

TARRAGON THEATRE

SIBS

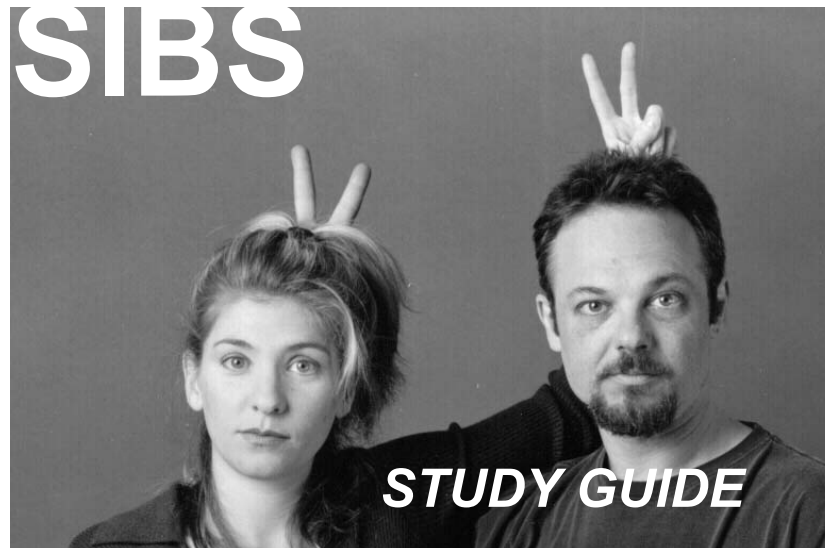


Written & performed by
Diane Flacks & Richard Greenblatt

Music composed & performed by
Rick Sacks

directed by Alisa Palmer
set and costumes designed by Glenn Davidson
lighting designed by Andrea Lundy
movement coach: Savoy Howe
stage managed by Arwen MacDonell

March 14 to April 16, 2000



CHARACTERS:

When you attend this production of SIBS, you will see 3 people onstage. Two of them, Richard Greenblatt and Diane Flacks, are actors who play HE and SHE: a brother and sister. The third person is Rick Sacks who has written a musical score for the show and performs it live. In essence, Mr. Sacks, and his music, are the third character.

SETTING:

Most of the action of the story takes place in the family home of HE and SHE. This includes the living room, hallways, and the bedrooms of HE and SHE. Sometimes, other particular locations are represented on the set; these include a synagogue or SHE's house. There are also non-specific locales, primarily expressed through lighting, such as the site at which SHE and HE plead to an unseen judge about each other. Because many of the scenes are memories there is fluidity to the space as well: imaginary walls are respected sometimes, and not others.

The set provides a constant backdrop on which the story can unfold, and information about what is different is shared with the audience by HE and SHE textually. We witness this as SHE's room is taken over by HE when SHE leaves for college, and then when it becomes a panelled den for their father after HE also moves out.

SYNOPSIS:

When we first meet HE and SHE it is at the home of their late parents, following shiva (a seven-day Jewish mourning period), as they begin to discuss the responsibilities of settling the estate. They are adults. This strained environment is our present-day; from here we travel back in time, and the audience follows the relationship of HE and SHE as they navigate through childhood, adolescence, high school, college and the working world. HE and SHE develop a complex relationship (as might be expected of siblings) and eventually they drift apart. The audience is able to trace how this has happened, through the benchmark yearly Passover gatherings, and to consider whether lost friendship can be mended.



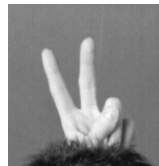
NARRATION:

SIBS is an impressionistic exploration, fast and often furious, of the perplexing relationship between brothers and sisters. The director and co-creators have chosen to make music and movement strong elements in the production. One way this benefits the production is to reduce realism and allow the pair to exist often in a more abstract world. It is for this reason that Richard and Diane do not have character names.

SIBS is a very physical piece, requiring the performers to act many different ages and convey a medley of emotions in rapid-fire succession. Savoy Howe, a movement coach, was brought in to keep the actors conditioned and safe during execution of the moves and to set a structure within which a series of actions could be built. These include the many dance sequences, the play-fights, or the age-specific acting. In many ways, the production is text applied to choreography with music keeping time.

