

*Updated with changes to programs on January 7, January 28 and February 11.*



## **Hermitage Announces a Full Slate of January and February Programs for the New Year Throughout Sarasota County**

*Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright **Paula Vogel** on February 11<sup>th</sup>,  
saxophonist and composer **Matthew Evan Taylor** on February 18<sup>th</sup>, and  
Beyonce-soloing band member **Lady Jess** on February 24<sup>th</sup> join Tony Award  
winner **Gavin Creel** on January 14<sup>th</sup> and Pulitzer Prize winner **Michael R.  
Jackson** on January 21<sup>st</sup>.*

December 10, 2021 (Sarasota County, Florida) — The Hermitage Artist Retreat announced today a full slate of early 2022 programs featuring new and returning Hermitage Fellows, from Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright **Paula Vogel** and interdisciplinary artist **Ni’Ja Whitson** to Beyonce collaborator and soloing band member **Lady Jess**. The program lineup – presented at outdoor venues throughout Sarasota County including the Hermitage Beach and Selby Gardens Downtown – also includes “Say Their Names,” a partnership with Manasota ASALH to present selections from composer-saxophonist **Matthew Evan Taylor**, inspired by the fight against anti-Black racism. These new programs add to the Hermitage’s previously announced January programs with Tony Award-winning Broadway star **Gavin Creel** on January 14th and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical theater playwright-composer **Michael R. Jackson** on January 21st.

“We are thrilled to launch 2022 with an exciting slate of programming that introduces our Gulf Coast community to some of the most extraordinary talents and performers working today,” said Hermitage Artistic Director and CEO **Andy Sandberg**. “We are grateful to continue our collaboration with Selby Gardens to present a new program with **Lady Jess**, a brilliant violinist who has frequently shared the stage with Beyoncé, as well as returning Hermitage Fellow **Michael R. Jackson**, who won the Pulitzer Prize last year for his musical *A Strange Loop*. We’re also looking forward to new partnerships with Manasota ASALH (featuring **Matthew Evan Taylor**) and the Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast (featuring **Ni’Ja Whitson**), among other leading arts and cultural institutions in our region. Where else can audiences experience – in the span of a few weeks – works in progress from so many of the world’s greatest artists, alongside theater legends like **Paula Vogel** and **Gavin Creel**?!”

In addition, the Hermitage has announced that the January 14<sup>th</sup> public program on the Hermitage Beach with **Gavin Creel** will now be presented in partnership with all of the leading theaters in Sarasota County, exemplifying our community’s spirit of collaboration. Creel’s Hermitage residency will be sponsored by Charlie Huisking.

All of these outdoor programs are free and open to the public with a \$5/person registration fee. Due to capacity limitations and social distancing, **registration is required** at **[HermitageArtistRetreat.org](https://HermitageArtistRetreat.org)**.

All of the Hermitage’s scheduled programming through the end of 2021 and into early 2022 will continue outdoors unless otherwise indicated, all with socially distanced seating.

[See below for complete program details and artist bios.](#)

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 theater, music, visual art, literature, and more. As part of their residencies, Hermitage Fellows participate in free community programs, offering audiences in the 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, readings, interactive experiences, open studios, school programs, teacher workshops, and more, serving thousands in our regional community each year.

**The newly announced programs include:**

- **"Journeys of Identity in Music," Friday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 5pm:** Trumpeter, composer, and vocalist **Amir ElSaffar** returns to the Hermitage to share his work on the beach, following his 2020 performance as the inaugural artist in the "Hermitage @ Selby Gardens" series. Hailed as "one of the most promising figures in jazz today" by the Chicago Tribune, ElSaffar is a remarkable cross-disciplinary artist, creating cross-cultural music that mixes ancient and modern sound. **Wang Lu**, pianist and composer, adds her cosmopolitan and stylistically wide-ranging perspective, which earned her the Berlin Prize in 2019 as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship. Come see what happens when these incredible artists sit side-by-side to share their latest works. *Wang Lu's Hermitage Residency generously sponsored by Ina Schnell in memory of Susan Brainerd.*  
**Registration is required at [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](https://HermitageArtistRetreat.org) (\$5/person registration**

