

SPONSORED BY THE WOMEN AND THEATRE PROGRAM &  
THE ASSOCIATION OF THEATRE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## 2012 JANE CHAMBERS AWARDS

### MAIN CONTEST WINNER

**STILL** (3w, 1m), by Jen Silverman. Boldly creative and moving, *STILL* excavates a distinctive cluster of relationships and ruptures that collide when forty-one-year old Morgan's baby is born dead. The play's striking images—a pumpkin cradled like a baby, a masked midwife, an adult-sized dead baby who roams the world, a punk and pregnant dominatrix—create a highly original dramatic journey of mothering and mortality, love and loss. The profound heartbreak, surprising humor, and desire that ripple across this play, the freshness of the language, and the risks *STILL* takes to map unsentimental representations of women's experiences rarely staged give this play powerful theatrical force—and human depth. For rights, contact Kate Navin at the Abrams Artists Agency <kate.navin@abramsartny.com>.

**JEN SILVERMAN** studied at Brown University and the Iowa Playwrights Workshop. She is an Affiliated Artist with New Georges, a member of Youngblood, and has developed work with The Lark, NY Stage & Film, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, hotINK (NYC), The Brick (Brooklyn), Leviathan Lab (NYC), and the Seven Devils Playwrights Conference. *CRANE STORY* premiered off-Broadway in 2011 with The Playwrights Realm, and *THE EDUCATION OF MACOLOCO* won the 2009 Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Play Festival and was published by Samuel French. Her new play *AKARUI* will premiere at Cleveland Public Theatre in May 2012. She received a 2011 commission from InterAct Theatre and the National New Play Network for *THE DANGEROUS HOUSE OF PRETTY MBANE*, written during a 2012 residency at the MacDowell Colony. Jen has upcoming residencies at the Millay Colony and New Harmony. In 2011 she was a US Delegate for a China/America Writers Exchange in Beijing and Chicago.

### RUNNER-UP

**THE FINAL SAY** (4w, 2m), by Meryl Cohn. Madcap in moments, and profound in others, this two-act comedy/drama centers on a young playwright, Betsy Goldstein, whose labor of love about her grandmother's heroism during World War II is almost produced—until "HOLOCAUST SUPERSTAR: THE MUSICAL" takes the slot. When Betsy learns that the upcoming musical shares key distinctive features with her storyline and is written by her former mentor, she must decide how far to go to protect her play and her beloved grandmother's story. Alternating between scenes at the theatre—full of hilarity—and the nursing home where Betsy speaks to her grandmother's feisty, estranged best friend, this play complicates our understanding of whose stories we tell, and why. With wit and depth, the play asks us, Who owns what stories—and can ideas truly be stolen? Vivid characters, much laughter, and reflection ensue... For rights, contact the playwright at <merylcohn777@gmail.com>.

**MERYL COHN** was awarded the 2009 Jane Chambers Playwriting Award for *THE SIEGELS OF MONTAUK*. She was a semifinalist in 2006 and 2008 for the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference (*REASONS TO LIVE* and *AND SOPHIE COMES TOO*) and a 2007 MCC Playwriting finalist (*NAKED WITH FRUIT*). Recent work has been staged or developed at The N.Y. International Fringe Festival, W.H.A.T, The Road Theatre, Provincetown Theater Company, TOSOS, Smith College, and the Road Theatre. Meryl studied playwriting at Smith College and received an M.F.A. in Dramatic Writing from NYU. Her humor book, *DO WHAT I SAY: MS. BEHAVIOR'S GUIDE TO GAY AND LESBIAN ETIQUETTE*, was published by Houghton Mifflin.

FEMINIST PLAYS BY WOMEN, WITH GREAT ROLES FOR WOMEN (AND SOMETIMES FOR MEN)

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**HONORABLE MENTIONS**

**EXILE** (3w, 2m), by Nasaran Ahmadi. This fast-moving two-act play about the interaction of global identities, video game culture, and political stakes morphs love story into heroine's journey in a heartbeat. Sameera pitches a game about a post-nuclear Iran to Elly, a video game mogul who's attracted to the idea—and Sam. Meanwhile, Tamrin, Sam's partner, pursues a publishing deal that outlines the US's involvement in dismantling the Middle East. Sameera's tryst sets off a bomb in the protagonist's home life—and self-understanding—that throws her into the video game, taking place in a vaporized Iran where she acts as both savior and stranger in her homeland. The play's inventive move into virtual space-as-dramatic-nexus-of-possibilities creates theatrical excitement and its contemporary political relevance hooks audiences through real-life stakes. For rights, contact the playwright at <nastaran@nastaranahmadi.com>.

