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**RIVENDELL THEATRE ENSEMBLE OPENS 17<sup>th</sup> SEASON WITH  
THE REMOUNT OF ANNE MCGRAVIE'S *WRENS*,  
SEPTEMBER 6 – OCTOBER 13**

**Directed By Rivendell Co-Founder Karen Kessler, This Remount Of Rivendell's  
First Production Includes A Special Benefit Performance With Original 1996 Cast**



**Original 1996 cast photo**

**Chicago, IL** – Rivendell Theatre Ensemble's **Artistic Director Tara Mallen** announces the first production in its 2012-2013 Season dedicated to the theme "reinvention" is *WRENS*, by **Anne McGravie** and directed by **Rivendell Theatre Ensemble's co-founder Karen Kessler, September 6 – October 13**, at Rivendell's new performance venue, 5779 N. Ridge. Previews are \$15 and run Thursday, Sept. 6 – Saturday, Sept. 8 at 8 p.m. There is a Gala Performance Sunday, Sept. 9 at 6 p.m. and **opening/press night is Monday, Sept. 10 at 7 p.m.** The regular performance tickets are \$30 with the schedule Thursdays and Fridays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays at 3 and 8 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 14 at 6 p.m. is a benefit performance of *WRENS* with the original 1996 award-winning cast reprising their roles. Tickets are on sale now; call 773.334.7728 or visit [www.RivendellTheatre.org](http://www.RivendellTheatre.org).

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Rivendell burst onto the off-Loop scene in 1996 with its groundbreaking world premiere production of Anne McGravie's *WRENS*, which earned three Joseph Jefferson awards and secured Rivendell's status as "a major force on the Chicago fringe" (*Chicago Tribune*). This season, RTE co-founder Karen Kessler returns to direct an all new cast featuring Ensemble members **Ashley Neal, Mary Cross, and Rebecca Spence with Meg Warner, Jodi Kingsley, Amanda Powell, and Katrina Kuntz**. McGravie's moving semi-autobiographical examination of loyalty, morality and duty during World War II centers on a group of young Women's Royal Navy Servicewomen packed together in a tiny barrack on the eve of VE Day. With humor and wisdom, McGravie shines a light on the complex emotions of these women as they are confronted with the bittersweet prospect of peace at last and the impending loss of their newfound wartime independence.

The all-female production team includes **Joanna Iwanicka** (set), **Diane Fairchild** (lights), **Christine Pascual** (costumes), **Kate Hopgood** (sound), **Stephanie Hurovitz** (production stage manager), and **Jen Seleznow** (production manager).



**Playwright Anne McGravie in her WRENS uniform circa 1942**

#### **ABOUT ANNE MCGRAVIE, playwright**

Anne McGravie is a Scottish-born (Edinburgh) playwright who lives and writes in Chicago. Equity and non-equity theatres in Chicago, New York, Australia and the U.K have produced her work. She is a founding member of the Chicago Alliance for Playwrights, a member of the Women's Theatre Alliance, The Dramatists Guild, and International PEN (San Miguel Chapter). The founder of PACE Theatre Group at Cook County Department of Correction, she is also the recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship. A few of her notable Chicago productions include *The Cairn Stones* at Bailiwick theater, *The Poppy Garden* at Footsteps Theater; *The Hiroshima Project* at Bailiwick; *No Place Like Home* at Steppenwolf Theatre Company which McGravie both collaborated on as a writer and performed in; and of course several productions (including the world premiere at Rivendell) of one of her most personal plays, *WRENS*, based on Anne's first hand experience serving in the Women's Royal Naval Service during World War II.

At age 86, McGravie is enjoying perhaps her busiest season to date. Anne's most celebrated play, *WRENS*, (JEFF recipient, Illinois Arts Council Fellowship, Ragdale) reunites her with Tara Mallen and Rivendell Theatre for this remount in Rivendell's beautiful new theatre. At the same time, *The Clown Next Door* is being produced by Susan

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Padveen's Neapolitans. In October, McGravie's short play *A Stone-cold Case* will be part of the opening celebrations for Loyola University Drama Department's Newhart Theatre, Sarah Gabel, Artistic Director. In addition, McGravie's "Inishfree" was one of the short stories that introduced Brigham Young University's production of *Arabian Nights*. Kathleen Thompson and her e-publishing company, Around the Block Press, are producing McGravie's first novel, *Dancing on Ashes*.

