

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 ADDITIONAL PLAYWRIGHTS TO JOIN AMBITIOUS POWER PLAYS INITIATIVE COMMISSIONING AND DEVELOPING 25 NEW PLAYS OVER 10 YEARS

***** Playwrights Emily Feldman, Lauren Yee, Karen Zacarías and Zack Zadek join Power Plays initiative, exploring stories of politics and power from 1776 through today *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announces four additional commissioned playwrights as a part of **Power Plays**, an ambitious initiative commissioning and developing 25 new plays and musicals from a diverse mix of writers, composers and lyricists over the course of 10 years. Playwrights **Lauren Yee, Zack Zadek, Emily Feldman** and **Karen Zacarías** join previously commissioned playwrights with projects underway, including **Eduardo Machado**, whose Power Play *Celia and Fidel*, a perceptive and authentic look at Fidel Castro's most trusted confidant and political partner, Celia Sánchez, enjoys its world premiere in Arena's Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle, February 28 through April 12, 2020.

"One of the best parts of the Power Play cycle is the wildly different artists we are able to commission to write plays about the 25 decades of America's life as a nation," stated Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "Both Lauren Yee and Karen Zacarías are two of the most produced playwrights in America. Their fertile imaginations have brought theater plays like, *Cambodian Rock Band* and *Destiny of Desire*. Zack Zadek and Emily Feldman are joining forces on a musical about Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the women in his life. I look forward to reading the first drafts of each of these new stories and following wherever these talented playwrights take us."

The Power Plays initiative features American stories of politics and power, exploring the people, events and ideas that have helped shape our country's narrative and identity, with one story per decade, beginning with 1776 through the current decade. These works have the ability to show America at its best and worst, to bring people together who may not otherwise find themselves in the same room and to introduce audiences to historical figures they may not know or understand. Power Plays feature works by well-established writers, as well as those who are in the earlier stages of their careers in theater, embracing the diversity of our country to understand who we are as Americans.

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Power Plays encompasses five unique voices cycles:

- Presidential Voices – plays about exceptional presidents and remarkable events in their lives
- African-American Voices – plays that herald African-American stories in our country's history and politics
- Insider Voices – plays that delve into an exclusive perspective on the complex workings of American institutions or cultures
- Musical Theater Voices – musicals that celebrate political ideas and events
- Women's Voices – plays that shine a spotlight on women in our country's political life

With this initiative, Arena Stage amplifies its role as a national center dedicated to American voices and artists, located in the heart of the nation's capital. Upcoming play and musical commissions are focused on such diverse topics as Oklahoma's "Black Wall Street," Fidel Castro and witchcraft.

Power Plays build on the tremendous success of previous Arena Stage commissions focused on both political figures and historic events including **Lawrence Wright's** *Camp David* (2014), which explored the pivotal 1978 Camp David Accords between President Jimmy Carter, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat; **John Strand's** *The Originalist* (2015), which offered a rare portrayal of the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia; **Jacqueline E. Lawton's** *Intelligence* (2017), which fictionalizes the true events of a covert operative who protects the United States' national security post-9/11; **Bob Banghart, Georgia Stitt and John Strand's** *Snow Child* (2018), which follows a couple's voyage to rebuild themselves in the Alaskan wilderness; **Mary Kathryn Nagle's** *Sovereignty* (2018), which drew past and present parallels between sovereign nations and the U.S. government; and **Aaron Posner's** *JQA* (2019), which presented a unique look into the childhood, adulthood and late life of John Quincy Adams. Previously commissioned playwrights also include: **Nathan Alan Davis; Eve Ensler; Kenneth Lin; Craig Lucas; Eduardo Machado; and Theresa Rebeck.**

For information about sponsorship and branding opportunities associated with Power Plays, contact Ryan Merkel at rmerkel@ArenaStage.org or 202-600-6042.

Playwright Biographies

Emily Feldman (*Playwright*)'s work has been developed by Roundabout Theatre Company, The Playwrights Realm, Alliance Theatre, Second Stage Theater, A.C.T., Portland Center Stage, La Jolla Playhouse and Actors Theatre of Louisville, among others. Her play *The Best We Could (a family tragedy)* will premiere at Manhattan Theatre Club in 2020. Alum: The Working Farm at SPACE on Ryder Farm, I-73 at Page 73, the Jerome Fellowship/Core Apprenticeship at the Playwrights' Center, Orchard Project Greenhouse and New Harmony Project Two Rivers Emerging Playwrights Group. Current: Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at the Juilliard School, core writer at The Playwrights Center, commissions from Manhattan Theatre Club and Playwrights Horizons. Emily has taught playwriting at Playwrights Horizons Theater School at NYU and holds an M.F.A. from University of California, San Diego and a B.A. from Middlebury College.

