

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 OPENS FALL/WINTER SEASON WITH RELEASE OF THIRD WORLD-PREMIERE FILM, *THE 51ST STATE*

***** Arena's latest film centers around the historic fight for D.C. statehood, the protests
after the murder of George Floyd and the growing movement for racial justice *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater's latest world premiere docudrama, *The 51st State*, will receive its world premiere through Arena Stage's [Supper Club](#) on **September 16 at 7 p.m.** Following the premiere, viewers can join artists and creatives for a post-film discussion and after-party on Zoom. The film will be available online to the general public on **Thursday, September 17**. Patrons will be able to view the film on both the Arena Stage and [WTOP.com](#) websites by searching for Arena Stage.

The hyper local 60-minute film created by Washington, D.C. artists through the voices of 11 residents was inspired by protests and the reignition of a movement after the murder of George Floyd and the quest for creating the 51st state and sovereignty in Washington, D.C. From a first-time protestor to a fourth-generation Washingtonian political scientist, to artists, an attorney, people of faith, and a retired couple moved to take part in the movement despite the COVID-19 risks, these diverse perspectives and real-life stories are vividly told and transformed into affecting narratives by 10 local playwrights.

"This is a hyper-local docudrama about a city in transition. What an amazing and overwhelming time to live in, in the midst of a pandemic with tragedy after tragedy and yet people coming together for positive change," shares **Artistic Director Molly Smith**.

Featured playwrights in the docudrama include **Dane Figueroa Edidi, Farah Lawal Harris, Caleen Sinnette Jennings, Teshonne Nicole Powell, Otis Cortez Ramsey-Zöe, Gregory Keng Strasser, Deb Sivigny, Mary Hall Surface, Aria Velz and Karen Zacarías**.

"This is a docudrama about Washingtonians taking action and voicing their divergent points of view," continued **Smith**.

Filmed in different locations around D.C., the story of each citizen is portrayed by 11 actors well known to the Washington theater scene. *The 51st State* cast includes **Sherrí L. Edelen, Michael Glenn, James J. Johnson, Joy Jones, Jason B. McIntosh, Gary L. Perkins III, Todd Scofield, Thomas Adrian Simpson, Dani Stoller, Justin Weak's and Jacob Yeh**.

Arena's artistic leader and the film's director **Molly Smith** along with Deputy Artistic Director **Seema Sueko**, Director of Community Engagement/Senior Artistic Advisor **Anita Maynard-Losh**, Everyman Theatre's Associate Artistic Director and artist **Paige Hernandez** and Arena's Master Teaching Artist **Psalmayene 24** directed the monologues. Original music is composed by DJ and sound designer **Nick "tha 1da" Hernandez**.

As of September 17, *The 51st State* can be streamed on [WTOP.com](#) and arenastage.org/The51stState.

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The premiere will also launch the third outing of **Arena's Supper Club**. Patrons will be able to dine on delicious fare delivered to their door from area restaurants while watching the live premiere. Cuisine options include **Ben's Chili Bowl**, **Get Plated**, **Hank's Oyster Bar** at the Wharf, **Rasika** and **Ridgewells Catering**. To reserve a supper club meal, click [here](#).

The 51st State is generously sponsored by The Artistic Director Fund, the Eugene M. Lang Foundation, Joanne Barker, Jane Lang and The Barbara R. Walton Endowment Fund for New Playwrights.

Arena Stage extends special thanks to Suzanne Blue Star Boy, Chalkline Productions, LLC, Southwest

Business Improvement District and SAG-AFTRA. 

The 51st State is a project of Arena Stage's Fall/Winter 2020 season *Looking Forward* (Artistic Director Molly Smith, Executive Producer Edgar Dobie).

