



Tara Mallen
Artistic Director

Trisha Hooper
General Manager

proudly present the World Premiere of



by Alex Lubischer

Directed by Hallie Gordon

February 12 – March 28, 2026

Pivot Production Sponsor:
Cathleen Cudnowski Dixon and David Dixon

Rivendell's 30th Anniversary Season Sponsor:
Sharon I. Furiya

rivendelltheatre.org

Rivendell Theatre Ensemble is a member of Theatre Communications Group, Inc. (TCG), National New Play Network (NNPN), the Andersonville and Edgewater Chambers of Commerce, and the League of Chicago Theatres.

CAST

Kara Pfeifer Ashley Neal+
George van Acren Keith Kupferer*+
Doug Wessel Glenn Obrero+
Anne van Acren Tara Mallen*+
Levi van Acren David Stobbe

Understudies:

Anne Mary Cross+
Doug Wessel and Levi van Acren Matthew Benenson Cruz
Kara Jessica Ervin+

**Understudies will not substitute unless a specific announcement is made at the time of the performance.

Time: August, 2025 Place: Platte County, Nebraska

The play runs approximately 105 minutes, including one ten minute intermission.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Playwright Alex Lubischer
Director Hallie Gordon+
Artistic Producer Pat Fries+
Associate Production Manager Heather Gervasi
Production Stage Manager Kristi Martens*
Assistant Director Eric Slater+
Scenic Designer Jackie Penrod^
Costume Designer Janice Pytel+^
Lighting Designer Diane Fairchild+^
Sound Designer Joyce Ciesil
Projection Designer Andres Fiz+
Props Designer Em Allen
Dramaturg Tanya Palmer+
Assistant Dramaturg Madison Blackwood
Assistant Stage Manager Casey Fort
Technical Director Axel Adams
Master Electrician/Assistant Lighting Designer Abby Letscher
Box Office Manager Ema Kester
Casting Director Ashley Neal+
Casting Associate Glenn Obrero+
Intimacy Consultant Lucy Carapetyan
Violence Consultant Alison Dornheggen
Production Intern Charleigh Justice
Production Photography Jeff Kurysz

+ Denotes member of Rivendell Theatre Ensemble

* Denotes member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional stage actors and managers

^ Denotes a member of USA 829 – a labor union and professional association of Designers, Artists, Crafts-people, and Department Coordinators.

RIVENDELL THEATRE ENSEMBLE STAFF

Artistic Director Tara Mallen+
General Manager Trisha Hooper+
Grants Manager Madison Blackwood
Graphic Design Anthony Churchill
Community Engagement Brit Cooper Robinson
Facilities Manager Eric Slater+
Director of New Work Caroline Michele Uy+
Marketing Director Tanya Ward+

Ushering provided by The Saints

Public Relations provided by Cathy Taylor Public Relations, Inc.



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United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829, IATSE is the union representing Scenic, Costume, Lighting, Sound and Projection Designers in Live Performance



UNITED SCENIC ARTISTS

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



There are moments in life that naturally draw us together: death, birth, and love. Around each of these moments, we build traditions—ways of gathering, witnessing, and holding one another. As I've grown older, that need for community has only deepened, especially in the world we're living in today.

There is a deep, human need for spaces that hold us together, and for me, that space is Rivendell Theatre. Returning here to celebrate 30 years of stories that center women feels like a vital homecoming. In a world that often feels fractured, this community of artists provides the traditions of gathering and support that I am so thankful for.

With *Pivot*, I wanted to create a space for that sense of community. A place where the audience isn't simply attending a performance, but becomes part of a shared experience. Don't worry—I'm not asking for physical participation. I know that can be uncomfortable for some. What I'm asking instead is simpler, and perhaps more meaningful: come together with us.

Be our community. Be the people of Nebraska in this small Midwestern town—the ones who know George, Anne, Kara, Levi, and Doug. We invite you to laugh, to judge, to support, to cry, and maybe even to help. But most of all, we want to be with you—and to have you be with us.

—Hallie Gordon, Director and Ensemble member

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

In simple terms, this is a play about a wedding. Things go wrong, comedy ensues, and emotions—as tends to be the case—run high. But underneath the plot, in the soil of the play, is the matter of farming.

I grew up on a farm in Platte County, Nebraska taking pigs to market before dawn and driving the grain cart through soybean fields alongside my brother who piloted the com-

bine. I never saw a story onstage that captured life on the farm as I knew it. When I did see stories about farmers, they were confined to the Dust Bowl or set even further in the past. But farming, like nearly every industry in the last thirty years, has transformed, and I wanted to write a play that depicted Americans who tend the land in the 21st century.

Some challenges: How to get the land onstage? How to make this story compelling for city and country folk alike? Ritual—like that of a wedding—held the key and proved especially fitting for a play about agriculture. Farming nowadays has gotten so expensive, from wildly priced hybrid seed corn and pesticides to high-tech machinery, that inheriting or marrying into the field can be the only way to get one's start.

After typing the words *End of Play*, a new challenge arose: finding the right home for this story and the right team to make it come alive for a community. So, I was honored and, to tell the truth, pleasantly surprised when Rivendell approached me about producing *Pivot*. The pairing made sense. This is a play about a woman who wants to be a farmer; its creation stemmed from a deep empathy for women and queers who don't fit into traditional notions of how men and women should conduct themselves in rural spaces.

