

For Immediate Release

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Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer

Written & performed by **Libby Skala**
with music by **Steve May**

*"Whoever saves a life, it is considered as if
he saved an entire world." - THE TALMUD*

"Brilliantly compelling. Simply gorgeous."
THE LONDON FREE PRESS

[PRESENTING ORGANIZATION] presents **Libby Skala**, winner of the London Fringe's Best Solo Performer Award, in her new solo show **IRENA SENDLER: RESCUING THE RESCUER**, a heroic intergenerational story about the power of one person to effect change in the world. Music is composed and performed by **Steve May**. [LOCATION], [DATES], [TICKET INFO].

Through a kaleidoscope of characters, **Libby Skala** brings to riveting life the true story of **Irena Sendler**, a Polish Catholic social worker who defies Nazi rule to organize an underground network that successfully rescues 2,500 Jewish children from certain death in the Warsaw ghetto during WWII. For decades, her heroism remains hidden behind the iron curtain. In 1999, three Protestant high school students in rural Kansas stumble upon a brief mention of her in an old magazine clipping. Their curiosity evolves into an award-winning National History Day project, bringing Sendler to international attention. It propels them across the ocean to Poland, where they befriend the elderly Irena and learn first-hand how one person "answering the need of her heart," can impact history.

The idea for **IRENA SENDLER: RESCUING THE RESCUER** was sparked by an unexpected meeting in New York with **Norman Conard**, the remarkable Kansas high school history teacher whose students instigated Sendler's 2007 Nobel Peace Prize nomination through their work. Mr. Conard has since founded the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes, an organization working to transform classrooms and communities through student-driven projects celebrating unsung heroes whose lives illustrate the power of one to create positive change. Conard encouraged Skala to develop a one-woman show about Sendler, and invited her to Kansas where she met his former student Megan Stewart Felt, program director of the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes and delved into the transformative first-hand accounts of Sendler. Special thanks to Life in a Jar Foundation: www.IrenaSendler.org.

RUNNING TIME: 60 MIN. / GENERAL AUDIENCE / WWW.IRENASENLER.LIBBYSKALA.COM

Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer

Bios

LIBBY SKALA (playwright/actress)

Libby Skala won an Impresario Award at the London Fringe Festival for **IRENA SENDLER: RESCUING THE RESCUER**, which was developed with the support of Life in a Jar Foundation and appeared at Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, sponsored by The Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida. She has performed her solo play **LiLiA!** (about her grandmother, actress Lilia Skala) to sold-out houses in Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, Toronto and Winnipeg (where it was selected "Best Show" out of 118 shows by CJUM Radio at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival). In New York it was produced Off-Broadway by Mirror Repertory Company; it opened Vancouver's Pacific Theatre season, ran in London, Edinburgh, Dresden, Berlin and Tbilisi, Rep. of Georgia. Libby's second show **A TIME TO DANCE**, about her great aunt a dance therapy pioneer won Best Solo Performer Award at the London Fringe Festival. **FELICITAS**, the story of another great aunt, an infant nurse, completes the immigrant sister trilogy. All shows have toured internationally.

In New York, Libby appeared at The Jewish Museum with Rosemary Harris, Marian Seldes, Elizabeth Ashley, Jayne Atkinson and David Margulies, reading from books published by The Feminist Press. In Canada, she played Viola in the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival's production of **TWELFTH NIGHT**. In Washington, D.C., she appeared in Jeffrey Sweet's **VALUE OF NAMES** at Theatre J. She makes appearances in the award-winning film festival hit *Dogs in the Basement aka Unscrewed*, and in Jonathan Glazer's *Birth*, starring Nicole Kidman. A graduate of Oberlin College, she is an award recipient of the Pandella Cultural Fund in Switzerland and lives with her musician husband in Brooklyn, New York. www.LibbySkala.com

STEVE MAY (composer/musician)

Kentucky native Steve May has been playing music since the tender age of three, when he made his first make-shift violin out of a ruler taped to a cereal box. His background includes classical, country, Celtic, bluegrass, folk, jazz, and Brazilian music. On fiddle, he alternates between an acoustic and an electric 7-string with the range of violin, viola and cello. On the mandolin, he alternates between an acoustic and baritone electric. That versatility allows him to switch seamlessly between traditional sounds and crunchy rock and hip hop grooves. His interest in various musical traditions has led him to a variety of recording and performing projects. He composed and performs music for Libby Skala's one-woman shows **FELICITAS** and **IRENA SENDLER: RESCUING THE RESCUER**. Other credits include: Joe Bayer Band; Erica Sunshine Lee; Beltaine's Fire; Steve Ferguson and Midwest Creole Ensemble; The Clearing; Three at Last; and Lisa Redfern. www.SMay.net

The London Free Press

POSTMEDIA

FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2017

Rescuing the Rescuer brilliantly compelling



JOE BELANGER
AT THE FRINGE

Irena Sendler never thought she did anything special.

Her philosophy was simple, learned from her father, a doctor: "If a person is drowning, you save them. I did nothing that every normal person would do under the circumstances."

