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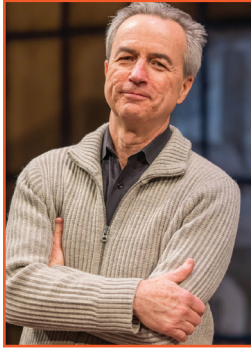
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WHO KNEW?



Welcome to the Outcalt Theatre, and our “pre-season” treat. I love histories, and I love biographies — you know, those “big boring books?” True, some of them are tough sledding, but I always find a fascinating fact or two in every chapter: something I not only didn’t know, but also didn’t expect.

So, when I read the play *Erma Bombeck: At Wit’s End* in 2016, I was struck by two things. First, I had no idea of Erma’s passionate advocacy for the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s. Frankly, there was very little I knew about her personal life at all, but this one passion of hers was completely unexpected.

Second, her motivation for writing her columns — to give voice to women who chose to get married and raise a family — seemed to mirror the intent of a contemporary syndicated columnist, Pam Sherman, who

lived near me in Rochester, New York. I decided that if I was to produce *At Wit’s End*, I needed to convince Pam to portray Erma. You see, Pam had been a professional actor in Washington, D.C. (and a lawyer prior to that) before moving to western New York with her husband 20 years ago and becoming a columnist.

Pam told me that Erma Bombeck was a hero of hers and she indeed thought of her when starting her own column, *The Suburban Outlaw*. We shared our mutual admiration for Erma Bombeck’s wit, courage, and legacy.

Fortunately, Pam took the big leap back onstage in Rochester, and she has since played Erma in Buffalo and Denver — but has always wanted to play her in Cleveland!

And friends, what makes this engagement so special for *At Wit’s End* at CPH is that the playwrights, Allison Engel & Margaret Engel, are twin sisters from Chagrin Falls!

Who knew?

Enjoy!

Mark Cuddy

Interim Artistic Director

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The cast, crew, and creative team of this production and the CPH staff would like to acknowledge those of the Shawnee, Miami, Erie, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Haudenosaunee peoples, whose lands we stand on, and the nearly 28,000 Native American people who live in Northeast Ohio today who represent over 100 tribal nations. For information about the lands on which you reside, visit native.land.ca.



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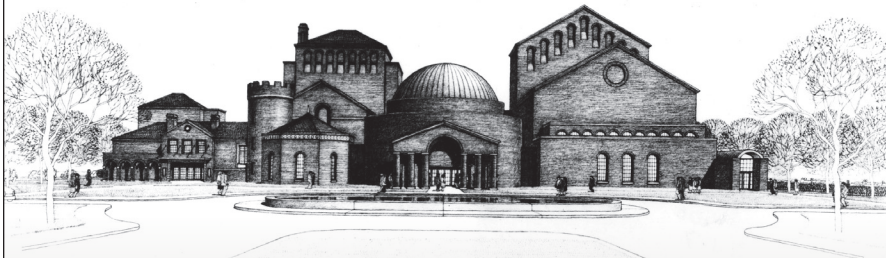
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Welcomes you to the

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AT WIT'S END**

by **ALLISON ENGEL**
and **MARGARET ENGEL**

Directed by **MARK CUDDY**

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* * *

Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com

Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End was originally developed for the stage with David Esbjornson

Cleveland Play House's Production Staff is responsible for the sets, costumes, lighting, props, furniture, scenic painting, sound, and/or special effects used in this production.

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SYNOPSIS

Erma Bombeck, one of America's most beloved humorists, captured the frustrations of her generation by asking, "If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits?" Equal parts wife, mother, daughter, and "domestic demigoddess," she gave voice to the everyday joys and struggles faced by women of all ages. Starring nationally-syndicated columnist Suburban Outlaw® Pam Sherman, *Erma Bombeck: At Wit's End*, celebrates a remarkable woman who reminded us all how to embrace whatever life throws at us with grace, grit, and good humor.

TIME: The present, and various times from 1962-1996

PLACE: The Bombeck home in suburban Dayton, Ohio

CAST

ERMA BOMBECK Pam Sherman*

*Indicates member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

The director is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

The scenic, costume, lighting, sound, and projections designers in LORT Theatres are represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA-829 of the IATSE.

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Lighting Technician.....AARON FRAZIER

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Wowed by the set? Feel free to snap a photo before the show, during intermission, or after the show. Don't forget to tag Cleveland Play House (@clevelandplayhouse on Twitter and Instagram) and use the hashtag #CPHErma #CPHErmaBombeck.

