

***TOO MUCH MEMORY** In the Room*

Director/Playwright Meg Gibson and Playwright Keith Reddin discuss Salt Lake Acting Company's upcoming production of TOO MUCH MEMORY with SLAC's Daisy Blake, Andra Harbold, Shannon Musgrave, Una Pett, and Becky Santti.

SLAC. When and how did the idea to write *TOO MUCH MEMORY* first strike you? Why *ANTIGONE*?

MEG GIBSON. Well, it has to be said that it struck me first, because I approached Keith about the idea at one point.

KEITH REDDIN. Wasn't this that you had to have a proposal about going back into a directing program?

Ms. GIBSON. I was going back into a directing program, and they asked me to have a project while I was there.

Mr. REDDIN. Like a thesis project.

Ms. GIBSON. I was only there a year as a Research Fellow, and it was pretty auspicious and wonderful that I got to do this thing. They said I should have a project to propose, and so I proposed a translation of Jean Anouilh's *ANTIGONE*. When I went to go do that translation – I was at Yale – and everybody at the French Department just said, “No. No. It's too hard. It's impossible. There's a reason why this play hasn't been translated more than twice, once in 1948, once in like 1970.” And so... I had just come off of directing *BIG LOVE* here in Salt Lake, and working with Chuck Mee, who also does collaged text –

Mr. REDDIN. – and usually starts from a Greek text. Most of his plays are from a classic Greek play.

Ms. GIBSON. Yes, so this idea began to formulate of taking *ANTIGONE* and sort of leaping off from this tradition of using the play to mirror what was going on in our culture and our civilization – I shouldn't say our civilization – our American culture, right now. Keith and I were at the O'Neill conference, and [to Keith] I sort of told you about it, and then I sort of started dating him –

Mr. REDDIN. – you started off saying you couldn't find somebody to work on this – and I said, “Well, I'll take a look at it,” and then –

Ms. GIBSON. We sort of mutually came up with the idea of collaging it.

Mr. REDDIN. It was also an excuse for us to get together. (Laughter)

SLAC. I was just going to ask that!

Mr. REDDIN. “We’ll have to go back to my apartment to talk about the play...” (Laughter) We wanted to date, but at the same time work on this project.

Ms. GIBSON. I was in school, and I would go down to his apartment, and I would bring him all these different things that influenced me through my whole life to this point – that spoke to me about what I believed and didn’t believe – democracy, politics, whatever – all this stuff. And Keith would bring different stuff to it as well – about Richard and Pat Nixon – he has written a whole play [BUT NOT FOR ME] about Richard Nixon’s debate with Helen Gahagan Douglas.

Mr. REDDIN. I know a lot about different politics.

Ms. GIBSON. So we started coming up with an aggregation of text that we wanted to lift from that were American – not just American – but that had huge influences on us as Americans, mirroring what was going on at the time – in 2003/2004. We started writing it in 2004, which was a year after we went to war, and it was a year after everybody had tried to protest the invasion of Iraq. That’s what got me simmering about the whole *ANTIGONE* thing – watching young people I knew, and a lot of the youth in this country trying to protest – it’s their war, in a sense, and they did not get very far. I was shocked to see how limited a protest they were allowed to make. We were pretty much silenced. The Administration has spent thirty years trying to figure out how to curb it, and they succeeded. They did. And I just thought, how do you live with that? How do you live with – especially when you’re young – how do you live with that sort of squashed voice?

SLAC. The political context has shifted significantly since the premiere of *TOO MUCH MEMORY*. How has the play’s resonance changed for you?

Mr. REDDIN. This is one of the things we were talking about with the actor who’s playing Creon [Morgan Lund]. A lot of the discussion yesterday was about how we had all of these expectations for change and the reality of what can be accomplished and what can be changed while these events are still going on – the disappointments or the frustrations that are caused by that. So we had lines that we added after the [2008] election. Creon actually says, I took on this job, and everybody expected a lot of change. They expected these sweeping changes from what was before, and the chaos of what was before, and now there’s the frustration that things aren’t moving fast enough, or things aren’t changing, but we still live in a world where there are terrorists and threats, and I sometimes have to bypass some laws or put down some laws that to other people seem like we’re losing our democracy. Again, it comes into the current debate of, “Well, when we have a new administration...” We thought, all that will change. We won’t have Guantánamo, and we won’t have torture, and then those security laws will go away. But [Obama’s] continuing some of them. Some might argue that he’s not any different, but my point – and Creon’s point – would be we still live in a world where there are all kinds of threats. Even last week where we had a terrorist threat, and airport security is that much more. It’s always

that debate of what rights do we give up for our security. So Creon's argument has been a constant of – I know you wanted change, but it can't happen sometimes as fast or as much as you want, and I have to keep the peace and I have to keep security.

