

# MEDIA RELEASE

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



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT:

Anastasia St. Hilaire, Arena Stage  
[asthilaire@arenastage.org](mailto:asthilaire@arenastage.org), 202-600-4054

Amy Killion, Bucklesweet  
[amy@bucklesweet.com](mailto:amy@bucklesweet.com), 703-559-9714

## ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR THE FIRST PRODUCTION OF ITS 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/5<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE, and CENTER THEATRE GROUP

(Washington D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announced today the cast and creative team for ***Cambodian Rock Band***. Originally scheduled to be a part of the 2021/22 Season lineup, the much-anticipated Signature Theatre production of this intimate rock epic will kick off Arena's "electrifying, music-filled, and deeply pleasurable" 2023/24 Season. Written by **Lauren Yee** (*The Great Leap, King of the Yees*), featuring songs by **Dengue Fever**, and directed by **Chay Yew**, *Cambodian Rock Band* will run **July 19 – August 27, 2023**, in the **Kreeger Theater**. Press Night will be held on **Friday, July 21 at 8 p.m.** For information and tickets, please visit [arenastage.org/rock](https://arenastage.org/rock).

*Cambodian Rock Band* tells the story of a Khmer Rouge survivor, Chum, returning to Cambodia for the first time in 30 years as his daughter, Neary, prepares to prosecute one of Cambodia's most infamous war criminals. Backed by a live band playing contemporary Dengue Fever hits and classic Cambodian oldies, this darkly funny play is equal parts comedy, history, and rock concert, as family secrets are revealed against a dark chapter of Cambodian history. *Time Out Chicago* promises "The guitars shred your heart."

"Finally!" cheered Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "I am so happy that Arena will *finally* be presenting this psychedelic theatrical extravaganza. I've been looking forward to sharing *Cambodian Rock Band* with D.C. audiences since we first announced it in spring 2021. I cannot think of a better way for Arena to kick off this next chapter in its long history." **Smith** will retire from Arena Stage at the end of this month following a storied 25-year tenure as its artistic director. She will be succeeded by **Hana Sharif**, who comes to Arena from The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis.

"Prior to the '70s, Cambodia was a rock-and-roll hotbed—'the Detroit of Southeast Asian,' as one of the play's character calls it," continued **Smith**. "However, as the Khmer Rouge rose to power, intellectuals, artists, and musicians were singled out as enemies of the state, and their numbers count among the

nearly two million victims of the resulting purge. While *Cambodian Rock Band* is a play about history and politics on a large scale, it is primarily concerned with a family, and a daughter's discovery of her father's hidden life. And, of course, as the title suggests, it is also about music: wild, raucous, and anarchic, with distorted guitars and hypnotic, pounding rhythms—the music of youth and innocence.”

“Lauren Yee’s *Cambodian Rock Band* is a work of incredible theatrical deftness, brutal honesty, pure heart, and wit,” said director **Chay Yew**. “Her play breathes life into the timely issues in our divided nation: immigration, race, genocide, and human rights abuses; the rights of refugees and emigres; the consequences of apathy when a country shifts under a brutal regime; and the destruction of freedom of expression in the midst of political transitions and upheavals. In Lauren’s astute eyes, one thing remains consistent throughout our temperamental world: the constancy, the resilience, and enduring power of art and artists. Lauren Yee’s *Cambodian Rock Band* celebrates the indomitable legacy of art and music; how artists capture our individual and national spirit and hopes; and the uncanny ability of art to inspire, to affirm our humanity, and to bring us together.”

Many of the cast members come to Arena Stage from the original Signature Theatre production in 2020, as well as subsequent runs at the Alley Theatre and Berkeley Repertory Theatre earlier in 2023. All will be making their Arena debuts. The cast includes **Kelsey Angel Baehrens, Brooke Ishibashi, Francis Jue, Abraham Kim, Tim Liu, Jane Lui, Alex Lydon, Joe Ngo, and Vi Tran**.

