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MEDIA RELEASE

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

***** Arena Stage selected to administer new program that supports seven new play projects; partnership aims to enhance the ability for the nation's nonprofit theaters to bring new work to full production *****



(Washington, D.C.) The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) announced a new program today, the NEA New Play Development Project (NPDP), to help the nation's nonprofit theaters bring more new plays to full production. The national program will be hosted by Arena Stage's American Voices New Play Program. Selecting and providing support for exceptional new plays and new play development models will be a key component of the program. The NEA New Play Development Project will support the development of seven new plays at theaters from across the country. Two projects selected as NEA Outstanding New American Plays will receive up to \$90,000 each to support advanced development, including at least one full production. Five projects selected as NEA Distinguished New Play Development Projects will receive up to \$20,000 each to support the early stages of development for a new play with strong potential to merit a full production. In both cases, the selected plays will be developed in close collaboration with the playwrights.



"A full production is really the only way a playwright and his or her audience can fully experience a play in the way it was intended to be experienced. We're delighted to announce the NEA's New Play Development Project to help the best of the nation's new plays achieve that goal," said Bill O'Brien, NEA Director of Theater and Musical Theater. "We're also delighted have such an outstanding organization as Arena Stage helping us to administer the program. They bring an enormous amount of experience to the project, and we applaud the substantial commitment they are making in the support of new work on a national scale."

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The NEA New Play Development Project will further support artistic excellence in the theater field by actively encouraging the study of and dialogue around existing and new models for new play development. The seven new plays supported by the program also will be studied as part of that ongoing dialogue. In partnership with the NEA, Arena Stage will provide a forum that will not only encourage this discussion but will actively support the dissemination of any findings throughout the field.

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"This is one of the most important partnerships in Arena's history," said Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith. "We fiercely believe in American writers and have focused our mandate to study, explore, and reveal American voices. In partnership with the NEA, our dream will be realized on a national level through this extraordinary program."

Already a recognized leader in the theater field, Arena Stage is one of the nation's oldest nonprofit theaters with a focus on American work. Arena's new partnership with the Arts Endowment will fall under the leadership of Producing Artistic Associate David Dower. Dower, the founding Artistic Director of San Francisco's Z Space Studio, one of the nation's leading laboratories for the development of new work, also created the Western Presenters Commissioning Initiative, through which ten West Coast presenters jointly commissioned a dozen new works specifically for touring.

The NEA has previously supported new play development through a separate initiative administered by the Theater Communications Group, the NEA/TCG Theatre Residency Program for Playwrights, which will conclude in 2009. That program fosters relationship building and information sharing between institutions and resident playwrights. The NEA New Play Development Project will respond to current challenges and opportunities that exist in the field. It will also add a formal component for the dissemination, study, and discussion of various models for new play development.

The Arts Endowment expects that the application guidelines for the new program will be available by late spring 2008 and that the inaugural round of projects will be announced in fall 2008.

*The **National Endowment for the Arts** is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established, bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases. For more information, please visit www.arts.gov.*

***Arena Stage's** core purpose is to produce huge plays of all that is passionate, exuberant, profound, deep and dangerous in the American spirit. Now in its sixth decade, Arena Stage has become renowned as one of the most robust not-for-profit theaters in the United States, attracting a diverse annual audience of more than 200,000. In January 2008, Arena Stage will commence construction to make way for the new Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater—a \$125 million expansion of the current campus including the addition of a 200-seat venue dedicated solely to new American theater. The Center is scheduled to open in 2010. For more information please visit www.arenastage.org.*

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