

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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arenastage.org/press-room/press-kits/1920-press-kits/celia-and-fidel-press-kit

ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES FULL CASTING FOR
WORLD PREMIERE OF EDUARDO MACHADO'S *CELIA AND FIDEL*
FEBRUARY 28 – APRIL 12, 2020

*** Molly Smith directs this compelling new work centered around Fidel Castro
and his most trusted confidant, Celia Sánchez, during the 1980s in Cuba ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the full company for the world premiere of **Eduardo Machado's** (*Havana Is Waiting*, *The Cook*) ***Celia and Fidel***. It's 1980 and Cuba is dealing with a failing economy. As Fidel Castro ponders on how to move his country forward, his political partner, Celia Sánchez, is never far from his side. Imbued with magical realism, *Celia and Fidel* is the dynamic story of radical change in Cuba featuring the country's most notorious political figure and Cuba's most influential female revolutionary. Directed by **Molly Smith**, ***Celia and Fidel*** runs February 28 through April 12, 2020 in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle.

Machado, a Cuban native, has penned dozens of plays about his home country, but this will be his first time bringing Fidel Castro to the stage. He chose to set this play during a critical moment in Cuban history to show what can happen when a nation and its people have their fate decided by one man.

"Even though Fidel Castro has had an unseen presence in many of my plays, I avoided bringing him on stage until now," explains **Machado**. "Representing an icon like Castro is problematic as his likeness and mythology are so familiar that many have already made up their mind about him whether they realize it or not. I wouldn't have taken on Fidel unless I saw an opportunity to use the glow of his persona to illuminate a lesser-known female leader of the Revolution, Celia Sánchez."

"Celia was the first female soldier in the rebel army and was Fidel's right hand for the first 20 years of the Revolution," **Machado** continues. "I hope that *Celia and Fidel* and the relationship we are putting onstage will help to elevate Celia to what I see as her rightful place, even as it aims to humanize Fidel and the Revolution."

Making his Arena Stage debut and stepping into the role of Fidel Castro is **Robert M. Jimenez** (Broadway's *Take Me Out*). Returning to Arena Stage is **Marian Licha** (Arena's *Anna in the Tropics*, *Destiny of Desire*) as Celia Sánchez. Also making their Arena debuts are **Liam Torres** (INTAR's *Locusts Have No King*) as Manolo Ruiz and **Heather Velazquez** (Lincoln Center's *Pipeline*) as Consuelo.

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“Castro and Cuba stand large in America’s collective imagination making this an ideal Power Play. There are very few plays about Castro and his compatriots — usually we see him only in documentaries. Our Power Play Cycle is the perfect time to dive into these controversial subjects,” shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. “Eduardo Machado is an important voice in the American theater. This is a dynamic play delving into the complexity of the brain and heart of Fidel Castro and his trusted advisor Celia Sánchez. Celia was one of the great thinkers of the revolution, yet she was hidden in plain sight from most of the world. In Cuba, she was considered the Mother of the Revolution. This premiere takes us to Cuba in 1980 during the drama of the Mariel Boatlift.”

Celia and Fidel is the seventh commissioned production to debut as part of Arena Stage’s **Power Plays**, an ambitious initiative commissioning and developing 25 new plays and musicals from 25 writers over the course of 10 years. With Power Plays, Arena Stage focuses Washington, D.C.’s unique theatrical voice on politics, power and ideas of America, amplifying the theater’s role as a national center dedicated to American voices and artists, located in the heart of the nation’s capital. The massive undertaking features one story per decade, beginning with 1776 through present day, and builds on the tremendous success of previous Arena Stage commissions and Power Plays, including Aaron Posner’s *JQA*, Lawrence Wright’s *Camp David*, John Strand’s *The Originalist* and Mary Kathryn Nagle’s *Sovereignty*.

In addition to Smith, the creative team includes Set Designer **Riccardo Hernández**, Costume Designer **Alejo Vietti**, Lighting Designer **Nicole Pearce**, Sound Designer **Roc Lee**, Dialect and Vocal Coach **Lisa Nathans**, Casting Director **Victor Vazquez, CSA**, Stage Manager **Susan R. White** and Assistant Stage Manager **Allie Roy**.

