

FAQ for JANE CHAMBERS CONTEST

What are the guidelines for the Jane Chambers Contest?

Playwrights who are in graduate programs may choose whether to submit their work to the main contest (often nicknamed "the professional contest") or the student contest while pursuing their MFA; most graduate playwrights submit to the student branch. The same play *cannot* be submitted to both. We do have emergent and established playwrights submitting works to the main contest--which we see as one of the contest's strengths. Sometimes the winner is more junior, sometimes senior; sometimes the work has received professional premiere, often just a workshop at a university or small theater.

Who was Jane Chambers?

Jane Chambers (1937-1983) was an influential feminist playwright, poet and novelist whose works foreground lesbian experience and women's perspectives. Her plays include *A Late Snow*, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* and *My Blue Heaven*. Many of her plays were inspired by life in Provincetown, and she was one of the first American playwrights to create openly lesbian characters comfortable with their sexuality. She was an active member of WTP, the Dramatist's Guild, Actor's Equity, and the East End Gay Organization for Human Rights, among other groups. After her death of cancer, her long-time partner Beth Allen published a collection of her poems entitled "Warrior at Rest" and the Women and Theatre Program of ATHE created the Jane Chambers Playwriting Contest in her honor

How are the plays judged for the Jane Chambers Contest?

Plays submitted for the Jane Chambers Contest are judged through rounds of review, advancing by recommendation. The judges are guided to read the plays looking for both artistic excellence and feminist perspectives, and to stay open to experimentations in form. Feminism is understood to include varied perspectives and theatrical possibilities. The plays should also feature significant opportunities for female performers and be written by a woman. On the basis of merit and our contest's goals, plays advance through a series of rounds—typically three, depending on the number of submissions—until the finalist round, where a panel of three to five judges determine that year's winning play and runners-up.

These waves of review assure that winning plays have impressed several judges; it is also true that any play which wildly impresses a single reader in earlier rounds will likely advance to the final round on the basis of that one (versus multiple) recommendation—to assure our openness to difference or radical excellence. Most plays advance from any given round, meanwhile, by acclimation, or at least two judges reports. Judges are specifically urged **not** to consider how

easily the play might be performed to ensure that we are providing a forum for recognizing top plays and playwrights rather than feasibility; thus the Jane Chambers Contest can offer something differently than a contest or developmental lab run by a professional theatre attuned to its own technical, economic or stylistic concerns.

I am not sure my play is feminist enough, or that I will rise to the top of applicants. Should I apply?

We do ask that writers submit their best new/recent work—and honor the contest’s mission statement. We recognize an expansive range of feminist visions—seeking plays that articulate feminist perspectives, however complex or diverse. (Plays need not focus on lesbian experience, to be clear.) We honor plays that create significant (and typically plural) roles for women. We welcome experimentations in form; we do not mandate them. Often winning plays engage under-represented themes, figures, or women’s experiences.

We revel in the variety and number of submissions we receive, for this helps WTP to gauge trends in women’s playwriting, and helps to connect writers and feminist theater artists. Each year, some jurors will contact a playwright directly whose work they have considered and responded to intensely—or see promise for—to inquire about production or workshop development of the piece, whether in a theatre or university setting. This is the exception for plays submitted, but happens for at least a couple of plays each year, often for works that resonate with a particular juror’s sensibility or program.

What do you mean by new?

Works that have been completed in the past two years are eligible. The works may have been staged or published in the past year, however that is not necessary for submission. Also, unlike many other awards, no letter of professional nomination is required.

Who are the judges?

The judges for the primary Jane Chambers Contest are all established feminist dramaturgs, playwrights, critics, and theater artists, most directly associated with the Women and Theater Program and/or LMDA.

The jurors for the Student Jane Chambers Contest include established and emergent feminist critics, writers and theater artists. In order to ensure that the student contest includes an aspect of peer-review and to appreciate the ethos of the next generation of feminist writers, some of those judges include graduate students in Theater and Performance Studies Programs.

