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For Immediate Release

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**Cuban Missile Crisis Drama Gets Long-Delayed World Premiere:
The Titans Opens July 18 at Gunston Theater Two in Arlington**

“I lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis,” says *The Titans*’ director **Jack Marshall**. “But when I first heard Jon Townson deliver President Kennedy’s speech announcing that Russian nuclear missiles had been detected in Cuba, I felt a real chill. Could this really have happened? Today, it seems like a bad dream.”

Indeed it did happen. For thirteen tense and frightening days in October, 1962, the world stood on the brink of nuclear war while President John F. Kennedy and U.S.S.R. Premier Nikita Khrushchev employed threats, secret communications, public posturing, deception, and back-room maneuvers to avoid mutual destruction while pursuing national interests. How the nightmare scenario developed, and the little-known facts of how Armageddon was finally averted, is the riveting story told by *The Titans*, a play commissioned by the Kennedy Center in the 1990s but only now receiving a full production as part of The American Century Theater’s “Reflections” series. The series features productions of new plays about significant 20th Century figures and events.

TACT Resident Playwright **Robert McElwaine** (who wrote the book for TACT’s Helen Hayes winning musical, *Danny and Sylvia*) was Kennedy Center president Roger Stevens’ assistant and house playwright when Stevens asked him to research and author a drama about the Cuban Missile Crisis. A former Hollywood screenwriter with a background in politics, McElwaine jumped at the opportunity. “I spent weeks talking to the participants who were still living: Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, and many others,” says McElwaine. “I read every book, transcript and document I could find. And I ultimately decided that this story didn’t need much fictionalizing. Most of the dialogue and speeches in the script are authentic and documented.” Despite McElwaine’s dedication to accuracy, the play, which had been scheduled for a Kennedy Center run, was blocked by the Kennedy family. “We never were told why,” he says. “But the play--like the facts--is more sympathetic to Khrushchev than Robert Kennedy’s version of the story in his book, Thirteen Days.”

Newly-updated by the playwright with information that only recently has come to light, and featuring four more characters than the original, *The Titans* is finally getting a full production. Playing JFK is **Jon Townson**, a stalwart of Keegan Theater most recently featured in *Translations*. **Kim-Scott Miller**, who starred as the understanding father in TACT's season opener, *Ah, Wilderness!*, has a very different challenge as the complex, earthy and threatening Khrushchev. **John Tweel**, TACT's versatile company member who just ended a run as a Founding Father in Olney's *1776*, plays Robert Kennedy, while **Brian Razzino** appears in his third TACT show this season (*Cops; Wanda June*) as Soviet Foreign Minister and Khrushchev confidante Andrei Gromyko. Perhaps the most challenging role of all falls to **William Aitken**, who starred as the Hemingway-esque big-game hunter in *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*. Aitken will portray four historical figures who couldn't be more different: U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, Soviet military strategist Rodion Malinowsky, Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, and bellicose Air Force chief Curtis LeMay.

The intimate in-the-round setting for *The Titans*, designed by **Trena Weiss-Null** and lit by **AnnMarie Castrigno**, will give the audience a "fly on the wall" view of the tense, contentious and often emotional meetings that occurred on both sides of the Atlantic during those fateful October days. **Rip Claassen** will recreate the Sixties era costumes, and sound designer **Bill Gordon** has the task of reproducing the broadcasts and bulletins that informed millions of anxious Americans as the crisis was unfolding. Producer **Jason Beagle** is doubling as Assistant Director for the production, and **Rhonda Hill** is stage managing. **Michael Null** is the technical director.

Marshall, TACT's Artistic Director, directed a staged reading of an earlier version of *The Titans*, and was determined to take the drama to the next step. "I was fascinated by Bob's play from the moment I read it," he says. A native of Kennedy country in Boston and an American Presidency buff who often lectures on leadership, ethics and crisis management, Marshall has found directing the play a special pleasure, if an occasionally unsettling one. "In rehearsal, something will happen in a scene that makes me remember how very close we came to the unthinkable," he says with a shiver. "I hope *The Titans* will help us all recall the lessons of October, 1962. They are still vital today."

***The Titans* opens Friday, July 18, and runs through Saturday, August 16. The Press is invited to the performances on Saturday evening, July 19, at 8 PM, and Sunday afternoon, July 20, at 2:30 PM. The American Century Theater performs at Theater II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 S. Lang Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206, 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 company may also be reached at 703-998-4555, and at info@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.