

2009 JANE CHAMBERS AWARD

Sponsored by the Women & Theatre Program of ATHE

***THE SIEGELS OF MONTAUK* by Meryl Cohn (Cast: 5F, 1M)**

This witty, female-centered ensemble comedy explores variations on sex, loss, love, family and ethics as propelled by a disturbing mystery. With deft dialogue, a rich array of relationships, and humor as well as conscience, this romp-with-serious-stakes focuses on three adult Jewish sisters who gather for their mother's birthday to close out the family's Montauk beach house in the wake of their psychiatrist father's death—and the community scandal, as well as unexpected guests, it brings. Oldest sister Wendy, a psychologist, is hiding from her clients; youngest sister Sarah has discovered a dubious way to earn a living in the age of reproductive technologies; and middle sister Julie, a writer, can't measure up to her hyper-motivated peers. All probe their own lives as well as their father's on discovering his shocking secret. Lively, smart, and full of surprises, the play's characters both question and grow in ways that will make audiences laugh and reflect. This play rose from among 140 entries to win the 2009 Jane Chambers Contest for feminist playwriting. **For rights, contact merylcohn777@gmail.com or <merylcohn.com>.**

MERYL COHN was a semifinalist for the 2008 & 2006 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference (*Reasons To Live* and *And Sophie Comes Too*), a 2007 finalist for the Massachusetts Cultural Council Playwriting Grant (*Naked With Fruit*), and a 2006 Lark Play Development Center semifinalist. Seven of her plays have been commissioned for productions at Provincetown Theatre. Most recently her work has been produced or read by Counter Productions, TOSOS, The Smith College Theatre Department, & The Road Theatre in L.A. TOSOS will produce *And Sophie Comes Too* in N.Y.C.'s Fringe Festival, August 2009. Counter Productions will produce her new musical comedy, *Insatiable Hunger*, in Provincetown, October 2009. Cohn studied playwriting at Smith and received an M.F.A. in Dramatic Writing from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Her articles have appeared in *The Village Voice*, *The Boston Phoenix*, and *The Washington Post*. The author of *Do What I Say: Ms. Behavior's Guide to Gay and Lesbian Etiquette* (Houghton Mifflin), she offers irreverent advice in her nationally syndicated *Ms. Behavior* humor column, for which she has appeared on Oprah et al. She is a member of the WHAT Playwrights Alliance, TOSOS, The Northampton and Provincetown Playwrights Labs, and the Dramatists Guild.

RUNNERS-UP

***THE WISDOM OF SERPENTS* by Diane Baia**

CAST: 5F, 7M

A two-act historical drama about German medieval Mystic, Composer and Abbess Hildegard von Bingen, whose 12th century devotional songs animate the play. With historical vitality, Baia stages a dramatic conflict between von Bingen and the male hierarchy when at the apex of her career, in 1178, she and her order give sanctuary to a heretic knight returned from the Crusades, sparking an international crisis. Both intimate and epic, this fast-moving play gives voice to a complex array of medieval women's and men's experiences, providing a well-researched glimpse of this volatile time in Christendom. Educational, theatrical, and well-crafted in its sympathetic depiction of a woman of power and musical genius in the Middle Ages. **For rights, contact DianeBaia@hotmail.com or go to www.DianeBaia.com.**

DIANE BAIA is the author of the plays *The Wisdom of Serpents*, *The Dragon's Teeth*, *Cannibal Land*, and *The Lion's Share*. *The Dragon's Teeth*, had a workshop production by First Stage in Hollywood, California, while both *The Wisdom of Serpents* and *The Lion's Share* received staged readings at Chicago Dramatists, in Chicago, Illinois. She is a Chicago Dramatists network playwright and a member of The Dramatists Guild of America as well as of The International Centre for Women Playwrights.

