

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **TICKETS ON SALE NOW FOR THE HOBBY CENTER'S HOUSTON IS INSPIRED 2025-2026 RESIDENCIES**

### ***Single Tickets and Three-Show Ticket Packages Available***

**(Houston, TX) – The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts**, for the first time, swung the doors wide open for artists and arts organizations across Houston to apply for its annual ***Houston is Inspired*** initiative. Broadening the city's cultural fabric and embodying the iconic idea that Houston is Inspired, **The Ensemble Theatre | CJ Emmons, [Jk] Creativ**, and **Silambam Houston** have been carefully selected as the 2025-2026 season residency recipients. Single tickets as well as three-show ticket packages on sale now and are available at [thehobbycenter.org](http://thehobbycenter.org).

Launched in 2023-2024, *Houston is Inspired* is a signature Hobby Center program that celebrates and amplifies the work of local artists and organizations through week-long residencies, offering access to the Hobby Center's premier spaces, professional production support, and marketing resources.

The first two seasons featured curated partnerships, but with the introduction of an open application process, the Hobby Center took another meaningful step toward creating equitable access to Hobby Center partnerships and representing the full scope of Houston's arts community.

"We were honored to receive 52 applications from across the Greater Houston area, reflecting a powerful range of artistic voices, creative visions, and community-centered ideas," said Deborah Lugo, Vice President of Programming and Education at the Hobby Center. "Each application was reviewed by a panel of local arts leaders and the Hobby Center team and thoughtfully considered based on artistic excellence, community connection, readiness, and how the residency will further their creative work. The high quality of the submissions in this inaugural cycle made the selection process both inspiring and challenging, as we carefully weighed many compelling and worthy projects."

The initiative is designed to spotlight Houston's vibrant creative landscape, supporting authentic work that reflects the city's rich cultural diversity. Selected artists and organizations for the 2025-26 Season will receive comprehensive production, administrative and promotional support including a \$20,000 stipend to help fund the creation and development of their performance. They will receive five days of full access to Zilkha Hall comprised of the stage, dressing rooms, technical equipment, and production staff for rehearsals, tech and final performance. Additionally, a marketing investment from the Hobby Center alongside a project-specific promotional plan will be created and executed in partnership with the artist/organization.

On this season's recipients Lugo said, "These selected artists and organizations beautifully embody the guiding principles of the *Houston Is Inspired* series: community, celebration, and Houston. We're proud to honor milestones like the Ensemble Theatre's 50th anniversary and Silambam's 25th—two institutions that have become cultural cornerstones in our city. This series also showcases artists nurtured in Houston who are shaping the arts on a national scale, while amplifying the rich diversity of

cultures and histories that define our community. Though each production is distinct, together the series weaves a powerful narrative of Houston's innovative spirit and creative essence."

Each week-long residency is valued at over \$60,000 in support of the project.

Participating artists from this past season have praised the program's impact.

"From leadership to crew, every person involved during our recent inclusion in the *Houston is Inspired* initiative was consistently supportive, efficient, and kind in carrying out their responsibilities," said Dr. Jason Oby, Artistic Director of the Houston Ebony Opera Guild. "The Hobby Center's professionalism and care made the entire residency a smooth and stress-free experience."

Applicants must be a Houston-based performing artist or organization and demonstrate readiness to present a 90–120-minute performance in Zilkha Hall. To learn more about program eligibility and the application process, visit [TheHobbyCenter.org](https://TheHobbyCenter.org).

### **The Hobby Center Presents *Houston Is Inspired* 2025-2026 Season Public Performances:**

#### **Dec. 12, 2025 | The Ensemble Theatre | *CJ Emmons - I'm Freaking Talented***

CJ Emmons' one-man show takes the audience through his 23-year career in Hollywood with storytelling, comedy, and singing. From waking up on tour with Bobby Womack to sharing laughs and popcorn with Patti LaBelle, his journey spans from his humble Houston upbringing to conquering Britain's Got Talent and becoming a worldwide star. This show is the very definition of why he is Freaking Talented.

Celebrating 10 years as the principal singer of *Dancing with the Stars*, CJ has worked with Mariah Carey, Celine Dion, Patti LaBelle, Bobby Womack, Usher, and others. He co-produced the Whitney Houston Tribute at the BET Awards and earned an Emmy nomination for his vocals on HBO's "We're Here." His Grammy-nominated song "Maybe If I Cared" is available on all music platforms.

#### **Jan. 30, 2026 | [Jk] Creativ | *Our Road Home***

*Our Road Home* is an interactive rhythmic production created and directed by native Houston artist Jakari Sherman. Through layered rhythmic storytelling - spoken, rapped, preached, and sung - the work honors the communal labor and ingenuity that built spaces of freedom across time. The body is the central instrument of music and movement in *Our Road Home*, affirming that the power to create and preserve freedom resides within us. The percussive tradition of stepping, as well as drumming and vocal textures combine to highlight the agency of those who claimed their autonomy. Inspired by the legacy of Houston's Freedmen's Town, the work asks: Once freedom is gained, how do we live in it, preserve it, and pass it on when the pull of bondage lingers near?

*Our Road Home* is part of a broader initiative exploring "freedom as a way of life". It seeks to examine and exhibit freedom beyond a fight and invites audiences to imagine what it looks like to live and thrive in liberation. The shift from resistance to restoration opens space for imagination, healing, and speculative futures. The work premiered at the Bethel church historic site to commemorate the 160th anniversary of Freedmen's Town, and the Hobby Center's expanded production shares this important work with Houstonians and visitors of all ages.

