

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 TO HONOR U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JOHN LEWIS (D-GA) WITH THE AMERICAN VOICE AWARD THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2019

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will present the American Voice Award to **U.S. Representative John Lewis (D-GA)** on **Thursday, May 9, 2019**. Beginning at 6:00 p.m. the evening will include a cocktail reception in the Bank of America Lower Lobby with a seated dinner in the Molly Smith Study. Tazewell Thompson, playwright and director of *Jubilee*, will give remarks. *Jubilee* is inspired by the world-renowned a cappella African American ensemble born on the campus of Fisk University. Rep. Lewis is a graduate of Fisk University. The seated dinner will feature the presentation of the American Voice Award to U.S. Representative John Lewis.

The **American Voice Award** honors elected officials recognized for their extraordinary support of and advocacy for American arts and arts education. Rep. Lewis has dedicated his life to protecting human rights, securing civil liberties and building what he calls “The Beloved Community” in America. As a student at Fisk University, Congressman Lewis organized sit-in demonstrations at segregated lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee. By 1963, he was dubbed one of the Big Six leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, was named chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and was one of the speakers at the historic March on Washington. After participating in the Freedom Rides and the March from Selma to Montgomery, among other civil rights actions, Congressman Lewis was also appointed by President Jimmy Carter to direct more than 250,000 volunteers of ACTION, the federal volunteer agency. He was elected to Congress in 1986 and represents the 5th Congressional District of Georgia. He holds a B.A. in Religion and Philosophy from Fisk University, and he is a graduate of the American Baptist Theological Seminary.

“Congressman Lewis is an American hero and we are proud to present this award to him. His work for the lives of all Americans is exemplary and his leadership has been fearless for decades,” shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**.

Past recipients of the Award include Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), Congressman G. K. Butterfield (D-NC), Senators Thad Cochran (R-MS), Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT); Representatives Tom Davis (R-VA), Norman D. Dicks (D-WA), Bob Matsui (D-CA) and Jim Moran (D-VA); Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge (D-Ohio); former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts Dana Gioia; Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC); and Congressman Chris Van Hollen (D-MD).

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After writing and directing numerous productions at Arena Stage, Tazewell Thompson returns with his world-premiere a cappella production *Jubilee*, which is inspired by the world-renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers who shattered racial barriers in the U.S. and abroad, entertaining kings and queens through their bold a cappella performances. Performances run through June 9, 2019.

For media inquiries, please email press@arenastage.org.

Jubilee is generously supported by **Exelon Corporation, Altria Group, AARP, Inc., Comcast NBCUniversal, Andrew R. Ammerman, R. Lucia Riddle, Dr. Donald Wallace Jones, Dr. Betty Jean Tolbert Jones and Tracey Tolbert Jones.**

In addition to the *Jubilee* production sponsors; the event is generously sponsored by **Arent Fox, LLP.**

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 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

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