The circumstances? World War II, Nazi occupied Poland, the Warsaw Ghetto where more than 400,000 Jews were imprisoned and thousands of children faced certain death, as did anyone (and their families) who tried to save them.

Sendler helped save 2,500 of the children.

Would you?

Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer, written and performed by Brooklyn-based actor/playwright Libby Skala at Sprit Family Theatre for London Fringe tells the story of Sendler and how a couple of high school students in a small Nebraska town discovered Sendler's story and told it in a play, *Life In A Jar*.

It's a compelling story, beautifully told by Skala who plays about a dozen characters, each transformed into a person with the shifting and retying of a shawl, body language and voice.

The script is taut, tasteful and brilliantly constructed.

The show opens with a plaintive violin, played by Steve May, and Irena singing a prayer. Simply gorgeous.

See **IRENA** | C5



If you go

What: *Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer*, written and performed by Libby Skala, of Brooklyn, N.Y., presented by London Fringe.

When: Friday, 8 p.m., Sunday, 2 p.m., Monday, 7 p.m., Wednesday, 8 p.m. and June 9, 6:30 p.m.

Where: Sprite Family Theatre, Covent Garden Market.

Tickets: \$14.

Libby Skala plays about a dozen characters in *Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer*, playing at Sprit Family Theatre as part of the Fringe Festival.

MIKE HENSEN/THE LONDON FREE PRESS

Inspiring slice of history

IRENA from C1

Then we're introduced to one character after another: the students, the teacher, a parent, Sendler's relatives and one of the many neighbours Sendler recruited to hide the children she smuggled out of the ghetto.

The history teacher, Mr. C, assigned students to do a research project and one, Liz Chambers, who'd been abandoned by her drug addict mother, found a brief story about Sendler among his suggestions. She started researching and was inspired to continue trying to understand why mothers would give up the children they love to Sendler knowing they'd never see them again.

Sendler and the others involved in the smuggling buried lists of the hidden children in jars in order to keep track of their identities, new and old, to reunite them with

their families.

The aim was to return the children to their original families when the war was over. Most of the families died in the Holocaust.

During the war she was tortured and imprisoned by the Nazis and sentenced to death, but survived.

None of the children were ever discovered and all survived.

After the war, we learn, Sendler was punished and lived in relative obscurity, her role mostly unknown or ignored by the communist regime for her role in the Polish resistance.

Irena Sendler is a fabulous, inspiring slice of history, beautifully told and performed to deliver a simple message: One person can change the world.

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Irena Sendler: Rescuing the Rescuer

Laurie Bursch

Reviewer

June 4, 2017 at 11:27 am

A mournful violin sets the scene for a young Jewish boy's song. He's the first of ten people played by the talented Libby Skala, in this moving tale of a woman we've never heard of – Irena Sendler, a Polish woman who saved 2,500 Jewish children during the Second World War. As one of the two Kansas high school students in the piece asks, "How come we're never heard of this woman?" Skala conjures up these two, and eight more – Irena's children and neighbours, the teenagers and their teacher – with a single scarf for a prop, along with accents and postures, bringing these honest, brave, real people to us. It's a powerful story told in a compelling way.



How one woman saved 2,500 lives

Posted by Dale Fenwick | Date: February 05, 2017 | in: Faith and Inspiration, Featured, Home Page



Nearly everyone knows that Oscar Schindler saved 1,200 people during the Holocaust, thanks to Steven Spielberg. But there were others who saved Jews, including Irena Sendler. Sendler was a Polish Catholic social worker who defied Nazi rule to organize an underground network that successfully rescued 2,500 Jewish children from certain death in the Warsaw ghetto during WWII.

For decades, her heroism remained hidden behind the iron curtain, until one day in 1999 when three Protestant high school students from rural Kansas stumbled upon a brief mention of her in an old magazine clipping. Eager to know more, the determined young Kansans, after exhaustive research, wrote and performed a play portraying her work for National History Day. Their award-winning project brought Irena Sendler to international attention. It propelled them across the ocean to her doorstep where they found a transformative friendship with the sparkling nonagenarian who teaches them first-hand how a single individual "answering the need of her heart" can change the course of the world.

The Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida (<http://www.holocaustedu.org/>) highlighted the role of rescuers during the Holocaust with a special performance centered on the life of Irena Sendler yesterday.



Libby Skala. Photo by Doug Miner

The moving one-woman show was performed by **Libby Skala** (<http://www.libbyskala.com>) who brought to dramatic life the true story of Irena Sendler.

This performance was part of **Arts for ALL Day sponsored by United Arts of Central Florida** (<https://unitedarts.cc/arts-for-all-day/>). Arts for ALL Day was a new, must-see event for all Central Floridians, with a focus of introducing new communities to local arts and cultural organizations throughout Central Florida. The free event was created by United Arts of Central Florida and was held yesterday, at Loch Haven Cultural Park in Orlando. The family-friendly, taste-of-the-arts style event, took place in Loch Haven's multiple theaters and indoor and outdoor exhibit spaces, throughout the Mennello Museum of American Art, Orlando Museum of Art, Orlando Repertory Theatre, Orlando Science Center and Orlando Shakespeare Theater venues.