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**ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM
FOR NEW PLAY CELEBRATING ANNA JULIA COOPER**

TEMPESTUOUS ELEMENTS

By KIA CORTHRON

Directed by PSALMAYENE 24

*** Arena's 11th Power Play brings to life hidden D.C. history ***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater announced today the cast and creative team for the world premiere of *Tempestuous Elements*, playwright **Kia Corthron**'s new work exploring the trailblazing career of visionary Black feminist and educational luminary Anna Julia Cooper. Directed by **Psalmayene 24**, the production will run **February 16 – March 17, 2024**, on Arena Stage's iconic in-the-round Fichandler Stage. Press Night will be held on **Thursday, February 22 at 8 p.m.** For more information and tickets, please visit arenastage.org/elements.

Tempestuous Elements follows Cooper as she 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, her professional and personal relationships become fodder for innuendo and social ostracization. This inspiring new play 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.

"I was researching my play *Fish*, about the contemporary public school system, when I came across legendary writer/activist/speaker and primarily educator Anna Julia Cooper," said **Corthron**. "She was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, and lived to be 105, so had a long career. I was especially interested in her tenure as principal/teacher at D.C.'s renowned M Street School in the years around the turn of the twentieth century. So, when Arena Stage offered me a commission for a new play (the subject matter was up to me), I was eager to explore this Washington treasure."

"D.C. audiences are among the most curious and thoughtful theatergoers in the nation. And we are so excited for them to join us in exploring the legacy and impact of Anna Julia Cooper's tenure at M Street School," said Arena Stage Artistic Director **Hana S. Sharif**. "Kia Corthron's passion for deconstructing

the intersecting threads of political pressures challenging Cooper's life's work soars in this production and will undoubtedly spark conversation around the state of education today."

Tempestuous Elements is the 11th addition to Arena Stage's Power Play initiative. The program was launched in 2016 to commission original works on politics and power, reflecting American diversity and challenges through five cycles and voices—presidential, African American, insider, musical theater, and women's voices. Previously produced Power Plays include Lawrence Wright's *Camp David* (2014); John Strand's *The Originalist* (2015); Jacqueline E. Lawton's *Intelligence* (2017); Bob Banghart, Georgia Stitt, and John Strand's *Snow Child* (2018); Mary Kathryn Nagle's *Sovereignty* (2018); Aaron Posner's *JQA* (2019); Eduardo Machado's *Celia and Fidel* (2021); Craig Lucas' *Change Agent* (2022); Nathan Alan Davis' *The High Ground* (2023); and Kenneth Lin's *Exclusion* (2023).

"I've lived in Harlem, New York City, for decades. But I grew up in Cumberland, a valley in the Maryland Appalachians, and remember childhood trips to D.C. where my grandmother and other relatives lived at the time," continued **Corthron**. "I graduated from the University of Maryland in College Park, and then lived and worked for a few years in the D.C. area. So, in writing the play, I had a sense of homecoming. I made sure to have references that Washingtonians could appreciate (like W.E.B. Du Bois, who is a character in the play, speaking of the "swamp" with regard to D.C. summer weather). It would be wonderful if *Tempestuous Elements* went on to subsequent productions, but none could mean more than its premiere at Arena Stage, presented before the citizens of the city Anna Julia Cooper loved and adopted as her own."

This D.C. story will be brought to life by a talented ensemble comprised largely of D.C.-based actors.

Returning to Arena are cast members **Kelly Renee Armstrong** (*Our War*), **Peter Boyer** (*Holiday*), **Renea S. Brown** (*Change Agent*) **Gina Daniels** (*Roe*), **Jasmine Joy** (*POTUS*), **Paul Morella** (*All My Sons*), **Kevin E. Thorne II** (*Seven Guitars*), and **Renee Elizabeth Wilson** (*Seven Guitars*).

Making their Arena Stage debuts with *Tempestuous Elements* are cast members **Joel Ashur** (Mosaic Theater's *Confederates*), **Ro Boddie** (Round House Theatre's *The Mountaintop*), **Jonathan Del Palmer** (Folger Theatre's *The Winter's Tale*), **Brittney Dubose** (Liva Garra Theatre's *The Window King*), **Yetunde Felix-Ukwu** (Round House Theatre's *Nollywood Dreams*), **Lolita Marie** (Olney Theatre's *The Brothers Paranormal*), and **Monique Paige** (Studio Theatre's *Breath, Boom*).

