



BARBARA CHISHOLM

BY CHRISTOPHER CARBONE
PHOTOS BY KIRK R. TUCK



When Barbara Chisholm lets out one of her big, deep-throated laughs, you know you're in the presence of someone in love with her craft. The actress, theater enthusiast and 25-year Austinite, starring in *Red Hot Patriot*, a one-woman show at Zach Scott Theatre that pays glorious tribute to the irreverent journalist Molly Ivins, is a natural fit for the role. She took time out to speak with us about acting and why she loves the Capital City.

How are things going with *Red Hot Patriot*? You're carrying all the weight on your shoulders.

Molly Ivins gives good theater! The force of nature that her personality consisted of

and the wide-open heart and mind that she had—it's a tremendously rich pool to jump in. It doesn't feel hard from that standpoint. She's such an obvious choice as a subject matter for a show like this. It's been unbelievably gratifying. I've been a huge fan of hers since the 1980s. I have her books. I felt and do feel very familiar with her. It's great to play her in Austin where people love and admire her and have such a rich affection for her.

What do you appreciate the most about the theater community in Austin?

I get comments from my friends and colleagues from other cities a lot that our community is so supportive. Theaters support other theaters and artists. It makes for a very fertile ground as a result.

You've been doing theater for a while. How did you get your start?

I studied acting in college. When I was out of school, in Washington D.C., my parents were in San Antonio and I didn't know where I was going to go. I was working at a theater in San Antonio, but I had a brother in Austin. I moved here on a whim. My first day in town, I went to several theaters, among them Zach Scott, with my resume and head shot. Someone overheard me and said, 'we're in the middle of a show and our stage manager just quit—can you be our stage manager?' That was my one inglorious stage manager moment. Shortly after, I auditioned for a show and was cast.

Are there any roles you would love to play or aspects of theater that inspire you the most?

For the last few years, what's been most exciting for me have been new works. I worship writers and playwrights. It's so exciting to be in the kitchen part of it, actually building a play. That's one great thing about *Red Hot Patriot*, which had a run in Philadelphia prior to coming here. We did some script changes and to be a part of that is so exciting!

Have you seen any shows outside Austin that you've enjoyed?

While I was in New York, I saw the Round-about production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with Brian Bedford. It was so tight and seemed fool-proof—that's when you know it's just tremendous.

Austin has changed tremendously in the time you've lived here. What's a favorite characteristic of Austin for you?

In 2005, we did a show called *Keepin' It Weird* that was very much in a journalistic style. We interviewed hundreds of Austinites to ask them about the changing city and Dave [Steakley] created a play that explored how you keep the soul of Austin while growing. There were iconic Austinities from Lady Bird Johnson to Rick Linklater to Leslie Cochran, and also regular residents. Growth and change is inevitable. The challenge is to keep your soul and the best thing you can do is plan. Think about core values. For me, it's the creative culture that's here. If we lost that, that would be losing the soul of Austin. It's a culture that supports and encourages artists, so that we *can* live here. ■