#### **ABOUT KAREN KESSLER, director**

Kessler is a co-founder of Rivendell Theatre Ensemble and a proud member of A Red Orchid Theatre where she is currently directing a new play by Brett Neveu, *The Opponent*. Most recently for Red Orchid, Kessler directed the Midwest premiere of *Louis Slotin Sonata* and previously directed the Midwest premiere of *Pumpgirl* by Irish playwright Abbie Spallen, the Chicago premiere of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*; the US premiere of *Gagarin's Way* by Gregory Burke (a play that won an After Dark award for "Outstanding Ensemble") and the Midwest premiere of *Mr. Kolpert* by David Gieselmann. Other Chicago credits include: Collaboraction's *Sketchbook 2009 – Who Put the Dead Bird in My Mailbox?* by Sarah Hammond; the US Premiere of Roddy Doyle's *War* for Seanachai Theatre; *A Going Concern*, *This Lime Tree Bower*, *Remembrance*, *A Mislaid Heaven*, and the award winning *Early and Often* for Famous Door; the Midwest premiere of Sam Shepard's *The God of Hell* at the Next Theatre; *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, *Wrens*, *Hamlet* and *Cyrano de Bergerac* for Rivendell Theatre; and the Midwest premiere of Steve Martin's *The Underpants* for Noble Fool Productions. Credits outside of Chicago include: Northern Stage Ensemble in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, Notre Dame Shakespeare Festival, Connecticut Repertory Theatre, Illinois Shakespeare Festival and Idaho Repertory Theatre. Kessler is an Associate Professor of Directing and Shakespeare at Ball State University in Indiana.

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

Since 1994 Rivendell has given voice to theatre's forgotten majority – women. In 1908, women wrote only 12.8% of the plays produced on New York stages. More than one hundred years later, this number has actually shrunk. In spite of this dismal fact, 60% of theatre audiences nationwide are women. Since our inception, Rivendell has sought to address these inequities by bringing women's stories to the stage and by employing and showcasing the work of women artists.

Since Rivendell's inception in 1994, the Ensemble continues to make a name for itself as Chicago's premier theatre offering a unique female perspective in an intimate setting. The use of small venues--at first due to budgetary constraints--soon became essential to our aesthetic and brought us to our now trademark salon style. Over the course of the past sixteen seasons, Rivendell has been honored with more than twenty Joseph Jefferson nominations for artistic excellence and emerged as a national force in new play development.

Rivendell's most recent seasons have been banner years for Rivendell launching the Company from a "**major force on the fringe**" (*Chicago Tribune*) to "**top notch**" (*The Chicago Reader*) status with "**first rate**" productions that are "**impossible to overpraise**" (*TimeOut Chicago*). Rivendell remains dedicated to bringing new work to the stage having produced five Midwest premieres in the last three seasons. Recent seasons boasted critically acclaimed Jeff award-winning productions such as *These Shining Lives*, *Mary's Wedding*, and Rivendell's world premiere production of *The Walls* produced in partnership with Steppenwolf Theatre. In the fall of 2010, Rivendell partnered once again with Teatro Vista on the Midwest premiere of **26 MILES** directed by RTE founder and Artistic Director Tara Mallen; the production garnered enormous media attention with CBS

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naming RTE one of "**The Best Storefront Theatres in Chicago**" and writing "**Rivendell offers a theatre experience that blends surreal beauty with raw honesty.**" Most recently, the "**Always Excellent Rivendell Theatre Ensemble**" (*Chicago Sun-Times*) premiered *Crooked* this past spring in their new Edgewater theater space to terrific critical response such as "**a sharply funny coming-of-age story**" (*Chicago Tribune*) "**beautifully modulated revealing work**" (*Chicago Reader*) and "**It really doesn't get better than this**" (*The Fourth Walsh*).

Rivendell's commitment to nurturing women artists and developing new works about the female experience remains stronger than ever today. We approach each season with an eye toward change and a fierce dedication to combating the deepening inequities women artists experience on the national theatre landscape.

Rivendell Theatre Ensemble is now in residence in their beautiful new artistic home at 5779 North Ridge Avenue in Chicago. 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).

*WRENS*, by Anne McGravie and directed by Rivendell Theatre Ensemble's co-founder Karen Kessler, September 6 – October 13, at Rivendell's new performance venue, 5779 N. Ridge has preview tickets for \$15 and runs Thursday, Sept. 6 – Saturday, Sept. 8 at 8 p.m. There is a Gala Performance Sunday, Sept. 9 at 6 p.m. and Opening/press night is Monday, Sept. 10 at 7 p.m. The regular performance tickets are \$30 with the schedule Thursdays and Fridays at 8 p.m. and Saturdays at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 14 at 6 p.m. is a benefit performance of *WRENS* with the original 1996 award-winning cast reprising their roles. Tickets are on sale now; call 773.334.7728 or visit [www.RivendellTheatre.org](http://www.RivendellTheatre.org).

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