**NASTARAN AHMADI's** plays include *LAYLA AND MAJNUN, DOCTORING, EXILE, THE WAR IS OVER* and *STRANGERS*. Currently, Nastaran is a 2011-2012 Writing Fellow at The Playwrights Realm in NYC and a Writer-in-Residence in LMCC'S Workspace Program. Her play *EXILE* was also a finalist for the 2012 O'Neill Playwrights Conference. In June 2012, Nastaran was hosted by The Orchard Project to develop her new play, *ROCKET SONG*, and in the fall she will travel to Oregon to develop her new work *THE BET* with Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Black Swan Lab. A member Playwright of the Lark Play Development Center, Ahmadi's work has received Honorable Mentions from the Jane Chambers Playwriting Award (for *DOCTORING*) and from The Middle East America Distinguished Playwright Award. Her MFA in Playwriting is from the Yale School of Drama, where she received the ASCAP Cole Porter Prize. See <www.nastaranahmadi.com >.

**BUZZ** (3w, 4m) by Susan Ferrara. Artfully layering British cultural history and biography, theater and life, this full-length play excavates the creative genius of Buzz Goodbody, the charismatic first female director of the Royal Shakespeare Company—who in the 1970s created The Other Space, transforming how we stage classics today. This play opens with a mystery: Four days after the first performance of her legendary *HAMLET*, with a young Ben Kingsley in the title role, Buzz was found dead in her flat, an apparent suicide. In *BUZZ* Hamlet's gravediggers escort us through the memory, fact and fiction of Buzz's life work, as we investigate the product of one agent of change (Buzz herself) in a sea of status quo. This play's sophisticated language, creative storytelling, and insightful specificities raise astute questions about gender and work, women in theater, mortality, and the drive to make art. For rights, contact <susieferrara@gmail.com>.

**SUSAN FERRARA** is an actor/playwright. Her playwriting includes *THE MACHINE* (2009 O'Neill semi-finalist, 2010 Leah Ryan Award Finalist, 2011 New Dramatists semi-finalist), *SUICIDE ON PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE*, and *BUZZ* (2012 New Dramatists Semi-Finalist, 2012 Reverie Prod, Next Generation Playwriting Finalist), among many. Her acting credits include: *PEASANT* (writer/performer), Gerry on the award-winning webseries *THEN WE GOT HELP!*, the Onion News Network, *THE CHERRY ORCHARD, STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE, HELLCAB, MACBETH, ORLANDO*, and others. She is a member of AEA, SAG, AFTRA, Dramatists Guild, CTC Ensemble and Resonance Ensemble. For more, go to < www.susanferrara.com >

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**KALI DANCES** (4w, 3m, 1 either), by Patricia Montley. This compelling mystery opens a multiracial, lens on questions of faith and feminism, justice and complicity, death and dying. When a music teacher is found at the church organ with her throat slit, her lesbian lover, the pastor, and his young daughter, confront one another with grief and anger. The African-born investigating detective suspects each of them. Or is the homicide a hate crime? The terrifying Indian Goddess Kali challenges them all to come to terms with her, partly staged through dance, helping audiences to navigate this modern day mystery play's fascinating intersection of Hindu and Christian beliefs about death. For rights, contact the playwright at <pat\_montley@msn.com>.

**PATRICIA MONTLEY's** plays include dramas, satires, adaptations of Greek classics, musicals, story theatre versions of Japanese and Native American folk tales, and ten-minute works. A member of the Dramatists Guild, she has had twelve plays published (Samuel French, Playscripts, Meriwether, Heinemann, Applause, Dramatic Publishing, Prentice-Hall, ICWP, and *Dramatics Magazine*). Her work has received readings at Center Stage, the Abingdon Theatre, the Kennedy Center Page-to-Stage Festival, and productions at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Nebraska Repertory Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Source, Harold Clurman Theatre, and Nat Horne Theatre, among others. Montley's work has been supported by residencies at the Millay Artists' Colony and the Djerassi Resident Artists Program, among others. She has taught playwriting, including at Goucher College and Johns Hopkins University. Her musical *Rosvitha's Review* (with music by Elizabeth Cameron) was honored by the Jane Chambers Award in 1986. She is also a poet.

**TAR BEACH** (4w, 1m), by Tammy Ryan. This moving, sophisticated coming of age story centers around two young Brooklyn sisters, quite different and closer than they know, and a best friend, during the summer of Son of Sam—in 1977. Excellent psychological depth for all characters, including their parents, and complex rendering of relationships, class, gender, and sudden loss of innocence make this snapshot of working class Catholic lives distinctive. Expertly plotted, *TAR BEACH* blends poetry and realism, humor and trauma with creative confidence and gripping humanity. For rights, contact the playwright's agent, Susan Gurman, at 212-749-4618.

