

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES MOLLY SMITH'S FINAL PRODUCTION AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

“MY BODY NO CHOICE”

MONOLOGUES FROM EIGHT OF AMERICA'S MOST EXCITING PLAYWRIGHTS
REFLECT ON WOMEN'S CHOICES PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Washington, D.C.—Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater today announced **Molly Smith's** final production before she steps down as Artistic Director: ***My Body No Choice***, which features monologues from eight of America's most dynamic female playwrights on women's choices on the autonomy of their bodies.

In a deliberate nod to the voting age of 18—one of the most important milestones in a young person's life—this limited engagement of ***My Body No Choice*** will run for just 18 performances in the **Kogod Cradle**, from October 20 through November 6, in the run up to the mid-term elections. **Press night will be held on Thursday, October 20, at 7:30 pm.** In addition, **all tickets are priced at \$18.** General admission tickets are available now at arenastage.org/mybody.

“To say I was devastated when *Roe v. Wade* was smashed by the Supreme Court is an understatement,” said **Smith**. “With the clock being turned back 50 years, women are once again second-class citizens in the United States of America. After reading voraciously about the decision, I knew that I had to quickly make a theater piece that provided a forum for the shared experience of what this decision feels like to lose this important choice.”

My Body No Choice will explore the importance of bodily autonomy, from the ability to choose—or not—to have an abortion, to the freedom to choose one's body size, to making a decision around when to end one's life. The short stories are both fiction and non-fiction by eight of America's most exciting female writers, who are: **Lee Cataluna** (*Home of the Brave*), **Fatima Dyfan** (Woolly Mammoth Theatre New Work Fellow), **Lisa Loomer** (*Roe*), **Dael Orlandersmith** (*Stoop Stories*), **Sarah Ruhl** (*In the Next Room, or the vibrator play*), **Mary Hall Surface** (*Perseus Bayou*), **V** (formerly **Eve Ensler**) (*The Vagina Monologues*), and “**Anonymous**.” These tremendous artists and their monologues represent a rich diversity of theatrical storytelling and personal experiences.

“Women need to tell their stories,” said **Smith**. “For far too long, women have been afraid to tell their stories, particularly about abortion. The national conversation around gay rights changed dramatically when people came out to their families, friends, and neighbors. Suddenly everyone knew someone who was gay, and being gay was normalized.”

“Now, women need to change the conversation around choices that are being made for them, around the autonomy of their bodies in large part by people who have no experience of what it is like to be a woman. We need to tell our stories; it’s past time.”

“When Molly reached out to me, I said of course I would be happy to help with this important initiative. I had been thinking along the same lines and hadn’t put pen to paper yet,” says playwright **Sarah Ruhl**. “This moment in America is an all hands on deck situation; artists, thinkers, activists, providers, patients, politicians—we ALL need to do our part to create visibility around the importance of women’s health and reproductive justice for all people in a post-Roe world. It is a nightmarish situation.”

As an important part of this production, Arena Stage invites all women, trans, and non-binary individuals from all over the United States to share *their* stories about choices and their bodies, in videos of up to 2 minutes in length. Up to 18 videos will be showcased on Arena Stage’s digital media properties, extending the experience of *My Body No Choice* long after the lights have come down and the run has ended. Learn more and submit your story at arenastage.org/mybody.

The full creative team and casting will be announced at a later date.

PLAYWRIGHT BIOGRAPHIES (in alphabetical order)

Lee Cataluna is hard at work on a piece for Arena Stage’s Power Plays series, writing about the bloody riot that followed the surprising results in the election of Hawaii’s last king. Her play *Heart Strings*, which tells a story about a chosen family using traditional Hawaiian string figures, is currently in production at Atlantic Theater. Lee’s other work includes *Sons of Maui* for San Francisco Playhouse, *What the Stars See at Night* for La Jolla Playhouse, and *Home of the Brave* for La Jolla Playhouse’s POP Tour. She was born on Maui, is part Native Hawaiian, and has an MFA in Creative Writing from UC Riverside. www.leecataluna.com

Fatima Dyfan (she/her/hers) graduated from Georgetown University with a BA in Government and African American Studies with a minor in Theater & Performance Studies in 2021. Fatima explores mixed medium writing that illuminates life. She served as the Executive Producer of GU’s Black Theatre Ensemble for two years. With them, she directed Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls...* and ended her collegiate career with a performance art thesis exploring autobiographical notions of black womanhood. She was able to work the piece as a Playwright in the Playwright’s Arena at Arena Stage from 2020-2021. She is currently spending a year at Woolly Mammoth Theatre as the New Work Fellow through the Miranda Family Fellowship. She is a performer, poet, and creative spirit who believes in healing, community, care, and the immense power of imagination.

