

## 2023 JANE CHAMBERS AWARD for PLAYWRITING

### MAIN CONTEST WINNER for 2023

***THE MAGICIAN'S SISTER* (2F, 1M, flexible casting) by Jami Brandli.** This charismatic play follows two sisters, one a struggling Magician and the other, the Play's narrator, who serves as her (slightly older) "Wise Assistant." Set in the past, present and possible, the play moves fluidly across ages as the sisters strive to fulfill their conflicting desires and make peace with their mother's mental illness, violent death and dream that they become "extraordinary." Forgotten historical female magicians, as great as Houdini, weave throughout the play as the sisters seek inspiration. Their father (and manager), meanwhile, masks struggles, including his grief upon his wife's death, their barriers to success, and his own declining health. As the adult sisters branch out, a failed escape trick in Las Vegas compels each to seek her own life, even as the younger's mental illness blooms. Yet when the Magician disappears, The Wise Assistant must follow the clues to reveal each sister's truth—and the play's storytelling magic. Judges commended how Brandli centers roles for women across a spectrum of ages with vivid, creative, and moving arcs. The play's deft 'magician's' work with theme, live performance and storytelling elegantly reveals differently gendered lives and cycles of pressures, yearning and reinventions—discovering how caregiving, mental illness, audacious women, and historical erasures can shape psychic lives and family cultures. The final scene—like a magician's feat—frees each sister in ways that had seemed impossible, even while revealing their deep bonds and the story's artful coherence. Elegantly-crafted and theatrical, *THE MAGICIAN'S SISTER* reimagines archetypal roles with feminist generosity.

**JAMI BRANDLI's** plays include *The Magician's Sister*, *M-Theory: a play told in 11 dimensions*, *The Romeo and Juliet Senior Citizens Project: A Comedy*, *Technicolor Life*, *O: A Rhapsody in Divorce*, and *BLISS (or Emily Post is Dead!)*—named by The Kilroys' List and LA Times Critics' Choice. Her work has been produced/developed at New Dramatists, New York Theatre Workshop, Kitchen Dog Theater, Women's Voices Theater Festival, Moxie Theatre, Ashland New Plays Festival, and the Center Theatre Group, among other venues. (*The Magician's Sister* received a public presentation at the Kirk Douglas Theatre in September 2022.) Beyond the 2023 Jane Chambers Prize, selected awards include the Center Theatre Group Writer's Workshop, John Gassner Memorial Playwriting Award and the Humanitas Prize PLAY LA. A finalist for the Princess Grace Award and O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, among others, Brandli's short works are published with TCG, Dramatic Publishing Company, Applause Books, and Smith & Kraus. She is represented by the Michael Moore Agency and Writers Management. For more information, visit [www.jamibrandli.com](http://www.jamibrandli.com) and her [NPX profile](#).

### 2022 Runner-Up to the Jane Chambers Award

***SPAY* (3F, 1M, multiracial cast) by Madison Fiedler.** A brilliant, moving play about a family and the opioid epidemic, set in "Pilliamson," West Virginia. In the wake of their mother's overdose, the two Attridge sisters have taken very different paths: As Harper raises Noah's child, vowing to tread new ground, Noah finds herself unable to break old cycles – until a stranger with her own relationship to addiction and intervention promises a way to do just that. Madison

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Fiedler's new drama *SPAY* interrogates questions of care & addiction, reproductive justice and constrained choices in small-town Appalachia. Centering women —sisters, mothers, social workers, teachers, addicts—and webs of addiction and survival, with a consciously cross-racial, mixed gender cast. Fiedler's taut storytelling and characters reveal human lives, even as they reflect on a tapestry of social and feminist concerns that intersect with US poverty, public health, and addiction. Readers commended the play's "complicated and aching, realistic portrayal of two sisters" caught in crisis, as well as its nuanced language and pacing. This acclaimed new play, also a Susan Smith Blackburn finalist, stirs catharsis as well as thought-provoking questions onstage and in the house.

