

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## TWO WORLD PREMIERE FILMS HEADLINE ARENA STAGE'S SPRING/SUMMER SEASON

\*\*\* Washington's vibrant voices power two new works capturing the heart and spirit of the region during this historic time

### Arena launches inaugural Supper Club\*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater opens its online Spring/Summer Season, *Looking Forward* in June with two world premiere films, *May 22, 2020* and *Inside Voices: a film by Arena Stage's Voices of Now ensembles*. Both films will premiere through Arena's new Supper Club and are at the core of Arena Stage's mission to support our region's talented artists of all ages and to champion new work and authentic voices.

Premiering June 12, *May 22, 2020*, a filmed docudrama, directed by Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**, captures one day in the life of our region. Ten D.C.-Maryland-Virginia subjects ranging in age from 18 – 89, and from a variety of backgrounds including a climate change activist to a grandmother living alone, were interviewed by 10 area playwrights on May 22, 2020. From these rich conversations, writers composed original monologues, a window into radically changed lives during the COVID-19 pandemic which will be filmed with Washington actors. Featured playwrights include **Randy Baker, Audrey Cefaly, Annalisa Dias, Caleen Sinnette Jennings, Aaron Posner, Psalmayene 24, John Strand, Gregory Keng Strasser, MaryHall Surface** and **Karen Zacarias**. Arena's artistic leader **Molly Smith**, Deputy Artistic Director **Seema Sueko** and Director of Community Engagement/Senior Artistic Advisor **Anita Maynard-Losh** will direct the monologues.

"The concept of *May 22, 2020* is to capture a moment in time that will never occur again," states Arena Stage Artistic Director and film director **Molly Smith**. "We are being hyper local here as the interviewees, writers, directors, actors and video makers are all from the Washington, D.C. metro area. Our purpose as a regional theater reflecting our city is a powerful motivator. This part of America is unlike any other part of America and we want to capture it. Docudramas are immediate and full of individual stories. Newspapers do a brilliant job of this type of storytelling and this is our opportunity to catch the zeitgeist of the moment through filming ten monologues that range from an emergency room nurse to a beekeeper to a DC Detective."

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For more than 17 seasons, Arena Stage's Voices of Now ensembles have provided a vital theatrical platform for young artists to use their personal experience to investigate the world around them and pose questions relevant to their communities. Recognizing the impact of the pandemic on today's youth, Voices of Now quickly transitioned its rehearsals online adapting their traditional original theater festival to film. Directed by **Ashley Forman** and **Mauricio Pita**, *Inside Voices: a film by Arena Stage's Voices of Now ensembles* is a visual time capsule of the experiences of over 120 student artists. *Inside Voices* premieres on June 19.

"Inside Voices: a film by Arena Stage's Voices of Now ensembles is an opportunity for young artists to respond to and process this global emergency through creating art," shares **Anita Maynard-Losh**. "It is also an opportunity for the community to have a unique artistic record of what these young people have experienced at this historic time."

"Voices of Now artists are uniquely trained and inspired to create theater that provokes thoughtful inquiry while also representing their authentic point of view," states **Ashley Forman**, Director of Education and Artistic Director of Voices of Now. "Access to over 100 Voices of Now Artists has presented an historic opportunity for us, as theater makers, to catalogue the experiences of young people in a way that will speak to future generations."

Creating a fully immersive experience, patrons are invited to livestream the films from the comfort of their home as part of the newly created **Arena Stage Supper Club**. Patrons will be able to dine on delicious fare delivered to their door from area restaurants while watching the live premieres.

With restaurant and catering partner options in D.C., Maryland and Virginia, patrons will have a variety of options to enjoy each night. Cuisine options include seasonal American cuisine from **RIS**, flavorful barbecue from **Cinder BBQ** and savory dishes from **Geppetto's**, **RSVP** and **Ridgewells Catering**. The Supper Club and these unique events bring our communities together again virtually to engage with artists and their original work.

Additional information on how to watch the films and purchase a Supper Club can be found here: [arenastage.org/supperclub](https://arenastage.org/supperclub). Dinner prices for the Supper Club range from \$60 to \$99 per two persons.

### Upcoming Schedule

June 12 at 7:00 p.m.