As well as providing support for HE and SHE, Rick Sacks utilizes his score at times, to narrate, comment upon and/or clarify the actions on stage. As well as music, sound effects are also his domain; this frees the actors from needing to use realistic props or set pieces (i.e. the slamming of imaginary doors during the “music wars”).

The narration is not a linear one progressing from childhood to present day; rather, it skips back and forth through time. Every memory shows us a little more clearly who HE and SHE are and informs the present-day discomfort and sense of history.



ABOUT the CO-CREATORS and the CREATION:

Diane Flacks and Richard Greenblatt last appeared together at Tarragon as part of the collectively-created seder play *The Theory of Relatives*. Richard Greenblatt also directed Diane Flacks' solo play *By a Thread* (in which she starred) and her play *Gravity Calling* at Tarragon.

As well as writing and performing in theatre, Diane also produces, writes and performs for film and television; she is also at the Tarragon this season as part of a playwriting unit called Playwrights II.

Richard has been very busy with *2 Pianos, 4 Hands* which he co-created with Ted Dykstra; he performed during several runs in Toronto (at both Tarragon and the Royal Alex), in Washington and New York, and most recently in London, England; he also directed the current two women-pianists' North American tour.

During *Theory of Relatives* (on which Diane & Richard met) they played a brother and sister and felt a whole other show possible in the relationship. The two began creating scenarios and performed a 15 minute piece at the Tarragon Spring Arts Fair in 1998. From there, at their writing desks, and through physically focussed workshops the material was expanded to this 80 minute production.



STAGING QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES:

- a) What do you feel Glenn Davidson (set designer) is trying to convey through his design? What would you do differently or keep the same?
- b) Name 3 different 'locations' that are created on the set. Since, in some cases, the locations are superimposed on the house set what differentiates one from another? How do the actors convey where they are and how do they use the existing structure, i.e. levels or depth, to add scope to the imaginary location?
- c) Why do the actors perform the entire show in one set of wardrobe? What practical and style parameters needed to be considered when the wardrobe for each was chosen? (Consider what clothing tells us about a person, and, the extent of physical activity performed in this show).
- d) How is the passage of time conveyed in this play?
- e) How do sounds and music help create different atmospheres? A pallet of sounds, like an artist's pallet, is a collection of colours used to evoke different moods or settings. Can you identify the different musical sounds that depict the various ages that HE and SHE shared?
When applied to music for theatre, what might the term 'transparent' mean?
Do you feel the music/musician in *SIBS* is like another character in the play? Why or why not? Did you enjoy having the score performed live?
Similar to clothing, music attributed to a certain character can offer non-textual clues to their personality – what do the songs in the "music war" portion of *SIBS* tell us about HE and SHE?
- f) What role does movement play in *SIBS*? Is it a replacement for words and/or ideas? Is the movement in this presentation successful at conveying images or ideas? What can movement convey that words cannot?

If you were asked to choreograph a movement sequence to express a state of mind or an emotion how might you begin? (Think of it like composing music to enhance text: look at texture of movement, velocity, spatial design, etc.)

SIBS uses repetitions of certain actions to delineate the bond between HE and SHE. Because of this stylization what do variations on the actions reveal about changes in the characters' relationship over the years? (Consider each of the greeting dances.)

Choose a relationship (like parent/ child, best friends) and, working with a partner, develop three actions to convey the relationship to an audience. Try to create variations on the actions that would imply changes in attitude or the passage of time.



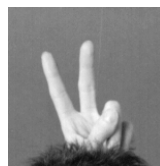
THEMATIC QUESTIONS and EXERCISES:

- a) At the beginning of the show, one character says he is “so exhausted”. On one level, he is tired from grief and mourning, but in what other ways do the characters exhaust each other emotionally and physically?
- b) *National Post* theatre reviewer, Robert Cushman, said this play is about “long haul” relationships. What are the joys and perils of knowing and being known by someone for a long time?
- c) Do you have siblings? If so, do you resonate with any aspects of the play? If not, how and why do your sibling relationships differ? Do single children have other relationships that are similar, perhaps in terms of their intensity and longevity?
- d) Discuss some common differences (real or perceived) between only children, children with one or two siblings, and children from a large family.
Discuss some common differences (again, real or perceived) between oldest, youngest and middle children.
How would this play be different if the characters were a different combination i.e. 2 brothers or sisters, twins, etc.?
- e) This play relies largely on the comedy of recognition. However, the common family unit has changed greatly in the past 50 years to encompass step and half siblings, single parents, same-sex couples etc. Given these shifts, are there still universal family dynamics such as the play seeks to elucidate?

