

# Deb Margolin



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## NEW DRAMATISTS RESIDENT PLAYWRIGHT SINCE 2008

Deb Margolin is a playwright, actor and founding member of Split Britches Theater Company. She is the author of eight full-length solo performance pieces, which she has toured throughout the United States, and is the recipient of a 1999-2000 OBIE Award for Sustained Excellence of Performance. Her multi-character play, *Three Seconds in the Key*, commissioned by The Public and premiered by New Georges in New York, won the 2005 Kesselring Prize for Playwriting. Margo Jefferson of the *New York Times* called the work "a fiercely good play." *Why Cleaning Fails*, a play that bridges simple acts of domestic cleaning with the massive act of cleaning called for by the events of 9/11, was presented by HERE Arts Center in New York, and occasioned a *New York Times* House and Home Section look at the mess in Margolin's house. Her play, *Critical Mass*, an investigation of the impulse to tell people what's wrong with them, was translated into Hebrew and presented in Israel. A book of Deb's performance pieces and plays, entitled *Of All The Nerve: Deb Margolin SOLO*, was published in 1999 by Cassell/Continuum Press. Deb was awarded the 2005 Richard H. Brodhead Prize for Teaching Excellence at Yale University, and the 2008 Helen Merrill Distinguished Playwright award. Deb's work has been commissioned by The Jewish Museum of New York, Actors Theatre of Louisville, The Public, P.S. 122 and many other venues. She lives in New Jersey, which she adamantly denies.

## Scripts available through New Dramatists

### THREE SECONDS IN THE KEY

*Drama, Full-length One-Act, 90 Minutes 5M, 1W, 1C*  
*Set: A woman's living room, set in the middle of a basketball court*  
A woman with Hodgkin's disease and her young son entangle with and deny her mortality by watching the New York Knicks basketball team play through a losing season on television. A tender filial series of scenes is complicated when the Knicks team captain, whom the little boy adores, steps out of the ecology of the television and into the ailing woman's life, cajoling her back into her body from a painful place of emotional exile. She tries to teach him Yiddish. Issues between Blacks and Jews are argued over with passion and tenderness both. Finally, after she has accepted her life, however transitory, in a physical body, and he has accepted newly his obligations to himself and his own children, he steps forward and meets the little boy. A lyrical, redemptive drama with really funny parts in it.

Productions: Performance Space 122; Public Theater, New York; New Georges at Baruch Arts Center; San Francisco Playhouse.

"Margolin's use of language is incredible—even staggering at times. She's

funny and poetic, obtuse and specific all at the same time. *Three Seconds in the Key* puts us in the mind of illness, where fighting and winning are more than a game and spiritual connection is more than empty words or a plea bargain with God."—Oakland Tribune

"A fiercely good play."—New York Times

"An unsentimental, surrealist triumph!"—Time Out New York

"Truly a significant literary achievement."—off-off online

### BRINGING THE FISHERMEN HOME

*Full-length One-act Drama, 75 Minutes 4M, 2W*  
*Set: series of continuous doctors' examining rooms; a bare downstage "prayer space"*

"I believe I have already set down in my notes that love greatly resembles an application of torture or a surgical operation. But this idea can be developed, and in the most ironic manner. For even when two lovers love passionately and are full of mutual desire, one of the two will always be cooler or less self-abandoned than the other. He or she is the surgeon or executioner; the other, the patient or victim."—Baudelaire

Jane Sand, a college professor with a young daughter, falls into a Baudelairean darkness when circumstances bring her into contact with the medical establishment. Charged with eroticism and obscured by comedy, her relationship with a witty, urbane surgeon degenerates into something half-holocaust half-rapture. Eventually, a botched operation silences the woman forever, whereas the voices of age and inanity, medical jargon and human suffering, persist. A dreamlike journey into the unspoken and unspeakable erotics of medicine.