**May 22, 2020**

### **Playwrights**

**Randy Baker** is a playwright, director, and the co-Artistic Director of Rorschach Theatre in Washington DC. Recent shows he has directed include *Very Still and Hard to See* (Five Helen Nominations including Best Director) with Rorschach and *Hello, My Name Is...* with The Welders (Three Helen Hayes nominations including Best Director). Recent plays he has written include *Forgotten Kingdoms* and *Truth & Beauty Bombs: A Softer World* at Rorschach Theatre. He has had plays produced and workshoped at Arena Stage (Through playwrights Arena), Theater J, American University, Spooky Action Theatre, NCDA, Theatre Lab, and George Washington University, among others.

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His next project is an adaptation of the Malay epic, *The Legend of Hang Tuah* with Pointless Theatre. Randy is an adjunct professor at George Washington University and is faculty at The Theatre Lab School of the Dramatic Arts. He received his MFA in creative writing from Goddard College and is the Washington DC regional rep for the Dramatists Guild of America.

**Audrey Cefaly** is a southern writer and Alabama native based in the D.C. region. Her plays include *The Gulf* (Edgerton Award, Lammy Award, Samuel French OOB Fest Winner, Charles MacArthur Award Nominee); *Alabaster* (2019 NNPN RWP, 2018 NNPN Showcase, David Calicchio Prize - Marin Theatre Company); *Maytag Virgin* (Women's Voices Theater Festival); *The Last Wide Open* (Cincinnati Playhouse commission); *The Story of Walter* (adaptation of her podcast by the same name); and *Love is a Blue Tick Hound* (a collection of award-winning one-acts). Cefaly has developed plays with the National New Play Network, Signature Theatre, Serenbe Playhouse (New Territories), Aurora Theatre, Florida Rep, Theater Alliance, Quotidian Theatre Company and Contemporary American Theater Festival. She is published by Samuel French, Smith & Kraus (two volumes of *Best American Short Plays*) and Applause Books. Cefaly was recently named a Traveling Master by the Dramatist Guild Foundation. She is an outspoken proponent of silence in storytelling and has authored numerous articles on the topic of playwriting for HowlRound and Samuel French's *Breaking Character Magazine*. Cefaly is a recipient of grants from the Boomerang Fund for Artists as well as the Alabama and Maryland state arts councils.

**Annalisa Dias** is a citizen artist, community organizer and award-winning theater maker working at the intersection of racial justice and care for the earth. She is a producing playwright with The Welders, a D.C. playwrights' collective; and is co-founder of the DC Coalition for Theatre & Social Justice. Annalisa frequently teaches theater of the oppressed and decolonization workshops nationally and internationally and speaks about race, identity and performance. She is a TCG Rising Leader of Color and also works toward diversity and inclusion full time at the American Political Science Association. Recent original work includes *4380 Nights*, a world-premiere play about detainees at Guantanamo and the historical legacy of global colonialism, which opened in January 2018 at D.C.'s Signature Theatre as part of the second Women's Voices Theatre Festival. Upcoming work includes *The Earth, That Is Sufficient*, a world-premiere performance project about environmental history and hope for the future, to be produced by The Welders in Washington, D.C. Annalisa's work has been supported by the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, the Puffin Foundation, the Network of Ensemble Theatres NET/TEN program, TCG's Global Connections program and the Mead Theatre Lab.

**Caleen Sinnette Jennings** is an actor, director, playwright, and a founding member of The Welders, a D.C. Playwrights' Collective. Dramatic Publishing Company has published eight of her plays, and her work has appeared in seven play anthologies. In 2015, the Kennedy Center commissioned her to write a stage adaptation of Walter Dean Myers' novel, *Darius & Twig*, which was produced at the Kennedy Center Family Theatre and did a national tour in 2017. Plays in her *Queens Girl Trilogy* have been commissioned and produced at Theatre J, Mosaic and Everyman Theatres.