fee). ***The Hermitage Beach, 6660 Manasota Key Rd., Englewood 34223***

- **“Walk on Through,” Friday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 5pm:** Tony and Olivier Award winner **Gavin Creel** (*Hello, Dolly!*, *The Book of Mormon*, *Hair*) has a new passion project in development. Spurred by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to create a piece inspired by their vast collection, he has spent countless hours absorbing the sights, sounds, and lessons of this self-contained universe. The working result, *Walk on Through*, captures the sense of wonder and impossible connection museums offer to humanity. Be among the first to hear selections of this work in progress, performed by Hermitage Fellow Gavin Creel himself, as he continues this new journey of creation. *Gavin Creel's Hermitage Residency is generously sponsored by Charlie Huisking. Registration is required at [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org) (\$5/person registration fee). ***The Hermitage Beach (6660 Manasota Key Road, Englewood, Florida 34223)****
- **Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens: “The Work,” Friday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 5:30pm:** Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and composer **Michael R. Jackson** returns to the Hermitage following his popular beachfront program last season. Since his critically acclaimed musical, *A Strange Loop*, premiered at Playwrights Horizons, the theater-maker has continued the work with projects such as *White Girl in Danger* and *Accounts Payable*, a commission from Lincoln Center. Join Jackson as part of the “Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens” series and hear from the writer-composer whose work has been described by *The New York Times* as being driven by “curiosity, positivity, and humor – but also an irrepressible appetite for the possible.” *This event is presented in partnership with Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Registration is required at [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org) (\$5/person registration fee). ***Marie Selby Botanical Gardens (Downtown Sarasota), 1534 Mound Street, Sarasota, FL 34236)****

- **“Natural Inspiration,” Friday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 5pm ET:** Hermitage Fellow **Ni’Ja Whitson** returns to the beach, exploring a theme familiar to artists and nature-lovers alike – moments of inspiration. **Whitson** explores how nature and the environment influence their practice, sharing excerpts of works-in-progress inspired by the Hermitage’s Manasota Key campus and Florida wildlife. *This event is presented in partnership with Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast. Registration is required at [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org) (\$5/person registration fee).* **The Hermitage Beach, 6660 Manasota Key Rd., Englewood 34223**
- **“Pen to Paper with Pulitzer Prize-Winning Playwright Paula Vogel,” Friday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 5pm ET:** Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, American Theater Hall of Fame Honoree, and Hermitage Fellow **Paula Vogel** offers an exploration of playwriting in which Paula and members of the audience will write a short play and work on writing exercises together. Culminating in an event Vogel lovingly calls a “bake-off” in which writers create and design a short play, there are no critiques during the workshop; rather, all writing prompts are seen as gifts to everyone in the room. No knowledge of theater or playwriting required – just an open mind and a willingness to explore the theatrical voice. *This event is presented in partnership with Booker High School.* The “Hermitage @ Booker” series features outdoor public programs intended for adults, as well as high-school and college students in the community. **Registration is required at [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org) (\$5/person registration fee).** **Booker High School (outdoor courtyard), 3201 North Orange Avenue, Sarasota, FL 34234**
- **“Say Their Names,” Friday, February 18<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30pm ET:** The Hermitage Artist Retreat is pleased to partner with **Manasota ASALH** in presenting saxophonist and composer **Matthew Evan Taylor**. Hailed as a “risk taker” (*Huffington Post*) whose music is “insistent and defiant” (*Lucid Culture*), Matthew is a leading voice at the intersection of musical virtuosity and social justice. Join us to hear selections from Taylor’s solo concert *Say Their Names*, inspired by the fight

against anti-Black racism and police brutality. *This event is presented in partnership with **Manasota ASALH. Registration is required at [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](https://HermitageArtistRetreat.org) (\$5/person registration fee). The Hermitage Beach, 6660 Manasota Key Rd., Englewood 34223***

- **Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens “Violin: Dope, Honest, & Evolved,”**  
**Thursday, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 6pm ET:** A soloing member of pop superstar Beyoncé’s band and Artistic Director of New York’s Urban Playground Chamber Orchestra, violinist **Lady Jess** offers an informal concert of music composed for acoustic violin and electronics. Exploring the stages of hope, mania, and revelation borne of an isolated lockdown experience as a Black Woman in 2020-21, including her ‘break-up’ with classical music, the program concludes with a deep dive into the artist’s work and process. *This event is presented in partnership with **Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. Registration is required at [HermitageArtistRetreat.org](https://HermitageArtistRetreat.org) (\$5/person registration fee). Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Downtown Campus, 1534 Mound St., Sarasota, FL 34236***

