

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**ARENA STAGE TO HONOR  
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON AND DEBORAH RUTTER  
AT ANNUAL GALA**

**MONDAY, APRIL 28, 2025**

**FEATURING A MUSICAL PERFORMANCE FROM  
TONY AWARD WINNER  
LAURA BENANTI**

(Washington, DC) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announced today the honorees of its **Annual Gala**. For their illustrious careers in public service and the arts, Gala Co-chairs Susan E. Carter and R. Lucia Riddle are thrilled to honor **Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton** and Former President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts **Deborah F. Rutter** as the respective recipients of this year's Beth Newburger Schwartz and American Voice Awards. The one-night-only celebration will be held on **Monday, April 28, 2025**. For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit [arenastage.org/gala](http://arenastage.org/gala).

"We are thrilled to chair the Arena Stage Gala to help support the theater's world-class productions and community outreach," shared **Carter** and **Riddle**. "We look forward to welcoming guests to a joyful evening of great food, stellar performances, and conviviality."

Named for its first recipient, the **Beth Newburger Schwartz Award** celebrates a female leader who betters the community in which she lives and works, through her own unique strengths and talents.

**Norton** has represented and championed the residents of the District of Columbia since 1991. Before joining Congress, she served as the first female chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as appointed by President Jimmy Carter. Her work to secure Federal buildings, her service as chair of the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, and as a member of the Committees on Oversight and Reform Transportation and Infrastructure have brought significant economic development to the District. As a prominent national figure, feminist, civil rights leader, tenured law professor, and board member to three Fortune 500 companies, she has been recognized as one of America's most influential women and one of Washington's most powerful.

Past recipients of the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award include Arlene Kogod, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser, Nina Totenberg, Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, Arena Stage Artistic Director Emerita Molly Smith, and the Honorable Marcia L. Fudge.

Established in 2005, the **American Voice Award** recognizes leaders for their extraordinary support and advocacy of American arts and arts education.

As the first woman to lead the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, **Rutter** oversaw programming across all genres, as well as a global network of education initiatives. In 2019, she opened REACH, the first expansion of the Center's campus designed to bring audiences into the artistic process, setting the stage for dynamic growth. She expanded the Kennedy Center's programming to fully represent the diversity of art in America and introduced social impact and wellness programs across communities. Before her tenure at the Kennedy Center, Rutter held executive leadership roles with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, the Seattle Symphony, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Rutter sits on the board of Vital Voices, is a member of the board of directors of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and served as co-chair of its Commission on the Arts.

Past American Voice Award recipients include Representative Judy Chu (D-CA), Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), the late Representative John Lewis (D-GA), Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, among others.

The evening will feature a cocktail reception, a seated dinner, an unforgettable musical performance from Tony Award winner **Laura Benanti** (*Gypsy*), and the presentation of awards on Arena Stage's in-the-round Fichandler Stage with **Felicia Curry** as Master of Ceremonies.

Arena Stage thanks its Diamond Sponsors: **Decker Anstrom and Sherry Hiemstra, B. Thomas Mansbach, and Tiffeny Sanchez and Reg Brown.**

Gala proceeds support Arena Stage's award-winning Artistic Productions and Community Engagement Programs.

### **Location**

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater  
1101 6th Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024

### **Event Schedule**

5:30pm: Reception

6:30pm: Seated Dinner

8:00pm: Award Presentations and Musical Performance

A reception and dancing will follow the award presentation and performance.

### **Ticket Information**

**Single Pearl Ticket:** \$1,200

- One (1) ticket to the pre-show reception, dinner, award presentation, performance, and after party
- Complimentary valet parking

**Performance Ticket:** \$200

- One (1) ticket to the award presentation, performance, and after party
- Complimentary valet parking

### **Sponsorship Opportunities**

Diamond Sponsor: \$50,000

Sapphire Sponsor: \$30,000

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For more information on ticket or table purchases, please contact Maria Corso at 202-600-4025 or [rsvp@arenastage.org](mailto:rsvp@arenastage.org).

For more information on corporate sponsorships, please contact Abigail Cady at 202-600-4030 or [acady@arenastage.org](mailto:acady@arenastage.org).

For media inquiries, email [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).

### **Biographies**

#### **Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton**

Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton has represented and championed the residents of the District of Columbia since 1991. Before joining Congress, she served as the first female chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as appointed by President Jimmy Carter. Her work to secure Federal buildings in DC and her service as chair of the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit and as a member of the Committees on Oversight and on Reform Transportation and Infrastructure have brought significant economic development to the District.

