

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 AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER ANNOUNCES SEASON TO BEGIN IN JANUARY 2021

*** The five-production season will celebrate works from acclaimed playwrights Lydia R. Diamond, Marcus Hummon, Britta Johnson, Eduardo Machado, Charles Randolph-Wright and August Wilson***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie announced the updated 2020/21 Season during a livestreamed event with the *Washington Post*'s Peter Marks. The season reflects Arena Stage's commitment to compelling, dynamic work that is packed with drama, humor, music and first-class storytellers. With this line-up, Arena Stage continues its commitment to strong representation for artists of color and women artists. The first three productions *Celia and Fidel*, *Seven Guitars* and *Toni Stone* were previously scheduled in the 2019/20 Season but were cut short due to COVID-19 restrictions. Musicals *American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words* and *Life After* will round out the season calendar. The five-production season which includes two world premieres, one Power Play and two musicals will begin January 22. The season livestreamed event can be viewed [here](#).

"We are a theater that focuses on American plays, American ideas and American artists. The double impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have made us as Americans more introspective than before," states Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith. "It's a time for looking deeply inward. We need a combination of soulfulness and joy—Arena's season offers both thought-provoking and joyful projects that provide a powerful antidote to this moment in time. The season is full of soul and champagne, with energizing stories and soaring music."

The season opens in January with Arena Stage's seventh Power Play, *Celia and Fidel*. Originally produced in the 2019/20 Season, *Celia and Fidel*, opened and closed on the same day because of the pandemic. Written by Eduardo Machado and directed by Molly Smith, this captivating story follows Fidel Castro's rise to power, his political partner and closest confidant, Celia Sánchez, who inspired a revolution, and their fight over the children of the revolution, and the future of a nation.

Toni Stone, the "must-see play" (*Theatermania*) based on the real-life woman who became the first female athlete to play professional baseball in the Negro Leagues will receive its Washington premiere in March. Award-winning playwright Lydia R. Diamond and director Pam MacKinnon tell the vibrant story of Stone's life as she throws curveballs both on and off the field.

Longtime Arena favorite Tazewell Thompson returns to direct August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* starting in April. The untimely death of a gifted blues guitarist forces seven friends to reunite unexpectedly. Wilson's fifth play in his American Century Cycle is the culmination of Arena's August Wilson Festival, celebrating the noted playwright during Arena's 70th Anniversary Season.

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The world-premiere musical ***American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words*** co-written 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** will open in May. Randolph-Wright directs this powerful musical about one of the most notable human rights leaders and impassioned agitators who changed the course of history with his own revolution.

Our final show of the season brings the exciting new voice of acclaimed young Canadian composer, **Britta Johnson**. Her compelling musical, ***Life After***, directed by award winner, **Annie Tippe** (Octet), makes its East Coast premiere in August. 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.

Arena Stage has and continues to prioritize the safety of its staff, artists and audiences in its planning to re-open the building and theaters. "Our North Star remains the health and wellbeing of our employees and artists. Equally, it is our duty to adhere to all health authority directives in creating a safe place for our many patrons to gather to enjoy a production. Arena Stage finds its resiliency in the value our many supporters have placed on our enterprise and the confidence they are all expressing in our mission to create a safe place where all are welcome," said Executive Producer **Edgar Dobie**. "Let's keep Arena in the low risk cohort of institutions that will emerge from this pandemic changed for certain and as purposeful as ever."

Arena for more than 70 seasons has been a home for exhilarating theater, dynamic artists and meaningful programs and events. Even with a closed building, Arena continues to innovate and engage audiences and artists by going virtual with a full and robust roster of creative online programs. The *Looking Forward* Season continues with weekly and monthly events including **Molly's Salons, Broadway dance classes, Masterclasses, Civil Dialogues, over 45 gifts of art, an Artists Marketplace, Facebook watch parties and two world-premiere films, May 22, 2020 and Inside Voices: a film by Arena Stage's Voices of Now ensembles**. Arena Stage's Community Engagement team has continued to connect with young artists through its **virtual camp**, the new **audition intensive** and its **Voices of Now ensembles**. To learn more about the Looking Forward Season, visit: arenastage.org/lookingforward. Stay tuned for an exciting announcement about the Fall/Winter online season.

