

# THE MAKING OF **EDGAR & EMILY**

by Sheryl Flatow

At an early rehearsal of *Edgar & Emily*, Joseph McDonough's one-act, two-character comic fantasia about a meeting between Edgar Allan Poe and Emily Dickinson, Gregg Weiner and Margery Lowe are running a scene in which the future Belle of Amherst is trying to persuade the very unenthusiastic – and long dead – Master of the Macabre to read some of her poems. She pleads and cajoles and uses reverse psychology in an effort to convince him, and her unrelenting determination elicits laughs from the handful of observers in the studio. When the actors are done with the scene, a smiling William Hayes, the show's director, offers his appreciation and encouragement.

"You've got to run with that," he tells Lowe. "Emily is desperately lonely for company and she finally has somebody in her room so she chatters on and on, which makes her annoying and funny. And you've got this thing that you do so well, this sing-song quality in your voice that's overly bright and becomes a bit obnoxious. Please keep playing with it because it brings out the Diane Chambers in Emily."

Yes, Diane Chambers, the intellectual, exceedingly talkative cocktail waitress on the sitcom *Cheers*. Does that mean that there's some Sam Malone in Poe? "Yes," says Hayes a few days later. "And Frasier too."

None of this is meant to suggest that Edgar and Emily are mere sitcom characters. In this world premiere play, which runs through April 22, McDonough has fashioned two smart, clever, funny, creative, tormented people who are trying to resolve their own personal struggles. The comparison to Diane Chambers is a way of underscoring certain qualities in Emily that make her instantly recognizable,

(Continued on page 2)

PHOTO © GEOFFREY CHURCHILL



Margery Lowe and Gregg Weiner  
in *Edgar & Emily*

■ **edgar & emily**  
pairing an unlikely pair

■ **class act**  
in their own words

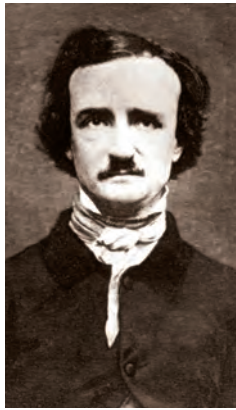
■ **wait for it . . .**  
premiere of ordinary americans

■ **season closers**  
psychological mystery / folk music



## Edgar & Emily (Cont. from page 1)

relatable, and contemporary, and serves notice that the playwright is giving the audience *his* Edgar and *his* Emily, not the Poe and Dickinson who have come down to us through history books and biographies.



Edgar Allan Poe



Emily Dickinson

"I did a lot of research and filled a notebook with lots of interesting little details about their lives," says McDonough, "but I was never going to write a docudrama. When I sat down to write the play, I had an idea of these two people in my mind and I just wrote. I wanted my Emily to be lively, to be able to hold her own with Poe, to be his equal. People tend to think of him as this dark, serious guy, this wild madman, but my Edgar is probably more flamboyant and egotistical than the real one. And even though Emily may have decided to be reclusive, that doesn't mean she wasn't full of life. There is a perception of her as this quiet spinster, but there are those who say that she was a lot more lively than she's given credit for. For the sake of contrast and for the humor in the play, I wanted their personalities to be very different because that lends itself to comedy. And I think people will be surprised by how funny they both are."

McDonough "became obsessed" with writing a play about these literary giants some two and a half years ago, believing that such an unlikely pairing would be full of dramatic possibilities. "At the same time, within their writings they express a lot of similar themes, although in different ways," he says. "That was another reason I thought it would be interesting to get them into a room together."

The room is Emily's bedroom, and on one fateful night in 1864 Poe bursts in, hauling along a coffin. At the time of their meeting, Dickinson is an emerging poet and Poe has been dead for almost 15 years, but no matter. As they banter and bicker and slowly reveal themselves to one another, each provides the other with encouragement and courage.

