



VISITING EDNA

BY DAVID RABE



DRAMATISTS
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VISITING EDNA
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For Ruth and Jill

The world premiere of VISITING EDNA was produced and presented at Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Anna D. Shapiro, Artistic Director; David Schmitz, Managing Director), Chicago, Illinois, in 2016. It was directed by Anna D. Shapiro; the scenic design was by David Zinn; the costume design was by Linda Roethke; the lighting design was by Marcus Doshi; the sound design was by Rob Milburn; the original music was by Michael Bodeen; the artistic producer was Jonathan Berry; the casting was by Tam Dickson; and the stage manager was Christine D. Freeburg. The cast was as follows:

ACTOR ONE	Sally Murphy
ACTOR TWO	Tim Hopper
EDNA	Debra Monk
ANDREW	Ian Barford
ACTOR THREE	Michael Rabe

CHARACTERS

ACTOR ONE

ACTOR TWO

EDNA

ANDREW

ACTOR THREE

SETTING

Edna's apartment. 1990s.

VISITING EDNA

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The time is the 1990s, Edna's apartment in a medium-sized Iowa town. Stage right is a small kitchen area that contains a sink, stove, refrigerator, kitchen table with a vase of flowers on it and chairs, a little desk beside the refrigerator. The space extends stage left into a living room where a recliner sits beside a small table and facing a TV stand, wooden, but with no actual TV on it, though there is a VCR under it. Nearby shelving holds some VHS tapes. The door to the outside is up center with an alcove between two small rooms, stage left being the door to Edna's bedroom. The interior of Edna's bedroom is a playing space upstage left. This room should meet the needs of playability rather than strict literal architecture. To the stage right of the alcove there is a bathroom door and further along, a door to a second small bedroom, both facing out. These doors are more or less parallel to and behind the kitchen counter and stove. Lamps here and there. Family pictures on the wall. Tokens and cards. A crucifix on the wall. A second recliner has been shoved off to the side. Lights rise on Actor One, a bright, energetic young woman dressed in a black sweater and slacks, a perky, fun outfit enters from stage left and walks down front, addressing the audience.

ACTOR ONE. I am, as you see, a person. A human being. And given the nature of our relationship—yours and mine—at the present moment—our spatial relationship—you can safely conclude that I

am an actor. Which I am. And as an actor, I am to portray—in the play—for the length of the play, I am to portray... Television. That's right. Television. I am to act it. I am, to act, as an actor, Television. In other words, that's my character. I will be—when you look at me, you will see—“Television.” That's what he's written, and so I am ready—I will to the best of my abilities—I mean, “Actor One will portray television,” he writes. And I'm like, you know, well, all right. Sure. Whatever you say. I mean, a part is a part. I'll take it. But then I thought, “Now what? Exactly how do I do it?” At first I asked myself, “Well, should I pretend to be a box?” I mean, should I kind of somehow...however...box myself? I mean, I thought about wearing a box. Being a box. We all thought about it. We consulted—the director, costume designer—we have brainstormed, believe you me...and... Or, you know, is it rabbit ears? Could it be this sort of hat thing with rabbit ears? Don't be surprised if you see that. Me with rabbit ears. Or...maybe a cord, you know, a cable cord or...a satellite dish! That's it. I carry it or attach it somehow... I don't think he gave the whole thing any real thought. He just had this idea. And so I'll be doing my best. But I'm feeling that it'll all be a sort of—as the saying goes, “a work in progress.”

Actor One can sit on the TV stand at times, using elements such as cables, antennae, a satellite dish. Lights, along with coordination with Andrew or Edna using the remote, can signal when the TV is on or off and create a presence at this location which she can occupy, though at times she can move about as her relationships develop with the characters. There should also be a use of music and sound to enhance her TV presence.

Now, as Actor One says, “a work in progress,” Actor Two enters from stage right. A man, trim, with an intelligent gaze, not without cunning, he wears a black sweater and casual black trousers. He walks down front, addressing the audience.

ACTOR TWO. And I—I am to portray Cancer. That's right. You heard me right. I, too, am a work in progress. Steadily. Secretly. Do you even see me?

A tea kettle whistles and the bathroom door opens and an old woman comes out; she shuffles toward the recliner.

Ah. Here she comes. Edna. My host. Age 78. Back from the bathroom. Congestive heart failure. Diabetes. Arthritis that feels like a vicious slash beneath her clavicle and down, like a knife through the throat of a sheep. Knees of course, too. Knuckles. Ankles. She's had a colostomy. Diverticulitis that couldn't be reversed. She's just had to irrigate herself. That's where she's coming from. It's a process that has to do with flushing her bowels to avoid these violent cramps. It's an enema of sorts that she has to do twice a week. Only she doesn't have any bowels anymore. Not in the conventional sense. And now me—she has me, too—her diagnosis, as she likes to call me. And do you know what? Colostomy. Arthritis. Congestive heart failure, and she's desperate to live. Hungry to live. Praying to live.

As Edna sinks into the chair, Actor Two studies her.

The irrigation—leaves her, as you see, exhausted, her heart struggling, all systems debilitated, an opportunity, I would think, for me to take a little more advantage. To inch forward. Dig deeper. Pursue my goals. (*Looking out.*) I mean nothing by it. But already you don't like me. I can tell. It's just what I do. Being what I am.

Edna sits panting. Actor One has been watching, and she leans in toward Edna now.