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INSPIRED BY AN ICON: Allison and Margaret Engel on Erma Bombeck

Compiled by Craig Joseph, Literary Director

Allison and Margaret Engel, twin sisters raised in Northeast Ohio, have been steeped in the world of journalism since childhood. So it's no surprise that they were drawn to write about beloved humorist — and Dayton native — Erma Bombeck.

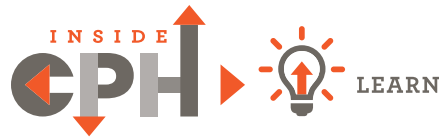
In addition to being a Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University, Allison has been a reporter for the *Des Moines Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury*, and *Pacific News Service*. Margaret is the executive director of the Alicia Patterson Journalism Foundation, and was a reporter for the *Washington Post*, *Des Moines Register*, and *Lorain Journal*, following her time as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard.

“We grew up outside of Cleveland, not very far away from where Erma started, so of course, *The Plain Dealer* ran her column,” she says. “One of our early memories is of our mom sitting at the dining room table with a newspaper, and the whole newspaper is shaking with her laughter. We would say, ‘Mom, what’s so funny? What’s so funny?’ The only two words she could get out, because she was laughing so hard, were ‘Erma Bombeck.’ Our mother read her religiously and as soon as we got old enough, we did too.”¹

But Allison and Margaret were compelled to write their play, not only because of nostalgia, but also to counteract the erasure of an important voice in journalism history.

“Erma Bombeck was the epitome of a woman’s voice being heard across America,” Allison explains. “As popular as she was, we don’t think she has received the acclaim that is due her. She was the most widely read columnist in the history of the country, as well as the author of more than a dozen best-selling books. Yet she never won the Pulitzer Prize and is rarely mentioned in journalism schools. Most likely, her subject matter — families and children — was not considered as important as the thoughts of political pundits.”²

Ironically, though, the Engel sisters discovered as they wrote that beyond her witty col-



umns about getting her husband out the door, wrangling rambunctious children, and managing a variety of household chores, Bombeck was, *in fact*, an important voice in trying to get the Equal Rights Amendment ratified.

In 1978, “Bombeck’s feminism became more public when she was named to the President’s National Advisory Committee for Women and embarked on a two-year speaking tour urging holdout states to ratify the Congressionally sanctioned ERA. While stumping for the ERA, Bombeck blended her trademark humor with a spirit of activism. ... ‘We’ve got to get sex out of the gutter and back into the Constitution where it belongs. ... The ERA cause — ‘equality of rights under the law’ — may be the most misunderstood words since ‘one size fits all.’”³

1. Arena Stage. (n.d.). *Meet the Artists Playwrights Allison Engel and Margaret Engel*. The B-Side - The Official Blog for Arena Stage. https://blog.arenastage.org/arena_stage_blogs/2015/10/meet-the-artists-playwrights-allison-engel-and-margaret-engel.html

2. Treanor, L., & About Lorraine TreanorLorraine Treanor has been editor of DC Theatre Scene since 2006. She has produced concerts and plays in her hometown of Chicago. (2015, September 29). *UpClose: Allison and Margaret Engel, Women’s Voices Theater Festival*. DC Theatre Scene. <https://dctheatrescene.com/2015/09/29/allison-and-margaret-engel-wvtf/>

3. Levithan, K. (2012, March). *Erma Bombeck: Feminist Housewife*. Literary Mama. <http://www.literarymama.com/profiles/archives/2012/03/erma-bombeck-feminist-housewife.html>

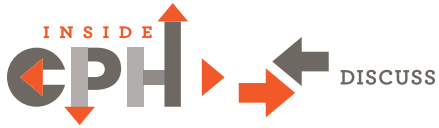
WIT AND WISDOM FROM ERMA BOMBECK

Pulled from Erma Bombeck: A Life in Humor, by Susan Edwards

On Books: “As a child, my number one best friend was the librarian in my grade school. I actually believed all of those books belonged to her. I would take a paper bag and fill it up. When she warned that some of those books were too old for me, I told her that they were for my mother. I have never regretted my dishonesty.”

On Humor: “The thing to remember about a humor column is, this is not a cure for cancer. We’re talking 500 words to get somebody’s mind off Bosnia, the health plan, all that stuff. I want to get as far away from those things as I possibly can. I prefer to talk about my mother finishing her Christmas shopping. You read something like that and for five minutes, you don’t think about the bad stuff. You think about this crazy lady who’s out there wrapping her presents and gloating because it’s only November and she’s getting it done already!”