McDonough submitted his comedy to The Dramaworkshop, PBD's lab for developing new plays, where Lowe and Weiner are resident artists. They were chosen to do the initial table reading – that is, sit at a table with the other resident artists and read the play aloud. "They brought to the table a built-in chemistry that they had developed over the years, and they nailed it," says Hayes. "Everyone at the table was laughing and extremely engaged, and halfway through the process I decided that the play would be great fun and a different kind of piece to bring to the stage for our audience."

McDonough came to town for four days last June to work with Hayes and the cast, making a few tweaks to the script along the way. "There weren't many changes then, because the play had a particularly good framework," says Hayes. Most of the editing occurred just weeks ago, during rehearsals. "In the first week, we concentrated on further clarifying Emily's journey, because it's really her play. We would read the play several times a day, and Joe would go home at night and do rewrites. The play has since gotten a tremendous amount of focus, and it's cleaner and tighter. Not much changed during the first two-thirds of the play, just in the last third. That's when it gets serious, and it needed clarity. It's really an absurdist comic drama, outrageously over the top at the beginning and then, like many absurdist pieces, it becomes serious. But that has to sneak up on the audience, so it's a delicate balance. A lot of the discussion has been about whether everything is taking place in Emily's head."

McDonough signals to the audience in the play's opening moments that they should

set aside any preconceived notions they might have about Poe and, especially, Dickinson, first by having Emily play with an anachronistic toy, and then with Edgar's unusual entrance. "You don't often think of Emily Dickinson in a comedy," he says. "I wanted to give the audience permission to laugh." Lowe adds, "The audience gets the style of the world right away. It's almost like *Saturday Night Live*."

Although the play was inspired by real people, Hayes discouraged Lowe and Weiner from doing much research on Dickinson and Poe. "It's not a biography of them, and the research could just get in the way," says Weiner. "Some of the biographical information is important, not only to build the character, but also because it's in the play. But if you're spending so much time getting to know who Poe is and not enough time working on the play itself, then you're putting your energy in the wrong spot. More than anything else, reading his poetry and short stories helped give me another layer as an actor to build my Edgar Allan Poe into a three-dimensional, real human being."

Lowe adds, "There are those who say Emily was a recluse, others who say she wasn't, and I would normally debate these points of view in my head. But Bill said, 'Stop. Throw it all away. Just play what's on the page. She's silly, she's fun. This is our Emily.' So I went into rehearsals knowing about her background, but I didn't do the kind of research I normally do. In our play she's a recluse, so that's all I needed to know. And in the bits of poetry of hers that I read, I came to understand her struggle and her fascination with life and death. That was the constant question that occupied all her days."

(Continued on page 3)





## Edgar & Emily (Cont. from page 2)

Throughout the rehearsal period, the fine tuning of the play proved to be stimulating for everyone. "I felt from the very beginning that Bill had a real feel for the play and for my writing," says McDonough. "He offered great guidance and had a lot of great ideas, so it's been a painless process throughout the rewrites. Margery and Gregg also had some terrific suggestions, and as we got further into rehearsals, they also came up with some funny bits. It's been a great collaborative process."

Hayes adds an extra week of rehearsals for world premieres because, he says, "they're not proven plays and you need extra time to work through them. You have to have the freedom to make good choices and have the freedom to make wrong choices, not only as an actor, but as a director. It's a far more collaborative process than a play that's more established, where I can go in with a really solid vision. With a new play, you're developing a vision."

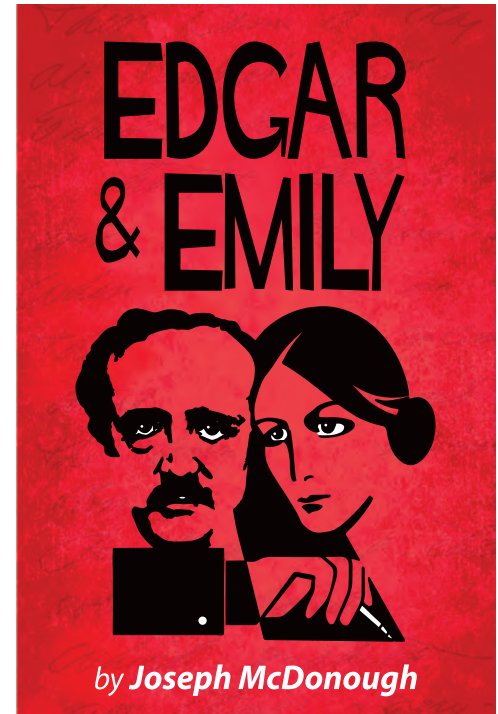
Weiner adds, "It's a lot of mental heavy lifting because not only are we putting up a show, but we're trying to help it and grow it. We're trying to find things that can help it do what it wants to do, which is entertain. So it's not just learning lines. It's asking, 'Why are we saying this line? Do we need this? What can we do here?' When

