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**“An American Century Christmas,” A Celebration of Holiday
Music and Memories from TV, Radio, Recordings and Hollywood,
Runs December 10-January 4**

American Century Theater audiences are getting a special gift this holiday season: *An American Century Christmas*, an old-fashioned holiday special full of old classics, Christmas chestnuts, memories, laughs, tears and Christmas spirit, opening Wednesday, December 10 and running through January 4 at Theater II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 S. Lang Street in Arlington, Virginia.

An American Century Christmas is a two-hour reflection on how America celebrated Christmas between 1900 and 2000, the century that gave us the Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular and Macy’s Parade, “White Christmas” and the Grinch. For children, it’s a chance to experience many of the cherished Christmas moments their parents enjoyed. And for grown-ups, it’s Christmas like it used to be, before legal squabbles over decorations, culture wars, and “Bad Santa.”

Where else can you get O. Henry, Scrooge, George Bailey, Rudolph and “Santa Baby” in one show, along with mistletoe and “carols ‘round the tree”? If you think you’ll need a boost this year to get in the Christmas spirit, join American Century Theater for this “new” show which echoes the success of the 2003-04 season holiday offering, *If Only in My Dreams*.

If Only in My Dreams, also assembled for TACT by Artistic Director Jack Marshall and Musical Director Tom Fuller, recreated the emotional Christmases in the U.S. during the Second World War, told through song and the letters of servicemen and their families. The show was the surprise hit of the season, filling houses well after New Year’s Day. The same creative team has assembled this new Christmas show, consistent with the company mission of bringing audiences the best of 20th-Century entertainment before it is forgotten.

“*An American Century Christmas* has a different feel and focus,” says Fuller. “It traces the celebration of Christmas in America by the popular culture, blending familiar songs and recordings with the moments from television, movies and radio that have become part of our collective memories, the sounds, sights and themes that defined Christmas for a century.”

An American Century Christmas contains selections from over 70 songs, including salutes to Gene Autry, romantic Christmas standards, animated Christmas specials, classic Christmas movies, and more, all presented in the format of the TV Christmas variety show specials that used to be staples of the family holiday experience. Longtime TACT audiences will remember that old television shows have given TACT some of its most applauded productions, such as “The Carol Burnett Show” retrospective *Laughter at Ten O’Clock* and the celebrated company debut play, *Twelve Angry Men*.

“This is a family show if there ever was one, and children under 18 who attend with a paying adult are admitted free!” notes producer Ann Marie Plubell. Marshall and Fuller handle the direction and musical direction, with frequent TACT accompanist Alvin Smithson (*Hellzapoppin*) at the keyboard. The 10 member cast makes the sound of 20 in the intimate Theatre Two, and is filled with musical theater veterans from around the area.

The husband and wife team of Mick and Patricia Tinder host the evening: both appeared in TACT’s recent *Stunt Girl*, and have thrilled area audiences as John and Abigail Adams in *1776*. Steve Lebens (*Hellzapoppin*, *Call Me Mister*), Kathryn Fuller (*The Cradle Will Rock*; *Hollywood Pinafore*, *Hellzapoppin*), Scott Kenison (*Laughter at Ten O’Clock*), Glenn White (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Hellzapoppin*, *The Crucible*), Adam Juran (*Stunt Girl*), and Bill Gordon (*Happy Birthday*, *Wanda June*, *Cops*) round out the cast, along with newcomers McCall Noelle Doyle and Ann DeMichele.

Helping to create this new-old special is a team of TACT favorites: AnnMarie Castrigno as lighting designer; Rip Claassen, costumes; Michael Null, technical director; and Trena Weiss-Null, who will adapt her set for *Life With Father*. Cast members Kathryn Fuller and Bill Gordon, who will double as assistant director and sound designer. Rhonda Hill will stage manage for the 35th time at the company.

Sound designer Bill Gordon declares, "Television Christmas variety specials are almost an extinct art form, but for almost half a century they were the way Americans got into the Christmas spirit. It's a wonderful format that mixes music, comedy and drama, and I've always want to do one."

Performance Information:

An American Century Christmas opens Wed., December 10, 2008 and runs through Sun., January 4, 2009 at Theater II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 S. Lang Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206. Performances most weeks are Thursday through Saturday evenings at 8 pm, with Saturday and/or Sunday matinees at 2:30 PM, and with additional weeknight shows during the weeks of Christmas and New Year’s.

More information is available at www.AmericanCentury.org or by calling the theater at 703-998-4555 to order tickets.

The press is invited to the show’s opening on Wed., December 10, and also its next performance on Thurs., December 11. PLEASE NOTE: the December 10 Opening Night performance will begin at 7:30 PM. The December 11 show will occur at the usual 8 PM time. All performances are in the Gunston Arts Center’s Theatre Two.

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 supported 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, numerous foundations and many generous donors.

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