

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 AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER ANNOUNCES COMPANY'S 2021/22 SEASON

*** Live in-person performances return to the Mead Center in September ***

*** The season features a world-premiere *Power Play*, acclaimed and inspiring dramas, a high-energy musical and contemporary dance infused with comedy and electrifying music from a diverse group of voices including Lydia R. Diamond, Eduardo Machado, August Wilson and Lauren Yee ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie announce the 2021/22 lineup for the company's 72nd Season. Arena is excited to welcome back audiences into our spaces and roar back with an ambitious, thrilling season packed with drama, humor, high-energy music and stories that bring us together. The season reflects Arena's commitment to produce compelling, dynamic work that speaks to this moment in time as we navigate a new world. Arena is committed to creating work that reflects the voices of our communities and our country. As part of Arena's mission to serve artists on a national, regional and local scale, two exciting collaborations will take place with American Conservatory Theater and Step Afrika!

"Arena is definitely roaring back! The Earth is shaking beneath our feet as the world shifts on its axis once again and welcomes us back to the theater. Our 2021/22 Season is a unique combination of champagne and soul," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "We have and will continue to champion diverse voices on and off stage. We remain rooted in our 72-year history — and when you return, there will be much that is familiar but different, too. When we began focusing on American plays, American ideas and American voices 23 years ago, it was provocative because almost no other theater in the U.S. was focused this way. Even though about a third to more than half of our artistic voices have been people of color, it is time to do more — to amplify the voices of all artists to tell the stories of our time. This has been a year of soulful introspection, but, yes, we need the bubbly overflowing with a big, fun musical too."

The season kicks off in September in the Kreeger Theater with **Lydia R. Diamond's** (Arena's *Stick Fly*, *Smart People*) **Toni Stone**, based on the real-life woman who became the first female to play professional baseball in the Negro Leagues. The highly anticipated work was originally planned for the 2019/20 Season. **Pam MacKinnon** directs this inspiring story that shines a light on one of history's greatest trailblazers. For a special one-night-only event in September, *Toni Stone* will be simulcast to the center field videoboard in Nationals Park for up to 12,000 people to experience.

In October, **Eduardo Machado's** (*Havana is Waiting*, *The Cook*) **Celia and Fidel** will make its return to the Kogod Cradle. The production premiered and was forced to close on its opening night in March 2020 due to the pandemic. Arena'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. **Molly Smith** directs this captivating story at a time when it's more important than ever to examine dictators and reflect on their impact on modern society.

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In November, **Tazewell Thompson** (Arena's *Jubilee, Mary T. & Lizzy K.*) returns to Arena Stage to direct August Wilson's fifth cycle play **Seven Guitars**. Infused with deep and soaring blues rhythms, this heartfelt classic follows the cycle of life, love, pain, suffering and joy of seven lives who are reconnected following an untimely death. Arena has produced nine out of the 10 plays in Wilson's American Century Cycle, which chronicles the Black experience in America throughout the 20th Century. This is the second half of Arena Stage Giants Festival featuring August Wilson.

In the new year, **Change Agent**, Arena's eighth Power Play, makes its premiere. This provocative tale, written and directed by **Craig Lucas** (*An American in Paris, The Light in the Piazza*), dramatically conjures celebrated, controversial and unsung figures in American history surrounding pivotal events in the 1960s.

The season continues in March 2022 with **Catch Me If You Can**, featuring a cool jazz score packed with glamour and charm for the entire family. Based on true events and the hit film, **Corbin Bleu** (Arena's *Anything Goes, Broadway's In the Heights*) returns to Arena to step into the role of the notorious con man Frank Abagnale Jr. Directed by **Molly Smith**, this high-flying musical sensation features the hit songs "Don't Break the Rules", "Live in Living Color" and "Doctor's Orders."

Also in the lineup, Arena will kick off the first North American tour of New York's Signature Theatre's production of **Lauren Yee's** (*The Great Leap, King of the Yees*) acclaimed play **Cambodian Rock Band** in the spring. This darkly humorous, electrifying work tells the story of a father and daughter as they confront the legacy of the Khmer Rouge. Thrilling mystery meets rock concert in this passionate story about survivors, family and the enduring power of music.

