

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

Molly Smith Artistic Director Edgar Dobie Executive Producer Zelda Fichandler Founding Director

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arenastage.org/news-press/press-room/press-kits-photos/productions/erma-bombeck
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ERMA BOMBECK: AT WIT'S END
BY SISTERS ALLISON ENGEL AND MARGARET ENGEL
RECEIVES WORLD PREMIERE AT ARENA STAGE
OCTOBER 9-NOVEMBER 8, 2015

*** Barbara Chisholm plays celebrated humorist in new one-woman play directed by David Esbjornson ***

(Washington, D.C.) “If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits?” Erma Bombeck, the award-winning humorist and syndicated columnist known for her wry and humorous take on family life, is the subject of the newest project from twin-sister journalists and playwrights **Allison Engel and Margaret Engel**—the world-premiere drama ***Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End*** debuting at Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. The Engels reunite with director **David Esbjornson** (Arena Stage’s *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*) following their collaboration on the smash hit *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*, which starred Kathleen Turner in its celebrated 2012 run at Arena Stage.

Stage and screen actress **Barbara Chisholm**, seen in the 2014 Oscar-nominated film *Boyhood* and also in the Austin, Texas production of *Red Hot Patriot*, makes her Arena Stage debut as Erma Bombeck in this one-woman drama, which looks at the life of the celebrated columnist, drawing upon Bombeck’s immense body of work and conversations the Engels had with Bombeck’s family, her longtime agent Aaron Priest and Norma Born, who manages her archives. ***Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End* October 9-November 8, 2015 in the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle.**

“When considering projects for Arena to participate in the Women’s Voices Theater Festival, *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End* was at the top of my list,” shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. “Written by two talented women, Allison Engel and Margaret Engel, about a hero for women from my mom’s generation, there was no doubt in my mind that this was an ideal combination. My grandmother would often clip Erma’s column from the newspaper and put it on the refrigerator for us to read. She was one of the funniest chroniclers of women in the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s. Her support of the Equal Rights Amendment movement moved women’s voices to the forefront. We’re glad to have her spirit in our house.”

“Erma Bombeck was an important presence in our house growing up—as in many other households around the country, she was invited in by my mother who found joy and comfort in her humor,” says **Esbjornson**. “As Erma’s understanding about women’s rights grew, so did the consciousness of her readers. In a quieter and more methodical way, she helped to significantly change the quality of that conversation all over America. I am very pleased to join the Engel sisters and Arena Stage in celebrating an extraordinary woman who helped politicize thousands of women (and men) through her intelligence and down-to-earth humor.”

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“Erma’s journey mirrored American social history as post-war women found their voice,” add **Allison Engel** and **Margaret Engel**. “She directed the world’s attention on the universe of women and children, describing with humor and insight the lives behind America’s front doors.”

Arena Stage is one of the seven originating theaters of the **Women’s Voices Theater Festival**, and *Erma Bombeck: At Wit’s End* is the second project produced by the theater as part of the citywide Festival, which will feature over 50 productions in the nation’s capital region, September through October 2015. For additional information on the Festival please visit womensvoicestheaterfestival.org.

Allison Engel (*Playwright*) has been a reporter for the *Des Moines Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury* and Pacific News Service and was a Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University. She and her twin Margaret wrote the play *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*. She also has been a speechwriter and aide for former Iowa governor Tom Vilsack and lieutenant governor Sally Pederson. In Iowa, she was active in the Des Moines Playhouse, serving as president and head of play selection. She recently spent five years as director of communications at the University of Southern California before becoming the associate director of the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities at the university. She received an MA in screenwriting from USC in 2009. She is married to Scott Kirkpatrick and they have two children, Miles and Nora. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

Margaret Engel (*Playwright*) directs the Alicia Patterson Journalism Foundation and was the managing editor of the Newseum. She and her twin Allison wrote *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*. She was a reporter for *The Washington Post*, *Des Moines Register* and *Lorain Journal* and was a Nieman fellow at Harvard. She and Allison wrote *Food Finds: America’s Best Local Foods and the People Who Produce Them* and helped turn the book into a show for Food Network, where it ran for seven years. She serves on the board of Theatre Washington/Helen Hayes Awards, The Nieman Foundation and chairs the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards board. She and her husband, Bruce Adams, wrote three editions of a travel guide to America’s baseball parks with the help of their children, Emily and Hugh. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

David Esbjornson (*Director*) returns to Arena Stage after directing *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* and *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*. He also directed productions of *Red Hot Patriot* at Philadelphia Theatre Company and Geffen Playhouse. Premieres include Edward Albee’s *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* (Broadway); *The Play About the Baby* (Century); *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* (Broadway); *Resurrection Blues* (Guthrie); *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* and the first staged presentation of *Perestroika* (Eureka); *Homebody/Kabul* (London); *Therese Raquin* (CSC); *In the Blood* (Public); *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Minetta Lane); *My Old Lady* (Promenade); *Memory House* (Playwrights); *Purgatorio*; *How? How? Why? Why? Why?* (SRT) and *Abigail/1702* (NYSF). Recent work includes *Lady from Dubuque* (SRT), *Measure for Measure* (NYSF Delacorte) and *Gabriel and Trumpery* (Atlantic). Revivals include *Driving Miss Daisy* (Broadway and West End); *Death of a Salesman* (Gate-Dublin); *Hamlet* (TFNY); *A Few Good Men* (West End); *All My Sons* (Huntington); *Much Ado About Nothing* (NYSF); *The Normal Heart* (Public); *Mud and Drowning* (Signature); *The Entertainer*, *The Maids*, *Endgame* and *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (CSC); *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *Summer and Smoke* (Guthrie); and *Farmyard* (NYTW). David has served as Artistic Director of NYC Classic Stage Company and Seattle Repertory Theatre and is the current Chair of Theatre at Rutgers’s University.

