

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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<https://www.arenastage.org/press-room/press-kits/press-kits-landing/jubilee-press-kit/>

ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES WORLD PREMIERE OF  
TAZEWELL THOMPSON'S A CAPPELLA MUSIC INFUSED PLAY, *JUBILEE*  
APRIL 26 – JUNE 2, 2019

\*\*\*Tazewell Thompson directs this a cappella production chronicling  
the world-renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers known for shattering racial barriers\*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the full company for the world premiere of **Tazewell Thompson's** inspirational a cappella music infused play, *Jubilee*. Inspired by the world-renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers, this uplifting new work chronicles the bold African American ensemble as they travel the world, captivating kings, queens and audiences with hymns and spiritual songs supported by their rich voices. Written and directed by **Thompson** with vocal arrangements and music direction by **Dianne Adams McDowell**, *Jubilee* runs April 26 – June 2, 2019 in the Kreeger Theater.

Arena Stage is excited to welcome back Thompson, who has directed over a dozen productions at Arena as the former resident director and former associate artistic director. Thompson returns to Arena after directing an extended run of Lorraine Hansberry's groundbreaking masterpiece *A Raisin in the Sun* in 2017. In addition to directing, he also wrote both *Constant Star* and *Mary T. & Lizzy K.*, while amassing an impressive repertoire of works during his time at Arena.

"Sometimes when we look back, we lean forward. The story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers as told by the amazing Tazewell Thompson is one of resilience, passion and commitment," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "Tazewell is a wonderful storyteller and has been part of Arena Stage for over 30 years and it's always energizing to showcase his talent in D.C."

Making their Arena Stage debuts and portraying members of the singing student troupe include **Shaleah Adkisson** (Broadway's *Hair*, Off-Broadway's *Rent*) as Mabel Lewis, **Lisa Arrindell** (Broadway's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) as Ella Sheppard, **Zonya Love** (Geffen Playhouse's *Light Out: Nat "King" Cole*, Broadway's *The Color Purple*) as Georgia Gordon and **Sean-Maurice Lynch** (Ford's *Twelve Angry Men* and *Ragtime*) as Frederick Loudin. Also making their Arena debuts are **V. Savoy McIlwain** (1st Stage's *A Civil War Christmas*, Rep Stage's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*) as Thomas Rutling,

—continued—

**Aundi Marie Moore** (Metropolitan Opera's *Porgy and Bess*) as Maggie Porter, **Simone Paulwell** (The Glimmerglass Festival's *Porgy and Bess*, San Francisco Opera's *Show Boat*) as America Robinson, **Travis Pratt** (NBC's *America's Got Talent*) as Isaac Dickerson, **Katherine Alexis Thomas** (Milwaukee Rep's *The All Night Strut!*) as Minnie Tate and **Greg Watkins** (Creative Cauldron's *Thunder Knocking on the Door*, Constellation's *Aida*) as Benjamin Holmes.

Making their return to Arena Stage are **Joy Jones** (Arena's *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Mary T. & Lizzy K.*) as Jennie Jackson, **Bueka Uwemedimo** (Ford's *Twelve Angry Men*, Arena's *A Raisin in the Sun*) as Greene Evans and **Jaysen Wright** (Imagination Stage's *Dickens's Davy Copperfield*, Arena's *Smart People*) as Edmund Watkins.

"I wrote *Jubilee* having been captivated by the story of The Fisk Jubilee Singers from a short PBS documentary I saw many years ago. Their struggles, personal stories, talents and accomplishments through song haunted me. I wanted to learn and know more," explains **Thompson**. "I began researching and what started as a curiosity became an obsession. I fell in love with these impossibly brave and extremely talented individuals. The Fisk Jubilee Singers and their campaign to save a school for their people is a great story. A very real part of African American history, and therefore, part of American history. The play is not a documentary; it is, in my own words, a tribute. A way to honor and pay homage to a group that brought Negro Spirituals to the world."

In addition to Thompson, the creative team includes Vocal Arrangements and Music Direction by **Dianne Adams McDowell**, Set Designer **Donald Eastman**, Costume Designer **Merrily Murray-Walsh**, Lighting Designer **Robert Wierzel**, Sound Designer **Fabian Obispo**, Projection Designer **Shawn Duan**, Wig Designer **Anne Nesmith**, Fight Director **Ron Piretti**, Casting Directors **Victor Vazquez** and **Geoff Josselson**, Stage Manager **Kurt Hall**, Assistant Stage Manager **Marne Anderson** and Production Assistant **Paula Fritz**.

