

Houston's plays smart and thoughtful

'HIGH YELLO ROSE' AND
OTHER TEXAS PLAYS
BY STERLING HOUSTON
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San Antonio playwright Sterling Houston, who died in 2006, perhaps could have made a national name for himself. But he chose to concentrate on his home state.

"If he had taken his work to the (National) Black Theater Festival, it might have helped," says Sandra Mayo, a theater historian who has studied Houston's work. "He kept talking about doing it, but he never did. It was more important to him to keep



doing what he was doing locally."

Mayo has worked hard to spread the word about Houston's work. She

makes it a point to include it in her contemporary theater classes at Texas State University-San Marcos, where she is the director of multicultural and gender studies. Mayo has edited collections of Houston's work, the latest of which, "High Yello Rose and Other Texas Plays," includes seven plays, as well as a short bio.

The plays showcase Houston's considerable

strengths as a writer, including his wit, his playfulness and his deep knowledge of San Antonio history. The plays are thought-provoking, smart and sometimes moving; they're also a lot of fun to read.

Mayo wrote a series of insightful essays for the book that help place Houston's work into the larger context of African American theater. And she notes connections within a broader theatrical landscape, pointing to ties between "Drawing Wheel" and both Tennessee Williams' "The Glass Menagerie" and Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," for example.

The essays also encom-

pass Houston's close relationship with Jump Start Performance Co., which pays tribute to the late playwright Thursday by renaming its home theater The Sterling Houston Theater. The change will be celebrated with a gala, including a performance of "High Yello Rose," Houston's gender-bending take on the Texas Revolution.

Mayo isn't done with Houston. She's working on a history of black theater in San Antonio that will include him, as well as an anthology of plays by black Texas playwrights that will feature "Driving Wheel."

For information on the Thursday Jump Start gala, call (210) 227-5867.