

WTP Celebrates the 40th Anniversary of the Jane Chambers Award for Feminist Playwriting

As we inch ever closer to the 2024 annual ATHE conference the members of the Women & Theatre Program also approach a major milestone in the history of this esteemed organization. This year, WTP will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Jane Chambers Playwriting Award!

The Jane Chambers Award recognizes new plays and performance texts created by women writers which present a feminist perspective and provide significant opportunities for female performers. This annual award understands feminism to cross an array of class, sex, race, national, ethnic, theatrical, and/or geographic perspectives and welcomes experimentations in form and in subject matter.



Jane Chambers

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.

Pre-dating ATHE, WTP and the Jane Chambers Award created and maintains a unique and significant place in the development of feminist theatre in the US.

Since the contest began in 1984, The Jane Chambers Award has received over five thousand submissions, averaging at least three hundred per year for the past ten years. Every one of those plays needed to be read and evaluated by steadfast, committed, and engaged readers from WTP and other feminist artist-activists and critics.

Hundreds of people have served as readers in our four decades of hosting this award, and many have gone on to work with the plays and playwrights years after the submission.

Beginning in 1991 WTP added the Student Jane Chambers Award to the WTP ATHE Pre-Conference to honor and encourage young women playwrights to find their voices and create more spaces for women on stage and in all circuits of production and reception.

As Maya E Roth, the longest steward of the Award (since 2006), explains, “The Jane Chambers Prize for Feminist Playwriting has had an outsized impact on the field and artist lives, contributing to more astute reception, and increased production, of myriad of women and genderqueer writers for the stage. Importantly, the Prize intervenes in longstanding bias in the profession, yet too we annually investigate and recognize feminist excellence — to diversify the world, the academy and feminism.

Erin Kaplan, President of WTP writes “Personally, I am proud to say that in 2008 I was the recipient of the student award for my play, *Collateral Bodies*. I had the opportunity to work with

Jen-Scott Mobley on the reading which was done at *Teatro Pregones* in New York City. As an MA student at NYU's Steinhardt School, studying Educational Theatre in Colleges and Communities, the honor of being selected for this award meant everything to me. It encouraged me to continue working on the project which culminated in a sold-out Off-Off Broadway production and the publication of the play by Dramatic Publishing a few years later. I can confidently say that none of that would have happened without WTP."

A sample of Playwrights honored by WTP and ATHE for the Jane Chambers Award includes many under-recognized writers who have gone on to major acclaim, including Madeleine George, Lisa Loomer, Dominique Morrisseau, Martyna Majok, Dorinne Kondo, Jen Silverman, and Mary Kathryn Nagle, among others.

In 2019 Jane Chamber's Award Co-Chairs, Maya Roth and Jen-Scott Mobley published, *Lesbian & Genderqueer Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize* which includes interviews and plays from five recent winners. Their second volume, *Cross-Cultural Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize*, which features a parallel structure, will come out later this year, both published by NoPassport Press.

It is an honor and a privilege to work with the incredible women who have put so much into this award, and by extension, who have changed the landscape of feminist theatre in the US.

As part of this remarkable celebration, we invite all of ATHE to attend our annual Jane Chambers Reading this August in Atlanta, and we hope you will stay to honor all the writers, readers, winners, actors, directors, students, coordinators, and audience members who have made this esteemed award what it is today.