

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ARENA STAGE HONORS U.S. SUPREME COURT
JUSTICE KETANJI BROWN JACKSON
WITH THE AMERICAN VOICE AWARD**

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater presented the **American Voice Award** to **Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson** on **Thursday, February 22, 2024**, as part of the Opening Night celebration for the world premiere of **Kia Corthron's *Tempestuous Elements***.

Established in 2005, the American Voice Award honors public officials recognized for their extraordinary support of and advocacy for American arts and arts education. **Justice Jackson** has repeatedly demonstrated her dedication to fighting for human and civil rights and her deep commitment to equal justice. She is both the first Black woman and the first former federal public defender to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Jackson also has a unique connection to theater, having participated in student productions and an improv group throughout her career at Harvard. She was sworn in as the 116th Supreme Court Justice on June 30, 2022. Justice Jackson earned both her Bachelor of Arts and Juris Doctor from Harvard University, graduating with the latter *cum laude* in 1996.

The award was presented by Arena Stage Artistic Director **Hana S. Sharif** at the pre-performance dinner. "It is a distinct privilege to present this award to Justice Jackson on the opening night of *Tempestuous Elements*, a play that reflects on the life and legacy of another arts advocate, educational luminary Anna Julia Cooper," said **Sharif** in her remarks. "Justice Jackson stands in the magnificent tradition of Anna Julia Cooper as a trailblazing leader, undaunted by inequity and galvanized by her work in service of liberation and Justice for all people. This is emblematic of the spirit of the American Voice Award. I am honored to stand in the company of all of you this evening to present Justice Jackson with this award."

American Voice Award recipients previously honored by Arena Stage include Representative Judy Chu (D-CA), Senator Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), the late Representative John Lewis (D-GA), and Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), among others.

Corthron's *Tempestuous Elements* follows Anna Julia Cooper's fights for her students' right to an advanced curriculum. When her tenure as principal of D.C.'s historic M Street School is sabotaged by her colleagues and neighbors, Cooper's professional and personal relationships become fodder for innuendo and social ostracization. This inspiring new Power Play commission takes audiences on the journey of this formidable Black feminist's fight for educational equity, freedom, and legitimacy at the turn of the 20th century. Directed by **Psalmayene 24**, and featuring an ensemble cast led by **Gina Daniels** as Cooper, the world-premiere production runs through March 17, 2024, on Arena Stage's iconic in-the-round Fichandler Stage.

The *Tempestuous Elements* Opening Night celebration included a reception in the Bank of America Lower Lobby, a seated dinner in the Molly Smith Study, the performance in the Fichandler Stage, and a

post-show reception in the Grand Lobby. In addition to the award presentation, the dinner featured remarks from **Corthron**, Arena Stage Board Chair **Catherine Guttman-McCabe**, and AARP Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Director of Internal Engagement **Gerri Madrid-Davis**.

To view photos of the evening, please visit [here](#).

Arena Stage thanks **Tiffeny Sanchez and Reg Brown** for their generous sponsorship of *Tempestuous Elements* and their tremendous support of Black storytelling in DC.

Tempestuous Elements is also made possible through generous funding from **AARP** with additional support from **Susan and Steve Bralove, Dr. Donald Wallace Jones, Dr. Betty Jean Tolbert Jones, and Tracey Tolbert Jones, PNC, and The Drs. Elliot and Lily Gardner Feldman Endowment for New Plays at Arena Stage**.

This project is supported in part by the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

In addition to *Tempestuous Elements* production sponsors, the Opening Night Celebration is supported by **GEICO**.

The first racially integrated theater in our nation's capital and a pioneer of the regional theater movement, Arena Stage was founded on August 16, 1950, in Washington, D.C., by Zelda Fichandler, Tom Fichandler, and Edward Mangum. Today—nearly 75 years later—Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. We produce plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit, and present diverse and ground-breaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Consistently contributing to the American theatrical lexicon by commissioning and developing new plays, Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement and serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

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