On The Women’s Movement: “They picked out the American housewife as the battleground for the whole movement, but they didn’t invite us to the war. I would personally like to wring the neck of whoever invented the phrase ‘just a housewife’ because, basically, that’s what I still am. ... No one ever asked me to make a stand. Which I think is fairly typical. We housewives were the last to be asked what we wanted. That’s probably why the amendment is in trouble today. Finally the feminists are coming to us and saying ‘We can’t do this without you.’”



On Her Material: “I am antiabortion. But I don’t want to inflict my beliefs on other people. I’ll do it privately, but I won’t do it in a column. I’ll inflict my kids, my husband, my marriage, my home, domestic situations — anything I think is going to make them laugh that day. But not serious things.”

On Her Kids: “But they still had a good life even if I sometimes left them on their own. They each had a shot at college. They didn’t end up stealing hubcaps. They never served time. They aren’t weird. They turned out decent, so obviously, I wasn’t a bad mother.”

On Her Long Career: “One thing in my favor is that I’m really insecure; I’m always looking over my shoulder, and I always think it can all go away tomorrow. That works for me because if I ever become complacent and think, Hey, I’ve got it made, what are they going to do, fire me? The answer is, yes. ... If they don’t like what they see, they’ve got an out. So I live hand-to-mouth.”

On Marriage: “Marriages are basically out of your control. You’re a boat in a storm. You just ride it out and hope the boat holds together. I used to think I could change things like birth, death, and struggle. You can’t. You rise above them.”

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WHO'S WHO



PAM SHERMAN (*Erma Bombeck*) is an actor, writer, leadership consultant, and recovering lawyer who was profiled in *People* magazine about her career transition from attorney to actor. She has appeared in numerous productions in D.C. at Source Theatre, Theater J, Arena Stage, Ford's Theatre, and the long-running show *Shear Madness* at the Kennedy Center. Her film and television appearances include *Homicide*, *Unsolved Mysteries* and *The Replacements*. Her own one-woman show *Pumping Josey: Life and Death in Suburbia*, co-written with Caleen Sinette Jennings, premiered at Horizons Theater. Her portrayal of Erma Bombeck has played to sold-out audiences at Rochester's Geva Theatre, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and Shea's 710 in Buffalo. Sherman keynotes, conducts programs, and coaches leaders about how to present themselves and their stories with an EDGE: Explore, Dream, Grow & Excite. She is a highly rated global resource for leadership groups EO, Vistage, and YPO. Her nationally syndicated column, *The Suburban Outlaw*[®], was published on the USA Today Network for 15 years, and she was recently honored by the National Society of Newspaper Columnists and recognized by the Erma Bombeck Writer's Center for her humor writing. She studied at American University, Cardozo School of Law, the Neighborhood Playhouse, and BADA Oxford. She is a member of the NY and DC bars, AEA, and SAG. Pam lives in Pittsford, New York, with her husband Neal, where they launched two adults into the world and are still raising two neurotic dogs. thepamsherman.com Follow: @thepamsherman

ALLISON ENGEL (*Playwright*) has been a reporter for the *Des Moines Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury*, and *Pacific News Service*, and a Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University. She was a speechwriter for former Iowa governor Tom Vilsack and lieutenant governor Sally Pederson, and president of the Des Moines Playhouse. She and her twin Margaret wrote the play *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*, which had its world premiere at Philadelphia Theatre Company with

Kathleen Turner in the title role, where it broke the theatre's box office record. The play went on to Arena Stage, the Geffen Playhouse, Berkeley Rep, the Zach Theatre, and many others. She was director of communications at the University of Southern California and associate director of the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities. She holds an MA in screenwriting from USC. Earlier, she co-wrote *Food Finds: America's Best Local Foods and the People Who Produce Them* with her twin, and adapted the book into a show on Food Network, where it ran for seven years.

MARGARET ENGEL (*Playwright*) directs the Alicia Patterson Journalism Foundation and was the managing editor of the Newseum. She was a reporter for the *Washington Post*, *Des Moines Register*, and *Lorain Journal*, and was a Nieman fellow at Harvard. She and her twin wrote the play *Red Hot Patriot: The Kick-Ass Wit of Molly Ivins*, which has had 50 productions to date around the country. In 2017, the two authors wrote a book with Reise Moore, *ThriftyStyle: The Ultimate Bargain Shopper's Guide to Smart Fashion*, which included input from several costume designers. Earlier, she and her husband, Bruce Adams, wrote three editions of a Fodor's travel guide to America's baseball parks. She has served on the board of Theatre Washington/Helen Hayes Awards and the Fund for Investigative Journalism, and chairs the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism awards board. She is a member of the Nieman Foundation board.

