

# 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 ANNOUNCES CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY'S PRODUCTION OF *TONI STONE* APRIL 23 – MAY 31, 2020

\*\*\* Pam MacKinnon directs this heroic, true story about the first woman to play professional baseball \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the company for *Toni Stone*, written by Arena alumna resident playwright **Lydia R. Diamond**. Set in the 1950s, *Toni Stone* was the first woman to play baseball in the Negro Leagues, also making her the first woman to play professionally in a men's league. Against all odds, Stone blazed a path in the male-dominated sports world, shattering expectations and creating her own set of rules.

Award-winning playwright **Diamond** (Arena's *Smart People*, *The Bluest Eye*) tells the dynamic and uplifting story of Stone's journey of perseverance and resilience just to do what she loved the most — play baseball. Directed by **Pam MacKinnon**, *Toni Stone* runs **April 23 – May 31, 2020 in the Kreeger Theater**.

Based on *Curveball, The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone* by **Martha Ackmann** and commissioned by **Roundabout Theatre Company** and **Samantha Barrie**, *Toni Stone* received development support from the Resident Artists Program at Arena Stage, Washington, D.C. This production is in association with American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) and Roundabout Theatre Company, where it received its world premiere in May 2019.

"I am so proud of this production and play — more than seven years in the making," explains **MacKinnon**. "Bringing Miss Toni Stone's story from my home theater of A.C.T. in San Francisco to Arena Stage, steps away from Nationals Park, is a dream."

"We've been following *Toni Stone* for several years," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "I have loved this project from the first I heard of it from Samantha Barrie, who has been a stalwart champion of the play as it developed. Lydia R. Diamond is a brilliant playwright and has written an important play highlighting a story that has not been told on stage before. Having Pam MacKinnon as director makes this production a home run."

Returning to Arena Stage includes **JaBen Early** (Arena's *Junk*) as King Tut, **Sean-Maurice Lynch** (Arena's *Jubilee*) as Stretch and Helen Hayes Award-winner **Dawn Ursula** (Arena's *A Raisin in the Sun*) as Toni Stone.

Making their Arena debuts are **Daniel J. Bryant** (Roundabout's *Toni Stone*) as Spec, **Kenn E. Head** (FOX's *Empire*) as Millie, **Marquis D. Gibson** (Studio Theatre's *Wig Out!*) as Jimmy, **Ray Shell** (West End's *Starlight Express* and *The Lion King*) as Alberga, **Rodney Earl Jackson, Jr.** (Broadway's *Book of Mormon*) as Elzie and **Jarrold Smith** (A.C.T.'s *The Royale*) as Woody.

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In addition to MacKinnon, the creative team includes Choreographer **Camille A. Brown**, Set Designer **Riccardo Hernández**, Costume Designer **Dede Ayite**, Lighting Designer **Allen Lee Hughes**, Sound Designer and Original Music **Broken Chord**, Hair and Wigs Designer **Cookie Jordan**, Dramaturg **Allie Moss**, Casting Directors **Janet Foster, CSA & Victor Vazquez, CSA**, Stage Manager **Elisa Guthertz** and Assistant Stage Manager **Kurt Hall**.

**Lydia R. Diamond** (*Playwright*) is an award-winning playwright whose work includes *Toni Stone*, *Smart People*, *Stick Fly* (Broadway run at Cort Theatre), *Voyeurs de Venus*, *Harriet Jacobs* and *The Bluest Eye*. Producing theaters include: American Conservatory Theater, Arena Stage, Congo Square, Second Stage, Company One, Goodman, The Guthrie, Huntington, MPAACT, Roundabout Theatre Company, Steppenwolf and McCarter Theatre Center. Diamond has been a W. E. B. DuBois Harvard Fellow, a Harvard Radcliffe Institute Fellow, a Huntington Playwright Fellow, and a NEA/TCG playwright, and is the 2020 recipient of the Horton Foote Playwriting Award. Lydia was a writer/consulting producer for Showtime's fourth season of *The Affair* (nominated for a Writer's Guild Award — Best Drama, episode 407). Lydia is on faculty at University of Illinois Chicago.

