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For Immediate Release

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**American Century Theater Presents
Washington Area Premiere of *Cops*;
1976 Trend-setting Drama Opens January 4**

It never appeared on Broadway. Nonetheless, *Cops*, the intense 1976 police drama that begins a month-long run at Theater Two in Arlington's Gunston Art Center on January 4, embodies the American Century Theater's core mission of presenting important 20th Century plays. The ground-breaking thriller by Terry Curtis Fox had a major impact on American culture and entertainment, and is sure to have an impact on audiences as well.

"*Cops* marks the moment in American culture when police dramas stopped being about cops and robbers," says American Century Theater artistic director Jack Marshall. Through most of the Seventies, police dramas on television and movies celebrated the undeniable heroism of urban law enforcement by glamorizing it in unrealistic shows like "Charlie's Angels" and "Starsky and Hutch." Then Terry Curtis Fox wrote *Cops* for Chicago's daring Organic Theater, and the sensational play ripped away the glamour for all time. The play's complex portrayal of police as complex and conflicted participants in a sometimes crude and brutal environment led directly to "Hill Street Blues," the legendary television show that paved the way for "NYPD Blue," "The Wire" and "The Shield." "Cops" also helped launch the careers of Dennis Franz, later the star of "NYPD Blue," and David Mamet favorite Joe Mantegna. And today nobody thinks of urban law enforcement as "glamorous."

The play realistically depicts a brief, violent and disturbing encounter between a bungling criminal and three police officers in a Chicago diner. Director Stephen Jarrett, whose previous work with TACT included *Luv*, believes the close proximity of the Theater Two audience will create exactly the effect that the playwright intended. "You need to know the cops, you need to know the victims, you need to feel the violence and the danger," he says. "This is where live theater trumps television. You're not in your living room. You're *there*, where it all is going down. One minute you are looking someone in the eyes, and the next minute, he's shot dead."

Jarrett's accomplished cast is a mixture of TACT audience favorites and impressive newcomers. Shane Wallis, whose powerful presence contributed to such TACT productions as *Machinal*, *Moby Dick Rehearsed* and *Mister Roberts*, and John Bailey, whose quirky characters have been highlights of such shows as *Hollywood Pinafore*, *The Boys in the Band* and *The Seven Year Itch*, join with Regan Wilson, Honora Talbott, Robert Heckart, Bill Gordon, Brian Razzino and Bruce Follmer, last with TACT in its very first production, *Twelve Angry Men*. Not all of them are left standing by the end of the play.

Producer Rhonda Hill and Stage Manager Alecia Oliver have entrusted the show's set design to Trena Weiss-Null, with lighting by AnnMarie Castrigno. Karen Curie is handling the props, including several guns, and the sound design is by technical director Michael Null. Rip Claassen is the costume designer.

"*Cops* is a departure for The American Century Theater in some ways," says Marshall "It is short, with the action unfolding in real time. The words are the harsh language of the street, and whatever truths lie in the play must be extracted by audience members from a bloody incident that shows human beings at their best and worst."

Cops opens January 4, and runs through January 26. The American Century Theater performs at Theater II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 S. Lang Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206. Performances are Thursday through Saturday evenings at 8 pm, with Saturday or Sunday matinees at 2:30 PM. More information is available at www.americancentury.org.

The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing, great, important, and neglected 20th Century American playwrights. TACT is funded in part by the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, numerous foundations and many generous donors.