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Press photos at <http://www.americancentury.org/photos/stalag>

Suspicion . . . as Deadly as Betrayal— The American Century Theater's *Stalag 17* Opens March 26, 2010

The American Century Theater continues its 2009–2010 season with the classic prisoner-of-war drama, *Stalag 17*. Written by Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski, the play is based on their actual experiences in the World War II, Nazi-run, POW camp in Austria, where, in late 1944, more than 30,000 prisoners—4,000 of them Americans—were held. TACT's production brings to life the grim reality, deprivation, and risks of wartime imprisonment, punctuated by often-comic efforts to stay sane. Plotting escape is the daily agenda, but plans are made with the knowledge that anyone among them could be a traitor.

Stalag 17 first opened on Broadway in 1951, with soon-to-become-Broadway-legend John Ericson as Sefton. The story was adapted by Billy Wilder and Edwin Blum to script the 1953 Academy Award–winning film, which also won William Holden the Best Actor award. The play's tone and style influenced many iconic war films, including *The Great Escape*, starring Steve McQueen, James Garner, and Richard Attenborough.

Director William Aitken notes that “TACT's *Stalag 17* is not your father's *Stalag 17*: though it will contain humor, the production aims to bring to the stage the grittiness and depth that are the reality of war and of life in a POW camp.” Aitken last directed for TACT in 2007, bringing to the stage Eugene O'Neil's *Desire under the Elms*. He has also trod the boards in multiple roles in *The Titans*, TACT's 2008 production based on the Cuban missile crisis (and authored by Robert McElwaine, TACT's resident playwright, who passed away this past January).

TACT Producing Director **Sherri L. Perper** has assembled the design team that will transform Gunston Theatre II into an Austrian Prison Camp. Designers include **Anndi Daleske** (set), **Rip Claassen** (costumes), **Cheryl Ann Gnerlich** (lighting), **Ian Armstrong** (sound), and **Ceci Albert** (props). **Jameson Shroyer** (technical director/master carpenter), **Casey Kaleba** (fight choreographer), and **Robert Pierce** (stage manager) complete the production staff.

Stalag 17's “all star” is headed up by **Tony Bullock** (Sefton), **Hans Dettmar** (Schultz), and **Jon Townson** (Price). Bullock (who earned his MFA from the Asolo Conservatory at Florida State University) and Dettmar (a WATCH award nominee for his portrayal of John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*) are making their TACT debuts. Townson worked with Aitken in *The Titans*, where he played John F. Kennedy.

James Finley (Dunbar), **Donald Osborne** (Shapiro), and **Steve Lebens** (Reed) return to perform with TACT after a brief hiatus following the recent production of the fifties comedy, *Will Success*

Spoil Rock Hunter? **Karl Bittner** (SS Captain) and **Bill Gordon** (Hoffy) played, respectively, in TACT's *Life With Father* and *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*. (Gordon, a radio professional, also produces TACT's "Before the Curtain Is Raised" podcast series.) **David Olmsted** (Horney), who has worked backstage with TACT, now assumes his first onstage role with the company.

Rounding out the cast are TACT newcomers **Tom Eisman** (Herb), **Jay Hardee** (Marko), **Matthew Meixler** (McCarthy, Second SS Guard), **John Stange** (Stosh), **James Svatko** (Geneva Man), and **Gabriel Swee** (Duke).

Performance Information

The press is invited to the Saturday, March 27, 2010, performance at 8:00 pm.

Show dates are Friday March 26–Saturday April 17.

Preview performances (pay what you can), Wednesday, March 24 and Thursday, March 25

Opening night performance and reception, Friday, March 26

Pay-what-you-can performance, Wednesday, March 31

Post show talk-back discussion with members of the cast and artistic staff, Thursday, April 1

School matinee, Wednesday April 14 at 10:00 am

Show times are Thursday–Saturday evenings 8 pm and Saturday/Sunday matinees 2:30 pm. No matinee performances March 27 or April 4.

Location

Theater II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 South Lang Street, Arlington VA 22206

Tickets

Prices range from \$26–32.

Discounts are available for seniors (65+), students, active duty military, and groups.

Children under 18 are admitted free with a (full-price) adult (space permitting, limit 5).

Tickets can be ordered online at www.americancentury.org or by calling 703.998.4555.

More information and reservations

Call 703.998.4555, email office@americancentury.org, or visit www.AmericanCentury.org.

Directions

Visit <http://americancentury.org/directions>

Gunston Arts Center, Theater II, is about 10 minutes from downtown DC and 5 minutes from Shirlington Village. Free, ample, well-lighted **parking** is available.

About TACT

The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing significant 20th 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.