***CHARM* by Kathleen Cahill**

Cast: 3+F, 5M

A creative, historically-inspired imagining of the private life and influence of Margaret Fuller, the 19th century American writer and women's rights activist who may have inspired Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. With wit and theatricality, this 90-minute play is an open dream about Fuller's passions and her robust, complex relationship with the American literary giants of her time—Hawthorne, Emerson

and Thoreau—providing a delightful, and insightful, feminist perspective on America’s history as well as Cahill and the literary men of her generation. **For rights, contact kathleencahill10@comcast.net.**

KATHLEEN CAHILL won the 1995 Jane Chambers Playwriting Award for her musical *The Fifth Season* (since re-titled *Dakota Sky*). She has also won the Connecticut Commission on the Arts Playwriting Award (twice), the Massachusetts Artists Foundation Award, a Rockefeller Grant, an NEA New American Works Grant, and a Drama League Award. Her plays include *The Still Time* (Georgia Rep/ Porchlight Theatre, Chicago) *Women Who Love Science Too Much* (Porchlight Theatre) *Henri, Louise and Henry* (Cleveland Public) *SLAM* (Plan B Theatre, Salt Lake), *Charm* (workshops at Icicle Creek Theatre Festival, A.C.T. in Seattle, Lark Theatre Playwrights Week, Orlando Playfest 2009, and Orlando Shakespeare New Play Workshop, with a 2010 premiere at Salt Lake Acting Company) and *Counting the Waves* (Play-in-a-Day, Orlando Shakespeare) Her screenplay *Downtown Express* stars Nellie McKay and Philippe Quint. Her musicals include: *The Navigator* (reading at Shetler Productions, Berklee College of Music) *Friendship of the Sea* (North Shore Music Theatre Educational Outreach.) *Dakota Sky* (Olney Theatre, MD; Norris Theatre, L.A.) *Water on the Moon* (Signature Theatre readings) and *Captivated* (Kennedy Center New Works Festival) with librettos for *Clara*, *Fatal Song* and *A Tale of Two Cities: Paris and Berlin in the Twenties*, all for the Maryland Center for the Performing Arts. She holds an M.F.A. in Music-Theatre from NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, writes for Masterpiece on PBS, and is Visiting Professor of Theater at the University of Utah.

TOPIARIES by Elizabeth Rosengren Cotone

Cast: 3F, 2M

With beautiful imagery, compelling contemporary characters, optional video, and an ecological spirit, this intimate full-length play contends with a woman artist’s creative life as it is compromised or fed by people and places, as well as by her living with a serious reproductive disease. At play’s center is a formerly high-profile NYC glass artist who has moved upstate to live and work by the sea, where her past successes and failures might haunt her less. Faced with choosing between her studio and an old tree threatening its foundation, and between life as a gallery artist or populist one, she must re-imagine her life—and identity. **For rights, contact the playwright at rosengrene@yahoo.com or 917-583-4447.**

ELIZABETH COTONE has spent the past ten years as a writer, actor and producer in both theatre and film on both coasts. Her original play *Anna and the Bear* (a.k.a. *Chekhov’s Chicks*) opened to critical acclaim at Manhattan Theatre Source in 2007. In 2008, four of her independent short films were produced by Thunderbird Productions in L.A. A resident of New York City for the past three years, she previously founded the Writers Group of Theater 150 in Ojai, California, where she also served as Artistic Director. She holds her B.A. in Drama from Kenyon College, and has been accepted to the M.F.A. program in Screenwriting at USC’s School of Cinematic Arts.

CHING CHONG CHINAMAN by Lauren Yee

Cast: 3F, 3M

This highly theatrical, bold look at contemporary Asian-American identity orbits around the ultra-assimilated Wong family, a Chinese-American family where sister Desdemona dreams of early admission to Princeton and teenage brother Upton dreams of World of Warcraft superstardom while mother yearns for a new baby and father a holiday. All pursue their dreams with the help of an indentured Chinese servant who harbors an American dream of his own. With an absurdist style that harpoons clichés, Yee’s fast-paced, often hilarious play travels across continents, cultural complexities and generations with rapier wit, physical comedy, and astute commentary. *CHING CHONG CHINAMAN* was a finalist for the 2008 Princess Grace Award and winner of the 2007 Yale Playwrights Festival as well as the Kumu Kahua Theatre’s 2007 Pacific Rim Prize. **For rights, contact lauren.d.yee@gmail.com or (415) 794-1080.**

