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ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WAITING ROOM: A NEW FILM BY ARENA STAGE'S VOICES OF NOW ENSEMBLES DEBUTS NEXT MONTH

***** The film, highlighting the stories of over 100 student artists,
will be available to view on June 26 *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is pleased to announce the premiere of ***Waiting Room: A New Film by Arena Stage's Voices of Now Ensembles*** which debuts on **June 26 at 7 p.m.** on Arena's website. *Waiting Room* explores how remote learning and social isolation have impacted students and young professionals both physically and mentally over the last year, while also addressing the adjustment of resuming in-person activities and looking ahead to what life may look like after the pandemic.

"Over the past seven years in Voices of Now, I've grown so much as an artist and person. Working on a film has been different, yet still an incredible experience. In past years, each ensemble combined many unique stories surrounding different topics into a performance. Through film, however, we've decided to focus on the one topic that has been impacting us all — the pandemic. When the film is released, you will see a wide array of experiences surrounding the same major event," shares Voices of Now artist **Zarah King**.

Last year, the Voices of Now ensembles premiered their first film, [Inside Voices](#), a moving time capsule that explored the lives of young artists as they navigated the immediate impact of the first few months of the global pandemic as our world began to shut down. The film inspired a partnership between Arena, the Black Coalition Against COVID (BCAC), Howard University's WHUT-TV and WHUR radio that allowed the work to be broadcast to audiences across the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Waiting Room expands on the exploration of *Inside Voices*. Student artists document their lives as they navigate the rules of a temporary world while waiting for something better.

"Voices of Now has really been a place of stability for me over the last few years, even in the pandemic. *Waiting Room* is a continuation to *Inside Voices* and working on it when the pandemic finally feels like it might be over soon really brings it all full circle," states Voices of Now artist **Reyna Berry**.

Directed by Ashley Forman and Mauricio Pita, *Waiting Room* was shot on electronic devices to chronicle the personal experiences of the emerging artists.

"It's been an honor to experience the events of the past year along-side the Voices of Now community and see how the changes in our world have impacted students, teachers and artists alike," explains director of *Waiting Room* **Mauricio Pita**. "As events unfolded, artists responded with creativity regardless of technological and spatial limitations. As a result of this experience, it has impacted the way Voices of Now approaches storytelling and artmaking. This flexibility allowed us to embrace a wide range of artistic mediums: animation, film editing, music, composition, visual art, digital art, stop motion and more, while still remaining faithful to what makes Voices of Now great — autobiographical stories that pose questions with the intent of creating change in our communities."

—continued—

Now in its 18th season, Arena Stage's Voices of Now ensembles, ages 11 to 24, have provided a vital theatrical platform for youth and young people to use their personal experiences to investigate the world around them and pose questions vital to their communities. These two films serve as a theatrical archive for this unprecedented moment in history.

"It is critical that the experiences and feelings of young people are heard and considered. Their stories will allow us to put the systems in place necessary to support their emotional, social and physical well-being as we all reenter public life," shares director of *Waiting Room* **Ashley Forman**. "I believe it is vital to give young people a seat at the table when making decisions that impact their lives, particularly now, when the rules of social and academic engagement change from week to week. They are experts in their daily experiences and there is no better way to learn what they need than to give them the tools and the platform to express themselves."

As of June 26th, *Waiting Room: A New Film by Arena Stage's Voices of Now Ensembles* can be viewed on Arena's website.

Voices of Now Teaching Artists

Ky'Lend J. Adams, Josh Bickford, Rebecca Campana, Iesha M. Daniels, Ashley Forman, Olivia Jones, Kerry McGee, Mauricio Pita.

Waiting Room Creative Team

Directors: Ashley Forman and Mauricio Pita

Film Editor: Antonio Hernandez

Motion Graphics Designer: Shawn Duan

Music Composer: Roc Lee

Advocacy Ensemble

Alexandra Berrios

Colby Molleo

Gabriella Giegerich

Madelynn Washburn

Mia Heckler

Morgan Sheets

Patrick Payne

Glasgow Ensemble

Amira Menacer

Brooke Ehmann-Jones

Caledonia Ross

Charlotte Holbrook

Juliette Jensen

Lina Rosenbaum

Nadeen Salah

Holmes Ensemble

Alex Gardner

Diana Mendez

Gabriela Daniel

Isabella Falcone

Noelia Gil

Sophia Beltran

Sylvie Bankseter

Jefferson Ensemble

Autumn Drake

London Williams

Lucea Matuszeski

Key Ensemble

Alli Holtmann
Caylee Gross
Dayanara Cabrera
Lesly Cruz Pastora
Sajidah Algadhi
Sarah Adkins

Mead Ensemble

Claire Filipowicz
Cora Bower
Isabella Guagenti
Izabella Ciceron
Jasper Lavan
Joshua Reynolds
Mira Herman
Sitina Tochterman
William Peck
Yalini Kathamuthu

Mentor Ensemble

Chloe Lanyi Lari
Christina Springer
Danielle Kelly
Edie Carey
Jaeyoung Lee
Julia Gorman
Katie Hindin
Nora Shafer
Reed Roddy-Johnson
Reyna Berry
Winta Habtemichael
Zarah King
Zoey Miller

Robinson Ensemble

Alison Ho
Azariah Gonzales
Ben Sklarew
Daphne Taylor
Elise Hayes
Faith Brosnan
Isabella Ragona
Jamie McCormick
Jasmine Sklarew
Kira Gilligan
Lillian Schermer
Lydia Klosk
Maia Lawton
Matthew Lin
Sophie Hoffman
Victoria Machado

Thoreau Ensemble

Alex Emmerich
Anna Glassman
April Jin
El Tysse
Emi Harrison
Jenna Jumaili
Kyle Ratner

Wendt Center for Loss and Healing Ensemble

Alison Brown-Smith
Charlotte Covell
Monique Johnson

Arena Stage would like to acknowledge Voices of Now Partners including Fairfax County Public Schools, Glasgow Middle School, Holmes Middle School, Key Middle School, Robinson Secondary School, Thoreau Middle School, Jefferson Middle School Academy, The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing, Catholic University of America, Georgetown University, Howard University, George Mason University and George Washington University.

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 Forman is the Director of Education at Arena Stage as well as the Artistic Director of Voices of Now and is in her 18th season at Arena Stage. 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 three times (2013, 2015 and 2019) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (2019). She has presented on her devised theater process 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. For the past six years, Ashley has served as a visiting artist at Utah State University, where she has devised and directed plays every other year as well as serving as a guest lecturer. She is also on the Board of Directors for American Alliance for Theater and Education where she serves as the National Programming Director. 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 is Arena Stage's Community Programs Manager where he collaborates with the Director of Education in executing the artistic vision of Arena's devised theater program Voices of Now (VON). Mauricio managed the online transition of VON from a theater festival to a feature film during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also served as Creative Producer for the 2020-2021 Virtual Season of IN Series. Previously, he was the Director of Education at GALA Hispanic Theater and has worked extensively as a director, educator and performer in Washington, D.C. and New York City, NY. 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.

Voice of Now is generously supported by Lead Sponsor, Sam G. Rose.

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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. arenastage.org

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