The *Tempestuous Elements* creative team includes Set Designer **Tony Cisek**, Costume Designer **LeVonne Lindsay**, Lighting Designer **William K. D'Eugenio**, Original Music and Sound Design by **Lindsay Jones**, Hair and Wig Designer **LaShawn Melton**, Associate Director and Choreography by **Tony Thomas**, Dialect and Vocal Coach **Lisa Nathans**, Text Director **Anita Maynard-Losh**, Dramaturg **Otis Ramsey-Zöe**, Casting Director **Joseph Pinzon**, Stage Manager **Christi B. Spann**, and Assistant Stage Manager **Jalon Payton**.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES (in alphabetical order)

Kelly Renee Armstrong (*Lottie/Abigail*) is an actor and writer who last appeared at Arena Stage in *Our War*. Regional credits include *Bov' Water* (Northern Stage), *The Call* (Theater J), *The Elder Statesman* (Washington Stage Guild), *Invisible Man* (u/s, Studio Theatre), and *Yellowman* and *Antigone Project* (Rep Stage). Kelly received the Maryland Individual Artist Award grant and was a finalist for the Many Voices Fellowship. She has developed her plays with the Playwrights' Center, Playwrights' Arena, and Eden Theater Company. Kelly is a proud graduate of Bowie State University and holds an MFA in Acting and Playwriting from The Catholic University of America. Much love to Kaliah and my family! kellyreneearmstrong.com

Joel Ashur (*Mr. Turner/Francis/Atwood*) recently concluded *Confederates* at Mosaic Theater. Other credits include *Bars and Measures* at Mosaic Theater, *Good Bones* at Studio Theatre, *How the Light Gets In* at 1st Stage, *Nollywood Dreams* at Round House Theatre, *Sweat* at Fulton Theatre, *Sister Act* at North Carolina Theatre, *Lombardi* at Actors Theatre of Indiana, and *A Friend of a Friend* at Capital Repertory Theatre.

Ro Boddie (*Hiram/W.E.B. Du Bois*) is proud to be making his Arena Stage debut. Select D.C. area appearances include *The Mountaintop*, *Radio Golf*, *The Tempest*, and *A Boy and His Soul* (Round House Theatre) and *Pipeline*, *Three Sisters*, and *No Sisters* (Studio Theatre). New York credits include *Socrates* (The Public Theater) and *Seize the King* (Classical Theatre of Harlem). Select regional credits include Bay Street Theater, Mark Taper Forum, La Jolla Playhouse, Cleveland Play House, and Baltimore Center Stage. Television credits include *Godfather of Harlem*, *Run the World*, *The Good Wife*, *Elementary*, and *Person of Interest*. Ro is an alum of University of the North Carolina School of the Arts and recipient of the 2016 Actor of the Year Craig Noel Award. Instagram: @roboddieart

Peter Boyer (*Male Understudy*) previously appeared at Arena Stage as Henry in *Holiday* and as Voice of Cop in *The High Ground*. Notable roles include Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Broadway Christmas Carol* at MetroStage, Groucho Marx in *Groucho: A Life in Revue* at Wayside Theatre, Dromio of Syracuse in *Comedy of Errors* at Baltimore Shakespeare Festival, Captain Hook in *Tinkerbell* and Captain Braidbeard in *How I Became a Pirate* at Adventure Theatre, and Charles Dickens in *Discord* and Mr. Praed in *Mrs. Warren's Profession* at Washington Stage Guild. His one-person play *Captain Hook: My Story, or How I Clawed My Way to the Top* was produced at Spotlighters Theatre in collaboration with the Baltimore Playwrights Festival, and at Artistic Synergy of Baltimore. www.petersbrain.art