LAUREN YEE is a 2008/09 Dramatists Guild fellow, a 2009 MacDowell Colony fellow, and a member of the 2009 Public Theater Emerging Writers Group. She has been a finalist for the Djerassi Resident Artist Program, the Heideman Award, the Jerome Fellowship, and the PONY Fellowship. Other honors include fellowships from the Albee Foundation, the American Antiquarian Society, Byrdcliffe, Hawthornden Castle, and the New York Mills Cultural Center; funding from the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation and Theatre Bay Area; and commissions from the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, the O’Neill Studio and PlayGround. *Ching Chong Chinaman* received its world premiere at Mu Performing Arts in 2009 after development at the 2007 NY International Fringe Festival and Impact Theatre in 2008; the play will receive its New York premiere at Pan Asian Rep in 2010. Selected other plays include *Highrise*, *Postgrad*, *Samsara*, and one acts such as *Mother Tongue*, *Over the Asian Airwaves*, and *Escaping Chinatown*. She is pursuing her MFA at UCSD (conferment 2012), and holds a BA from Yale.

STUDENT JANE CHAMBERS WINNER – 2009***COLLATERAL BODIES*** by Erin Kaplan (NYU)

CAST: 7F

This new work explores human rights issues through the life experience of women from five different cultures: American, Mexican, Arab, Somali, and Eastern European. Woven together with poetry and song, the stories of five different women unravel in interview style. Their personal stories, which deal with human rights violations ranging from bride burning to female circumcision, from incarceration of women to sex trafficking, explore the specific nature of these crimes and highlight the universal lack of regard for women's lives, bodies, and minds in contemporary perspective. Despite the atrocities committed against them, their stories celebrate their individual courage and indomitable spirit to survive and thrive. *Collateral Bodies* is a feminist call to action, a reminder of the great work and activism required ahead before women around the world are treated with dignity and respect and their gender does not compel them to experience cycles of fear and danger. For rights contact <erinrkaplan@gmail.com>.

ERIN KAPLAN is an actor, teaching artist, workshop facilitator, playwright and activist living in Brooklyn. She holds a BA from the University of Michigan's Residential College in Drama, English Literature and Political Science and an MA in Educational Theatre in Colleges and Communities with a focus in Applied Theatre from New York University's Steinhardt School. In the summer of 2007 Erin was fortunate enough to study at the Center for Theatre of The Oppressed in Rio Di Janeiro with Augusto Boal and carries his belief that "We are all actors" through all of her work.

THE JANE CHAMBERS AWARD recognizes plays & performance texts created by women writers which present a feminist perspective and that provide significant opportunities for female performers. This annual award, founded in 1974, welcomes experimentations in form and in subject matter. It is given in memory of lesbian playwright Jane Chambers, who through her plays such as *A Late Snow*, *My Blue Heaven*, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, and *Kudzu* became a major feminist voice in American theater. Sponsored by the Women and Theatre Program with the Association for Theater in Higher Education, the contest understands feminism to cross an array of class, sex, race, national, ethnic, theatrical, and/or geographic perspectives. In 2009, *The Siegels of Montauk*, *The Wisdom of Serpents*, *Charm*, *Topiaries*, and *Ching Chong Chinaman* rose from 140 submissions as selected through three rounds of review, collectively adjudicated by 16 feminist theater artists and teacher-scholars affiliated with WTP, ATHE and LMDA. In 2009 our Jane Chambers Contest winner receives \$500 & a rehearsed reading at ATHE's annual summer conference, presented August 10th, at 10:30am. The student Jane Chambers Winner will receive a reading at the Women and Theatre Program Conference August 8th, also in NYC. In addition to WTP and ATHE, financial contributions in 2009 were given by anonymous donors, playwrights, and individual WTP members as part of our ongoing, crucial fundraising drive. Guidelines for submission and donation may be viewed online at the WTP website: <<http://www.athe.org/wtp/html/chambers.html>>.