As Kara says, "she's not everyone's favorite"—but I love her. I wonder about her and other women taking the reins in what has for so long been a masculine domain. What challenges will they discover as farmers? And what miracles?

—Alex Lubischer 2/10/2026



Photo Credit: Jeff Kuryz

SPECIAL THANKS

Cathleen Cudnowski Dixon and David Dixon, Sharon Furiya, Mickie Paskal, Sandra Loaria and Francisco Aguerrin & Rogers Park Burger King, Samuel Rubio, Tablesapes Event Rentals, Martha Wegener & Steppenwolf Theatre, Nyabweza Itaagi & Grow Greater Englewood, Haley LeRand & Global Gardens, Iris Michael & Windy City Harvest and the one and only Jerre Dye.

As always...to the Miseti family, volimo te!

PROFILES



ASHLEY NEAL (Kara) is thrilled to be back at Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, where she is a long time ensemble member. Rivendell credits include: *Scientific Method*, *Cal in Camo*, *Alias Grace*, *Wrens*, *These Shining Lives*, and

more. She is also an ensemble member at First Floor Theatre. Additional Chicago credits include *Evanston Salt Costs Climbing*, *Plano* (First Floor Theatre); *The Cave*, *Killing Game*, *The Nether*, and *A Red Handed Otter* (A Red Orchid); *Evil Perfect* (Bramble Theatre Company); *The Singularity Play* (Jackalope Theatre); *Eric Argyle* (Steep Theatre); *Men Should Weep*, *London Wall*, and *Stage Door* (Griffin Theatre). She has appeared in many films and TV episodes including *Stuck*, *The Chi*, *Chicago Fire*, and more. She is represented by Big Mouth talent and is a member of SAG. All my thanks to Lloyd and Ida Mae.



KEITH KUPFERER (George) is a founding member of Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, now celebrating their 30th anniversary and performed in the critically acclaimed premieres of *A Mile in the Dark*, *The Cake*, *American Wee-Pie*, and *Cal in Camo*

(Jeff Award for Supporting Actor). Other notable theater credits include *Support Group for Men*, *God of Carnage*, and *Sweat* (Goodman); *The Seagull*, *The Great Leap*, *The Qualms*, *Good People*, and *Middletown* (Steppenwolf); *Hillary and Clinton*, *Never the Sinner*, and *Appropriate* (Victory Gardens); *West Side Story* (Lyric Opera); the world premiere of *The Humans* (American Theatre Company); *Lowcountry* (Atlantic Theater); as well as work at Writer's Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Northlight Theatre, A Red Orchid, and Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Keith can currently be seen in Alex Thompson and Kelly O'Sullivan's *Ghostlight* which premiered at Sundance in January 2024 to rave reviews and was released by IFC Films nationwide last summer. Keith has received widespread praise for his "powerhouse performance" (Deadline Hollywood) and has garnered multiple prestigious end-of-year nominations from the Gothams and Independent Spirit Awards, was the recipient of Best Actor in a Comedy by the Satellite awards and named the "2025 Chicagoan of the Year In Film" by the Chicago Tribune. Additional film credits include the upcoming *Saturn Return* (Netflix), *Widows*, *The Dilemma*, *Dark Knight*,

Public Enemies, *The Express*, *Stranger Than Fiction*, *Road to Perdition*, *Finding Santa*, *Fred Klaus*, *The Last Rites of Joe May*, and *The Merry Gentleman* directed by Michael Keaton. TV credits include *The Bear*, *Emperor of Ocean Park*, *Better Call Saul*, *Empire*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Betrayal*, *Crisis*, *Chicago Fire*, and *Detroit 187*. Keith is represented by the Gersh Agency and Fusion Entertainment.



GLENN OBRERO (Doug) is very happy to be a member of the Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, where he's appeared in productions such as *Scientific Method* and *Wipeout*. Some Chicago Theater credits include: *The Great Leap*

(Steppenwolf Theatre); *20,000 Leagues Under The Seas* (Lookingglass Theatre); *The Chinese Lady* (Timeline Theatre); *Ironbound* (Raven Theatre); and *A Tale of Two Cities* (Shattered Globe Theatre). He's also worked in Regional Theaters such as Peninsula Players Theatre, Kitchen Theatre, and Asolo Repertory Theatre. Film and TV Credits: *Chicago Fire* (NBC); *Next* (FOX); and *When Cats Fly* (Upcoming Feature Film). He is a Casting Associate of Rivendell Theatre Ensemble and is represented by Gray Talent Group.



TARA MALLEN (Anne) A producer, actor, and director, Tara is the founder and Artistic Director at Chicago's award-winning Rivendell Theatre Ensemble. She is a 3Arts William Franklin Grisham Awardee, a 2024 Impact Award winner

from the Chicago Foundation for Women and a Volunteers of America Silver Star Award. Since Rivendell's inception in 1996, Tara has produced and acted in over fifty productions. Onstage Rivendell credits include: *Gorgeous* (co-production with Raven Theatre); *Motherhouse* (Jeff Award for Best Ensemble), *The Cake* (Jeff Award for Best Actor/Principal Role), *Laura and the Sea*, *Look*, *We Are Breathing*, *Rasheeda Speaking*, *My Simple City* (Jeff Award for Actor/Principal Role), *Wrens* (Jeff Award for Supporting Actress, Jeff Award for Best Ensemble). Rivendell directing credits include: the sold-out, critically acclaimed rolling world premiere *Wipeout*, *Women at War*, *The Electric Baby*, *26 Miles* (co-production with Teatro Vista), *Fighting Words*, *Psalms of a Questionable Nature*, *Elliot*, *a Soldiers Fugue* (co-production with StageWorks Hudson). Other stage credits