**MADISON FIEDLER** is a playwright from North Carolina who writes about attempts at care, community & kinship. Plays include *SPAY* (winner of 2023 M. Elizabeth Osborn Award; 2022 world premiere extended run with Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, directed by Georgette Verdin; nominee for the Jeff Award for Best New Work; Susan Smith Blackburn Prize finalist; runner-up for the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award, runner-up for the Princess Grace Playwriting Fellowship; honoree by the Kilroys List, National Showcase of New Plays); *SCREECH OWL* (Studio Theatre workshop; finalist for Leah Ryan Fund for Emerging Women Writers, the Playwrights Realm Writing Fellowship, the Henley Rose Playwright Competition for Women, and Theater J's Patty Abramson Prize), *THE INCUBATORS* (Westport Country Playhouse), *EXALTED* (IRT Theater, New York Theater Festival), and *I TALK TO THE FLOWERS* (Skidmore College, University of Kentucky). She has had residencies with the Roundabout Theatre Company, among others, and is a National New Play Network Affiliated Artist as well as member of the Dramatists Guild. Madison is represented by A3 Artists Agency. BA Northwestern University. She currently lives in Brooklyn. See < [madisinfiedler.net](http://madisinfiedler.net)>.

**HONORABLE MENTIONS**

***FUNNIE: the Most Lamentable Comedie of Jane the Foole (4F, 4M, variable beyond)* by Jessica Moss.** Packed with laugh-out-loud one liners, this ensemble comedy, set in anachronistic Renaissance England hilariously takes on the age-old-stereotype that women aren't funny. Inspired by the little-known figure of Jane—a rare female jester during Henry the VIII's reign—*Funnie* follows Jane's struggle to be recognized as a comic, only to find herself preyed upon by the court jester Carl-the-Funny and the old-boy's-club of Tudor stand-up comedy. Like Monty Python with a feminist slant, *Funnie* expertly balances history, feminism, and satire to interrogate systemic patriarchy, juxtaposing Jane's journey with current events from the #metoo movement and the bad behavior of some well-known male entertainers: With the help of Anne Bolyen and the 'and Maidens, Jane speaks out against the male fool repeatedly sexually harassing women, but will they prevail in this world that privileges men? This audacious play's comic timing and clever theatricality make it a female empowerment romp nonetheless. Themes of ambition, justice, gendered power, class inequality, and consent are rendered with specificity, schtick and cross-epochal savvy. (When the 'and Maidens reveal they've experienced sexual harassment, habitually, with no public outcry, the actresses drop their over-the-top Cockney to speak in cast members' own language cultures.) Irreverent in its historical/contemporary mash-up, with bits of vaudeville, this new play also centers the complex friendship between Jane and

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young Queen Anne Boleyn—who imagines her power as Queen and visionary will protect her. *Is it possible to succeed when you live in a world where you're not seen as a person?*

**JESSICA MOSS** writes, performs, and produces. Some of her plays include *Funnie* (2022 winner of the Leah Ryan's FEWW Prize, O'Neill finalist), *A Girl Lives Alone* (SafeWord New Play Contest winner), *Cam Baby* (Toronto Fringe New Play Winner, Weissberger finalist), *Polly Polly* (Ed Mirvish Award for Entrepreneurship), *Modern Love*, *Next to Him*, *We'll Make it Together*, and more. Her piece *Our Play* was recently a selection at Lanford Wilson New American Play Festival and will be performed at Southeast Missouri State University in 2024. Also in 2024, her TYA Show *The Worries of Wesley* will be presented by the Contemporary Theatre of Ohio. These are her first professional productions and it sure took her long enough! She very much wants to find a home for *Funnie* to receive its premiere. A Toronto native, Jessica trained at Juilliard. For more information, visit her [NPX profile](#)

***THE BODY PLAY (3-5, majority F) by Madison Wetzell.*** In this tragicomedy shaped by a queer, feminist lens, something is very wrong with Amy's Body. Often hilarious, *The Body Play* creatively explores living with chronic illness and the absurdity and existential stakes of embodiment. One protagonist is played by two actors—a detached, neurotic Mind, and her chaotic, screaming Body. The Mind submits her Body to the scrutiny of experts—doctors, therapists, yoga teachers—and ultimately explores what it might mean to BE a body. Judges commended the play's physical theater, verbal dexterity (via tour-de-force monologues and one-liners, alike) as well as its implicit social critique that we are living in contexts that damage our bodies, relationships, selves and world. This play's allegory of mind/body separation, enacted by two different performers playing the queer female protagonist who has an unknown chronic illness—with one actress representing Amy's mind/self, the other her body in pain, fatigue and exile—is theatrically provocative and poignant. Equally exciting is the play's inventive casting and challenging roles to perform, the protagonist's irreverent subjectivity and *The Body Play's* vivid, hilarious critiques of the medical industrial complex as well as wellness cultures, as navigated by a divided, feminist self. Quirky, disarming, and highly relatable.