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Her most recent commissions have been from two from Roundhouse Theatre, one from South Bend Civic Theatre, and one from Arena Stage Her work has also been produced by The African Continuum Theatre, Imagination Stage, The Folger, and The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Horizons Theatre and The Source Theatre Company. Caleen has received five nominations for outstanding new play from the Helen Hayes Awards and play writing awards from the Kennedy Center and The Actor's Theatre of Louisville. She is Professor of Theatre, Emerita from American University in Washington, D.C. where she joined the faculty in 1989. In 2019, she received A.U.'s inaugural award for Diversity, Equity and

Inclusion. In 2003, she received A.U.'s Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award and in 1997 she received A.U.'s award for Outstanding Scholarship, Research and other Professional Activities. She has been a faculty member of the Folger Shakespeare Library's Teaching Shakespeare Institute since 1994 and she was Project Manager on a 2016 NEH grant to the Folger entitled *Crosstalk: D.C. Reflects on Identity and Difference*. Jennings graduated from Bennington College with a B.A. in Drama and received her M.F.A. in Acting from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

**Aaron Posner** is an award-winning playwright, director, teacher and former artistic director of two LORT theaters. His Helen Hayes Award-winning play, *Stupid Fucking Bird*, was one of the 10 most produced plays in the country in 2015. Other plays include *Life Sucks* and *No Sisters* (both re-inventions of Chekhov), *District Merchants* (inspired by *The Merchant of Venice*), *Who Am I This Time? (& Other Conundrums of Love)* (adapted from Kurt Vonnegut), *The Chosen* and *My Name Is Asher Lev* (adapted from Chaim Potok), *Sometimes a Great Notion* (adapted from Ken Kesey) and several more. He has directed more than 150 productions at major regional theaters across the country, including Arena Stage, and currently lives outside of D.C. with his wife, actress Erin Weaver, and his amazing daughter, Maisie.

**Psalmayene 24** is an award-winning playwright, director and actor. Psalm, as his colleagues call him, has received commissions from The African Continuum Theater Company, Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, The Kennedy Center, Solas Nua and Mosaic Theater Company. His play, *The Frederick Douglass Project*, co-written with Deirdre Kinahan, was selected by *The Washington Post* as a Best of Theater pick for 2018. His one-man play, *Free Jujube Brown!*, is published in the first Hip-Hop Theatre anthology, *Plays from the Boom-Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop Generation* (TCG). He is the recipient of an Individual Artist Award in Playwriting from the Maryland State Arts Council. He has also received grants from the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities and the Boomerang Fund for Artists Inc. Psalm has received the Imagination Award from Imagination Stage (past recipients include Dr. Jane Goodall, Christopher Reeve and Dennis Haysbert) and his projects have been supported by The National Endowment for the Arts and The Walt Disney Corporation. His directing credits include *Word Becomes Flesh* (Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Direction, Play), *The Shipment*, *Not Enuf Lifetimes* and *Read: White and Blue*. As an actor, he has appeared on HBO's critically acclaimed series *The Wire*, been nominated for a Helen Hayes Award, and is a member of Actors' Equity Association. Psalm is currently the Master Teaching Artist at Arena Stage and is the Artist-in-Residence at Bowie State University.

**John Strand's** Arena Stage commissions include *The Originalist*, about the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia; *The Miser*, an adaptation of the Molière play set in Reagan-era America; *Lovers and Executioners*, winner of the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play; and *Tom Walker*. Recent work includes the book and lyrics for *Hat! A Vaudeville*, a new musical with a score by composer Dennis McCarthy (South Coast Repertory); *Lincolnesque*, a dark comedy about politics and madness in D.C. (Old Globe); and *Lorenzaccio*, his adaptation of Alfred de Musset's 1834 French classic (Shakespeare Theatre Company).

Strand wrote the book for the musical *The Highest Yellow*, with a score by Michael John LaChiusa (Signature Theatre). Additional plays are *The Diaries* (Signature Theatre, MacArthur nomination); *Otabenga* (Signature Theatre, MacArthur nomination); *Three Nights in Tehran*, a comedy about the Iran-Contra affair (Signature Theatre); and *The Cockburn Rituals* (Woolly Mammoth). Strand spent 10 years in Paris, where he worked as a journalist and drama critic, writing in English and French, and directed New York University's Experimental Theater Wing in Paris. His novel *Commieland* was published by Kiwai Media, Paris in 2013. John wrote the script for Arena's 2017 production of *The Originalist* and the 2018 production of *Snow Child*.