Lisa Loomer’s plays include *Roe*, *Living Out*, *The Waiting Room*, *Distracted*, *Homefree*, *Café Vida*, *Expecting Isabel*, *Two Things You Don’t Talk About at Dinner*, *Birds*, *Bocón!*, *Maria! Maria Maria Maria*, and *Broken Hearts*. Her work has been produced at Roundabout, Vineyard Theatre, Second Stage, INTAR, The Public, Mark Taper Forum, Arena Stage, South Coast Repertory, Kennedy Center, Seattle Repertory, Denver Center, La Jolla, Trinity Repertory, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Missouri Repertory, and in Mexico, Israel, Egypt, and Germany. Screenwriting credits include *Girl*, *Interrupted* and pilots for HBO, CBS, FOX, and Showtime. She has received awards from the American Theatre Critics (twice), Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays, Lurie Foundation, Edgerton Foundation, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, Jane Chambers Playwriting Award (twice), an Imagen Award, and an Ovation Award. She’s currently writing the books for the musicals *Real Women Have Curves* and *Like Water for Chocolate*.

Dael Orlandersmith’s plays include *Stoop Stories*, *Black n’ Blue Boys/Broken Men*, *Horsedreams*, *Bones*, *The Blue Album*, *Yellowman*, *The Gimmick*, *Monster*, and *Forever*. Ms. Orlandersmith was a Pulitzer Prize

finalist and Drama Desk Award nominee for *Yellowman* and the winner of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *The Gimmick*. Dael is the recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts grant, The Helen Merrill Award for Emerging Playwrights, a Guggenheim, along with several other awards and honors. Her play *Forever* was commissioned and performed at the Mark Taper Forum/Kirk Douglas Theatre, followed by performances at the Long Wharf Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, and Portland Center Stage. Her play *Until the Flood* was done at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, followed by Rattlestick Theater, Milwaukee Rep, Portland Center Stage, ACT Seattle, Arcola Theatre in London, the Druid at the Galway Arts Festival, the Traverse at Edinburgh Festival, the Schaubühner Theatre in Berlin, and at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC. Ms. Orlandersmith is working on a commission for Rattlestick Theater called *Watching the Watcher*. She recently opened *New Age* at Milwaukee Rep directed by Jade King Carroll and *Antonio's Song/I Was Dreaming of a Son* co-written with Antonio Suarez Edwards and directed by Mark Clement. She is also working on a new work with writer/performer David Cale called *You Don't Know the Lonely One*, and is working on a new piece called *Spiritas*. In 2020, Ms. Orlandersmith received the Doris Duke Award.

Sarah Ruhl is an award-winning American playwright, author, essayist, and professor. Her plays include *The Oldest Boy*; *Dear Elizabeth*; *Stage Kiss*; *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play* (Pulitzer Prize finalist, 2010); *The Clean House* (Pulitzer Prize finalist, 2005; Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, 2004); *Passion Play* (Pen American Award, Fourth Freedom Forum Playwriting Award from the Kennedy Center); *Dead Man's Cell Phone* (Helen Hayes Award for Best New Play); *Melancholy Play*; *Demeter in the City* (nine NAACP Image Award nominations); *Scenes From Court Life*; *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage*; *For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*; *Eurydice*; *Orlando*; and *Late: a cowboy song*. Her plays have been produced on Broadway and across the country as well as internationally, and translated into fourteen languages. Originally from Chicago, Ms. Ruhl received her M.F.A. from Brown University, where she studied with Paula Vogel. She is the recipient of a Helen Merrill Emerging Playwrights Award, a Whiting Writers' Award, a PEN Center Award for mid-career playwrights, a Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, and a Lilly Award. She is a member of 13P and New Dramatists and won the MacArthur Fellowship in 2006. She teaches at Yale School of Drama and lives in Brooklyn with her family. sarahruhplaywright.com