Renea S. Brown (*Ernestine/Lula/Mrs. Cook*) last appeared in Arena Stage's *Change Agent*. Recent credits include Camae in *The Mountaintop* and Dede in *Nollywood Dreams* (Round House Theatre); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Our Verse in Time to Come*, and *The Reading Room Festival* (Folger Theatre); *Love Factually* (Kennedy Center); *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* (Shakespeare Theatre); and more. Off-Broadway: Short New Play Festival (Red Bull Theater). Regional: American Shakespeare Center, Kentucky Shakespeare, Island Shakespeare Festival, Quintessence Theatre, Nebraska Rep, Arizona Theater Company, and more. Renea has an MFA from The Academy of Classical Acting. You can catch her in *Metamorphoses* at Folger Theatre this summer! Instagram/TikTok: @therealdarklady www.reneabrown.com

Gina Daniels (*Anna*) appeared at Arena Stage in *Roe* in 2017. Later that year, she was in *The Effect* at Studio Theatre. Gina was in the Broadway companies of *Network* and *All The Way; Becomes a Woman* at Mint Theater Company; *Judgement Day* at Park Avenue Armory; *The White Snake* at Wuzhen Theatre Festival; and *Angels in America* at Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, as The Angel. Her other credits include Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Syracuse Stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Portland Center Stage, Paper Mill Playhouse, Arden Theatre, TheaterWorks Hartford, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Baltimore Center Stage, Geva Theatre Center, and Pittsburgh Public Theater, among others. In 10 seasons at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Gina appeared in over 30 productions, originated roles in a dozen world premieres and ran Shakespeare's gamut from Perdita to Portia to Puck. Television/Film credits include *Law & Order*, *Evil*, *Manifest*, *FBI*, *Orange is the New Black*, and *Lapsis*. www.gina-daniels.com

Jonathan Del Palmer (*Male Understudy*) is excited to make his Arena Stage debut. His most recent appearance on a D.C. stage was in *The Winter's Tale* (Folger Theatre). Other recent D.C. credits include *Life Jacket* (4615 Theatre); *The Rainmaker*, *columbinus*, and *The Member of the Wedding* (1st Stage); *Day of Absence* (Theater Alliance); *Moon Man Walk* (Constellation Theatre Company); *Suddenly Last Summer* (Avant Bard Theatre); and *Our Verse in Time to Come* (Folger Theatre). Del also appeared in *How to Quit*

Your Day Job at 54 Below in New York City and was trained at the National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts. Instagram: @jonathandelpalmer

Brittney Dubose (*Lucretia/Annie*) is excited to return home to D.C. after living in Texas for 24 years and beyond thrilled to be making her Arena Stage debut! Her regional credits include *The Window King* (Live Garra Theatre) and *A Change Gon' Come* (The Finest! Performance Troupe). Some of her other credits include *Her Stories* (Soul Rep Theatre Company), *Temple Spirit* (Echo Theatre), and *The Bluest Eye* (Jubilee Theater). Brittney's film credits include *The Starter Marriage* directed by Arthur Muhammad and *Color Me You* directed by Marco Bottiglieri. Instagram: @brittney_dubose

Yetunde Felix-Ukwu (*Minerva/Miss Patterson*) last appeared at Arena Stage in the staged reading of *Scarfoot Lives*. Locally she was most recently seen in the Helen Hayes-nominated *Nollywood Dreams* (Round House Theatre). Select regional credits include *A Christmas Carol* (TheatreSquared); *Babel* (Unicorn Theatre); and *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* (Kansas City Repertory Theatre). Yetunde's TV/film credits as a Dialect Coach include *Time Bandits* (Paramount+) and *King Shaka* (CBS/Showtime). Instagram: @yetundelive www.yetundelive.com

Jasmine Joy (*Ruth/Ivy/Josephine*) last worked on Arena Stage's hilarious production *POTUS*. She is delighted to return for this powerful, dynamic world premiere. Local credits include *Shear Madness* at The Kennedy Center; *Dance Nation* at Olney Theatre Center; *The Mamalogues* at 1st Stage; *A Chorus Within Her* at Theater Alliance; *Moon Man Walk* at Constellation Theatre; *A Wind In The Door* at The Kennedy Center TYA; *The Hula-Hoopin' Queen*, *Corduroy*, and *The Snow Queen* at Imagination Stage; *Womxn on Fire Festival* at Keegan Theatre; *The Powers That Be*, and *#solestories* at Venus Theatre; and *The Gulf* at Peter's Alley. You can see Jasmine next in *Is God Is* at Constellation Theatre! Jasmine would love to thank her daughter, Calypso, for being her inspiration. www.jasminejoybrooks.com