we're in the process, we're trying to think as these characters. I don't ever say the typical, 'My character wouldn't say that,' but I might say, 'This doesn't make sense. Right, Joe?' And sometimes he'll explain the intention of the line, and then it makes perfect sense. Other times he'll say, 'You're right. Cut it.' It's a great environment."

One of the discoveries Hayes made as they examined the text over and over was that there was a case to be made that Emily is much tougher than Edgar. "It's not in the script but it's there in the subtext," Hayes says. "She's smarter than he is, she's a chatterbox and a know-it-all, and she's manipulative. He is full of himself and condescending and appears overly confident, but he's really a wimp. He trembles at the slightest sound he hears outside the room. And that's fun, because he's this big, commanding guy and yet she's strong and he's a wuss."

Lowe and Weiner say they're aware there are people who have strong opinions and care deeply about these writers, and their image of Poe and Dickinson might well be at odds with the play's. The hope is that they can put their views aside and just enjoy McDonough's creations. Lowe is excited that lots of students will be coming to see *Edgar & Emily* and hopes the play will pique their interest about these two American originals. "It's a

great introduction to Dickinson and Poe, because it's factual but not historical, and it's silly and fun," she says. "And I hope the students will come away wanting to learn more about them and will want to try more theatre. What we're doing is opening a door."



**NOW THROUGH APRIL 22**

## Students Respond to *On Golden Pond*



Gary Cadwallader, PBD's Director of Education and Community Involvement, preps a student audience

We've spoken often on these pages and elsewhere about how critical it is to introduce students to live theatre. Through our StageCoach initiative, we bus students to special matinee performances of all our mainstage plays, and we've seen these teenagers come under the spell of theatre magic. But we'd rather you didn't take our word for it; we want you to hear from the students themselves. We sent a list of questions to students at South Tech Academy about their experiences attending *On Golden Pond*, and they responded with great enthusiasm, thought, intelligence, and insight. We wish we had the space to share all of them. We've excerpted as many as possible, which were proofread and edited for space.

**Juan M.:** "*On Golden Pond* was the first live stage play I ever saw, and it was a unique experience. The intensity with which my eyes and ears were [glued] to the stage, following every step, listening to

(Continued on page 4)

## Students (Cont. from page 3)

every word, was extraordinary. [I had the] impression of being there. Throughout the play, I got lost inside the conversations of the characters and forgot about everything else around me. I was immersed inside the story. *On Golden Pond* not only was a form of entertainment, but also a valuable asset that brought me joy and means to reflection – reflection about life, about how one should enjoy life with those around you and live every moment as if it were the last.”

**Nicole:** “I could relate to Norman and Chelsea’s relationship as my father was pretty strict and not too emotional. Their relationship made the story emotional for me. I believe all the students left with a great appreciation for the theatre experience.”

**Wade:** “The experience I got from *On Golden Pond* is one that I will never forget. The story was so humorous to me because of Norman’s wittiness and his relationship with Ethel. The struggles of death that were obvious to the couple in their golden years, and the relationship between Norman and Chelsea, added to the story to bring some darker, deeper emotions that moved the audience. PBD provided a full experience.”

**Juan C.:** “The story of *On Golden Pond* is truly beautiful, and having the husband and wife be an interracial couple demonstrated that love has no boundaries. I can relate to [the father-daughter relationship] for I never got my father’s approval and I could never satisfy him. The story has taught me that it is never too late to fix things.”

