

**SHEPHERD EXPRESS**  
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**DIALOGUE WITH LAURA GORDON**



Place: Bella Caffè, Third Ward, Milwaukee

Time: Early spring, 2012

(Marie Kohler and Laura Gordon, friends and colleagues, are having soup after rehearsal and "talking theater.")

**MK: We've known each other through how many chapters of Milwaukee theater?**

LG: (smiling) I joined the Rep under Joe Hanreddy in 1993. My first production was *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

**MK: I remember it well—a beautiful production. I co-founded Renaissance Theaterworks in 1993, so we've been plugging away side by side for nearly 20 years. I've watched your wonderful performances—and now your directing work. That career has really taken off!**

LG: (with irony) Thank heavens. Roles are scarce for women over 50.

**MK: (laughing) True. What have you directed recently?**

LG: *The Winter's Tale* at Utah Shakespeare Festival, *In the Next Room* (or *The Vibrator Play*) at Actors Theatre of Louisville and Milwaukee Rep. This summer I'm directing *The Royal Family* at American Players Theatre.

**MK: Tell me about *In the Next Room*.**

LG: It's a love story, really, about a doctor and his wife who both learn to be intimate in a way they haven't before. The play says it's possible: Marriage can find itself if we see each other whole.

**MK: You're also a lead in *Honour*, which I'm directing at Renaissance—also about a wife and husband and sex...**

LG: And a woman's sense of wholeness—knowing who you are. Playwright Joanna Murray-Smith has written it beautifully. (thoughtfully) These themes of identity seem to be coming to me right now at this professional crossroads in my life... It's interesting...

**MK: Do you prefer acting or directing?**

LG: They both feed each other. I like the collaboration of directing... I can say "Isn't the set great? The actors?" without feeling self-conscious. I get to watch actors work, which I find miraculous—not when I'm acting myself! But watching them—actors blow me away.

**MK: I know!**

LG: It's humbling, isn't it?

**MK: (nodding) You are a dream to direct—so intelligent and sensitive to the text. Even before I ask, you drop into a true spot, finding the emotion and handling language beautifully. (Pause) Why do you do theater?**

LG: (Beat) I think the experience of being on stage telling stories in the moment—feeling emotion and being in touch with emotion—is full. It's rich. I've had the opportunity to feel empathy for a tremendous range of human experience. Hopefully through that work, we give the audience the opportunity to experience empathy as well. That's got to be a good thing. (With feeling) I think about someone like Rose [Pickering]... You can't look at her life and not see how huge and profound that can be... All those nights in the darkness telling wonderful stories to all those people? Does that have value? I have to say it does.

*In the Next Room* (or *The Vibrator Play*) runs at Milwaukee Repertory Theater through April 22; *Honour* is at Renaissance Theaterworks through April 15.

*photograph courtesy of Shepherd Express*