**Samantha Barrie** (*Commissioning Producer*), prior to commissioning and developing *Toni Stone*, Samantha was the casting director for The Old Globe and worked in the artistic departments of The Public Theater and Roundabout Theatre Company. In addition to producing, she designs educationally focused tours around the world for some of the country's most prestigious media outlets and non-profit institutions. She feels immense pride that because of this project her son Isaac knows Toni Stone's story.

**Roundabout Theatre Company** (*Todd Haimes, Artistic Director/CEO*) was founded in 1965. New York's not-for-profit Roundabout Theatre Company celebrates the power of theater by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present and educating minds for the future. Roundabout produces a mix of revivals and world premieres on and off Broadway, winning eight Best Revival Tony Awards and debuting such new playwrights as Stephen Karam, Lindsey Ferrentino, Steven Levenson, Ming Peiffer and Jiréh Breon Holder. Its educational initiatives impact 15,000 students and over 1,000 teachers annually. [roundabouttheatre.org](http://roundabouttheatre.org).

**American Conservatory Theater** is a Tony Award-winning theater and educational institution dedicated to nurturing the art of live theater through dynamic productions, intensive actor training in its conservatory and an ongoing engagement with its community. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Pam MacKinnon and Executive Director Jennifer Bielstein, A.C.T. embraces its responsibility to conserve, renew, and reinvent our relationship to the rich theatrical traditions and literatures that are our collective legacy, while exploring new artistic forms and new communities. A commitment to the highest standards informs every aspect of A.C.T.'s creative work. Founded by pioneer of the regional theater movement William Ball, A.C.T. opened its first San Francisco season in 1967. Since then, A.C.T. has performed more than 400 productions to a combined audience of more than seven million people. A.C.T. reaches more than 250,000 people through its productions and programs every year. For more information, visit [act.sf.org](http://act.sf.org).

**Pam MacKinnon** (*Director*) is the artistic director of American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) in San Francisco. She has directed eight Broadway productions. She won Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Steppenwolf, Arena, Broadway) as well as an Obie Award and Tony and Lortel nominations for Bruce Norris' *Clybourne Park* (Playwrights Horizons, Taper, Broadway). She recently served a three-year term as president of the executive board of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) and continues to serve on their board. Recent credits include world premieres of Bruce Norris' *Downstate* (Steppenwolf, National Theatre), Lydia Diamond's *Toni Stone* (Roundabout) and Kate Attwell's *Testmatch* (A.C.T.).

### Cast Biographies (in alphabetical order)

**Daniel J. Bryant** (*Spec*) is excited to reprise his role from last year's world-premiere production at Roundabout Theatre Company. Daniel's West Coast credits include Lynn Nottage's *Las Menina* (San Jose Repertory Theatre) and *Slide Glide the Slippery Slope* (Mark Taper Forum). Regionally, his credits include: *Broken Fences* (16th Street Theater); *Topdog/Underdog*, *True West* and *The People's Temple* (American Theater Company). At Congo Square Theatre, where Bryant is an ensemble member, he was featured in *The Talented Tenth*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* and *Stick Fly*, originating the role of Spoon. Other credits include: *Vivisections from the Blown Mind* and *By the Music of the Spheres* (Goodman Theatre); *Wheatley* (Victory Gardens Theater); and *A Clockwork Orange* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company). Daniel is also a voice-over artist, director and a proud member of AEA, SDC, AFTRA and SAG.

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**JaBen Early** (*King Tut*) is excited to return to Arena Stage. His other regional credits include: *All the Way* (Lincoln Center); *Piano Lesson* (Olney Theatre); *Julius Caesar* (Folger Shakespeare Theater); *The Convert* and *Civilization* (Woolly Mammoth Theater); *F\*\*king A* and *Wars* (Studio Theatre); *All the Way*, *Ruined* and *The Great Society* (Arena Stage); *We Are Proud* and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Guthrie Theatre); *The Convert* (Marin Theatre Company); and *We Are Proud to Present...* (Interact Theatre). Early's film work includes *Harriet*. Training: Morehouse College.

