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8TH ANNUAL *POETRYLIFE* CELEBRATED ON FEBRUARY 18

(Sarasota, FL) — On Monday, February 18, the 8th Annual *PoetryLife* event, a celebration of poetry and the inspiration it serves for writers and artists around the globe, was held at Florida Studio Theatre in association with Bookstore1Sarasota. *PoetryLife* was started by Bookstore1Sarasota owner and *PoetryLife* creative director, Georgia Court, who believes that the written word is an essential part of young people's education and of enjoying life as an adult. She said, "Young people exposed to poetry are given a life-long love of language and poetry gives adults a way to enhance and appreciate a life well-lived."

PoetryLife is a culmination of a year-round program that includes a regular Poetry Local Mic at Bookstore1Sarasota, an Open Mic contest for teens, and a Favorite Poem reading that will be held at the Hermitage Artist Retreat in April.

Proceeds from *PoetryLife* will benefit the *PoetryLife* Fund, which supports educators who teach poetry in the community. Two grants of \$500 each were awarded to outstanding educators—Debra Gorham Piner and Bonnie Destakasi. Piner, who teaches at Booker High School, will use her grant to purchase books of poetry in a variety of languages to help her ESL students connect with their native languages. Destakasi, teacher at Sarasota Military Academy, will use her award to create a Poetry Listening Immersion corner in her classroom.

For more information on the event, please visit sarasotapoetry.com.

The day's events featured special guest poets Terrance Hayes, a National Book Award winner, and renowned British poet Simon Armitage. In 2010, for services to poetry, Armitage was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) by the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Hayes is an artist-in-residence at New York University, and is the recipient of a 2014 MacArthur Foundation Genius Award.

PoetryLife kicked off with *Poetry: Beating Heart of the Arts*, an engaging panel discussion about how artists of all disciplines have found inspiration in poetry, which took place at 11AM in FST's Court Cabaret. The panel featured Armitage, Hayes, and acclaimed local artist Bill Buchman, and was moderated by FST's Associate Director At-Large, Kate Alexander. Armitage and Hayes each read a poem from their books, and all the panelists discussed their personal experiences with poetry and its influence on other artistic forms.

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The panel then took questions from the audience about how different people interpret their work based on their personal background, the effect that technology has on poetry as an art form, and who or what inspires them to write. Armitage then chronicled his journey as a "modern troubadour," which can be found in his nonfiction book, *Walking Home: A Poet's Journey*. Armitage walked for 265 miles across England, stopping in a different place every night to perform. Using the donations he collected for his performance, he would find lodging and food for the evening. Armitage did this to demonstrate that poetry still has a place in people's minds and hearts. *Poetry: Beating Heart of the Arts* concluded with a musical performance by Bill Buchman and lunch.

The event continued into the evening with live performances by Armitage, Hayes, and Buchman. Armitage performed first, reading several poems, including "Thank You for Waiting," "A Chair," and "To-Do List." Hayes followed, performing pieces from *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassins* and Wanda Coleman's "American Sonnet #95." The event concluded with Hayes reading "The Piano Has Teeth" while Bill Buchman provided musical accompaniment on the piano. Audience members were captivated throughout the night, commenting "That was soul-feeding" and "That was incredible." A book signing by Armitage and Hayes concluded this inspiring evening.

The 8th Annual PoetryLife was made possible thanks to event sponsors BookStore1Sarasota, Sarasota Herald-Tribune, UBS Financial Services Inc., Gulf Coast Community Foundation, Kerkering Barberio, Waldron Kraemer & Joan Lovell, Carma Lloyd, Robin Radin, and New Directions Publishing.

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by Artist, Jon Spelman. Starting out as a small touring company, FST traveled to places such as migrant camps and prisons. The company then acquired the former Woman's Club building, becoming the first permanent venue. Shortly after Producing Artistic Director Richard Hopkins arrived, the building was purchased and renamed The Keating Theatre. In the years that followed, Florida Studio Theatre established itself as a major force in American Theatre, presenting contemporary theatre in its five theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Gompertz Theatre, the Parisian style Goldstein Cabaret and John C. Court Cabaret, and Bowne's Lab Theatre.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to a broad-based audience. FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. As FST grows and expands, it continues to provide audiences with challenging, contemporary drama and innovative programs.

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