

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For additional materials, visit:
arenastage.org/ToniStone

ARENA STAGE IN ASSOCIATION WITH A.C.T. ANNOUNCES CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR ROUNABOUT THEATRE COMPANY'S PRODUCTION OF *TONI STONE* SEPTEMBER 3 – OCTOBER 3, 2021

*** Pam MacKinnon directs this heroic, true story that shines a light on
one of history's greatest trailblazers ***

*** Single tickets go on sale August 3, 2021 ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the company for *Toni Stone*, written by Arena alumna resident playwright **Lydia R. Diamond**. Set in the 1950s, Toni Stone was the first woman to play baseball in the Negro Leagues, also making her the first woman to play in a professional men's league. Against all odds, Stone blazed a path in the male-dominated sports world, shattering expectations and creating her own set of rules. Arena is excited to roar back with this uplifting and inspiring story that marks the return of live productions to the Mead Center.

Award-winning playwright **Diamond** (Arena's *Smart People*, *Stick Fly*) tells the dynamic and exhilarating story of Stone's journey of perseverance and resilience just to do what she loved the most — play baseball. Directed by **Pam MacKinnon**, *Toni Stone* runs **September 3 – October 3, 2021 in the Kreeger Theater**. Press night for *Toni Stone* will be held on **Thursday, September 9, 2021**.

"What better way to come roaring back in the Nation's Capital than with a story of perseverance and overcoming the odds," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "Lydia R. Diamond has crafted an inspirational play about Toni Stone, the first woman to play professional baseball in a men's league. Pam MacKinnon directs phenomenal performances telling this vital story about a woman who was determined to play baseball at the highest level. In December 2020, the Negro Leagues were officially recognized as a Major League — at long last — and Arena is excited to amplify Toni's hidden history."

Reprising their roles from the A.C.T. run include **JaBen Early** (Arena's *Junk*), **Kenn E. Head** (Roundabout's *Toni Stone*), **Rodney Earl Jackson Jr.** (Broadway's *Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of The Temptations*), **Sean-Maurice Lynch** (Arena's *Jubilee*) and **Jarrod Mims Smith** (A.C.T.'s *The Royale*).

Also joining the cast and making their Arena Stage debuts are **Gilbert L. Bailey II** (Broadway's *Beetlejuice*), **Deimoni Brewington** (Theater Alliance's *Blood at the Root*), **Aldo Billingslea** (Folger's *The Winter's Tale*) and **Santoya Fields** (Berkeley Repertory's *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*).

Based on the novel *Curveball, The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone* by **Martha Ackmann** and commissioned by **Roundabout Theatre Company** and **Samantha Barrie**, *Toni Stone* received development support from the Resident Artists Program at Arena Stage, Washington, D.C. This production is in association with **American Conservatory Theater** (A.C.T.) and Roundabout Theatre Company, where it received its world premiere in May 2019.

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“Toni Stone’s story has been a part of my life for almost a decade. Throughout my career my favorite projects have been those I get to revisit,” explains **MacKinnon**. “I am grateful that this production, which closed on its opening night at American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco on March 11, 2020, due to the pandemic, will now mark Arena Stage’s return to in-person theater. Lydia Diamond’s play and this company of committed actors and designers take seriously the charge to share Toni’s story and the story of the Negro Leagues. Black Lives Matter.”

In addition to MacKinnon, the creative team includes Choreographer **Camille A. Brown**, Set Designer **Riccardo Hernández**, Costume Designer **Dede Ayite**, Lighting Designer **Allen Lee Hughes**, Sound Design and Original Music by **Broken Chord**, Hair and Wig Designer **Cookie Jordan**, Assistant Choreographer **Jay Staten**, Stage Manager **Elisa Guthertz**, Assistant Stage Manager **Kurt Hall** and Production Assistant **Dayne Sundman**.

Additional casting will be announced at a later date.

For a special one-day-only event on **Sunday, September 26**, *Toni Stone* will be simulcast to the center field video board in Nationals Park. Further details will be announced next month.