### **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 14 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](https://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 Arts and Culture, 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, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

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### **PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED HERMITAGE PROGRAMS:**

**Sunday, Dec 12 @ 2pm**, Hermitage @ The Bay: “Muse(ic) and Poetry” with Hermitage Fellows **Mae Yway**, **Ishion Hutchinson**, and 2021 Hermitage Aspen Prize in Composition recipient **David ‘Clay’ Mettens** (Live at The Bay Park)

**Friday, Dec 17 @ 5:30pm**, Hermitage @ Booker: “The Edge of Music,” with Hermitage Fellow **Luke Stewart** (Live at Booker High School)

**Friday, Jan 7 @ 5pm**, “**Journeys of Identity in Music**” with Hermitage Fellows **Amir ElSaffar** and **Wang Lu** (Live on the Hermitage Beach)

**Friday, Jan 14 @ 5pm**, “Walk on Through” with Hermitage Fellow & Tony Award Winner **Gavin Creel** (Live on the Hermitage Beach)

**Friday, Jan 21 @ 5:30pm**, Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens: “The Work,” with Hermitage Fellow & Pulitzer Prize Winner **Michael R. Jackson** (Live at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens)

**Friday, Jan 28 @ 5pm**, “Natural Inspiration,” with **Hermitage Fellow Ni’Ja Whitson** (Live on the Hermitage Beach)

**Friday, Feb 11 @ 5pm**, “Pen to Paper with Pulitzer Prize-Winning Playwright Paula Vogel,” with Hermitage Fellow **Paula Vogel** (Live at Booker High School)

**Friday, Feb 18 @ 5:30pm**, “Say Their Names,” with Hermitage Fellow **Matthew Evan Taylor** (Live on the Hermitage Beach)

**Thursday, Feb 24 @ 6pm**, “Hermitage Sunsets @ Selby Gardens

“Violin: Dope, Honest, & Evolved,” with Hermitage Fellow **Lady Jess** (Live at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Downtown Campus)

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## **COMPLETE ARTIST BIOS**

### **Wang Lu**

Composer, pianist, and Hermitage Fellow Wang Lu writes music that reflects a very natural identification with influences from urban environmental sounds, linguistic intonation and contours, traditional Chinese music, and freely improvised traditions, through the prism of contemporary instrumental techniques and new sonic possibilities. She is currently the David S. Josephson Assistant Professor of Music at Brown University. Wang Lu’s works have been performed internationally, by ensembles including the Ensemble Modern, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Alarm Will Sound, Minnesota Orchestra, and International Contemporary Ensemble, among others. Wang Lu received the Berlin Prize in Music Composition (2019) and was a 2014 Guggenheim Fellow. Her portrait albums *Urban Inventory* (2018) and *An Atlas of Time* (2020) were released to critical acclaim.

### **Gavin Creel**

Gavin Creel received the 2017 Tony Award for his performance as Cornelius in the Broadway revival of *Hello Dolly!* starring Bette Midler. After making his Broadway debut in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, for which he received his first Tony nomination, Creel went on to star in the Broadway productions of *Hair* (second Tony nomination), *La Cage Aux Folles*, *She Loves Me*, *The Book of Mormon*, and *Waitress*. Gavin received an Olivier Award for his portrayal of Elder Price in the London premiere of *The Book of Mormon* and also appeared on the West End in *Mary Poppins*, *Hair*, and *Waitress*. On television, Creel can be seen in *American Horror Story* and alongside Julie Andrews in *Eloise at the Plaza* and *Eloise at Christmastime*. As a songwriter, he has released three original albums: *GoodTimeNation*, *Quiet*, and *Get Out*; he is currently writing an original musical piece entitled *Walk on Through*, inspired by a commission from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. A native of Findlay, Ohio, Gavin is a proud graduate of University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, and Dance.

### **Michael R. Jackson**

Michael R. Jackson is a 2021 Hermitage Fellow and the recipient of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. Jackson’s Pulitzer Prize and New York Drama Critics Circle 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.

