

## **MEDIA CONTACT**

Ann Barnett

[abarnett@karamuhouse.org](mailto:abarnett@karamuhouse.org)

330-687-8385



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **KARAMU HOUSE CONTINUES “FREEDOM AFTER JUNETEENTH” SERIES WITH EPISODE ON THE BLACK VOTE**

The original production series by Karamu, America’s oldest Black producing theatre, continues with its second episode, premiering online on Thursday, September 24, 2020 at 7PM ET/4PM PT

(Cleveland, Ohio)—Karamu House, America’s oldest Black producing theatre, continues its original production series, “Freedom After Juneteenth,” with its second episode, “Voting: Your Right. Your Power.” Premiering on Thursday, September 24, 2020 at 7PM EST/4 PM PST, this episode will stream on social media, including [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#), and other video platforms, including [Vimeo](#), Roku and Fire TV. Written by local playwright, Latecia Delores Wilson—and directed and produced by Karamu President + CEO, Tony F. Sias—this next episode of the “Freedom After Juneteenth” series dives into the history and meaning of the Black vote in America. “The goal of this episode is to reveal the fact that we all have power: the power to vote; the power to make change; and, the power to take action,” says Wilson. “And honestly, there are just too many of us not exerting this power.”

Since June 2020, Karamu House has been producing and streaming original (and completely new) productions, in the face of two pandemics: COVID-19 and racism. Its first two productions, “Freedom on Juneteenth” and Episode One of “Freedom After Juneteenth” have collectively reached more than 100,000 households from across the country. “Karamu continues to come to the screen because we believe that an artistic response (to the issues of the day) are vital for dialogue and action to take place,” says Sias. “And as America’s oldest producing Black theatre, it is part of our responsibility to both entertain and inform—and now also activate members of the community for positive change.”

Following the artistic portion of Episode Two of “Freedom After Juneteenth,” Women V.O.T.E. (Visionaries Organized to Educate), in partnership with WKYC Channel 3, will present a moderated panel discussion with community leaders, including Jade Davis, Vice President, External Affairs, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority; Stefanie Brown James, Co-Founder & Chair, The Collective PAC; Ricardo Leon, Executive Director, Metro West Community Development Corporation; and, Danielle Sydnor, President, NAACP Cleveland Branch. The panel will be moderated by Romney Smith, anchor on WKYC Channel 3.

“Freedom After Juneteenth” is presented through the generous support of Bank of America. The series also receives support from FirstEnergy, the Dr. Rhonda Williams Fund, and Women V.O.T.E., as well as through the continuing generosity of Karamu House’s members, donors and supporters.

## **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

- MORE -

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.

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 one of The Cleveland Foundation's 2020 Minority Arts and Education Fund (MAEF) recipients, 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)  
Michele Edwards (Griot, Mama Jean)  
Darelle Hill (Roderick)  
Christina Johnson (Ruth)  
Zach Palumbo (Jim)  
Corlesia Smith (Charlie)  
Prophet D. Seay (Griot, PopPop)  
Mary Frances Miller (Griot, Meredith)  
Joshua McElroy (Griot, Junebug)

### **MUSICIANS**

Dr. David M. Thomas, Music Director & Keyboards

### **CREATIVES**

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

- MORE -

Sound Assistant – Auri Crowley  
Wardrobe Coordinator - Brielle McGrew  
Carpenters – Keenan Cobb, Issac Washington  
Director of Production - Vonetta Flowers  
Video Production – Wonderhouse Films  
Photographer – Kayla Lupean Photography

###

### **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).