

FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

COMMUNICATING THE MISSION OF FELLOWSHIP FOR PERFORMING ARTS

Gifts from Fellowship Circle members provide FPA the means to produce compelling theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Stealing Past Watchful Dragons

Most Reluctant Convert
connects with critics . . .
and an atheist.

PAGE 2

Screwtape Comes To London!

PAGE 4

FPA Fellowship Circle

PAGE 5

From the Desk of Max McLean

To engage, theatre
must entertain.

PAGE 6

2016-2017 SCHEDULE

C.S. LEWIS
THE
Screwtape
LETTERS

NEW YORK CITY
Nov 15-27

LONDON
Dec 8 - Jan 7

MARTIN
LUTHER
ON TRIAL

NEW YORK CITY
Dec 1 - Jan 29

FPAtheatre.com

Current as of Oct. 7, 2016. Check
FPAtheatre.com for updates.

FPA in New York and London!

Our Second NYC Season and FPA's First International Production

Fellowship for Performing Arts' production of *C.S. Lewis' The Screwtape Letters* has been seen by over 500,000 people...in the United States alone.

Now, Max McLean returns to the role he originated as the opening production of FPA's second New York theatrical season, before taking the play to the Park Theatre, London for its European premiere (See story Page 4).

Immediately following *Screwtape*, *Martin Luther on Trial* will have its official New York City opening at The Pearl Theatre. The show was developed last season prior to opening in Washington, D.C., in April.

"For years, *Screwtape* has been capturing the imaginations of theatergoers with Lewis' wit and insight into the human condition," said McLean, FPA founder and artistic director.

"Audiences are responding similarly to our new work—*Martin Luther on Trial*. Both of these plays engage audiences in a way that opens them to examine basic tenets of the Christian faith such as spiritual warfare and how it influences an individual's pride, humility and the exercise of power."

Continued on page 2



Max McLean as Screwtape and Karen Eleanor Wight as Toadpipe in *The Screwtape Letters*.



Mark Boyett (from left), Fletcher Mactaggart and Paul Schoeffler in *Martin Luther on Trial*.

New York and London Continued from front

The Screwtape Letters turns a conventional message of God’s love on its head by portraying the devil’s chief psychiatrist—Screwtape—corresponding with a junior tempter to deceptively lure a human soul away from God.

The New Yorker called it “theologically thoughtful” and “consistently pointed and amusing.” *The New York Times* went so far as to say that “the Devil rarely been given his due so perceptively.” Its combination of insight and humor has empowered *The Screwtape Letters* to engage for 75 years as a novel and for the past decade on stage.

When *Martin Luther on Trial* made its debut in Washington, critics called it “theatrical heaven.”

One critic even went so far as to say that:

“*Martin Luther on Trial had its world premiere at the Shakespeare Theatre [in D.C]. It joins the canon of great theatrical works about religious figures such as T.S. Eliot’s [play] about Thomas Becket and George Bernard Shaw’s Saint Joan. Like those formidable forerunners, Martin Luther on Trial wrestles dramatically with heady matters of God and conscience—that*

deep and serious stuff that arises in us as a species hardwired for both belief and doubt. But this play goes them one better: Martin Luther on Trial is quite the divine comedy and it’s funny as hell.”

“Luther is a controversial figure who generates an enormous range of emotions,” McLean said. “His actions resulted in a split within the body of Christ. Cooler heads did not prevail. Theatre allows us to explore Luther’s story with the benefit of hindsight to reveal how some of his actions influenced Freud, Martin Luther King, Jr., Hitler and even the current Pope, Francis.

“We knew it would be profound and fascinating. We were delightfully surprised by how funny and entertaining the audiences thought it was.”

Beyond the play’s humor, *DC Metro Theater Arts* remarked on how it re-enacts one of the most civilization-altering conversion events in human history:

“The compelling performance [of Martin Luther] captures each nuance and epic passion in a way that scales the character’s convictions and contradictions to Shakespearean dimensions. The scene when Luther comes upon the concept of grace and falls to his knees humbled and overcome was as powerful an epiphany as I’ve seen played onstage.”

“Theatre’s ability to provoke powerful moments of reality is what connects audiences to Christian ideals that would otherwise be dismissed or taken for granted,” McLean said. “This is what C.S. Lewis meant when he penned the phrase, ‘to steal past watchful dragons.’ Art and theatre can overcome a pre-conceived stigma and give an old idea a deeper, fresher hearing.”