MARK CUDDY (*Director*) has directed over one hundred plays and musicals across the country including *At Wit's End* starring Pam Sherman at Geva Theatre where he served as Artistic Director for twenty-seven years. Among many others, his recent directing work at Geva includes *Constellations*, *Ring of Fire*, *Once*, *The Humans*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Good People*, *Clybourne Park* co-produced with Cleveland Play House, and the annual production of *A Christmas Carol* for which he also wrote the adaptation.

LAURA CARLSON TARANTOWSKI (*Scenic Designer*) is the resident scenic designer and lecturer at Oberlin College. Recent work at Oberlin includes *Stonewallin*, *Or*, and *The Moors*. Other

local design work includes *Everybody* for the Case Western Reserve-Cleveland Playhouse MFA Acting Program, *Stew, Kill Move Paradise*, and *Stupid F*cking Bird* for Dobama Theatre; and *Rent* for *Cain Park*. She holds an MFA in scene design from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

JEREMY PAUL (*Lighting Designer*) is a director, designer, and interdisciplinary artist. Recent designs include lighting for *Head Over Heels*, Near West Theatre; and *The Thin Place*, Dobama Theatre; and projections for *The Other Place*, Dobama Theatre. He has directed the world/regional premieres of *My Barking Dog* (Eric Coble), *Black Cat Lost* (Erin Courtney), *Tall Skinny Cruel Cruel Boys* (Caroline V. McGraw), *Inoculations* (Darren O'Donnell), *Anna Bella Eema* (Lisa D'Amour), and *Stranded on Earth* (Eric Coble) — in addition to devising and co-creating more than 25 original productions including *Inferno*, *Who We Used To Be*, and *The Excavation*. He is the founder and executive artistic director of Maelstrom Collaborative Arts, which supports the growth of innovative interdisciplinary artists in Cleveland. Since 2021, he has been the inaugural Interdisciplinary Artist-in-Residence at the Cleveland Institute of Music. jeremypaul.com

TYREE J. FRANKLIN (*Production Coordinator*) (He/Him) is a Cleveland based stage manager and Artist with his BFA in Stage Management from Wright State University. His recent stage management credits includes *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin* (Karamu House) *The Liar, Everybody, Passage* (Cleveland Play House), *Langston Hughes' Black Nativity* (Karamu House) He would like to thank his family and friends for their continued love and support!

CLEVELAND PLAY HOUSE, founded in 1915 and recipient of the 2015 Regional Theatre Tony Award, is America's first professional regional theatre. Throughout its rich history, CPH has remained dedicated to its mission to inspire, stimulate, and entertain diverse audiences across Northeast Ohio by producing plays and theatre education programs of the highest professional standards. CPH has produced more than 100 world and/or American premieres, and over its long history more than 12 million people have attended over 1,600 productions. Today,

Cleveland Play House celebrates the beginning of its second century of service while performing in three state-of-the art venues at Playhouse Square in downtown Cleveland.

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Suburban Outlaw® Productions was formed to support all creative content of Pam Sherman, AKA The Suburban Outlaw®, including columns on the USA Today Network in more than 50 Gannett newspapers for 15 years, as well as podcasts, keynotes, and programs presented globally. Managed by Neal Sherman, AKA “*the husband*,” who is the Founder and CEO of TAGeXBrands (www.TAGeXBrands.com). Over three decades, TAGeX Brands has grown into the world's largest aftermarket for restaurant and food service equipment providing facility and equipment management to restaurants, supermarkets and retailers. Sherman has a BA from American University, MBA from New York University and is a Fellow of the Culinary Institute of America. Neal Sherman has been Pam Sherman's partner and cheerleader for over 40 years in life and work and especially in the raising of their two adult children, Zach, and Eliza, and loving more than anything, his little dogs.

RACHEL L. FINK (*Managing Director*) (she/hers) is thrilled to return to her hometown as Cleveland Play House's Managing Director after having served as the Executive Director of the Tony Award-winning Lookingglass Theatre Company. Rachel has held leadership positions at arts organizations across the United States including Theatre Bay Area, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, International Festival of Arts & Ideas, Long Wharf Theatre, and Lyric Opera Cleveland. Rachel's professional distinctions include Fellow, Civic Leadership Academy at the University of Chicago/Harris School of Public Policy; US delegate, British Council's Cultural Leadership International Programme; Inaugural Member, American Express/Aspen Institute Fellowship for Emerging Nonprofit Leaders; Board Member, League of Chicago Theatres; and Board Member, Theatre Bay Area. She was also recognized as a 2013 “Face of Theatre Bay Area,” and as one of New City Stages' 50 Players in 2022. Rachel holds a BA in Theatre Arts from Case Western Reserve University and an MFA in Theater Management from the Yale School of Drama.

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