

# FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

COMMUNICATING THE MISSION OF FELLOWSHIP FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

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

## FROM VICE TO VIRTUE

BY MAX McLEAN

In the 1995 film, *The Usual Suspects* the protagonist says “The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world that he didn’t exist.” This idea is so universal that when Christianity posits the existence of supernatural good and evil, there is almost immediate resistance. So how can a stigmatized idea receive a fresh hearing? At FPA, we believe that theatre offers a way in.

The magic of theatre is its ability to make emotional and sensory connections. It’s these imaginative *experiences* that initiate a new idea to an audience and allows it to percolate. “It is by logic that we prove, but by intuition that we discover,” wrote the physicist Henri Poincaré. Theatre from a Christian worldview, when executed with excellence, nudges this intuitive sense. It nourishes an interaction between the intellect and the “Numina” or Spirit to awaken the conscience.

Sometimes a person is so convicted that their will is engaged and real life change begins to take place.

One of the reasons we do a Q & A after most performances is to give the audience an opportunity to explore what they have just seen. They’ve been engaged by a supernatural story that is both meaningful and Christian. Now they have questions. “Why did this hit me?” “Why do I feel a sense of conviction right now?” “Could this imaginative portrayal be true?”

*Continued inside*

## AUDIENCE RESPONDS

“Saw the show for the second time, was able to bring non-believing friends...one of the few ‘Christian’ events/activities they are willing/excited to attend. Come back to DC again so we can continue to share ‘Screwtape’ with friends.”

– David, Wash. D.C.

“Thank you for enabling my sons to receive spiritual realities that I have tried to show for years.” – Cecilia, Atlanta

“Thankful that Christian plays are being performed in major venues that might attract those not in ‘Christian circles’ – serious theatre instead of ‘light weight’ art.” – Kelly, South Carolina

“I am challenged to avoid Christian mediocrity.”

– Jon, Atlanta

“Wow! What a wakeup call. Thank you for this brilliantly, energetically performed catechesis. Well done!” – Anon., Atlanta

“Remarkable! Edifying! I must see the other cities you take this to and bring friends -- both Christian and non.” – Carol, Milwaukee

“I find it greatly inspiring to see my values and beliefs related in a thoughtful production such as this. I hope to have the same impact with my work.” – Janie, Atlanta

“Very intense, powerful, and thought provoking. Excellent for any Christian or non-Christian.” – College Student, New York City

“Taught me things I had not thought of, like Satan has created nothing -- all pleasures are from God, only corrupted by Satan. Reminded me how subtle Satan is.” – Kathy, Tampa

“So encouraged to see Christian theatre look so good! Keep it up!” – Alice, Kansas City



## THE *Screwtape* LETTERS NATIONAL TOUR

**Lincoln** Lied Center, April 6

**Modesto** Gallo Center, April 10

**Los Angeles** Alex Theatre, April 13

**Colorado Springs** Pikes Peak Center, April 27

**Sacramento** SCC Theater, May 4

**Minneapolis** Pantages Theatre, May 10-11

**Indianapolis** Clowes Hall, Butler U., June 1

**Atlanta** Woodruff Center, June 7-9

**Portland** Portland Center, June 14-15

**San Francisco** Leshner Center, June 21-23

**Boise** Morrison Center, Boise State, July 20

**Charleston** College of Charleston, July 26-27

**Santa Fe** Lensic Center, Aug 2-3

**Houston** Wortham Center, Aug 16-17

**Louisville** Kentucky Center, Sept 28

**San Diego** Balboa Theatre, Oct 19

**St. Louis** Touhill Center, Dec 7

**Tulsa** Broken Arrow PAC, Oct 5

**Dallas** Majestic Theatre, Nov 16-17

Visit [ScrewtapeOnStage.com](http://ScrewtapeOnStage.com) for up-to-date tour info. Above dates as of April 8.