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. All current subscribers will be contacted by the Sales Office to discuss their options and confirm their show selection.

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

Celia and Fidel

By Eduardo Machado

Directed by Molly Smith

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle | January 22 – March 7, 2021

Can one woman change the mind of a man and the fate of a nation? Fidel Castro's most trusted confidant and political partner, Celia Sánchez is never far from his side as he grapples with how to move his country forward. It's 1980 and a failing economy has led 10,000 Cuban citizens to seek asylum at the Peruvian Embassy in Cuba. Castro must decide what kind of a leader he wants to be, merciful or mighty. Imbued with magical realism, Arena Stage's seventh Power Play imagines a conversation between Cuba's most influential female revolutionary and its most notorious political leader in a contest between morality and power.

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Celia and Fidel was generously commissioned by Drs. Elliot and Lily Gardner Feldman and BakerHostetler LLP as part of Arena Stage's Insider Voices Power Play Cycle. Additional support provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Toni Stone

By Lydia R. Diamond

Directed by Pam MacKinnon

Choreographed by Camille A. Brown

In Association with American Conservatory Theater presenting The Roundabout Theatre Company's production of *Toni Stone* and Samantha Barrie

In the Kreeger Theater | March 11 – April 25, 2021

Considered a pioneer, Toni Stone is the first woman to play baseball in the Negro Leagues, also making her the first woman to play professionally in a men's league in the 1950s. Against all odds, Stone blazes a path in the male-dominated sports world, shattering expectations and creating her own set of rules. Based on Martha Ackmann's book *Curveball, The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone*, the latest work from award-winning playwright Lydia R. Diamond (*Smart People, The Bluest Eye*) tells the dynamic and uplifting story of Stone's journey of perseverance and resilience just to do what she loved the most – play baseball.

Supporting Sponsorship for *Toni Stone* is generously provided by AT&T, Susan and Steve Bralove, Exelon, Sue Henry and Carter Phillips.

August Wilson's Seven Guitars

By August Wilson

Directed by Tazewell Thompson

In the Fichandler Stage | April 23 – May 23, 2021

The 1940s Pittsburgh is the backdrop for August Wilson's fifth cycle play and the second production in the August Wilson Festival. Seven lives are interconnected when old friend and blues singer Floyd Barton vows to turn his life around after a surprise windfall leaves him hopeful for a second chance. Infused with rich and soaring blues rhythms, this "rich and exceptionally vivid" (*Variety*) play pits the desire for a better future against the harsh realities ultimately leading to heartbreaking and unescapable circumstances.

Prime Sponsorship for August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* is generously provided by AARP and Comcast. Supporting Sponsorship is generously provided by Judith N. Batty, Patricia and David Fisher and Margot Kelly.

American Prophet: Frederick Douglass In His Own Words

Co-written and Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright

Co-written and Music by Marcus Hummon

In the Kreeger Theater | May 28 – July 3, 2021

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, activist John Brown and Douglass' wife, Anna Murray-Douglass, without whom his defiant escape from slavery would not have been possible.

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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 revolutionary legacy of one of history’s first freedom fighters.

Prime Sponsorship for *American Prophet* is generously provided by Exelon, David Bruce Smith and The Grateful American Foundation. Supporting Sponsorship for *American Prophet* is generously provided by Andrew R. Ammerman, Judith N. Batty, Dr. Donald Wallace Jones, Dr. Betty Jean Tolbert Jones and Tracey Tolbert Jones, PNC, R. Lucia Riddle and Tiffeny Sanchez and Reg Brown.

Life After

Book, Music and Lyrics by Britta Johnson

Directed by Annie Tippe

Choreographed by Ann Yee

In the Kreeger Theater | August 13 – September 26, 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.

Prime Sponsorship for *Life After* is generously provided by Beth Newburger Schwartz. Supporting Sponsorship for *Life After* is generously provided by Catherine and Chris Guttman-McCabe.

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

Arena is grateful for and acknowledges the support of a group of Chairpersons of its Board of Trustees who has agreed to match all ticket donations made through December 31, 2020 ensuring that Arena Stage comes roaring back. Donations can be made at arenastage.org/ticketdonation.

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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