



IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 9, 2013

MEDIA CONTACT: James Juliano  
SHOUT Marketing and Media Relations  
773.852.0506 | james@shoutchicago.com

\*Media passes, photographs, videos, interviews and additional materials available upon request.

**RIVENDELL THEATRE ENSEMBLE PRESENTS  
JOEL DRAKE JOHNSON’S *RASHEEDA SPEAKING*  
THE FIRST MAINSTAGE PRODUCTION OF THEIR 2013-2014  
“STIRRING THE POT” SEASON, JANUARY 9 – FEBRUARY 15, 2014**

The World Premiere Dark Comedy About Race Relations in a Doctor’s Office is Directed by Sandy Shinner and Features Rivendell Artistic Director Tara Mallen and Steppenwolf Ensemble Member Ora Jones

CHICAGO – Rivendell Theatre Ensemble (RTE), Chicago’s only Equity theatre devoted to the work of women theatre artists, announces the world premiere of **Joel Drake Johnson’s *Rasheeda Speaking***, directed by **Sandy Shinner**. *Rasheeda Speaking* features RTE Artistic Director **Tara Mallen** and Steppenwolf Ensemble member **Ora Jones** and runs **January 9 – February 15, 2014** at Rivendell’s performance venue, 5779 N. Ridge. Previews are Thursday, Jan. 9 – Saturday, Jan. 11 and Wednesday, Jan. 15 – Friday Jan. 17, 2014 at 8 p.m. **Press Opening is Saturday, Jan. 18, 2014 at 7 p.m.** with Opening Night Sunday, Jan. 19, 2014 at 6 p.m. The performance schedule is Thursdays and Fridays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays at 4 and 8 p.m. There are additional Wednesday performances January 22 and 29 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for previews and \$30 for all other performances and may be purchased online at [www.RivendellTheatre.org](http://www.RivendellTheatre.org) or by phone, 773.334.7728.

Joel Drake Johnson’s dark comedy *Rasheeda Speaking* tells the story of a successful white physician (Eric Slater) who attempts to oust his black receptionist (Ora Jones) by enlisting her white female co-worker (Tara Mallen) as a spy. Tensions rise as relations between the two women quickly deteriorate, turning their once cordial workplace into a battlefield of innuendo, paranoia and passive aggression. Using his trademark wit and detailed observation, Johnson mines the subtleties of “post racial” America to explore what we are really saying when we refuse to talk about race.

This production reunites long-time playwright/director team, Joel Drake Johnson and Sandy Shinner, who most recently collaborated on *Tranquillity Woods* as part of Steppenwolf’s First Look Repertory of New Work. The cast of *Rasheeda Speaking* features RTE Artistic Director Tara Mallen and Steppenwolf ensemble member Ora Jones, who was last seen on Rivendell’s stage in *Knowing Cairo*. Additional cast members are RTE member **Eric Slater** who recently performed on the Goodman Stage in Noah Haidle’s *Smokefall* and guest artist **Lorraine Freund**.

The production team includes RTE members **Megan Wilkerson** (set), **Diane Fairchild** (lights), **Victoria DeIorio** (sound), with **Samantha C. Jones** (costumes), **Danielle Case** (props), Kristina Valada-Viars (stage manager) **Hannah Baker** (assistant stage manager) and **Ebony Joy** (assistant director).

**ABOUT JOEL DRAKE JOHNSON, PLAYWRIGHT**

Joel Drake Johnson is a Chicago based playwright whose plays *Four Places*, *Before My Eyes*, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (featuring Tony-Award Nominee Kevin Anderson and Jeff-Award Winner Francis Guinan) and *The End of the Tour* were first produced at Chicago’s Victory Gardens Theater under the direction of Sandy Shinner. *Four Places* was subsequently produced in Los Angeles by The Rogue Machine Theatre, where it garnered five Ovation Award nominations, four nominations (including best play) from the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle and a Garland Award for Best New Play. Johnson penned *The Fall to Earth* (Rick Snyder, director), which premiered at Steppenwolf Theatre and featured Tony-Award Winner Rondi Reed. His plays *A Blameless Life* (Anna D. Shapiro, director) and *Tranquillity Woods* (Sandy Shinner, director) were both

- more -

produced as part of Steppenwolf's First Look Repertory of New Work. He is currently working on several new projects including *22 Mistakes* for Next Theatre this coming season and *A Queer Kiss* for Deep Dish Theatre in Chapel Hill, NC. His work has been nominated four times for Chicago's Jefferson Award for Best New Work and has received critically acclaimed productions across the country.