Mary Hall Surface is a DC-based playwright, director, producer, and teaching artist. She was proud to be a playwright for both of Arena's 2020 film projects, *May 22, 2020* and *The 51st State*. A nine-time Helen Hayes Award nominee, including four for the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play, she received the 2002 Outstanding Director of a Musical for her *Perseus Bayou*. Her plays have been produced across the US, Europe, Japan, Taiwan, and Canada, including eighteen Kennedy Center productions. Her 2018 direction of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* (Constellation Theatre Company) was recognized by *The Wall Street Journal* as one of the outstanding regional theater productions of the year. She is the proud founding artistic director of DC's Atlas INTERSECTIONS Festival, where she curated over 600 all-arts performances and events from 2009–2015. She currently delights in presenting creative and reflective writing workshops inspired by art through the National Gallery of Art, the Smithsonian Associates, and museums nationwide, as well as through her own new Writers' Studio on Italy's Amalfi Coast. www.maryhallsurface.com

V (formerly **Eve Ensler**) is the Tony Award-winning playwright and author of the Obie Award-winning theatrical phenomenon *The Vagina Monologues* (translated into 48 languages and performed in 140 countries), along with many other plays. She is the author of a number of books including her latest bestsellers *The Apology* (translated into more than 15 languages) and *In the Body of the World*, as well as the *New York Times* bestseller *I am an Emotional Creature*. She starred on Broadway in *The Good Body*, and most recently Off-Broadway at Manhattan Theatre Club in the critically acclaimed *In the Body of the World*. During the COVID-19 pandemic she helped create *That Kindness: Nurses in Their Own Words*, a tribute to nurses presented by Brooklyn Academy of Music in accordance with theaters all across the country. Film credits include *The Vagina Monologues* (HBO), *What I Want My Words to Do to You* (Executive Producer, PBS), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Consultant). She is founder of V-Day—the 23-

year-old global activist movement which has raised over 120 million dollars to end violence against all women (cisgender and transgender), those who hold fluid identities, nonbinary people, girls, and the planet—and founder of One Billion Rising, the largest global mass action to end gender-based violence in over 200 countries, as well as a co-founder of City of Joy. She writes regularly for *The Guardian*.

“Anonymous” is a D.C. Metro-based artist who is honored to have her work at Arena Stage, and honored to be in the company of extraordinary sister playwrights. She has chosen to remain anonymous to highlight how private and personal our choices are. She has chosen to have her voice heard to highlight the need for all women to speak their truths in their own ways at this critical juncture in human history. Pain is personal and powerful. Pain is both private and political.

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

My Body No Choice

Monologues by Lee Cataluna, Fatima Dyfan, Lisa Loomer, Dael Orlandersmith, Sarah Ruhl, Mary Hall Surface, V (formerly Eve Ensler), and “Anonymous”

Directed by Molly Smith

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | October 20 – November 6, 2022

ABOUT:

In June 2022, reproductive rights took a giant leap backwards when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. In the United States, we can drive when we turn 16, and vote when we turn 18. But we no longer have the bodily autonomy to make the choices that will impact us the most.

In *My Body No Choice*, Molly Smith’s final directorial venture for Arena Stage, eight of America’s most exciting female playwrights share what choice means to them, through the telling of fiction and non-fiction stories rooted in personal experience; theirs or a friend’s. Because this is a time when women need to tell their stories.

Support for *My Body No Choice* is provided by **The Artistic Director Fund** and **Sue Henry and Carter Phillips**.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

TICKETS: Tickets for *My Body No Choice* are \$18, and seating is general admission. Tickets may be purchased online at arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 (Tuesday – Sunday, 12:00-8:00 p.m.), or in person at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth Street, SW, D.C. (only on performance days, and only starting 90 minutes prior until curtain).

PERFORMANCE DATES:

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday at 7 p.m. (no performance on October 25)

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday at 1:30 p.m.

Full Calendar: arenastage.org/tickets/calendar

SAFETY: Arena Stage requires that patrons, staff, and volunteers wear facial masks inside the Mead Center, unless actively eating or drinking, regardless of vaccination status. 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.

TRAVEL: Limited parking is available in Arena Stage’s on-site garage and the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, SW, one block from the Mead Center for American Theater, and ranges from \$18-27.

Please visit arenastage.org/transportation for information on transportation to and parking around the Mead Center, and call 202-488-3300 to purchase parking in advance.

For complete 2022/23 Season details, visit 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

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