**Tazewell Thompson** (*Playwright and Director*) is an international theater and opera director, award-winning playwright, teacher and actor. He has directing credits in major opera houses and theaters across Europe, Africa, Asia, Canada and the USA. *Jubilee* represents Tazewell's 20th production for Arena Stage. His play *Constant Star* has had 16 productions in major national theaters and his play *Mary T. & Lizzy K.*, commissioned by and produced at Arena Stage, is the recipient of the Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award. His production of *Porgy & Bess*, broadcast live from Lincoln Center, received Emmy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Classical Production. He is currently writing the libretto for a newly commissioned opera with composer Jeanine Tesori for Glimmerglass Festival to premiere summer 2019.

**Dianne Adams McDowell** (*Vocal Arrangements and Music Direction*) had the pleasure of working at Arena Stage on Tazewell Thompson's *Constant Star*, for which she received a Helen Hayes Award nomination. Dianne served as Vocal Arranger for Broadway's *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*, which was the recipient of numerous Drama Desk Awards, four 2014 Tony Awards including Best Musical and a 2015 Grammy Award nomination. Composer/lyricist credits include the New Victory Theater production of *The Wind in the Willows* with husband/collaborator James McDowell, as well as their musical *Bookends*. Other credits include Radio City Music Hall's *Magnificent Christmas Spectacular*, Broadway's Tony Award-nominated *Starmites* and Disney productions. She is the recipient of the Barrymore Award and the Beverly Hills/Hollywood NAACP Award. Dianne is thrilled to be collaborating, once again, with her dear friend Tazewell.

**Cast Biographies (in alphabetical order)**

**Shaleah Adkisson** (*Mabel Lewis*) has been seen on Broadway and on tour in *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* and Off-Broadway in *Rent*. Regional: *Clybourne Park*, *Avenue Q*, *The Hot Mikado*, *Beehive: The 60's Musical*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Grease*, *Nunsense* and *Children of Eden*. When not working in the theatre she works as an administrator and teaching artist with Bridge Arts Ensemble, an organization of freelance musicians catering to school districts in upstate New York. Additionally, she performs in NYC and on tour with Soul Picnic Productions (*Back to the Garden* and *August 1969: A Tribute to the Women of Woodstock*). Instagram: @shal252k; [www.shaleahadkisson.com](http://www.shaleahadkisson.com)

**Lisa Arrindell** (*Ella Sheppard*) will be making her Arena Stage debut in *Jubilee*. She appeared on Broadway in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Off-Broadway in *HooDoo Love* and *Heliotrope Bouquet* at Playwrights Horizons; *Mixed Babies* at Manhattan Class Company; and *Richard III* at The Delacorte. Film credits include *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, *Tyler Perry's Madea's Family Reunion*, *Christmas Wedding Baby*, *A Christmas Blessing*, *The Sin Seer*, *The Wronged Man*, *A Lesson Before Dying*, *Disappearing Acts*, *Having Our Say: The Delaney Sisters' First One Hundred Years* and *Clockers*. Guest appearances include *Madam Secretary*, *Elementary*, *Saints and Sinners*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Quad* and *Notorious*. Lisa graduated from LaGuardia High School of Performing Arts and she received her B.F.A. in Theatre from The Juilliard School. IG: @lisaarrindell

**Joy Jones** (*Jennie Jackson*) was previously seen in Arena Stage's *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Mary T & Lizzy K*. Off-Broadway, she appeared in workshops at the Lincoln Center Festival, The Public and Playwrights Horizons. In London, Joy performed in *Tantalus* (Royal Shakespeare Company). Selected DC-area credits include *The Hard Problem*, *Cloud Nine*, *Belleville*, *Invisible Man* (Studio Theatre) and *The Call* (Theater J). Her selected regional credits include *Disgraced* (Virginia Stage); *Invisible Man* (Huntington Theatre); *Ruined* and *Tantalus* (Denver Center); *The Champion* (TheatreSquared); and *Pericles* (PlayMakers Repertory). Her recent on-camera appearances are *Little America* (Apple TV) and *DC Noir* (Pictureshow Productions). Joy has an Acting MFA from UNC-Chapel Hill and a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Ensemble for *Invisible Man* at the Studio Theatre. Web: [thejoyjones.com](http://thejoyjones.com).

