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**The Hermitage Presents New Play Commissions
by Madeleine George and Shariffa Ali
First Two Recipients of Hermitage Major Theater Award
in New York City in November**

Casting for **Madeleine George's** new comedy ***THE SORE LOSER*** includes **Adam Chanler-Berat, Lynda Gravatt, Allison Guinn, Greg Hildreth, James Jackson Jr., Matthew Maher, T Mitsock, Shannon Tyo, and Joel Van Liew**

Presented November 17 at MCC Theater in NYC

Written and directed by **Shariffa Ali, *HERO*** will be workshopped by a team of collaborative performers, and excerpts will be shared as a work in process.

Presented November 20 at MCC Theater in NYC

Madeleine George was selected as the first HMTA recipient by **Leigh Silverman, Liesl Tommy, and Doug Wright**. **Shariffa Ali** was selected as the second HMTA recipient by **Lynn Nottage, David Henry Hwang, and Regina Taylor**.

The **Hermitage Major Theater Award (HMTA)**, presented by the **Hermitage Artist Retreat** and made possible with support from the Kutya Major Foundation, recognizes a playwright or theater artist with a commission of **\$35,000** to create an original work, as well as providing a residency at the Hermitage's beachfront campus Sarasota County, Florida, and this inaugural workshop of the newly created play in New York.

November 7, 2023 (New York, NY / Sarasota, FL) — **Andy Sandberg**, Artistic Director and CEO of the **Hermitage Artist Retreat**, announced today that **Madeleine George** and **Shariffa Ali**, the first two recipients of the \$35,000 **Hermitage Major Theater Award (HMTA)**, will have presentations of their newly commissioned plays this month in New York at **MCC Theater** on November 17 and 20. Developed while in residence at

the Hermitage in Sarasota County, Florida, these two accomplished theater makers will present workshop readings of their works in New York as part of the commission includes the first presentations in a recognized 'arts capital.'

Pulitzer Prize finalist and playwright **Madeleine George**, currently a writer on the hit Hulu series "Only Murders in the Building," will be presenting her new comedy ***The Sore Loser*** to an invitation-only audience on Friday, November 17th at 4pm. Theater-maker and director **Shariffa Ali** will share an in-process presentation of her newly devised work, ***Hero***, for invitation-only audiences on Monday, November 20th at 4pm. Both readings will take place at MCC Theater in New York. Each of these original commissions are coming to fruition in less than two years of the recipients learning of their award.

The **Hermitage Major Theater Award** was established in 2021 to recognize a playwright or theater artist with a substantial commission to create a new, original, and impactful piece of theater. This national jury-selected award, established by the Hermitage with generous support from **Flora Major** and the Kutya Major Foundation, offers one of the largest nonprofit theater commissions in the country. George and Ali have each received a cash prize of \$35,000, as well as a residency at the Hermitage (Sarasota County, Florida), plus developmental and financial support for these upcoming developmental readings in New York. The prize is intended to bridge the connection between the Hermitage (Sarasota County, Florida), where the commission is born, and other leading arts and culture centers around the world, including New York, London, Chicago, and notable arts capitals where great theater is frequently developed and presented.

HMTA winners are nominated and selected by a jury of nationally recognized arts leaders in the field of theater. The 2021 Award Committee that selected Madeleine George includes Tony Award-nominated director **Leigh Silverman**, award-winning director of stage and film **Liesl Tommy**, and Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning playwright **Doug Wright**. The 2022 Award Committee that selected **Shariffa Ali** includes two-time Pulitzer Prize winner **Lynn Nottage**, Tony, Grammy, and Obie Award-winning playwright **David Henry Hwang**, and Golden Globe Award-winning actor and playwright **Regina Taylor**.

