

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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arenastage.org/press-room/press-kits/2021-press-kits/american-prophet-press-kit

CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT AND MARCUS HUMMON
TO DEBUT WORLD-PREMIERE MUSICAL *AMERICAN PROPHET*,
BASED ON THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS
AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER
JULY 9 – AUGUST 16, 2020

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces the world-premiere musical *American Prophet*, directed and co-written by award-winning playwright **Charles Randolph-Wright** (Broadway's *Motown The Musical*) and featuring new music by Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter and co-script writer **Marcus Hummon**. The musical chronicles the life and legacy of one of the most notable human rights leaders of the 19th century, Frederick Douglass. Known as one of the greatest leaders of the abolitionist movement, Douglass was a prominent activist, author, orator and statesman. His own words power the soaring new melodies and original script. Directed by Randolph-Wright, *American Prophet* runs **July 9 - August 16, 2020 in the Kreeger Theater**.

Arena Stage is excited to welcome back Randolph-Wright after his world-premiere production *Born For This: The BeBe Winans Story*. Randolph-Wright was a member of the inaugural class of resident playwrights. During his time at Arena, he has amassed an impressive repertoire of works including *Blue*, *Cuttin' Up*, *Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies*, *Ruined*, *Love in Afghanistan* and more. *American Prophet* marks his twelfth show at Arena.

"Frederick Douglass always has been the ultimate hero to me, and *American Prophet* is one of the most inspiring projects I have ever done at Arena," shares **Randolph-Wright**. "What a perfect place and a perfect time to tell this extraordinary and necessary story. How did this escaped slave become one of the most important people of the 19th century - of any century? The answer is in Douglass' own words, and Marcus Hummon and I are proud and humbled to help bring these transcendent words to the stage."

"When Charles Randolph-Wright shared the first Marcus Hummon songs with me, they took my breath away. Marrying some of Frederick Douglass' words to beautiful music is powerful," explains Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "It's rare to focus on Frederick Douglass in the theater—and his time is now. What he has to say about freedom and life in America has great resonance for us today."

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Kenneth B. Morris Jr. is proud to see his family history come to life on the stage. Morris is a descendant from two of the most influential names in American history. He is the great-great-great grandson of Frederick Douglass and the great-great grandson of Booker T. Washington. He is also the co-founder and President of the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives.

“Frederick Douglass’ legacy as a social reformer reminds us all of our inherent dignity and our duty to uphold the inalienable rights of all members of the human family. I am humbled that Marcus Hummon and Charles Randolph-Wright found inspiration in the life story of my great ancestor,” explains **Morris Jr.** “On behalf of the Douglass family, I thank them and the *American Prophet* team for animating his life and that of my great-great-great-grandmother, Anna Murray-Douglass. I pray that the spirit of Frederick and Anna will live intensely in the hearts and minds of everyone who has an opportunity to attend this powerful Arena Stage production.”

Full casting will be announced at a later date.

Following a reading at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center in 2018, *American Prophet* is produced in association with Reggie Hill.

To hear a preview of some of the music from *American Prophet*, please visit arenastage.org/tickets/american-prophet

For additional information about *American Prophet*, visit: americanprophetthemusical.com

Charles Randolph-Wright (*Co-writer/Director*) is thrilled that *American Prophet* will be his 12th production at Arena. His other directing credits include *Motown the Musical* (Broadway, London and tour), *Porgy and Bess* (75th anniversary tour), *Guys and Dolls* (the 50th anniversary National Tour), *They're Playing Our Song* (in Brasil in Portuguese) and the Broadway-bound musical, *Born for This* (co-written with Bebe Winans). Charles also directed and co-wrote *The Diva Is Dismissed* (starring Jenifer Lewis) and *Just Between Friends* (Bea Arthur on Broadway). For TV, Charles' directing credits include *Greenleaf*, *Katy Keene*, *Step Up Highwater*, *Lincoln Heights* and *Live at Lincoln Center*. He directed the award-winning film *Preaching to the Choir*, the European Freestyle campaign for Nike and produced and wrote the series *Linc's*. Charles is the executive producer of the film *Maurice Hines: Bring Them Back* (Grand Jury Prize at the NY Doc Film Festival). www.Randolph-Wright.com.

Marcus Hummon (*Co-writer/Composer*) is a Grammy winner and inductee to the Nashville Songwriter Association International's Hall of Fame. Hummon has enjoyed a successful career as a songwriter, recording artist, composer, playwright and author. His songs have been recorded in many genres, including pop, R&B, gospel and most notably in country music, where he has written some of the genre's most iconic songs. Hummon has written six musicals and an opera. Three of his musicals, *Warrior*, *The Piper* and the musical-dance-hybrid *Tut* were featured Off-Broadway. Hummon has received seven BMI Awards, and five BMI #1 Awards, including Rascal Flatts' *Bless the Broken Road*, which won the 2005 Grammy for 'Best Country Song'. He has published two books *Anytime, Anywhere* and *The Passion*. Hummon is a native of Washington, D.C., and is thrilled to work at Arena Stage.

American Prophet

Book by Charles Randolph-Wright and Marcus Hummon

Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright

Music and lyrics by Marcus Hummon

In the Kreeger Theater / July 9 - August 16, 2020

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ABOUT: Charles Randolph-Wright (*Born For This: The BeBe Winans Story*, Broadway's *Motown the Musical*) returns to Arena Stage with a ground-breaking musical tribute to Frederick Douglass. Douglass' own words power the soaring new melodies and original script from Grammy Award-winning songwriter Marcus Hummon and Randolph-Wright. This daring and heart-stirring new work moves through Douglass' life as a fierce abolitionist and distinguished orator featuring interactions with key figures including President Abraham Lincoln and his own wife, Anna Murray Douglass without whom his defiant escape from slavery would not have been possible. Filled with stirring new songs including "What Does Freedom Look Like," "We Need a Fire" and a "A More Perfect Union," this world-premiere celebrates the enduring legacy of one of history's first freedom fighters.

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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