**Zonya Love** (*Georgia Gordon*) is honored to be making her Arena Stage Debut in *Jubilee*. She was seen in the original production of *The Color Purple* on Broadway as Celie, Off-Broadway's *Avenue Q* as Gary Coleman, The Flea Theater's Emma and Maxx, and various regional productions. Some of her favorite roles include Effie in TUTS' *Dreamgirls*, Deloris Van Cartier in Broadway Sacramento's *Sister Act*, Bessie Smith in Milwaukee Repertory's *The Devil's Music* and Mayme in Nevada Conservatory's *Intimate Apparel*. She has appeared on *Smash*, *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *Blacklist* and *Blue Bloods*. Twitter: @lovezonya, Instagram: @lovezonya Website: [www.zonyalove.com/](http://www.zonyalove.com/) Proud member of Broadway Inspirational Voices. Psalms 139:14

**Sean-Maurice Lynch** (*Frederick Loudin*) is delighted to be making his Arena Stage debut in *Jubilee*. D.C. area credits include *Twelve Angry Men*, *Ragtime* and *Parade* at Ford's; *Ruined* at Everyman Theatre; *Lost in the Stars* at Washington Opera; *Passing Strange* and *Pop!* at Studio Theatre; *Show Boat*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Hairspray*, *Dreamgirls* at Signature Theatre; and *A Year with Frog and Toad* at Adventure Theatre. Sean-Maurice is currently on staff at Arena Stage as the Training Programs Manager.

**V. Savoy McIlwain** (*Thomas Rutling*) is a baritone, a native of Washington, D.C. and is thrilled to have his debut at Arena Stage. Favorite credits include *Sweeney Todd* (Repstage); *Show Boat* (Signature Theatre); *Jelly's Last Jam* (Signature Theatre); *Caroline or Change* (Roundhouse Theatre); *Strega Nona* (Adventure Theatre); *Christmas Gift* (NEWorks Productions); *Camera Obscura* (Urban Arias); *Fortune's Bones* (C. Smith Performing Arts Center, World Premiere); *Porgy and Bess* (Grand Theatre de Geneve); *Transformations* (Maryland Opera Studio); *Amahl and the Night Visitors* (Ashlawn Opera); *La Boheme* (West Edge Opera) and many others. Savoy is a graduate of the famed Duke Ellington School of the Arts, holds a BM from the University of Northern Iowa and MM from the University of Maryland at College Park. [www.vsavoymcilwain.com](http://www.vsavoymcilwain.com)

**Aundi Marie Moore** (*Maggie Porter*) American soprano, hailed by *The Washington Post* for possessing a voice of "Clarion Beauty" has captured the hearts of many audiences and critics alike with her rich warm expressive tones. Career highlights include Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* with L'Opéra de Monte Carlo; Nedda in *Pagliacci* with Sarasota Opera; Soprano 2 in *Facing Goya* with the Spoleto Festival USA; Serena in *Porgy and Bess* with Atlanta Opera; Young African American Soprano in the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon's *Rappahannock County* with Virginia Opera; and Odessa Clay in the World Premier of *Approaching Ali* with Washington National Opera. Upcoming 19/20 season, Strawberry Woman in *Porgy and Bess* with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. #Livingmydreams @Aundimariemoore [www.aundimariemoore.com](http://www.aundimariemoore.com)

**Simone Paulwell** (*America Robinson*) has garnered international attention for her innate ability to capture audiences with her strikingly powerful and agile voice. A Washington D.C. native, she made her national debut as a soloist with The President's Own: United States Marine Band in 2007. Paulwell has performed for audiences of all ages and cultures and has graced such prestigious stages as The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, D.C., Carnegie Hall, in New York City, the Reichold Center for the Arts in the U.S. Virgin Islands, The Washington National Opera Company and The San Francisco Opera Company. Paulwell recently completed her first summer at The Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, New York. In 2015 Paulwell made her European debut as Serena in *Porgy and Bess* at the Rai Centre in Amsterdam and at Theatre Odyssud in Blagnac, France. Education: Morgan State University, in Baltimore, MD, and Wilberforce University, in Wilberforce, OH, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Music degree.

