

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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arenastage.org/fannielouhamer

ARENA STAGE TO HOST OUTDOOR PERFORMANCES OF CHERYL L. WEST'S *FANNIE LOU HAMER, SPEAK ON IT!*

*** Award-winning actress E. Faye Butler returns to Arena to take on the iconic role of
civil and voting rights activist, Fannie Lou Hamer ***


*** This free, limited engagement runs October 23 – October 30, 2020 ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, in partnership with District Wharf and the Southwest Business Improvement District, announces the production of *Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It!* This 50-minute call to action is a captivating look at the impassioned freedom fighter who became one of the most powerful female voices of the civil and voting rights movements. Two-time Helen Hayes award-winner **E. Faye Butler** (Arena's *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*) takes on the title role as Fannie Lou Hamer. This abridged version of **Cheryl L. West's** (Arena's *Akeelah and the Bee*, *Pullman Porter Blues*) play *Fannie*, shines a light on the importance of exercising your right to vote in the 2020 election. Directed by **Henry Godinez** with musical arrangements by **Felton Offard**, *Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It!* runs **October 23 – October 30, 2020 at Transit Pier Floating Stage at The Wharf (970 Wharf St. SW).**

Admission is free and ticketed. Social distancing and masks are required. Each performance will be limited to 40 patrons with a limit of four tickets per group. Once seated, audience members will be asked to remain in their seats throughout the performance. All seats will be arranged with social distancing guidelines in place. Tickets will be available to the general public as of 4 p.m. on October 15.

Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It! features excerpts of Hamer's famed speeches and is infused with powerful spirituals, civil rights anthems and relevant political action.

"Fannie Lou Hamer is an unsung American hero. A giant leader of the voting and civil rights movements, she fought back at every turn for the rights of women and Black people. E. Faye Butler brings her to life with her luscious voice and I am so excited to have *Fannie Lou Hamer: Speak On It!* in Southwest Washington," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**.

During each performance, the League of Women Voters will be onsite to answer questions and provide voter registration information. 

"Cheryl West's beautiful words and Felton Offard's arrangements will surely inspire all who hear them to action—vote! Fannie Lou Hamer battled through vicious attacks to vote to protect this right for all people—honor her actions by voting in November!" continued **Smith**.

Arena Stage is taking numerous steps to ensure the safety of artists, staff and audience members. Heightened cleaning procedures and sanitizing stations will be in place. Temperature checks will be required for all artists, staff and audience members. Masks will be mandatory. For a full performance schedule and more, visit [here](#).

Arena Stage has successfully collaborated with the Government of the District of Columbia and Actors' Equity Association (AEA) to develop safety protocols for this production. Arena Stage extends special thanks to Mayor Bowser, DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency and DC Health for their guidance and support, along with DC Federation of Musicians AFM Local 161-710.

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Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It! was commissioned and developed by Goodman Theatre and Seattle Repertory Theatre.

Playwright

Cheryl L. West (*Playwright*) returns to Arena Stage where her plays *Akeelah and the Bee* and *Pullman Porter Blues* was produced. Her plays have also been seen at Goodman Theatre, Minneapolis Children's Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle Rep, Indiana Rep, Old Globe, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Bay Street Theatre Festival, Syracuse Stage, Cleveland Play House, South Coast Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Manhattan Theatre Club and Off-Broadway's Second Stage. Plays include *Last Stop on Market Street*, *Shout Sister Shout* and *Jar the Floor*. She has written TV and film projects at Disney, Paramount, MTV Films, Showtime, TNT, HBO, CBS, BET and is the Webby-nominated writer for the original web series *Diary of a Single Mom*.

Director

Henry Godinez (*Director*) is the Resident Artistic Associate at Goodman Theatre. His Goodman directing credits include Charise Castro Smith's *Feathers and Teeth*, *The Sins of Sor Juana* and *Mariela in the Desert* by Karen Zacarias; José Rivera's *Boleros for the Disenchanted* (and world premiere at Yale Repertory Theatre); Regina Taylor's *Millennium Mambo*; Luis Alfaro's *Electricidad* and *Straight as a Line*; *The Cook* by Eduardo Machado; *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez; the Goodman and Teatro Vista co-production of José Rivera's *Cloud Tectonics* and the 1996–2001 productions of *A Christmas Carol*. He also served as director of the Goodman's Latino Theatre Festival. As an actor, Godinez appeared most recently in Goodman's *The Winter's Tale, 2666* and the Goodman and Teatro Buendía of Cuba world premiere of *Pedro Páramo* and at Writers Theatre in the title role of *Quixote: In the Conquest of Self*. He has also appeared on television in *Chicago PD*, *Above the Law*, *The Beast*, *The Chicago Code*, *Boss* and *Chicago Fire*. Co-founder and former artistic director of Teatro Vista, Godinez is the recipient of the 1999 Theatre Communications Group Alan Schneider Director Award, the Distinguished Service Award from the Lawyers for the Creative Arts and was honored as the 2008 Latino Professional of the Year by the Chicago Latino Network. Born in Havana, Cuba, Godinez is a professor at Northwestern University and serves on the Board of Directors of the Illinois Arts Council.