Lydia R. Diamond (*Playwright*) is an award-winning playwright whose work includes *Toni Stone* (2019 premiere at Roundabout Theatre Company), *Smart People*, *Stick Fly* (Broadway run at Cort Theatre), *Voyeurs de Venus*, *Harriet Jacobs* and *The Bluest Eye*. Her work has been performed at Arena Stage, Arden Theatre Company, Second Stage Theater, The New Vic Theatre, Company One, Goodman Theatre, The Guthrie Theater, Hartford Stage, Huntington Theatre Company, Long Wharf Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre and McCarter Theatre Center. Diamond has been a W. E. B. DuBois Institute Fellow at Harvard, a Sundance Playwright Lab Creative Advisor, a Harvard Radcliffe Institute Fellow, a Sally B. Goodman Fellow, a Huntington Playwright Fellow and a National Endowment for the Arts/Theatre Communications Group playwright. She is the 2020 recipient of The Horton Foote Prize, sits on the Dramatists Guild Legal Defense Fund board and is on faculty at University of Illinois at Chicago.

Samantha Barrie (*Commissioning Producer*) prior to commissioning and developing *Toni Stone*, Samantha was the casting director for The Old Globe and worked in the artistic departments of The Public Theater and Roundabout Theatre Company. In addition to producing, she designs educationally focused tours around the world for some of the country’s most prestigious media outlets and non-profit institutions. She feels immense pride that because of this project her son Isaac knows Toni Stone’s story.

Roundabout Theatre Company (*Todd Haines, Artistic Director/CEO*) was founded in 1965. New York’s not-for-profit Roundabout Theatre Company celebrates the power of theater by spotlighting classics from the past, cultivating new works of the present and educating minds for the future. Roundabout produces a mix of revivals and world premieres on and off Broadway, winning eight Best Revival Tony Awards and debuting such new playwrights as Stephen Karam, Lindsey Ferrentino, Steven Levenson, Ming Peiffer and Jireh Breon Holder. Its educational initiatives impact 15,000 students and over 1,000 teachers annually. roundabouttheatre.org.

American Conservatory Theater is an essential gathering place that brings artists and communities together to inspire and provoke. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Pam MacKinnon and Executive Director Jennifer Bielstein, A.C.T.’s mission is to engage the spirit of the San Francisco Bay Area, activate stories that resonate, promote a diversity of voices and points of view, and empower theater makers and audiences to celebrate liveness. A.C.T. values inclusion, transformational learning, participation and rigorous fun. A.C.T. is a Tony Award-winning nonprofit theater serving almost 200,000 people in the San Francisco Bay Area annually through theater, training, education and community programs. For more information, visit act-sf.org.

Pam MacKinnon (*Director*) is the Artistic Director of American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) in San Francisco. She has directed seven Broadway productions, including *The Parisian Woman*, *Amélie: A Musical*, Edward Albee’s *A Delicate Balance*, Wendy Wasserstein’s *The Heidi Chronicles* and David Mamet’s *China Doll*. She won Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (Steppenwolf, Arena, Broadway) as well as an Obie Award and Tony and Lortel nominations for Bruce Norris’ *Clybourne Park* (Playwrights Horizons, Taper, Broadway). She is the immediate past recently president of the executive board of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) and continues to serve on their board. Recent credits include world premieres of Bruce Norris’ *Downstate* (Steppenwolf, London’s National Theatre), Lydia Diamond’s *Toni Stone* (Roundabout, A.C.T.), Chris Chen’s *Communion* (A.C.T.) and Kate Attwell’s *Testmatch* (A.C.T.).

Cast Biographies (in alphabetical order)

Gilbert L. Bailey II (*Spec/Gabby*) is excited to be making his Arena Stages debut in *Toni Stone*. Before COVID-19 struck, he was an original company member of *Beetlejuice*. Other Broadway credits include the original company of *A*

Bronx Tale and *The Book of Mormon*. He has also performed at The Milwaukee Repertory Theatre where, while playing Harpo in *The Color Purple*, he made a move on the woman playing Squeak. Now, her name is Jessie Hooker-Bailey, they are married, and they are raising a beautiful puppy together, a black lab mix named Jade, who became a one-year-old this past June! You can follow Gilbert on Instagram @GLBaileyii, to see a copious amount of pictures that feature his wife and/or his dog. Thanks Michael!

Aldo Billingslea (*Alberga/Rufus*) studied Theatre in Texas at Austin College and Southern Methodist. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, he teaches Acting at Santa Clara University. He's performed in the works of Lorraine Hansberry, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Oscar Wilde, Lillian Helman, Thornton Wilder and Marcus Gardley. Productions include more than two dozen plays by Shakespeare and eight of August Wilson's decalogy. Favorite productions include, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, *Winter's Tale* at Folger, *The Elephant Man* at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley and *Othello* at Marin Theatre Company and California Shakespeare Theatre.

