

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Greta Hays/Lauren Alexander
press@arenastage.org, 202-600-4056

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ARENA STAGE HOLDS FOUR-DAY VOICES OF NOW FESTIVAL MAY 17-20, 2017 AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER

*** Festival showcases original plays written and performed by 100+ young artists from the D.C. area ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will host the **Voices of Now Festival**, a four-day event featuring original works of theater written and performed by 10 different youth ensembles. The Festival will bring together nearly 120 artists, ages 11-24, from D.C., Maryland and Virginia who have been working with professional theater artists from Arena Stage to devise original one-act plays. **The 2017 ensembles will come together May 17-20, 2017 to perform and discuss their work in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle at the Mead Center.** Please see below for the full event schedule

Currently in its 14th year, [Voices of Now](#) (VON) is an internationally renowned, season-long drama program that works with ensembles of middle, high school and adult artists to devise autobiographical theater pieces. Each ensemble's play poses challenging social questions relevant to the artists' communities and investigates those questions by recounting the artists' personal stories. This year's plays examine topics including school fight culture; the experience of first and second generation Americans; the education system; the implications of language; and questions that emerge when grieving a loss. All performances will be followed by a talkback led by an Arena Stage staff member.

"I've been thinking about free speech a lot lately, and Voices of Now is a stunning example of how theater and the arts can allow young people speak about our complicated lives," shares **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "Everyone needs to be allowed to dream, but also to investigate, question, challenge. I'm so proud of Arena's community engagement team for leading such a meaningful contribution to the lives of local young people. These performances will wow all audiences, not just the students' friends, teachers or parents. Every year I come away inspired and awed."

VON formed its first partnership 14 years ago with **Jefferson Middle School Academy** in Southwest D.C. In addition to Jefferson, several Fairfax County Public Schools will again take part in the festival, including **Glasgow Middle School, Key Middle School** and **Robinson Secondary School**. Returning for its seventh year is an ensemble in partnership with the **Wendt Center for Loss and Healing**, which is made up of young artists who have experienced the death of a loved one.

This year's program features the return of the **Burke School Ensemble**, which serves middle-school students with emotional and/or behavioral needs, as well as the third year of the **Key World Ensemble** at Key Middle School, which was formed to explore the experience of ELL (English Language Learner) students in Fairfax, VA.

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Additional ensembles include the **Mead Ensemble**, a program located at the Mead Center designed for students in grades 7-11, the **Mentor Ensemble**, which is made up of alumni from previous ensembles whose role is to mentor the younger artists in the program, and the **Advocacy Ensemble**, which features emerging artists from throughout the D.C.-metro area who are interested in using theater as a tool for social advocacy.

This year's Voices of Now Festival is dedicated to the memory of Toni A. Ritzenberg, a long-time, fervent supporter of Arena Stage's community engagement programs.

2017 Voices of Now Festival Schedule

All performances take place in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle in the Mead Center, 1101 Sixth St., S.W.

Wednesday, May 17 –7:30 p.m.

Missing Link by the Mentor Ensemble

Learning Curve by the Advocacy Ensemble

Home Team by the Jefferson Academy Ensemble

Thursday, May 18 —7:30 p.m.

Fight or Flight by the Key Middle School Ensemble

Language Barrier by the Key World Ensemble

Learning Curve by the Advocacy Ensemble

Friday, May 19 —7:30 p.m.

Under Pressure by the Glasgow Middle School Ensemble

Label Maker by the Burke School Ensemble

Missing Link by the Mentor Ensemble

Saturday, May 20 —7:30 p.m.

World Wide Web by the Robinson Secondary School Ensemble

Tongue Tied by the Mead Ensemble

Cast Away by the Wendt Center Ensemble

TICKETS: Tickets for the Voices of Now Festival are **FREE**, though reservations are required through the Arena Stage Sales Office at **202-488-3300** or at tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=24370.

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.

Voices of Now International: Arena Stage has partnered with the U.S. Department of State and foreign embassies to coordinate five Voices of Now international trips. Following an initial trip to India in 2012, the program has continued its international expansion by sending staff members to Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi and Patna, India; Zagreb, Croatia; and Lima, Peru to work with a variety of communities, including local participants, artists, educators, leaders, college-age youth from vulnerable communities and young adults with physical disabilities.

For more information on Voices of Now, visit arenastage.org/education/voices-of-now.

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Feedback from Voices of Now Participants:

“Voices of Now gives you time to focus and think. It gives you a different perspective on how life is.”
–Imari Williams, Advocacy Ensemble

“We hope our play highlights the importance of each person getting a good education and appreciating it.”
–Kaitlyn Lewis, Advocacy Ensemble

Voices of Now is made possible by support from the Harman Family Foundation, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, Raytheon, GEICO, Rockwell Collins, Friends of Southwest D.C., Eileen Fisher and the Weissberg Foundation.

Arena Stage’s community engagement efforts are generously sponsored by Denie and Frank Weil; the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities; Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; AT&T; Harman Family Foundation; Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, Inc.; The JBG Companies; Alice Shaver Foundation; Dimick Foundation; Friends of Southwest D.C.; Hattie M. Strong Foundation; Nora Roberts Foundation; Venable Foundation; Weissberg Foundation; Raytheon; GEICO; Rockwell Collins; Edington, Peel & Associates; Foley & Lardner LLP; Joanne Barker; Jean Schiro-Zavela and Vance Zavela; Actors’ Equity Foundation; Theatre Forward; Robert and Natalie Mandel Family Foundation; and Youth Activities Task Force (YATF) of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, Inc. Additional support is provided in memory of Toni A. Ritzenberg.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Director 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 impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

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