Sometimes, this means being humble enough to re-consider the sins of the past without whitewashing it. The 500th anniversary of the Protestant reformation is such a moment.

Thank you for helping us do this. The upfront cost of producing theatre from a Christian worldview of this caliber is so high, and ticket revenue does not come close to covering it. So, the partnership of FPA’s Fellowship Circle of supporters is essential to bringing works like *The Screwtape Letters* and *Martin Luther on Trial* to New York and London.

Thank you for joining with us to create the opportunity to “steal past the dragons” and engage deeply with audiences across the country, and, soon, across the Atlantic. ■

LIGHTS UP IN LONDON!

On Dec. 8, the lights go up in London’s Park Theatre, and a set familiar to more than half a million Americans will be introduced to audiences for first time in the U.K. It’s the international debut of *The Screwtape Letters*.

As Fellowship for Performing Arts Founder and Artistic Director Max McLean goes back into the role of *Screwtape*, it marks the culmination of years of planning, effort and consistent support and prayer from our Fellowship Circle members.

“We’ve worked for several years to make *Screwtape* in London a reality, and all along the way, the encouragement and support of the FPA ‘family’ has been consistent and real,” Max said. “The result is this opportunity to engage audiences internationally, to take FPA’s mission one step farther.”

For more than three years, FPA explored opportunities overseas. Two years ago, we

connected with a respected and successful London producer to partner with. Last year, they identified the Park Theatre as the right venue. Now, from Dec. 8 through Jan. 7 “His Abysmal Sublimity *Screwtape*” takes the stage to entertain and engage audiences in the U.K. with the wit, wisdom, insight and Christian worldview of C.S. Lewis.



The Park Theatre is a respected venue, just north of Central London. It fits with FPA’s strategy to produce in leading cultural venues. Additionally, this brings Lewis “home.” It’s a mere 50 miles from Oxford where he wrote this classic novel.

“In a real sense, our Fellowship Circle of supporters will be in the theatre with us,” Max said. “It’s your partnership and your commitment to our mission that makes this possible.”

If you’re in London in December or January, come see the show, and tell your friends in the U.K.! Visit FPAtheatre.com for ticket information. ■



STEALING PAST WATCHFUL DRAGONS

A critic and an atheist respond to The Most Reluctant Convert

Fellowship for Performing Arts ended its recent 22-performance run in Chicago of *C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert* on a strong note with The Mercury Theater completely full over the last three weeks.

That was helped by a favorable review in the *Chicago Tribune*, which called Max McLean, as Lewis, “a storytelling master” and makes clear why Lewis appeals to so broad an audience.

Lewis famously described himself as “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.” And it’s that reluctance, along with the astonishing lucidity of his prose, the open-hearted spirit of his storytelling and the exquisite rigor behind his intellect, that have combined to make C.S. Lewis pretty much every atheist’s favorite Christian thinker.

This may explain a rather surprising letter FPA received shortly after the review was published:

*Dear Mr. McLean—
I saw your show in Chicago yesterday afternoon and I’d like to offer some very hearty congratulations! I can’t remember the last time I was moved to send a fan letter, but you’ve really got one coming — what an absolutely splendid performance! I must tell you, you didn’t make a dent in my atheism, but it was a whopping good show and I had a grand time.
Cordially, D.E.*

“I was a bit puzzled as to why this gentleman took the effort to write such an unusual note,” said Max, FPA’s founder and artistic director. “Obviously Lewis’ spiritual journey from atheism to Christianity captured his imagination. The irony, humor and brilliance of Lewis’ conversion moved him enough to express his delight.

“A long time ago, Dr. R.C. Sproul said something that has

stayed with me for many years. He taught me that ‘regeneration precedes faith.’ That notion has guided so much of our work at FPA. It means that God is at work penetrating a person’s heart in secret ways long before it is recognized. The step from dismissal to engagement is a large one.”

At FPA we often use the phrase “steal past watchful dragons.” It’s a phrase Lewis used to try to get “past a certain inhibition which had paralyzed much of my own religion,” he said.