**Marquis D. Gibson** (*Jimmy*) is grateful for this debut at Arena Stage. Some of his D.C. credits include *Wig Out!* (Studio Theatre) and *Black Nativity* (Theater Alliance, Helen Hayes Award Outstanding Ensemble). Regional credits include: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Marin Shakespeare Company); *The Christians* and *Sex with Strangers* (Hippodrome Theatre); *Shakespeare in Love* (Cincinnati Playhouse and Baltimore Centerstage); and *Mother Emanuel* (NYC Fringe). Training: Howard University. [www.marquisdgibson.com](http://www.marquisdgibson.com).

**Kenn E. Head** (*Millie*) is thrilled to be part of this production of *Toni Stone*. He has worked on numerous plays at many theaters over his career. To name a few: Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Yale Repertory Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Next Theatre Company, American Theatre Company and Victory Gardens Theater. His television credits include: *The Chi*, *Chicago Med*, *Empire*, *The Exorcist*, *Chicago Fire*, *Early Edition* and *ER*. He is also particularly proud of some indie films of which he has been part, including *Once Upon a River*, which is currently in the festival circuit and *Chosen*.

**Rodney Earl Jackson, Jr.** (*Elzie*) made his Broadway debut in *The Book of Mormon* and was last seen at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in the world premiere of *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations*. He traveled in the first national tour of *Motown: The Musical*. Jackson is a San Francisco native who built his love and foundation for arts and theater in public city organizations, such as San Francisco Arts Education Project, San Francisco Recreation and Parks, Young People's Teen Musical Theatre Company and the Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts. He is the co-founder/artistic director of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company (SFBATCO), a five-year-old nonprofit whose mission is to produce live theater that reflects the experiences of the Bay Area's historically and currently marginalized communities and creating mentorships that aspire to engage a new generation of live theater supporters. (he/him) @rodneyearljacksonjr

**Sean-Maurice Lynch** (*Stretch*) last appeared at Arena Stage as Frederick Loudin in *Jubilee*. D.C.-area credits include: *Twelve Angry Men*, *Ragtime* and *Parade* (Ford's); *Ruined* (Everyman Theatre); *Lost in the Stars* (Washington Opera); *Passing Strange* and *Pop!* (Studio Theatre); *Show Boat*, *Sweeney Todd*, *[Title of Show]*, *Hairspray*, *Brother Russia* and *Dreamgirls* (Signature Theatre); and *A Year with Frog and Toad* (Adventure Theatre). From 2016 -2020, he worked at Arena Stage in the community engagement department as the training programs manager. He is a proud alum of the Allen Lee Hughes Fellowship.

**Ray Shell** (*Alberga*) has been a permanent fixture on London's West End since 1978, starring in productions by Cameron Mackintosh, Andrew Lloyd-Webber, Paulette Randall, Trevor Nunn, Clarke Peters and others. Shell covered James Earl Jones in *Driving Miss Daisy* (West End); played Joe Keller in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (Talawa Theatre Company); Shell is the creative director of London's Giant Olive Theatre Company, directing for them *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist*, *Zip* and *The Tulip Wars*. Shell recently acted in Lee Daniels's film *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*. Shell's internationally published novel, *Iced*, will be produced and directed by Daniels. His other written works include *Carolina Red*, *Spike Lee: The Eternal Maverick*, articles and short stories for *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Serpent's Tail* and *Penguin Books*. Instagram: @taip\_lab

**Jarrod Smith** (*Woody*) has performed in *The Whipping Man* (South Coast Repertory and Pasadena Playhouse); *Sojourner's* (Magic Theater); and *The Royale* (A Contemporary Theater).

