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Hermitage Artist Retreat's 2020 Artful Lobster: An Outdoor Celebration! Raises More than \$128,000

(November 19, 2020) The Hermitage Artist Retreat recently announced that it raised \$128,500 through its 2020 Artful Lobster fundraising luncheon on November 14. Now in its 12th year, the Artful Lobster raises valuable funds for the Hermitage's renowned artist residency program and community programming initiatives. Amidst limited capacity and added safety precautions, nearly 150 guests attended the sold-out event, which took place outdoors beneath a large tent on the Hermitage's beachfront campus and was chaired by Flora Major and Leslie Edwards. Ralph Farris, a Hermitage Fellow and founding violist and artistic director of the genre-bending string quartet ETHEL, headlined the event, impressing audiences with his original compositions created at the Hermitage, as well as his unique medley of Philip Glass, John Lennon's "Imagine," and "America the Beautiful." Michael's On East served a plentiful barbeque and much heralded lobster feast.

"We are thankful to all who attended or supported this year's festivities," notes Hermitage Artistic Director and CEO Andy Sandberg. "We were particularly appreciative

of everyone's cooperation with our added health and safety protocols, which made for a safe and enjoyable experience for all in attendance. The generous outpouring of support for the work we are doing at the Hermitage is a demonstration of our community's commitment to the arts and the creative process."

This year's Artful Lobster weekend also celebrated the legacy of longtime champions of the Hermitage and Manasota Key, Nelda and Jim Thompson, with a special tribute event on Friday, November 13. Approximately 40 guests gathered at sunset on the beach for this elegant and intimate celebration that included a tribute video featuring digital appearances by friends and fans, including honorary co-chairs Rebecca Cook and Bernard Dickens and Warren and Brammie Cook; Michael Saunders; and tennis legend and longtime friend Martina Navratilova. The event also featured a moment of celebration and light in memory of Jim Thompson, and a surprise visit from the Florida Gator. The John Miller Jazz Ensemble Trio provided the entertainment for the evening, and an unannounced performance from Ralph Farris delighted the guests. Additional details surrounding the funds raised from this benefit for the Hermitage, along with a special recognition in the Thompsons' honor, will be announced in the coming weeks.

Sponsors and partners for "The Artful Lobster: An Outdoor Celebration!" included the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, CHUBB, Key Agency, Herald-Tribune Media Group, Sarasota Magazine, and WUSF Public Media. A full list of this year's Artful Lobster sponsors, benefactors, and partners can be found at **HermitageArtistRetreat.org/ArtfulLobster2020**.

The Hermitage hosts artists on its Gulf Coast Manasota Key campus for multi-week residencies. Artists come from around the world and across multiple disciplines create and develop new works of visual art, theater, music, literature, and more. As part of their residencies, Hermitage Fellows are asked to participate in community programs, affording audiences in our region the unique opportunity to engage with some of the world's leading artists and to get a "sneak peek" into extraordinary projects and artistic minds before their works go on to major galleries, concert halls, theaters, and museums around the world. These free programs include performances, lectures, interactive experiences, open studios, school programs, teacher workshops, and more, serving thousands in our regional community each year. All Hermitage programs in the coming weeks and months will be socially-distanced outdoor events or virtual experiences with renowned Hermitage Fellows and alumni.

For more information about the Hermitage and upcoming programs, visit HermitageArtistRetreat.org.

About the Hermitage Artist Retreat:

The Hermitage is a nonprofit artist retreat located in Manasota Key, Florida, inviting accomplished artists across multiple disciplines for residencies on its beachfront campus, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. Hermitage artists are invited to interact with the local community, reaching thousands of Gulf Coast residents and visitors each year with unique and inspiring programs. Hermitage Fellows have included twelve Pulitzer Prize winners, along with multiple Tony, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and MacArthur Fellowship award winners. Works created at this beachside retreat by a diverse group of Hermitage alumni have gone on to renowned theaters, concert halls, and galleries throughout the world. Each year, the Hermitage awards the \$30,000 Hermitage Greenfield Prize for a new work of art,

and the Aspen Music Festival awards the annual Hermitage Prize in Composition. For more information about The Hermitage Artist Retreat, visit HermitageArtistRetreat.org.