#### **May 1, 2026 | Silambam Houston | *Kāvya: Poetry in Motion***

*Kāvya: Poetry in Motion* is an original Silambam Houston presentation, born from the vision of Artistic Director Lavanya Rajagopalan. This evocative production masterfully interweaves music, dance, and poetry to illuminate a profound truth: that despite separations of culture, language, and time, fundamental human emotions serve as an intrinsic unifying force for humanity.

The production's rich textual landscape features poetry spanning centuries and continents, from the mystical verses of 13th-century Sufi poets and concise beauty of 17th-century Japanese Haiku to the diverse voices of 19th to 21st-century Gaelic, Estonian, Dutch, Spanish, and English literature. These poetic expressions are seamlessly integrated with a musical score that traverses a wide spectrum of

classical and contemporary genres, all brought to life through the expressive movements of a range of Indian classical dance genres.

**TICKETS:** Single tickets start at \$20. Three-show packages start at \$51 and are available at [thehobbycenter.org](http://thehobbycenter.org).

Patrons can become a “Hobby Center Insider” by signing up at [thehobbycenter.org/news/stay-connected](http://thehobbycenter.org/news/stay-connected) where they receive perks such as access to purchase tickets before the public on sale.

### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS:**

**The Ensemble Theatre** was founded in 1976 by the late George Hawkins. Influenced by the Black Theatre Movement of the 1960s and 70s and frustrated by the lack of roles for African Americans in Houston theater productions, Hawkins decided to start his own company, originally called the Black Ensemble Theatre. At first a touring company—a loose term to describe how Hawkins would pack his Cadillac with props and costumes and drive around the city performing in borrowed and appropriated spaces—Hawkins’ company found a permanent home on Tuam Street in 1976 and began mounting full productions. The company, which would eventually shorten its name to The Ensemble Theatre, moved to its current permanent 30,000 square foot home on Main Street in 1985, where it has grown exponentially.

Today, The Ensemble Theatre is the oldest and largest professional African American theatre in the Southwest and one of only eight worldwide that operates its own facility and produces in-house.

Each year, The Ensemble’s six mainstage productions attract more than 35,000 audience members, the majority of whom (80%) are African American, and another 30,000 individuals annually through its educationally themed performances for schools, churches, and a variety of community organizations. The Ensemble relies upon the expertise of approximately 175 contract employees annually, thereby significantly contributing to the economic stability of Houston’s creative sector.

**[Jk] Creativ** is a multidisciplinary creativ company developing purpose-driven and truth-seeking cultural works. Through myriad creativ initiatives - from visual design to live performance; discussion groups to serving the unhoused - the company is redefining how the arts and creatives are engaged as agents of change within communities. Creativ Director, Jakari Sherman is a recent MacDowell Fellow and Dance Source Houston Artist-in-Residence, who is considered the first modern choreographer of ‘stepping’. For two decades, Jakari has pioneered the integration of traditional and contemporary stepping into full-length concert works, challenging conventions through storytelling, technology, and cross-disciplinary innovation. Jakari is the former Artistic Director of Washington, DC-based Step Afrika!, and an ethnochoreologist conducting research into the culture and history of stepping and other percussive movement practices. His work has been recognized globally for its unique blend of cultural exploration and energetic percussive dance. He is the Director of *Drumfolk* and *The Migration: Reflections on Jacob Lawrence*, both celebrated works of the Houston Theatre District.

**Silambam Houston**, founded in 2002, is Houston’s premiere Indian classical arts organization, seeking to increase the appreciation and understanding of Indian artistic traditions across cultural boundaries. Providing a unique blend of arts education programs, strong and diverse outreach efforts, hosted performances by local and visiting artists, and an active professional performing Company, all harnessing the versatility and adaptability of the timeless artistic traditions of India to reach diverse, and ever-expanding communities.

Recognized as one of Houston’s ‘**Cultural Treasures**’, Silambam will, in 2026, proudly enter its 25th year of enriching the Houston community with exceptional artistic programming. While deeply rooted in the 2000-year-old artistic traditions of India, all of Silambam’s programming is intentionally crafted to resonate with, and remain relevant to, a wide range of contemporary audiences.

Silambam’s performing and teaching artists represent world-class excellence in a spectrum of Indian classical art forms - Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, Odissi, Mohiniattam, Carnatic vocal and violin, Hindustani vocal, tabla, mridangam, and yoga. A recipient of National Endowment for the Arts funding,

Silambam has been recognized as one of 'Houston's Cultural Treasures', through a national initiative backed by the Ford Foundation and Houston Endowment.

**The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts** serves as a connector, convenor and incubator for all Houston audiences, artmakers and arts organizations. Opened in 2002, the campus houses two theaters including the 2,650-seat Sarofim Hall and the 500-seat Zilkha Hall. Delivering a best-in-class patron experience, the Hobby Center welcomes over 500,000 audience members annually to engage with high-quality arts programming including the Memorial Hermann Broadway at the Hobby Center series. The Hobby Center is also home to a full season of musical theatre produced by Principal Resident Company Theatre Under the Stars, as well as a variety of diverse performances from both Houston-based and touring artists and companies. Education and accessibility initiatives are central to the Hobby Center's impact in Houston through programs like the ExxonMobil Discovery Series that welcomes thousands of students to free performances every season. Please visit [TheHobbyCenter.org](http://TheHobbyCenter.org). Follow the Hobby Center on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

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