Ms. GIBSON. I think that – George II – was a very obvious tyrant in a sense, which might have been the strongest impulse for why the play began. But what we've noticed is the play, depending on what community you're doing it in or what the political landscape is at the time (because it's been playing off and on now for over a year and a half), it sort of subtly mirrors whatever's going on in that community, and that was quite... I wouldn't say I was surprised by it... Pleased is the wrong word... I realized that what Sophocles was up to was something that was going to be an ongoing problem. It wasn't so much that you use the play to solve a problem; you use the play to live through a question. How do you continue to live together and work stuff out in a democracy when you're in a crisis? And there's always some kind of a crisis going on. It sounds ridiculous because there have been so many crises in the past decade, but the subtlety of it, be it grand or small, be it the monetary crises, or choosing to send more people to Afghanistan, or Prop 8 – or this morning in the paper – people in England want to protest soldiers who have died in Afghanistan being publicly mourned. OK, so if that's allowed, how do you deal with the crisis of a difference of opinion there – without harming one another?

Mr. REDDIN. And like our play, there's a debate going on because the English government – like Creon – says, "But you know what? If we have those kinds of protests against the Muslim deaths of the Afghan war, aren't we creating a situation where there might be riots or civil disorder? In order to keep security, we should shut down that protest." So, we have the same thing: people wanting to protest and a government saying, "There might be a risk. It might get out of hand."

Ms. GIBSON. "In the interest of the safety of all."

Mr. REDDIN. "In the interest of the larger safety, we have to suppress protest." Or people taking to the streets. It was interesting yesterday also when we had a discussion with the actors after the first read thru. They said, "Wow, it feels really relevant because we feel like we live in this oppressive society in this situation in this city where we have a very strict government and point of view, and it's really hard to be heard, and sometimes we feel like we're shut down." For them, it had a relevance that didn't feel like the play had changed for them. It felt like it was still relevant, more relevant because they were dealing with a social, religious point of view that was saying, "We want to shut down any kind of protest or other points of view."

Ms. GIBSON. The play becomes a cautionary tale – [to Keith] you don't think so?

Mr. REDDIN. No, I don't think it's a cautionary tale. I think it is what those plays [Greek tragedies] are. They just raise questions. They never offer a solution. And I think *bad* political theatre offers solutions.

Ms. GIBSON. – Gives you the answer. Okay.

Mr. REDDIN. Agitprop is agitation and then propaganda because you're offering a solution. And I'll admit, I used to try to write that stuff because I wanted to change the world. I realized fairly quickly – for me, anyway, it's a really immature way of creating theatre, and it's not very interesting. For me, the most interesting political theatre is like Chekhov – Chekhov is the most political theatre I've ever done because what he does – without any judgment, he presents these people, flawed as they are. You have a wide range: you have the revolutionary and you have the reactionary/ and they're sitting at the same table.

Ms. GIBSON. /And you have the bourgeoisie –

Mr. REDDIN. Or the shopkeeper –

Ms. GIBSON. Or the intellectual –

Mr. REDDIN. Or the landowner, or the student – and they're all sitting out in the garden bullshitting and complaining. (Laughter) To me, that's really political, because you're doing all those points of view, and they're all right – and they're all wrong. And they're all inspiring, and they're all annoying. I would aspire to that. The tragedy of [TOO MUCH MEMORY] is the two extreme points of view. They won't budge from their points of view, and that creates tragedy.

SLAC. Just to backtrack for a moment, the first question that we were all completely intrigued by and all wanted to ask –

Ms. GIBSON. Excuse me, I'm eating pastry from the Tulie Bakery. It's so good, I can't stop myself. (Laughter)

Mr. REDDIN. Was that a product placement? (Laughter)

Ms. GIBSON. No. But I do think they are the best croissants in America. (*Mouth full*) I speak with authority!

SLAC. We are all very curious about the process of writing collaboratively. We're curious about how it tweaked your own habits...? How do you write collaboratively? (Laughing) It's a very intriguing subject, I think.

Ms. GIBSON. It's really hard. And I think part of the reason that this play occurred at all is that it was very, very early on in our relationship. And it may be one of the only times in our relationship in which Keith would go, "OK, I'll do that." (Laughter) It was an unusual situation because I was coming to Keith with a lot of ideas. He took those ideas, and took all these different people that I was influenced by, and put them into his own words. What was unique about this – and different from Chuck Mee – was that Keith was able to take all these

ideas and weave them into his own style of writing. He is so good at putting dialogue and the action of the play through the dialogue and through the characters that it became this seamless piece of writing that just got better and better every time – we would do a workshop of it and rework it again. I have to be honest and say that while a lot of it was – were – my ideas initially, the actual hardcore writing of it is Keith's. I think that's a lot of the reason why the play is as good as it is – because he's a master at dialogue and a master at working with character.

Mr. REDDIN. I concur. (Laughter) The collaboration – in a really kind of odd way, without us realizing it – mirrored the play. I think writing the play, [Meg] was Antigone and I was Creon. She had all this passion and all these ideas she wanted to do, and I said, “But you know, a play needs structure, so we need to have this debate happen in a structured way, and we have to build dramatic conflict and all that...”