Playwrights

Dane Figueroa Edidi is excited to be returning to Arena Stage. The last time she was here, she choreographed *Nina Simone: Four Women* which garnered her a Helen Hayes nomination. In 2019, she won a Helen Hayes award for her play *Klytmenestra: An Epic Slam Poem* which had its world premiere at Theater Alliance. She is a newly commissioned artist at Baltimore Center Stage and she co-produced and curated *Black Trans Women At The Center...* at Long Wharf Theater. Considered a prolific artist, she has 13 books published and another world premiere of her latest play, *Ghost/Writer*, at Rep Stage. ladydane.com

Farah Lawal Harris (she/her/hers) is a first-generation Nigerian playwright, actress and poet. She is the Artistic Director of Young Playwrights' Theater, a Producing Playwright with The Welders and was included on the 2020 Kilroys List for her play, *Silence is Violence*. She deeply believes in the power of Black women and their stories and aims to make people feel less alone through her art, which is her activism. Her plays are deeply personal, raw, poetic, funny and hip-hop-infused with a focus on social justice. Farah co-founded the D.C.-based theatre companies, The Saartjie Project and Wild Women Theatre (*Deconstructing the Myth of the Booty*, *Four Women*, and *Letters to and from Me*). Her play, *America's Wives*, was produced by the Capital Fringe Festival in 2018. For more, visit farahlawalharris.com.

Caleen Sinnette Jennings is an actor, director and playwright. Dramatic Publishing Company has published eight of her plays. Since the COVID-19 lockdown, she has been commissioned to write for Arena Stage, Signature, Everyman Theatre and Roundhouse Theatres. From 2015-2020, her *Queens Girl Trilogy* plays have been commissioned and produced by Theatre J, Mosaic Theatre and Everyman Theatre. After playing at the Kennedy Center Family Theatre in 2017, her adaptation of *Darius & Twig* did a Kennedy Center national tour. 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 a Professor of Theatre, Emerita at American University in Washington, D.C. where she taught for 31 years and received A.U.'s Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award in 2003. She has been a faculty member of the Folger Shakespeare Library's Teaching Shakespeare Institute since 1994. Caleen graduated from Bennington College with a B.A. in Drama, and she received her M.F.A. in Acting from NYU Tisch School of the Arts.

Teshonne Nicole Powell is a writer and arts administrator from Providence, RI. She has extensively worked with FRESHH Incorporated Theatre (FRESHH) in Washington, D.C. as a performer, arts administrator and manager of Sister Cipher, a playwriting circle for Black women. She's directed staged readings with *Silenced Voices: Anacostia Playhouse New Works Festival* (2018), and FRESHH's *Next to Kin One-Act Festival* (2019). FRESHH also produced her short play, *Afromemory* (2018), and presented an extended version at The Kennedy Center *Page-to-Stage New Play Festival* in 2018. Teshonne is also a member of The Welders and will produce her play, *Girls' Night (with Spirits)*, in October 2021. She is a former company member of Mixed Magic Theater in Pawtucket, RI, and a graduate of Duke University and Howard University. Learn more about Teshonne at tnicolepowell.com.

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Otis Cortez Ramsey-Zöe is a care worker, dramaturg, director and theatre arts educator. He is an Adjunct Instructor in Dramaturgy at Carnegie Mellon University and Junior Lecturer in Women's Studies at University of Maryland. He has developed new works at such institutions as Sundance Institute, The Kennedy Center, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Playwrights Center, National New Play Network, Theater Alliance, The Classical Theatre of Harlem and Arena Stage. He was an Adjunct Instructor in Performing Arts at American University, Lecturer of Theatre Arts at Howard University, Associate Artistic Director at *banished?* productions, Future Classics Program Coordinator at The Classical Theatre of Harlem and Literary Manager at Center Stage. He holds degrees from New York University and the University of Notre Dame.

Gregory Keng Strasser is a director and writer. *The Washington Post* called the D.C. 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 D.C.; and Ann Arbor, Michigan. Credits include *The Infinite Tales* (World Premiere - 4615 Theatre Company) *Doi Nang Non: A Puppet-Dance Drama* (with Makhomphom, 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 was 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. Currently, Greg is developing a video game script with 4615 Theatre Company which he runs as Producing Director. Slide into his Instagram DMs @gregory.keng.strasser or visit his website at gregorykengstrasser.com.

Deb Sivigny (she/her/hers) is most well-known as an award-winning costume and scenic designer from Washington, D.C. Specializing in the creation of new work, she was a member of the playwrights collective The Welders, and creator of *Hello, My Name Is...* an immersive promenade about Korean adoptees. Her work has also been featured at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage and Theatre Lab's Dramathon. She is currently working on an environmental piece about North Korean refugees. Her academic research includes "design-driven" works inspired by literature and personal experience and design dramaturgy. She is on the faculty at George Mason University. Website: debsivigny.com Instagram: @indepenguin.