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Lauren Yee (*Playwright*)'s *Cambodian Rock Band*, with music by Dengue Fever, premiered at South Coast Rep. with subsequent productions at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, City Theatre, Merrimack Rep, Signature Theatre, Portland Center Stage and Jungle Theatre. Her play *The Great Leap* has been produced at the Denver Center, Seattle Repertory, Atlantic Theatre, the Guthrie Theatre, American Conservatory Theatre, Arts Club, InterAct Theatre and Steppenwolf, with future productions at Long Wharf and Asolo Rep/Miami New Drama. Honors include: The Doris Duke Artists Award, Whiting Award, Steinberg/ATCA Award, American Academy of Arts and Letters Literature Award, Horton Foote Prize, Kesselring Prize, Primus Prize, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton and the number one and number two plays on the 2017 Kilroys List. She's a residency five playwright at Signature Theatre, a new dramatist's member, a Ma-Yi Writers' Lab member and a playwright's realm alumni playwright. T.V. credits include: Apple's *Pachinko* and Netflix's *Soundtrack*. Current commissions include: Geffen Playhouse, La Jolla Playhouse, Portland Center Stage, Second Stage and South Coast Rep. BA: Yale. MFA: UCSD. www.laurenyee.com.

Karen Zacarías (*Playwright*) was recently hailed by American Theater Magazine as one of the 10 most-produced playwrights in the U.S. Her award-winning plays include: *The Copper Children*, *Destiny of Desire*, *Native Gardens*, *The Book Club Play*, *Legacy of Light*, *Mariela in the Desert*, *The Sins of Sor Juana*, the adaptations of *Just Like Us*, *Into the Beautiful North* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent*. She is the author of 10 renowned TYA musicals and the Marvel play *Squirrel Girl Goes to College*, and the librettist of several ballets. She is one of the inaugural resident playwrights at Arena Stage (where she has been produced four times), a core founder of the Latinx Theatre Commons – a large national organization of artists seeking to update the American narrative with the stories of Latinos – and she is the founder of the award-winning Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT). YPT was cited by the Obama Administration as one of the best arts-education programs in the nation. Karen was just voted 2018 Washingtonian of the Year by Washingtonian Magazine for her advocacy work involving the arts. She was an inaugural 2019 Sine Fellow for Policy Innovation at American University and was selected by The League of Professional Theatre Women to receive the 2019 Lee Reynolds Award given annually to a woman in theater who has helped illuminate the possibilities for social, cultural or political change. She also was awarded the 2019 medallion by the Children's Theater Foundation of America for her advocacy for youth and the arts. Karen lives in Washington, D.C. with her husband and three children.

Zack Zadek (*Playwright*) is a composer, lyricist, playwright and songwriter with Warner/Chappell. Zack has been named by Playbill "A Contemporary Musical Theatre Songwriter You Should Know," and was a MacDowell Fellow, a VCCA Fellow, and currently is a 2019 Dramatist Guild Fellow. Zack won the Weston New Musical Award for his book, music and lyrics to *Deathless* (dir. Tina Landau), which was produced at Goodspeed Musicals in 2017. His work has been developed and presented at The Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center, Roundabout, Lincoln Center, The Kennedy Center, New York Stage and Film, The 5th Avenue Theatre, TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, The Lark, Arena Stage, Goodspeed Musicals, SPACE on Ryder Farm, Weston Playhouse, Finger Lakes Musical Theatre Festival, Legacy Theatre, NYMF, The Mitten Lab and in the UK at the London Theatre Workshop and Edinburgh Fringe. He is a two-time finalist for the Kleban Prize as a librettist and a lyricist, a three-time Jonathan Larson Grant Finalist, SigWorks at Signature Theatre finalist, KSF Artists of Choice finalist and winner of the inaugural NMI/Disney Imagineering New Voices Award. Other pieces include: *The Crazy Ones* (dir. Sam Buntrock/Hunter Bird); *The Role of a Lifetime* (dir. Jerry Mitchell); and *6* (dir. Sheryl Kaller/Max Friedman). Upcoming projects include: *Store Brand* (dir. Jaki Bradley), which is being developed by The Civilians and current commissions from Mike Bosner Productions, Jill Furman Productions, Arena Stage and Ars Nova. He is currently a writer-in-residence with The Orchard Project Greenhouse and Ars Nova.

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For more information on the Power Play initiative please visit <https://www.arenastage.org/about-us/artistic-initiatives/power-plays/>.

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.
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