The American Century Theater
presents

A PIECE OF MY HEART

by Shirley Lauro
Suggested by the book by Keith Walker

ON STAGE
Mt. Vernon Place United Methodist Church Theater
900 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington DC
November 6–21, 2009

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by Shirley Lauro
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Mt. Vernon Place United Methodist Church Theater
900 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington DC

Director
Jason M. Beagle

Producing Director
Sherri L. Perper

Stage Manager
Bob Pierce

Set Design
HannaH J Crowell

Master Carpenter
Christie Swaney

Lighting Design
Brian S. Allard

Sound Design
Tim Morse

Costume/Props Design
Ceci Albert

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A Piece of My Heart is produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.


Please—Silence cell phones and other sound producing devices. The use of recording equipment and/or the taking of photographs during the performance are strictly prohibited.

There will be one 15-minute intermission.

About The American Century Theater

The American Century Theater was founded in 1994. We are a professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to presenting great, important, and worthy American plays of the twentieth century—what Henry Luce called “the American Century.”

The company’s mission is one of rediscovery, enlightenment, and perspective, not nostalgia or preservation. Americans must not lose the extraordinary vision and wisdom of past playwrights, nor can we afford to surrender the moorings to our shared cultural heritage.

Our mission is also driven by a conviction that communities need theater, and theater needs audiences. To those ends, this company is committed to producing plays that challenge and move all Americans, of all ages, origins, and points of view. In particular, we strive to create theatrical experiences that entire families can watch, enjoy, and discuss long afterward.

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The company’s mission is one of rediscover...
Artistic Director’s Note

*A Piece of My Heart* (1991) by Shirley Lauro

Nothing tests human beings, alters nations, or offends common sense as deeply as war. The ancient Greek dramatists recognized the theatrical potential of war-related drama, and, long after Sophocles and Aristophanes hung up whatever-they-used-to-write-their-scripts-with, plays about war continued to assume a significant role in helping societies understand what they had learned—or failed to learn—from the violence, valor, and tragedy each war brought in new and unexpected forms.

At least, they did so while society paid attention to what was on stage. For at least three decades, it has been cinematic and television dramas that have made the most influential observations about war. This doesn’t mean that America’s playwrights haven’t been eloquent and perceptive. It just means that fewer people are paying attention to them. Thus, you probably have never had a chance to see *A Piece of My Heart* but have watched *Platoon*, *We Were Soldiers*, or *Apocalypse Now* more times than you want to admit, right?

Most memorable American plays about this nation’s wars have been unambiguously critical, often to the extent of outright pacifism. This seeming imbalance is one of many inevitable side effects of the natural tilt of all arts to the Left: those creative souls who can’t get a foothold in traditional capitalist pursuits tend to roll gently down the slope into arts or academia. There is also the fact that pro-war plays, often written as propaganda pieces before or during a war, usually have little staying power, sometimes because they were never very good, but more often because the war that looked so just and noble in theory proved to be ambiguous, corrupting, and horrible once the bullets and bombs started flying.

The twentieth century saw a lot of warfare, and Americans were usually in the thick of it. Nonetheless, only two of our wars have spawned much good theater. The champion, of course, was World War II. Among the many significant plays it inspired were Robert Sherwood’s *Idiot’s Delight* and *There Shall Be No Night*, Ernest Hemingway’s *The Fifth Column*, Lillian Hellman’s *Watch on the Rhine*, and Arthur Laurents’ *Home of the Brave*.
plus successful mid-war comedies like *The Doughgirls* and *Dear Ruth*. One of the best World War II dramas is *A Sound of Hunting* by Harry Brown, almost completely forgotten. TACT should produce it some day. There were WWII musicals, too, notably *South Pacific*.

After the war, some of the most popular and effective plays came from veterans recounting their war experiences. In this category were Thomas Heggen’s *Mister Roberts*, the definitive WWII comedy, and *Stalag 17*, the POW comedy/drama which The American Century Theater will produce next spring.