In addition to **Yew**, the creative team for *Cambodian Rock Band* includes Set Designer **Takeshi Kata**, Costume Designer **Linda Cho**, Lighting Designer **David Weiner**, Co-Sound Designers **Mikhail Fiksel & Megumi Katayama**, Projection Designer **Luke Norby**, Wig Designer **Tom Watson**, Music Supervisor & Co-Music Director **Jane Lui**, Music Supervisor & Co-Music Director **Matt MacNelly**, Associate Director **Graham Schmidt**, Stage Manager **Merrick A.B. Williams**, Assistant Stage Manager **Caroline Duffin**, and Replacement Assistant Stage Manager **Christi B. Spann**.

*Cambodian Rock Band* was commissioned and first produced by South Coast Repertory with support from the Time Warner Foundation. It was developed with support from The Ground Floor at Berkeley Repertory Theatre and produced by special arrangement with Broadway & Beyond Theatricals. This Signature Theatre production is presented in association with Alley Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, ACT Theatre/5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and Center Theatre Group.

## **CAST BIOGRAPHIES**

**Kelsey Angel Baehrens** (*u/s Neary/Sothea, Pou/S21 Guard*) is a hapa Filipina-American currently based out of her hometown, Honolulu, Hawaii. Regional credits: *Cambodian Rock Band* (HI), *Lizzie, the Musical* (Playhouse Square, OH), *Henry IV, pt 1* (Hawaii Shakes Fest). Directing creds: Kate Hamill’s *Pride & Prejudice* (KOA Theater, HI); associate to director Erin Ortman on *Jeannette*, a new musical about the right to vote; associate to director Jess McLeod on the NYCLU’s “Sing Out for Freedom”; assistant to Alex Gemignani at the O’Neill Center’s NMTC 2022. Graduate of Baldwin Wallace University and Mid-Pacific School of the Arts. Her deep gratitude to the *raddest* tour family ever, to Kaimake, the Tarantulas, Kana’ina, and bong. [kelseyangelbaehrens.com](http://kelseyangelbaehrens.com) Instagram: @kelseyangelb

**Brooke Ishibashi** (*Neary/Sothea*) recently appeared as Florinda in the celebrated production of *Into the Woods* at The Kennedy Center. She made her Broadway debut in the same production and originated the role at City Center Encores! Off-Broadway. After originating and developing the roles of Neary and Sothea (South Coast Repertory, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse), Brooke is proud to be returning to her bandmates, The Cyclos. She is a former Actors’ Equity Association national councilor, Fair Wage Onstage core member, NYCLU ambassador, and Be An #ArtsHero/Arts Workers United cofounder. Arts & culture contributes \$919 billion+ to the U.S. economy, employing 5.2 million+ arts workers. There is no American economic recovery without a robust arts & culture recovery. Our fates are intrinsically tied together. she/her/hers [BeAnArtsHero.com](http://BeAnArtsHero.com)

**Francis Jue** (*Duch*) is thrilled to make his Arena Stage debut. Francis was last seen in DC in *You for Me for You* at Woolly Mammoth. In the season before the pandemic, Francis received a Lucille Lortel Award for *Cambodian Rock Band*, an Outer Critics Circle Award for *Soft Power*, and a Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for *The Language Archive*. He has appeared on Broadway in *Pacific Overtures*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and *M. Butterfly*. Recent Off-Broadway credits include *Good Enemy*, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, and *Wild Goose Dreams* (Obie Award). Recent regional credits include *Today is My Birthday*, *King of the Yeas* (Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award), and *Tiger Style!*. TV/Film credits include *Madam Secretary*, *Hightown*, *Law & Order: SVU*, *Joyful Noise*, *White Noise*, and *Our Son*.

**Abraham Kim** (*Rom/Journalist*) Regional: Originated the role of Rom in *Cambodian Rock Band* (Signature Theatre Company, Pacific Playwrights Festival, South Coast Repertory, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse); Son in *LA Riots* (Cafe/Club Fais Do-Do). Music: National and International tours with Run River North, DANakaDAN, and Magnetic North & Taiyo Na; Drummer on Magnetic North & Taiyo Na's album, *Home:Word*. Music band affiliations: IXS, Monroe Street, The Blazing Rays of the Sun, Former Faces, Fyke, Ruth + the Library, Priska, Surrija. Music producer: Priska (*State Change*), SGLA (*Be Thou My Vision*). TV/Film: *Good Session* (CBS pilot); *Jasyn's Theme* (YouTube). Education: Craig Kupka, Daniel Yoo, Angelica Thompson. Instagram: @Oabrahamkim0

