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THE HERMITAGE
artist retreat



PHOTO RELEASE:

**The Hermitage Presented Two New Commissions from
Madeleine George and Shariffa Ali in NYC**

*The first two recipients of the **Hermitage Major Theater Award** —
Madeleine George and **Shariffa Ali** — presented the first showings of their newly
commissioned works at **MCC Theater** in NYC.*

THE SORE LOSER

By **Madeleine George**

Directed by **Mack Brown**

Cast: **Adam Chanler-Berat, Lynda Gravatt, Allison Guinn, Greg Hildreth,
James Jackson, Jr., Matthew Maher, T Mitsock, Shannon Tyo, Joel Van Liew**

Photo Link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/kbl09n3aawtd8ghutt32m/h?rlkey=lld78k6ia92neuwfufnpsg06m&dl=0>

Photo Credit: Danny Bristol Photo / Hermitage Artist Retreat

HERO

Written and Directed by **Shariffa Ali**

Cast: **Shariffa Ali, Joanna Evans, Jason Maina**

Photo Link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/271my3h9k53y6ud222rdc/h?rlkey=z5ymbz94qrfeyymhq9nei61i&dl=0>

Photo Credit: Danny Bristol Photo / Hermitage Artist Retreat

November 27, 2023 (New York, NY / Sarasota, FL) — **The Hermitage Artist Retreat** (Andy Sandberg, Artistic Director and CEO), today released photos from the premiere presentations of newly commissioned works by **Madeleine George** and **Shariffa Ali**. George and Ali, the first two recipients of the \$35,000 **Hermitage Major Theater Award** (HMTA), had readings of their newly commissioned plays in New York at Off-Broadway's **MCC Theater** just before Thanksgiving. Developed while in residence at the Hermitage in Sarasota County, Florida, these two new works are wholly original and coming to fruition less than two years after Madeleine George and Shariffa Ali learned of their selection for this distinguished national prize.

The **Hermitage Major Theater Award**, presented by the **Hermitage Artist Retreat** and made possible with generous support from the Kutya Major Foundation, recognizes a playwright or theater artist with a commission of **\$35,000** to create an original full-length work for the stage, as well as providing an extended residency at the Hermitage's beachfront campus Sarasota

County, Florida, plus the chance to present the inaugural workshop presentation of the newly created play in a major arts capital such as New York, London, or Chicago.

Pulitzer Prize finalist and playwright **Madeleine George**, currently a writer on the hit Hulu series “Only Murders in the Building,” was selected as the first winner of the HMTA by an Award Committee comprised of **Leigh Silverman**, **Liesl Tommy**, and **Doug Wright**. George presented the first full-length reading of her new play ***The Sore Loser*** to an invitation-only audience on Friday, November 17. *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. Casting for *The Sore Loser* included 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 Compeupance*, “30 Rock”), and **Joel Van Liew** (“FBI”, *Limitless*). The reading was directed by **Mack Brown**.

Theater-maker and director **Shariffa Ali** was selected as the second recipient of the Hermitage Major Theater Award by **Lynn Nottage**, **David Henry Hwang**, and **Regina Taylor**. Ali shared an in-process presentation of her newly devised work ***Hero*** for an invitation-only audience on Monday, November 20, also at MCC Theater. Ali and two of her collaborators, **Joanna Evans** and **Jason Maina**, provided an overview and excerpts from this heartwarming and inspiring new play with music, set in a small South African town and inspired by the true story of Shariffa’s longtime friend and collaborator **Vuyo Sotashe**.

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 unrestricted 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, plus developmental and financial support for these 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.

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:

Hermitage programs are supported, in part, by Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax revenues; the State of Florida through the Division of Arts and Culture and the National Endowment for the Arts; as well as the Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, and Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

HMTA WINNER 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.

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