

MEDIA RELEASE

MOLLY SMITH ARTISTIC DIRECTOR EDGAR DOBIE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ZELDA FICHANDLER FOUNDING DIRECTOR



CONTACT:
Ryan Impagliazzo, Arena Stage
ryani@arenastage.org, 202-600-4051

March 8, 2023

Amy Killion, Bucklesweet
amy@bucklesweet.com, 703-559-9714

“ELECTRIFYING, MUSIC-FILLED, AND DEEPLY PLEASUREABLE!”

ARENA STAGE’S 2023/24 SEASON IS FULL OF HEART AND HOPE

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith** and Executive Producer **Edgar Dobie** today announced the company’s 74th season. The upcoming subscription season—“electrifying, music-filled, and deeply pleasurable,” as **Smith** puts it—will feature two original musicals, an acclaimed play with music, an uproarious comedy, Arena’s 11th Power Play, and a return by audience-favorite Step Afrika!. 2023/24 Season subscriptions are now available for purchase at arenastage.org/23-24.

“This is an exciting yet bittersweet moment for me,” said **Smith**, who will retire on June 30th, 2023, completing her 25th season as artistic director. “I came to Washington 25 years ago with an important mandate: to focus Arena Stage on American plays, American voices, and American artists...and I was fortunate to be able to do it with a remarkably talented, fully committed staff who excel at bringing dreams to life. As I pass the baton to a new Artistic Director, the 2023/24 Season highlights why Arena is one of the most exciting theaters in the country!”

The season will kick off in July with the much-anticipated North American tour of New York’s Signature Theatre’s production of **Lauren Yee’s** (*The Great Leap, King of the Yees*) **Cambodian Rock Band** directed by **Chay Yew**. Featuring songs by psychedelic surf rock band **Dengue Fever**, this darkly humorous, electrifying play with music tells the story of a father and daughter as they confront the brutal legacy of the Khmer Rouge. Thrilling mystery meets rock concert in this passionate story about family, survival, and the enduring power of music.

Come the fall, the occupants of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, will have a second home: Arena’s iconic in-the-round Fichandler Stage. Following a hit 2022 Broadway run, **Selina Fillinger’s** (*The Collapse, Something Clean*) White House-set play, **POTUS: Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive**, will make its D.C. premiere in October helmed by **Margot Bordelon**. Hailed as a “rough-and-tumble feminist comedy” (*The New York Times*), this farce will be led by a tight ensemble of seven fiercely funny women.

The season continues into the holidays with a new American musical. Reuniting the team from its 2022 Berkeley Repertory Theatre world premiere, **Swept Away** features a book by Tony Award® winner **John Logan** (*Red, Moulin Rouge! The Musical*), direction by Tony Award® winner **Michael Mayer** (*Spring Awakening, American Idiot*), and music and lyrics by “America’s Biggest Roots Band” (*Rolling Stone*), **The Avett Brothers**. Set off the coast of New Bedford, Mass., in 1888, this “thrilling suspenseful ride” (*BroadwayWorld*) finds four shipwrecked survivors questioning how far they will go to stay alive.

2024 kicks off the 11th installment in Arena's ambitious Power Play initiative. Maryland-born writer **Kia Corthorn's** *Tempestuous Elements* dramatizes a key moment of the 1900s, pulling back the curtain on the visionary Black feminist leader, educator, and intellectual Anna Julia Cooper. Born in North Carolinian slavery, by 1901 Cooper had become principal of the renowned M Street School, an institution for African American students in Washington, D.C. This world premiere will be directed by D.C. artist **Psalmayene 24** in the Fichandler Stage.

The spring will feature a second original musical by a celebrated creative team. *Unknown Soldier* was co-written by **Daniel Goldstein** and the late **Michael Friedman** (*Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*), who tragically died in 2017. The Arena staging will be helmed by **Trip Cullman**, who directed the show's earlier productions at the Williamstown Theatre Festival and Playwrights Horizons, and who will be at Arena later this spring for the world premiere of Kenneth Lin's *Exclusion*. Spanning the 20th and 21st centuries, this sweeping, elegiac musical follows a woman's journey to unearth the secrets buried in her family's past.

"A critical part of the resiliency of not-for-profit theater is partnerships," said **Dobie**. "Our presentation of *Cambodian Rock Band* is made possible through collaboration with other resident theaters, and our productions of *Swept Away* and *Unknown Soldier* are the result of partnerships with commercial producers. Sharing resources to support good storytelling can be a vital part of any season. In fact, the 2017 Tony Award®-winning Best Musical *Dear Evan Hansen* started its journey to Broadway and beyond in 2015 in our Kreeger Theater—the future home of *Cambodian Rock Band*, *Swept Away*, and *Unknown Soldier*—thanks to a fabulous partnership. Additionally, we continue our successful multi-year partnership with Step Afrika! with *The Migration* and Step Afrika!'s *Magical Musical Holiday Step Show*. As we look toward the 2023/24 Season, I am buoyed by thoughts of our creative partners, who help us be more than we are when alone."