Lolita Marie (*Hannah/Nellie/Mary*), two-time Helen Hayes Award recipient, is making her Arena Stage debut. D.C. area credits include *The Brothers Paranormal* and *The Joy That Carries You* (Olney Theatre); *Well and Doubt* (1st Stage); *The Royale* (Olney and 1st Stage in Rep); *Sweat*, *The Outsider*, *N - A Play*, *God of Carnage*, and *American Daughter* (Keegan Theatre); *Hurricane Diane* (Avant Bard); *This Girl Laughs...*, *Flood City*, *for colored girls...*, and *brownsville song* (Theater Alliance); *The Adventures of Pericles* (Chesapeake Shakespeare Company); *Native Son* (Mosaic Theater); *The Skin of Our Teeth* and *Blood Wedding* (Constellation Theatre); *The Secrets of the Universe* and *Leto Legend* (Hub Theatre). Independent film and television credits include *Too Saved* and *Nocturnal Agony* (Nubia Filmworks), and *Who the (Bleep) Did I Marry?* (Investigation Discovery).

Paul Morella (*Hughes*) previously appeared at Arena Stage in *All My Sons* and *Orpheus Descending*. He recently completed his 14th season of *A Christmas Carol* at Olney Theatre, a one-person show he adapted from Charles Dickens' original novella. Other regional credits include leading roles at Folger Theatre, Signature Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Studio Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Theater J, Ford's Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Asolo State Theater, Delaware Theatre Company, Olney Theatre, Everyman Theatre, Round House Theatre, Potomac Theatre Project, MetroStage, and Mosaic Theater. He also tours the country as Clarence Darrow in the one-person play, *A Passion for Justice*. He is on the faculty of American University's Washington College of Law, where he teaches the Art of Persuasion as part of its Trial Advocacy Program. www.clarencedarrow.org

Monique Paige (*Female Understudy*)'s D.C. credits *Breath, Boom* (Studio Theatre). New York credits include *Goliath* (Robert Morris Theatre) and, most recently, *She's Got Harlem on Her Mind* (Metropolitan Playhouse). Philadelphia credits include *Back to the Old Landmark* (Freedom Theatre), *A Salt Water Oasis* (InterAct Theatre), *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men* (Allens Lane Art Center), and *The Piano Lesson* (Barnstormers Theater).

Kevin E. Thorne II (*John/Lawrence/Silas*) is a D.C.-based actor making his return to Arena Stage. His previous credits include u/s Red Carter in *Seven Guitars* at Arena Stage; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in *The Mountaintop* at Lyric Rep Theatre; Flow in *Fabulation or, The Re-education of Undine* at Mosaic Theater Company; Charles Gilpin in *N* at Keegan Theatre; Clip in *I Killed My Mother* at Spooky Action Theater; u/s Joker/Scarecrow in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* at Synetic Theater; Arveragus in *Imogen* at Pointless Theatre Co; and Samuel P. Leonard in *Nation We Build Together*, Dr. Huey P. Newton in *Cramton 1961*, and Jesse Owens in *Going The Distance* at Discovery Theater. Kevin holds a BFA in Acting from Howard University. Instagram: @kj_nation

Renee Elizabeth Wilson (*Female Understudy*) is beyond thrilled to be back at Arena Stage with *Tempestuous Elements!* Previous Arena Stage credits include *Seven Guitars*. Her most recent theater credits include *Intimate Apparel* (Theater J); *Monumental Travesties* (world premiere), *Native Son*, and *Milk Like Sugar* (Mosaic Theater Company); *Moon Man Walk* (Constellation Theatre Company); *Radio Golf* and *Nollywood Dreams* (Round House Theatre); *The Hula-Hoopin' Queen* (Imagination Stage); *Ain't No Mo'* (Woolly Mammoth Theatre); and *Skeleton Crew* (Studio Theatre). Renee is an American actress and a NASM-certified personal trainer. She is a graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts and has a BFA in Drama from NYU Tisch. Instagram/Twitter: @actpoetic88

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

TEMPESTUOUS ELEMENTS

By Kia Corthron

Directed by Psalmayene 24

In the Fichandler Stage | February 16 – March 17, 2024

ABOUT: *Tempestuous Elements* reveals the struggle of educational luminary Anna Julia Cooper as she fights for her students' rights to an advanced curriculum. In a scandal orchestrated by the government, her tenure as principal of D.C.'s historic M Street School is sabotaged by her colleagues and neighbors leading Cooper's professional and personal relationships to become fodder for innuendo and social ostracization. Witness the journey of this formidable Black feminist's fight for educational equity, freedom, and legitimacy at the turn of the 20th century.

