

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CORNELIUS SMITH JR. TO PERFORM AS FREDERICK DOUGLASS  
IN *AMERICAN PROPHET: FREDERICK DOUGLASS IN HIS OWN WORDS*  
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 **Cornelius Smith Jr.** (ABC's *Scandal* and *All My Children*) will perform in Arena Stage's 2020/21 Season.

**Cornelius Smith Jr.** will play Frederick Douglass in the world-premiere musical, *American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words*. Douglass' words power the soaring new melodies and original script from Grammy Award-winning songwriter **Marcus Hummon** and **Charles Randolph-Wright** (Broadway's *Motown the Musical*). Directed by Randolph-Wright, *American Prophet* runs **July 9 - August 16, 2020 in the Kreeger Theater**.

"What makes a theater great? Great artists," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "*American Prophet* is a dynamic and dramatic new musical and I look forward to having Cornelius Smith Jr. shine as Frederick Douglass."

"I am excited to direct the extraordinary artist Cornelius Smith Jr. in a portrayal of a young Frederick Douglass that we have never seen," shares director **Charles Randolph-Wright**. "Cornelius takes Frederick's words to a level that resonates with today's audience while honoring Douglass' astounding prescience from 170 years ago."

**Cornelius Smith Jr.** (*Frederick Douglass*) co-starred as Marcus Walker on ABC's hit series *Scandal* for four seasons. From 2007-2011, Smith starred as Dr. Frankie Hubbard on the daytime television drama *All My Children*, for which he earned an Emmy nomination and won an NAACP Image Award. He most recently appeared in the Amazon Studios feature film *Seberg* opposite Anthony Mackie & Kristen Stewart. Smith will next be seen in a recurring role on the Lionsgate TV/Spectrum Originals anthology series *Manhunt: Lone Wolf* and the Netflix Limited Series *Self-Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* opposite Octavia Spencer and Tiffany Haddish playing the role of W.E.B DuBois. He also played Michael Houston in Angela Bassett's directorial debut, made-for-television movie *Whitney*, and has appeared in episodes of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *Forever* and *Major Crimes*. He is thrilled to be making his Arena Stage debut. Smith holds a Master of Fine Arts from New York University Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Acting Program. [www.corneliusmithjr.com](http://www.corneliusmithjr.com)

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## Page 2— American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words Casting Announcement

**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](http://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.

Additional casting will be announced at a later date.

### World-premiere musical

***American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words***  
**Music, lyrics and book by Marcus Hummon**  
**Written and directed by Charles Randolph-Wright**  
**In the Kreeger Theater | July 9 - August 16, 2020**

**ABOUT:** Frederick Douglass' own words power the soaring new melodies and original script from Grammy Award-winning songwriter Marcus Hummon and Charles Randolph-Wright. This daring and heart-stirring new work presents Douglass as a fierce abolitionist and distinguished orator featuring interactions with key figures including President Abraham Lincoln and Douglass' own wife, Anna Murray-Douglass, without whom his defiant escape from slavery would not have been possible. Filled with electrifying new songs including "What Does Freedom Look Like," "We Need a Fire" and "A More Perfect Union," this world premiere celebrates the enduring legacy of one of history's first freedom fighters.

To hear a preview of some of the music from *American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words*, please visit [arenastage.org/tickets/american-prophet](http://arenastage.org/tickets/american-prophet).

**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](http://arenastage.org)

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