Regarding how a brother or sister often thinks of their siblings still as children (even when grown) Diane Flacks (SHE) is quoted as saying: “Certainly as an older sibling, I always see that...I always go ‘I remember picking you up, giving you an airplane ride, and here we are sitting and talking about your husband.’

- f) This is a common occurrence amongst family members – how does a child grow and explore when those closest endlessly view them as young? How is this expressed through the character of HE?

- g) Memory can be a funny thing sometimes...why do you think a group of people can experience the same event and yet remember it in completely different ways?
- h) Many families have traditions – why are these important?
Religion is also comprised largely on tradition – how do the characters in *SIBS* embrace and resist the traditions of their religious upbringing? Does religion play a role in your upbringing – if so, what does this institution provide for you? If you do not subscribe to a standard religion what other ways do you experience spirituality in your life?
- i) How do other’s opinions and judgements define us? Why is that particularly powerful when it is our family? Why does this cause rebellion? Discuss the need for balance between self-exploration and listening to the advice of others. What are some healthy and unhealthy methods of self-exploration?
- j) Near the beginning of the show both actors face the audience and give information about the other – does this affect the way you perceive each character? What about characters that we do not meet - such as mom or dad or Uncle Joey – what do we learn about them through the eyes of HE and SHE. How do you imagine them? Is this a fair assessment?
- k) How do the successive Passover sessions demonstrate, or reveal changes in, the relationship of HE and SHE and/or how each of them views the world?
- l) How is the relationship of HE and SHE during the present-day conversation, following shiva, similar to what it was when they were kids? How is it different?
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INSIDE THE TARRAGON THEATRE **for teachers and students**

Welcome to the Tarragon Theatre! We are thrilled to welcome all of you to *SIBS*. In addition to viewing and studying the production itself, it is also important to be aware of the mandate and history of the Tarragon Theatre. This in turn will broaden your understanding of the shows that are produced here.

MANDATE

The Tarragon mandate is “To develop Canadian playwrights and produce their scripts; to shape a community of Canadian artists and actors to interpret these plays; and to build an audience to receive and accept this work”. The theatre is continually reaching out to new artists---playwrights, actors, directors, and designers. By adhering to our mandate, we are able to celebrate the talents and stories of many, many Canadian artists thus making Tarragon an important aspect of Canadian culture.

OUR SPACES AND FACILITIES

If you take a tour around the theatre, you will soon notice that The Tarragon Theatre is a different type of theatre than The Elgin Winter Garden or the Pantages Theatre. Instead of sitting in a huge auditorium, you will be sitting in smaller more intimate “black box” theatre spaces. The Mainspace is Tarragon’s original 205-seat auditorium; it is the site of 5 of Tarragon’s yearly productions. In 1983, we added the Extra Space; this is a 100-seat flexible auditorium designed for more intimate experimental shows. It is the site of 3 Tarragon Theatre productions as well as numerous other touring and small theater-company shows. As well, both theatres have been venues for the Toronto Fringe Festival and Summerworks.

If you take a walk back-stage, you will see our scenery, properties and wardrobe shops, administrative and production offices. Upstairs we also house the Tarragon Studio; this end of the building contains a lobby and three spaces which play host to both our own rehearsing productions and rental companies, as well as provide room for receptions, workshops, and other developmental activities.

Our ground level, including both theatres and the lobby, provides full access and facilities for the physically challenged. In June of this year, Tarragon will briefly close its doors to renovate so that we can add an elevator making the entire building accessible. The addition of an elevator has prompted other renovations as well: when our doors reopen, Tarragon Theatre will proudly show off it’s new audience washrooms, box office, concession area, and soundproofing for the Extra Space!