And she said, “But I have all these ideas! I have all these ideas!”

And I went, “Yes. But there are rules to plays that have to be...”

“Fuck the rules! Let's just do it!”

And I said, “Yes, but a good play needs these things...”

So we were always butting heads –

Ms. GIBSON. We were always butting heads –

Mr. REDDIN. – in a creative way.

Ms. GIBSON. Yes.

Mr. REDDIN. Just like Antigone, she said, “Storm the barricades with the play.”

And I said, “Yes, but I want it to have elements of a well-made play or a tragedy.”

The thing about the Greek tragedies is that they're so well structured, and they're so economical, and they're so spare, and they have such dramatic drive –

Ms. GIBSON. We cut a lot ultimately.

Mr. REDDIN. All those plays – *OEDIPUS*, *ANTIGONE*, *MEDEA* – they all take place in an hour. You don't realize that, but they are so well-constructed. The thing is, we wanted to put so much into it. The battle was always, how much can we take out? The battle was, how much can we cut? How spare can it be? And every time she wanted to have a speech or include this – for every ten quotes or sources that she wanted, I said, “You know what? We're going to pick two. Or one – the right one.” So that was the battle. It was about this passion, ideas and structure. Or laws and passionate ideas. Sometimes I felt like I was Creon, where I'm going, you have a very romantic idea that you want to say all these things, which is great, but we can't. We have to do it

in an hour and five minutes or an hour and ten minutes. And we have to keep it compelling, and we have to drive it.

Ms. GIBSON. It was hard also because when we finally went into production at the Fringe [New York International Fringe Festival] and you have to be in and out in fifteen minutes in that process. It totally changed what I wanted to do with it directorially, and we were also working with a producer at that point as well, so then we had to collaborate even further to figure out how we could take what we wanted to say with the play and yet keep it in the context of the Fringe – and yet keep it immediate. We knew we needed that in spades – that kind of rock n’ roll – there’s a kind of roughed in aspect to the play that actors have to maintain through the whole performance process so it seems really, really fresh and not clean, in a sense. I’ve always wanted to do live action video when we got to the Senate, and we’ve never been able to do it, but I think ultimately, we *shouldn’t* do it.

Mr. REDDIN. Yeah, what I thought the International Fringe forced us to do – the idea that we had to set up in 15 minutes, do our show, then get the hell out in 15 minutes, required us to say – like the play – what is the minimum amount that we need? Not, “What do we need?” but “What is the least amount that we need?” If we can do it with 10 chairs and 2 tables, that’s great. Then when we saw how effective and theatrical that was, we said, this play should be so tight and so well constructed that you could fill up a van – or as we did here – literally send it by UPS from NY, and you can do it. We’re rehearsing it in the Chapel [Theatre]; we started just sitting around, and we said, that’s our set. You’re sitting on the set. There’s not going to be anything more, and it should be like you could do it like that in the Chapel, or we could do it at the high school, or we could do it in the Elks Lodge Hall, or whatever. I think that that forced us, like the play, to really see what is strong about the play./It’s not about sets and videos...

Ms. GIBSON. /What’s essential. It keeps us focused on why we’re doing it at all.

SLAC. Who is your ideal audience for this play? Who should see this play?

Ms. GIBSON. Anyone can see it. I remember we did a reading of it at the Huntington. I was up there acting in a play, and Nicky Martin said, “Yeah, do a reading of it. I’d love to hear it.” So we did it, and Nicky came over to me after and said, “The older I get, the more I agree with Creon.” (Laughter) And I think that was part of it that was phenomenal to me was that the older I get, even though I passionately agree with everything Antigone believes in, I was finally able to be more compassionate about the situation that Creon is in. It’s hard to be a leader. It’s really, really – “It’s hard to be a leader” – I sound like such a – (Laughter)

Mr. REDDIN. It’s hard to a director and to have all these people who want to have their point of view.

Ms. GIBSON. Yeah. So when you ask who is the ideal audience, my ideal audience would be a complete balance of youth and older people – people who have lived through incredible crises, lived through the difficulty

of making choices in a crises and those who are saying it's my turn. What does Jerry Seinfeld say about his children? "They want my job." The next generation wants your job, wants to have a voice; it's in our DNA. We want to have our place in a culture, in our civilization, in our world. And you want that with all of the freedom that you think you instinctually deserve. And so to have those two things responding to the play at the same time, that's what's going on in front of you, that would be an ideal audience. Although I would love to see it with just a high school audience. I would love to see that.

Mr. REDDIN. My ideal audience would be a special night where it's half price for high school girls, high school students and the other half is like –

Ms. GIBSON. Senior citizens?

Mr. REDDIN. – no, like Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Ms. GIBSON. Yeah!

Mr. REDDIN. And you have them in the audience, and half of them would be, "Right on. They don't understand how we have to keep civilization together," and the other is like, "Screw that!"