**Travis Pratt** (*Isaac Dickerson*) is a multitalented award-winning tenor, who has a passion for music and a gift of connecting with audiences across genres. A graduate of The University of Michigan with a MM in Vocal Performance, the Georgia native received his first taste of stardom on the NBC hit reality show *America's Got Talent*. This set the stage for several partnerships with MAC Cosmetics, the American Cancer Society, FOX and NBC television networks. Travis' prodigious combination of talents and authenticity has earned him the moniker of a "Renaissance Man" with features in *Rolling Stone* and *Huffington Post*. As an accomplished vocalist, choir conductor and pianist, his multidisciplinary experiences have taken him from the cabarets of New York to televised performances in Europe and Africa. He created the Role of Jehandre in the premier of *Sousatzka the Musical* in Toronto, Canada. Travis is currently performing on stages across the country and recording his debut solo project.

**Katherine Alexis Thomas** (*Minnie Tate*) is making her Arena Stage debut in *Jubilee* and is excited to be here! Some of her regional theatre credits include *Ragtime* (Marriott Theatre & Griffin Theatre, recipient of the Joseph Jefferson Award). She was also recently seen in *The All Night Strut!* (Milwaukee Repertory Theatre) and *Dreamgirls* (Porchlight Musical Theatre). Many thanks to her family, friends and mentors! GO BLUE!

**Bueka Uwemedimo** (*Greene Evans*) is excited to be back at Arena Stage. Regional credits include: Ford's: *Twelve Angry Men*; Arena: *A Raisin in the Sun*; D.C.-Area: 1st Stage: *The Good Counselor* (Helen Hayes nom). Other: West End: *Lion King*, *Magic of Motown*; Everyman: *Intimate Apparel*, *Ruined*. TV and Film: *Madam Secretary*, *FBI*. [www.BuekaUwemedimo.com](http://www.BuekaUwemedimo.com) @Bueka.IG

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**Greg Watkins** (*Benjamin Holmes*) is delighted to make his debut at Arena Stage. Credits include Constellation Theatre Company: *Aida*; Anacostia Playhouse: *Happy Ending*; Workhouse Arts Center: *Rock of Ages*; Arts Centric: *Sister Act*; Toby's Dinner Theater: *Dreamgirls*; WSC Avant Bard: *The Gospel at Colonus* (Helen Hayes nomination) and *King Lear*; The InSeries: *From U Street to the Cotton Club*; and Creative Cauldron: *Thunder Knocking on the Door*. Greg is the recipient of two awards in honor of Dr. Quincy Jones, the ASCAP Foundation/Cherry Lane Foundation/Music Alive (2008) and the Deb Moss Project/Raney Moss Group Foundation, Inc. (2019), both for his outstanding work in production, composition, performance and musical direction and his stellar work as an educator with youth in the arts. He has also appeared in several operas including Steven M. Allen's *The Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadows*, for which he originated the leading baritone role of quintessential writer and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and garnered media attention in the PBS Documentary, *Beyond the Mask*. Greg has musically directed numerous productions, including *The Poet Warriors* (2010 Capital Fringe Best Musical Award) and the nationally acclaimed staged-reading of Christina Ham's *Four Little Girls* where he also served as co-music arranger alongside Broadway & Sundance film composer Kathryn Bostic and Tony Award-winner Phylicia Rashad. EDUCATION: Howard University (B.M. Music Education). INSTAGRAM: @gregwatkinsmusic [www.gregwatkinsmusic.com](http://www.gregwatkinsmusic.com)

**Jaysen Wright** (*Edmund Watkins*) is thrilled to return to Arena Stage after previously appearing in *Smart People*. Theatre credits include *Davy Copperfield*, *Anatole*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* and *Looking for Roberto Clemente* at Imagination Stage; *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Everyman Theatre; *Actually* and *Sons of the Prophet* at Theater J; *Macbeth* at Folger Theatre; *The Wiz* and *A Christmas Carol* at Ford's Theatre; *Wig Out*, *Choir Boy* and *The Rocky Horror Show* at Studio Theatre; *Now Comes the Night* and *Take Me Out* at 1<sup>st</sup> Stage; *Pinkalicious* and *12 Days of Christmas* at Adventure Theatre; *The Carolina Layaway Grail* with The Welders; *Measure for Measure*, *Coriolanus* and *Wallenstein* at Shakespeare Theatre. Jaysen holds an MFA in Acting from Indiana University. Instagram @thejayceface [www.jaysenwright.com](http://www.jaysenwright.com)