Mary Hall Surface is devoted to intergenerational audiences and multidisciplinary collaborations. A member of Arena's 2017 Playwright's Arena, she was also among the 10 playwrights for *May 22, 2020*. Recent D.C. projects include writing/directing *Color's Garden*, inspired by Henri Matisse's art (National Gallery of Art) 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, Mary Hall 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 produced by the Kennedy Center, where she is a National Teaching Artist. maryhallsurface.com.

Aria Velz is a director, dramaturg, producer and just likes being a part of the team. Aria was an Allen Lee Hughes Fellow at Arena Stage where she worked on Ken Ludwig's *Baskerville*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Blood Quilt*, among others. She is a graduate from The University of the Arts with a BFA in Directing, Playwriting, and Production. Thank you KJM for being my partner and forever dramaturg.

Karen Zacarias 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 of Arena Stage in Washington, DC, where she drives the season-planning process, identifies ways to optimize the impact of artistic programming, directs plays, and oversees new play development among other programs. She recently created the Arena Stage Theater Artists Marketplace and brought playwrights and policy leaders together at the Power Play Summit. At Arena, she directed *Right to be Forgotten*, *The Heiress*, *The Price*, and *Smart People*. Her R&D work includes developing the Consensus Organizing for Theater methodology, creating the Green Theater Choices Toolkit, and researching the neuroscience of theater. Previously, she was Associate Artistic Director at Pasadena Playhouse and Executive Artistic Director at Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company, which she co-founded in San Diego. She has directed plays and musicals and acted at theaters across the U.S. including 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. Her work has been recognized by the Chicago Jeff Awards, NAACP San Diego, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Asian Pacific American Friends of the Theater, San Diego Craig Noel Awards, and the California State Assembly. seemasueko.com.

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*.

Paige Hernandez is a multidisciplinary artist who is critically acclaimed as a performer, director, choreographer and playwright. As an AEA equity actress, Paige has performed on many stages throughout the country. She has collaborated with the Lincoln Center and has been commissioned by several companies including the National New Play Network, the Smithsonian, The Kennedy Center, La Jolla Playhouse and the Glimmerglass Festival. She is the recipient of an Individual Artist Award from the Maryland State Arts Council as well as three Helen Hayes nominations for choreography and performance. Paige has also been named a "classroom hero" by *The Huffington Post*, a "Citizen Artist Fellow" with The Kennedy Center, "40 under 40" by the *Washington Post* and one of "Six Theatre Workers You Should Know" by *American Theatre Magazine*. She is elated to be the Associate Artistic Director of Everyman Theatre in her hometown of Baltimore, MD. With her company B-FLY ENTERTAINMENT, Paige continues to develop and tour original work internationally. paigehernandez.com.

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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.

Music Composer

Nick "tha 1da" Hernandez has produced original scores for: *The Hip-Hop Children's Trilogy* with playwright Psalmayene 24 (Imagination Stage); *Fences* (Ford's Theater); *Native Son* and *Les Deux Noir* (Mosaic Theater); *Word Becomes Flesh* (Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Production) at Theater Alliance; *Long Way Down* and *Darius & Twig* (The Kennedy Center); and *Havana Hop and All The Way Live* with sibling Paige Hernandez (Discovery Theater). Additionally, Nick has produced theme music & projects for Hot 97 FM, Red Bull Music, Netflix, D.C. Public Library, Smithsonian Associates, and Words, Beats & Life Inc. Social Media: @nicktha1da.

Cast

Sherri L. Edelen last appeared at Arena Stage in *Ann*. Other Arena credits include *Dave*, *Vanya...Spike*, *My Fair Lady* and *Cabaret*. She received the Helen Hayes Award for *Les Miserables* and *Side Show* at Signature Theatre and a Barrymore Award for *The Light in the Piazza* at the Philadelphia Theatre Company. She performed in the NY Workshops of *Freaky Friday* and the Broadway bound *Dave*. Other credits include *Copenhagen* at Theatre J, *Romeo and Juliet* at Folger Theatre, *Outside Mullingar* at Fusion Theatre Company and *Gypsy* at Signature Theatre. National tours include *Me and My Girl* and *Nunsense*. She performed at the Kennedy Center, Shakespeare Theatre, Olney Theatre, Ford's Theatre and Round House Theatre for over 20 years.