Close on the heels of The Big One when it comes to inspiring playwrights, though, was the Vietnam conflict. The war’s main theatrical chronicler is playwright David Rabe, whose trilogy—*The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, *Sticks and Bones*, and *Streamers*—forms the backbone of the American stage Vietnam repertoire. There is much we noncombatants can learn about war, humanity, and America from some other excellent Vietnam plays too, like the show you are about to see, Shirley Lauro’s *A Piece of My Heart*.

But it’s a good bet, considering how little success playwrights have had discouraging warfare over the last 2500 years, that we won’t learn enough.

We never do.

—Jack Marshall, Artistic Director

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**Director’s Note**

A couple of weeks ago, members of the company had lunch with Polly, a Vietnam veteran. She’s a former Army nurse who was stationed in Vung Tau from March 1966 to March 1967. Today, she runs a nonprofit that supports nursing education. She advocates for nurses. They are her life’s work. We talked about her life before and after the war.

Her first night in Vietnam was marked by an attack on the airfield. The Quonset hut she was about to call home was hit. She and the other nurses were whisked to safety in a building under construction nearby, where they stayed on the floor for hours before a nurse crawled through the door and told them she was going to teach them all to crawl. They practiced for a while and decided it was time to leave. Polly crawled right into her head nurse who had walked in and was standing looking down at her. “If you’re scared,” said Head Nurse, “I could stay with you.” Polly told other funny anecdotes about trips to Japan and tales of drinking, her stories recalling for us many moments in the play.

She produced a tattered photo album that had been in a box collecting dust for years. It contains her personal photographs from Vietnam—trips to the beach, life in the ward, glimpses of her patients, people whose fates she does not know. What struck me about our conversation was that she avoided talking about the experiences during her tour—those memories seemed locked behind a wall. She has never visited the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial Wall in Washington, DC—she “just can’t go there” . . . either.

She asked why the play starts at the Wall and not at the Vietnam Women’s Memorial nearby. Until the statue was dedicated in 1993, Keith Walker’s book (1986) and Shirley Lauro’s play (1991) were among the only “memorials” to the strength and courage of the thousands of military and civilian women who served in Vietnam.

As our meeting ended, Polly looked at the album and said, “I suppose I should do something with these [photos], but I’m not sure what.” Generously, she allowed us to share them with you in our lobby display, where they begin the story that will continue for you onstage. Directing this play came from a desire to give greater voice to stories like hers.

—Jason M. Beagle, Director

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**Preview The American Century Theater’s 2009/10 season closer!**

A reading of Langston Wilson’s *Serenading Louie*  
 Steven Scott Mazzola, Director  
 Read by Felice Skye, Vanessa Bradchulis, Michael Sherman, and Theodore Snead

*Four friends in the turbulent 1970s find unrest, each other, and solutions to uneasy questions and the harsh realities of the time.*

Nov. 18, 7:30 pm, Mt. Vernon Place United Methodist Church Theater  
 A free offering of The American Century Theater
Melissa W. Bailey (Mary Jo) is thrilled to be making her Washington metro area debut with The American Century Theater. She is a graduate of the College of William and Mary where she recently performed in Mnemonic, The Secret Garden, and Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love.

Robin Covington* (Sissy) is making her debut with The American Century Theater. Recent roles: Catherine in Proof, Marie in Incorruptible, and Sarah in Seascape. She also stage managed Freakshow for PinkySwear Productions at the 2009 Capital Fringe Festival. Robin earned her BFA from Shenandoah University and attended the School for Film and Television, NYC.

Greg Gallagher (All the American men) played Lance Corporal Dawson in A Few Good Men (Zemfira Stage) and Werewolf in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (St. Mark’s Players). He has performed in staged readings as Antipholus of Ephesus in A Comedy of Errors (Foundry Players) and as The Patient in Your Mother’s Butt—Three Plays from Alan Ball (The Actor’s Center). Greg has studied locally at Studio Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Theatre Lab, and Washington Improv Theater.

Melissa Marie Hmelnicky (Martha) is excited about her first collaboration with The American Century Theater and delighted to join the cast for the DC run of this beautiful piece. Recent credits include: Candy Starr in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (The Keegan Theatre, Ireland Tour/DC run), Anya in The Cherry Orchard and Sonnerie in Red Noses (Washington Shakespeare Company), and Lane/Merriman in The Importance of Being Earnest (The Keegan Theatre). Other favorite roles include: Sunny Freitag in Last Night of Ballyhoo, Death in Orpheus, Madame Tépan in Picnic on the Battlefield, and Celia in As You Like It. Melissa holds a BA in Drama from The Catholic University of America. Big thanks to those who selflessly serve this nation and its people.