The 2023/24 Season finale will be a presentation of dance company Step Afrika!'s landmark work, *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*. Based on the iconic painting series that charts the story of African American migrants from the South to the North in the early 1900s, this percussive dance-theater piece tells this astonishing history through pulsating rhythms and visually stunning movement, at a moment in history when the "New Great Migration" is reversing that trend. This performance will coincide with Step Afrika!'s 30th Anniversary and mark the midway point of the five-year Arena-Step Afrika! collaborative partnership, following *Drumfolk* during the 2021/22 Season.

2023/24 SEASON

Cambodian Rock Band

By Lauren Yee

Featuring Songs by Dengue Fever

Directed by Chay Yew

A Signature Theatre Production

In Association with Alley Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, ACT Theatre/5th Avenue, and Center Theatre Group

In the Kreeger Theater | July 18 – August 27, 2023

It's 2008 and a father-daughter duo are heading to Phnom Penh; she to prosecute a notorious Cambodian war criminal, he 30 years after escaping then-Communist rule. In a psychedelic theatrical extravaganza set to some of the country's most popular rock music, including from Dengue Fever, *Cambodian Rock Band* shines a light on the country's vibrant '70s rock scene and how an entire

generation of musicians was purged by the Khmer Rouge, as it brings long-buried family secrets back to life.

POTUS: Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive

By Selina Fillinger

Directed By Margot Bordelon

In the Fichandler Stage | October 13 – November 12, 2023

When the Commander-in-Chief publicly calls his wife a “See You Next Tuesday,” all H-E-Double Hockey Sticks breaks loose. In this searingly funny Broadway hit, *POTUS* follows how seven women of dramatically different backgrounds minimize the damage done by male arrogance and political posturing, in an endearing homage to the women who keep things running behind the scenes.

By Special Arrangement with Matthew Masten, Sean Hudock, and Madison Wells Live

Swept Away

Book by John Logan

Music and Lyrics by The Avett Brothers

Directed by Michael Mayer

In the Kreeger Theater | November 25 – December 30, 2023

When a violent storm sinks their whaling ship off the coast of New Bedford, Mass., the four survivors face a reckoning: how far will they go to stay alive? And can they live with the consequences? With music and lyrics from The Avett Brothers (“America’s Biggest Roots Band,” *Rolling Stone*), whose 2004 “Mignonette” was inspired by an 1884 shipwreck and the struggle of four men to survive, *Swept Away* is an electrifying, soul-stirring exploration of how facing tragedy can open the door to forgiveness... if only we’ll let it.

Tempestuous Elements

By Kia Corthron

Directed by Psalmayene 24

In the Fichandler Stage | February 16 – March 17, 2024

Born into slavery in North Carolina, Anna Julia Cooper was a visionary Black feminist and educator in the late 19th/early 20th centuries, and only the fourth African American woman to earn a doctoral degree. *Tempestuous Elements*—the 11th in Arena Stage’s Power Play cycle—shines a light on Cooper’s tumultuous tenure as Principal of Washington, D.C.’s historic M Street School where she fought to keep Black education alive, despite the racism, gossip and sexism that threatened to consign her efforts to obscurity.

By Special Arrangement with Hunter Arnold

Unknown Soldier

Book by Daniel Goldstein

Music by Michael Friedman

Lyrics by Michael Friedman and Daniel Goldstein

Directed by Trip Cullman

In the Kreeger Theater | March 29 – May 5, 2024

Cleaning out her grandmother’s home, Ellen Rabinowitz discovers the photograph of an anonymous soldier tucked away in a box of keepsakes. And so begins *Unknown Soldier*, a sweeping, elegiac musical from Daniel Goldstein and the late Michael Friedman on a woman’s journey to unearth the secrets of her family’s past... and which will chart her future.

The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence

By Step Afrika!

In the Fichandler Stage | June 6 – July 14, 2024

Using its hallmark style of percussive dance-theater, Step Afrika!'s *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence* tells the story of one of the largest movements of people in United States history, when millions of African American migrants moved from the rural South to the industrial North in the 1900s to escape Jim Crow, racial oppression, and lynchings. Inspired by Jacob Lawrence's iconic 60-panel "The Migration Series" (1940-41), this signature work from the award-winning dance company uses the images, color palette, and motifs in the painting series to tell this astonishing story through pulsating rhythms and visually stunning movement.

The 2023/24 Season also includes a return engagement of **Step Afrika!'s *Magical Musical Holiday Step Show***, running December 8 – 17, 2023, in the Fichandler Stage, for which tickets will be available in June 2023.

**Plays, artists, and dates subject to change.*

Subscription packages are now on sale and may be purchased by visiting arenastage.org/23-24. Packages may also be purchased by phone at 202-488-3300 or in person at the Arena Stage Sales Office, Tuesday through Sunday, from noon until 8 p.m.

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 impacting the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its eighth decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

###

Connect with us:

facebook.com/arenastage

twitter.com/arenastage

instagram.com/arenastage

youtube.com/user/arenastage1

arenastage.org