Productions: Dixon Place, New York; New Work Now! Public Theater, New York; Cleveland Public Theater, Cleveland, OH

"One of the most exciting theater events of the season! *Bringing the Fishermen Home* takes on the medical system and the intricacies of doctor/patient relations...a funny, provocative, highly theatrical show."—Cleveland Free Times

"The spectator has a chance to appreciate the indelible richness of Margolin's language" —Cleveland Plain Press

### CRITICAL MASS

*Comedy, Full-length One-act, 80 Minutes 2M, 4W*  
*Set: A big chair with a RESERVED sign on it on an otherwise bare stage*

A critic is seated smack in the middle of a series of events he is

meant to review, and people mistake each other for things they are not. A wild, vaudevillian comedy that investigates the critical impulse, from its most elegant to its most petty, *Critical Mass* features actors who run into the audience and criticize the show as if they were members of it, then return to their roles as performers. Actors regard one another's body type, weight gain, genital size, sexual agility; a cocktail party leads to tears, the theater critic weeps over his memory of a poignant performance of Beckett's *Godot*; booing at a sports arena is parsed as a form of criticism, the Narrator and the Critic find a way to come together and then fall inevitably apart, and criticism is regarded from every angle as a systemic, irreversible and terminal part of the human condition.

Productions: Performance Space 122, NYC; Whole Art Theatre, Kalamazoo, Michigan; University of Tel Aviv, Israel.

"Smart and hilarious...*Critical Mass* is an insightful work about our compulsion to inflict opinions on one another, and beyond that, a treatise on how we smother our loneliness with words. Ms. Margolin is an ideal escort through the world of verbs and nouns: she has such a lovely way with them."—*New York Times*

"Inspired heights of canny observation...the writing is brilliant."  
—*Village Voice*

"Like a dance built with words."—*Attitude Magazine*

### **TIME IS THE MERCY OF ETERNITY: A Meditation in Four Acts**

*Drama in Four Separate Parts, 75 Minutes 2M, 2W*

*Set: A bed, a trunk, some overturned chairs*

A quartet of interconnected short pieces examining the nature of violence, and its relation to the psyche and the human body. A suicide bomber who speaks from beyond death, who killed only himself when he might have killed multitudes and who pulled the string on his belt just to make everything stop (*When They Quiet Down, I Start*) is followed by a the anguished conversation of a couple who have lost their only son in a war, and all that remains of him is a photograph of the lower half of his left leg (*Clarisse and Larmon*). *The Rich Silk Of It* tracks the last five seconds of the life of a young, beautiful woman about to be murdered by her ex-fiance; the final, eponymous piece finds the one woman who was the wife of the bomber, the mother of the dead girl and of the lost soldier lying joyously in a display bed in a department store, refusing to leave until the authoritarian Woman in Blazer lies down with her for a kiss.

Productions: *Clarisse and Larmon*: Humana Festival of New American Plays, Ohio Theater, Women's Interart Theater; *The Rich Silk Of It*: Yale University, New Haven, CT; The Women's Project, NYC; Cupcake Café, NYC; *Time is the Mercy of Eternity*: Britebar, NYC; entire quartet, West End Theater, New York, NY

"Like a cameo with an opera inside...a testament to the power of passionate utterance. *Time Is the Mercy of Eternity* sparkles!"—*Village Voice*

"I like that Margolin begins her meditation by shaking us loose from assumptions we carry with us too carelessly."—*NYTheatre.com*

"A quartet of playlets that tackle weighty subjects with quirky humor, quiet beauty, and a sense of profane poetry. *Time is the Mercy* assembles snapshot moments linked by themes of time, mortality, and the ravages of war upon the body and spirit."—*Backstage*

### **O WHOLLY NIGHT AND OTHER JEWISH SOLECISMS**

*Comical/Lyrical Solo Monologue, 65 Minutes 1W*

*Set: A bare stage with an antique dress hanging upstage just right of center*

A Jewish woman discourses on the sexiness of waiting for the Messiah, a fundamental Jewish precept, and applies it comically and painfully to events remembered, simple moments of daily life: her grandmother in the old-lady home, her husband proposing

marriage at a funeral home, her baby daughter melting into sleep in her arms, a dress she's been given by a woman who denies ever seeing "that *shmata*." She posits that the Messiah could be anybody, and that we're all called upon at different times to act as Messianic stand-ins, so it's advisable to wear clean underwear at all times and treat everyone with grace and respect. A comical, wistful investigation of Jewish identity.