Cast

E. Faye Butler (*Fannie Lou Hamer*) returns to Arena Stage, where she most recently appeared in *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel*. Previous Arena credits include *August Wilson's King Hedley II*, *Smokey Joe's Café Pullman Porter Blues*, *Trouble in Mind*, *Rodgers and Hammerstein's Oklahoma!*, *Crowns*, *Ain't Misbehavin': The Fats Waller Musical* and *Polk County*. Butler performs in regional theaters across the country including Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Court Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Baltimore Centerstage, La Jolla Playhouse, Marriott Theatre, Paramount Theatre, Pasadena Playhouse, Mixed Blood, Illusion Theatre, Signature Theatre, Olney Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, The Muny, St. Louis Repertory, Seattle Repertory, Drury Lane Theatre, Congo Square, Fulton Theatre, MSMT, Sacramento Music Theatre, Northlight Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, The Barn, The Kennedy Center, Arkansas Repertory, Chicago Children Theatre, Philadelphia Theatre Company, Porchlight Music Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre D.C., Milwaukee Repertory, Peninsula Players, Paper Mill Playhouse, Dallas Theatre Center and ASOLO Repertory. She is the recipient of nine Jeff Awards, four Black Theatre Alliance, an After Dark, John Barrymore, RAMI, two Helen Hayes, two Black Excellence, Kathryn V. Lampkey, Ovation, Excellence in the Arts, 2016 Rosetta LeNoire, Sarah Siddons Leading Lady and Guy Adkins Awards. She was also named a 2011 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow. She was inducted into the National Women in the Arts Museum in Washington, D.C. and recently released her first House and Club single in Milan, Italy, "Down to the Rhythm." She is a proud AEA member.

Music Director

Felton Offard (*Music Man/Our Band*) grew up in Freeport, Illinois and attended Northern Illinois University, earning both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees. Goodman Theatre productions include *Purlie* and *Crowns*. Other Chicago area productions include *Hamilton* (Private Bank Theatre); *The Color Purple* (Cadillac Palace); *Addams Family*, *First Wives Club*, *Motown* (Ford Oriental); *Sister Act* (Marriott); *Could It Be Magic?* (Mercury Theatre); *Raisin* (Court Theatre); *Blue Brothers* (CCPA); *Comfortable Shoes* (Royal George Theatre); *Grease* (Auditorium Theatre). Touring credits include *Jersey Boys*, *Three Mo' Divas*, *Flashdance*, *Standing In The Shadows Of Motown* and *Come Fly Away/Fly With Me*. Regional theatre include *Come Fly With Me* (Alliance Theatre).

Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It! is generously sponsored by **Holly Hassett**.

The video production of *Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It!* is generously sponsored by **Nelson Mullins**.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

E. Faye Butler is

Fannie Lou Hamer, Speak On It!

Adapted by Cheryl L. West from her play *Fannie*

Directed by Henry Godinez

Music Direction and Arrangements by Felton Offard

October 23 – October 30, 2020

Monday- Friday performances at 5:30 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday matinees at 1 p.m., evening performances at 5:30 p.m.

Location: Transit Pier Floating Stage at The Wharf (970 Wharf St. SW).

PARKING: Parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage. Subscribers may purchase parking in advance for \$18 and \$20 for the general public. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300 or by visiting [here](#). Parking is also available at the underground parking garage on Maine Avenue SW. Weekday and weekend rates range from \$18-45. For evenings after 4 p.m. Monday – Thursday, discounted parking is available at \$20 for 2+ hours. There are three entrances: Blair Alley, Sutton Square and 7th Street Park. Handicap accessible parking spaces are available in the garage. To reserve advance parking at The Wharf, visit [here](#).

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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