

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 HOSTS ONE-NIGHT-ONLY GALA
TO HONOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVOCATE MELANNE VERVEER
WITH TONY AND GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING
PERFORMER HEATHER HEADLEY AS HEADLINER
WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 2020

*** The Arena Stage Annual Gala features the presentation of the
Beth Newburger Schwartz Award to Melanne Verveer, Executive Director of the
Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie are pleased to announce the presentation of the fifth annual Beth Newburger Schwartz Award to **Melanne Verveer**, with actor and performer **Heather Headley** headlining the **2020 Arena Stage Annual Gala**. The Gala will be held on **Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at The Anthem (901 Wharf Street, SW)**.

The evening kicks off with a cocktail reception, followed by the award presentation, a three-course seated dinner and performance. The dinner will feature the presentation of the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award to Melanne Verveer, in recognition of her efforts for women's rights and her continual support of the arts. She is currently the executive director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. Verveer served as the first United States Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues to which she was nominated by President Obama in 2009. Previously, she was the chair and CEO of Vital Voices Global Partnership, an international NGO that she founded to invest in emerging women leaders. She also served as assistant to the president and chief of staff to the first lady during the Clinton administration.

"Arena Stage, under the exceptional leadership of Molly Smith, has become a national hub for the best in American theater in our nation's capital. The theater company has made it possible for the public to access innovative, engaging and transformative productions that not only entertain, but also inspire and even move us to action," shares **Verveer**. "It is an honor to receive the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award as Beth has set a high and exemplary standard throughout her life as an entrepreneur and civic leader. We owe her an enormous debt of gratitude for her many contributions to our community."

The award was first presented to Arena Stage board chair Beth Newburger Schwartz in 2016. Other recipients include Arlene Kogod in 2017, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser in 2018 and Nina Totenberg in 2019. The award celebrates a female leader who strives to better the community in which she lives through her own unique strengths and talents.

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Page 2— Melanne Verveer to receive Beth Newburger Schwartz Award

“Melanne Verveer is an international champion for girls and women. She is dynamic, she is brave and she is unabashedly driven about creating a better world with women, girls and vital voices,” says **Smith**. “A collaborative leader, Ambassador Verveer has been successful in changing attitudes and building bridges while promoting the critical role of women in establishing peace internationally. She is a huge proponent of the arts and we are thrilled to honor her with the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award.”

All proceeds will benefit all Arena Stage artistic and educational programs.

The 70th Anniversary Gala is presented by Ourisman Automotive Group and generously sponsored by Diamond Sponsors AT&T and Hoffman & Associates and Platinum Sponsor Exelon.

Event Schedule

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

6 p.m. Cocktail reception

7 p.m. Award presentation and seated dinner

8:30 p.m. One-night-only performance with Heather Headley

For additional event details, visit: arenastage.org/gala.

For information on individual ticket or table purchases please contact Maria Corso at 202-600-4025 or email mcorso@arenastage.org.

For information on corporate sponsorship packages, please contact Shayla Hines at 202-600-4030 or email shines@arenastage.org.

For media inquiries, please email press@arenastage.org.

Melanne Verveer (*Award Recipient*) is the executive director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. She also serves as the special representative on gender issues for the OSCE Chairmanship. Verveer previously served as the first U.S. Ambassador for Global Women’s Issues, a position to which she was nominated by President Obama in 2009. She coordinated foreign policy issues and activities relating to the political, economic and social advancement of women, traveling to nearly 60 countries. President Obama also appointed her to serve as the U.S. Representative to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. From 2000-2008, she was the chair and co-CEO of Vital Voices Global Partnership, an international NGO that she co-founded to invest in emerging women leaders. During the Clinton administration, she served as assistant to the president and chief of staff to the first lady. Verveer has a B.S. and M.S. from Georgetown University and holds several honorary degrees. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission, and she serves on the Boards of the National Endowment for Democracy, the Atlantic Council and the World Bank Advisory Council on Gender and Development. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Secretary of State’s Award for Distinguished Service. In 2008, the president of Ukraine awarded her the Order of Princess Olga.

Heather Headley (*Featured Performer*) is a Tony and Grammy Award-winning actress and performer. In 1997, Headley won a Tony Award for the role of Nala in the original Broadway cast of the Tony-winning musical *The Lion King*. Headley was asked to audition for the title role in the writing duo’s next Broadway venture together, *Elton John and Tim Rice’s Aida*. Her portrayal of the Nubian princess, Aida, won her the praise of critics and another prestigious Tony Award. She also received the coveted Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actress in a Musical. She has also been named as one of *People Magazine’s* 50 Most Beautiful People and *Essence Magazine’s* 30 Women To Watch. In 2012, Headley made a triumphant return to the stage, starring in *The Bodyguard* in London’s West End. She continued her musical success with her 2002 debut album, “This Is Who I Am.” Two songs, “He Is” and the album track “I Wish I Wasn’t,” both emerged as Top 5 R&B and Dance chart hits. In 2009, Headley released “Audience of One” for which she won the Grammy Award for the Best Contemporary R&B Gospel Album. She made her return to

Broadway in 2016 starring in the Tony Award-winning musical, *The Color Purple*, playing the role of Shug Avery. Headley has also had a recurring role on “Chicago Med.”

Beth Newburger Schwartz is an entrepreneur who has started and sold several businesses. She is currently president and CEO, Epoch Communications, Richlynd Federal and Middle Finger Productions. Beth is known in preservation circles for her work as director of communications for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. She served as a senior political appointee in both Clinton administrations, first in the White House Women’s Office and later as associate administrator, General Services Administration. In addition to her professional career, Beth is past chair of Arena Stage and currently vice president, past chair and trustee of the National Children’s Museum, trustee of the Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, President’s Council of Cornell Women, the Boat Owners Association of the United States and chairman of the board of Apollo Enterprise Imaging. Beth shared her love of theater and the arts with her late husband, Richard Schwartz, founder and chairman of BoatUS and an extraordinary philanthropist.

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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