Eduardo Machado (*Playwright*) was born in Cuba and came to the United States when he was nine. He is the author of over 40 plays, including *The Cook*, *Havana is Waiting*, *The Modern Ladies of Guanabacoa*, *Fabiola*, *Broken Eggs* and *Stevie Wants to Play the Blues*. His plays have been produced at Seattle Repertory, The Goodman, Hartford Stage, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Mark Taper Forum, Long Wharf, Hampstead Theatre in London, The Cherry Lane Theatre, Theater for the New City and Repertorio Español, among many others. He was formerly artistic director of INTAR Theatre in NY and has been a Professor of Playwriting at NYU Tisch and Columbia. He is the co-author of *Tastes Like Cuba: An Exile’s Hunger for Home* and his plays are published by Samuel French and TCG.

Molly Smith (*Director*) has served as Artistic Director since 1998. Her more than 30 directing credits at Arena Stage include large-scale musicals, like *Anything Goes*, Disney’s *Newsies*, *Carousel*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Oklahoma!*, *My Fair Lady*, *The Music Man*, *Cabaret*, *South Pacific*; new plays, like *Sovereignty*, *The Originalist*, *Camp David*, *Legacy of Light*, *The Women of Brewster Place*, *How I Learned to Drive*; and classics like, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Great White Hope* and *All My Sons*. Her directorial work has also been seen Off-Broadway at 59E59 in New York, Portland Center Stage, Canada’s Shaw Festival, The Court Theatre, The Old Globe, Asolo Repertory, Berkeley Repertory, Trinity Repertory, Toronto’s Tarragon Theatre, Montreal’s Centaur Theatre and Perseverance Theater in Juneau, Alaska, which she founded and ran from 1979-1998. Molly has been a leader in new play development for over 40 years. She is a great believer in first, second and third productions of new work and has championed projects, including *Dear Evan Hansen*; *Next to Normal*; *Passion Play*, a cycle; and *How I Learned to Drive*. She led the re-invention of Arena Stage, focusing on the architecture and creation of the Mead Center for American Theater and positioning Arena Stage as a national center for American artists through its artistic programming. During her time with the company, Arena Stage has workshopped more than 100 productions, produced 39 world premieres, staged numerous second and third productions, and been an important part of nurturing nine projects that went on to have a life on Broadway. In 2014, Molly made her Broadway debut directing *The Velocity of Autumn*, following its critically acclaimed run at Arena Stage. She was awarded honorary doctorates from American University and Towson University. In 2018, she was honored as Person of the Year by the National Theatre Conference and inducted into the Washington DC Hall of Fame. This year she was awarded the Director of Distinction in Cairo, Egypt, from the Academy of Arts.

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Cast Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Robert M. Jimenez (*Fidel Castro*) is thrilled to be making his Arena Stage debut in Eduardo Machado's powerful new play. It's an honor to work with this talented cast and creative team. Robert's favorite Broadway experience was originating the role of Martinez in Richard Greenberg's Tony Award-winning play, *Take Me Out*, directed by Joe Mantello. It was a unique opportunity to perform with a show from The Donmar Warehouse in London's West End to The Public Theater in NYC, and then to the Walter Kerr on Broadway. Robert recently took part in the inaugural pride plays, playing Jose Maria in *Mariquitas* by Eduardo Machado (Rattlestick Theater). One of his most challenging and rewarding roles was playing a special-needs adult in *The Field Trip* by Chip Bolcik (Cherry Lane Theater).

Marian Licha (*Celia Sánchez*) was last seen at Arena Stage as Sister Sonia in *Destiny of Desire* and as Ofelia in *Anna in the Tropics*. Other favorite roles include: *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (Round House Theatre); and *Ana en el Tropico* and *The House of Spirits* (Gala Theatre). Regionally and Off-Broadway, she has worked at The Kennedy Center, Provincetown Playhouse, TOMI Theatre, Repertorio Espanol in NYC and The Capital Fringe Festival. Her original one-woman show *Frida Vice-Versa*, co-written with R. Dennis Green and directed by Jessica Lefkow, continues to tour the country. Marian starred as Imelda in NBC's *Homicide* and Mrs. Serrano in *Step Up 2*. She is a proud member of AFTRA/SAG and Actor's Equity, and the mother of two beautiful children. www.marianlichea.com