Michael Glenn is delighted to return to Arena Stage, having previously appeared in *Junk*, *Sovereignty*, *Baskerville* and *Good People*. Washington-based for two decades, Michael has performed on nearly every area stage. Some favorite past credits include *Gem of the Ocean* and *Small Mouth Sounds* at Round House Theatre, *Nell Gwynn* and *Sense & Sensibility* (Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Ensemble) at the Folger Theatre, *Hothouse* and *Cat's Cradle* with Longacre Lea, *School for Lies* with the Shakespeare Theatre Company, *Clybourne Park* at Woolly Mammoth, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* at Theater J, *Robin Hood* at Imagination Stage, *Lieutenant of Inishmore* at Signature Theatre and *Marjorie Prime* at Olney Theatre Center. Michael's voice also appears on hundreds of western, science fiction, fantasy and pulp audio books with Graphic Audio.

James J. Johnson appeared in Arena Stage's Helen Hayes Award-winning production of Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*. Other D.C. credits include: *The Royale*, *Hero's Welcome* (1st Stage); *Les Deux Noirs* (Mosaic Theatre Company); *Our Suburb* (Theater J); *The Member of the Wedding* (Ford's Theatre); *The Unmentionables* (Woolly Mammoth Theatre); *Kingdom*, *Wedding Dance*, *Buffalo Hair* (African Continuum Theatre Co.); *Anna Lucasta* (Rep Stage); *Jungle Book* (Adventure Theatre MTC); *Zomo the Rabbit*, *P. Nokio*, (Imagination Stage); *Homer P. Figg* (Kennedy Center). Film credits: *Too Saved*, *Nocturnal Agony*, *The New N-Word* and *The Henchman's War*. Education: BFA, Virginia Commonwealth University. James is also a founding member of Galvanize DC, a support network for Black DMV theatre artists. Instagram: @JamesJJohnson1. Website: jamesjohnson.weebly.com.

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Joy Jones was previously seen in Arena Stage's *Jubilee*, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Mary T. & Lizzy K.* Off-Broadway, she appeared in workshops at the Lincoln Center Festival, The Public and Playwrights Horizons. In London, Joy performed in *Tantalus* (Royal Shakespeare Company). Selected D.C.-area credits include: *The Hard Problem*, *Cloud 9*, *Belleville* and *Invisible Man* (Studio Theatre). Her selected regional credits include: *Disgraced* (Virginia Stage); *Invisible Man* (Huntington Theatre); *Ruined* and *Tantalus* (Denver Center); *The Champion* (TheatreSquared); and *Pericles* (PlayMakers Repertory). Her recent on-camera appearances are *Little America* (Apple TV); *Daylight Daycare* (Hulu); and *Augustus* (iEG Productions). Joy has an acting MFA from UNC-Chapel Hill/PlayMakers Repertory and a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Ensemble in *Invisible Man* (Studio Theatre). thejoyjones.com.

Jason B. McIntosh is a D.C. based actor last seen as Roosevelt in August Wilson's *Radio Golf* at Everyman Theatre in Baltimore. Jason's other recent performances include Juror #6 in *Twelve Angry Men* at Ford's Theatre and Evan in *Sweat* at Everyman Theatre. Jason will be appearing in the film *Nevernight* due out in 2021. Jason is a proud member of Actors Equity Association.

Gary L. Perkins III is a two-time Helen Hayes award winning actor in the D.C. area. Regional theater credits include: Theater Alliances: *Blackest Battle*, *Word Becomes Flesh* (Remount), *Word Becomes Flesh* (Helen Hayes Award); Imagination Stage: *Zomo the Rabbit*, *Thumbelina*; Keegan Theatre: *Airness* (Helen Hayes nomination); 1st Stage: *Airness*, *A Civil War Christmas*; Studio Theater: *P.Y.G or The Misedumacation of Dorian Belle*; Solas Nua: *The Frederick Douglass Project* (Helen Hayes Award); Forum Theater: *The Shipment*; New Horizon Theater: *Do Lord Remember Me*. He has appeared in independent films, commercials and received his training from Point Park University in Pittsburgh, PA. Instagram: @garylperkins3rd.

