

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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For additional information, visit:
arenastage.org/lookingforward

ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES NEW VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING FOR THE 2021/22 LOOKING FORWARD SEASON

*** The Winter/Spring Looking Forward Season features a three-part original musical series, world-premiere films, a love letter experience via mail and more ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces its robust lineup of digital programming for the 2021/22 Looking Forward Season. Following on the success of last year's virtual offerings, the upcoming season expands even further to reflect Arena's commitment of championing diverse voices, engaging audiences and producing compelling, dynamic work. As part of Arena's mission to serve artists and audiences on a national, regional and local scale, the 2021/22 Looking Forward Season is packed with ambitious new works. Following on the success of previous films, Arena is excited to debut a newly commissioned filmed musical series, ***Arena Riffs***, along with an original film ***Indigenous Earth Voices*** and a new theatrical film by Arena's **Voices of Now** ensembles. The Looking Forward Season also includes a **Love Letter Experience** delivered to mailboxes across the country and an exciting slate of **virtual classes**.

"It feels like a long journey into spring this year, but we have some wonderful new pieces that will illuminate and brighten our days with our raucous online program. I'm so excited to premiere two new films, *Arena Riffs* and *Indigenous Earth Voices*," shares Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**.

"*Arena Riffs* will take us on three different emotional journeys through our virtual world, using music, lyrics and each artist's unique creative visions. The artists were asked to create whatever they envisioned and make small films through music and imagery," **Smith** continues. "Indigenous people's stories are so rarely told in the mainstream and *Indigenous Earth Voices* will share those deep and meaningful stories highlighting the connection of Indigenous people to the land."

Beginning in March, Arena will debut ***Arena Riffs***, a three-part commissioned musical series that features three different composer and lyricist teams with musical selections infused with sounds of folk, indie and hip-hop. The self-produced, self-contained finished pieces will be delivered to be presented by Arena Stage. Performances will premiere on March 17, March 31 and April 14. Each original musical will be 20 – 30 minutes long and will be available to stream on Arena's website.

Each artist was given free rein in terms of what they wanted to compose. Themes in the musical series include the grief and void created by the pandemic, the nationwide reckoning on racial injustice, finding joy in difficult times and the exploration of one's relationship to the country. The series includes the premiere of the musical ***The Freewheelin' Insurgents***, written and directed by award-winning playwright, director and actor **Psalmayene 'Psalm' 24** (Arena's *The 51st State*, May 22, 2020). The series also includes musical pieces by indie-folk duo **Shaun and Abigail Bengson** (*The Keep Going Song*, *Hundred Days*) and award-winning composer **Rona Siddiqui** (*Salaam Medina: Tales of a Halfgan*, *One Good Day*). The cast and creative teams include **Louis Davis**, **Shannon Dorsey**, **Doug Fitch**, **Em Goldman**, **Raja Feather Kelly**, **Gary L. Perkins**, **Justin Weeks**, **Tony Thomas** and **Nick "tha 1da" Hernandez**. For further details, visit [here](http://arenastage.org).

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Premiering in May, **Indigenous Earth Voices**, will explore the people's relationship to the Earth. All of the artists involved in this film, including actors, directors, interviewees and playwrights are Indigenous. The film features six stories from locations throughout Canada and the United States focusing on stories of subsistence, family traditions, land rights, myths and legends, regalia, tribal rituals, treaties and issues that impact Indigenous cultures.

These stories, written by six playwrights, are based upon interviews with tribal leaders and storytellers from many different tribes across Canada and the United States. The interviewees come from the tribes of Cherokee, Cree in Canada, Cu'pik Eskimo in Alaska, Lakota, Piscataway, Shoshone, Zuni and others. Featured playwrights include **Tara Beagan** (Ntlaka'pamux and Irish Canadian), **Lee Cataluna** (Hawaiian), **Dillon Chitto** (Choctaw, Laguna and Isleta Pueblo), **Frank Henry Kaash Katasse** (Tlingit), **Mary Kathryn Nagle** (Cherokee) and **Madeline Sayet** (Mohegan). Full casting details will be announced next month. For more information, visit [here](#).

Later in the year, Arena's **Voices of Now** ensembles will premiere an additional theatrical film following on the success of last year's original piece and visual time capsule. The film will debut on June 18. Further details will be released at a later date.