Liam Torres (*Manolo Ruiz*) is an actor, activist and teaching artist for Manhattan Theatre Club in New York. He is excited to be working with Molly Smith and Arena Stage. Liam has appeared in several Eduardo Machado plays, including: *Mariquitas*, *Paula* and *Havana Journal* at Theatre for the New City. His New York credits include: Tom in Intar's *Locusts Have No King*, *Lobster Face*, *Fit*, *The Hologram Theory*, *The Last Castrato* and *The Marital Bliss of Francis & Maxine*. Regional credits include: *Anna in the Tropics* at SpeakEasy in Boston; *Sleepwalkers* at Alliance Theatre in Atlanta; and *Better* at Pinter Studios in London. Film credits include: Lauren Fritz's film *Kabul*, *The Wounded and the Slain* and *Zoo* with Jermaine Hopkins.

Heather Velazquez (*Consuelo*)'s theater credits include: *Pipeline* (Lincoln Center); *American Mariachi* (Denver Center and The Old Globe); *Another Word for Beauty* (Goodman Theatre); *So Go the Ghosts of Mexico* (Sundance theatre Lab); *Rosario and the Gypsies* (Theatre for the New City); *Pinkolandia* (Intar); *Nobody Rides a Locomotive No Mo'* (Rising Circle Theatre). Television credits include: *Blue Bloods* and *Live from Lincoln Center* (Pipeline).

For full company biographies, please visit arenastage.org/tickets/1920-season/celia-and-fidel.

Celia and Fidel is generously commissioned by **Drs. Elliot and Lily Gardner Feldman** and **BakerHostetler LLP** as part of Arena Stage's Insider Voices Power Play Cycle.

Post-Show Conversations

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff – March 11, March 25 and April 7 following the noon performance; March 26 following the 8 p.m. performance and March 31 following the 7:30 p.m. performance.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Celia and Fidel

Written by Eduardo Machado

Directed by Molly Smith

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | February 28 – April 12, 2020

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Page 4— Cast and creative team announced for *Celia and Fidel*

ABOUT: Can one woman change the mind of a man and the fate of a nation? Fidel Castro's most trusted confidant and political partner, Celia Sánchez, is never far from his side as he grapples with how to move his country forward. It's 1980 and a failing economy has led 10,000 Cuban citizens to seek asylum at the Peruvian Embassy in Cuba. Castro must decide what kind of a leader he wants to be: merciful or mighty. Imbued with magical realism, Arena Stage's seventh Power Play imagines a conversation between Cuba's most influential female revolutionary and its most notorious political leader in a contest between morality and power.

CAST:

Fidel Castro: Robert M. Jimenez
Celia Sánchez: Marian Licha
Manolo Ruiz: Liam Torres
Consuelo: Heather Velazquez

CREATIVE TEAM:

Director: Molly Smith
Set Designer: Riccardo Hernández
Costume Designer: Alejo Vietti
Lighting Designer: Nicole Pearce
Sound Designer: Roc Lee
Dialect and Vocal Coach: Lisa Nathans
Casting Director: Victor Vazquez, CSA
Stage Manager: Susan R. White
Assistant Stage Manager: Allie Roy

PLAN YOUR VISIT

TICKETS: Tickets for *Celia and Fidel* are \$40-95, 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 arenastage.org/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 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 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday at 2 p.m.
Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday, March 11, Wednesday, March 25 and Tuesday, April 7.

Closed captioning: GalaPro begins Friday, March 6.

Open-captioned performance: Wednesday, March 25 at 7:30 p.m.

Audio-described performance: Saturday, April 11 at 2 p.m.

Southwest Night: Sunday, March 29 at 6 p.m.

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Full Calendar: arenastage.org/tickets/calendar

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 \$29, and a la carte options are also available. To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/prix-fixe. The café opens two hours before the show. To view the concessions menu, visit 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 2019/20 Season details, visit: arenastage.org/tickets/1920-season.

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

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