

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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For more information: arenastage.org/american-artist-award/

ARENA STAGE TO HONOR
TONY AWARD-WINNING ACTRESS AND CHOREOGRAPHER BAA YORK LEE
AT OPENING NIGHT CELEBRATION FOR DISNEY'S *NEWSIES*
NOVEMBER 13, 2019

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will present the American Artist Award to Tony Award-winning actress, choreographer, director and author **Baayork Lee**. The award will be presented **Wednesday, November 13, 2019** as part of the opening night celebration for Disney's *Newsies*, directed by **Molly Smith**.

Beginning at 6 p.m., the evening will include a cocktail reception in the Bank of America Lower Lobby, seated dinner in the Molly Smith Study, 8 p.m. opening night performance of Disney's *Newsies* in the Fichandler Stage and post-show dessert reception in the Grand Lobby. The seated dinner will feature the presentation of the American Artist Award to Lee.

"Baayork Lee personifies the best of American theater. She is a choreographer, director, leader, dancer and actor," explains **Smith**. "Not only does she work as an artist, she also co-founded the nonprofit National Asian Artists Project (NAAP) which provides training, education and opportunity for aspiring young Asian-American theater artists through musical theater programs in New York's Chinatown, Korea and Japan.

"She has travelled the world creating her own special brand of choreography and intense love for the theater," says **Smith**. "I have had the pleasure of working with Baayork many times including my first musical, *South Pacific*, and experienced her drive, talent and joy. This award highlights exemplary careers in the theater, and Baayork's trajectory from ensemble to front of the stage to training choreographers to director to national leader is remarkable and worthy of this recognition."

The **American Artist Award** recognizes artists of the highest caliber, honoring their work and significant contributions to American theater. Past awardees include Eve Ensler, Hal Linden, Moisés Kaufman, Sheldon Harnick, Kathleen Turner, Leslie Uggams, Edward Albee, James Earl Jones, Robert "Bob" Alexander, August Wilson and Arena Stage co-founder Zelda Fichandler.

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BAAYORK LEE has performed in a dozen Broadway shows and created the role of Connie in *A Chorus Line*. She also served as Michael Bennett's assistant choreographer on *A Chorus Line*, of which she has directed and choreographed many national and international companies. Her directing and choreography credits also include: *The King and I* and *Bombay Dreams* (national tours); *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella* (NYC Opera); *Barnum* (Australia); *Carmen Jones* (Kennedy Center); *Porgy and Bess* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (European tours); and *Gypsy* and *A New Brain*.

Lee has also choreographed *Miss Saigon* (Kansas City Starlight); *Mack and Mabel* (Shaw Festival); *Animal Crackers*, *South Pacific* (Helen Hayes nominations), *Coconuts*, *Camelot* and *Damn Yankees*, all at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. Through her nonprofit National Asian Artists Project (NAAP), Baayorks' vision includes educating, cultivating and stimulating audiences and artists of Asian descent through the many outreach programs the company offers. The organization has produced *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *Hello Dolly!*, *Oliver!*, *Into the Woods* and *Honor* (collaboration with *Prospect Theater Company*) with all Asian-American casts. With these classic shows, NAAP has demonstrated that famous works can speak to all audiences and ethnicity is no longer a barrier. She has been the recipient of numerous awards for her work, including the 2017 Isabelle Stevens Tony Award; 2014 Paul Robeson Award from Actors Equity Association; the Asian Woman Warrior Award for Lifetime Achievement from Columbia College; Asian/Pacific American Heritage Association Achievement in Arts Award; and the Dynamic Achiever Award from OCA Westchester.

"It humbles me to be honored by Arena Stage with this American Artist Award," shares **Lee**. "I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Molly Smith: my friend, my director, and my mentor. As her choreographer, I was privileged to watch the growth of this most diverse and inspiring theater. Arena and Molly continue to break new ground and with every production we are aware of the importance of its voice that speaks to and for the American Theater."

Inspired by the real-life Newsboys Strike of 1899 in New York City, this *Newsies* follows the story of newsboys and newsgirls who dream of a better life and lead a crusade for justice. Just in time for the holidays, the score features fan favorites, including "King of New York," "Carrying the Banner" and "Seize the Day." *Newsies* will feature D.C. actress **Erin Weaver** (Arena's *Mother Courage*) as Katherine Plumber with **Edward Gero** (Arena's *Junk* and *The Originalist*) as Joseph Pulitzer. Making their Arena Stage debuts are **Daniel Maldonado** as Jack Kelly, **Joe Montoya** as Crutchie and both **Josiah Smothers** (The National Theatre's *Finding Neverland*) and **Hazel Hay** as Les Jacobs. *Newsies*, directed by **Molly Smith**, with choreography by **Parker Esse** and music direction by **Laura Bergquist**, will run **November 1-December 22, 2019** in the iconic in-the-round **Fichandler Stage**.

For media inquiries, please e-mail press@arenastage.org.

For sponsorship opportunities, please contact Shayla Hines at 202-600-4030 or email SHines@ArenaStage.org. Table sponsorships benefit Arena Stage's artistic and educational programs.

Newsies is generously sponsored by **George Ftikas in memory of Duffy Ftikas, The Reef Team at TTR Sotheby's International Realty, The Drutz Family Fund for Musical Theater, GEICO, Ilene and Steven Rosenthal and Sheila Stampfli**. Choreography is sponsored by **Virginia McGehee Friend**.

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

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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

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