The Hermitage is supported by:

Hermitage programs are supported, in part, by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts; by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax Revenues; and by the Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Council of Arts and Culture and the State of Florida (Section 286.25 Florida Statutes), as well as the Gulf Coast Community Foundation and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

Ralph Farris (full bio):

Ralph Farris is a Juilliard-trained multi-instrumentalist, performer, music director, curator, composer, arranger, and record producer. He is a tireless collaborator, whether working as an individual, or as a founding member and Artistic Director of ETHEL, the genre-bending string quartet described by *The New York Times* as “indefatigable and eclectic,” and by *The New Yorker* as “vital and brilliant”. That spirit has led to work with a who’s-who of rock stars, filmmakers, choreographers, educators, stage directors and poets.

Ralph has taken part in major collaborations with ETHEL, Robert Mirabal, Molissa Fenley and Frank Cassara, Annie-B Parson, Vijay Iyer, Stewart Copeland, Martin Scorsese (on the short *The Key to Reserva*), and Kurt Elling (on the GRAMMY®-winning album *Dedicated to You: the Music of Coltrane and Hartman*); toured extensively with Roger Daltrey (as Music Director and lead fiddle), Todd Rundgren, Joe Jackson, Ensemble Modern, Bang On A Can, Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Ensemble, Orpheus Chamber Ensemble, and Kaki King; performed in concert with Seiji Ozawa, John Williams, Leonard Bernstein, David Byrne, Thomas Dolby, Tom Verlaine, Jill Sobule, Andrew Bird, Fernando Otero, Jake Shimabukuro, JP Jofre, Pete Townshend, Alice Cooper, Sinead O’Connor, Lou Reed, and Trey Anastasio; conducted *The Lion King* and *Annie* on Broadway; composed for film (Noelle Brower’s short *Everything Is Ordinary*; Anika Burt’s short *Begin Again*; Susan Todd’s short *The Mother Is the One Who Stretches* (with ETHEL); Danièle Wilmoth’s feature *Eleanore And The Timekeeper* (with ETHEL); Jehane Noujaim’s industrial *Pangea Day*), for dance (Monkeyhouse), and for the stage (Aquila Theatre’s productions of *A Female Philoctetes* and *The Tempest*, Jarrett & Raja, Lawler & Fadoul, the Jerome Foundation, BRIC Arts Media, Arts Brookfield, OZ Nashville, BAM, and the NEA); arranged music for Five For Fighting (the GRAMMY®-nominated hit “Superman (It’s Not Easy)”), Dishwalla, Chantal Kreviazuk, Room 11, Pound, Dayna Kurtz, Lord Graham Russell (of Air Supply), and the University of Michigan; recorded with Paul Simon, Depeche Mode, Ivy, Fountains of Wayne, Regina Carter, Clay Aiken, Rod Stewart, Natalie Merchant, Better than Ezra, and Harry Connick, Jr.; and produced records for ETHEL and the Hevreh Ensemble.

With ETHEL, Ralph has been honored by ASCAP and nominated for a Native American Music Award.

ETHEL is the Resident Ensemble at The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Balcony Bar, Quartet-in-Residence at Kaufman Music Center’s 2018/19 Face the Music, and Ensemble-in-Residence at Denison University, where, in 2017, the ensemble members received honorary doctorates.

Current projects include composing a ballet based on *Snow White* for Pineapple Dance; scoring a piece for Tracy MacDonald’s CollegeNET documentary *Rigged*; a new all-violin quartet, Firewood; ETHEL’s multi-media production of *Circus: Wandering City* (co-commissioned by The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and Brooklyn Academy of Music); producing a series of contemporary classical recordings for composer Stanley Grill; and, conceiving Co-Lab: the Art of Collaboration, a virtual conference produced in association with Rogers Art Loft in Las Vegas.