As previously announced, Arena Stage is excited to bring a love story directly to mailboxes nationwide. Inspired by **Ken Ludwig's *Dear Jack, Dear Louise***, patrons can relive, or experience for the first time, the joyous, heartfelt drama through a series of nine letters in the mail that follow the love story of Ludwig's parents, Jacob S. Ludwig and Louise Rabiner. For \$35, the **Love Letter Experience** includes letters, personal photos and telegrams specifically designed and handcrafted with period details by the Arena Stage prop shop. This enchanting, limited-time experience is available for purchase by visiting [here](#). Mailings will start in early March, with new letters placed in the mail twice a week. Recipients should expect to receive all nine packets within a six-week period.

Arena's ongoing Winter virtual class series continues with offerings catered to families, theater lovers, students, adults and emerging theater artists. Masterclasses include audition preparation with **Franchelle Stewart Dorn**, dialogue writing with **Eduardo Machado**, stage management with **Christi Spann**, monologue writing with **Jacqueline E. Lawton** and script analysis with **Nehal Joshi**. The Insider Lecture Series gives participants a glimpse into the offstage work that helps create the magic seen onstage. Upcoming lectures will be led by Properties Director **Jenn Sheetz** and Costume Director **Joseph Salasovich**. Additional offerings through March include a Drama Book Club led by dramaturg, director and instructor **Otis Cortez Ramsey-Zöe** and Arena's School Programs Manager **Rebecca Campana**, along with Family Creativity Workshops led by Arena's Director of Education **Ashley Forman**. Further information and registration details on these programs can be found [here](#).

Arena's series of weekly virtual conversations will continue with another season of **Molly's Salons**. More information on featured upcoming guests and registration details can be found [here](#).

Arena Riffs Composers

Abigail and Shaun Bengson are a married composing and performing duo based in New York City and Vermont who have performed across the country and around the world. Their video, *The Keep Going Song*, has been viewed over 4 million times. Three of their singles have been featured on "So You Think You Can Dance" (FOX). Their theater work includes *The Keep Going Song* (Actor's Theatre of Louisville), *Hundred Days* (La Jolla Playhouse, New York Theatre Workshop, U.S. Tour), *The Lucky Ones* (Ars Nova), *Where the Mountain Meets the Sea* (ATL's Humana Festival), *Anything That Gives Off Light* (Edinburgh Theatre Festival), *You'll Still Call Me By Name* (New York Live Arts, Jacob's Pillow) and *Iphigenia in Aulis* (Classic Stage Company). They have received the Jonathan Larson and Richard Rogers awards and nominations for the Drama Desk, Drama League and Lucile Lortel awards.

Psalmayene 24 is an award-winning playwright, director and actor. Psalm, as his colleagues call him, is currently the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Playwright in Residence at Mosaic Theater and the Doris Duke Artist in Residence at Studio Theatre. Directing credits include *Pass Over* by Antoinette Nwandu at Studio Theatre, *Native Son* by Nambi E. Kelley at Mosaic Theater Company, *Word Becomes Flesh* (recipient of five 2017 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Direction of a Play) by Marc Bamuthi Joseph at Theater Alliance and *The Shipment* by Young Jean Lee at Forum Theater. Psalm was one of the writers of Arena Stage's film, *May 22, 2020*, and he was one of the directors of Arena's film, *The 51st State*. He wrote "Double Entendre", the fifth episode of Roundhouse Theatre's ten-part pandemic influenced web series *Homebound*. His play, *Les Deux Noirs* (2020 Charles MacArthur Award Nomination for Outstanding Original New Play or Musical and Venturous Capital Grant recipient), is inspired by a legendary 1953 confrontation between famed writers Richard Wright and James Baldwin in a Paris café and received its world premiere production at Mosaic Theater Company. Psalm has received commissions from the African Continuum Theater Company, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, The Kennedy Center, Theater Alliance, Solas Nua, Mosaic Theater Company and Theatrical Outfit. His one man play, *Free Jujube Brown!*, is recognized as a seminal work in hip-hop theatre and is published in the anthology, *Plays from the Boom Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop*

Generation (TCG). His new play, *Dear Mapel*, a series of letters to his deceased father, will receive its world premiere production at Mosaic Theater this fall.

Rona Siddiqui is a composer/lyricist based in New York City. She is a recipient of the Jonathan Larson Grant and Billie Burke Ziegfeld award. She was named one of Broadway Women's Fund's Women to Watch. Her show *Salaam Medina: Tales of a Halfghan*, an autobiographical comedy about growing up bi-ethnic in America, had a reading at Playwrights Horizons (directed by Raja Feather Kelly). Other musicals include *One Good Day*, *Hip Hop Cinderella* and *The Tin*. She is the recipient of the ASCAP Harold Adamson Lyric Award, the ASCAP Foundation Mary Rodgers/Lorenz Hart Award and ASCAP Foundation/Max Dreyfus Scholarship. She has written pieces for *Wicked's* 16th anniversary commemoration *Flying Free*, 24 Hour Musicals, Prospect Theater Company, The Civilians, and has performed concerts of her work at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Feinstein's/54 Below. Rona music directed the Off-Broadway Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Strange Loop* for which she received an Obie along with the cast and creative team (*Playwrights Horizons*). She has orchestrated for Broadway Records, Broadway Backwards, NAMT and Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera.

