

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Lauren McMillen/Samantha Schneider  
[press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org), 202-600-4055

February 18, 2020

### ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER ANNOUNCES COMPANY'S 2020/21 SEASON

\*\*\* Season features five world premieres, four Power Plays, three musicals infused with electrifying, contemporary music, comedy and drama from a line-up of diverse talent including Nathan Alan Davis, Lynn Nottage, Charles Randolph-Wright and Theresa Rebeck \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie announce the 2020/21 Season. The season reflects Arena Stage's commitment to compelling, dynamic work that is packed with drama, humor and music. This season, more than half of our playwrights and directors are represented by women and people of color. Stories of politics and power are celebrated in the four world-premiere Power Plays. As part of Arena's mission to serve artists on a national, regional and local scale, two exciting collaborations will take place with Denver Center Theatre Company and Hartford Stage.

"Luscious. This is one of our most ambitious seasons yet with five world premieres, four Power Plays and three musicals," shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "This season is full of con men and saints, strong comedies and terrific dramas and so much music! It's a joy to see our Power Play commissioning program yield such remarkable and diverse stories — from 1770s to 1920s to 1960s to right now."

In July, the season kicks off with the previously announced world-premiere musical **American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words**, by award-winning playwright **Charles Randolph-Wright** (Arena's *Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story*, Broadway's *Motown the Musical*) and Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter **Marcus Hummon**. Randolph-Wright directs this musical that chronicles the early life and legacy of one of the most notable human rights leaders of the 19th century. **Cornelius Smith Jr.** (ABC's *Scandal*, *All My Children*) takes on the role of the iconic author, human rights leader, orator and statesman, Frederick Douglass.

The season of powerhouse musicals continues with **Catch Me If You Can**, a cool jazz score filled with a hip sensibility for the entire family. Based on true events and the hit film, **Corbin Bleu** (Arena's *Anything Goes*, Broadway's *Kiss Me, Kate*) returns to Arena to step into the role of the notorious con man Frank Abagnale Jr. Directed by **Molly Smith**, this musical features the hit songs "Don't Break the Rules" and "Live in Living Color." An exciting new voice emerges in the new year with the acclaimed young Canadian composer **Britta Johnson** and her compelling musical, **Life After**, directed by **Annie Tippe**. This award-winning work explores the messiness of loss and the complexities of love, when a young girl unravels the secrets of her recently deceased father.

A riotous comedy, **Pearl Cleage's Angry, Raucous and Shamelessly Gorgeous**, directed by **Susan V. Booth**, builds bridges across generations. The comedic drama from **Lynn Nottage**, **Crumbs from the Table of Joy**, directed by **Hana S. Sharif**, is a tender, funny and empowering coming-of-age story in 1950s Brooklyn.

—continued—

## Page 2 – Arena Stage announces 2020/21 season

Acclaimed monologist **Mike Daisey** tackles the climate emergency with his one-man show ***The Change***. Deputy Artistic Director **Seema Sueko** directs the Tony Award-winning ***Rashomon***, a passionate, tragic and ultimately comic mystery revealing the elusiveness of truth when a samurai is found dead in the forest and everyone claims responsibility.

The season's four Power Plays will focus on stories of politics and power from 1776 through present day. **Theresa Rebeck's** (NBC's *Smash*) world-premiere drama ***Enlightenment*** takes on witchcraft, equality and women's rights in 1776. Playwright **Nathan Alan Davis** addresses Black Wall Street in ***The High Ground***. Directed by **Megan Sandberg-Zakian**, this eye-opening drama shows how a soldier struggles to restore his town to its former glory.

The season culminates with the world premiere of ***Change Agent***, written by **Craig Lucas** and directed by **Molly Smith**. This captivating story imagines conversations between celebrated and unsung figures in history surrounding pivotal events in American history in the 1960s.

### **Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater 2020/21 Schedule\***

#### ***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**

Charles Randolph-Wright (Arena's *Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story*, Broadway's *Motown the Musical*) returns to Arena Stage with a ground-breaking musical about Frederick Douglass, portrayed by Cornelius Smith Jr. (ABC's *Scandal*, *All My Children*). 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 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.

#### ***Enlightenment***

**Written and Directed by Theresa Rebeck**

**In the Kreeger Theater | September 11 – October 18, 2020**

It's 1776. Witchcraft meets American Enlightenment aspirations when news of the Declaration of Independence drifts into the Pennsylvania woods. Mr. Ames is inspired by the founder's notions of equality, but his high ideals may not extend to his entire household. His wife and slaves ask, "When it says all men are created equal, does that mean me?" Named "one of her generation's major talents" (*New York Times*), Pulitzer Prize-finalist Theresa Rebeck dares to explore the state of equality and women's rights during the War of Independence.

#### ***The Change***

**Conceived and Directed by Mike Daisey**

**In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | October 9 – November 1, 2020**

Preeminent monologist Mike Daisey (*A People's History*, *The Trump Card*) takes on the end of this world in the premiere of *The Change*. In an epic story that plays out in three distinct parts — *Yesterday*, *Today*, and *Tomorrow* — Daisey interrogates our skill at hiding from the truth by confronting the climate crisis that both terrifies and paralyzes us. From "the master storyteller" (*New York Times*), *The Change* is an intimate, intensely personal call to face this existential threat with humor and heart.