# FROM VICE TO VIRTUE

Continued from front

Of course many are reluctant to make a quick move from darkness to light. Theatre is not church. It is a safe, third space where new ideas can be explored. We assume a diverse audience is present. We know from experience what conviction feels like. It is uncomfortable. We, also, know what it feels like to be an outsider. This is why we present in mainstream performing arts venues rather than in a church setting. Our ministry is a work of seed planting. It may take several provocative encounters, as well as relationships with other believers, for the seed planted to take root and grow.

## The Great Divorce

Achieving this objective requires choosing the right material and executing it with the highest level of excellence that our budgets can afford. C.S. Lewis offers such good material for theatrical adaptation. It is for this reason that our main project in 2013 is adapting a second Lewis work for the stage: *The Great Divorce*.

*The Great Divorce* is Lewis' antithesis to *The Screwtape Letters*. Unlike *Screwtape*, who represents those spiritual forces that control our natural impulses that lead a soul down the 'slow, gentle path to hell', *The Great Divorce* imagines a visit to the outskirts of heaven where divine Spirits are waiting to confront our selfishness and

lead us toward the Celestial City to be all that God wants us to be.

FPA has explored the psychological terrain of Evil and Vice, now we wish to captivate audiences with the beautiful yet hard path toward grace, repentance, and virtue.

FPA's production of *The Great Divorce* epitomizes Lewis' view of how conviction works and why so

presentations of *The Great Divorce* to a small, select audience. The feedback we received was enthusiastic. The next step is a developmental production this summer.

At the same time FPA continues to tour *The Screwtape Letters* and to develop other theatrical projects, including a new play about controversial figure Martin Luther whose heroic virtue and tragic flaws changed the spiritual map of the world, and a play about C. S. Lewis' journey from atheism to Christianity.

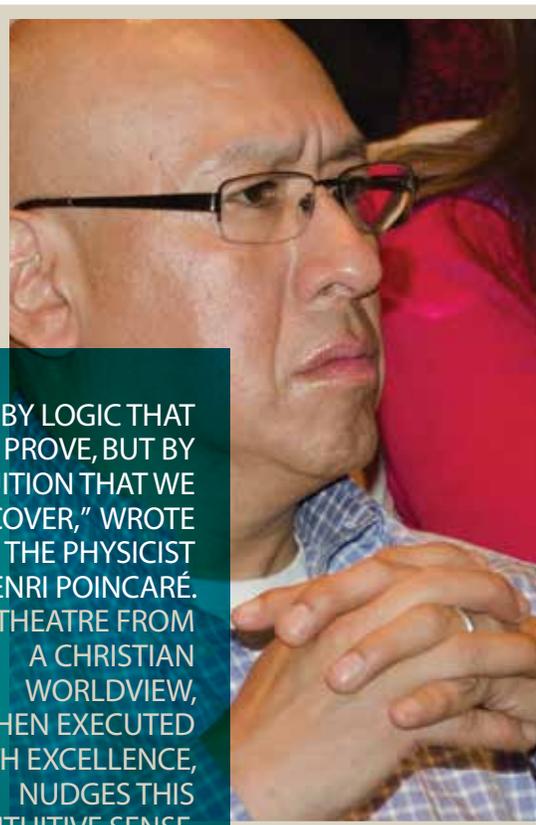
## Partner With Us

Bringing these productions to broad national audiences is a large undertaking. To achieve the kind of intelligent, engaging, high-quality productions FPA is known for will require huge amounts of time and resources. The pre-production budget for *The Great Divorce* is \$750,000.



I am asking you who believe in our mission to partner with us as we complete this journey to full production.

With your help, we can engage imaginations to consider the path from vice to virtue, darkness to light. Please help us achieve this important work of bringing a winsome and intelligent Christian voice to a diverse audience. ■



"IT IS BY LOGIC THAT WE PROVE, BUT BY INTUITION THAT WE DISCOVER," WROTE THE PHYSICIST HENRI POINCARÉ. THEATRE FROM A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW, WHEN EXECUTED WITH EXCELLENCE, NUDGES THIS INTUITIVE SENSE.

many resist it. As Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, "It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power--it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk."