#### **ABOUT SANDY SHINNER, DIRECTOR**

Sandy Shinner, a veteran Chicago director, is the producing artistic director of Shattered Globe Theatre Company. Shinner previously held the position of associate artistic director of Victory Gardens Theatre for more than thirty years. She has directed 100-plus productions at theaters including Actors Theatre of Louisville, Steppenwolf, Remy Bumppo and American Blues Theater, created and produced the nationally known IGNITION! Festival at Victory Gardens and was co-director of the award-winning Access Project. Shinner returns to RTE after directing the acclaimed *Crooked* in 2012.

#### **ABOUT RIVENDELL THEATRE ENSEMBLE**

Since 1994 Rivendell Theatre Ensemble has given voice to theater's forgotten majority—women. As Chicago's only professional woman-centered theater company, RTE continues to develop relevant new stories in a fertile environment. Today, RTE remains steadfast in its commitment to provide female theater artists with an ally, advocate and artistic home in Chicago and has developed a reputation, both locally and nationally, for developing exceptional, groundbreaking work with women at the core.

*Rasheeda Speaking* is the latest in Rivendell's long history of world and regional premieres—a history that in addition to Anne McGravie's award winning *Wrens* (1995 and 2012 seasons), includes the American Critics Association "Best New Play" *My Simple City* by Richard Strand, Carson Kreitzer's *Self-Defense* (2004-05 season, with Steppenwolf), Quiara Alegria Hudes' *26 Miles* (2006-07 season, with Teatro Vista), Melanie Marnich's *These Shining Lives* (2008 season, remounted in 2010), Stephen Massicotte's *Mary's Wedding* (2009-10 season), Catherine Trieschmann's *Crooked* (2012 season), and Lisa Dillman's *American Wee-Pie* in the spring of 2013, which was nominated for a Jeff Award for "Best New Play."

Since 2012, thanks in large part to the generosity of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation PAV Fund, RTE transformed two adjoining storefronts that had been empty for 30 years into a state-of-the-art 50-seat flexible theatre space at 5779 N. Ridge Avenue in Chicago's exciting Edgewater neighborhood. RTE is rapidly becoming a major destination for new women writers and today offers an actual artistic home for women actors, directors and designers.

For more information about Rivendell's 2013 – 2014 "Stirring the Pot" season, visit [www.RivendellTheatre.org](http://www.RivendellTheatre.org).

Free parking is available in the Senn High School parking lot (located a block and a half from the theatre behind the school off Thorndale Avenue). There is limited paid and free street parking in the area and the theatre is easily accessible via the Clark (#22) or Broadway (#36) bus and a short walk from the Bryn Mawr red line El station.

Rivendell Theatre Ensemble's world premiere of Joel Drake Johnson's *Rasheeda Speaking* runs January 9 – February 15, 2014 at Rivendell's performance venue, 5779 N. Ridge. Previews are Thursday, Jan. 9 – Saturday, Jan. 11 and Wednesday, Jan. 15 – Friday Jan. 17, 2014 at 8 p.m. **Press Opening is Saturday, Jan. 18, 2014 at 7 p.m.** with Opening Night Sunday, Jan. 19, 2014 at 6 p.m. The performance schedule is Thursdays and Fridays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays at 4 and 8 p.m. There are additional Wednesday performances January 22 and 29 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for previews and \$30 for all other performances and may be purchased online at [www.RivendellTheatre.org](http://www.RivendellTheatre.org) or by phone, 773.334.7728.

###

**Rivendell Theatre Ensemble is supported in part by generous grants from:** The Alphawood Foundation; The Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation; The Chicago Community Trust; The Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation; The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation; The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust; A CityArts Grant from the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; and the Illinois Arts Council, a State Agency.