**Alexandra:** “I related to Billy. He is portrayed as a teenager that can be cool and open-minded. He’s not the typical teen that’s rude and disobedient. Chelsea and Norman remind me of my mom and grandpa by the way they act towards each other, the tension they have between them. Seeing *On Golden Pond* made me [realize] that I can relate to a play, that they don’t always tell perfect stories as I imagined, and that maybe there is hope in finding a solution between my mom and grandpa.”

**Jada:** “This was my first play at PBD and I think I will be visiting again. I was expecting it to be like a musical play but it was something totally different. It was funny, had a deep meaning behind it, and it triggered your emotions. The post-show discussion with the actors added an extra touch. It allowed you to get to know the actors a little better and clear up any confusion you had. It also allowed the actors to explain certain scenes a

little deeper. Overall, my experience was wonderful.”

**Katherine:** “The experience meant a lot to me, not only because it was my first time watching a live play, but because of its message. The main thing that impacted me was the relationship between Norman and Chelsea, because I have experienced what they were going through first-hand. For years, since I was a little girl, my mom and my uncle wouldn’t get further than a ‘hi’ when they’d see each other. And just like Norman, my mom was hurting within but she wouldn’t show it. Eventually she spoke up. So the fact that Norman and his daughter made up in the end made me feel a special connection to the play and allowed me to understand [it] more in depth. Also, it was a great privilege to be able to learn something meaningful outside of our school walls. It was an unforgettable experience, and I am really looking forward to going back.

**Jennifer:** “For me, this story was a clear message of keeping others close before you lose them. The experience definitely stuck with me.”

**Notrecia:** “This was my first time seeing a live stage play. You could feel everything the characters felt. My favorite character was Chelsea because of her courage to break the ice with her father. I think that a lot of people can relate to her not wanting to be the bigger person, but this shows the benefits of her doing so. Her character was a shining example for everyone who is struggling with behaving with magnanimity.”

**Sherley:** “This was my first time and not my last time at PBD. I was confused at first as to what I was walking into. I’m not a theater type person, but after this experience I’m willing to come back again. The play had humor and characteristics that I find in people in my everyday life. The post-show discussion with the actors was very informative. Over all, I loved it!”

**Jenyhard:** “This was the first time I saw a live stage play, and to sit and watch up close and engage with the actors was a fun experience I will never forget. It had me rolling on the floor with laughter and on the edge of my seat to see what was to come. It would be exciting to have another opportunity to see another fantastic play at PBD.”

**Rachel:** “It was really cool to watch a play with people my age because generally you don’t picture anyone younger than 18 being a part of the audience. Before the show started, it was explained to us that at PBD they try to make theatre more

## Ordinary Americans

Another world premiere play by Joseph McDonough coming to PBD

She was the first, first lady of television, whose portrayal of a New York housewife was beloved by millions across the country. Her show aired on CBS on Monday nights at 9pm, and she was the initial recipient of an Emmy Award for Lead Comedy Actress. And if you think her name was Lucille Ball, you would be wrong.

Her name was Gertrude Berg, and beginning in 1929, first on radio and later on television, she was better known as her character, Molly Goldberg. Today she is largely forgotten, but when PBD Producing Artistic Director William Hayes learned about her remarkable life, he thought it provided wonderful material for a play. He approached Joseph McDonough, and after the playwright did his own research, he was equally inspired. So Hayes commissioned him to write the play, which will premiere on PBD’s mainstage during the 2019-2020 season, starring Elizabeth Dimon.



Joseph McDonough



Elizabeth Dimon

“It’s a fascinating story,” says McDonough. “She was like Oprah Winfrey before Oprah. She owned her own show, and she wrote and starred in every episode on radio and television. In those days, for a woman, especially a Jewish woman, to do that was incredible. And she never shied away from the fact that her characters were Jewish, which was also important. Yet the family’s appeal was that they were just ordinary Americans, which is actually the title of the play.