Todd Scofield last appeared at Arena Stage in *Sovereignty* and *City of Conversation*. Over the past 17 years in D.C., Todd has also done numerous shows at Shakespeare, Folger, and Round House Theatres, as well as shows at Studio, Theater J, Ford's, Olney, Adventure Theatre and Imagination Stage. Outside of the D.C. area, Todd worked at Everyman Theatre, Arden Theatre, PlayMakers, Charlotte Rep and four seasons at North Carolina Shakespeare Festival. Television credits include recurring roles in seasons 3 and 5 of *The Wire*.

Thomas Adrian Simpson is a longtime Arena performer (he first walked through the stage door some thirty years ago). Tom was most recently a member of the *Newsies* cast, playing three different roles -Wiesel, Jacobi and the Mayor. Other notable performances at Arena Stage include Eli Whitney in *Anything Goes*, Karl Lindner in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Colonel Pickering in *My Fair Lady* and Abraham Lincoln in *Mary K. and Lizzie T.* Regionally, Tom has appeared at The Goodman, Signature, Ford's Theatre, The Kennedy Center, The Shakespeare Theatre, Roundhouse, The Delaware Theatre Co, The Olney Center for the Performing Arts, Theatre J and Studio Theatre among others. TV appearances include *House of Cards* and *America's Most Wanted*. He trained at The University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

Dani Stoller is a Brooklyn-born playwright and actor originally from Brooklyn, New York. Her plays include *Easy Women Smoking Loose Cigarettes*, which received its world premiere at the Tony Award – winning Signature Theatre, *Accepts with Pleasure*, which was part of the inaugural SigWorks workshop series and *Crazy Bitch: An Unauthorized Account of the First Mrs. Edward Fairfax Rochester*. As an actor she has performed at The Folger Shakespeare Theatre (*Midsummer*, *District Merchants*) Olney Theatre Center (*The Crucible*, *Anne Frank*), Signature Theatre, Studio Theatre (*Carrie the Musical*), 1st Stage, Keegan Theatre and The Kennedy Center. She received a Helen Hayes Nomination for Best Supporting Actress in a Musical for her performance as Mrs. Taylor in *Bat Boy*. Education: BFA Ithaca College. danistoller.com.

Justin Weaks makes his Arena Stage debut in *The 51st State*. A Charlotte, NC native, he has been appearing on Washington, D.C. stages since 2015, working at theaters such as The Kennedy Center, Woolly Mammoth Theater Company, Ford's Theatre, Studio Theatre and many more. Pre-pandemic, he was working with Theater Alliance (*This Bitter Earth*) and Studio Theater (*Pipeline*). Additional regional and New York credits include work with Round House Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theater, New York Theatre Workshop, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Shakespeare & Company and Barter Theatre. A two-time Helen Hayes Award recipient and five-time nominee, Justin is a teaching artist in the DMV area and a company member of the Woolly Mammoth Theater Company. Education: BA in Theatre from Greensboro College. Instagram: @keithweaks.

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Jacob Yeh is thrilled to be working on such an important & timely project with Arena Stage and these wonderful artists & collaborators. Jacob is a D.C.-area-based actor who has over 45 professional productions to his credit, including productions at these (and other) theatre companies: Studio Theatre, Theater J, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Ford's Theatre, Washington Stage Guild, NextStop Theatre (Helen Hayes Award Nomination - Supporting Actor - *East of Eden*), 1st Stage (HHA Nom. - Ensemble - *The Farnsworth Invention*), Constellation Theatre, Imagination Stage, Adventure Theatre and 4615 Theatre. Future projects include *Marjorie Prime* at Prologue Theatre, *Maple & Vine* at Spooky Action, *Noises Off* at NextStop Theatre and *The Tempest* at Round House Theatre. jacob-yeh.com.

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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