CAST:

Lottie/Abigail: Kelly Renee Armstrong*
Francis/Mr. Turner/Atwood: Joel Ashur*
Hiram/W.E.B. DuBois: Ro Boddie*
Male Understudy: Peter Boyer*
Ernestine/Lula/Mrs. Cook: Renea S. Brown*
Anna: Gina Daniels*
Male Understudy: Jonathan Del Palmer*
Lucretia/Annie: Brittney Dubose
Minerva/Miss Patterson: Yetunde Felix-Ukwu*
Ruth/Ivy/Josephine: Jasmine Joy*
Hannah/Nellie/Mary: Lolita Marie*
Hughes: Paul Morella*
Female Understudy: Monique Paige*
John/Lawrence/Silas: Kevin E. Thorne II*
Female Understudy: Renee Elizabeth Wilson

CREATIVE TEAM:

Playwright: Kia Corthron
Director: Psalmayene 24
Set Designer: Tony Cisek

Costume Designer: LeVonne Lindsay
Lighting Designer: William K. D'Eugenio
Original Music and Sound Design: Lindsay Jones
Hair and Wig Designer: LaShawn Melton
Associate Director and Choreography by: Tony Thomas
Dialect and Vocal Coach: Lisa Nathans
Text Director: Anita Maynard-Losh
Dramaturg: Otis Ramsey-Zöe
Casting Director: Joseph Pinzon
Stage Manager: Christi B. Spann*
Assistant Stage Manager: Jalon Payton*

*Members of Actors' Equity Association

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

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.**

PLAN YOUR VISIT

TICKETS: Tickets are \$41-95 plus applicable fees. Ticket prices and availability are subject to change. Arena Stage's many savings programs include discounts for teachers and school employees, "pay your age" tickets for those aged 30 and under, and "Southwest Nights" for those living and working in the District's Southwest neighborhood. To learn more, visit arenastage.org/savings-programs.

Tickets are available at arenastage.org. Tickets may also be purchased by phone at 202-488-3300, or in person at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth Street, SW, D.C., Tuesday-Sunday, 12-8 p.m.

Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300
Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380

PERFORMANCE DATES:

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday at 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 8 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m.

Weekday matinees at 12 p.m. on February 29, March 6, March 7, and March 13

Early Curtain: Sunday, March 3 at 6 p.m.

Southwest Nights: Tuesday, March 5 at 7:30 p.m. and Friday, March 15 at 8 p.m.

Audio-Described Performance: Saturday, March 2 at 2 p.m.

ASL-Interpreted Performance: Saturday, March 16 at 8 p.m.

Mask-Required Performances: Saturday, February 25 at 2 p.m.; Saturday, March 9 at 8 p.m.; Tuesday, March 12 at 7:30 p.m.; Wednesday, March 13 at 12 p.m.

Post-Show Conversations

Connect with the show beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with staff and artists on February 27 following the 7:30 p.m. performance; and on February 29, March 6, March 7, and March 13 following the 12 p.m. matinees.

Full Calendar: arenastage.org/tickets/calendar

SAFETY: Arena Stage recommends but does not require that patrons wear facial masks in our theater except in our occasional mask-required performance. These conditions are subject to change, and Arena continues to consult with medical professionals, monitor government best practice recommendations, and engage in industry trainings to ensure the health and safety of our patrons, artists, and staff. For up-to-date information, visit arenastage.org/safety.

TRAVEL: Limited parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage for \$18 to \$30, including drive-up valet parking for \$30. Call 202-488-3300 to purchase in advance. For more information on transportation and other parking options around the Mead Center, visit arenastage.org/transportation.

For complete 2023/24 Season details, visit arenastage.org/season.

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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