include *The Luckiest* (Jeff Nomination for Supporting Actor) (Raven Theatre); the world premiere of Lynn Nottage's *Sweat* (Arena Stage); and *How Long Will I Cry* (Steppenwolf Theatre). In 2024, Tara appeared alongside her husband, Keith, and daughter, Katherine, in Alex Thompson and Kelly O'Sullivan's film *Ghostlight*, premiering at Sundance in to rave reviews and released by IFC Films nationwide. Additional film/TV credits include the soon to be released *Saturn Return* (Netflix); *Contagion* (Warner Brothers); *The Last Shift* (Sony Pictures); *The Emperor of Ocean Park* (MGM+); *Dark Matter* (Apple TV); *Empire* (Fox); *Boss* (Starz); *Chicago Fire* (NBC); *Doubt* (CBS/Sony Pictures); *Chicago P.D.* (NBC); *Sense8* (Netflix) and the independent feature *FOOLS*. She plays a leading role in Kelly O'Sullivan and Alex Thompson's newest film *Mouse* premiering at the 2026 Berlinale.



DAVID STOBBE (Levi) is grateful to be making his Rivendell Theatre Ensemble debut. A founder of The Tramp Collective and an ensemble member of Avalanche Theater, David's Chicago credits include the premiere of *Pro-Am* (First

Floor Theater); *Marie Antoinette* and *The Magical Negroes* (Story Theater); *Ophelia in Space* (The Tramps); and *Big River* (Mercury Theater). Regional credits: *Waitress* (Paramount Theater); *Frozen* (Fulton Theater); and *Buddy Holly* (Marriott Theatre). He can be seen in John Mossman's *Good Guy with a Gun* on Apple TV+. Much love to his Wife Becky.



MARY CROSS (U/S Anne) is a founding member of Rivendell Theatre Ensemble. Chicago credits include: *Motherhouse* (Jeff Award for Best Ensemble) *Spay*, *Something Clean*, *Women At War*, *Eat Your Heart Out*, *Faulkner's Bicycle*, the role

of Meg in the 1996 world premiere of *WRENS* (Jeff Award for Best Ensemble), and the role of Gwyneth in the 2012 *WRENS* remount (Jeff Award nomination for Best Ensemble) (Rivendell Theatre Ensemble); *The Crucible* (Steppenwolf); *Twisted Knots* (The Royal George); *Bondagers* (Jeff Award for Best Ensemble) (Shattered Globe); *Two Planks And A Passion*, *A Mislead Heaven* (Jeff Nomination for Best Actress) (Famous Door Theatre). NYC credits include: *Harbingers Of Turpitude* (Lucille Lortel Theater);

Millennium Baby (Ensemble Studio Theatre); *The Chaos Theories* (Shotgun Productions). Film/TV: *Fools*, *Killing Eleanor*, *Other People's Children*, *Chicago Med*, *Chicago Fire*.



JESSICA ERVIN (U/S Kara) is an ensemble member at Rivendell where she originated the role of Annie in Rivendell's Jeff Award-winning production of *Motherhouse*. Other RTE credits include: *No Such Thing*, *Dry Land* (Jeff

Nomination for Actress in a Principal Role), *I Wanna F*cking Tear You Apart*, *The Firebirds Take the Field*; and understudy credits on *Scientific Method*, *Alias Grace*, and the tour of *Women at War*. Other theatrical work includes roles with Goodman, Minetta Lane, Strawdog, A Red Orchid, Walkabout, Kalliope and Co., and Prop Thtr. On-screen, she has appeared on *Chicago Fire* (NBC), and in the films *Regret Like That*, *Princess Cyd*, *Provo*, *Lucid*, and *Late Bloomer*, in addition to other study and a commercial for CDW NetApp. Jessica is a graduate of The School at Steppenwolf and Ball State University. She is proud to be represented by the Actor's Talent Group. www.jessicaervin.com



MATTHEW BENENSON CRUZ (U/S Doug/Levi/Others) is an actor and musician based in Chicago by way of Nashville, TN. He is thrilled to work with Rivendell Theatre Ensemble for the first time. Recent Chicago credits include:

Sunny Afternoon (Chicago Shakespeare Theatre) and *Passion* (Blank Theatre Company). He has also worked with such regional theatres as American Players Theatre, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Studio Tenn Theatre Company, Nashville Repertory Theatre, and Exit 11 Productions. BA/BM: Oberlin College & Conservatory of Music.

PRODUCTION TEAM



ALEX LUBISCHER (Playwright) is a queer Midwestern writer, born and raised on a farm in Nebraska. His plays include *Bobbie Clearly* (Jeff Award Winner: Outstanding New Play, Steep Theatre, Roundabout Theatre

Company), *You Deserve To Be Here* (Goodman Playwrights Unit commission; Roundabout Theatre Laura Pels commission), *Do Wasps Have Desires?* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), *Weird Kids* (Haven Chicago), *The Quonsets* (Yale Cabaret, co-written with Majkin Holmquist), and *Survey No. 5* (House of International Theatre, Copenhagen). Current theatre projects include an untitled commission for Raven Theatre. He has also developed new work at Playwrights Horizons, Atlantic Theater Company, South Coast Repertory, Page 73, The Orchard Project, SPACE on Ryder Farm, A Red Orchid Theatre, First Floor Theater, Red Theater, The Understudy, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and the Great Plains Theatre Conference. He teaches playwriting in Chicago at Bramble Theatre Company and DePaul University. Special thanks to Hallie, Ashley, Tara, and everyone at Rivendell. Thank you, especially, to Hanna. Everything about farming in this play is for my Dad. MFA: Yale School of Drama.



