



the mead center
for american theater

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CURTIS T. BELL DONATES \$2.5 MILLION TO POWER PLAYS INITIATIVE AT ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announced today that **Curtis T. Bell** has made a **\$2.5 million gift towards the theater's ambitious Power Plays initiative**. Over the next 10 years, Arena Stage will commission and develop 25 new plays and musicals focused on stories of politics and power. Bell's contribution will be leveraged as a matching gift challenge, ultimately raising an additional \$2.5 million to fully fund the Presidential Voices cycle of the initiative.

"Curt has given us an enormous gift, and we'll be reaping the rewards for years to come," shares Executive Director **Edgar Dobie**. "For theaters to remain healthy, new work has to be part of what you're tackling. It's often the new work that's the most engaging, and there's a sense of pride of seeing it first. With Power Plays, what we have is a risk worth taking and a risk worth supporting. We have to do this. We've matured with our mission to focus on the American voice and American stories, but that can't just be projects that have already been created. At least half of what we're doing is feeding the cannon. What Curt has done is given us the freedom to be courageous and ambitious in mining these veins of new work."

Power Plays encompasses five distinct cycles—Presidential Voices, African-American Voices, Insider Voices, Musical Theater Voices and Women's Voices. The Presidential Voices cycle includes the previously produced *Camp David* by Lawrence Wright, which explored the pivotal 1978 Camp David Accords between President Jimmy Carter, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, and will include future projects on John Quincy Adams and Theodore Roosevelt, among others.

"We've just come out of a riveting presidential campaign, one that woke up everyone in the country about presidential elections—even those who had no interest before," says **Bell**. "Through Power Plays, Arena is ensuring that people who live here know the political figures and the stories that have shaped this powerful city. Through the Presidential Voices cycle, Arena is ensuring that we understand where powerful figures come from—and what they do once they get into office. For Arena, it's the role of a lifetime. I'm honored to play a small part in giving back to an organization that has given so much to me."

Power Plays is the largest commissioning project in Arena Stage's history and will feature one story per decade, beginning with 1776 through today. Seven commissioned projects are currently in development, with playwrights Nathan Alan Davis, Eve Ensler, Rajiv Joseph, Mary Kathryn Nagle, Aaron Posner, Sarah Ruhl and John Strand. Jacqueline E. Lawton's *Intelligence* is currently running through April 9, 2017 as the third commission to debut as part of the initiative, joining *Camp David* and John Strand's *The Originalist*, which offered a rare portrayal of the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.

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Curtis T. Bell, a Washington, D.C. native, has been an entrepreneur and real estate investor in the D.C. region for over five decades. During his teenage years, he worked at his parent’s silver and antique store located on 722 13th Street NW, which assisted many First Ladies and D.C. dignitaries. The business catered to the Washington Carriage Trade. His childhood home was situated on 24 acres inside the Beltway on Old Georgetown Road. The sale of the estate home and other real estate investments has afforded him the opportunity to give back to the D.C. theater community and other D.C. charities.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Director 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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