Ms. GIBSON. Let chaos rule.

Mr. REDDIN. Let chaos rule.

SLAC. That exactly segues into our next question. That different people with identify with Creon or Antigone, based on political opinion or, possibly, age. Did you intend a specific antagonist and protagonist or does it just depend on where you are on the political spectrum?

Mr. REDDIN. You know, every time I hear it, I think they're both right and they're both really wrong.

Ms. GIBSON. And that was what we wanted to do. Because that became my experience as I have lived, from growing up in the sixties, through everything that's happened – in the 80s and the 90s and now what has happened in this decade. You see people make mistakes, and you see people getting things done by making mistakes. Everybody's right and everybody's wrong. I was quoting Adlai Stevenson yesterday; he said, "Democracy is not a natural state." It's difficult, it's not easy. How do you have a dialogue? How do you not destroy each other by having an extreme point of view all the time? We're living in that in this country decade after decade after decade.

Mr. REDDIN. I think it's even more extreme now. I think most people would agree we have such extreme points of view. Every day people watch *only* Fox News or *only* MSNBC, and they're so extreme, and there's no compromise when you watch either one. They demonize the other station and the other point of view.

Completely demonize. Keith Olbermann is never going to say Rush Limbaugh or Glenn Beck has said something that actually makes sense –

Ms. GIBSON. Well, they don't, but – (Laughter) Sorry, I'm joking.

Mr. REDDIN. You can joke –

Ms. GIBSON. I'm joking –

Mr. REDDIN. – at our peril –

Ms. GIBSON. – at our peril.

Mr. REDDIN. To dismiss them as 'just idiots' is very dangerous because they are extremely smart, articulate people. The thing that I found out about Glenn Beck is he's a really smart guy and he knows a shit load of history and philosophy, so to dismiss him as a crazy boob is very dangerous.

Ms. GIBSON. Yes, he very cleverly uses Thomas Paine to get his point across. He co-opts all kinds of liberal points of view to make his right wing point. It's very clever.

Mr. REDDIN. The point I'm making then is because we live in a world of such extremes, I think the play is a great – as you were saying "a cautionary tale" to say those two extremes – without listening to each other, without having a dialogue, just being so set – inevitably there is tragedy. So the play is the tragedy – neither of them will budge. Neither of the points of view – you know, the red states and the blue states – they have gotten so extreme and so hard in their point of view. I think we live in an even more dangerous age than we did three or four years ago. This last election – and probably the one coming up in the fall of 2010 – is so extreme and so heated, that we're going to again have a mirroring of the play. If no one budes and no one even bothers to listen to the other point of view, we're just going to be shouting at each other. It was like those town hall meetings – that's what would happen in the play if people just starting shouting at each other – which they start to do at one point. They're just shouting at each other, and they say, "This is bullshit!" "No, screw you!" Do you know? And we have no where to go; both of them are going to be destroyed.

SLAC. And in that case, what do you hope *TOO MUCH MEMORY* will catalyze, if there is that state of non-movement?

Ms. GIBSON. Recognition of our – God, I'm going to end up sounding earnest, I apologize... Each of us has a responsibility to a kind of discipline to attempt dialogue – and how to go about that without pushing to the painful point where harm is done. And how we accept that a middle way is not necessarily an average or a mediocre or a boring way, but the way that will show us a way to allow each other to have a different opinion but to still live with each other. I suppose I hope the play is that subjective, that experience – that that's what people go away with. What would I do? How would I behave? What would I choose to believe in and how would treat

another in this situation? What are my emotional and spiritual and political responsibilities to those that I love and to a stranger?

I think that these days when we go to the theatre, we mostly just kick back and we're entertained. Very rarely do we go to the theatre in order to have ourselves reflect on or examine what we really might think about something. I'm not saying that's good or bad, I'm all for entertainment. I just saw this great production in New York of this adaptation of *BRIEF ENCOUNTER*, and it was just so much fun. There was nothing political about it at all, but I really, really enjoyed myself. It was just so magically and deliciously entertaining. It was just – oh ah! (Laughter) There's all different kinds of theatre out there, and I hesitate to say one is better than the other – I *don't* think that. But sometimes I think that it's work using theatre as a place for all of us. That's the thing about this play – it's not just something the audience is experiencing; it's something we're asking the actors to reflect upon as well *as* they're doing the play. The actors are very much actors and characters from one moment to the next. Everyone's on stage the whole time, and because of that, it becomes more of a communal examination of how it is we're occurring in our world, than just something that is separated from audience and performer and director.