HALLIE GORDON (Director) has directed *Eat Your Heart Out*, *Dry Land*, and *Cal and Camo* for Rivendell Theatre and is currently the Senior Associate Artistic Director at Olney Theatre Center in Maryland. Hallie is formerly

the Director of Artistic Development at Kansas City Repertory Theatre, the Artistic Director for Young Adults, and Artistic Producer at Steppenwolf. Hallie has directed the following for Steppenwolf Theatre: *HIR*, *The Rembrandt*, and the world premieres of *Animal Farm*, *The Book Thief*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The House on Mango Street*, and Lydia R. Diamond's adaptation of *Harriet Jacobs*. A new premiere of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, also adapted by Lydia R. Diamond, won a Black Excellence Award from the African American Arts Alliance of Chicago and transferred Off-Broadway to The New Victory Theatre. Additional credits include *Smart People* (Writers Theater), *Eclipsed* (Northlight Theatre), and additional credits at Goodman Theatre, Timeline Theatre, Chicago Dramatists and Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

She is the recipient of The Helen Coburn Meier & Tim Meier Achievement Award.

PAT FRIES (Artistic Producer) is thrilled to return to Rivendell, where he is an Ensemble Member. Other credits include work with Goodman Theatre, Powerhouse Theatre, Berkeley Rep, Olney Theatre Center, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Next Theatre, Northwestern University, Porchlight Music Theatre, and Teatro Vista.

HEATHER GERVASI (Associate Production Manager) (she/they) is a Chicago based creative, originally from West Falls, NY. Heather is thrilled to be working with Rivendell as the Associate Production Manager this season. They are extremely grateful for all of the experiences that they have had within the theatre community here and cannot thank her circle enough for overflowing her cup with love. Other Chicago credits include: *Jackie Wilson* (ASM, Black Ensemble Theatre); *On Your Feet* (SM Intern), *Sister Act* (ASM Cover) (Drury Lane Theatre); *2024 New Stages Festival* (PA, Goodman Theatre); and *Birthday Candles* (PA, Northlight Theatre). Heather served as production manager for Porchlight Music Theatre for the 2022-2025 Seasons.

KRISTI J. MARTENS (Production Stage Manager) is excited to return to Rivendell Theater Ensemble with the World Premiere of *Pivot* after working on the World Premiere of Lisa Dillman's *No Such Thing*. She has additional credits at: Mercury Theater Chicago, Drury Lane Theater (Oakbrook Terrace), Northlight Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Goodman Theatre, The Royal George Theater, Drury Lane Evergreen Park, Drury Lane Water Tower, Fox Valley Repertory, Oak Park Festival Theater, Fulton Opera House (Lancaster, PA), Maine State Music Theater (Brunswick, ME), Theater at the Center (Munster, IN), Carousel Dinner Playhouse (Akron, OH), Dallas Theater Center (Dallas, TX). A proud Equity member for over 36 years, Kristi started stage managing with children's theater.

ERIC SLATER (Assistant Director) has been a member of the Rivendell Ensemble since 2005 and has worked on more than fifteen projects in that time including *The Tasters*, *Cal In Camo*, *Alias Grace*, and *Rasheeda Speaking*. Additional Chicago credits include: *Inherit the Wind*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *This Happened Once At The Romance Depot Off I-87 in Westchester*, *Support Group For Men*, *Smokefall*, *Feathers And Teeth* (Goodman); *The Doppelganger* (an international farce) (Steppenwolf); *Tiny Beautiful Things*, *Hand To God* (Victory Gardens); *Small*

Jokes About Monsters (16th Street). Off-Broadway: *Juvenal Players* (The Kitchen); *The Dudley's: A Family Game!* (Theatre for a New City); *Our Greatest Year* (Kraine & The Brick); and the original cast of *Gloryana* (Workshop Production, The Public Theatre & The York Theater). Film: *Regret Like That, In The Flood, You Don't Belong Here, Widows, The Try Out*. TV: *Monster: The Ed Gein Story, Emperor of Ocean Park, Fargo, and Chicago Fire*

JACQUELINE PENROD (Set Designer) Jackie is very happy to be working with Rivendell Theatre Ensemble for the first time on this premiere production of *Pivot* by Alex Lubischer. Other recent designs include *The Wickhams: Christmas at Pemberly* and *Georgiana & Kitty: Christmas at Pemberly* (Buffalo Theatre Ensembles); *Big River* (Mercury Theater); *Miss Bennett: Christmas at Pemberly* (Northlight Theatre); *Frida... a Self Portrait* (Writer's Theatre); and additional work at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Portland Center Stage, and Kansas City Rep. A few of her favorite designs are: *Around the World in Eighty Days* (Lookingglass Theatre), *Eclipsed* (Pegasus Theatre); *Stick Fly* (Windy City Playhouse); *Welcome Home Jenny Sutter* (Next Theatre Company); *Pygmalion* and *Love and Information* (Remy Bumppo Theatre Company). Jackie is also a puppet maker and carver. She is a member of United Scenic Artists local 829.

