

For immediate release (as at 1.12.07)

## THE CATHERINE JOHNSON AWARD FOR BEST PLAY 2007

The Pearson Playwrights' Scheme is delighted to announce the winner of the first Catherine Johnson Award for Best Play 2007. He is **James Graham** whose play *Eden's Empire* was written whilst attached to the Finborough Theatre.

The Pearson Playwrights' Scheme, formerly known as the Thames Television Theatre Writers' Scheme, is one of the most prestigious awards for new writing in British theatre. It awards up to five bursaries a year, each worth £7,000, to writers of outstanding promise and allows the playwright a twelve-month attachment to a theatre and commissions the writers for a new play. Recipients of the bursaries for 2008 will be announced later this month.

The Scheme also offers an award for the Best Play written by the five bursary winners from the previous year. This new award, worth £10,000, has been generously donated by Catherine Johnson, a graduate of the Scheme and herself the winner of the Best Play written in 1991. Catherine, who is a member of the judging panel for new bursaries and author of *Mamma Mia*, has been looking for a way to give something back to the Scheme which helped and encouraged her in the early days of her career.

Judges of the Pearson Award include Sir John Mortimer CBE QC, Dame Beryl Bainbridge, Catherine Johnson, Sue Summers, Thelma Holt CBE, Michael Billington, John Tydeman OBE and Jack Andrews MBE.

Previous recipients of the Pearson bursary over the last thirty years include Richard Bean, Alan Bleasdale, Gregory Burke, David Edgar, David Eldridge, Lee Hall, Jacqueline Holborough, Catherine Johnson, Charlotte Jones, Fin Kennedy, Hanif Kureshi, Nick Leather, Martin McDonagh, Gary Mitchell, Chloe Moss, Gary Owen, Joe Penhall, Winsome Pinnock, Billy Roche, Simon Stephens, Sue Townsend and Timberlake Wertenbaker.

Previous winners for the Pearson Award for the **Finborough Theatre** include Chris Lee in 2000, Laura Wade in 2005 for *Colder Than Here* which also won the Pearson Award for the Best Play, James Graham in 2006 and Al Smith in 2007. For three years running, the Finborough Theatre has been the only unfunded theatre to win a Pearson Bursary.

**James Graham** is Playwright-in-Residence at the Finborough Theatre. He has written three plays – commissioned by Artistic Director Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre - *Albert's Boy* (2005), starring Victor Spinetti, which earned James a prestigious Pearson Award bursary, *Eden's Empire* (2006) and *Little Madam* (2007). James was the Finborough Theatre's nomination to the BBC and Royal Court's programme for young writers, 'The 50', celebrating the Royal Court's 50th anniversary. His original television comedy-drama, *Caught in a Trap* has been commissioned by producers Greenlit.

### The Press on James Graham

"Fringe theatre at its best..." *Albert's Boy* offers Victor Spinetti the chance to give a masterclass...Its debate is clear and the conflict between the two men is lucidly realised." Aleks Sierz, *The Stage* on *Albert's Boy*

"Compelling — affable, agonised, raging, and despairing by turns." Sam Marlowe, *The Times* on *Albert's Boy*

"Gripping...a dramatic piece of living history" Michael Billington, *The Guardian* on *Eden's Empire*

"Graham's nuanced, intelligent play" *Time Out* on *Eden's Empire*

"It's a shame that work as good as this will get overlooked in the forthcoming awards flurry." Fiona Mountford, *Evening Standard* on *Little Madam*

"James Graham...shows himself to be a young playwright of great promise." Alistair Smith, *The Stage* on *Little Madam*

"The prolific and talented James Graham, who is still only 25" Paul Taylor, *The Independent* on *Little Madam*

### For more information, please contact

**Jack Andrews, Administrator of the Pearson Playwrights Scheme, on 020 8940 2243** or

**Neil McPherson** on e-mail [press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk](mailto:press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk) or **07977 173135**



118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone +44 (0)20 7244 7439 Fax +44 (0)20 7835 1853  
e-mail [admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk](mailto:admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk) [www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk](http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk)

The Finborough Theatre is managed by The Steam Industry. Registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 3448268. Registered Charity no. 1071304. Registered address: 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED. A member of the Independent Theatre Council.