Congresswoman Norton entered Congress as a prominent national figure, having previously been a civil rights and feminist leader, a tenured law professor, and a board member for three Fortune 500 companies. She has been recognized in surveys as one of the 100 most influential American women and one of Washington's most powerful women. A third-generation Washingtonian, Congresswoman Norton's work for full congressional voting rights and complete democracy for the people of DC continues her lifelong commitment to human and civil rights.

#### **Deborah F. Rutter**

Former President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Deborah Rutter is one of the leading voices in arts administration today. As the first woman leader of the national cultural center, Rutter oversaw programming across all genres, as well as a global network of education initiatives. In 2019 Rutter opened the REACH—the first expansion of the Center's campus designed to bring audiences into the artistic process—setting the stage for dynamic growth. She expanded the Kennedy Center's programming to fully represent the diversity of art in America and introduced social impact and wellness programs across communities.

Before her tenure at the Kennedy Center, Rutter held executive leadership roles with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, the Seattle Symphony, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Rutter sits on the board of Vital Voices, is a member of the board of directors of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and served as co-chair of its Commission on the Arts.

### **Laura Benanti**

Tony® Award winner and five-time Tony® Award nominee Laura Benanti is a highly celebrated stage and screen actress. Benanti co-starred in the hit film *No Hard Feelings* with Jennifer Lawrence and Matthew Broderick and guest stars in Max's *Gilded Age*, Hulu's *Life & Beth* (created by and starring Amy Schumer), and *Elsbeth* on CBS. Benanti earned rave reviews for her portrayal of a grieving widow in Netflix's film *Worth*, starring opposite Michael Keaton, Stanley Tucci, and Amy Ryan. She can currently be seen in the film *Goodrich*, opposite Michael Keaton. She will next be seen in *Everything's Going to Be Great* with Bryan Cranston and Allison Janney. Ms. Benanti's iconic impression of Melania Trump on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* is widely praised. Other TV work includes *Younger*, *Ziwe*, *Gossip Girl*, *Supergirl*, *Nashville*, and *Inside Amy Schumer* (among many others). In the theater, Ms. Benanti took Broadway by storm at the age of 18 as Maria in *The Sound of Music* and has subsequently starred in ten more Broadway shows (musicals, straight plays, comedies, and dramas) including *Into the Woods*, *Nine* (opposite Antonio Banderas), *Gypsy* (for which she won a Tony Award), *She Loves Me*, *My Fair Lady*, and Steve Martin's *Meteor Shower* opposite Amy Schumer and Keegan-Michael Key. This year, Ms. Benanti debuted her highly celebrated solo comedy show *Laura Benanti: Nobody Cares*, which she created, wrote, and starred in. This *New York Times* critic pick is available for streaming on Audible.

### **Felicia Curry**

Felicia Curry appeared at Arena Stage this season in both Karen Zacarias's adaptation of *The Age of Innocence* and Ken Ludwig's adaptation of *Death on the Nile*. Most recently, she was in the one-woman thriller, *Sandra*, at TheaterWorks Hartford, and performed her solo cabaret at Everyman Theatre. Felicia received a Helen Hayes Award for *Lela & Co.* at Factory 449 where she is a company member. She is also a Resident Company Member at Everyman Theatre and an Artistic Associate at Ford's Theatre. Felicia made her Broadway debut in the Tony-nominated revival of *Into the Woods*, and then toured with the show around the country, including at The Kennedy Center. She has a Berkshire Theatre Critics Award, a RTCC Award, an Anderson-Hopkins Award, and is a two-time AUDELCO nominee for *Queens Girl in the World* at Abingdon Theatre and *Fabulation* at The Billie Holiday Theatre, both off-Broadway. Felicia has been named one of "12 DC Stage Dynamos" by *The Washington Post* and one of "DC's Biggest Theater Stars" by *Washingtonian* magazine. She is on the WAPAVA Board of Directors and the Emmy-nominated host of *WETA Arts* on PBS.

*The first racially integrated theater in our nation's capital and a pioneer of the regional theater movement, Arena Stage was founded in 1950 in Washington, D.C. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Hana S. Sharif and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. We produce plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit, and present diverse and groundbreaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Consistently contributing to the American theatrical lexicon by commissioning and developing new plays, Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement and serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. [arenastage.org](http://arenastage.org)*

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