

I am not a theater critic but I have been devoted to covering theater since my early 1980s reports on the explosion of Chicago storefront theaters for National Public radio. When I was hosting *The Mara Tapp Show* in the 1990s, I was honored to host weekly for conversations about and scenes from some of Chicago's best shows, and delighted when those interviews filled houses for our local theaters.

In 2015, at the request of friends, I started a series of emails with recommendations for shows I thought worthy of patrons. Some years later, actors, directors and publicity people in Chicago's theater world prevailed on me to share raves, a request I accepted, especially in light of the increasing tensions in the theater world and need to keep Chicago theaters healthy. Then some personal events and a pandemic intervened. But Chicago theater is back so it is time to offer support in our new world.

As I moved out of the changing world of journalism for a second career in education, I was more free to express my opinions. Primary among these is my desire to see Chicago's rich theatrical scene continue to thrive in this time of diminishing coverage of the arts, and to celebrate the great artists of our city. It has always struck me that Chicago's actors are so talented they can make even the worst plays bearable. My other goal is serve as a journalistic steward in the tradition of colleagues I admire – the late Sheldon Patinkin, a great man of Chicago theater with whom I discussed such matters regularly and who is missed beyond words; the late *Chicago Sun-Times* Restaurant Critic Pat Bruno, who guided my sense of what makes a great critic; *Chicago Tribune* Theater Critic Richard Christiansen, who I first interviewed for NPR when I was a fresh-out of- J-School journalist on a mission to tell the tale of Chicago's storefront theaters and WTTW Critic Hedy Weiss, whose irrepressible joy in and support of theater is infectious. For that reason, I will not memorialize my negative opinions. We have enough of that in this town. If a play isn't recommended, assume I missed it or hated it. Please take my comments for what they are – recommendations for shows that have engaged me and those I bring to them. If you find yourself uninterested or annoyed by what I say, please hit delete and know that I will not be offended since I will not know.

Here's to Chicago theater,
Mara Tapp