ACTOR ONE. Edna. I'm here. Right here. Turn me on, why don't you. Wanna watch the news? Or a sitcom? You should watch a sitcom.

The phone rings, and Edna reaches, picks it up.

EDNA. Hello. Oh. Hello, Bernice. What? No, no. I'm fine. Just worried. You know. I fly with them. If those kids of mine, either one of 'em are in the air, I'm flying too. What? Really? No. I don't have the damn thing on.

As she picks up the remote, aims it, and turns on the television:

No, no. I didn't hear about that.

ACTOR ONE. (*Hurriedly putting on a contraction of rabbit ears on her head.*) Tornadoes ripped through Ashgwago County with devastating two-hundred-miles-per-hour winds in a savage wedge of violence that left twelve dead and two thousand homeless.

EDNA. That's not our way is it. I mean, it's not headed our way.

ACTOR ONE. Eyewitnesses reported seeing cars lifted and hurled

about like kindling, or as Myra Krenwitz, who lost her entire home, but escaped without injury to herself or family, said, “Like bugs in a fan”!

EDNA. Lemme mute this thing. I can't hear you.

She pops the remote.

You know where that is, that's nowhere near here. That's Texas I think. Or somewhere like that. Oh, I know, those poor people. That woman there—that poor woman she lost everything. Poor things.

Pause.

I know, I meant to call you. I would have by tomorrow. I haven't been back home all that long. Oh, I had the greatest trip, it was the greatest visit. I just have the greatest kids. You know when I got my diagnosis, well, we didn't know which way to turn. We were looking for a place for me out east, because they're both in Massachusetts. Not that I could ever actually leave here to go live way out there. Been here all my life, don't you know. And anyway I been feeling so good. “Well,” Andrew said, either I'm putting the kids on a plane and we're all coming out to see you, or you're coming here for a visit.” I didn't think I could do it. And I couldn't if they hadn't done everything for me. Jenny came and got me and flew out with me, and it was first class, I'll have you know. That's right. Andrew paid, and oh my, the room you have. I might just as well have been in this recliner where I'm sitting this second for the whole flight. It was a beautiful. A beautiful flight. Not a bump in the sky the whole time. That's right. And then Andrew flew back with me—got me here and then he had to go on to Omaha then Los Angeles for business; that's where he's coming in from today. That's right, he's going to come for a visit. He should have got into Chicago hours ago, and so he should be landing here any minute. If the damn thing's on time. It was first class with him, too. First class both ways. Like I was a queen. And the service? Well, they're just there every minute with “Can I get you this?” and “Can I get you that?” We had a full meal. The poor people back in coach they're packed in like eggs in a crate and I don't think they get even a sandwich anymore. No. I never did before. First time in my life. And it's a good thing, too, because it spoils you. Jenny said, “I don't think I can fly any other way after this, Mom.”

Pause.

Yes. Beautiful birthday I had. A wonderful party at each of their houses. First I had the one at Andrew's and then when I went to Jenny's house, I had another one. And do you know what they had for me at Andrew's? Oh, the kids were so sweet. And on the cake, this candle that when you lit it, it sang "Happy Birthday." No. The candle. That's what I'm saying. It sang this little tune when you lit it. I know. What'll they think of next? It did me a lot of good. More than anybody knows. And do you know what? All of a sudden, I'm worried of tyin' up this phone.

Moving downstage she looks out, as if through a large window.

What if Andrew's trying to call from the airport if something went wrong? You know those damn little planes coming into this one-horse town—Oh! (*Startled, looking off.*) There's a cab pulling up in the courtyard. I bet that's him. Yes, yes, it is. (*Hurrying back to the table.*) I'll call you tomorrow. Bye.

She hangs up the phone and then Andrew comes in the front door. He's in his 50s and he carries a suitcase, and has a fairly large satchel over his shoulder. He carries a computer bag.

ANDREW. Hi, Mom.

EDNA. How was the flight?

ANDREW. Okay. You know. Not bad. Good to see you, Mommy. (*Bending to hug and kiss her.*)

EDNA. You don't know what a treat it is to see you walk in that door.

He sets the suitcase down and takes the satchel off.

ANDREW. I'm going to have a little drink, okay. Before I unpack.

EDNA. I don't know what I got here for you.

ANDREW. You stay put. I brought something.

With a pint of Jack Daniel's taken from his suitcase, he goes to the kitchen for a glass, some ice from the refrigerator.

When I was leaving LA, the plane sat on the runway for over an hour. Just sat there.

EDNA. Oh, you must be exhausted. Why'd they do that?

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by David Rabe

3M, 2W

Edna has suffered losses as she has aged, and now she faces a late-life cancer diagnosis. Edna's son, Andrew, is home for a visit. Together they try to bridge the gulf between the love they shared in his childhood and the polite but baffling relationship they now live with. Mother and son stumble toward honesty as they wrestle with the phantoms—both mundane and profound—that keep them from real connection.

"[A] deeply disturbing play—a howl of authorial anguish... the writing soars with Rabe's remarkable fusing of wisdom and ignorance about life, with his compassion for troubled souls and yet his fury at how from one another we find ourselves wrenched apart." —**Chicago Tribune**

"Rabe's play mightily resists traditional dramatic twists or revelations, insisting on a realistic depiction of a complex relationship... the work ultimately has a deeply searing power... [it's] a beautifully agonizing depiction of spending time with a loved one who is dying, trying to make the time have meaning, and usually failing." —**Variety**

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