**TAMMY RYAN** was awarded the ATCA's 2012 Francesca Primus Prize for her play *Lost Boy Found in Whole Food*, which was developed by the New Harmony Project and co-produced by Premiere Stages and Playwrights Theater of New Jersey. Her play, *THE MUSIC LESSON* received the AATE Distinguished Play Award and is published by Dramatic Publishing Company. Other plays include *LINDSEY'S OYSTER*, *A CONFLUENCE OF DREAMING*, *BABY'S BLUES*, *FBI GIRL*, *THE PIRATE QUEEN*, *IN THE SHAPE OF A WOMAN*, *DARK PART OF THE FOREST*, *THE BOUNDARY*, *PIG* and *VEGETABLE LOVE* and *DRY CLEANING THE SOUL* (winner in the 6 Women Write Playwriting Festival). She has held fellowships at VCCA and the Sewanee Writers Conference. Ryan is based in Pittsburgh where her work can be seen at the Pittsburgh Playhouse. She is a regional representative for the Dramatists Guild of America. For more information, refer to her website: [www.tammyryan.net](http://www.tammyryan.net)

**WINNER OF STUDENT JANE CHAMBERS CONTEST**

**AGNES' BABY** (2w), by Olivia Briggs. This compelling two-act play explores issues of sex trafficking, politics, and privilege through the relationship between a congresswoman, Agnes, and a South Korean woman working as a prostitute. As Agnes attempts to control their relationship and maintain her public image, her colleagues work to control her; meanwhile, "Baby" faces mortal perils. Agnes must decide between the career she has spent her life building and the woman she wants to be when "Baby" challenges her to help. Through compelling characters, the play confronts

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the (un)comfortable boundaries delineating nationality and privilege, the personal and the political, as well as love and power. For rights contact the playwright at <ob457@nyu>.

**OLIVIA BRIGGS** received her B.A. in theatre from Oberlin College and is currently an M.F.A. candidate in Dramatic Writing at NYU Tisch Asia in Singapore. For the past six years, Olivia has served as the resident director of Shakespeare in the Valley, an annual teen Shakespeare workshop and performance organized by The West Kortright Centre. Virginia's Panglossian Productions theatre company produced Briggs's short play "Expecting Lila" in 2012.

**STUDENT CONTEST RUNNER UP**

**SAMSARA** (2w, 1m), by Lauren Yee. This charismatic one-act blends reality and fantasy in a delightful and unsettling portrayal of the complex personal and ethical issues that arise in surrogate pregnancies when American couple Katie and Craig vow to make a last-ditch effort to create a baby through India's thriving surrogacy industry. Suraiya, whose womb they "rent," suspects the child she carries is displeased with the arrangement— objections she fields during her prenatal appointments and conversations with the couple. While Katie and Craig try to maintain a perfect façade, we wonder if their decision for surrogacy will unite or divide them. A hilarious look at reproduction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, questioning whether we can truly achieve intimacy in the face of shrinking worlds and expanding boundaries. For rights, contact <aoegel@aoiagency.com>.

**LAUREN YEE** received her B.A. from Yale and is completing her M.F.A. in playwriting at UC San Diego. Her plays include: *CHING CHONG CHINAMAN*; *CREVICE*; *HOOKMAN*; *IN A WORD*; *A MAN, HIS WIFE, AND HIS HAT*; and *SAMSARA*. Yee has been a Dramatists Guild fellow and a MacDowell fellow as well as a finalist for the Wasserstein Prize and other awards. *CHING CHONG CHINAMAN*, published by Samuel French, was a finalist for both the Princess Grace and Jane Chambers Awards. *SAMSARA* has received readings at theatres including East West Players, Queens Theatre in the Park, and the Orlando Shakespeare Festival. In the 2012/2013 season, City Lights Theatre Company, fu-GEN, The Hub Theatre, and Mu Performing Arts will produce Yee's works. See her website <laurenyee.com>.

**THE JANE CHAMBERS AWARD recognizes plays & performance texts by women that present a feminist perspective & contain significant opportunities for female performers. This annual award is given in memory of lesbian playwright Jane Chambers who, through her plays *A Late Snow*, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*, *My Blue Heaven*, *Kudzu*, & *The Quintessential Image*, became a major feminist voice in American theatre. Sponsored by the Women and Theatre Program with the Association for Theater in Higher Education, the Jane Chambers winner receives \$1,000 & a reading of the winning play at ATHE. Guidelines for submission—and our archive of recent winners—can be viewed at <www.athe.org/wtp/>. We welcome private donations, which make the prizes for Main and Student divisions possible. This year's Main Jane Chambers Winner —*STILL* by Jen Silverman—rose from 117 submissions. The Student Winner —*AGNES' BABY* by Olivia Briggs—rose from a pool with plays representing top MFA programs from across, and beyond, the US.**