Next, the season continues in May 2022 with the production of Step Afrika!'s **Drumfolk**, a rhythmic storytelling of the history of African American percussive traditions inspired by the Stono Rebellion of 1739 — when Africans lost the right to use their drums, but the beats found their way into the bodies of the people. *Drumfolk* takes audiences on a journey from the 17th century to today, revealing the hidden histories and resounding movements that transformed America. As previously announced, this immersive production will be the first of three as part of a three-year collaborative partnership between Arena and Step Afrika!.

In July 2022, the world-premiere musical **American Prophet: Frederick Douglass in His Own Words** will make its debut in the Kreeger Theater. Filled with soaring new melodies and powered by Douglass' own speeches and writings, **Charles Randolph-Wright** (Broadway's *Motown the Musical, Arena's Born For This: The BeBe Winans Story*) returns to Arena with this new work that celebrates the revolutionary legacy of one of history's first freedom fighters. Co-written and featuring new music by Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter **Marcus Hummon**, this daring and heart-stirring musical dramatizes Douglass as a young, fierce abolitionist and distinguished orator.

Arena will also welcome some of its favorite performers back to the theater for **Cabaret Nights**. Beginning this July, patrons will enjoy Broadway to Jazz to the American Songbook from a selection of artists.

As Arena prepares for a full reopening, we will prioritize the safety of our artists, audiences and staff. We are requiring that patrons, staff and volunteers wear masks inside the Mead Center. Enhanced cleaning and sanitization will take place throughout the building. For superior air quality, we have upgraded our ventilation/filtration systems and have implemented a full digital ticketing system that will include contactless ticket scanning and digital programs. These conditions are subject to change. For the latest information, visit arenastage.org/staysafe.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater 2021/22 Schedule*

Arena Stage in Association with A.C.T. Presents The Roundabout Theatre Company's Production of *Toni Stone*
Written by Lydia R. Diamond
Directed by Pam MacKinnon
Choreographed by Camille A. Brown
In association with Samantha Barrie
In the Kreeger Theater | September 3 – October 3, 2021

History is filled with trailblazers and Toni Stone was one of them. 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 shattered expectations and created her own set of rules in the male-dominated sports world. Based on Martha Ackmann's book *Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone*, award-winning playwright Lydia R. Diamond (*Smart People, The Bluest Eye*) tells the dynamic story of Stone's journey of perseverance and resilience just to do what she loved the most — play baseball.

Celia and Fidel

Written by Eduardo Machado

Directed by Molly Smith

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | October 8 – November 21, 2021

It's 1980s Cuba and the revolution has reached a crazed tipping point. Fueled by a stagnant economy, 10,000 citizens have fled to the Peruvian Embassy in Cuba seeking asylum. As Fidel Castro grapples between his desire to maintain power and do what is best for his country, he turns to his closest confidant and political partner, Celia Sanchez for answers. What kind of a leader is he? Merciful or mighty? Imbued with magical realism, Eduardo Machado's *Celia and Fidel* — Arena Stage's seventh Power Play — imagines a fight between Cuba's most influential female revolutionary and its most notorious political leader.

August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*

Written by August Wilson

Directed by Tazewell Thompson

In the Fichandler Stage | November 26 – December 26, 2021

The lives of seven friends are irrevocably changed when their old friend and blues singer Floyd Barton reappears with a chance of a lifetime. Infused with deep and soaring blues rhythms, this "rich and exceptionally vivid" (*Variety*) play pits the determination for a better future against the harsh realities ultimately leading to heartbreaking and inescapable circumstances. Director Tazewell Thompson returns to Arena Stage to direct August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* — the fifth play in Wilson's American Century Cycle and the second half of Arena Stage Giants Festival featuring August Wilson.

Change Agent

Written and directed by Craig Lucas

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | January 21 – March 6, 2022

The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Civil Rights Movement and the Cold War were just some of the most influential periods in U.S. history, in an eerie resonance with the current social and racial movements of today. Tony Award-nominated (*An American in Paris*, *The Light in the Piazza*) playwright and director Craig Lucas' provocative Power Play imagines dramatic scenes between figures from history who were celebrated and unsung. These insider voices were responsible for influencing major decisions that are still unfolding and radically impacting our country today.