JANICE PYTEL (Costume Designer) has been a Rivendell Ensemble member since 2011 and has served on RTE's literary committee. Her most recent Rivendell design credits include: *The Cake, Cal in Camo, Alias Grace, and Dry Land*. In Chicago she has worked with Steppenwolf, Victory Gardens, About Face, Writers Theatre, Court Theatre, Theater Wit, and many other companies large and small. Her work has been seen on stage and on screen throughout the US and in numerous countries across 5 continents. Her most recent project, *Dana H*, was recently honored with two Tony Awards, including Best Actress in a Play and marks the 2nd time Janice has costumed a Tony Award winning solo performance. She is adjunct faculty at Columbia College Chicago and serves on the regional board for her union, USA 829.

DIANE FAIRCHILD (Lighting Designer) Diane Fairchild is a proud ensemble member of Rivendell, an Artistic Associate of Next Theatre, and part time faculty at The School of the Art Institute. Other design credits include work at Lifeline, Babes with Blades, BoHo, Next, Northlight, Court, Timeline, Wheaton College, City Lit, Chicago Dramatists, Redmoon, Pegasus, Side Project, Raven, and the Michigan Shakespeare Festival. Awards she has been

nominated for include a Non-Equity Jeff (*The Gimmick*, 2010), Broadway World Chicago (*Floyd Collins*, 2012 and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, 2013), and a Wilde (*Love's Labours Lost*, 2012). Ms. Fairchild holds an MFA in theater design from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and she earned her BFA in design and technology for theater from Wright State University in her hometown of Dayton, Ohio.

JOYCE CIESIL (Sound Designer) Originally from the suburbs of Chicago, Joyce is a regional sound designer and composer. She previously designed *SPAY* for Rivendell Theatre Ensemble. Additional recent sound design credits include: *The Scarlet Letter* (American Stage); *Hurricane Diane* (Hartford Stage); *Notes on Killing Seven Oversight Management and Economic Stability Board Members, Falcon Girls* (Yale Rep). Joyce served as the 2024 and 2025 resident sound designer at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference, is a guest artist at the National Theater Institute, a member of the TSDCA, and a 2022 Jeff nominee for best midsize sound design.

ANDRES FIZ (Projections Designer) is excited to return to Rivendell as a new ensemble member, having previously designed *Wipeout*. Other credits include *Jesus Hopped the A Train* (City Lit Theatre); *The Love of Three Kings, Il Prigioniero* (Chicago Opera Festival); *Turn of the Screw, Orfeo Ed Euridice* (DePaul Opera Theatre); and *Les Miserables* (TUTS Houston). Andres has assisted on shows at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Time Line Theatre, Chicago Opera Theater, Drury Lane Theatre and Berkeley Repertory Theatre. They received a BFA in projection design from The Theatre School at DePaul University. www.andresfiz.com

EM ALLEN (Props Design) is thrilled to join RTE for this show! They are a Scenic and Prop Designer currently based in Milwaukee, WI with a B.F.A in Theatre Arts and Psychology from Lawrence University and an M.F.A in Scenic Design from the University of Washington, Seattle. Properties Designs include *The Children, The Treasurer, and Splash Hatch* (Next Act Theater) and *Men on Boats* (Waukesha Civic Theater). Recent Scenic Designs include *The Last Five Years* (Milwaukee Rep); *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity* (Next Act); *Topdog/Underdog, Laughs in Spanish, and Stew* (Milwaukee Chamber), among others. emallendesign.com

TANYA PALMER (Dramaturg) is a new member of Rivendell's artistic ensemble and a dramaturg, creative producer, educator, and playwright who currently serves as the Assistant Dean and Executive Artistic Director at Northwestern University's School of Communication, overseeing programming at the Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts. Prior to joining Northwestern, served as the Director of New Play Development at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago for 14 seasons and at Actors Theatre of Louisville for 5 seasons. Originally from Calgary, Canada, she lives in Evanston, Illinois with her husband Jim and their two teenagers, Harper & Theo.

MADISON BLACKWOOD (Assistant Dramaturg) (she/her) is a multidisciplinary theatre practitioner focused on new work development, arts education, accessibility, and inclusivity. Marking her Chicago debut, she has supported Rivendell's literary team for two years and now also serves as Grants Manager. Madison's experience spans theatre education, house management, dramaturgy, and producing for the Finborough Theatre, Jasmin Vardimon Company, Performing International Plays, St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, Indiana Repertory Theatre, the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, COCA St. Louis, and Stages St. Louis. She holds a BA in Theatre Studies from Ball State University and an MA in Creative Producing from the University of Kent. Madison is grateful to be part of the Rivendell community, and to her husband, sound and projections designer Connor Blackwood, and their son, Caspian, for their endless love and support.

CASEY FORT (Assistant Stage Manager) is overjoyed to be back to work with Rivendell Theatre Ensemble after his previous run with *Motherhouse*. After graduating from The Theatre School at DePaul University, he has worked backstage around Chicago and across the country. He has recently been the Youth Liaison on A Red Orchid's production of *The Cave*, Deck Managed at The Santa Fe Opera, and on tour with *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Because and for mentors, friends, family, and teachers.

LUCY CARAPETYAN (Intimacy Consultant) Lucy is an actor, intimacy director, and casting director, and ensemble member at Steep Theatre. Her work has been seen across Chicago at Steep, Northlight, Steppenwolf, Raven, and many others.