Jeri Marshall (Steele) has performed locally in F**king A (Studio Theatre Secondstage), The Country Wife (Chesapeake Shakespeare Company), Jungle Book (Imagination Stage), Romeo and Juliet (Tapestry Theatre Company), Aida (ArtsCentric Productions), Daughter Concubine (theHegira with African Continuum Theatre Company at the Kennedy Center), Beehive: The ’60s Musical (Winters Lane Productions), Zooman and the Sign (Kogod Theatre), Anne of Green Gables (Laurel Mill Playhouse) and Discovery Theater.

* Equity Membership Candidate
Momo Nakamura (LeeAnn) is thrilled to be working with The American Century Theater for the first time. She graduated from Towson University with a BA in Theatre Arts and has been working professionally on stage and on camera in the DC/Baltimore market. Momo is an Artistic Associate of Landless Theatre Company.

Anne Veal* (Whitney) just returned to DC after a season-long acting apprenticeship with Actors Theatre of Louisville. Credits include Brink! (33rd Humana Festival of New American Plays), Nest (Signature Theatre), Apparition (Project 1367), Short Order Stories (Charter Theatre), Bad Hamlet (2009 Capital Fringe Festival), Hansel and Gretel (Classik Theatre), as well as Hamlet and numerous other roles at American University. Anne is working on a piece integrating performers and interactive projection inspired by the Orestia.

Production Staff

Ceci Albert (Costume and Properties Design) is in her second production with The American Century Theater, where she designed costumes and properties for Life with Father last season. She has supported the productions of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at The Arlington Players, Saturday, Sunday, Monday at Little Theatre of Alexandria, and six seasons of productions with St. Mark’s Players. Retired from the Air Force in 1999 after almost 27 years of service, Ceci considers this production of A Piece of My Heart important not only for recognizing the diversity among women who “volunteer” but for acknowledging the variety of their contributions to the services.

Ben Allen (Sound Operator) is an attorney by day and a theatre technophile by night. He began working in theatre in Texas, before moving into movies and television and, in recent years, focusing almost exclusively on theatrical sound design. Most recently he designed sound for The House of Blue Leaves, Fat Pig, and The Musical of Musicals (The Musical!) (Dominion Stage), The Elephant Man (CCT with 2nd Flight Theatre Company), and Grease (Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia). This is Ben’s first show with The American Century Theater, and he is very excited to work with the talented cast and crew.

Brian S. Allard (Lighting Design) is excited to be working with The American Century Theater. He recently designed the lights for Rorschach Theatre (Living Dead in Denmark, 1001, and Skin of Our Teeth), Opera Vivente (Albert Herrington), Folger Shakespeare Library (Lynn Redgrave’s Rachel and Juliet), the Hegira (Deep Belly Beautiful), Catalyst Theater Company (Roundheads and Peakheads and Swimming in the Shallows), Madaep Players (Sixth and Seventh Annual Winter Carnivals of New Works), American Opera Theater (Hydrogen Jukebox), and Journeymen Theater Ensemble (As American As and Neglect). Brian is Technical Director for Bowen McCauley Dance and the Dakshina/Daniel Phoenix Singh Dance Company.

Jason M. Beagle (Director) is making his Washington metropolitan area directorial debut with A Piece of My Heart. Jason has directed at regional, university, and community theatres across the Midwest. As a directing fellow at Shakespeare Theatre Company, 2003–2004, Jason assisted on productions of Five by Tenn, The Rivals, Much Ado About Nothing, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. At TACT, he produced The Titans, assistant directed Cops, and was volunteer coordinator 2008–2009. He earned a Masters in drama with a directing emphasis from the University of Montana and a BA in theatre studies from Wright State University.