Indigenous Earth Voices Playwrights

Tara Beagan is a Ntlaka'pamux and Irish "Canadian" half-breed. She is cofounder/codirector of ARTICLE 11 with Andy Moro. ARTICLE 11 has worked across Turtle Island, in Aotearoa, Australia and Scotland and is based in Mohkinstsis (Calgary.) Beagan served as Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts (Toronto) from February 2011 to December 2013. She's been in residence at Cahoots (Toronto), NEPA, the National Arts Centre (Ottawa), Berton House (Dawson City) and is now at Prairie Theatre Exchange (Winnipeg.) Seven of her 32 plays are published. Two plays have received Dora nominations, with one win. In 2020, *Honour Beat* won the Gwen Pharis Ringwood Award and Beagan won the Siminovitch Prize for drama and playwriting.

Lee Cataluna was born and raised in Hawaii and is of Native Hawaiian descent. Recent projects for the stage include *Ipu* for Oregon Shakespeare Festival, *Home of the Brave* for La Jolla Playhouse, *Flowers of Hawaii* at Native Voices at the Autry and *Mudpies and Magic* at Honolulu Theatre for Youth. Her books include *Folks You Meet at Longs* and the children's book *Ordinary 'Ohana*. She has an MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts from University of California, Riverside.

Dillon Chitto is a Native American of Mississippi Choctaw, Laguna and Isleta Pueblo descent. He grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he learned the importance of art, culture and traditions from his family. In his playwriting, he connects these themes using storytelling techniques learned throughout his life. He is presently in Chicago, Illinois and is currently a company member of BoHo Theatre where he is an artistic administrator. His first play, *Bingo Hall*, was given a world premiere by Native Voices at the Autry in March 2018 in Los Angeles. He was selected as Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program's 2017 winning playwright. He has also worked with Global Voices theatre project in London as well as Theater Above the Law in Chicago. He was recently selected as a resident for AlterTheater's 2020 AlterLab cohort.

Mary Kathryn Nagle is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation. She is also a partner at Pipestem Law, P.C., where she works to protect tribal sovereignty and the inherent right of Indian Nations to protect their women and children from domestic violence and sexual assault. From 2015 to 2019, she served as the first Executive Director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program. Nagle is an alum of the 2013 Public Theater Emerging Writers Program. Productions include *Miss Lead* (Amerinda, 59E59), *Fairly Traceable* (Native Voices at the Autry), *Sovereignty* (Arena Stage), *Manahatta* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Return to Niobrara* (Rose Theater), *Crossing Mnisose* (Portland Center Stage), *Sovereignty* (Marin Theatre Company) and *Manahatta* (Yale Repertory Theatre).

Frank Henry Kaash Katasse is from the Tsaagweidi clan. Frank is an actor, director, producer, improviser, educator, author and playwright. Frank received his Bachelor's in Theatre Arts from the University of Hawai'i: Mānoa. Frank served as Board President of Juneau/Douglas Little Theatre (2013-2019), a Perseverance Theatre company member (2008-present) and the Playwright in Residence for Theater Alaska (2020-present). In 2017, Perseverance Theatre produced (along with Native Voices at the Autry and La Jolla Playhouse) the rolling world premiere of Katasse's play *They Don't Talk Back*. Frank has also developed two full length plays, *Where the Summit Meets the Stars* and *Spirit of the Valley*, as the Playwright in Residence (2018). Frank currently lives in Douglas, AK with his wife and two kids.

Madeline Sayet is a citizen of the Mohegan Tribe, the Executive Director of the Yale Indigenous Performing Arts Program (YIPAP) and Co-Artistic Director of Red Eagle Soaring: Native Youth Theater. For her work as a theater maker, she has been honored as a Forbes 30 Under 30, TED Fellow, MIT Media Lab Director's Fellow, National Directing Fellow, Native American 40 Under 40 and a recipient of The White House Champion of Change Award from President Obama. Her play, *Where We Belong*, first shown in London at Shakespeare's Globe, will have its U.S. premiere in DC as part of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's current season. www.madelinesayet.com.

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Ken Ludwig's Dear Jack, Dear Louise Love Letter Experience is generously provided by the Artistic Director's Fund.

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 impacting the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its eighth decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

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