**Tim Liu** (*Ted/Cadre/Leng*) was born and raised in NJ. He most recently performed Off-Broadway in the world premiere of *Good Enemy* directed by Chay Yew for Audible Theater. Additional theater credits include Off-Broadway performances with the Pearl Theatre Company (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Eric Tucker), Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, HERE Arts Center, and other NYC theaters. Regionally he has worked with Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, B Street Theatre, Capital Repertory Theatre, The Shakespeare Theatre of NJ, and Centenary Stage Company. Recent TV and Film credits include *Pam & Tommy* (Hulu), *The Endgame* (NBC), *New Amsterdam* (NBC), *Girls on the Bus* (HBO), *A Father's Son* (w/ Ronny Chieng and Tzi Ma), and *Knock at the Cabin* (M. Night Shyamalan).

**Jane Lui** (*Pou/S21 Guard*) is a songwriter, vocalist, producer, keyboardist, and percussionist. Recent credits include "Opera Evelyn" vocal contributions to the soundtrack of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (A24), Arranger/Pou in *Cambodian Rock Band* (off-Broadway Signature Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, South Coast Repertory), Huong in *Vietgone* (East West Players), original compositions in *All's Well That Ends Well* (OSF), and composer and music director in *Secret in the Wings* (Coourage Theatre Co). Her music project, SURRIJA, explores glitch and warm electronic design in song form. The album earned a nomination for Best Pop Album at San Diego Music Awards 2021. The music video "Southern Winds" earned Best Music Video at Dublin Web Fest 2017. She has worked with Matt Chamberlain, Son Lux, Felicia Day, CDZA, and toured internationally. [Surrija.com](http://Surrija.com) Instagram: @surrija

**Alex Lydon** (*u/s Ted/Cadre/Leng, Rom/Journalist*) is thrilled to be joining the Cyclos for their national tour! Previous credits include *As You Like It* (Quest Players), *Such Things as Vampires* (People's Light), *It Can't Happen Here* (Berkeley Rep), *Sisters Matsumoto* (CenterREP), and the Ground Floor workshop of *Cambodian Rock Band*. Many thanks to Lauren Yee, Chay Yew, and the rest of the Cyclos.

**Joe Ngo** (*Chum*)'s credits include *Cambodian Rock Band* (South Coast Repertory, La Jolla Playhouse, Alley Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Berkeley Repertory, and Signature Theatre NYC; Drama League nomination, Obie Award winner). Other regional credits include *Vietgone* (Studio Theatre), *King of the Yeas* (Baltimore Center Stage and ACT Contemporary Theatre), *White Snake* (Baltimore Center Stage), *Mlima's Tale* (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis). Joe's TV/Film credits include *Crashing* (HBO) and *Funan* (GKids). [www.joe-ngo.com](http://www.joe-ngo.com) Instagram: @joengoinsta

**Vi Tran** (*u/s Chum, Duch*) is pleased to be making his Arena Stage debut. Born in the shadow of Sai Gon, Vietnam and raised in the cattle country of southwestern Kansas, Vi is equal parts sea salt and wheat fields. His autobiographical refugee folk musical *The Butcher's Son* chronicles his family's escape from Vietnam, their capture by the Khmer Rouge, and their resettlement in the meatpacking country of America. It was nominated for eight awards at the 2018 Chicago Musical Theatre Festival, winning Most Promising Musical and Best Leading Performer (Tran). Regional credits include *Cambodian Rock Band* (Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Alley Theatre), *Vietgone* (Unicorn Theatre, American Stage), *Miss Saigon* (Paramount, Western Playhouse). Watch and listen at [youtube.com/vitranmusic](https://youtube.com/vitranmusic). Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram: @vitranmusic

## **PRODUCTION INFORMATION**

**Arena Stage in Association with Alley Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, ACT Theatre/5th Avenue, and Center Theatre Group**

