

Bebe Neuwirth will deliver her renditions of gems from the Great American Songbook at Arena Stage.



One Enchanted EVENING

Actress, dancer and singer Bebe Neuwirth graces Arena Stage's 2017 Benefit.

By Michael McCarthy

Catching up with the ageless Bebe Neuwirth is like trying to lasso a comet. She's forever involved in a TV or stage production, and in May, the actress, who stars as Nadine Tolliver on the hit CBS series *Madam Secretary* with Téa Leoni, will land at Arena Stage for a night of song as the theater hands out the second annual Beth Newburger Schwartz Award to arts philanthropist Arlene Kogod. Neuwirth, who's a two-time Tony and Emmy winner, has had turns on Broadway as Nickie in *Sweet Charity* and Velma Kelly in *Chicago*. And, of course, her cultural cache sits squarely on the shoulders of the unflappable Dr. Lilith Sternin, whom she portrayed on TV's *Cheers* and *Frasier*. We finally caught up with her in between shoots of *Madam Secretary* to learn a simple truth: Nothing stops this lifetime dancer, especially a journalistic lasso. *May 1, \$1,000 VIP dinner and performance, 1101 Sixth St. SW, arenastage.org*

What can guests expect for the benefit show at Arena?

I've never performed at Arena before, so I'm quite looking forward to it. The show I'm putting together consists of many of the songs I do in my show of story songs. Some are from musical theater; some are not. There are several different composers—Kander & Ebb, Kurt Weill and Tom Waits, to name



From top: Arena Stage; benefit guests will enjoy a VIP reception, followed by a three-course seated dinner, cabaret performance and post-show wine and desserts.



a few. Some are funny, some sweet, and some are intensely emotional. I work with a terrific music director and pianist, named Scott Cady, and he has done all the arrangements as well. We've worked together for a long time, and he never ceases to amaze me with his artistry.

I've heard you say that the foundation of dance—from the time you were taking classes at age 5—impacted you greatly. What has it done for you professionally?

I guess all the elements expressed through dance—time, space, rhythm and shape—are things I'm sensitive to. I don't really think about it; these things are just part of me no matter what I'm doing.

Clearly, you're in incredible shape—are there any other workouts you do, and do you still go to dance?

Over the years, I've tried going to the gym from time to time, but found it really boring. There was a time when I was injured, and I did some Pilates, and I liked it very much. [So], yes, I still go to ballet class! I always say, just because I'm not dancing doesn't mean I'm not dancing. Meaning, that motor is always going.