Deimoni Brewington (*Jimmy/Father O'Keefe*) is making his Arena Stage debut. His most recent credits include *The Adventures of Pericles* (Chesapeake Shakespeare Company), *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* (Roundhouse Theatre, Drama League Award nomination) and *Blood at the Root* (Theater Alliance, Helen Hayes Award, Best Ensemble in a Play). Deimoni's film credits include *Protest in 8* (Theater Alliance). Deimoni holds a BFA in Musical Theatre from Howard University. Instagram: @creatlas

JaBen Early (*King Tut/Supervisor*) is a native Washingtonian, previously seen in *Junk*, *The Great Society*, *All the Way* and *Ruined* at Arena Stage. D.C. credits include *Father Comes Home from the Wars* (Round House Theatre), *Unexplored Interior* (Mosaic Theater Company), *The Convert* (Woolly Mammoth), *Julius Caesar* (Folger Theatre), *F***ing A* (Studio Theatre), *Native Sun* (American Century Theater), *Titus Andronicus* (Molotov Theatre), *Me and The Devil Blues* (Flying V) and *The Cloak Room* (Capital Fringe Festival). Regional credits include *Toni Stone* (A.C.T), *All The Way* (Lincoln Center), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Guthrie Theatre), *We Are Proud to Present...* (Philly Interactive Theatre), *Ruined* (Marin Theatre Company) and *The Death of Bessie Smith* (Liberty Free Theatre). Early's film work includes *Harriet* and Arena's *May 22, 2020*. He trained at Morehouse College, Sarah Lawrence University and the BADA program at Magdalen College, University of Oxford.

Santoya Fields (*Toni Stone*) is excited to be making her debut at Arena Stage. She is a teaching artist and actor whose credits include *School Girls; or the African Mean Girls Play* (Berkeley Repertory Theater); *Men on Boats* (American Conservatory Theater), *Black Odyssey* (California Shakespeare Theater) and *White* (Shotgun Players). For her performance in *White*, Fields was nominated for a two theater awards. Offstage Santoya studies African American Studies at UCLA. She is advocate for arts and education, and creates workshops and trainings focused on historical cultural awareness, racial esteem and equality in organizations and classrooms.

Kenn E. Head (*Millie/Willie*) is thrilled to be part of this production of *Toni Stone*. He has worked on numerous plays at many theaters over his career including Steppenwolf, Yale Repertory, The Goodman, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Next Theater Company, American Theater Company and Victory Gardens. His television credits include *The Chi*, *Chicago Med*, *Empire*, *The Exorcist*, *Chicago Fire*, *Early Edition* and *ER*. He is also particularly proud of some of the Indie films of which he has been part, *Once Upon A River* due to premiere soon as well as *The Chosen*.

Rodney Earl Jackson Jr. (*Elzie*) made his Broadway debut in *The Book of Mormon* and was last seen at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in the world premiere of *Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations*. He traveled in the first national tour of *Motown: The Musical*. Jackson is a San Francisco native who built his love and foundation for arts and theater in public city organizations, such as San Francisco Arts Education Project, San Francisco Recreation and Parks, Young People's Teen Musical Theatre Company and the Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts. He is the co-founder/artistic director of the San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Company (SFBATCO), a five-year-old nonprofit whose mission is to produce live theater that reflects the experiences of the Bay Area's historically and currently marginalized communities and creating mentorships that aspire to engage a new generation of live theater supporters. (he/him) @rodneyearljacksonjr

Sean-Maurice Lynch's (*Stretch/Syd*) recent credits include *Jubilee* at Arena Stage. D.C. area credits include *Twelve Angry Men*, *Ragtime* and *Parade* at Ford's; *Ruined* at Everyman Theatre; *Lost in the Stars* at Washington Opera; *Passing Strange* and *Pop!* at Studio Theater; *Show Boat*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Hairspray*, and *Dreamgirls* at Signature Theater. Sean-Maurice is currently Associate Producer of New Play Development at Theater Alliance in Washington, D.C.

Jarrold Mims Smith (*Woody/Mother*) is from New Orleans, LA. He's making his Arena Stage and Washington, D.C. debut. Jarrold has performed in *The Whipping Man* (South Coast Rep & Pasadena Playhouse), *Soujourners* (Magic Theatre) and *The Royale* (A Contemporary Theater).

For full company biographies, please visit [here](#).

Prime Sponsorship for *Toni Stone and Arena Stage* is generously provided by **Beth Newburger Schwartz**. Supporting Sponsorship for *Toni Stone* is generously provided by **AT&T, Susan and Steve Bralove, Exelon and Sue Henry and Carter Phillips**.

