nina Simone, one of America's most iconic singers and civil rights activists, **Christina Ham's provocative musical journey *Nina Simone: Four Women*** makes its East Coast debut at Arena Stage. Set in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in which four little girls lost their lives in 1963, Ham uses Simone's song "Four Women" as the framework to explore the songstress' shift from artist to artist-activist. **Timothy Douglas** returns to Arena Stage to direct this "gorgeous and moving testimonial" (*Star Tribune*). ***Nina Simone: Four Women* runs November 10-December 24, 2017 in the Kreeger Theater.**

Joining the previously announced **Harriett D. Foy** (Broadway's *Amelie* and *Mamma Mia*, Arena's *The Women of Brewster Place*) as Nina Simone, the cast includes D.C.-area's **Felicia Curry** (Arena's *Disgraced*) as Sweet Thing and **Theresa Cunningham** (Round House Theatre's *Caroline or Change*) as Sarah, with **Toni L. Martin** (Broadway's *Airline Highway*) as Sephronia. **Darius Smith** (Signature's *Jelly's Last Jam*) will play Nina's younger brother Sam Waymon.

"The horrendous carnage of the Birmingham church explosion of 1963 became the fire for Nina Simone's fervent music of the civil rights era," shares **Molly Smith**. "Christina Ham's *Nina Simone: Four Women* breathes new life into the music of the High Priestess of Soul and is sure to resonate with the same power, urgency and passion that it did in '60s and '70s."

"The bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church came at a cataclysmic time not only in the fight for civil rights, but also in Ms. Simone's battle to figure out who she was going to be as an artist," says **Ham**. "*Nina Simone: Four Women* attempts to capture that struggle as she pens what she considered to be her first civil rights song, 'Mississippi Goddam,' and how she stepped off the sidelines in the fight for racial equality and became an artist and activist on her own terms. Her songs 'Young, Gifted and Black,' 'Go Limp,' 'Old Jim Crow' and 'Four Women' capture a born again artist melded by the politics of her time."

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“At the very moment of epiphany that compels her active and full commitment to the civil rights movement, *Nina Simone: Four Women* offers searing insights into the incomparable and uncompromising world of the international star and legend,” shares **Douglas**. “The power of this soul-stirring musical journey serves as its own (re)call-to-action toward the universal goal of equality and equity.”

**Christina Ham** (*Playwright*)’s plays have been developed and produced both nationally and internationally with the Kennedy Center, The Guthrie, Goodman Theatre and the Tokyo International Arts Festival, among others. Her play *Four Little Girls* was directed by Phylicia Rashad at the Kennedy Center to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. Christina is a two-time recipient of a McKnight Fellowship in Playwriting Award and a Jerome Fellowship from the Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis. Her plays are published by Dramatic Publishing. A graduate of the University of Southern California with an M.F.A. in playwriting from the UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television, Christina is a Core Writer of the Playwrights’ Center and the playwright-in-residence at Pillsbury House Theatre in Minneapolis. [www.christinaham.com](http://www.christinaham.com)

**Timothy Douglas** (*Director*) directed *Disgraced* and *King Hedley II* at Arena Stage. D.C. credits include *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1, 2 & 3)*, *Two Trains Running*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *Permanent Collection* and *A Lesson Before Dying* (Round House); *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea* (six Helen Hayes nominations) and *Insurrection: Holding History* (Theater Alliance); *The Last Orbit of Billy Mars* (Woolly Mammoth); and *Much Ado About Nothing* (Folger Theatre). Additional credits include the premiere of Rajiv Joseph’s *The Lake Effect* (Silk Road Rising), *Bronte: A Portrait of Charlotte* (Off-Broadway) and the world premiere of August Wilson’s *Radio Golf* (Yale Repertory). He has directed for Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, American Conservatory Theater, The Guthrie, Berkeley Repertory, Center Theatre Group, South Coast Repertory, Steppenwolf, Portland Center Stage, Berkshire Theatre Festival and Milwaukee Repertory. [www.timothydouglas.org](http://www.timothydouglas.org)

