

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2026 VOICES OF NOW FESTIVAL**

(Washington, DC) Arena Stage's Community Engagement Division today announced the date of its annual **Voices of Now (VON) Festival**, a day-long celebration of youth-devised theater featuring four ensembles of middle and high school artists from across the DC region. Developed through longstanding partnerships with DC Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools, and the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing, the highly anticipated program includes performances and post-show talkbacks that invite audiences to engage directly with the work on stage. This year's festival will be held on **Saturday, April 25, 2026, at 1PM**. Admission is free, but seating for performances is limited. For more information and to reserve tickets, visit arenastage.org/voicesofnow.

"Voices of Now is rooted in collaboration and community, where young people discover and claim their voice," shared **Sean-Maurice Lynch**, Arena Stage Senior Director of Community Engagement & Audience Experience. "From student artists to Fellows working across departments, this festival builds a bridge between creative expression and learning—grounded in mentorship, connection, and leadership that grows with each generation."

New this year, the festival will be hosted by a teen emcee from Fairfax County's Johnson Middle School, expanding youth leadership beyond performance and into the full festival experience. As emcee, they will guide the day—introducing each ensemble, connecting performances, and keeping the overall event tempo.

Also new, the 2026 cohort of Arena Stage's beloved Allen Lee Hughes Fellowship program played a central role in planning and producing this year's festival. Fellows contributed across production, marketing, social media, hospitality, outreach, development, and event management. As a shared project for all Fellows during their tenure, the Voices of Now Festival offers hands-on professional training, giving emerging artists and arts administrators meaningful experience supporting a major event.

Participating 2026 Voices of Now ensembles include Robinson Secondary School and Holmes Middle School in Fairfax County, Jefferson Middle School in DC, and the Wendt Center Teen Grief Ensemble. Drawing from lived experiences, each group presents original work rooted in questions the artists raise about identity, community, and personal experience.

About Voices of Now

Instituted more than 20 years ago, Voices of Now is an internationally recognized program in which young and emerging artists create autobiographical work through a devised theater process, combining writing, movement, and performance to explore issues central to their lives and communities. Through this process, participants work together to develop original pieces that reflect both individual experience and collective perspective.

Voices of Now is made possible through generous support from **Hattie M. Strong Foundation**, **Enterprise Mobility Foundation**, and **Friends of Southwest DC**.

Arena Stage's community engagement efforts are generously sponsored by Denie and Frank Weil; The Toni A. Ritzenberg Fund for Educational and Community Outreach Programs at Arena Stage; Joanne Barker; The Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Foundation; Rick and Carol Froehlich; Events DC; Alice Shaver Foundation; Venable Foundation; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; Nora Roberts Foundation; Enterprise Mobility Foundation; Friends of Southwest DC; and Actors' Equity Foundation.

In partnership with Howard University's Department of Theatre Arts, Arena Stage's Internship Program is made possible through generous funding from Tiffeny Sanchez and Reg Brown.

For more information on the Voices of Now program and festival, please visit arenastage.org/voicesofnow.

The first racially integrated theater in our nation's capital and a pioneer of the regional theater movement, Arena Stage was founded in 1950 in Washington, D.C. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Hana S. Sharif and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. We produce plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit, and present diverse and groundbreaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Consistently contributing to the American theatrical lexicon by commissioning and developing new plays, Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement and serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

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