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## **The American Century Theater Launches Its 15<sup>th</sup> Season with Vietnam Drama: *A Piece of My Heart* (1991), by Shirley Lauro September 11–October 10**

In 1994, The American Century Theater launched its quest to bring Washington area audiences the full range of 20th century American theater. It begins its 15<sup>th</sup> season with a fascinating, intense drama written in the only decade of that “American Century” that TACT has yet to explore—the nineties. The play is *A Piece of My Heart*, by Shirley Lauro, and it celebrates the unsung women who served in Vietnam.

The 1991 play was inspired by the 1986 oral history of the same name, compiled by Keith Walker. Walker recounted the stories of 26 of the estimated 1,500 American women who went to Southeast Asia in the sixties—as nurses, civilian humanitarian workers, and entertainers. These women fought a different war than the servicemen, but it was often no less harrowing, involving battles with their consciences, with fear and frustration, with the South Vietnamese and the American military command, with substandard medical resources, and, always, with men.

Director Jason Beagle suggested the play to TACT artistic director Jack Marshall as a good fit with the company’s mission. The theater had begun its exploration of the Vietnam War’s impact with *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* (1970, produced by TACT in 2008), but that play is a dark fantasy; *A Piece of My Heart* is painfully real.

“This is a play made for intimate performance spaces,” Marshall notes. “The Vietnam War was a distant, televised experience for much of the country. Our small theater gives audiences the ‘close ups’ that reveal, in nuances of expression and body language, what the women who served endured. And in Jason, we have a director with a deep personal response to the play—that’s critical.”

To bring *A Piece of My Heart* to life, Producer Sherri L. Perper and Beagle have recruited an ensemble largely new to TACT: Jeri Marshall, Melissa Bailey, Momo Nakamura, Robin Covington, Anne Veal, and Greg Gallagher (who has the daunting challenge of playing all twenty of the men in the women’s stories) join Christine Hirrel, last seen at TACT in the spring 2009 production of *Native Son*.

The set design is by HannaH J Crowell, who recently won accolades for her set for TACT’s production of Edward Albee’s *Seascape*. Lighting design is by Brian S. Allard, sound design by

Timothy Morse, and costumes and properties by Ceci Albert. Stage managers are Christine Lange and Robert Pierce.

“This play makes us think—about the meaning of service, heroism, forgiveness, sacrifice, despair, depression, rejection, friendship, about trauma, life, and death, about the possibility of rebirth,” Beagle says. “I can’t imagine anyone *not* having a powerful response to it.”

### **Performance Information for *A Piece of My Heart***

There will be one pay-what-you-can **preview**, on Thursday, September 10, at 8:00 pm. The production **opens Friday, September 11, 2009** and runs through Saturday, October 10, 2009 at Theater II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 South Lang Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206. Performances most weeks are Thursday through Saturday evenings at 8:00 pm, with weekend matinees at 2:30 pm on September 13, 19, 20, 26, 27, and October 3, 4, and 10. There will be an additional pay-what-you-can performance at 8:00 pm on Wednesday, September 16.

**REVIEWERS PLEASE NOTE: The press is invited to the show’s performance on Saturday, September 12, at 8:00 pm.** Press photos are available at **[www.AmericanCentury.org/photos/piece](http://www.AmericanCentury.org/photos/piece)**.

**More information is available at [www.AmericanCentury.org](http://www.AmericanCentury.org) or by calling the theater at 703-998-4555.**

*The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing significant 20<sup>th</sup> century American plays and musicals at risk of being forgotten. TACT is funded in part by Arlington County through the Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources and the Arlington Commission for the Arts, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and many generous donors.*

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