### **Cast Biographies**

**Theresa Cunningham** (*Sarah*) is excited to make her debut at Arena Stage. D.C.-area credits include *Caroline or Change* (Stillpointe Theatre, Round House); *A Raisin in the Sun* and *If I Hold My Tongue* (Compass Rose Theatre); *Wiley and the Hairy Man* (Imagination Stage); *Once on This Island* (Olney); *Ain’t Misbehavin’* (Riverside Theatre); and *Les Misérables* and a Helen Hayes Award for *The Color Purple* (Toby’s Dinner Theatre). Regional credits include *I Dream* (Alliance Theatre); *Smokey Joe’s Café* (Atlanta Lyric Theatre); *Three Sistahs* (Horizon Theatre); *Member of the Wedding* and *Seussical* (Springer Opera House); *True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* (Theatre in the Square); *Alice Thru the Wonderglass* (Synchronicity Theatre); and *Heartbeats* (Aurora Theatre). Theresa studied musical theater at Syracuse University.

**Felicia Curry** (*Sweet Thing*) returns to Arena Stage after appearing in *Disgraced*. D.C.-area credits include *OLIVÉRio*, *Chasing George Washington* and *Beehive* (Kennedy Center); *Ragtime*, *A Christmas Carol* and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Ford’s Theatre); *Caroline or Change* and *This* (Round House); *Home* (Rep Stage); *Laugh and Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* (Studio Theatre); *Les Misérables* (Signature Theatre); Imagination Stage; Adventure Theatre MTC; MetroStage; Olney; and Toby’s Dinner Theatre. Regional credits include *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* and *The Mountaintop* (Gulfshore Playhouse), *Sister Act* (Riverside Center) and *The Color Purple* (Virginia Repertory Theatre). New York credits include *We Three Lizas* (Joe’s Pub) and *The Brontes* (NYMF). Felicia has received five Helen Hayes Award nominations and a RTCC Best Actress Award. She is a graduate of University of Maryland.

**Harriett D. Foy** (*Nina Simone*) appeared at Arena Stage in *The Women of Brewster Place*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Polk County*, *From the Mississippi Delta* and *A Wonderful Life*. Broadway credits include *Amelie*, *Amazing Grace*, *The American Plan*, *Mamma Mia* and *Once on This Island*. Off-Broadway credits include *Rimbaud* (BAM); *On the Levee*; *Crowns* (AUDELCO Award winner); *Lone Star Love*; *Dinah Was*; and *Inside Out*. Regional credits include *Reunion* (Ford’s Theatre); *The House That Will Not Stand* (Yale Repertory/Berkeley Repertory, TBA Award winner); *dance of*

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*the holy ghosts* (Yale Repertory); *Breath and Imagination* (ArtsEmerson); *LMNOP* (Goodspeed), *Ambassador Satch* (Dubai); and *Seven Guitars* (Center Stage). Film/TV credits include *Winter's Tale*, *Collateral Beauty*, *Welcome to the Wayne*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Rescue Me* and *Law & Order*. She received her B.F.A. from Howard University. "WGATAP!" Twitter: @divafoyh. [www.harrietttdfoy.com](http://www.harrietttdfoy.com)

**Toni L. Martin** (*Sephronia*) of Milwaukee, WI, is thrilled to make her Arena Stage debut. Broadway credits include *Airline Highway*. Additional New York credits include *Dream Ticket* (NYC Fringe Festival). Chicago credits include *Airline Highway* (Steppenwolf Theatre) and *A Raisin in the Sun* (TimeLine Theatre) for which she won Best Supporting Actress from Black Theatre Alliance. Film/TV credits include NBC's *Chicago Fire* and Netflix's *Gypsy*. She received her B.F.A. from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. All praise goes to The Creator and much love to my friends and family who show up and support!