Mr. REDDIN. You don't want to make it sound like it's a lecture –

Ms. GIBSON. It's not a lecture at all –

Mr. REDDIN. I think it's incredibly entertaining, and part of my challenge was when you're writing a tragedy, how do you get laughs, too? So I've been trying to do that as well, and we are changing references to the community so that it will feel really spontaneous and relevant to right here. In response to your question before – for me, what I hope that we say is that we like to think that we live in a democracy, and democracy – the system we've set up, that we live in, or try to live in, or aspire to live in is about compromise. Compromise has become a four-letter word, and we cannot survive without compromise – in our relationships – in our marriage –

Ms. GIBSON. – in our marriage, yes –

Mr. REDDIN. – we have to compromise *all* the time –

Ms. GIBSON. – but it's not a dirty word.

Mr. REDDIN. – well, sometimes we have arguments where we feel like it's a dirty word because we're giving up something, we're giving up something of ourselves, but you know what? In order to work together, in order to stay together, in order for us to have a system that works, we have to do that. And again, I feel like we've gone so extreme that if you say "I'm compromising," it's really like I've sold out. Or "I compromised" means just bend over. No, seriously –

Ms. GIBSON. (Laughing) I know.

Mr. REDDIN. That's what it's equated to. Everyone in the media says, "There's no way I'm going to compromise my point of view." Do you know? Because it's all about being whittled away, and I lose who I am. The play needs to put out the idea that -

Ms. GIBSON. The other choice besides extremity

Mr. REDDIN. Is dialogue.

Ms. GIBSON. Is dialogue. And compromise.

Mr. REDDIN. And compromise. There's a line - Ismene says, "I know you think compromise is a dirty word or a terrible thing..." In an odd way, the one that really doesn't want to get involved has something that's actually very insightful. Unfortunately, she comes to it too late, and she can't convince other people and she can't do it herself. But she says this idea of, I know you think compromise is a dirty word, but if we go this extreme route, we'll just end up being killed -

Ms. GIBSON. -or raped -

Mr. REDDIN. Or whatever.

SLAC. Could you talk a little bit more about the collage texts that you incorporated? How did you decide what to include?

Ms. GIBSON. We had to get permission, ultimately, for the publication.

Mr. REDDIN. [Meg] had a lot of people that influenced her or that excited her and authors and quotes and poems and texts, and I had mine. So that's how the collaged text happened, and again it was a compromise of what feels appropriate for the play.

Ms. GIBSON. And sometimes we would find things later on and think, oh, that would be really great for the play, but then we'd think, no, I've already made the point, so I really can't go back in another way. *TOO MUCH MEMORY* is really a collection of a lot of things that I've thought about and been influenced by as I've been working as an actor, and then as a director, over the last 30 years. For example, when I was an actress, and I was working on *AUNT DAN AND LEMON* - I was playing Aunt Dan - I was too young, but I was playing Aunt Dan down at Center Stage - and two of the things I read were *THE BANALITY OF EVIL*, by Hannah Arendt, and I also read Kenneth Tynan's biography, and both of them were huge influences for me because these were texts that were way into this world that I had to portray as an actress, and I think that sometimes are just happenstance, some things just fall into your lap. I've been reading and watching Peter Brook's work my whole life as an actress, and there are things that he says in *THE EMPTY SPACE* that I readily use in this play. There are things that he said that we actually quote briefly in the play. I was a child when the Democratic Convention

happened in 1968, but those guys were my heroes – and you know, then I started reading their texts, and I was like, “Uhhhh... this was really hairy stuff that they did, and do I agree? And where do I disagree with it? But they were a huge part in how I formulated my own points of view about things and how I arrived at this place where realizing the extremity of a choice was only going to damage myself and those around me. I have a father who is really Republican, but I love him and I want to have a relationship with him, so I have figured out how to -- allow him to have his political point of view at the same time I have mine, without ruining my relationship with him – without, you know, sneering at him or being scornful or anything else . That’s what he arrived at. He fought in WWII, and he has his opinion about things. So the collage is a result of – Keith, as I said before, was very influenced by Nixon. He was saying yesterday that he’s our King Lear –

Mr. REDDIN. He is – he’s our King Lear. He’s a tragic figure who ripped apart the country because – I don’t want to get into Richard Nixon... Part of this collage thing was – much as I admire Meg’s passion – the cynic in me finds the Chicago Seven and a lot of the people that she’s bringing in – and I don’t mean this as a criticism, this is just my point of view –

Ms. GIBSON. That’s ok.

Mr. REDDIN. – I find it very naïve –

Ms. GIBSON. They were naïve.

Mr. REDDIN. She goes, “Look at them,” and “Oh, my God, they did that...” and I went, “Yeah, that’s great, but it was really naïve if you thought you were going to change the country.”

Ms. GIBSON. But they did change the country for a while. They did.

Mr. REDDIN. Yes and no.

Ms. GIBSON. Yes and no. (Both laughing)

Mr. REDDIN. What I’m saying, again, is it was a nice balance of the passion and the pragmatist – from the political point of view and as artists. I think it was a really good collaboration for this particular piece because we, in a lot of ways, mirrored what we were setting out to try to express. The play itself and the point of view itself are always butting up against each other.

Ms. GIBSON. Yep.

