

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

2010

JANE CHAMBERS AWARD WINNER

A LIVE DRESS BY MARTHA JANE KAUFMAN (4w, 3m.)

Set in the Yiddish theater culture of New York in 1925, *A LIVE DRESS* draws the tangled threads of cultural autonomy and assimilation into focus by playing with performance, gender, sexuality and rites of passage. In this magical two-act play, the spirit world clamors to make its presence known across the time/space continuum by hanging a series of vacant dresses in the street... At the same time, Kaufman revises the traditions of Yiddish theater. Her central characters Sabina and Emma share a love of theater and a drive to perform, as they sneak into balconies to watch Yiddish plays and act together in cabaret-like love stories where each young woman takes a turn at "playing the boy," surfacing lesbian desire. The play's spirit world, meanwhile, is set into motion by Sabina's Grandmother who keeps an old family dress "alive" for her granddaughter, wearing it daily. With this play, Kaufman acknowledges the profound connection between our world and the spiritual realm, ancestors and imaginations, sexuality and performance. These connections are explained, managed and transformed by strong and compelling female characters as well as fascinating male roles. For more information about the play, or rights, contact <mjkaufmanster@gmail.com>.

Martha Jane Kaufman is a playwright, dancer and teacher. She has received awards and commissions from the Playwrights' Foundation, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, and Young Playwrights Inc. She has also choreographed six dances. Originally from Portland, OR, Martha attended Wesleyan University. She is currently a playwriting fellow at the Huntington Theater and will begin her MFA at Yale School of Drama in fall 2010.

RUNNER-UP

QUEENS FOR A YEAR by T.D. Mitchell. 7w min (up to 11mixed or all-female cast). A compelling realist play about five generations of female Marines juxtaposed against a stylized retelling of the Caeneus/Caenis myth: the maiden transformed into a male warrior at her request. In this compelling window on American culture refracted through class and gender, a young Marine officer, Molly, returns to her grandmother's home with a Marine grunt in tow, Amanda. Damaged in Iraq, Amanda is cared for by the generations of servicewomen in Molly's unusual family. Molly's determination to help Amanda, at her own peril, forces into question the wisdom of putting female warriors into a still-sexist, and very violent, male military culture. This tightly-structured play features several well-defined characters, high stakes scenes that take place in Iraq as well as at home, and an array of feminist perspectives on war. For rights, contact Lynn Fimberg of The Gersh Agency (310-274-6611).

T.D. Mitchell is an award-winning playwright and speechwriter (head writer, 2004 Women's March on Washington). She is currently writing for the television drama series "Army Wives" to support her theatre habit. Originally conceived at the Center Theatre Group / Mark Taper Forum's Playwrights' Workshop, *QUEENS* is the second in her trilogy exploring military culture. Her first, *BEYOND THE 17TH PARALLEL*, about the long-term impact of war on families, was developed at the Ojai Playwrights Conference. While seeking the right home theatre to further develop *QUEENS*, T.D. recently co-wrote and co-created an "Army Wives" spinoff pilot for ABC Studios.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

DOCTORING by Nastaran Ahmadi. 2w, 2m. This fun queer love story moves like a mystery. By requesting a favor from her best friend, Brian, who works in a Doctor's city office, Sheri sets off a chain reaction of fiascos, the sorting out of which requires one too many people to reveal one too many secrets. *DOCTORING* takes place first in the Doctor's office and then in the less clinical boundaries of Sheri's apartment—where a crush turns into obsession, a cyber-personality materializes in the flesh, and two friends learn the consequences and virtues of unrequited desire. For rights, refer to her website.

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

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Nastaran Ahmadi has had plays developed and produced at theaters including New York Theatre Workshop, Actors Theater of Louisville, Lark Play Development Center, The Ontological-Hysteric Theater, Playwrights Foundation in San Francisco, The Yale Cabaret, and The Yale School of Drama. *DOCTORING* was developed at The Lark and was a finalist for both the O'Neill 2010 Playwrights Conference and the Leah Ryan Fund for Emerging Women Writers. *DOCTORING* will receive further development at The Astoria Performing Arts Center in Fall 2010. Nastaran holds an MFA in Playwriting from Yale School of Drama, where she was awarded the ASCAP Cole Porter Prize for excellence in Playwriting. For more information, refer to <www.nastaranahmadi.com>.

POKE HER by Lisa O'Hara. 4w, 3m at minimum for 30+ roles. This boldly theatrical, often whimsical ensemble play charts a modernist roller coaster of feminist awakening: What is a woman? What does she want? Why can't her mother help her? And exactly how much space does she take up? Clare Lucille, a young girl of privilege, has not been happy with any of the answers, and she doesn't mind getting poked a bit on a quest to make a place for her true self in the world. It's a comedy, mostly. With oracles. And a splash of Virginia Woolf. For more information, contact <oharall@yahoo.com>.

Born in Virginia, **Lisa O'Hara** is a writer and editor now living in Queens, New York. A high school English and theater teacher for 15 years in Virginia public schools, Lisa holds a BA in Theatre Arts from Virginia Tech and a master's in English from Middlebury College. Her poetry has been published in *Voices from Here* by the Paulinskill Poetry Project in rural New Jersey. *Poke Her* is her first play.

STUDENT CONTEST WINNER

THE UNSPOKEN ONES by Liza Case. 4w, 1m. Set in the modern south, *THE UNSPOKEN ONES* tells the story of Darlene Petty, a working-class mother of three whose husband abandons her when she becomes pregnant again. When Darlene disappears, her mother, Shirley, sets off to find her. Along the way, she encounters her past and also receives guidance from sources she may never understand. The play shows women coping alone with the pain of being alive and explores the possibility that there just may be something more out there. For information or rights contact <lizacase@gmail.com>.

LIZA CASE grew up in Nashville, Tennessee. For many years she worked as an actor in both theatre and film. She also co-founded the New York Independent Film Monitor, and edited the paper for its nine-year run. During that time, she wrote and produced several short films. Among those, *Destiny* was licensed to the Emmy-Award-winning PBS show *The Short List* and to WE and IFC. She recently completed her BA in Creative Writing and Chinese Studies at The City College of New York and will begin the MFA program in Dramatic Writing at NYU in the Fall. *THE UNSPOKEN ONES* is her first full-length play. It won the 2009 Stark Award for Drama at City College. Liza lives in New York City with her son, Harlan.

THE JANE CHAMBERS PLAYWRITING AWARD recognizes plays & performance texts created 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 support from the Association for Theater in Higher Education, the Jane Chambers winner receives \$500 and a rehearsed reading of the winning play. Guidelines for submission—and our archive of recent winners—can be viewed at the Women and Theatre Program website: <<http://www.athe.org/wtp/>>. We welcome private donations at every level to keep this contest going, and to raise the visibility of this distinctive and deserving work to theatres, universities, and media.

The 2010 coordinators and curators of the Jane Chambers Contest are Priscilla Page (UMass Amherst) and Maya Roth (Georgetown University), on behalf of WTP and ATHE, with Nancy Lynch (Texas State University) coordinating the student Jane Chambers Contest.

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