**Darius Smith** (*Sam Waymon*) makes his Arena Stage debut. Off-Broadway credits include *Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* (NY City Center) and *Futurity* (ArsNova, Soho Rep). D.C.-area credits include *Jelly's Last Jam*, *La Cage aux Folles, Soon* (Signature); *The Producers*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Once on this Island* (Olney); and *Choir Boy* (Studio). Regional credits include *His Eye is On the Sparrow* (Portland Center Stage) and *Choir Boy* (Marin Theater Company, JAG Productions). His original works include *Marcus Nate is Alive and Great and Still Living in Detroit*, *The Snowy Day*, *U.G.L.Y.* Awards include NY City Center Music Directing Fellowship, San Francisco Theatre Critics Award for Outstanding Music Direction for *Choir Boy*, Signature Theatre Young Artist Citation and Bernard/Ebb Songwriting Competition Finalist. Upcoming productions include *The Wiz* (Ford's Theatre). Twitter/Instagram: @DSmithMusic. [www.darius-smith-music.net/](http://www.darius-smith-music.net/)

The creative team for *Nina Simone: Four Woman* includes Music Director **Darius Smith**, Choreographer **Dane Figueroa Edidi**, Set Designer **Timothy Mackabee**, Costume Designer **Kara Harmon**, Lighting Designer **Michael Gilliam**, Sound Designer **Matthew M. Nielson**, Wig Designer **Anne Nesmith**, Stage Manager **Christi B. Spann** and Assistant Stage Manager **Marne Anderson**.

For full company bios please visit [arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/nina-simone-four-women/](http://arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/nina-simone-four-women/)

*Nina Simone: Four Women* is generously sponsored by R. Lucia Riddle.

#### **Post-Show Conversations**

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff—December 6, December 12, December 13 and December 19 following the noon performance; November 28 following the 7:30 p.m. performance; and December 21 following the 8:00 p.m. performance.

#### **Production Information**

***Nina Simone: Four Women***

**By Christina Ham**

**Directed by Timothy Douglas**

**In the Kreeger Theater | November 10-December 24, 2017**

**ABOUT:** Velvet-throated songstress Nina Simone hypnotized audiences with her signature renditions of standards from the American songbook. But on September 15, 1963, a devastating explosion in Birmingham, Alabama rocked our entire nation to the core, and from the memory of the four little girls that were lost in this unimaginable tragedy came "Four Women" — along with Simone's other activist anthems like "Mississippi

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Goddam,” “Old Jim Crow” and “To Be Young, Gifted and Black.” Through storytelling and song, *Nina Simone: Four Women* reveals how this iconic chanteuse found her true voice — and how the “High Priestess of Soul” helped define the sound of the civil rights movement.

### CAST:

Sarah: Theresa Cunningham  
Sweet Thing: Felicia Curry  
Nina Simone: Harriett D. Foy  
Sephronia: Toni L. Martin  
Sam Waymon: Darius Smith

### CREATIVE TEAM:

Director: Timothy Douglas  
Music Director: Darius Smith  
Choreographer: Dane Figueroa Edidi  
Set Designer: Timothy Mackabee  
Costume Designer: Kara Harmon  
Lighting Designer: Michael Gilliam  
Sound Designer: Matthew M. Nielson  
Wig Designer: Anne Nesmith  
Stage Manager: Christi B. Spann  
Assistant Stage Manager: Marne Anderson

### Plan Your Visit

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Nina Simone: Four Women* 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, Southwest Nights and hero’s discounts, visit [arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs](http://arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs).

Tickets may be purchased online at [arenastage.org](http://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

### 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, 12/6, Tuesday, 12/12, Wednesday 12/13 and Tuesday 12/19

Full calendar: [tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=24937](http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=24937).

**Open-captioned performances: 12/9 at 2:00 p.m., 12/13 at 7:30 p.m. & 12/14 at 8:00 p.m.**

**Audio-described performances: 12/9 at 2:00 p.m.**

**ARENA STAGE CAFÉ: Prix fixe meals** are available at Richard’s Place, Arena Stage’s casual dining 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/](http://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-café/).

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The café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended. To **pre-order drinks** for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit [tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007](https://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 \$14.

**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 Director 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 and 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](https://arenastage.org)

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