ALISON DORNHEGGEN (Violence Consultant) is elated to be working with the wonderful team at Rivendell. A director, actor, fight choreographer and administrator based in Chicago, she is also a proud ensemble member of Babes With Blades Theatre Company. Select Chicago credits include work with Remy Bumpo, Mercury Theater Chicago, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Idle Muse Theatre Company, Raven Theatre, Oak Park Festival Theatre, Factory Theatre, and A Red Orchid Theatre. Select Regional credits include The Kennedy Center for the Arts, Ford's Theatre and Washington Stage Guild.

AXEL ADAMS (Technical Director) previously worked with Rivendell on Lisa Dillman's *No Such Thing*. Axel is new to the Chicago area, having recently moved here after completing his Bachelor's degree in Scenic Construction and Technical Direction at Arizona State University. When he's not running around putting a set together, Axel enjoys going for long walks and silver smithing.

ABBY LETSCHER (Master Electrician/Assistant Lighting Designer) (they/them) is a lighting designer and artist based in Chicago. They graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and English from Northwestern University.

EMA KESTER (Front of House) (she/they) is incredibly excited to be working with Rivendell Theatre Ensemble again! Ema is a multi-hyphenate theatre artist that finds joy in exercising their love for theatre arts in whatever way she can. Previously, Ema has assistant stage managed at Rivendell during the productions of *Motherhouse* and *No Such Thing*. Ema is also a member of the Production Team at 2nd Story, assisting with their storytelling workshops, productions, and other projects. They received their Bachelor of Arts from Loyola University Chicago in 2022, where she was introduced to Rivendell Theatre Ensemble by several beloved professors and mentors. Ema is very much looking forward to her future in the Chicago theatre world!

TRISHA HOOPER (General Manager) has been involved with Rivendell since graduating from Loyola University Chicago in 2007, where she studied English. She was recruited by Rivendell Founder Tara Mallen as a volunteer as the company was moving into our current space, and grew into her current position, General Manager, after previously serving as both Business Manager and Box Office Manager. She manages everything from payroll and cash flow to donor and ticket buyer relations for the organization. In addition to her work with

Rivendell, Trisha spent a summer with American Players Theatre in Spring Green, Wisconsin where she was a management intern. Trisha also made vegan pastries at Metropolis Coffee Company and is generally recognized as Rivendell's top baker to this day.

BRIT COOPER ROBINSON (Community Engagement Manager) is a Chicago-based theatre practitioner and writer, living on the stolen lands of the Kickapoo, Peoria, Potawatomi, Miami, and Ojibwe peoples. Driven by the transformative power of storytelling and the necessity of compassionate witness, her work is dedicated to sparking personal and systemic change. She is currently a co-producer and co-artist on the new *Folded Map Play*, after having previously co-devised the original *Folded Map Play*. She has also co-produced the storytelling series *Unearthing Our Fire*. Brit is a contributor to *Sixty Inches From Center*, *Our Bible App*, and *Understory Quarterly*. In her role as Community Engagement Lead for Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, she fosters connections that make engagement with social issues accessible, bridging the gap between theatrical work and meaningful action. She holds a BFA and MFA in Acting and is currently pursuing an MFT.

CAROLINE MICHELE UY (Director of New Work) is a new ensemble member at Rivendell and most recently served as the Artistic Producer for Rivendell's *Fresh Produce New Play Series* this past fall. They also worked as dramaturg on Rivendell's production of *Gorgeous* (co-pro with Raven Theatre). As a dramaturg, stage manager, and producer, they have worked at Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Steep Theatre, American Music Theatre Project, and other Chicago theaters. Other credits include: *New Stages Festival 2023* (Line Producer), *This Happened Once...* (Dramaturg), and *Swing State* (Asst. Dramaturg) (Goodman); *Purpose* (Script Supervisor, Steppenwolf); *Wonder Boy* (Dramaturg, AMTP); *The Writer* (Dramaturg, Steep Theatre). Stage management work includes *Mr. Wolf, You Will Get Sick* (Steppenwolf); *Suor Angelica*/

Gianni Schicchi, Die Fledermaus (Berlin Opera Academy), and additional credits from the University of Michigan, Trinity Rep/Brown University, Berlin Opera Academy, and New York Stage and Film. BFA Design & Production (Stage Management), BA Cognitive Science (Language & Cognition; Minor in Germanic Languages and Literature)—University of Michigan.

TANYA WARD (Marketing Director) Tanya Ward is an ensemble member and has served as Rivendell's marketing director since 2018. As a Core Artist and Artistic Producer for the developing *Folded Map Play*, she is thrilled to strengthen her writing and producing muscles with Rivendell. She has also served as Impact Producer for the award-winning documentary *The Road Up* (Siskel Jacobs Films), and as Associate Producer on the award-winning documentary *Being Michelle* (Orange Kite Productions).



PIVOT 2026 Photo Credit: Jeff Kurysz

R RIVENDELL
THEATRE ENSEMBLE
IT'S WOMEN'S WORK

“What’s a pivot?”:

Center pivot irrigation is the technology behind the giant green circles visible from airplane windows over the Midwest. The system works by rotating a long sprinkler arm around a central pivot point, delivering water evenly across a circular field. Invented by Nebraska farmer Frank Zybach in the late 1940s in Platte County, where *Pivot* is set, the design faced early skepticism but quickly gained traction once manufacturers began producing it. Today, it’s one of the most widely used irrigation methods in modern agriculture.



