

MEDIA CONTACT

Su Byron; 941-955-8103; SuByron@HermitageArtistRetreat.org



The Hermitage Artist Retreat Presents
“Michael R. Jackson: Just Sittin’ Here Lookin’”
With Pulitzer Prize Winner Michael R. Jackson
Friday, May 21, 6:30 p.m., on the Hermitage Beach

Presented in collaboration with Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe

(April 27, 2021) The Hermitage Artist Retreat presents “Michael R. Jackson: Just Sittin’ Here Lookin’” with Pulitzer Prize winner Michael R. Jackson, Friday, May 21, 6:30 p.m., live on the Hermitage Beach, 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood. Jackson, a 2021 Hermitage Fellow and the recipient of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Drama for his musical *Strange Loop*, will present an evening of music and stories, in a collaboration between the Hermitage and Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe. This event will also be available via live-stream. Michael R. Jackson’s Hermitage artist residency is generously sponsored by the Huisking Foundation. *Registration is required at HermitageArtistRetreat.org. (Free with a \$5 per person registration fee.)*

“It’s been a helluva year,” notes Jackson, “and I’ve just been ‘sittin’ here lookin,’ as my grandma used to say, holed up in my tiny New York City apartment during a hurricane of political, cultural, and epidemiological upheaval – and way too much social

media. The music within me has largely been suppressed during this time, but now a lot is coming up, and I might just need somebody to hold my hair back!"

Michael R. Jackson's Pulitzer Prize and New York Drama Critics Circle's winning musical, *A Strange Loop* (which had its 2019 world premiere at Playwrights Horizons in association with Page 73 Productions) was called "a full-on laparoscopy of the heart, soul, and loins" and a "gutsy, jubilantly anguished musical with infectious melodies" by Ben Brantley for *The New York Times*. In *The New Yorker*, Vinsom Cunningham wrote, "To watch this show is to enter, by some urgent, bawdy magic, an ecstatic and infinitely more colorful version of the famous surreal lithograph by M.C. Escher: the hand that lifts from the page, becoming almost real, then draws another hand, which returns the favor." In addition to *A Strange Loop*, Jackson also wrote book, music, and lyrics for *White Girl in Danger*. Awards and associations include the New Professional Theatre Festival Award, a Jonathan Larson Grant, a Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award, an ASCAP Foundation Harold Adamson Award, a Whiting Award, the Helen Merrill Award for Playwriting, an Outer Critics Circle Award, a Drama Desk Award, an Obie Award, an Antonyo Award, a Fred Ebb Award, and a Dramatist Guild Fellowship. Jackson is an alum of Page 73's Interstate 73 Writers Group, and a 2021 Hermitage Fellow.

Previously Announced Upcoming Hermitage Events

- Friday, April 30, 6 p.m.: "Conveying Meaning," with Hermitage Fellows Kristen Miller (poet), Michelle Lopez (author), and Kathleen Driskell (writer). *At the Hermitage Beach, 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood. Free with \$5/person registration fee. (Kathleen Driskell's Hermitage Artist Residency is made*

possible by the Annette Dignam State College of Florida Residency in Literature at the Hermitage.)

- Friday, May 14, 6 p.m.: “Artists and Writers Thinking Out Loud” with Hermitage Fellows Crystal Wilkinson (poet), Hari Kunzru (writer), and Lucy Kim (visual artist). *At the Hermitage Beach, 6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood. Free with \$5/person registration fee. (Crystal Wilkinson’s Hermitage Artist Residency is generously sponsored by Jane and Bill Knapp.)*
- Thursday, May 27, 6 p.m.: “Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens” with musical theater composer Rona Siddiqui. *At Selby Gardens Downtown, 534 Mound St., Sarasota. Free with \$5/person registration fee. Presented in collaboration with Marie Selby Botanical Gardens.*

Registration for all events is required at HermitageArtistRetreat.org. *All live events will be held outdoors, and capacity will be limited to accommodate safe social distancing. Early reservations are recommended. Masks required at check-in for all live programs, including outdoor events. To accommodate capacity restrictions, social-distancing measures, and virtual licensing costs, a \$5 per person registration fee will be added for most events.*

The Hermitage Artist Retreat *is one of the region’s most early adapters to offer a safe new model for live events and performance during the pandemic. The organization began to offer in-person events in early October at venues across Sarasota County, including Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Historic Spanish Point, and on the Hermitage Beach, in addition to its ongoing virtual programming which is available to audiences around the country. Over the past seven months, the Hermitage has safely and successfully presented dozens of unique in-person programs, implementing strict social distancing policies and outdoor-only venues, accommodating audiences who regularly provide positive and appreciative feedback on the*

Hermitage's health and safety protocols. "By doing this, we've been able to engage local audiences — and give a rare and empowering opportunity to dozens of performers, musicians, visual artists, writers, teaching artists, and more to share their talents and their work in progress with Sarasota audiences," says Andy Sandberg, the Hermitage's Artistic Director and CEO. "We are fortunate in that we are not limited by production values or the need for an indoor performance space. What we offer is a unique look into the creative process and early development of works by notable artists from around the world. Therefore, we feel it is our responsibility and an opportunity to provide both artists and audiences a safe and inspiring way to gather." Many Hermitage artists and audiences alike have noted that these experiences have been a highlight and an escape from the pandemic while many of their regular arts and cultural offerings have been shut down or limited to online-only programming. 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, Poets Laureate, MacArthur 'Genius' Fellows, and multiple Tony, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar winners and nominees. 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:

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