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Media Contacts:
Arena Stage: Kirstin Franko
202-600-4055; kfranko@arenastage.org
GWU: Angela Olson
202-994-3087; olsona@gwu.edu

The National Civil War Project to Create Original Theatrical Productions and Innovative Academic Programming

**Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater and the
George Washington University Join National Arts and Academic Partnership
Inspired by the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War**

WASHINGTON— Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater and the George Washington University, as part of eight universities and performing arts organizations, today announced the launch of The National Civil War Project, a radical collaboration to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War with original theatrical productions and innovative academic programming. The American Civil War is arguably one of the most significant times in American history, an era that raised issues still relevant today.

“Every anniversary is an opportunity to reflect,” **said Liz Lerman**, noted choreographer who first conceived of The National Civil War Project. “Our Civil War was 150 years ago: What does it still mean? What is the aftermath? Where is the damage? How is it absorbed? Who does the absorbing? These questions are too big for the arts alone, or for academia alone; my interest is in collaborations that will allow new understandings.”

Inspired by Ms. Lerman, MacArthur Genius Fellow, the project involves four partnerships facilitated through the launch by George Washington University and Arena Stage. The other three partners include Alliance Theatre and Emory College Center for Creativity & Arts at Emory University in Atlanta; American Repertory Theater and Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass.; and CENTERSTAGE in Baltimore and The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland in College Park. These diverse localities symbolize the geographic scope of the American Civil War.

“The project has grown in wonderful ways, beyond anything Liz Lerman and I had envisioned,” **shared Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith**. “This project is an unusual collaboration between universities, theaters and cities to focus our attention on the Civil War, reconstruction and its aftermath through productions, programs, conferences and acts of scholarship. Arena is proud to be partnering with George Washington University, championed by President Steven Knapp. GW was inspired by the vision of the ambitious undertaking and has been a true instigator in making the project happen. Washington, Baltimore, Boston and Atlanta are four important regions that were and are profoundly affected by the Civil War, and these cities are important centers for the project.”

The theatrical centerpiece of The National Civil War Project will be the commissioning and development of 12 new works about or inspired by the American Civil War in each region. Arena Stage and George Washington University will commission three new productions. GW will contribute academic resources to inform original theatrical works at Arena Stage.

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The National Civil War Project—Page 2

The first project Washington audiences will see is **Healing Wars**, a theatrical dance piece by Ms. Lerman featuring narrator Bill Pullman (*Independence Day, 1600 Penn*) that explores the experiences of the healers tasked with treating the physical and psychic wounds of battle. An ensemble of dancers will represent medics and soldiers from the American Civil War to today, and the work will be informed by interviews with students at GW's School of Nursing. **Healing Wars will run June 6–29, 2014 in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle.**

Our War is a national commission 25 playwrights—including two GW students—to create a multiplicity of voices about the American Civil War, reconstruction and its aftermath and the reverberations in our lives as Americans today. The final commission is an original piece by award-winning playwright and performer **Daniel Beaty**, portraying the depth and breadth of humanity involved in the American Civil War—from slaves to generals and abolitionists to slave owners, to those who went to war and those who were left behind. A stirring exploration of experiences during the war, this new work will fuse song and poetry, personal narrative and art as a means of asking what it was really like and how each person survived through their art.

Arena Stage's internationally renowned **Voices of Now** education program will create an ensemble of young emerging artists to devise an original one act play in response to source material from the Civil War and contemporary issues in nation's capital, which will be part of a partnership-wide devised theater project.

"The Civil War transformed American democracy, and we have a tremendous opportunity to showcase its magnitude through arts and academia," said **George Washington University President Steven Knapp**. "Theater is a vital part of American culture and universities can play a key role as a powerful influence. Our hope is that these collaborations between arts organizations and universities will become a national model for other institutions in the future."

George Washington will host Ms. Lerman's company in residence on campus and hold workshops for students before her work debuts publicly. GW also will sponsor 15 new student productions that pair history and theater students to work together to write plays. These plays will be presented in a special student playwriting festival in 2013 and 2014.

In addition to these artistic programs, GW will convene leading experts for a national conference in December 2013 at the Mead Center that will investigate the Civil War and how scholarship and artistry can inspire each other towards a deeper level of understanding. Collaborations between theater and university faculty will influence new curricula for students starting in the fall 2014 semester. GW will document the collaborations throughout the multi-year process to use later as a teaching model for other institutions.

In each of the partnership cities The National Civil War Project will convene experts for conferences and symposia and will produce public lecture series, community programs and dramaturgy, student devised theater playwriting projects, student-generated exhibitions, artist and academic roundtables and post-show discussions. Public presentations from each partnership will be shared through an interactive Media Wall at CENTERSTAGE and connected by satellite to high-definition video display, connecting the regions simultaneously. For programming from all participating organizations visit www.civilwarproject.org.

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The National Civil War Project—Page 3

About The National Civil War Project

The National Civil War Project is a radical multi-city, multi-year collaboration between four universities and five performing arts organizations to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War. The American Civil War is arguably one of the most significant times in American history, an era that raised issues still relevant today. The National Civil War Project will include the commissioning of 12 original works for the stage as well as create new arts-integrated academic programs. A national initiative symbolizing the geographic scope of the Civil War, the Project is inspired by noted choreographer and MacArthur “Genius” Fellow Liz Lerman and includes Alliance Theatre and Emory College Center for Creativity & Arts at Emory University in Atlanta, GA; American Repertory Theater and Harvard University in Cambridge, MA; Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater and The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.; and CENTERSTAGE in Baltimore, MD and The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center at the University of Maryland in College Park, MD.

About Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to the production, presentation, development and study of American theater. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Director Edgar Dobie, Arena Stage is the largest company in the country dedicated to American plays and playwrights. Arena Stage produces huge plays of all that is passionate, exuberant, 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 through the American Voices New Play Institute. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org.

About The George Washington University

In the heart of the nation's capital with additional programs in Virginia, the George Washington University was created by an Act of Congress in 1821. Today, GW is the largest institution of higher education in the District of Columbia. The university offers comprehensive programs of undergraduate and graduate liberal arts study, as well as degree programs in medicine, public health, law, engineering, education, business and international affairs. Each year, GW enrolls a diverse population of undergraduate, graduate and professional students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and more than 130 countries.

Broadcast quality video of Liz Lerman, press photos, quotes and additional information are available at www.civilwarproject.org/mediaroom.

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