**MADISON WETZELL** is a playwright currently pursuing an MFA at Brooklyn College. She previously lived and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her full-length work includes *Mediocre Heterosexual Sex* (Buffalo United Artists; Z-Space Problematic Play Festival; BAPF Finalist; O'Neill Theatre NPC Semi-Finalist), *The Lost Ballad of Our Mechanical Ancestor* (Shotgun Players' Champagne Reading Series; Winner, Risk Theater Modern Tragedy Competition; BAPF Semi-Finalist) and *The Body Play* (3Girls Theatre LezWrites Program; Town Hall Theatre New Voices Series; BAPF Finalist). Her short play, *The Official Unicorn Hunters' Guide*, was the winner (by audience selection) of ShortLived VIII at PianoFight. Madison has developed new work with Exquisite Corpse Company, Shotgun Players, 3Girls Theatre, Playground SF, FaultLine Theater, Soundwave, The Bechdel Group, and The Ground Floor at Berkeley Rep. <https://www.madisonwetzell.com>

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**THE JANE CHAMBERS AWARD** recognizes plays & performance texts by women writers that present feminist perspectives & significant roles for female and genderqueer performers. This annual award, established in 1984, 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. We understand feminism to refract across diversity, welcome experimentation in theme and form, and often honor works that stage under-represented lives. Sponsored by the Women and Theatre Program with the Association for Theater in Higher Education, the Jane Chambers winner receives \$1000 & a reading of the winning play at ATHE, and one year's membership with WTP. Guidelines for submission—and our archive of recent winners—can be viewed at < [www.womenandtheatreprogram.com](http://www.womenandtheatreprogram.com) >. This year's winning play *The Magician's Sister* by JAMI BRANDLI rose from more than 270 submissions, across three rounds of adjudication involving over 20 feminist critics, theater artists and educators. Honored plays suit a variety of theatre missions and feminist perspectives.

We welcome and rely upon private donations to honor women's playwriting; WTP and ATHE have no endowments, nor submission fees. (Please consider donating funds to help honor new works and sponsor readings!) The Prize Committee and curation is stewarded by Jen-Scott Mobley with Maya Roth on behalf of WTP and ATHE. We welcome nominations for the Coordinator of the Student Prize in addition to candidates to shadow and help steward the Main Prize. The Jane Chambers Student Contest—which confers \$250 and a reading at the WTP Conference—will return next year with to welcome works from 2022, as well as 2023.

Please help to spread good buzz for Plays that present feminist excellence. Teach them, stage them, and help to reshape the repertory—and world! See our anthologies featuring past Winners of the Contest.

*Lesbian & Queer Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize* —features winning plays, with interviews, by M. Casey (*Unspeakable Acts*), C. Chafee (*Full/Self*), M. Cohn (*The Siegels of Montauk*), MJ Kaufman (*MMM*), and G.Young (*Femmes: A Tragedy*). Edited by Maya E Roth and Jen-Scott Mobley with Preface by Jill Dolan and Afterword by Sara Warner. (2018) Published by NoPassport Press. Available from NOPE and Amazon.

**Forthcoming! *Cross-Cultural Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize***—features winning plays, with interviews, by C. Evans (*Trojan Barbie: A Car Crash Encounter with Euripides' 'Trojan Women'*), N. Goodnow (*Mud Offerings*), L. Loomer (*ROE*), J. Silverman (*STILL*) and E. Stanton (*No Candy!*). Edited by Maya E Roth and Jen-Scott Mobley with Preface and Afterword by Quiara Alegría Hudes. Forthcoming from NoPassport Press by Winter 2023.