HISTORY

Housed in a former cribbage board factory, the Tarragon theatre was founded in 1970 by Bill Glassco, a former professor at the University of Toronto. The first production was a play called CREEPS by David Freeman. This first play was representative of Tarragon's strong mandate to produce innovative, interesting new work by Canadian playwrights. This became a tradition, which has carried on up until the present. During Bill Glassco's twelve seasons as artistic director, Tarragon earned critical and popular acclaim and became a pioneer in the production of new Canadian plays and artists.

In 1982, Urjo Kareda, a former drama critic of the Toronto Star and literary manager of The Stratford Festival became the new Artistic Director. Under Kareda, the Tarragon continues to focus on exciting new Canadian work, and has productions of innovative international work as well. A continuing feature – begun by Bill Glassco - has been the presentation, on occasion, of modern perspectives on classic plays (by Chekhov, Ibsen, Strindberg, Goethe).

TARRAGON'S PLAYWRIGHTS

The Tarragon continues to champion works of protean Canadian playwrights such as Joan MacLeod, Michel Tremblay, Morris Panych, Don Hannah, John Murrell or Judith Thompson. We are also fostering a new wave of dynamic Canadian playwrights such as Jason Sherman, Janet Munsil, Diane Flacks, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Guillermo Verdecchia, Michael Healey, Ken Garnhum, M.J. Kang, Jonathan Wilson and Morwyn Brebner.

Many of these playwrights were originally members of one of the Tarragon/Chalmers Playwrights units. Established in 1982, the unit is renewed annually. The unit has six to seven writers who work on scripts or scripts in progress both collectively and individually with Urjo Kareda and Andy McKim. The process is very intensive. The writers who have been in this unit include: Jason Sherman, Joan MacLeod, John Mighton, Beth Herst, Brad Fraser, Don Hannah, Michael Healey and Atom Egoyan. The unit "shows its stuff" in a week of readings from their new plays. This free public offering is held in December and may be of interest to senior level, OAC students possibly working on plays of their own. Please call Kristen Van Alphen at (416) 536-5018 x.229 for more information or if you would like to join us at this event.

Playwrights-in-Residence

Tarragon has created four office spaces for playwrights-in-residence – a "room of their own" where writers can both work on their own and also connect with their peers and the theatre staff. This year's playwrights-in-residence are Morwyn Brebner, Daniel Brooks, Ken Garnhum, Jason Sherman, and Michael Healey.

TOURING AND VISITING ARTIST

Tarragon has mounted productions at the Edinburgh Festival, in London and Birmingham, the Mayfest in Glasgow, Edmonton, Expo '86 in Vancouver, the Young Canada Games in Charlottetown, the duMaurier World Stage Festival, and at Montreal's Festival Des Ameriques. Tarragon plays have been produced by many theatres across the country and outside of Canada: in the U.S, Great Britain, Australia, Europe, and South America.

AWARDS AND AUDIENCES

Tarragon has a continued tradition of high artistic achievement. In 1994, we received more Dora award nominations than any other theatre in Toronto. Our Governor General Award playwright recipients include Judith Thompson, John Krizanc, Ann Marie MacDonald, Joan MacLeod, Guillermo Verdecchio, Morris Panych, Jason Sherman and Michael Healey. Our Chalmers Award winners include David French, John Murrell, Tom Walmsley, Don Hannah, Ken Garnhum, Judith Thompson, Jason Sherman, and Michel Tremblay (Tarragon has been a pioneer producer of Quebec Playwrights in translation). Mallory Gilbert, Tarragon's General Manager, is a recipient of the Brenda Donohue Award and the M. Joan Chalmers Award for Arts Administration for her distinguished contribution to the theatre community. Urjo Kareda, who was awarded the Order of Canada in 1995, is the 1999 recipient of the Toronto Arts Awards for creative excellence in the performing arts.

