

## MEDIA CONTACT

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# KARAMU HOUSE TO PREMIERE FIRST EPISODE OF NEW SERIES, “FREEDOM AFTER JUNETEENTH”

America’s oldest Black producing theatre to premiere its new series, “Freedom After Juneteenth” on Thursday, August 20, 2020 at 7PM EST/4PM PST on social media and streaming platforms

(Cleveland, Ohio)— On Thursday, August 20, 2020, Karamu House—America’s oldest producing African American theatre—will premiere the first episode of “Freedom After Juneteenth,” an original theatrical series that will present an artistic response to critical issues facing Black America. In the safest way possible, Karamu House is continuing to fulfill its mission— producing theatre, providing arts education, and presenting community programs while honoring the African American experience—while creating awareness and dialogue about the dual pandemic facing Black America: COVID-19 and police brutality.

The first episode of “Freedom After Juneteenth” will address the issues of police brutality and trauma within the African American community. The first episode will premiere at 7PM EST/4 PM PST on social media, including [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#), and select streaming platforms, including [Vimeo](#), Roku and Fire TV.

Immediately following the theatrical program, the episode continues with a moderated panel discussion with community leaders to further discuss mental health and trauma within the African American community.

“Like all performing arts organizations, Karamu continues to face the many obstacles of the coronavirus pandemic,” says Tony F. Sias, President + CEO. “But as the country’s oldest African American producing theatre, it is essential for Karamu House to be on the frontlines of the critical issues that plague Black America, today. We are doing what we do best: rising to the occasion with our values of excellence and impact in hand.”

“Freedom After Juneteenth” is presented through the generous support of Bank of America and through the continuing generosity of Karamu House’s many donors and supporters.

Click [here](#) to watch the video trailer for the first episode of “Freedom After Juneteenth.”

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

TONY F. SIAS is the President and CEO of Karamu House, Inc., America’s oldest African American producing theatre. Under the direction and leadership of Sias since 2015, Karamu has been widely accredited for producing professional theatre, arts education, and programming for all communities while honoring the African American experience. Prior to his tenure at Karamu, Sias served in several progressive roles for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) including Director of Arts Education and Artistic Director of Cleveland School of the Arts. As a creative, Sias has produced, performed in, and directed more than 100 productions. Additionally, Sias has received the Ohio House of Representatives Tribute for Excellent Leadership in CMSD’s All-City Arts Program and the Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for Contributions in Education and Cultural Arts. His work has been highlighted nationally in *The New York Times*, *American Theatre Magazine*, NBC’s Today, among others. Sias served as a delegate from the U.S. Department of State in Istanbul, Turkey, representing the Council of International Programs in the Youth Arts for Peace Project.

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In 2018, Sias was inducted into The HistoryMakers, the largest African American oral history archive collection in the U.S. In 2019, Sias was named the Cleveland Arts Prize Barbara S. Robinson award winner, was selected a

fellow in the National Arts Strategies Chief Executive Program in partnership with Harvard Business School and continues his service as a National Board member for the League of Historic American Theaters. Sias earned a Bachelor of Science degree in dramatic art from Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi and a Master of Fine Arts in acting from The Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

### **ABOUT THE WRITER**

LATECIA DELORES WILSON has been a proud performer and educator for 12 years in the Greater Cleveland area. She has directed, produced and written more than 30 plays for youth, three mainstage productions and devised five works for theatre festivals—all work containing themes of community healing and social justice. Wilson has taught and directed productions for Cleveland School of the Arts, Dike School of the Arts, Tailspinner Children’s Theatre, The Boys and Girls Club, Dobama Theatre, Cleveland Public Theatre and Karamu House. She currently works as the Arts Education Manager for Karamu House. In addition to directing, Latecia is an actress, mental health advocate and visual artist. Most recently, she became The Cleveland Foundation’s 2020 Minority Arts and Education Fund (MAEF) recipient, in partnership with Birthing Beautiful Communities. Her MAEF 2020 work is based on an autobiographical production revolving around postpartum depression and generational trauma. Latecia believes the arts provide space and opportunity for healing and utilizes all of her work to empower, educate and spread joy.

### **PERFORMANCE ENSEMBLE**

Samantha Cocco (Holly)  
Ananias Dixon (Riley)  
Darelle Hill (Roderick)  
Christina Johnson (Ruth)  
Zach Palumbo (Jim)  
Corlesia Smith (Charlie)  
Latecia D. Wilson (Cindy)

### **MUSICIANS**

Dr. David M. Thomas, Music Director & Keyboards  
David L. Munford, Jr.

### **VOCALISTS**

Jacob B. Johnson  
Raven Platts  
Josiah Jones-Ray  
Clarissa Walker

### **CREATIVES**

Director + Executive Producer - Tony F. Sias  
Music Arrangement & Musical Director - Dr. David M. Thomas  
Playwright – Latecia D. Wilson  
Contributing Writers – Darelle Hill, Samantha Coco  
Choreographer – Aseelah Shareef  
Scenic & Multimedia Design - T. Paul Lowry  
Lighting Design – Rob Wachala  
Costume Design - Inda Blatch-Geib  
Sound Design - Richard Ingraham  
Props/Set Dresser – Dred Geib  
Technical Director/Scenic Painter - Prophet D. Seay

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Sound Assistant – Auri Crowley

Wardrobe Coordinator - Brielle McGrew  
Carpenters – Keenan Cobb, Issac Washington  
Director of Production - Vonetta Flowers  
Video Production – Wonderhouse Films

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### **About Karamu House**

Recognized as the oldest African American performing arts institute in the nation, Karamu House is listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places and featured in the Smithsonian’s African American Museum. Legendary artists including Langston Hughes, Ruby Dee, Robert Guillaume, Ron O’Neal, Bill Cobbs, James Pickens, Jr., Vanessa Bell Calloway and Imani Hakim have been associated with the 105-year old “place of joyful gathering” (the meaning of “Karamu” in Swahili.)

In 1915, Oberlin College graduates Russell and Rowena Jelliffe opened the Playhouse Settlement in an area called Cleveland’s “Roaring Third.” The Jelliffes wanted to build an environment where people of different races, religions, and socio-economic backgrounds could come together to share common ventures through the arts. Karamu was established as a gathering place for racially diverse members of the surrounding community at that time.

Today, Karamu is a beating heart for the entire community, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, or age. Core programs include socially relevant and professional quality theatre; arts education programming for all ages; and community programming, such as comedy, live jazz, and spoken word performances, that invites participation and engagement, reflection, and a re-commitment to cultural values.

For more information, visit [www.karamuhouse.org](http://www.karamuhouse.org).