“The crux of the play is that the actor who played her husband, Philip Loeb, got caught in the blacklisting scandal, and when CBS ordered her to fire him, she refused. Nobody stood up except Gertrude Berg. It was a very courageous stand, and it affected her career. It’s an important story that needs to be told, and I’m so glad Bill brought it to me. I’m very excited about it.”

*(Continued on page 5)*



## Students (Cont. from page 4)

available to our demographic by lowering the price of tickets. It made me realize how much this generation really should start appreciating the art of theatre. I hope that there will be more opportunities to take a class field trip to PBD again, and I hope that when I go and watch a play on my own that I will see more people my age in the audience who take time to appreciate the beauty of theatre."

**Widina:** "I identified best with Norman and Chelsea. My mother and I have a rocky, strained relationship. The play allowed me to see an outside perspective and apply some methods into my personal life. This play allows the audience to reflect on their own personal struggles and evaluate them."

**Anonymous:** "On Golden Pond was a powerful way of engaging the minds of the audience and understanding the values of relationships. The role of Chelsea was especially relatable to the teen audience because many of us have experienced similar situations with our parents and families. We can understand how Chelsea must have felt when trying to please her father but never succeeding. Seeing the characters change in front of my eyes made the story emotional for me. You really understand the impact actions have on other people."

**Cesia:** "The actors and actresses made it seem so real that I felt as if I were a part of the play. I could see myself in each character. I loved everything about the play because it showed how this actually happens in real life."

**Griselda:** "Props to the incredible cast that created a never-ending river of emotions. In Chelsea's character I observed her conflict not only with her father but within herself due to the resentment she held inside. Chelsea's persona revealed to me how at times we battle with our past, eventually affecting ourselves and our relationships with others. The shift in their relationship toward the end of the play successfully transmitted a powerful message of forgiveness."

**Andres:** "I absolutely loved this play and would be honored to return to PBD for another play."

**Michelle:** "On Golden Pond showed a relationship between a father and daughter that affected the whole family. Towards the end it was obvious how the father wasn't very different from his daughter. They were both too stubborn to admit their wrongs from the past. Because of that, years and years of their relationship wasted away, like the leaves falling off trees in autumn. My friends and I had different perspectives on the play, but we all agreed that it made us laugh and cry and pulled at the heartstrings."

**Aral:** "This play was one of the finest experiences I have had the honor of enjoying. Not only did the actors do a marvelous job, but they actually took the time to interact with us and answer many important questions so that everyone had something to take away and apply to their daily lives. My heartfelt thank you to all the actors and the staff of PBD. I look forward to returning to enjoy more of your works of wonder."



**Tuesday, 4/17/18**

**PRESENTATION** followed by Q&A

**Peter Shaffer**  
**Playwright**

**Host: J. Barry Lewis**

Delve into the life and legacy of the renowned playwright, author of the classic, Tony Award-winning plays *Amadeus* and *Equus*. The latter work, a great psychological mystery, concludes PBD's 2017-2018 season.

A series that explores all aspects of theatre, in conversations with or about the industry's top professionals and master artists.

Theatre talks are at 2pm and 7pm on Tuesdays.  
Individual tickets are \$23.



Peter Shaffer



### 2016-2017 Board of Directors

Stephen Brown, *Chair*  
Donald A. Brown, *Vice Chair*  
Louise Snyder, *Vice Chair*  
Tom Streit, *Vice Chair*  
Lew Kramer, *Treasurer*  
Carlton Moody, *Secretary*

Penny Bank	Sherry R. Jacobs
Sue Ellen Beryl	Marilyn Meyerhoff
Tina Bolton	Mark Perlberg
Esther Dinerstein	Stephen Rabb
Larry Goldfein	Ed Ricci
Ralph Guild	Marlene Silver
William Hayes	Mimi Draper Walsh