SLAC to Mr. REDDIN. In [Craig Gholson’s *Bomb* 1991 interview](#), you said, “I think of myself as a very American playwright. And when you look at the words that set the American way of life, they are ‘Life, Liberty, and the

Pursuit of Happiness. It's not happiness, it's the pursuit of happiness. We have the freedom to pursue happiness but that doesn't mean that we're guaranteed to get it. Happiness is very fleeting; that's a very American theme. We very rarely, if ever, find it. But I enjoy that we have the freedom to pursue it and I think that's what all the plays are about."

Mr. REDDIN. I still believe in that. I still believe we have the freedom to pursue it, but we are not guaranteed it. It is always work. Just like the characters say in the play, "I want justice". Justice is a great idea. It's a great abstract concept. We don't get justice in this country. We have laws, and sometimes the laws give us justice and often they don't; so the reality – the pragmatist – or maybe you would say the cynic in me, says – we don't have life, liberty and happiness; we have the opportunity to go for and *perhaps* find it. We have the opportunity to express ourselves politically, but that doesn't mean we're going to get heard or that we're going to change anything. But we do have the opportunity and the freedom to express that, which I think is – without me being sentimental or naïve –

Ms. GIBSON. You can go ahead and be sentimental for a moment – (Laughter)

Mr. REDDIN. That is a great freedom, and that is a great opportunity, and that's what's great about America, but the thing is I've read a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot about the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Founding Fathers... and each time I read more and more about them -- the incredible admiration I have for them – because they knew that human beings were screwed up and flawed and selfish and egotistical and narcissistic and –

Ms. GIBSON. – and they knew what power would do to them.

Mr. REDDIN. – they knew what power would do, so they created a system that –

Ms. GIBSON. – protected themselves from themselves sometimes –

Mr. REDDIN. – yeah, but basically they created a system that's all about compromise. All our country is built on the fact that we have two hundred, three hundred million points of view, and the way you do something is: you're going to have to find a consensus. And you have to work together, and you have to make a lot of compromises. Unfortunately sometimes – because we have these extreme points of view and there is no compromise – nothing can happen. Nothing can move forward. And that's the danger of the system – it takes compromise to such an extreme degree that nothing can ever be done. So compromise sometimes is like – you've got to give up some stuff. I think that everybody can pursue their point of view. We should have Fox News. I don't want to shut down Fox News, as much as I am angry at it.

Ms. GIBSON. One of the things that I admire about SLAC was that it really set out an agenda and had this core value of: we have the freedom to make our own choices as to what plays we're going to do year by year. It's a really ambitious and a personal reflection of not only the people who work here, but also what's going on in this community. I am so appreciative of the fact that I've been a part of that for thirty years off and on. You guys were aware enough of what was going on when we were doing [*TOO MUCH MEMORY*] earlier in New York, and you wanted to bring it here because you readily saw that it had some sort of mirror for your own community. I just wish Tony Larimer was still here to see it. I loved working with him so much. When he was younger, Creon is a part that he would have absolutely played. He had the intelligence and the stature and the charisma and the passion to woo us so brilliantly in a part like that –

Mr. REDDIN. We have a great cast.

Ms. GIBSON. We do have a great cast, but this season is dedicated to Tony – who, unfortunately, you didn't know, but I worked with him twice. I just think that that's a kind of perfection that – even though he's gone – that this is what we're doing in the year that's dedicated to him. I wanted to say that.

SLAC to Ms. GIBSON. Do you see parallels between *TOO MUCH MEMORY* and the last play you directed here, Chuck Mee's *BIG LOVE*?

Ms. GIBSON. Oh sure. Nothing is ever in and of itself. Chuck Mee was a huge influence on why I chose to work on this play in this way. I loved working on *BIG LOVE*. It was a huge challenge for me as a director, and it was sort of the tipping point – it was where I went, “If I can pull off *BIG LOVE*, then I think I might actually be alright as a director.” I don't want to have a massive ego about it. You know, the older you get, the more you recognize what you absolutely don't know. (Laughter) But I loved the way Chuck used text. We were working on *BIG LOVE*, which was his take on *THE SUPPLICANT WOMEN*, and he used a lot of text which had to do with gender wars in a sense – like, how is it that we deal with gender through the ages and currently? I sort of leapt off from that argument that he was making and the way he used text. Having this testimony by Tom Hayden at the back of my head all these years and wanting to get at how the revolution from the 1960s got us out of a particular war and moved us forward. And how we were sort of up against the necessity for a revolution under the Bush Administration, and we're really struggling to have it because the laws had been so firmly put in place that it was really hard to push against it without just going to jail and being silenced. So everything that Chuck Mee was up to – the way he was structuring his plays – was something that I leapt from and used contextually for this play, this adaptation.

SLAC. Any further reading/listening/viewing recommendations? Are there particular works by the writers you incorporated that you would urge reading?

Mr. REDDIN. Other than the Constitution? (Laughter)

SLAC. (Laughing) That's a good start.