**Gregory Keng Strasser** is a director and writer. The Washington Post called the DC premiere of his production of *410[GONE]* by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig "irreverent, audacious, and ultimately moving." He has made work in Bangkok, Thailand; Bali, Indonesia; Holstebro, Denmark; New York City, Los Angeles; Washington DC; and Ann Arbor, Michigan. Credits include *The Infinite Tales* (World Premiere - 4615 Theatre Company) *Doi Nang Non: A Puppet-Dance Drama* (with Makhampom, Splashing Theatre, and InsightPact of Bangkok), *The Odyssey* (World Premiere - adapted from Emily Wilson; Brighton Center for Performing Arts), *410[GONE]* (Rorschach Theatre), *Derangements* (Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics) and more. He is the 2020 Allen Lee Hughes Directing Fellow at Arena Stage where he assisted Seema Sueko on *Right to be Forgotten* by Sharyn Rothstein, Carey Perloff on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* adapted by Ursula R. Sarna; and Molly Smith on *Celia and Fidel* by Eduardo Machado. University of Michigan BFA; Odin Teatret Cohabitation Member 2019. Slide into his instagram DMs @gregory.keng.strasser or visit his website at [www.gregorykengstrasser.com](http://www.gregorykengstrasser.com)

**Mary Hall Surface** is a playwright, director, and teaching artist devoted to intergenerational audiences and multidisciplinary collaborations. Recent DC projects include writing/directing *Color's Garden*, inspired by the art of Henri Matisse (National Gallery of Art) and The National Symphony Orchestra's 2018-19 Young People's Concert, and directing *The Skin of Our Teeth* (Constellation Theatre), *The Second Shepherds' Play* (Folger Shakespeare Theatre), and *Ella Enchanted* (Adventure Theatre MTC). Nominated for nine Helen Hayes Awards, she received the 2002 Outstanding Director of a Musical for her *Perseus Bayou*. As the founding artistic director of Atlas INTERSECTIONS Festival, she curated over 600 all-arts performances and events from 2009–2015. She has had 18 productions presented or produced by the Kennedy Center, where she is a National Teaching Artist. She is the recipient of the Charlotte Chorpenning Prize from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education for her outstanding body of work, three DC Commission for the Arts and Humanities Individual Artists Grants, an Aurand Harris Fellowship, and a Thomas Watson Fellowship. She has been an advisor to American Theatre Magazine and was a member of Arena Stage's 2017 Playwright's Arena.

**Karen Zacarías** was recently hailed by American Theater Magazine as one of the 10 most-produced playwrights in the U.S. Her award-winning plays include *The Copper Children*, *Destiny of Desire*, *Native Gardens*, *The Book Club Play*, *Legacy of Light*, *Mariela in the Desert*, *The Sins of Sor Juana*, the adaptations of *Just Like Us*, *Into the Beautiful North* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*. She is the author of 10 renowned TYA musicals and the Marvel play *Squirrel Girl Goes to College*, and the librettist of several ballets.

She is one of the inaugural resident playwrights at Arena Stage (where she has been produced four times!), a core founder of the Latinx Theatre Commons – a large national organization of artists seeking to update the American narrative with the stories of Latinos – and she is the founder of the award-winning Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT). YPT was cited by the Obama administration as one of the best arts-education programs in the nation. She also was awarded the 2019 Medallion by the Children's Theater Foundation of America for her advocacy for youth and the arts.

### Directors

**Molly Smith** has served as Artistic Director since 1998. Her more than 30 directing credits at Arena Stage include large-scale musicals like *Anything Goes*, *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 has been awarded honorary doctorates from American University and Towson University.

**Seema Sueko** currently serves as Deputy Artistic Director where she drives the season planning process, directs plays, and oversees artistic programs. Her R&D work includes developing the Consensus Organizing for Theater methodology, creating the Green Theater Choices Toolkit, and researching the neuroscience of theater. Prior, she was Associate Artistic Director at Pasadena Playhouse and Executive Artistic Director of Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company, which she co-founded in San Diego. She has directed and acted at theaters across the U.S. including Arena Stage, Denver Center, Ford's Theatre, Pasadena Playhouse, People's Light, The Old Globe, Yale Rep, 5th Avenue Theatre, Native Voices, and Mo'olelo, among others.