Playwright Alex Lubischer photographed at a pivot

A center pivot is made of pipe spans supported by trusses and mounted on wheeled towers, all fed by a pumping system powered by electricity, diesel, gas, or a tractor. Farmers value the system for its automation, uniform water distribution, and ability to apply precise amounts of water or agricultural chemicals. These benefits reduce labor and improve efficiency, making irrigation more predictable and manageable.

However, the technology comes with trade-offs. Center pivots are expensive to install, often costing more than \$150,000 for a typical quartersection setup, and their circular coverage leaves dry corners in square fields. Terrain changes, mechanical issues, and safety considerations also require attention. Even so, the system’s reliability and efficiency have made it a defining feature of irrigated agriculture across the United States and beyond.

Agricultural Chemicals and Health Risks

A brief history of “Roundup”

Glyphosate, the active ingredient in the popular herbicide Roundup, is a chemical that was first used to clean out mineral deposits in pipes and boilers. But in the 1970s, a chemist at Monsanto—one of the largest American-owned producers of chemical, agricultural, and biochemical products until it was acquired by the German pharmaceutical company Bayer in 2018—discovered its herbicidal power. By 1974, Monsanto had patented glyphosate and introduced Roundup to the market. The

herbicide became popular among producers for its ability to manage noxious weeds on a large agricultural scale, saving time and money. Farmers like George, the patriarch in *Pivot*, would have been drawn to Roundup for its efficiency. Before Monsanto commercialized Roundup, farmers would manage weeds by tilling up the ground, making multiple passes across a field with large machinery and exposing the topsoil—which could lead to soil erosion and compaction. Or, a producer would use a variety of selective herbicides, which each targets a specific weed, resulting in multiple trips across a field and greater use of resources like fuel, labor, and time. In other situations, producers would have to physically walk a field and hand remove weeds. Between 1974 and 2015, glyphosate became the most widely used herbicide in the world – and Monsanto held the exclusive rights to the use of glyphosate in products in the U.S. until their patent expired in September 2000.

Links to cancer

Roundup's efficiency and ubiquity came at a cost however. In 1985, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classified glyphosate as a Group C Carcinogen, meaning it has "suggestive evidence of carcinogenic potential." But 6 years later, in 1991, the EPA changed carcinogenic classification to Group E, meaning "evidence of non-carcinogenicity for humans." In a March 2015 study by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a group of 17 scientists classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans." But according to a 2017 determination from the Environmental Protection Agency, glyphosate is not likely to be carcinogenic to humans. The EPA stated that it "considered a significantly more extensive and relevant data set than the International Agency for Research on Cancer," including studies submitted to support registration of glyphosate and studies EPA identified in the open literature. However in late 2025, a key scientific study, originally published in 2000, that had concluded that glyphosate wasn't a human health risk, was retracted by the scientific journal that had published it, setting off a new round of calls for the EPA to reexamine the chemical's safety.

Court Cases against Monsanto

In 2016, Dewayne "Lee" Johnson, a groundskeeper for Benicia Unified School District in the San Francisco Bay area, claimed exposure to Roundup caused his non-Hodgkin Lymphoma.

During the first set of Roundup court cases, Monsanto was in the process of being acquired by German pharmaceutical company Bayer. Once the acquisition was complete, Bayer also acquired the Roundup lawsuits filed against Monsanto.

Today, Bayer is under pressure to address what it estimates as about 30,000 currently unsettled claims—and any future claims—that the company's Roundup products caused Non-Hodgkin lymphoma. In addition to announcing it will withdraw glyphosate-based products from the residential market, it has said it is working to find alternatives to glyphosate while continuing to insist the chemical is safe to use as directed. (Bayer says about 107,000 cases have been settled.)

In Platte County, where *Pivot* is set, an average of nearly 500 pounds of glyphosate is sprayed per square mile of land. Nebraska consistently reports higher rates of Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma than the US average, and cancer remains the leading cause of death in the state—with rates particularly high in Eastern Nebraska, where Platte County is located.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Rivendell Theatre would like to acknowledge that we reside on the traditional Territories of the Three Fire Peoples - the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi, and the Chicagoland area is also the territory of Ho-Chunk, Miami, Inoka, Menominee, Sac, Fox, and their descendants. By making a land acknowledgment, we recognize that Indigenous peoples are the traditional stewards of the land that we now occupy, living here long before Chicago was a city and still thriving here today. As we work, live, and play on these territories we must ask what we can do to right the historic wrongs of colonization and state violence, and support Indigenous communities' struggles for self-determination and sovereignty.

Despite the many changes the city has experienced, Rivendell sees the importance of the land and this place that has always been a home to many diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Please visit <https://aicchicago.org/> to learn about the work being done by the American Indian Center of Chicago.

TICKETING POLICY

Rivendell offers tickets on a sliding price scale to ensure accessibility while supporting the high-quality art our audiences enjoy. Discounts for seniors, students, military and veterans, as well as pay-what-you-can and other ticket options are available in addition to prices listed.

We never want anyone to miss a trip to Rivendell because of a tight budget. If you don't see a ticket option that works for you, please contact us at 773-334-7728 or boxoffice@rivendelltheatre.org.

ACCESSIBILITY

Rivendell is committed to creating a welcoming, inclusive, and comfortable experience for all audience members. We believe access is an essential part of storytelling and we strive to make our productions accessible to as many people as possible.

If you have questions about accessibility or would like to request an accommodation, please contact us at 773-334-7728 or boxoffice@rivendelltheatre.org. Our team is happy to help and will do their best to meet your needs.