Ms. GIBSON. You can come see this play and not know anything about what Sophocles wrote –

Mr. REDDIN. Or the story of *ANTIGONE*, because we have a character, the Chorus, at the beginning explain who all the characters are and what the story is; he's assuming that you don't know anything about it when you come in.

Ms. GIBSON. So you don't need to read a darn thing before you get here – you might want to read some stuff afterwards, but I really think it's a subjective experience. Different texts fall in your lap – what does my friend call it...? He calls it 'living instinctually'. All of a sudden something will just fall in your lap. The stuff that fell in my lap was Susan Sontag stuff. She went to Sarajevo and put all these plays on when they were under siege there. She would go into a bombed out theatre and put on *WAITING FOR GODOT*. There's a speech she gave when she accepted an award in Germany [[2003 Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade](#)] – I don't have it with me, I wish I'd brought it with me – she just talked so eloquently about the need to speak up. It sort of fell into my lap, and it probably had a lot to do with me having the courage to stick my neck out and write this thing. Look, we don't live in a time where we're really encouraged to have a political point of view and put it into a piece of theatre. We're not encouraged to do a play that, "Hey, come to a play and have to really deal with the politics that are going on around you, then get in your car or get on the subway, whatever..." That's not really something that is encouraged. We stuck our neck out and produced it ourselves.

Mr. REDDIN. It seems like we're in a community – and I don't live here, and I haven't been here that long – but I'm getting a sense from hearing the people in the cast and the people working here that you're living in a community that so much is about "You can't say this, and you can't do that," that to have a theatre and have an opportunity to say, "But we have to say this, but at the same time, we have to respect your point of view. So, how about you don't silence us, and we don't silence you?" But when you have one authority saying, "You cannot say these things," and "you cannot live this way," then indeed, you have tyrants, then it is a tyranny.

Ms. GIBSON. Back to the question of things you want to read – oh my God, I've got to say this. Read different newspapers.

Mr. REDDIN. Read different points of view.

Ms. GIBSON. Read *USA Today* and then go read *The New York Times*, and see the difference in the way the story is told. Look at how media is shaping you. Go to the library and pick up a book – and look at photojournalism and see what people are shooting out there – do your best to get away from – I mean, the Internet is incredible.

God bless it, it's amazing and it's free, but... Western Civilization is based on the written word./ Can I say that? Does it sound really pompous?

Mr. REDDIN. /Well, not any more.

Ms. GIBSON. Not any more, but God knows we need to keep that in our hand as well. I would say whoever comes to the play, see what pops up in front of you as a result of coming, of listening to it – and that will tell you where you are.

Mr. REDDIN. Watch the network news one night and then watch the BBC World News the same night, and you'll see two completely different points of view.

Ms. GIBSON. What story gets told, what story doesn't.

Mr. REDDIN. Or if it's the same story, *how* it gets told. The play to me is like watching *ABC News* and *BBC News*.

Ms. GIBSON. Or *Democracy Now* thrown in there – I mean, let's hear it for Amy Goodman...

Mr. REDDIN. Yeah, but I'm saying, you don't necessarily need to read those things, but I would say look at a lot of different points of view. Or if you're going to go on the Internet, don't just go to the one thing that reflects your point of view. We have a tendency to do that. We watch the news that reflects our point of view and that tells us what we want to hear.

Ms. GIBSON. I also think – and maybe it's just a subjective experience in my own life, but there's poetry in the play. One of the people we quote is [Pablo Neruda](#). Keith gave me a collection of [W.S. Merwin's](#) poetry. You know, how old is he now? He's been writing poetry all of his life, and it's an amazing collection of poetry, and he just has this way – like this subtle knife of just going right through to what you're experiencing. Just... find poetry that you respond to – because it's hard to write that stuff, and yet it really – when it's a great poem at work it contextually grabs you on many, many levels at the same time. I urge all of us... Keith reads a poem a day, and I think that's good practice. That's good practice.

SLAC. What's next for each of you?

Mr. REDDIN. I'm going to do a project [[The ProjectProject](#)] at NYU graduate students, and then I'm going to do a new Sarah Ruhl play in New York, called *PASSION PLAY*, which is a huge, very ambitious – her sort of *ANGELS IN AMERICA* – three acts, three hours, and hopefully people won't leave at the second intermission. (Laughter)

Ms. GIBSON. One you've written -- you've collaborated on, and one you're acting in .

Mr. REDDIN. Yes. [Sarah Ruhl] did a recent adaptation/translation of *THE THREE SISTERS* that I acted in. So.

SLAC. (Laughing) And Meg, we get you for a little while.