### Honorary Directors

Ruth Baum	J. Barry Lewis
Nancy Beard	Sherron Long
Susan Bloom	Pamela McIver
Steven Caras	Charles Muoio
Rebel Cook	Robert Nelderlander
Congresswoman	Ann Marie Rezzonico
Lois Frankel	Shari Santell
Roe Green	William Shepherd
Tim Harris	Don Silpe
Sally Ann Howes	Joe Sitrick
Daryn M. Kirchfeld	Jan Winkler
Dorothy Lappin	Lee Wolf
Sidney Lesowitz	

### Staff

William Hayes, *Producing Artistic Director*  
Sue Ellen Beryl, *Managing Director*  
Lara Wagener, *Associate Managing Director*  
Gary Cadwallader, *Director of Education and Community Engagement*  
Leslie Mandell, *Development Manager*  
Samantha Mighdoll, *Marketing Manager*  
Donna Faber, *Company Manager*  
Bruce Linser, *The Dramaworkshop Manager*  
Theda Reale, *House Manager/Group Sales Coordinator*  
Lauren Doeblin, *Box Office Manager*  
Alex Chimienti, *Asst. Box Office Manager/Asst. House Manager*  
Meredith Bartmon, *Box Office Associate*  
Leanna Oliveira, *Box Office Associate*  
Michal Rodman, *Box Office Associate*  
Ashley Rodriguez, *Box Office Associate*

Michael Amico, *Production Manager*  
Dustin Hamilton, *Assistant Technical Director*  
Brian O'Keefe, *Costume Shop Manager/Resident Designer*  
J. Barry Lewis, *Resident Director*  
Chris Hill, *Master Electrician*  
Brad Pawlak, *Sound Engineer*  
Celeste de St. Aubin, *Props Master*  
Katie Pyne, *Assistant Stage Manager*  
Kelly Sirbola, *Wardrobe Supervisor*  
Shane Tanner, *Deck Chief*  
Brendon Roth, *Carpenter*

Sheryl Flatow, *Writer/Editor*  
Jennifer Sardone-Shiner, *Marketing Consultant*  
Frank "Fraver" Verlizzo, *Poster Artwork*  
Caroline von Feilitzsch, *Graphic Design*

**561.514.4042**  
**palmbeachdramaworks.org**



# EQUUS

by **Peter Shaffer** | director **J. Barry Lewis**  
producers **Marsha and Stephen Rabb**

**MAY 18 – JUNE 3**

A psychiatrist attempts to treat a young man who has a troubling obsession with horses.

Theatre To Think About



Palm Beach Dramaworks  
201 Clematis Street  
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

“**...All hail Palm Beach Dramaworks...**”  
– *The Wall Street Journal*

Palm Beach Dramaworks is located at the **Don & Ann Brown Theatre** on the corner of Clematis Street and Narcissus Avenue, one block west of Flagler Drive.

FLORIDA WEEKLY  
IN THE KNOW. IN THE NOW.

PNC BANK

impact  
The Palm Beach

Google Grants

SHUBERT FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
for Palm Beach and Martin Counties

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

CULTURE BUILDS FLORIDA  
THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

ARTS & CULTURE  
COUNCIL OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

CULTURAL COUNCIL  
OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

DISCOVER THE PALM BEACHES  
FLORIDA  
Powered by the Tourist Development Council

PALM BEACH COUNTY  
FLORIDA

Sponsored in part by the Board of County Commissioners, the Tourist Development Council and the Cultural Council of Palm Beach County.

**2018-2019 Subscriptions On Sale Now!**

**561.514.4042**

**palmbeachdramaworks.org**

Woody Guthrie's

**AMERICAN**

Songs and Writings by  
**Woody Guthrie**

Conceived and Adapted by  
**Peter Glazer**

Orchestrations and  
Vocal Arrangements by  
**Jeff Waxman**

A celebration  
of America's  
most admired  
folk balladeer.



**Summer Musical**  
**JULY 13 - AUGUST 5**

**SONG**

**TICKETS ON SALE NOW!**

Theatre To Think About



201 Clematis Street  
West Palm Beach, FL 33401  
561.514.4042  
palmbeachdramaworks.org