HannaH J Crowell (Set Design) has designed Seascape (TACT), Ain’t Misbehavin’ (Olney Theatre Center), The Receptionist (Studio Theatre Second Stage), Holes and If You Give a Mouse a Cookie (Adventure Theatre), and All’s Well That Ends Well, House of Yes, and Kafka’s Dick (Washington Shakespeare Company). Associate scene design work includes Pavilion (Hub Theatre), Second Line (Tribute Productions), A Murder, A Mystery, and a Marriage (Two River Theater Company), The Night is a Child (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), A Feminine Ending (South Coast Repertory and Portland Center Stage), and Sometimes a Great Notion (Portland Center Stage). Upcoming projects include Can’t Pay! Won’t Pay! (Hub Theatre) and Ngala Muli (Catholic University). HannaH earned her degree from North Carolina School of the Arts.

Tim Morse (Sound Design) is taking his first crack at live theater with his debut at The American Century Theater. From piano to guitar to DJ turntables, Tim’s music and style is continually evolving, and he hopes you share his excitement about this show.

Sherri L. Perper (Producing Director) produced The American Century Theater’s last-season hits Native Son and Life with Father. Of the many shows she has produced in the DC theatre community, her favorites are The Wiz, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Last Night of Ballyhoo, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Sherri also serves as TACT’s Director of Outreach and Volunteers. MA in Arts Management, George Mason University, Spring 2010.

* Equity Membership Candidate
Bob Pierce (Stage Manager) is thrilled to be in his first production for The American Century Theater. Previous credits include The Left Hand Singing, Hearts, and Falsettos (The New Jewish Theatre, St. Louis), Ain’t Got Time To Die and Capacity (First Run Theatre, St. Louis), The Invention of Love (Elden Street Players), Richard III (Tapestry Theatre), On Golden Pond (Prince William Little Theatre), and Jeffrey (Dominion Stage).

Christie Swaney (Master Carpenter) is working for the first time with The American Century Theater. She is Technical Director for Vpstart Crow Productions, Inc., where she has done technical direction and carpentry for all shows since 2002. She was also master carpenter for the Dominion Stage production of Fat Pig. Her grandfather’s present of tools for her eighteenth birthday enabled her total commitment to theatre.
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The Players ($100–$249) continued

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Adrienne White

For more than 25 years, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has been a place where friends, family and visitors from across the nation have come to pay tribute to those who served. The overwhelming response to the Memorial made us realize that we should do more to remember these heroes and honor the values of all of America’s service members.

An underground, state-of-the-art Education Center near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall will put faces to the more than 58,000 names of those who died or remain missing from the Vietnam War. But, we need your help to do it.

Help us collect the photos of the more than 58,000 men and women whose names are on The Wall. Take your photo to a FedEx Office location and scan the image. FedEx will send the image to us. That’s all there is to it.

Give us a few minutes of your time. You keep your cherished original photo. And we honor your loved one who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam. Don’t have a FedEx Office near you? You can scan your photo from your home computer. Visit www.VVMFCenter.org for details.

Whether or not you have a photo to share, please consider making a gift to help us build a place where these individuals will never be forgotten. The Education Center at The Wall. It will be a unique place of honor and healing for all generations.

Call (866) 990-WALL or visit www.VVMFCenter.org for more information.

They gave their lives for their country.
We honor their names. Help us remember their faces.
The American Century Theater
2009–2010 Season

Shirley Lauro’s *A Piece of My Heart* (1991)
Directed by Jason Beagle
September 11–October 10 (VA) and November 6–21 (DC)

George Axelrod’s *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1955)
Directed by Ellen Dempsey
January 15–February 6

Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski’s *Stalag 17* (1951)
Directed by William Aitken
March 26–April 17

World Premiere:
Allyson Currin’s *The Amazing Sophie [Treadwell]*
May 27–June 19

Rescue Series: Rodgers and Hart’s *Babes in Arms* (1937)
June 24–27

Lanford Wilson’s *Serenading Louie* (1976)
Directed by Steven Scott Mazzola
July 23–August 21

More information on the plays and on becoming a subscriber at www.AmericanCentury.org

*A Piece of My Heart* 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.

This arts event
is made possible in part by the
Virginia Commission for the Arts and
the National Endowment for the Arts.