### **Page 3 – Arena Stage announces 2020/21 season**

#### ***Catch Me If You Can***

**Book by Terrence McNally**

**Music by Marc Shaiman**

**Lyrics by Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman**

**Based on the Dreamworks Motion Picture**

**Directed by Molly Smith**

**Choreographed by Parker Esse**

**In the Fichandler Stage | October 23 – December 13, 2020**

Based on true events and the hit film, see how a charming, young con man posed as an airline pilot, doctor, lawyer and then escaped police custody all before he turned 22. Helen Hayes award-winning actor Corbin Bleu returns to Arena Stage (Arena's *Anything Goes*, Broadway's *In the Heights*, Broadway's *Kiss Me, Kate*) to take on the title role of confidence man Frank Abagnale Jr. The Tony-nominated musical comedy is jammed packed with dynamic numbers such as "Don't Break the Rules," "Live in Living Color" and "Doctor's Orders." *Catch Me if You Can* is "is a high-flying musical comedy" (*Hollywood Reporter*) packed with cool jazz for the entire family.

#### ***Angry, Raucous and Shamelessly Gorgeous***

**In Association with Denver Center Theatre Company and Hartford Stage**

**By Pearl Cleage**

**Directed by Susan V. Booth**

**In the Kreeger Theater | November 12 – December 20, 2020**

Decades ago, Anna Campbell shocked the theater world with her sensational and controversial work, *Naked Wilson*. Returning to the United States after a self-imposed exile, Anna is to be honored with a performance of her seminal work at a women's theater festival. The trouble is, the producers have cast a younger and less-experienced actress in Anna's original role and now the two must find common ground in order to move forward with the show and with their own lives. Novelist and playwright Pearl Cleage's "crowd-pleasing" (*Atlanta Journal Constitution*) comedy is the ultimate showdown. Will Anna reclaim her fame or bow out gracefully for the next generation?

#### ***Life After***

**Book, Music and Lyrics by Britta Johnson**

**Directed by Annie Tuppe**

**Choreographed by Ann Yee**

**In the Kreeger Theater | January 15 – February 21, 2021**

Grieving the recent loss of her famous father, 16-year-old Alice begins to question the events surrounding his death and sets out to uncover what really happened on the night that changed her family forever. With a soaring and gorgeous score, Britta Johnson's *Life After* is a bittersweet and witty new musical that explores the mess and beauty of loss and love. Through the vivid imagination of a young woman looking for the facts, we find a more complicated truth instead. The "startlingly talented" (*The Toronto Star*) playwright and composer Johnson delivers "musical theater perfection" (*Broadway World*) in this compelling and "life-affirming" (*Talkin' Broadway*) journey.

## **Page 4 – Arena Stage announces 2020/21 season**

### ***Rashomon***

**By Fay Kanin and Michael Kanin**

**Based on stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa**

**Directed by Seema Sueko**

**In the Fichandler Stage | February 5 – March 7, 2021**

A samurai is found dead in the forest. His wife, a bandit and a medium confound the court with their conflicting accounts of what transpired. Based on the dynamic stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Fay and Michael Kanin's Tony Award-winning *Rashomon* reveals the elusiveness of truth in this passionate, tragic and ultimately comic exploration of humanity.

### ***The High Ground***

**By Nathan Alan Davis**

**Directed by Megan Sandberg-Zakian**

**In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | February 26 – April 11, 2021**

The legacy of Black Wall Street, a once thriving community destroyed in the 1921 Tulsa race riots, lingers in the mind of an African American soldier. It is no coincidence that Standpipe Hill, known for its fateful role in the riots is where he wages a daily protest. Frustrated by the racial injustices then and now, he stages a one-man crusade to restore his town to its former glory, putting him at odds with local authorities. Will he accomplish his mission, or will we bear witness to history repeating itself again? Arena's third Power Play from 2018 Whiting Award-winner Nathan Alan Davis is a dynamic and compelling story on how the actions of the past still impact us today.

### ***Crumbs From the Table of Joy***

**By Lynn Nottage**

**Directed by Hana S. Sharif**

**In the Fichandler Stage | April 2 – May 2, 2021**

Teenage sisters Ernestine and Ermina are adjusting to their new life in 1950s Brooklyn which is humming with the energy of the Civil Rights Movement. Their opinionated aunt's talk of revolutions leads their neighbors to believe they are communists. However, nothing compares to their biggest adjustment — their father's surprise marriage to a German woman just days after meeting her on the New York subway. Told through the eyes of 17-year-old Ernestine, Pulitzer Prize-winner Lynn Nottage's "entertaining production" (*Chicago Theatre Review*) is a tender, funny and ultimately empowering coming-of-age story.

### ***Change Agent***

**By Craig Lucas**

**Directed by Molly Smith**

**In the Kreeger Theater | April 23 – May 30, 2021**

The Cuban missile crisis, the Civil Rights Movement and the Cold War were just some of the most influential periods in U.S. history. What if you could relive those moments through the people and leaders who experienced them directly? Tony Award-nominated (Broadway's *An American in Paris*, *Light in the Piazza*) playwright Craig Lucas' provocative Power Play imagines conversations between figures from history, who were celebrated, controversial and unsung. These insider voices were responsible for influencing major decisions that are still shaping our country today.

*\*Plays, artists and dates are subject to change.*

**Subscription packages are now on sale and may be purchased by calling the Arena Stage Sales Office at 202-488-3300 or by visiting [arenastage.org](https://arenastage.org).**

## Page 5 – Arena Stage announces 2020/21 season

**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)

###