**Presents the Signature Theatre Production of**

**CAMBODIAN ROCK BAND**

**By Lauren Yee**

**Featuring Songs by Dengue Fever**

**Directed by Chay Yew**

**In the Kreeger Theater | July 19 – August 27, 2023**

**ABOUT:** 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.

### **CAST:**

u/s Neary/Sothea, Pou/S21 Guard: Kelsey Angel Baehrens\*

Neary/Sothea: Brooke Ishibashi\*

Duch: Francis Jue\*

Rom/Journalist: Abraham Kim\*

Ted/Cadre/Leng: Tim Liu\*

Pou/S-21 Guard: Jane Lui\*

u/s Ted/Cadre/Leng, Rom/Journalise: Alex Lydon\*

Chum: Joe Ngo\*

u/s Duch, Chum: Vi Tran\*

### **CREATIVE TEAM:**

Playwright: Lauren Yee

Featuring Songs by Dengue Fever

Director: Chay Yew

Set Designer: Takeshi Kata

Costume Designer: Linda Cho

Lighting Designer: David Weiner

Co-Sound Designers: Mikhail Fiksel & Megumi Katayama

Projection Designer: Luke Norby

Wig Designer: Tom Watson

Music Supervisor & Co-Music Director: Jane Lui

Music Supervisor & Co-Music Director: Matt MacNelly

Associate Director: Graham Schmidt

Stage Manager: Merrick A.B. Williams\*

Assistant Stage Manager: Caroline Duffin\*  
Replacement Assistant Stage Manager: Christi B. Spann\*

\*Members of Actors' Equity Association

Support for *Cambodian Rock Band* is provided by **Andrew R. Ammerman**.

Arena Stage offers this production in memory of long-time friend and proud Washingtonian, **Curtis T. Bell**.

### **PLAN YOUR VISIT**

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Cambodian Rock Band* are \$66-105 plus applicable fees. Ticket prices and availability are subject to change. Arena Stage's many savings programs include "pay your age" tickets for those aged 30 and under, student discounts, and "Southwest Nights" for those living and working in the District's Southwest neighborhood. To learn more, visit [arenastage.org/savings-programs](https://arenastage.org/savings-programs).

Tickets are available at [arenastage.org](https://arenastage.org). Tickets may also be purchased by phone at 202-488-3300, or in person at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth Street, SW, D.C., Tuesday-Sunday, 12-8 p.m.

Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300  
Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380

### **PERFORMANCE DATES:**

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday at 7:30 p.m.  
Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8 p.m.  
Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m.  
Weekday matinees at 12 p.m. on August 3, 9, and 16

**Early Curtains:** Sunday, August 20 at 6 p.m.

**Southwest Nights:** Tuesday, July 25 at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, August 5 at 8 p.m.

**Audio-Described Performance:** Saturday, July 29 at 2 p.m.

**ASL-Interpreted Performance:** Saturday, August 19 at 8 p.m.

**Mask-Required Performances:** Tuesday, August 1 at 7:30 p.m.; Wednesday, August 16 at 12 p.m.; Saturday, August 26 at 8 p.m.; and Sunday, August 27 at 2 p.m.

**Closed Captioning:** GalaPro begins Saturday, July 22

### **Post-Show Conversations**

Connect with the show beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with staff and artists on July 27 following the 8 p.m. performance; on August 1 following the 7:30 p.m. performance; and on August 3, 9, and 16 following the 12 p.m. matinees.

**Full Calendar:** [arenastage.org/tickets/calendar](https://arenastage.org/tickets/calendar)

**SAFETY:** Effective May 5, 2023, Arena Stage recommends but does not require that patrons wear facial masks in our theater except in our occasional mask-required performance. These conditions are subject to change, and Arena continues to consult with medical professionals, monitor government best practice recommendations, and engage in industry trainings to ensure the health and safety of our patrons, artists, and staff. For up-to-date information, visit [arenastage.org/safety](https://arenastage.org/safety).

**TRAVEL:** Limited parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage for \$18 to \$30, including drive-up valet parking for \$30. Call 202-488-3300 to purchase in advance. For more information on transportation and other parking options around the Mead Center, visit [arenastage.org/transportation](https://arenastage.org/transportation).

For complete 2023/24 Season details, visit [arenastage.org/season](https://arenastage.org/season).

**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](https://arenastage.org)

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