Prime Sponsorship for *Toni Stone at Nationals Park* is generously provided by the **Annenberg Foundation and Sachiko Kuno Foundation**. Supporting Sponsorship is generously provided by **Exelon and GEICO**. Contributing Sponsorship is generously provided by **Strategic Education**.

Sponsorship for *Arena Stage's Season Artwork* is generously provided by **David Bruce Smith and The Grateful American Foundation**.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

**Arena Stage in Association with A.C.T. Presents
The Roundabout Theatre Company's Production of
*Toni Stone***

By Lydia R. Diamond

Directed by Pam MacKinnon

Choreographed by Camille A. Brown

In association with Samantha Barrie

In the Kreeger Theater | September 3 – October 3, 2021

ABOUT: History is filled with trailblazers and Toni Stone was one of them. Considered a pioneer, Toni Stone is the first woman to play baseball in the Negro Leagues, also making her the first woman to play professionally in a men's league in the 1950s. Against all odds, Stone shattered expectations and created her own set of rules in the male-dominated sports world. Based on Martha Ackmann's book *Curveball: The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone*, award-winning playwright Lydia R. Diamond (*Arena's Smart People, The Bluest Eye*) tells the dynamic story of Stone's journey of perseverance and resilience just to do what she loved the most — play baseball.

CAST:

Spec/Gabby: Gilbert L. Bailey II

Alberga/Rufus: Aldo Billingslea

Jimmy/Father O'Keefe: Deimoni Brewington

King Tut/Supervisor: JaBen Early

Toni Stone: Santoya Fields

Millie/Willie: Kenn E. Head

Elzie: Rodney Earl Jackson Jr.

Stretch/Syd: Sean-Maurice Lynch

Woody/Mother: Jarrod Mims Smith

CREATIVE TEAM:

Playwright: Lydia R. Diamond

Director: Pam MacKinnon

Choreographer: Camille A. Brown

Set Designer: Riccardo Hernández

Costume Designer: Dede Ayite

Lighting Designer: Allen Lee Hughes

Sound Design and Original Music: Broken Chord

Wig and Hair Designer: Cookie Jordan

Assistant Choreographer: Jay Staten

Casting Director: Teresa Sapien

Stage Manager: Elisa Guthertz

Assistant Stage Manager: Kurt Hall

Production Assistant: Dayne Sundman

PLAN YOUR VISIT

TICKETS: Tickets for *Toni Stone* go on sale August 3 and are \$41-95, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as pay-your-age tickets, student discounts, Southwest Nights and hero's discounts, visit arenastage.org/tickets/savings-programs.

Tickets may be purchased online at arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 or beginning August 17 at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth Street, SW, D.C.

Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300
Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380
TTY for deaf patrons: 202-484-0247
Info for patrons with disabilities: 202-488-3300

PERFORMANCE DATES:

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Friday & Saturday at 8 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday at 2 p.m.
Weekday matinees at noon on September 15 and September 28

Audio-described performance: September 28 at 2 p.m.
Southwest Night: September 26 at 7:30 p.m.

Full Calendar: arenastage.org/tickets/calendar

STAY SAFE: Arena Stage is requiring that patrons, staff and volunteers wear facial masks inside the Mead Center regardless of vaccination status. Enhanced cleaning and sanitization will take place throughout the building. For superior air quality, we have upgraded our ventilation/filtration systems and have implemented a full digital ticketing system that will include contactless ticket scanning and digital programs. These conditions are subject to change. For the latest information, visit arenastage.org/staysafe.

METRO: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is only one block from the Waterfront-SEU Metro station (Green Line). When exiting the station, walk west on M Street toward Sixth Street, and the main entrance to the Mead Center is on the right.

PARKING: Parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage. Subscribers may purchase parking in advance for \$18. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$25 or on the day of the performance for \$27 on a first-come, first-served basis. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets, and the garage closes one hour after the day's last performance ends. Patrons can also park at the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, one block from the Mead Center, for \$18 when pre-purchased and \$22 on the day of the performance.

VALET PARKING: Arena Stage offers valet service at no additional cost to patrons with accessibility needs who call 202-488-3300 in advance to request valet parking. On days when valet parking is being used for accessibility, it is also available to general patrons one hour prior to show time for \$30, based on availability. To use valet parking, pull up to the main entrance on Sixth Street.

For complete 2021/22 Season details, visit: arenastage.org/tickets/2122-subscriptions.

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 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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