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**Anita Maynard-Losh** is the Director of Community Engagement / Senior Artistic Advisor at Arena Stage. Now in her 16th season at Arena Stage, Anita has been involved in an artistic capacity on 40+ Arena Stage productions: she directed the world premiere of *Our War* as part of the National Civil War Project, and has been an associate director, text director and vocal / dialect coach on multiple other productions.

Anita trained and taught at the American Conservatory Theater, was on the faculty at Webster University, headed the theater department at the University of Alaska Southeast and was the associate artistic director of Perseverance Theater in Juneau, Alaska. Vocal / dialect coaching: ACT, Arena Stage, Kennedy Center, Washington National Opera, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Portland Center Stage and the Broadway revival of *Ragtime*.

*Support for the May 22, 2020 project is provided by The Artistic Director Fund and The Barbara R. Walton Fund for New Playwrights*

June 19 at 7:00 p.m.

***Inside Voices: a film by Arena Stage's Voices of Now ensembles***

**Voices of Now (VON)** is a season-long drama program that devises autobiographical plays with ensembles of middle-school, high-school and adult artists locally and internationally. Voices of Now plays are fast paced, collaboratively written physical theater pieces that pose challenging social questions relevant to the ensemble of artists and their communities. The plays investigate those questions through poetry, movement and the recounting of the artists' personal stories. One of the primary goals of the Voices of Now program is to create positive change within the artists' communities by engaging in dialogue centered on the artists' experiences in their worlds.

Voices of Now was designed by Arena Stage's Director of Education Ashley Forman. In addition to performing at Arena Stage, ensembles perform throughout their own communities. Past ensembles have performed at Atlas Performing Arts Center's Intersections Festival, Imagination Stage, American Alliance for Theatre and Education's National Conference, Association of Theatre in Higher Education Conference, 2013 International AIDS Conference and the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage.

**Ashley Foreman** is the director of education at Arena Stage in her 17th season. She is responsible for the design and development of Voices of Now, Arena Stage's devised theater program. Through a partnership with the U.S. Department of State, Ashley has implemented Voices of Now in India twice (2012 and 2014), Peru (2014), Croatia twice (2013 and 2019) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2019). She has presented on devised theater at numerous conferences, including the American Alliance for Theater and Education; the Association for Theater in Higher Education Conference; the National Bereavement Camp Conference; and the International AIDS Conference. Ashley has trained university professors and students, cultural attaches, pre-K through high-school public school teachers, teaching artists, professional artists, and young artists.

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Through *Voices of Now* she has devised autobiographical plays with numerous populations. Ashley oversees all lesson planning and curriculum for Arena Stage’s education programs. She graduated from Syracuse University with a B.S. in theater, concentration in directing, and a minor in child development.

**Mauricio Pita** was born in Caracas, Venezuela and is currently Arena Stage’s community programs manager. Previously he was GALA Hispanic Theater’s director of education where he led the Paso Nuevo Youth Performance Group.

In addition, Mauricio has worked as an educator for Young Playwrights Theatre, as a performer and educator for Superhero Clubhouse and The Society of Educational Arts (Teatro SEA) in New York City and has worked extensively as a performer with NYC Spanish Repertory Theatre, INTAR, Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC), The Kennedy Center, The Director’s Company and Studio Theatre. He was part of the artistic team for multiple devised theater productions at Columbia University and is a graduate of the Acting Program at Marymount Manhattan College and the Shakespeare Conservatory for Actors at Yale University.

*Voices of Now* is made possible by support from AT&T, Exelon, Wells Fargo & Company, the Hattie M. Strong Foundation, JBG Smith, Collins Aerospace, Friends of Southwest D.C., GEICO and the Weissberg Foundation in memory of Wally Babington.

*Arena Stage’s community engagement efforts are generously sponsored by The Estate of Ms. Toni A. Ritzenberg; Denie and Frank Weil; AT&T; the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; Joanne Barker; the deLaski Family Foundation; Exelon Corporation; the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Foundation; Floyd E. Davis Family Foundation; Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.; Alice Shaver Foundation; Theatre Forward; Collins Aerospace; England Family Foundation; Friends of Southwest D.C.; GEICO; JBG Smith; Wayne and Susan Jonas; Wells Fargo & Company; Foley & Lardner LLP; Weissberg Foundation; Jean Schiro- Zavela and Vance Zavela; Actors’ Equity Foundation; and Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc.*

***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](http://arenastage.org)

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