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For Immediate Release

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## **American Century Theater Revives *Life With Father*, Broadway's All-Time Most Popular Play, Starting *November 25***

The American Century Theater sometimes describes itself as the company that produces the “greatest shows you’ve never seen.” That certainly describes the Arlington company’s upcoming revival of Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse’s family comedy, *Life With Father*, a play that had unequaled fame and success on Broadway for more than a decade.

“It used to be described as the one play every American had to see: it was compared to Niagara Falls and the Washington Monument,” says artistic director Jack Marshall. “But over time, regional theaters moved on to newer plays, and audiences lost the chance to discover why it was America’s best-loved comedy for so long. Well, our job is to give them that chance .”

Lindsay and Crouse were among the most successful creators of Broadway gold in the 1930’s and 40’s, but none of their hits had the impact or staying power of *Life With Father*, which shattered box office records and also spawned a successful movie (starring William Powell, Irene Dunn, and Elizabeth Taylor), and television show. Howard Lindsay adored his play, based on the childhood recollections of author Clarence Day, Jr., so much that he cast himself in the leading role of Clarence Day, Sr., opposite his real-life wife, actress Dorothy Stickney. He stayed in the part for its entire run, creating the archetypical role of the irascible, lovable, fallible father that became the model for all TV sit-com dads to follow, from Robert Young in “Father Knows Best” to Tom Bosley in “Happy Days” to Bill Cosby in “The Cosby Show.”

*Life With Father* opened in 1939, in the teeth of the Depression, and the daily travails of the large Day family in a more innocent America was exactly what audiences wanted to see. “Lindsay and Crouse were masters of stage comedy with *heart*,” says the play’s director, **Rip Claassen**. “Like Neil Simon, they seldom got proper appreciation from critics, who regarded them as engineers rather than artists. But they knew how to

assemble comedies that worked, and what they built, they built to last. It shows. The script is as solid as they come, and the laughs are all still there. And so is the heart.”

TACT’s production has an unusual feature: the run is split into two parts, the first beginning **Tuesday, November 25 and ending December 6**, and a second run beginning **January 8 and running through January 24**. In between, TACT will present its special holiday musical revue, *An American Century Christmas*, which will open on December 10.

To play the classic role of stockbroker Clarence Day Senior, Claassen tapped TACT veteran **Joe Cronin**, most recently enjoyed by American Century audiences as the perpetually quizzical “Loose Leaf” in *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*, and a stand-out in over a dozen of the company’s productions. His wife will be the witty and antic **Deborah Rinn Critzer**, also featured in *Wanda June* as well as *Hellzapoppin* and *The Autumn Garden*. **Brian Crane**, familiar to TACT audiences for his work in *Wanda June* and *Hellzapoppin*, returns in the pivotal comic role of the Reverend. The rest of the large cast are newcomers to the company: **Karl Bittner** (as Clarence, Jr.), **Billy Puschel**, **Paul Hogan**, **Scott Clark**, **Sarah Holt**, **Megan Graves**, **Karen Lange**, **Ken Clayton**, **Seth Vaughn**, **Lexi Haddad**, **Tamra Testerman**, **Laura Rocklyn**, and **Shelby Sours**.

**Producer Sherri Haddad’s** design and production team includes assistant director **Tiffany Ford**, stage manager **David Olmsted**, the costume and props team of **Ceci Albert**, **Susan Sedgwick**, **Margaret Mook** and **Kate Dorrell**, **Jen Durham** on makeup and hair design, frequent TACT lighting designer **Ann Marie Castrigno**, sound designer **Bill Gordon**, and the season’s set team of **Trena Weiss-Null** and technical director **Michael Null**.

**The press is invited to the show’s opening on November 25, and also its next performance, which occurs after Thanksgiving, on November 28<sup>th</sup>, both at 8 PM in the Gunston Arts Center’s Theatre Two.**

The American Century Theater performs 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 matinées at 2:30 PM. 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, great, important, and neglected 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

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