



Press Release

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Vibrant carnival production wins international drama prize

An energetic play about the experiences of two best friends during a carnival of Caribbean culture has won the James Tait Black Prize for Drama.

Yasmin Joseph's debut *J'Ouvert* is the winner of the £10,000 drama award, which is linked to the UK's oldest literary awards.

Based around the vibrancy, history and politics of the celebrated Notting Hill Carnival, the drama was selected from more than 80 entries worldwide.

J'Ouvert is a reflection of the Black British experience and is told through the story of two women. It explores the tradition of carnival through themes of female friendship, sexual politics and cultural identity.

The play premiered at Theatre503 in London in 2019 and was co-produced by Theatre503 and Tobi Kyeremateng.

Yasmin Joseph is the current writer-in-residence at Sister Pictures and is on attachment at the Royal Court Theatre as a winner of the Channel 4 Playwrights scheme.

Yasmin Joseph said: "It matters so much to me that the power, magic and beauty of my culture is documented with love and with nuance. *J'Ouvert* was my love letter to Notting Hill Carnival, to the innovative women who are at the helm of the tradition and to Black British Caribbean people. This play feels like a small offering in comparison to the insurmountable contributions of my community, but it is still such an honour and a joy to have my play recognised by such an incredible award and amongst two of the most exciting and wondrously gifted women in theatre."

Three diverse productions were nominated for the international prize, which is annually presented by the University of Edinburgh in association with Playwrights' Studio, Scotland and Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh.

The impressive shortlist – which was comprised entirely of women for the first time – included two other acclaimed works. *[BLANK]* by Alice Birch, which was co-produced by Clean Break and Donmar Warehouse, and seven methods of killing kylie jenner by Jasmine Lee-Jones, which was produced by Royal Court Theatre with support from Jerwood Arts.

To mark the announcement of the winner, the three playwrights discussed their work via an online film hosted by television and radio presenter Shereen Nanjiani. The films can be viewed on the James Tait Black website.

Award-winning playwright Alice Birch's production of *[BLANK]* is a mosaic of 100 scenes telling the stories of adults and children caught up in the criminal justice system.

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



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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.

Chair of the judging panel Greg Walker, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University, said:

"This year's thrilling shortlist included exciting and original works exploring timely themes in fresh new ways. In this challenging year we have had our highest number of entries for the Prize, and they showed exciting diversity of form and writing. Yasmin Joseph's thought-provoking play shows energy and vibrancy and like all of the nominations helps us look at life a little differently."

The James Tait Black Prize for Drama was established in 2012, when Britain's longest-running literary awards were extended to include a category that celebrates innovative playwriting. It is awarded to the best new play in English, Scots or Gaelic that 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 then 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.

Fiona Sturgeon Shea, Creative Director, Playwrights' Studio, Scotland said: "Reading for the James Tait Black Prize for Drama has become one of the highlights of my year. In 2020, when it was impossible to visit the theatre in person, it allowed me to escape into the glorious, serious and thrilling worlds and narratives created by playwrights from around the world. The stories and characters felt particularly strong and resonant this year and the craft was astonishing. *J'Ouvert*, set at the Notting Hill Carnival, is a vivid and rhythmic journey through that landscape and the multiple characters who inhabit it. Yasmin Joseph's joyful, complex, rich and powerful play is a well-deserved winner of this prestigious prize.

Previous winners of the Prize 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).

The James Tait Black Prizes – <https://www.ed.ac.uk/events/james-tait-black>

Film and Theatre at the University of Edinburgh – <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/film>

The Traverse (The Traverse is funded by Creative Scotland and The City of Edinburgh Council, with additional support from The Scottish Government Performing Arts Venues Relief Fund – <https://www.traverse.co.uk/>

Playwrights' Studio Scotland – <https://www.playwrightsstudio.co.uk/>

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