



Press Release

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Timely and dazzling plays shortlisted for international drama prize

Thought-provoking plays exploring themes of criminal justice, race and the dark side of social media have been shortlisted for the James Tait Black Prize for Drama.

The three diverse productions nominated for the international prize – which is linked to the UK’s oldest literary awards – were selected from more than 80 entries worldwide.

Contenders for the Prize – announced today (Tuesday, 18 August) – feature plays that explore the sexual politics of the Notting Hill Carnival and examine the ownership of Black bodies online and in real life.

Also in the running is an experimental piece that probes the impact of the criminal justice system on people’s life experiences.

The three plays shortlisted for the £10,000 prize – which is awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh – are: *[BLANK]* by Alice Birch co-produced by Clean Break and Donmar Warehouse; *J’Ouvert* by Yasmin Joseph produced by Theatre503; and *seven methods of killing kylie jenner* by Jasmine Lee-Jones produced by Royal Court Theatre with support from Jerwood Arts.

Award-winning playwright Alice Birch’s production of *[BLANK]* is a mosaic of 60 unrelated scenes telling the stories of adults and children caught up in the criminal justice system.

Readers and performers can choose as many or as few scenes in order to construct their own narratives.

Yasmin Joseph’s debut *J’Ouvert* is based on the streets of Notting Hill among the history and vibrancy of its famous Carnival.

The play is a reflection of the Black British experience told through the story of two best friends, battling to preserve tradition in a society where women’s bodies are frequently under threat.

Jasmine Lee-Jones’ first play, *seven methods of killing kylie jenner*, explores cultural appropriation, queerness, friendship and the ownership of Black bodies both online and in real life.

The play’s two characters, Cleo and Kara, debate the role of influencer Kylie Jenner and the appropriation of black women’s beauty for profit.

The winner of the Prize will be announced in September and will take place via an online film this year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Chair of the judging panel Greg Walker, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University, said: “This year’s astounding shortlist works with timely themes in exciting and fresh new ways. This year we had our highest number of entries for the Prize, and they showed exciting diversity of form and writing. When considering the award, we ask our judges to nominate dramas that make them look at life a little differently, and this year’s James Tait Black nominees more than fit the bill in this challenging year.”



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The drama prize is presented by the University of Edinburgh in association with Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh.

The accolade is awarded to the best new play in English, Scots or Gaelic, which demonstrates an original theatrical voice and makes a significant contribution to the art form.

The Prizes are distinctive in the way that they are judged. Each year the judging panel relies on the help of postgraduate playwriting student readers to critically assess the entries.

The emerging playwrights employ their literary training to pass on their recommendations to the judges, who select the shortlist.

The judging panel includes students and academics from the University of Edinburgh, representatives from the Traverse Theatre, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Schaubuhne Theatre, Berlin, and freelance theatre director Pooja Ghai.

The James Tait Black Prize for Drama was launched in 2012, when Britain's longest-running literary awards were extended to include a category for drama.

Previous winners include: Clare Barron's *Dance Nation* (2019); Tanika Gupta's *Lions and Tigers* (2018); David Ireland's *Cyprus Avenue* (2017); Gary Owen's *Splott* (2016); Gordon Dahlquist's *Tomorrow Come Today* (2015); Rory Mullarkey's *Cannibals* (2014); and Tim Price's *Radicalisation of Bradley Manning* (2013).

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