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Wagner College Theatre announces 2017 Stanley Drama Awards

*Previous winners include Jonathan Larson's 'Rent,'
Terrence McNally, Lonne Elder III*

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — The Wagner College Theatre has announced that the winner of this year's Stanley Drama Award is Elisabeth Karlin for her play, "The Showman and the Spirit."

Two finalists for this year's awards were also announced: Tess Light for her play, "Billy Joel Holds the Key to the Afterlife," and Nicole Pandolfo for her play, "Pump."

The awards will be given at a ceremony scheduled for Monday, Feb. 27 at 5 p.m. in the Manzulli Board Room of Wagner College's Foundation Hall.

About the Stanley Drama Award. The Stanley Drama Award was established in 1957 by Staten Island philanthropist Alma Guyon Timolat Stanley and endowed through the Stanley-Timolat Foundation to encourage and support aspiring playwrights. The national Stanley Award competition is administered by the Wagner College Theatre program, ranked as the number one college theater program in the country in the Princeton Review's "Best Colleges Guide 2015." The Stanley Award carries with it a monetary prize along with the distinction of joining the company of past Stanley winners.

The Stanley Drama Award has a long and distinguished history. Past winners include Terrence McNally's "This Side of the Door" (aka "Things That Go Bump in the Night"), Lonne Elder III's "Ceremonies in Dark Old Men," and Jonathan Larson's "Rent." Among those judging for the Stanley Award have been playwrights Edward Albee and Paul Zindel, actresses Geraldine Page and Kim Stanley, and TV producer/pioneer talk-show host David Susskind.

New Yorker **Elisabeth Karlin's** plays include "The Showman and the Spirit" (finalist, Ashland New Play Festival, 2015; semi-finalist, O'Neill Playwrights Conference, 2014), "Bodega Bay" (produced by the Abingdon Theatre Company; winner of the Jerry Kaufman Award in Playwriting for 2013; published in "The Best Men's Stage Monologues, 2014" and "The Best Women's Stage Monologues, 2014," by Smith and Kraus); "Wild Men of the Woods" (produced by the Playwrights' Week program at The Lark, an international theater laboratory in New York, and winner of the Jerry Kaufman Award for 2008); "A Mother's Prayer" (produced by the Mile Square Theatre, Hoboken); "The Mooncalf" (produced by the Abingdon Theatre Company, and represented in "The Best Stage Scenes, 2001," by Smith and Kraus); "Lucy's Last Date" (produced at the Third Street Theatre, Los Angeles, and named a Drama-Logue Critic's Choice.)

“The Showman and the Spirit,” the first play of a trilogy, was presented along with “Hotbed,” the second play, as part of the Project Y Theatre’s Epic Plays reading series.

Other Karlin plays — including “Dress Down Day,” “A Bone to the Dog” and “Young Men Roam the Streets” — have received staged readings on some of New York’s most prominent stages.

Karlin has also written about film for various journals. Most recently, she has been a contributor to “Alfred Hitchcock Geek,” one of the most popular Hitchcock blogs on the Internet.

Synopsis: Elisabeth Karlin’s ‘The Showman and the Spirit.’ A Bronx high school in 1976. Andy Levitt, an idealistic young teacher, is organizing an assembly to celebrate the life of the late James Hudson, a heroic African-American performer and activist. His guest speaker is Lawrence Muffet, a contemporary and friend of Hudson’s. Muffet, a Hollywood character actor known for playing the servile and stereotypical roles that Hudson refused, arrives under the impression that it is he himself who is to be honored.

In the course of a school day, the teacher, the guest, his delicate daughter and a beleaguered school secretary collide head-on amid misunderstandings, old resentments and pre-conceived notions. As this clash of temperaments and wayward efforts to do the right thing plays out under the specter of James Hudson, Lawrence Muffet must confront his own legacy and his place in the shadow of the great man’s spirit.

Tess Light’s plays tend to incorporate any or all of the following: sarcasm, death, sarcastic death, Buddhism, foodism, poetry, song and Shakespeare. Despite this confusion, her plays have been produced in 12 states across the U.S. and four countries. Her comedy, “Tower of Magic,” won first place in the 2012 New Play Contest at Theatre Conspiracy (Fort Myers, Fla.) and second place in the 2013 New Play Contest at Stage West (Fort Worth, Texas). In 2015, her one-act comedy, “Expectant Pause,” won the Arts & Letters journal’s Drama Prize for One-Act Play, and was produced by Stage Door Productions’ One Act Festival. Her drama, “To Conceive Gods,” was a semifinalist for the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center’s National Playwrights Conference, the NuVoices competition at the Actors’ Theatre of Charlotte (N.C.), and others. After sampling eight cities in four countries, Light settled in Los Alamos, N.M. with her husband and sons, where she works as a physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory in the Space and Remote Sensing Sciences Group.

Synopsis: Tess Light’s ‘Billy Joel Holds the Key to the Afterlife.’ Carmen’s parents (Frances and Leo) met, loved, married, hated, and divorced before their daughter Carmen was ever born, and spent the decades after locked in a battle for control of one another — with Carmen as the battleground. So fierce is their competition that they even die almost simultaneously, leaving Carmen to weave together a family history using the only thread she’s got: their mutual love of Billy Joel. Meanwhile, Frances and Leo are stuck in limbo, unable to move on to new lives, until they come to terms with one another and their own failings.

Nicole Pandolfo, a New Jersey native currently based in New York City, is a 2016-17 Dramatist Guild Fellow and was recently selected for a 2017 commission with the NJPAC Stage Exchange with Premiere Stages at Kean University. Her work has been developed through the Jerome Foundation, the Actors Studio, the Lark and NJ Rep, among others, and she was a finalist for the Edward Albee Foundation Fellowship and the Leah Ryan Fund for Emerging Women Writers.

She is a member of the Actors Studio in the Playwright/Director Unit, directed by Lyle Kessler, and earned her MFA at Hunter College.

Synopsis: Nicole Pandolfo's 'Pump.' Jimmy loses his job as a reporter at the Philadelphia Times on the same day that a train carrying toxic chemicals derails in his hometown in New Jersey. To survive, he takes a job pumping gas at the station that his dad manages, where he learns that big oil interests and the health of people in his hometown collide in ways he never expected. This play examines the disenfranchisement of the working class, the role of the press in society, corporate greed and the continuing chemical and toxic waste incidents that threaten American communities today.