Ms. GIBSON. Yes, oh my gosh – I have this amazing assignment – the World Premiere of Kathleen Cahill's *CHARM*, which is about Margaret Fuller and her buddies, the Transcendentalists: Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson... Back to back, it's a really nice chunk of work that I'm really happy to be here and doing – and again, Salt Lake Acting Company for putting their necks out there and doing it. After that, I actually don't know. Keith said to me the other day, "So, what are you doing after *CHARM*?" I was like, Oh God, you're right. I have to find another job. So I don't know what I'm doing after that. I did do this really amazing play – I acted in a play last summer called *SLIPPING* [by Daniel Talbott], and there was a rumor that we might get to go do it in San Francisco, so maybe I will be acting in that. That's the trick for me right now as I spin all the plates of being a theatre artist in this country. I love acting and I love directing, and I'm starting to have more of a writing career as well – and just how I tap dance my way through all three of those mediums is what I'm trying to accomplish. Doug Hughes is a wonderful director in New York, and when I got done with my Research Fellow job, he said, "Well, now what are you going to do?" And I said, "I'm going to act and direct." And he said, "Well, that will take a knack." (Laughter) And it's really, really hard to do all of it, but I'm slowly, slowly finding my way of doing that. That's my next project – to keep doing all of it.

SLAC. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Or anything – nice? (Laughter)

Mr. REDDIN. I think we're just really excited to be here and hearing it again. The thing is, every time we've worked on it, it's been with people that we know and have worked with.

Ms. GIBSON. And it's still that way for me.

Mr. REDDIN. You know some of the people here, but for me, I've only heard it with people – because we started off with this project very small – literally asking friends of ours, or people that we knew, to work for free. Because when we did it at the Fringe, it was for free.

Ms. GIBSON. No, we paid them.

Mr. REDDIN. Not in the Fringe.

Ms. GIBSON. No, we – no ...

Mr. REDDIN. Ok, we paid them what –

Ms. GIBSON. We paid them a fee. It was embarrassing, but we did. We did.

Mr. REDDIN. Ok. They worked for free. (Laughter) I mean, the fee we paid them was like they worked for free. So the point I wanted to make is that I've only heard it with people that I know and people that I've worked with, and people who were working with us as we created it. So, it was really – I was very anxious about how it was going to be now – a full production in a whole new environment, a theatre with people I don't know, and I've never been here –

Ms. GIBSON. And he had to trust me because I came and cast it –

Mr. REDDIN. – I had no input in the casting. And then yesterday, I said, “What did you think you were doing?” No... (Laughter)

Ms. GIBSON. You were thrilled.

Mr. REDDIN. It was really thrilling. It was very exciting because it sounded pretty good. (Laughing)

Ms. GIBSON. I think the only other thing I wanted to say – I talked about sitting up on the floor of the Marriott Library and finding this testimony of Tom Hayden when I was all of eighteen or nineteen years old, and here I am, thirty years later – yikes – bringing that experience, that sort of seminal moment when I realized how fragile and difficult democracy is into a play that I created to mirror everything that I've been thinking about for the last thirty years. And here I am in Utah working with a company I've been a part of for thirty years... And they know me and trust me enough that they bring me back as someone they've known as an actor and director over the years. They're supporting my work in a way that I don't have with any other company in America. I mean, yes, I live in New York – and yes, I have friends there – and yes, you could say New York is a big regional theatre company because you work with a bunch of different companies when you live there – but the sense of commitment and community that expands over a thirty year period like this is really, really rare. And I'm very proud to have that – to have earned it – and to be able to reciprocate it. Every opportunity I've had with SLAC here I've been able to take back out to the rest of my life, and to bring what I have in the rest of my life back to SLAC, and that's a rare and wonderful thing. It really is.

SLAC. Yes.

Mr. REDDIN. And hopefully it gives me the opportunity to learn how to ski. (Laughter)

SLAC. Most importantly.

Anything to add?

Mr. REDDIN. (Laughing) Please – you will edit this – massively – (Laughter)

SLAC. Not at all.

Ms. GIBSON. We talked our asses off!

Mr. REDDIN. – otherwise it will be like sixty-five pages.

Ms. GIBSON. (Laughing) I think that, clearly, the way Keith and I talk – I'll say one thing and he'll sort of tear it down a little bit, and then he'll say one thing and I'll sort of shift it – that clearly shows you how we collaborate!

SLAC. (Laughing) It's brilliant!

Ms. GIBSON. And we've gotten better at it!

Mr. REDDIN. Basically, you say something, and I say, "What you meant to say was..." (Laughter)

SLAC. Thank you!

Ms. GIBSON (re the tape recorder) Turn that off!

Fin.

Addendum: The title of the play

Ms. GIBSON. Keith found [too much memory] in an Anne Carson poem and felt it perfectly described the super saturated atmosphere we are living in and what the play is therefore forced to hold in its crucible. When we live with holding on to extremes and don't budge there is inevitably a kind of explosion, a breaking off from the situation. That usually involves a tragedy occurring. That's my experience. So, it's a two fold title: how I felt about my own breaking point, living in America with all we continue to do, and using the play as a metaphor to examine how our actions impact our lives and the lives of others.