Cast Biographies

Barbara Chisholm (*Erma Bombeck*) is an Austin, Texas-based actor making her Arena Stage debut with this production, her second collaboration with David Esbjornson, who directed her as Molly Ivins in the Austin production of *Red Hot Patriot*. Regional credits include Constance in *Fixing King John* with the internationally renowned Rude Mechs; Dr. Gertrude Ladenburger in *33 Variations* with eminent pianist Anton Nel; Elena in the world premiere of Steven Dietz’s *Shooting Star*; Annie Wilkes in the North American premiere of Stephen King’s *Misery*; and multiple roles in Anne Bogart’s staging of *The Women* at San Diego Rep. Film/TV roles include the Oscar-nominated *Boyhood*, Emmy-nominated ABC drama *American Crime* and *Friday Night Lights*. She’s been voted Best Actor in the *Austin Chronicle*’s Best of Austin Readers Poll three times and received multiple acting honors from the Austin Critics Table and B. Iden Payne Theatre Awards.

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The creative team for *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End* includes Set Designer **Daniel Conway**, Costume Designer **Elizabeth Hope Clancy**, Lighting Designer **Rob Denton**, Sound Designers **Rob Milburn & Michael Bodeen**, Dramaturg **Jocelyn Clarke**, Associate Director **Anita Maynard-Losh** and Stage Manager **Marne Anderson**.

For full company bios and additional production information visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/erma-bombeck.

***Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End* is generously sponsored by George and Duffy Ftikas.**

***Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End* Special Events**

***Subverting Expectations: Women's Work in Theater*—October 11, 2015 at 3:30 p.m.**

What is feminist theater—is it simply a play written by a woman or is there more to it? How are plays by women different? Would you know a play was written by a woman by the writing alone? From comedy to drama to musicals, in solo shows, ensemble pieces or epic sagas, women playwrights are not only breaking the fourth wall, they're breaking the glass ceiling. Arena Stage playwrights Allison Engel, Margaret Engel (*Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End*) and Karen Zacarías (*Destiny of Desire*) discuss how women are seen and received in theater by audiences and artists, how they're subverting those expectations and what's next. Now that women have the world's attention, what will they do with it?

Post-Show Conversations

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff, October 27 following the 7:30 p.m. performance and October 29 following the 8:00 p.m. performance.

Production Information

Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End

By Allison Engel and Margaret Engel

Directed by David Esbjornson

Featuring Barbara Chisholm as Erma Bombeck

In the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle / October 9-November 8, 2015

ABOUT: From the writers of the smash hit *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins* comes a look at one of our country's most beloved voices, who captured the frustrations of her generation by asking, "If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits?" Discover the story behind the award-winning humorist who championed women's lives with wit that sprang from the most unexpected place of all—the truth. Part of the Women's Voices Theater Festival.

CREATIVE TEAM:

Director: David Esbjornson

Set Designer: Daniel Conway

Costume Designer: Elizabeth Hope Clancy

Lighting Designer: Rob Denton

Sound Designers: Rob Milburn & Michael Bodeen

Dramaturg: Jocelyn Clarke

Associate Director: Anita Maynard-Losh

Stage Manager: Marne Anderson

Plan Your Visit

TICKETS: Tickets for *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End* are \$55-90, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as Pay-Your-Age tickets, student discounts, Southwest Nights, and Hero's Discounts, visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs. Tickets may be purchased online at arenastage.org, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.

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Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300
Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380
TTY for deaf patrons: 202-484-0247
Info for patrons with disabilities: 202-488-3300

PERFORMANCE DATES:

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Friday & Saturday at 8:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday at 2:00 p.m.
Full calendar: tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=20434

Open-captioned performances: 11/4 at 7:30 p.m.

Audio-described performance: 11/7 at 2:00 p.m.

CATWALK CAFÉ: Prix fixe meals are now available at the Catwalk Café and include a choice of soup or salad, main entrée and dessert. Pre-ordered meals are only \$22 (\$25 if purchased that day). To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-cafe/. The Catwalk Café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended.

To **pre-order drinks** from the Catwalk Café for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007.

METRO: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is only one block from the Waterfront-SEU Metro station (Green Line). When exiting the station, walk west on M Street toward Sixth Street, and the main entrance to the Mead Center is on the right.

PARKING: Parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage. Subscribers may purchase parking in advance for \$16. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$19 or on the day of the performance for \$22 on a first-come, first-served basis. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets, and the garage closes one hour after the day's last performance ends. Patrons can also park at the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, one block from the Mead Center, for \$11. Street parking is also available along Maine Avenue.

VALET PARKING: Arena Stage offers valet service at no additional cost to patrons with accessibility needs who call 202-488-3300 in advance to request valet parking. On days when valet parking is being used for accessibility, it is also available to general patrons one hour prior to show time for \$25, based on availability. To use valet parking, pull up to the main entrance on Sixth Street.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. Arena Stage produces plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep and dangerous in the American spirit, and presents diverse and ground-breaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Arena Stage is committed to commissioning and developing new plays through the American Voices New Play Institute. Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org.

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