TARRAGON SPRING ARTS FAIR

Andy McKim inaugurated this free festival in 1985. An exciting arts event, which takes place this season over the weekend of May 27 & 28, the Spring Arts Fair features theatre, performance art, dance, readings, children's programming and more. Performances take place all over the theatre: in the Extra space, the studio, the prop-shop, the wardrobe, offices and places you would never expect. Students are encouraged to attend this free, fun, carnival type event. We have also begun to recruit a large number of students as volunteers - please call the theatre if you are interested.

TARRAGON PROGRAMS FOR EDUCATORS

This year we have begun to offer a variety of programs to educators. 'Teacher nights' is an event which occurs shortly after a show's opening and is designed to allow teachers from different regions to meet and interact in a social setting. It is also an opportunity to view our productions early to determine the possibility of incorporating them into class

curriculums. A free ticket is included in the evening, as well as a pre-show 'drink and mingle', complemented by a brief chat with a member of the production.

We are also offering three workshops this season, anticipated to be of interest for personal, professional or curriculum development. The workshops again offer an opportunity for educators to meet one another outside the regular sphere, to receive creative stimulation, and to continue a relationship with professional theatre. This season's sessions are *An Approach to Playwriting*, *Design: The Creative Shoestring*, and *The Reviews*.

TARRAGON PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

All the students who come to the Tarragon Theatre are a very important part of our audiences. Many of our plays deal with subjects that are of great interest to young people. Students have enjoyed seeing productions that, though not written specifically for them, deal with issues pertinent to their own lives. Thought, humour, and innovation replace spectacle and students begin to realize that many different kinds of theatre are possible.

At our student matinees, we attempt to give our students an exciting and intensive theatre-going experience. We offer pre-show tours, so students can gain a full picture of the theatre that they will be attending and pre-show discussions and workshops concerning the play that they will be attending. Of course we continue to offer post-performance discussions so that students can comment and ask their questions "in the moment" with various members of the cast. We are in the process of expanding our educational programs this year and input from teachers and students regarding new avenues to explore would be greatly appreciated.

Tarragon's work with young people extends beyond their attendance at performances. We offer a variety of opportunities for students to engage in theatrical pursuits. Our focus in this area is to develop activities wherein students looking to make a serious commitment and accept a creative challenge can work with theatre professionals in a professional environment.

Spring Training Project

Every spring, we offer the Tarragon Theatre Spring Training Project where we select a group of talented young people to participate in an intensive series of workshops led by professionals in the field. These workshops are text based and result in a performance at the annual Spring Arts Fair.

Young Playwriting programs

Being a playwright's theatre, we have programs designed for young writers as well as young actors. Our first program in this regard is the annual *Under 20 for Under Twenties* playwriting competition. We accept submissions from Ontario resident writers

who are under the age of twenty and all plays must be under twenty minutes in length. The winner receives \$250.00 and a professional workshop reading of their play at the Spring Arts Fair. We held this contest for the first time two years ago and it has become a great success. Some teachers have made the writing of the plays a class project. Again, viewing the free play-readings during December could be a useful tool in this process.

Our second program is the *Young Playwright's Unit*. Students interested submit a sample of their writing with a letter of intent, and meet with the Program Director. From this, a core group is chosen which meets throughout the March Break and weekly until June. The participants attend workshops in design, directing and improvisation to gain a sense of play development and through intensive sessions which include creative exercises and text study they begin to develop their own scripts. This year our program director is planning to take a summer break, to allow unit members to progress with their own writing projects, and meet again in the fall to review the script development of each participant.

Co-op Placements

Tarragon also takes on co-op students from the secondary and post secondary levels. Practice studies are made available in both administrative and production areas. There are no co-op placements available in terms of performance but through their co-op placements students are able to observe and experience the inner workings of a theatre environment.

Career Days

Tarragon also offers career days with tours and discussions for students considering a career in theatre or for those who wish to research it for a project. These days must be arranged a few weeks in advance. Please call Kristen Van Alphen, if you are interested.

Thanks to the generous support of Petro Canada, our youth theatre training encompasses workshop classes for high school students and educators, high-school matinees, training and performance projects for the Spring Arts Fair and young playwright development.

We hope that you have found this study guide to be interesting and informative. Thank you for attending *SIBS*. We look forward to having you back for one of our many of our productions here at Tarragon.