For full company biographies, please visit <https://www.arenastage.org/tickets/season-landing/jubilee/>

*Jubilee* is generously sponsored by **Exelon Corporation, Altria Group, AARP, Inc., Comcast NBCUniversal, Andrew R. Ammerman, R. Lucia Riddle, Dr. Donald Wallace Jones, Dr. Betty Jean Tolbert Jones and Tracey Tolbert Jones.**

### Post-Show Conversations

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff- May 15 following the 12:00 p.m. performance, May 16 following the 8:00 p.m. performance, May 22 following the 12:00 p.m. performance, May 28 following the 12:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. performances.

### PRODUCTION INFORMATION

#### *Jubilee*

**Written and Directed by Tazewell Thompson**

**Vocal Arrangements and Music Direction by Dianne Adams McDowell**

**In the Kreeger Theater | April 26 – June 2, 2019**

**ABOUT:** The world-renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers shattered racial barriers in the U.S. and abroad, entertaining kings and queens. For centuries, the bold a cappella African American ensemble born on the campus of Fisk University has blended their rich voices together sharing a heritage of suffering, strength and endurance. “A known showman” with a “gift for stirring theatricality” (*Washington Post*), playwright and director Tazewell Thompson brings an innovative and heart-stirring score to life in this world premiere. With uplifting spirituals and hymns including “Wade in the Water,” “Ain’t That Good News,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen,” this a cappella music infused play with more than three dozen songs is sure to ignite audiences.

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## **Page 6— Casting announced for *Jubilee***

### **CAST:**

Mabel Lewis: Shaleah Adkisson  
Ella Sheppard: Lisa Arrindell  
Jennie Jackson: Joy Jones  
Georgia Gordon: Zonya Love  
Frederick Loudin: Sean-Maurice Lynch  
Thomas Rutling: V. Savoy McIlwain  
Maggie Porter: Aundi Marie Moore  
America Robinson: Simone Paulwell  
Isaac Dickerson: Travis Pratt  
Minnie Tate: Katherine Alexis Thomas  
Greene Evans: Bueka Uwemedimo  
Benjamin Holmes: Greg Watkins  
Edmund Watkins: Jaysen Wright

### **CREATIVE TEAM:**

Director: Tazewell Thompson  
Vocal Arrangements and Music Direction: Dianne Adams McDowell  
Set Designer: Donald Eastman  
Costume Designer: Merrily Murray-Walsh  
Lighting Designer: Robert Wierzel  
Sound Designer: Fabian Obispo  
Projection Designer: Shawn Duan  
Wig Designer: Anne Nesmith  
Fight Director: Ron Piretti  
Casting Directors: Victor Vazquez, Geoff Josselson  
Stage Manager: Kurt Hall  
Assistant Stage Manager: Marne Anderson  
Production Assistant: Paula Fritz

### **PLAN YOUR VISIT**

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Jubilee* are \$41-95, 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 <https://www.arenastage.org/tickets/savings-programs/>.

**Tickets may be purchased online at [arenastage.org](https://www.arenastage.org), by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth Street, 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. and at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday May 19  
Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday May 15, Wednesday May 22, and Tuesday May 28

**Open-captioned performances:** May 23 at 8:00 p.m., May 29 at 7:30 p.m. and June 1 at 2:00 p.m.

**Audio-described performance:** May 18 at 2:00 p.m.

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**Full Calendar:** <https://tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=26702>

**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 <https://www.arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/prix-fixe/>. The café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended. To pre-order refreshments, visit <https://www.arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/concessions/>.

**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 \$17. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$20 or on the day of the performance for \$24 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 \$15.

**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.

For complete 2018/19 Season details, visit: [arenastage.org/tickets/season-landing/](https://arenastage.org/tickets/season-landing/).

*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 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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