"It feels like just yesterday we were announcing Madeleine and Shariffa as the recipients of this distinguished honor, and it is incredibly exciting to be seeing their original works already coming to life," said Hermitage Artistic Director and CEO **Andy Sandberg**. "Madeleine George and Shariffa Ali are two of the theater industry's most gracious and gifted talents, and we're honored to play a role in supporting their artistic journeys. The heart and humor in Madeleine's writing is enhanced by her generous spirit and her deep passion for the theater, and Shariffa Ali is a brilliant force of nature whose inventiveness as a theater maker is enriched by her kindness and her ultra-collaborative process. Bringing these original works to life is a true honor and a gift to

the American theater, made possible by the generosity of Flora Major, who has entrusted the Hermitage with invaluable opportunity.”

Written by Hermitage Major Theater Award winner **Madeleine George** and directed by **Mack Brown**, *The Sore Loser* is a Faustian comedy set in a bowling alley. It’s a play about power, domination, and the death of the patriarchy – as told through a small-town bowling tournament. The play aims to delight and disarm, even as it draws us into an encounter with our own darkest impulses: the will to dominate that lives inside all of us, out of which the annihilating hierarchies of our world arise. Casting for the first full-length reading of *The Sore Loser* includes stage and screen talents **Adam Chanler-Berat** (*Next to Normal*, “Gossip Girl”), **Lynda Gravatt** (*The Bounty Hunter*, *Delivery Man*), **Allison Guinn** (*On the Town*, “Only Murders in the Building”), **Greg Hildreth** (*Frozen*, *Maestro*), **James Jackson Jr.** (*A Strange Loop*, *White Girl in Danger*), **Matthew Maher** (*Gone Baby Gone*, *Captain Marvel*), **T Mitsock** (“Becoming Eve”), **Shannon Tyo** (*The Compeuppance*, “30 Rock”), **Joel Van Liew** (“FBI”, *Limitless*).

Devised and directed by Hermitage Major Theater Award winner **Shariffa Ali**, *Hero* is a heartwarming and suspenseful play that unfolds during a single, enchanting chapter in the life of a spirited middle school student. In a small South African town, Vuyo and his choir-mates find themselves at the center of an unspoken pact. When the opportunity arises for Vuyo to break from traditional gender norms to showcase his exceptional singing prowess in a national choir competition, the entire community embarks on a remarkable journey of transformation. Surrounded by love and unexpected support, Vuyo discovers a world where acceptance transcends the boundaries of gender and prejudice. Inspired by true events, *Hero* is a tale of courage, unity, and the extraordinary power of music to challenge societal norms.

Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning Playwright, Hermitage Fellow, Trustee, and HTMA Juror **Doug Wright** said of the Hermitage Major Theater Award: “In a challenged theatrical landscape, the Hermitage has done something heroic; they have instituted a brand new, financially generous commission for a playwright of demonstrable achievement to draft a new work. It is one of the premier commissions of its kind and could not come at a more auspicious, even urgent time.”

In addition to this newly created commission, the Hermitage Artist Retreat annually awards the prestigious jury-selected Hermitage Greenfield Prize (HGP), comparable commission that rotates each year between the disciplines of theater, music, and visual art. Past recipients in theater have included **Aleshea Harris** (2021), **Martyna Majok** (2018), **Nilo Cruz** (2015), **John Guare** (2012), and **Craig Lucas** (2009).

A leading national arts incubator, the Hermitage is the only major arts organization in Florida’s Gulf Coast exclusively committed to supporting the development and creation of *new work* across all artistic disciplines. The Hermitage

hosts artists on its Gulf Coast Manasota Key campus for multi-week residencies, where diverse and accomplished artists from around the world and across multiple disciplines create and develop new works of theater, music, visual art, literature, dance, film, 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, conversations, readings, interactive experiences, open studios, school programs, teacher workshops, and more, serving thousands in our regional community each year.

For more information about the Hermitage and the Hermitage Major Theater Award, visit HermitageArtistRetreat.org.