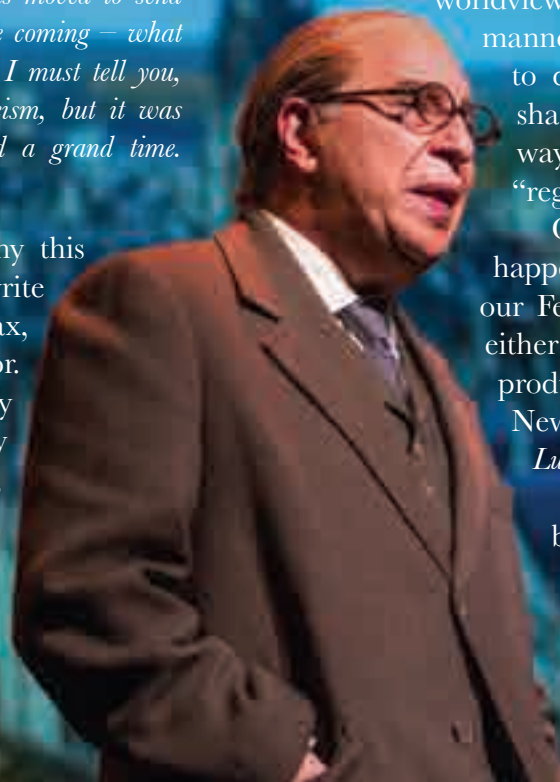
“Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told *one ought to*.

“An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons?”

At FPA, our mission is to present the Christian worldview in an engaging and entertaining manner, that maintains “real potency,” to diverse audiences who may not share our faith perspective. In that way, we hope to be part of the “regeneration that proceeds faith.”

Of course, that would not happen without the partnership of our Fellowship Circle of supporters—either in Chicago or our upcoming productions of *The Screwtape Letters* in New York and London and *Martin Luther on Trial* in New York.

Thank you so much. It’s because of you we can strive to steal past the dragons. ■



FPA FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

Fellowship for Performing Arts presents theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience. Our ability to mount such productions in leading theatrical venues across the country and in New York City rises from the generous support of our Fellowship Circle members. From all of us at FPA—Thank you for your partnership. To join our Fellowship Circle, visit CSLewisOnStage.com/donate or call us at 212.582.2920 and ask for Melissa Mollner or Bekah Ang.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Engagement follows entertainment

Variety—the leading film industry weekly—hosted a summit for those involved in faith-and-family filmmaking.

Since Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*, the film industry has awakened to the magnitude of the audience that responds to faith-based films. The quality of these offerings vary and many are produced by people who do not hold to a Christian worldview. The event's key message was captured well by screenwriter Brian Godawa, who participated in the conference. He said, "It doesn't matter what your message is if you don't tell a good story, you won't draw the audience."

Brian's insight resonates with what we attempt to do at Fellowship for Performing Arts. Among our core values is to create theatre from a Christian worldview at the highest levels of excellence that our talent and our budgets allow. That means we hire the best creative and artistic talent we can afford, regardless of their religious perspective.

At a casting call last month, one actor made an off-hand comment as he was wrestling with how to play the particular scene for the role he was auditioning for. He said, "I respect this." I interpreted that to mean that he admired the text and wanted to interpret the scene at a level worthy of the material on the page.

Good work not only attracts talented people; it also encourages them to step up their game.

One of the reasons we present our work in leading performing arts centers around the country is

related to this. We want our plays to be experienced in the same venues where the best art in that community is seen.

This also means we open our work to the judgment of critics who are skeptical of art with the word "Christian" attached to it.

In July and August, our latest work—*C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert*—played Chicago's Mercury Theater. The nationally-regarded theatre critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times* gave it a four stars review, their highest rating. She "highly recommended" the play to the paper's half million readers. However, the critic felt obliged to add a note of caution in her review. She wrote, "This

show is a production of the New York City-based Fellowship for Performing Arts which 'produces theater from a Christian worldview...But be assured, it involves nothing even remotely resembling proselytizing.'"

It is interesting that art from a Christian perspective requires a warning label. Nevertheless, the critic concluded by saying that

FPA's production "is an exercise in questioning the very essence of what it means to be alive. And you can remain an avid doubter even as you enjoy its bristling, provocative, highly entertaining arguments."

FPA believes it is not enough to lament that art from a Christian worldview is often relegated to the alleyways of the cultural marketplace. Rather, we see it as a challenge to earn a place on the main road by executing the work at a level required to get there and get a fair hearing in the public square.

It's the support of our Fellowship Circle members like you who make this attempt possible. Thank you, for partnering with us and for helping the Christian worldview compete in the cultural marketplace. ■

"IT DOESN'T MATTER
WHAT YOUR MESSAGE IS
IF YOU DON'T TELL
A GOOD STORY,
YOU WON'T DRAW
THE AUDIENCE."

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