**Dawn Ursula** (*Toni Stone*) last appeared at Arena Stage as Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun* and Desiree in *Love in Afghanistan*. A resident company member with Everyman Theatre, she most recently appeared as Mame in *Radio Golf*. Also a resident company member with Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, she most recently appeared there as Madre Maria in *Botticelli in the Fire*. Other credits include: the Angel in *Angels in America 1 & 2* (Round House Theatre and Olney Theatre Center) and Grace Kumalo in *Lost in the Stars* (Washington National Opera). She has received two Helen Hayes Awards and thrice been nominated. On-camera credits include Isabella in PBS' *Prince Among Slaves* and Mrs. "Bunny" Colvin on HBO's *The Wire*. Pronouns: she/hers. Private coach: Vera Katz Instagram: @dawnursula, [www.dawnursula.com](http://www.dawnursula.com).

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For full company biographies, please visit [arenastage.org/tickets/1920-season/toni-stone](https://arenastage.org/tickets/1920-season/toni-stone).

*Toni Stone* is generously sponsored by AT&T, Susan and Steve Bralove, Exelon and Sue Henry and Carter Phillips.

### Post-Show Conversations

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff on May 6 following the 12 p.m. performance, May 13 following the 12 p.m. performance, May 19 following the 12 p.m. performance and 7:30 p.m. and May 21 following the 8 p.m. performance.

### PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Arena Stage In Association with A.C.T. Presents the Roundabout Theatre Company's Production of *Toni Stone*

By Lydia R. Diamond

Directed by Pam MacKinnon

Choreographed by Camille A. Brown

In association with Samantha Barrie

In the Kreeger Theater | April 23 – May 31, 2020

**ABOUT:** Considered a pioneer, Toni Stone is the first woman to play baseball in the Negro Leagues, also making her the first woman to play professionally in a men's league in the 1950s. Against all odds, Stone blazes a path in the male-dominated sports world, shattering expectations and creating her own set of rules. Based on Martha Ackmann's book *Curveball, The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone*, the latest work from award-winning playwright Lydia R. Diamond (*Smart People*, *The Bluest Eye*) tells the dynamic and uplifting story of Stone's journey of perseverance and resilience just to do what she loved the most — play baseball.

### **CAST:**

Toni Stone: Dawn Ursula

Spec: Daniel J. Bryant

King Tut: JaBen Early

Jimmy: Marquis D. Gibson

Elzie: Rodney Earl Jackson, Jr.

Millie: Kenn E. Head

Stretch: Sean-Maurice Lynch

Alberga: Ray Shell

Woody: Jarrod Smith

### **CREATIVE TEAM:**

Playwright: Lydia R. Diamond

Director: Pam MacKinnon

Choreographer: Camille A. Brown

Set Designer: Riccardo Hernández

Costume Designer: Dede Ayite

Lighting Designer: Allen Lee Hughes

Original Music and Sound Designer: Broken Chord

Hair & Wigs Designer: Cookie Jordan

Dramaturg: Allie Moss

Casting Directors: Janet Foster, CSA & Victor Vazquez, CSA

Stage Manager: Elisa Guthertz

Assistant Stage Manager: Kurt Hall

### PLAN YOUR VISIT

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Toni Stone* 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 [arenastage.org/tickets/savings-programs](https://arenastage.org/tickets/savings-programs).

Tickets may be purchased online at [arenastage.org](https://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, May 6, Wednesday, May 13 and Tuesday, May 19.

**Closed captioning:** GalaPro begins Friday, May 1

**Open-captioned performance:** Thursday, May 28 8 p.m.

**Audio-described performance:** Saturday, May 30 at 2 p.m.

**Southwest Night:** Tuesday, May 24 at 7:30 p.m.

**Full Calendar:** [arenastage.org/tickets/calendar](https://arenastage.org/tickets/calendar)

**ARENA STAGE CAFÉ:** Prix fixe meals are available at Richard's Place, Arena Stage's casual dining café, with three-course meals available starting at \$25. To learn about these options, call 202-488-3300 or visit: [arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/prix-fixe/](https://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/prix-fixe/). To see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit [arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/menu/](https://arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/menu/). The café opens two hours before the show. To pre-order refreshments, visit [arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/richards-place-cafe/concessions](https://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](https://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](http://arenastage.org)

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