

MEDIA CONTACT

Su Byron; 941-726-8468; SuByron@HermitageArtistRetreat.org



Composer David ‘Clay’ Mettens wins the 2021 Hermitage Prize in Aspen

Mettens, a composition student at the Aspen Music Festival and School, receives a six-week residency at the Hermitage Artist Retreat in Englewood.

(August 26, 2021) The Hermitage Artist Retreat and the Aspen Music Festival and School (AMFS) announce that David ‘Clay’ Mettens, a composition student at the AMFS’s Susan and Ford Schumann Center for Composition Studies, has been awarded the 2021 Hermitage Prize in Composition. Mettens is the eighth recipient of this annual award, which includes a six-week residency at the Hermitage, along with a \$1,000 stipend. Mettens was selected by a jury that includes Alan Fletcher, AMFS president and CEO; Robert Spano, music director of the AMFS and the Atlanta Symphony, music director designate of the Fort Worth Symphony, and member of the Hermitage Curatorial Council; and the composition faculty of the AMFS, including Hermitage Fellow Christopher Theofanidis.

Hermitage Artistic Director and CEO Andy Sandberg presented the award to Mettens at the Aspen Music Festival and School’s Benedict Music Tent, alongside Fletcher, Spano, and Theofanidis. This unique initiative, which launched in 2013, reflects an invaluable partnership between the AMFS and the Hermitage, designed to

champion new and original works and to recognize exceptional talent in the field of classical music. The idea was first conceived when Robert Spano was in residence at the Hermitage and shared with his colleagues in Aspen how beneficial the retreat had been for him and his work. The Hermitage Prize in Composition was created to offer the same experience to young, talented composers just beginning their professional careers.

“I was told by our friends at the AMFS that this was a particularly exceptional year for the composers and musicians, and the talent exceeded my expectations,” notes Sandberg. “It was thrilling to hear Clay’s brilliant work in Aspen, workshopped and performed with the AMFS’s Aspen Conducting Academy Orchestra alongside original compositions by fellow composers in the program.” Sandberg adds that the Hermitage Prize in Composition given at the AMFS is the only student residency awarded by the Hermitage each year; all other Fellows are accomplished working professionals and leaders in their field, selected by the Hermitage’s National Curatorial Council. “This provides the recipient of the annual Hermitage Prize in Composition the opportunity to share this Hermitage experience with leading artists from all around the world.”

Hermitage Fellows include 13 Pulitzer Prize winners, multiple Grammy, Oscar, Emmy, and Tony winners, Poets Laureate, MacArthur “Genius” Fellows, and more. Hermitage Fellows regularly describe their time at the Hermitage as “magical,” “transformative,” and “life-changing.”

David “Clay” Mettens is a Chicago-based composer whose works have received numerous accolades, including a 2020 Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts & Letters and Ithaca College’s 2018 Heckscher Foundation

Composition Prize. His compositions have been performed by the Brussels Philharmonic, Washington National Opera, Spektral Quartet, and Ensemble Dal Niente, among others. Mettens holds a Ph.D. in music composition from the University of Chicago, and master's and bachelor's degrees from the Eastman School of Music and University of South Carolina, respectively. This summer, he was a recipient of the Susan and Ford Schumann Scholarship at the Aspen Music Festival and School.

“I’m thrilled to be invited to the Hermitage and work in a stimulating environment, surrounded by artists in other disciplines,” says Mettens. “My compositional imagination is fueled by encounters with literature, poetry, and visual art, and I look forward to practicing my craft in the company of brilliant creators in these disciplines.”

Previous residencies of AMFS Hermitage Prize recipients have led to exciting collaborations, lifelong friendships, and extraordinary new compositions. Past recipient Sid Richardson (2018) notes that winning the Hermitage Prize has been “an affirmation of my musical explorations. I can’t think of a greater opportunity for a young artist than to be given time, space, and a community of like-minded individuals within which to work.” Previous Hermitage Prize recipients include: Patrick Harlin (2013); Thomas Kotcheff (2014); Phillip Sink (2015); Andrew Hsu (2016); Joel Thompson (2017); Sid Richardson (2018); and Chelsea Komschlies (2019). The Hermitage Prize was not awarded in 2020, as the Aspen Music Festival and School was on hiatus due to the pandemic.

The Hermitage hosts artists on its Gulf Coast Manasota Key campus for multi-week residencies, where diverse artists 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 participate in free community programs, offering audiences throughout the Gulf Coast region a unique opportunity to engage with some of the world's leading artists and to get an authentic "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 and innovative programs include performances, lectures, interactive experiences, readings, open studios, school programs, teacher workshops, and more, serving thousands in our regional community each year. Past Hermitage Fellows have included 13 Pulitzer Prize winners, MacArthur "Genius" Fellows, Poet Laureates, National Book Award recipients, and multiple Tony, Grammy, Oscar, and Emmy Award nominees and winners.

Photo caption: *The Aspen Musical Festival's Benedict Tent (Aspen, Colorado): L to R: Christopher Theofanidis, Hermitage Fellow and Aspen Music Festival and School artist-faculty; Robert Spano, music director of the Aspen Music Festival and School and the Atlanta Symphony and a member of the Hermitage Curatorial Council; David "Clay" Mettens, recipient of the 2021 Hermitage Prize in Composition; Alan Fletcher, Aspen Music Festival and School president and CEO; and Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO of the Hermitage Artist Retreat. Photo Credit: Carlin Ma*

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 13 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, the newly announced \$35,000 Hermitage Major Theater Award for an original theater commission, and the Aspen Music Festival's Hermitage Prize in Composition. For more information, visit HermitageArtistRetreat.org.

About the Aspen Music Festival and School:

The AMFS is the United States' premier classical music festival, presenting more than 400 musical events during its eight-week summer season in Aspen. The organization draws top classical musicians from around the world to its Colorado mountain retreat for an unparalleled combination of performances and music education. Nearly 700 music students from 40-plus U.S. states and 30-plus countries come each summer to play in five orchestras, sing, conduct, compose and study with 200 renowned artist-faculty members. Students represent the field's best young talent; many have already begun their professional careers, while others are on the cusp. Renowned alumni include violinists Joshua Bell, Sarah Chang, Cho-Liang Lin, Robert McDuffie, Midori, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and Gil Shaham; pianists Ingrid Fliter, Orli Shaham, Conrad Tao, Yuja Wang, Wu Han, and Joyce Yang; conductors Marin Alsop, James Conlon, Leonard Slatkin, Robert Trevino, and Joshua Weilerstein; composers William Bolcom, Philip Glass, David Lang, Augusta Read Thomas, Bright Sheng, and Joan Tower; vocalists Jamie Barton, Sasha Cooke, Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, and Tamara Wilson; cellists Lynn Harrell and Alisa Weilerstein; guitarist Sharon Isbin; performer Peter Schickele; and bassist Edgar Meyer. The AMFS partners each year with the Hermitage Artist Retreat to present the Hermitage Prize in Composition, a distinguished annual recognition for a young composer.

The Hermitage is supported by:

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