The Hermitage Artist Retreat

Sarasota County, Florida

Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO

The Hermitage is a leading national arts incubator and non-profit artist retreat located on Manasota Key, Florida. For more than two decades, the Hermitage has invited 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 15 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 and accomplished group of Hermitage alumni have gone on to renowned theaters, concert halls, and galleries throughout the world. Each year, the Hermitage awards the Hermitage Greenfield Prize for a new work of art, the 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.

The Hermitage is supported by:

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ARTIST BIOS

Madeleine George

Madeleine George (Playwright, *The Sore Loser*) is the first recipient of the **Hermitage Major Theater Award**. Her plays include *Hurricane Diane* (Obie Award), *The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence* (Pulitzer Prize finalist; Outer Critics Circle John Gassner Award), *Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England* (Susan Smith Blackburn finalist), *Precious Little*, and *The Zero Hour* (Jane Chambers Award, Lambda Literary Award finalist). Honors include the Hermitage Major Theater Award, the Lilly Award, the

Princess Grace Award, and a Whiting Award. Madeleine's translation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* premiered at Two River Theater in 2022, and her audio adaptation of Alison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For* was released by Audible Originals in 2023. Madeleine has written on shows for FX and HBO, and she's been a writer/producer on all four seasons of the Emmy and Golden Globe-nominated mystery-comedy *Only Murders in the Building*, starring Steve Martin, Martin Short, and Selena Gomez. Since 2006, she has worked with the Bard Prison Initiative at Bard College, where she currently serves as Director of Admissions.

Mack Brown

Mack Brown (Director, *The Sore Loser*) is a Brooklyn-based butch charming. Recent creds: *marked green at birth*, *marked female at birth* (Fault Line Theatre), *The Interrobangers* (Theatre [Untitled]). Broadway: Associate Director for *Pictures from Home*. Off-Broadway: Associate Director for *I Can Get It for You Wholesale* (CSC) and *the bandaged place* (Roundabout). Roundabout Directing Fellow 2022-23. ReadyMack.com

Shariffa Ali

Shariffa Ali (Creator and Director, *Hero*) is the second recipient of the **Hermitage Major Theater Award**. Born in Kenya and raised in South Africa, she is an international theater maker, creative leader, director, and academic committed to advancing radical change through the power of art and activism. As a filmmaker, Ali's works have been featured at acclaimed film/VR festivals and institutions throughout the world, including Sundance Film Festival (USA); Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (South Africa); Brooklyn Film Festival (USA); Pan African Film Festival (USA); Electric Africa VR festival (South Africa) and DOK Neuland (Germany). As a theater artist and academic, Ali has taught at NYU, Brooklyn College, Yale University, and Princeton University. Past theater productions include *Eclipsed*, *Detroit '67*, *Intimate Apparel*, *We Are Proud to Present*, and an original new musical called *We Were Everywhere*. In 2022, Ali was named Elizabeth M. Swayzee Artist-in-Residence at Miami University, where she curated the inaugural Black Roots Festival in the spring of 2022.

HermitageArtistRetreat.org

Facebook / Instagram: **@HermitageArtistRetreat**

“An organization that does more for artists than any I have encountered.”

— Craig Lucas, Tony Award Nominee & Hermitage Greenfield Prize Winner

“The Hermitage provides an ideal landscape and environment for the artistic process.”

— Michael R. Jackson, Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award Winner

“Art and theater are our spiritual daily bread, and we're making it here at the Hermitage... and we go from the Hermitage and break bread in every community we travel to.”

— Paula Vogel, Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-Winning Playwright

“The Hermitage is the place where the work that you don't see getting done is done – the building of ideas, the nurturing of thoughts and dreams that eventually turn into the symphony you'll see at your performing arts center or the great touring musical that comes through your town.”

— Gavin Creel, Tony Award-Winning Performer and Composer

“Because of the Hermitage, some of the most beautiful plays have been written, and the most beautiful music has been made.”

— Emily Mann, Playwright, Director, and Tony Award Winner