

# Alexandria Gazette Packet

## A Police Drama With A Twist Port City Playhouse mounts taut "Split Second."

By Brad Hathaway, Gazette

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Some police dramas seem to dwell on the doughnut-eating, group-bonding stereotypes of the "Brotherhood" of the force. Television still fills hours of prime time with the other extreme, the bringing bad guys to justice part of that world. But there is another part of the story to be told, and Port City Playhouse is telling it in a drama featuring sharp performances and stark staging.

"Split Second," which plays at the Lee Center through June 21, details the pressures on one cop who gives in for one brief moment to the temptation to react as a human rather than as an instrument of the state when the suspect he is arresting taunts him with racial epithets and dismissive disdain.

The policeman in question is an African-American, the son of one of the few black policemen from Pittsburgh. He's a New York City cop who has chased a white man into a blind alley after interrupting his effort to steal a car. He gets the man in handcuffs and calls for a wagon to take the man to jail, but the man has a foul mouth and won't shut it. The cop tries to silence him up by pointing his gun at him, but he just gets louder, more foul and more insulting. When he gets to the ultimate string of "n-word" insults, the cop can hold his rage in check no more, and pulls the trigger.

That dramatic scene is just the set up for a series of scenes detailing the aftermath of that split second on the lives of the policeman and the people he loves. Author Dennis McIntyre wasn't interested in telling the story of the racist criminal. That side of the story is left for others to tell. In this 1984 play, he concentrates solely on the ramifications of that act on the cop and his world.

The rest of the tense evening consists of scenes detailing that impact. There's his interview with his superior who doesn't quite buy the story he has devised, but may be willing to accept it in order to protect "the force." There's a park bench conversation with a buddy who probes for details over a can of beer.

In one taut scene, his father finds he can't accept his son's violation of the standards he held when he was a cop. Then there's the confrontation with his wife who wants nothing so much but for him to do everything possible to keep the truth from coming out.

Christopher C. Holbert plays the cop in question with a solid, unmannered straightforwardness. He underplays his own characters emotions which amplifies the impact of the emotional explosions of Donnell Boykin as his father, and especially, Amy Miharu Hard as his wife. Her outburst "I can't live without that man . I won't live without that man" drives home the ultimate consequences that face her husband if he gives in to the temptation to tell the truth about his moment of weakness. (Kathy Nay will play the wife in this weekend's performances before Hard returns for the final week.)

Jackson Dismukes is suitably despicable as the taunting car-thief and Jermaine Shorts is smooth as the buddy who urges the cop to give the system the opportunity to protect him from consequences by telling whatever story will be accepted. This is nicely contrasted by Franklin Walker's portrayal of the police



Scene from "Split Second."

### Where and When

> The Port City Playhouse production of "Split Second" plays through June 21 at the Lee Center for the Performing Arts, 1108 Jefferson St. Performances are Friday - Saturday at 8 p.m. with an additional 8 p.m. performance on Tuesday, June 17. Tickets are \$13 - \$15. Call 703-683-0496 or log on to [www.portcityplayhouse.com](http://www.portcityplayhouse.com).

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captain who probes as much as duty requires, having seen and heard it all before.

The simple, uncomplicated structure of the play which works so well as a dramatic device, is enhanced by director Ed Bishop's uncomplicated staging.

If Dragnet's Jack Webb were still around, he would recognize the style as a reflection of his famous "just the facts" approach to story telling.

*Brad Hathaway reviews theater in Virginia, Washington and Maryland as well as Broadway, and edits Potomac Stages, a website covering theater in the region ( [www.PotomacStages.com](http://www.PotomacStages.com)). He can be reached at < a href=mailto:Brad@PotomacStages.com > Brad@PotomacStages.com.*



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