### **Ni’Ja Whitson**

Ni’Ja Whitson is a queer nonbinary trans/mogrifier multidisciplinary artist and futurist, United States Artist Fellow, Hermitage Fellow, Creative Capital and two-time “Bessie” Awardee who has been referred to as “majestic” by *The New York Times*. Whitson engages transdisciplinarity through a critical intersection of the sacred and conceptual in Black, Queer, and Transembodiedness. They are a 2021–2023 New York Live Arts Live Feed Artist in Residence, 18th St. Artist in Residence in partnership with Fathomers (Los Angeles), featured choreographer of the 2018 CCA Biennial, 2018–2020 Urban Bush Women Choreographic Center Fellow, and invited presenter at the 2019 international Tanzkongress festival. Recent commissions include the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC), Yale Dance Lab, Danspace Project at St. Marks, Abrons Arts Center, and ICA Philadelphia. Whitson is a sought-after speaker, presenter, and masterclass facilitator whose offerings have been shared at: Wesleyan University, Princeton, Cornell, LAX Festival, Movement Research, Dance NYC symposium, a 2020 keynote of the Collegium for African Diasporic Dance conference, and UNESCO. Writing credits include “Critical Black Futures: Speculative Theories and Explorations,” *Dance Research Journal*, and an upcoming anthology on *Lovecraft Country*. A complete bio can be found on their website: [www.NiJaWhitson.com](http://www.NiJaWhitson.com)

### **Paula Vogel**

Hermitage Fellow and Pulitzer Prize Winner Paula Vogel's plays include *How I Learned to Drive*, *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, *The Mineola Twins*, *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Hot 'N' Throbbing*, *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, *The Oldest Profession*, *A Civil War Christmas*, *Don Juan Comes Home From Iraq*, and *Indecent*. Most recent awards: the Hull-Warriner Award, the Margo Jones Award, Theatre Hall of Fame, Lifetime Achievement from the Dramatists Guild, Lifetime Achievement from the NY Drama Critics, Lifetime Achievement Obie, and the 2015 Thornton Wilder Award. She is honored to have two awards to emerging playwrights named after her: the Paula Vogel Award, created by the ACTF in 2003, and the award in Playwriting given annually by the Vineyard Theatre. Other awards include: the 1998 Pulitzer Prize, two Obies, the New York Drama Critics, Drama Desk, Outer Critics, Guggenheim, and two NEA fellowships. She taught for 30 years at Brown University as director of playwriting and at the Yale School of Drama as the Eugene O’Neill Professor of Playwriting. She now conducts Workshops and intensives across the country in theaters and community organizations.

Her upcoming projects include *They Shoot Horses Don't They* for the Bridge Theatre, with Marianne Elliott and Steve Hoggett directing, and her playwriting book/memoir *How To Bake A Play*, which she has been developing as part of her residency at the Hermitage.

### **Matthew Evan Taylor**

Hermitage Fellow Matthew Evan Taylor is a composer and saxophonist who has been hailed as “a promising new voice” (*Miami Herald*) and a “risk taker” (*Huffington Post*) – an artist whose music is “insistent and defiant... envelopingly hypnotic” (*Lucid Culture*). A southern kid who worshipped at the altar of Cannonball Adderly, Ornette Coleman, and Charles Mingus, Matthew’s music has been performed across the United States and Europe by such ensembles as the Cleveland Orchestra, the Detroit Symphony, the Metropolis Ensemble, the Imani Winds, and the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. As a performer, Matthew has worked with musicians Elliott Sharp, Marilyn Crispell, Tatsuya Nakatani, Taylor Ho Bynum, Mary Halvorson; visual artists Molly Zuckerman-Hartung and Dannielle Tegeder; and dancers Katherine Kramer, Sara Shelton, Laurel Jenkins, and Lida Winfield. His most recent project, “New Century | New Voices,” is a concert series in Middlebury, Vermont celebrating the continued contributions of women and composers of color to the classical music canon. The inaugural season, which began in January 2019, included collaborations with composers Carlos Simon, Marcos Balter, and Gabriela Lena Frank, and the Vermont-based new music ensemble TURNmusic. Taylor is Assistant Professor of Music at Middlebury College in Vermont.

### **Lady Jess**

Hermitage Fellow Lady Jess performs in New York and Los Angeles. Recent credits include *Judas and the Black Messiah*, solo performances at the LA Philharmonic and Harlem Chamber Players, and the release of her first single, *Colure*. She has recently completed her first inaugural season as Artistic Director of the Urban Playground Chamber Orchestra (New York). She is a soloing member of Beyoncé’s band, and toured with the superstar in 2018.

[HermitageArtistRetreat.org](http://HermitageArtistRetreat.org)