

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ~ May, 2012**

## **Inland Stage Honors Veterans with 'A Piece of My Heart'**

The Inland Stage Company features Shirley Lauro's "A Piece of My Heart," opening May 10. This drama tells the true stories of six women in the Vietnam War.

"I was very intrigued by a play that was directly based on women and war. It's a rare thing to find anything that is based specifically on women's contributions in a war, especially during that time in our history," said Director Alisa Lovas. "I am an actor, but after reading the play, I felt that I wanted to have more of a 'voice' in the overall production, so I chose to direct the play. I felt such a connection to the play and really wanted to honor the women who gave so much during their time in Vietnam."

During the war, women worked six days a week for at least twelve hours a day during their one-year tour of duty. According to Lovas, they did everything from assisting in surgery to holding their patient's hands while they passed away.

"The play also hits me on a personal note, because my father served two tours in Vietnam," Lovas said. "He was wounded and was cared for by the same type of nurses that tell their stories in this play."

Lovas grew up the child of a Vietnam Veteran, and although her father has never spoken to her about the war, she has always been extremely proud of his service. "I feel that now I have a better understanding of why he never spoke about this war that he served in and, in a small way, it is my way of paying tribute to him and the Vets who served and gave their lives there...men and women alike," Lovas said.

The cast features local, seasoned actors that are more than happy to participate in the production.

"I am thrilled to have such a strong cast for this show," Lovas said. "I am lucky enough to have seasoned actors, some of whom I have worked with before and some who are new and surprising me with the talent that we have locally. We have taken some time to watch footage and read up on the nurses who served during the war, so my actors all have a very strong sense of the way they each want to portray their character."

Monica Reichl plays Whitney, an upper crust society girl who decides to join the Red Cross to spend a year of service before settling into her life as a teacher. She chooses Vietnam believing it will be more cosmopolitan than going to Korea. "The show is filled with such rich characters," Reichl said.

In addition to Whitney, there are other moments where Reichl plays other characters: a head nurse orienting a new arrival to Vietnam, a VA spokeswoman who is explaining that Agent Orange Disease doesn't exist, and many others, so the show is a challenge in making all the characters real and distinct.

"What I love about this production is the cast... I am reunited with some wonderful talent that is some of the best in this area, in addition to working with some extremely talented actors that I have seen and admired but had yet to work with," Reichl said. "Even early on in rehearsal, the talent was so inspiring, that we were already feeling transported to this world as we were still stumbling around the set trying not to run into each other. Alisa, who I have known for many years, is directing the show with such a passion and striving for so much honesty. She has a history with Vietnam vets in her family and is in contact with the Red Cross and working toward accuracy to do both the soldiers and the nurse's justice."

Shannon Elizabeth Smith plays the role of Maryjo Kincaid, from Beaumont Texas. She was the lead guitarist in the Sugar Candies all-girl band. In '67 they got booked to go over to Vietnam and entertain the troops for a yearlong tour. She loved the idea of being a piece of home for the boys, and loved singing her heart out to them.

"I love the truth behind the show," Smith said. "This is one of those pieces you are proud to be in because you are representing real people, in real situations, and showing a side to something not everyone wants to see, but needs to see. This show is not only about the struggles of the women while they were in Vietnam, but how it impacted their lives forever."

Just in time for Memorial Day, the production is a tribute to the U.S. veterans.

"I think as we come to Memorial Day and think about the sacrifices so many have made in this country, not just the ones who died, but the ones who survived and still carry so much of the experience of war with them, this production will give some understanding of the chaos and unreality of what it was like, how to try to come home and be normal, and the hope that comes from sharing these stories and not letting our history ever be forgotten," Reichl said. "I think we work so hard now to support the soldiers even if we don't support the war. We try harder to be aware that there are men and women over there serving their country, following orders, but who are not to blame for the war. But all of this awareness comes from how horribly we handled the return of our troops from Vietnam and how much they were despised for somehow letting America down. We can't ever forget our mistakes or they will sneak back on us."

There will be information about the Red Cross available at performances and ISC is hoping to get some of the local veterans groups to participate and will have information available as well.

"It's always exciting to see new directors and how they work with their cast, crew and designers," said ISC Artistic Director Jim Marbury. "I'm thrilled to see so many outstanding actresses working together on this amazing show!"

"A Piece of My Heart" runs 8 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sundays, May 10 through 20.

Tickets for the show are \$15 for general admission, and \$12 for students, seniors and military. Thursday performances are "Pay What You Can," with a \$5 suggested donation. And on Saturdays there are Rush Tickets for \$7, 10 minutes before the show, if seats are available. ISC also offers group rates and season tickets.

The Esplanade Art Center is located at 2181 W. Esplanade Ave., San Jacinto, Ca.

Visit [www.inlandstage.org](http://www.inlandstage.org) for details.

