

# MEDIA RELEASE

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



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES NAMES OF ARTISTS SELECTED FOR EIGHTH COHORT OF THE BARBARA WALTON PLAYWRIGHTS' ARENA

**\*\*\*The year-long program invites local playwrights and theater makers to investigate their artistic process and advance their dramaturgical practice\*\*\***

(Washington D.C.)—Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater today announced the artists who have been selected to join the eighth cohort of **The Barbara Walton Playwrights' Arena**. Facilitated by Arena Stage dramaturg **Jocelyn Clarke**, six local early career writers will form a collaborative group dedicated to the support and development of each other's work and practice. In continued partnership with Georgetown and Howard Universities, this year's cohort features advanced students and recent alumni from both prestigious Washington institutions: **Darreonna Davis** (Howard), **Caitlin Frazier** (Georgetown), **Nick Giotis** (Georgetown), **Colum Goebelbecker** (Georgetown), **Nirlash Karki** (Howard), and **Trevonae Williams** (Howard).

The 2023 cohort will convene as a group over the course of the year and will work one-on-one with **Clarke** in a rigorous exploration of their artistry, providing them crucial support and guidance as they prepare for careers in the field. The cohort will hone their artistic voice in focused conversations with Clarke and gain unprecedented access to playwrights and directors from Arena productions.

"Barbara Walton Playwrights' Arena 2023 promises to be very exciting, as a cohort of new playwrights sets off on a journey where they create new work and advance their practice," shares **Clarke**. "As with previous cohorts, and all adventures into the unknown, the company, conversation and discoveries along the way are always more interesting than the destination. We are embarked!"

The Barbara Walton Playwrights' Arena debuted in 2013 as an artistic initiative designed to provide up-and-coming playmakers the opportunity to engage with Arena Stage resident playwrights, directors, designers, and staff about their work, the production process within a regional theater, and other topics pertinent to dramaturgy. In 2020, seeking to build upon the program's foundation as well as Arena's continued commitment to supporting American artists, Arena Stage announced its partnership with Georgetown and Howard Universities; reimagining the Playwrights' Arena to focus on student and recent alumni playwrights from the respective universities.

Arena Stage is grateful to the family of **Mrs. Barbara R. Walton** (1920-2003), for their support of our efforts to foster emerging playwrights and new work. Mrs. Walton was a Washington, D.C.-based playwright who also served on Arena's Board of Trustees from 1957 to 1965.

Funding for the partnership with Georgetown University is also provided by **Andrew R. Ammerman**.

## COHORT EIGHT BIOGRAPHIES (in alphabetical order)

**Darreonna Davis** is a senior journalism major and playwriting minor at Howard University. A New Orleans, Louisiana, native, Davis is a multimedia storyteller who is passionate about Black culture and history and seeks to tell both fiction and non-fiction stories that document Black life—past and present.

**Caitlin Frazier** is an English major and Theater and Performance Studies minor at Georgetown University, graduating in May 2023. A performer at heart (most recently Joanne in *nomadictheatre's RENT* and Flick in *Mask and Bauble's Violet*), Caitlin started her writing journey during her time spent at home over COVID. Writing allowed her to find deeper parts of herself, and it has been full steam ahead ever since. In the summer of 2021, she attended the Kennedy Center Playwriting Intensive. During her time at Georgetown, she has been an active member of *nomadictheatre* (Associate Producer), *Mask and Bauble Dramatic Society*, and *Black Movements Dance Theater*. She is excited to hopefully continue writing and acting post-graduation.

**Nick Giotis** is a senior at Georgetown University from Darien, CT. His first full length play, *Grand Courses*, was staged at Georgetown as the runner-up in the 36th annual Donn B. Murphy One Acts Festival (DBMOAF). His second play, *Melpomene, By Another Name*, the winning play at this year's DBMOAF, will be headlining the festival this February. Nick fell in love with playwriting his senior year of high school when his short play *Afterparty* was the only one rejected from his high school playwriting competition. He hasn't stopped writing since.