Catch Me If You Can

Based on the Dreamworks Motion Picture

Book by Terrence McNally

Music by Marc Shaiman

Lyrics by Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman

Directed by Molly Smith

In the Fichandler Stage | March 4 – April 17, 2022

Humor, music and dance drive this rousing musical based on true events and a critically acclaimed film. See how a charming, young conman posed as an airline pilot, a lawyer and then escaped police custody all before he turned 22. Helen Hayes Award-winning actor Corbin Bleu returns to Arena Stage (Arena's *Anything Goes*, Broadway's *In the Heights* and *Kiss Me, Kate*) to take on the role of this young con man Frank Abagnale Jr. The Tony-nominated musical comedy is jam-packed with dynamic numbers such as "Don't Break the Rules," "Live in Living Color" and "Doctor's Orders." *Catch Me If You Can* is "a high-flying musical comedy" (*The Hollywood Reporter*) packed with glamour and delight for the entire family. Where else, but Washington, D.C., could a musical about con men and being conned be the perfect story we need right now?

Cambodian Rock Band

Written by Lauren Yee

Featuring Songs by Dengue Fever

Directed by Chay Yew

A Signature Theatre Production

In the Kreeger Theater | April 12 – May 15, 2022

Guitars tuned. Mic checked. Get ready to rock! This darkly funny, electric new play with music tells the story of a Khmer Rouge survivor returning to Cambodia for the first time in thirty years, as his daughter prepares to prosecute one of Cambodia's most infamous war criminals. Backed by a live band playing contemporary Dengue Fever hits and classic Cambodian oldies, this thrilling story toggles back and forth in time as father and daughter face the music of the past. Lauren Yee brings us an intimate rock epic about family secrets set against a dark chapter of Cambodian history.

Drumfolk

By Step Afrika!

In the Fichandler Stage | May 31 – June 26, 2022

Electrifying percussive dance fused with contemporary art forms fuels Step Afrika!'s latest production, *Drumfolk*, inspired by the Stono Rebellion of 1739 and the Negro Act of 1740 in South Carolina. State laws mandated that enslaved Africans could not assemble or use their drums which were used to signal the uprising. They took away the drums, but they could not stop the beat. This is the rich and “inspiring” (*The New York Times*) story of a movement that could not be stopped and transformed African American culture from then to the present day. The immersive production will be the first of three as part of a multi-year collaborative partnership between Step Afrika! and Arena Stage.

American Prophet: Frederick Douglass in His Own Words

Co-written and directed by Charles Randolph-Wright

Co-written and music by Marcus Hummon

In the Kreeger Theater | July 15 – August 28, 2022

Frederick Douglass ignited the flame of a freedom movement that still burns today. Charles Randolph-Wright (*Arena's Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story, Broadway's Motown the Musical*) returns to Arena Stage with a groundbreaking musical powered by Douglass' own speeches and writings. Coupled with soaring new melodies and an original script from Grammy Award-winning songwriter Marcus Hummon and Randolph-Wright, Douglass rises as a fierce abolitionist and distinguished orator. Filled with electrifying new songs including “What Does Freedom Look Like,” “We Need a Fire” and “A More Perfect Union,” this world premiere celebrates the revolutionary legacy of one of history's first freedom fighters, whose fire is needed now more than ever.

**Plays, artists and dates are subject to change.*

*Sponsorship for Arena Stage's Season Artwork is generously provided by **David Bruce Smith and The Grateful American Foundation.***

*Prime Sponsorship for Toni Stone and Arena Stage is generously provided by **Beth Newburger Schwartz.** Supporting Sponsorship for Toni Stone is generously provided by **AT&T, Susan and Steve Bralove, Exelon and Sue Henry and Carter Phillips.** Contributing Sponsorship for Toni Stone at Nationals Park is generously provided by **Strategic Education.***

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*Prime Sponsorship for Seven Guitars is generously provided by **AARP, Comcast and The Paul M. Angell Foundation.** Supporting Sponsorship is generously provided by **Judith N. Batty, Patricia and David Fisher and Margot Kelly.***

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Subscription packages are now on sale and may be purchased by calling the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300 or by visiting arenastage.org. The Sales Office hours are Tuesday through Saturday from noon until 6 p.m.

***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 groundbreaking 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.
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