In all instances, we involve qualified feminist judges from across the country (and sometimes beyond!) in order to help us to recognize a diversity of feminist perspectives and artistic sensibilities. In this way, we also help to build feminist theatrical community and conversation. By spreading awareness of the quality,

quantity, and range of new plays written by women each year through the process of judging, we also educate educators and prospective collaborators—inspiring renewed advocacy on behalf of women in theater.

Can I become a juror for the Jane Chambers Contest?

Judges may be self-nominated or nominated by others. (Almost all have a direct affiliation with WTP and/or LMDA to ensure expertise in reading new works and/or feminist theater.) You may self-nominate by contacting one of the Jane Chambers Coordinators; do send a resume, a reference, and be prepared for a brief interview. Many judges participate year after year, and so there are not always open slots. New judges typically review first round plays.

Who administers the Jane Chambers Contest?

WTP. The Contest Coordinators are currently Maya Roth, Ph.D. (Georgetown University) with Jen-Scott Mobley, MFA/PhD (East Carolina University). This is a position in the Women and Theatre program (WTP) of the Association for Theater in Higher Education.

The Contest Coordinators are members of WTP and feminists with experience in professional theater *and* feminist criticism who are deeply committed to supporting the work of women playwrights. Eligibility to act as a coordinator/curator includes at least two years of service as a juror in the Jane Chambers Contest. Since coordinating the contest is such a formidable duty, WTP rotates leadership for the Contest periodically. DO look for each year's lead coordinator when applying for the Contest to heed the address for submission!

Is there an application fee?

No. In 2007-8 we had a short-lived application fee for the Jane Chambers Contest. As feminists, we are committed to minimizing barriers to submission for struggling artists, so we removed it. ***We do welcome and need donations, however.*** Contrary to popular understanding, there is no Jane Chambers Endowment. Please help us start one! Grant funding has diminished in the tightened economy, as have individual gifts.

Who funds the Contest?

Women and Theatre is a focus group of ATHE, the Association for Theater in Higher Education. We co-sponsor the contest, which WTP administers; both organizations contribute some funds to honoring the award-winner and hosting the playwright at our annual conference. WTP welcomes funds for the award money, staged readings, and publicity of the winners. We do not have sustained funding for the Contest, but rather cover expenses year-to-year...

Please let us know if you can help with donations.

How can I give a bit to the Jane Chambers Contest?

Please send a check made out to WTP earmarked for the Jane Chambers Award, and mail it either to WTP's Treasure, or to:

ATTN: Maya Roth
Re: JANE CHAMBERS GIFT
Department of Performing Arts
108 Davis Center, Box 571063
Georgetown University
Washington, DC 20057-1063

Or you can contact Maya Roth <mer46@georgetown.edu> or Jen-Scott Mobley <jenscottmob@gmail.com>. Checks work, for however small or large an amount!: You can also contribute online through our paypal link on the Women and Theater website. Be sure to earmark your donation for Jane Chambers: <https://www.paypal.me/womenandtheatrethe/>

What recognition does the Jane Chambers Contest Winner receive?

The award brings public recognition and some prestige, in addition to the \$1000 award and a reading of the play. The winner is announced at the annual ATHE Conference, which falls in the summer. At ATHE, the winner offers remarks and receives a rehearsed reading of the play, coordinated by WTP. The winner also benefits from publicity to the WTP membership, Jane Chambers applicants and jurors, ATHE membership, LMDA membership, and a range of literary and artistic offices at small and large US theatres

How do I know from year to year where to send my play submissions for the Jane Chambers Contest?

We now accept submissions nearly exclusively through a website/database. However, you must CHECK the WTP WEBSITE or the ATHE Awards page *each year* for the current Submission Guidelines. Because the coordinator role is so time-intensive and a service position —not only strictly unpaid but a labor of love—we sometimes rotate the coordinators. Moreover, we have been working to improve our electronic submissions and so contact information as well as URLS may change! Sometimes electronic postings do not disappear from years past and *so can get outdated: Check the Source: the WTP Website.*

<https://www.womenandtheatreprogram.com/jane-chambers>