Open Caption Performances:

- March 12
- March 19

TOWN HALL DISCUSSIONS

During the run of each production, Rivendell hosts town hall-style conversations that extend the work of the play beyond the stage and into the community. These discussions are designed to connect audiences with the people, ideas, and systems reflected in the story, creating space for shared learning, curiosity, and dialogue.

For *Pivot*, these conversations center on urban farming, food systems, land access, and community-based solutions in Chicago. Each town hall features practitioners actively doing this work; offering practical insight into how food is grown, distributed, and sustained in our city, and how communities are reclaiming agency through land and agriculture.

The *Pivot* town halls will take place following the Saturday matinee performances listed below. You are welcome to attend even if you do not attend the performance.

- ✿ **Saturday March 7th**
Iris Michael, Windy City Harvest
- ✿ **Saturday March 14th**
Haley LeRand & Jessica Davis, Global Gardens
- ✿ **Saturday March 21st**
Nyabweza Itaagi, Grow Greater Englewood

For details about content and panelists, join our email list at www.rivendelltheatre.org/yourvisit



SPAY Town Hall 2023

WELCOME TO RIVENDELL!

30 years ago, I founded Rivendell Theatre Ensemble with a group of exceptional artists who understood the unique power great stories can wield in opening minds and changing hearts. Since our inception, we have grown to fill a unique role as the only women-focused Equity storefront theatre in Chicago and one of only a handful in the country. We are proud to be recognized as a national force in new play development and as a home for women theatre artists. And I am equally proud of our Artistic Ensemble—current and past—whose dedication, artistic spark, and brilliance are at the very heart of Rivendell. As we launch our 30th Anniversary Season with this exquisite world premiere production of *Pivot*, we recognize there has never been a greater need for the arts than this very moment. We are all facing unprecedented challenges to our country and our humanity. The arts can shine an unflinching light on the toughest issues, dispel lies, promote possibilities, and provide new ideas and new perspectives. As we look forward, know that Rivendell will continue to develop and present bold work, amplify voices that need to be heard, support new and emerging women theatre artists, and seek out creative ways of connecting and supporting one another. I am so grateful you choose to join Rivendell on this journey; together I know we will shape a brighter future.

Tara M. Mallen

—Tara Mallen, Founding Artistic Director



PIVOT 2026 Photo credit: Jeff Kurysz

MISSION

Serving as a narrative of change, Rivendell Theatre Ensemble's mission is to elevate the lives of women through the power of theatre. We accomplish this by giving voice to women and their stories through artistic recognition of their lives, and by creating a rewarding experience for audiences and community through insightful stories and expansive outreach.

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Tara Mallen, Founding Artistic Director

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MOTHERHOUSE 2023 Photo Credit: Michael Brosilow

A LEGACY OF ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE AND ADVOCACY FOR WOMEN'S VOICES



Rivendell Theatre Ensemble continually strives to find insightful work and produce bold plays that push the boundaries of its ensemble of artists, collaborators and administrators.

It has been over 100 years since the 19th Amendment was ratified, granting white women the right to vote, and almost 60 years since women of color were given that right through the Voting Rights Act. And yet today women still struggle to have their voices heard or be seen.

Serving as a narrative of change, Rivendell's mission is to elevate the lives of women through the power of theatre. We accomplish this by giving voice to women and their stories through artistic recognition of their lives with the support of an award-winning ensemble of artists, combating the inequities experienced by women in the theater landscape through gender parity at all levels of theatrical production, helping other women theater artists find artistic recognition and visibility by providing mentorship and support through subsidized theater and rehearsal space, and by creating a rewarding experience for audiences and community by being a catalyst for conversation through insightful stories and outreach.

After three decades firmly in the cultural landscape of Chicago, Rivendell Theatre Ensemble has learned one very important thing: even in a small space you can tell big stories. And telling big, impactful stories is what Rivendell does best. Artistic Director Tara Mallen founded Rivendell Theatre Ensemble in 1996 with a group of like-minded artists who understood that stories must be shared to open minds. And since its inception, Rivendell has grown to uniquely fill an important role in the Chicago and national theatre community as the only women-focused Equity storefront theatre in Chicago and one of a handful in the country. In its 30-year history, Rivendell has earned 16 Joseph Jefferson Awards and more than 40 nominations. It is recognized as a national force in new play development and as a home for women theatre artists, engaging over 200 artists and 3,000+ audience members each year through its mainstage season, new work development, and outreach.

Learn more about our 30th Anniversary Celebration at www.rivendelltheatre.org.

Rivendell is Chicago's leading theatre company dedicated to producing new plays focused on women's stories, experiences, and issues. Join us for a show and you'll experience great plays with provocative social themes shot through a distinctly female lens.



THE TASTERS 2018 Photo Credit: Nathanael Filbert

MAKING ART POSSIBLE

Rivendell Theatre Ensemble is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. On the following pages we thank the donors who underwrite about 80% of our budget, complementing ticket sales and rental income to support equitable artist pay, high production values, and new play development.

If you are on this list, **we thank you.** You help us elevate the lives of women through the power of theatre. When you hear applause here, know that some of it is for you!

If you are not on this list yet, **please join the Rivendell family by making a donation today.** Every dollar makes a real difference at Rivendell—from paying theatre artists to providing the equipment and supplies they need to maintaining the facilities in which they create.

Please consider making a one-time or monthly donation by clicking the following

www.rivendelltheatre.org/donate

Or give right now with Venmo @rivendelltheatre

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