**Colum Goebelbecker** believes in the transformative power of the arts to humanize complex global issues and cultivate empathy across difference. As a DC-based actor, singer, dancer, musical theater performer, teaching artist, and playwright-in-training with Arena Stage, he strives to channel that belief into all his work. You can see Colum as Edvard in Rorschach Theater's upcoming production of *Sometimes the Rain, Sometimes the Sea* at the Atlas Performing Arts Center. He recently played Ichabod in *Ichabod: The Legend of Sleep Hollow*, an original musical at Creative Cauldron last October. Over the summer, he played Marco in *Higher* for the Capital Fringe Festival and Trinculo in *The Tempest* for Grassroots Shakespeare DC. Last March, he made it to the Final Four in Monologue Madness DC, an acting competition of over 200 actors. Colum graduated from Georgetown with a government degree and theater minor in December of 2021, and he's since found a home for his passion for theater for social change at the Lab for Performance and Politics. He works as a Project Associate for its award-winning In Your Shoes Program, a theatrical project that brings together intergenerational participants to engage in dialogue about critical issues such as race, political polarization, memory, and identity. He currently administers and co-teaches an In Your Shoes project in collaboration with Georgetown's Center for US-China Dialogue. Colum also works as a bilingual teaching artist for Imagination State's Óyeme Program. He teaches Latinx immigrant freshman and sophomores at Theodore Roosevelt High School basic theater skills with the goal of trauma-informed healing.

**Nirlash Karki** is a graduating senior at Howard University from Birendranagar, Nepal. A Film/TV Production major, with a Playwrighting minor, Nirlash is a passionate writer and director with a keen interest in producing formally daring and culturally resonant works across various storytelling media. He was also part of the Howard Entertainment Program, a pipeline program dedicated to bridging the gap between students of color and decision-making positions in the entertainment industry. Nirlash's creative output focuses on contextualizing identities along the lines of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class while rigorously engaging with the history of theatrical and cinematic mediums through both narrative and formal means.

**Trevonae Williams** is a senior journalism major and playwriting minor at Howard University, hailing from the island of Jamaica. As a multi-hyphenate artist, her primary goal is to create connection and community through authentic storytelling.

### **PLAYWRIGHTS' ARENA ALUMNI**

#### **Cohort Seven:**

Chanel Cain  
Iesha M. Daniels  
Thea Flanzer  
Rachel Linton  
Daks McClettie  
Samuel Oni

#### **Cohort Six:**

Veronica Ray Carr  
Rose Dallimore  
Fatima Dyfan  
Aiyaisha Peoples  
Jade Scott  
Timmy Sutton

#### **Cohort Five:**

Audrey Cefaly  
Annalisa Dias  
Paige Goodwin  
Psalmayene 24  
Alan Sharpe

#### **Cohort Four\*:**

The Welders  
Rorschach Theatre

*\*For the fourth iteration, Playwrights' Arena partnered with local playmaking organizations and collectives, surfacing and strengthening their art-making methodologies and company identity.*

#### **Cohort Three:**

Kelly Renee Armstrong  
Jennifer Barclay  
J. Shawn Durham  
Jennie Berman Eng  
Marian Licha  
Mary Hall Surface

#### **Cohort Two:**

Steven A. Butler, Jr.  
Patricia Davis  
Joshua Ford

Mary Stone Hanley  
Liz Maestri  
David Mitchell Robinson

**Inaugural Cohort:**

Norman Allen  
Randy Baker  
Jacqueline E. Lawton  
Heather McDonald  
Danielle Mohlman  
Shawn Northrip

For more information on The Barbara Walton Playwrights' Arena, please visit [arenastage.org/playwrightsarena](http://arenastage.org/playwrightsarena).

***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 groundbreaking 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](http://arenastage.org)

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