Productions: Jewish Museum of New York; Women's InterArt Theater, NYC; JCC Dallas Texas; Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas; Rude Mechanicals, Austin, Texas; Painted Bride Theater, Philadelphia, PA; countless colleges, synagogues, etc.

"*O Wholly Night* is performative in the true sense of the much overworked term. It embodies and enacts what it discusses. By performing hope, Margolin, in turn, generates it."—*Theater Week*

"The material takes time to gather power, eventually turning into a poetry of strong, fresh images and unexpected insights."—*Backstage*

"Ms. Margolin's one-woman show is a deft and delightful balancing act between stories: funny and sad, babies and grandmothers, past and present."—*Dallas Morning News*

"For all her humor, Ms. Margolin has some serious reflections on the cost of being different from the majority, but she makes them deftly, sometimes silently; they linger long after the hour of smiles has ended."  
—*New York Times*

### **INDEX TO IDIOMS: A Performance Novel**

*Comedy/Drama for solo performer, 75 Minutes 1W*

*Set: A bench, a screen upstage for projections*

Based on a list of English language idioms brought home by her school-aged son, a woman decides to tell the story of her invisible, indelible life using the idioms as chapter headings. *Index to Idioms: A Performance Novel* is a love song to the body, a series of looks at the female body in pleasure, in illness, in youth, in middle age, and in the singular utility of motherhood. A series of poetic and humorous monologues in which quotidian events are marked with the tenderness of a life lived under the mantle of mortality, *Index* is a series of emotional snapshots that show a profound respect for the tiny points of evolution in her own spirit and those of her children. Her daughter realizing she's going to die someday while the Mother is peeing; the son apologizing to a piece of salmon for eating by reminding the fish that, in becoming part of the boy's body it can live on through him. A sense of joy and triumph pervades this one-woman performance novel.

Productions: Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN; Culture Project, New York, NY; University of Texas at Austin; Kean University, NJ; Wells College, MA

"Densely written with a novelist's sense of detail, these bittersweet episodes zero in on the small but significant epiphanies that stand out like signposts in a woman's life. Each of [Margolin's] beautifully observed snapshots of the life of a suburban mother begins with the kind of teasing line that makes you want to know more."—*New York Times*

"Apocalyptic and hysterical, Margolin's episodic play suggest that motherhood may be as dangerous as life gets."—*Time Out New York*

"What makes *Index to Idioms* special is Margolin's generosity as a writer, and her humility before the transcendent moments to be found in the most ordinary places – in the clichés we use without thinking every day."—*NYTheatre.com*

**OF MICE, BUGS AND WOMEN**

*Full-length for solo performer* 1W

"A comic but melancholy sound, like a burlesque sigh, the drone becomes a gnawing aural emblem of both time passing and time frozen for Ms. Margolin's ingeniously interconnected characters and the performer herself...When Ms. Margolin at last plays herself, a new mother trapped in the alien land of Secaucus, N.J., you become conscious of the psychological matrix from which these other personas were born and of the reasons, familiar to any caretaker of a young child, that hearing has eclipsed vision as the dominant sense in her life... a fresh, reverberant exploration of the petri dish of an artist's imagination." —Ben Brantley, New York Times

**CARTHIEVES! JOYRIDES!**

*Full-length for solo performer* 1W

**OF ALL THE NERVE**

*Full-length for solo performer* 1W

**970-DEBB**

*Full-length for solo performer* 1W

**GESTATION**

*Full-length for solo performer* 1W