We just completed a three week lab with actors ending with two

# BRENT HARRIS TAKES OVER ROLE OF SCREWTAPE

After five years of portraying a conniving devil in C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, Max McLean is now handing over acting duties. Taking over the role of Screwtape is veteran actor Brent Harris, whose 2013 performances have already received critical acclaim.

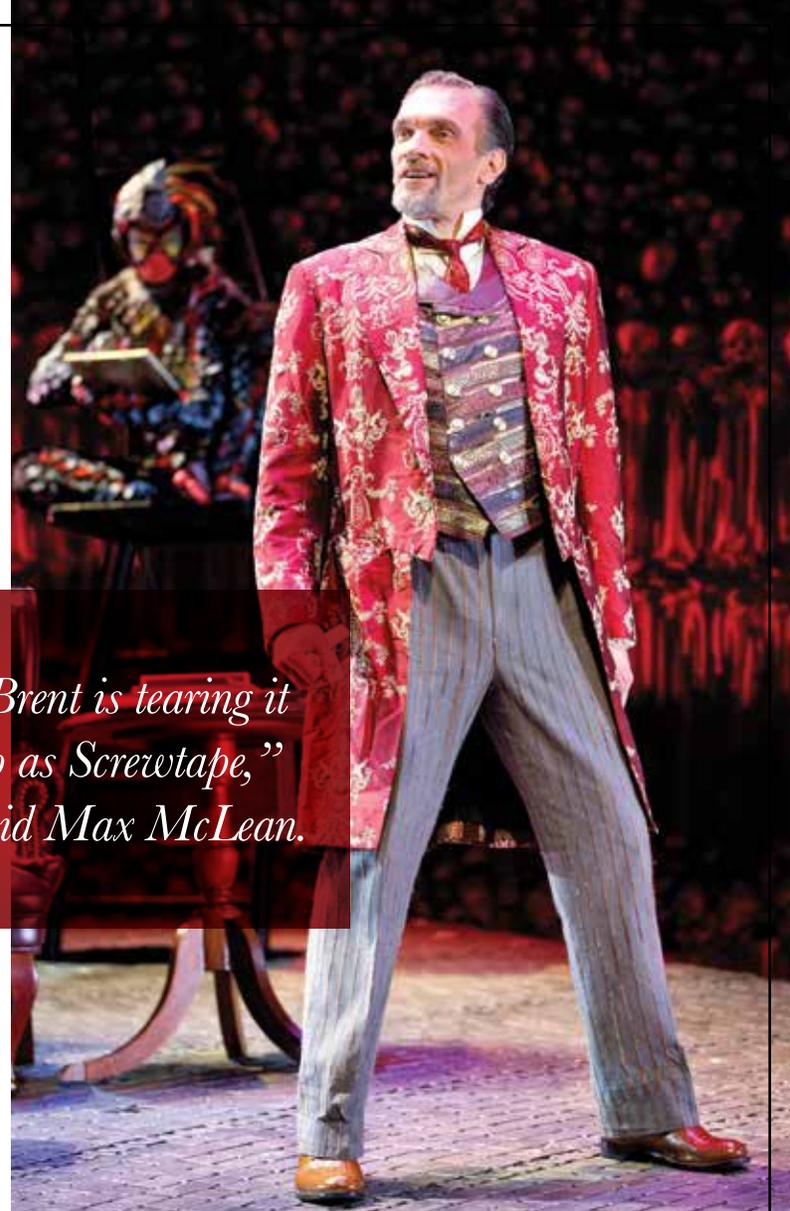
The Jacksonville Examiner said, "The fascinating well-spoken prose by award-winning actor Brent Harris, along with the interaction of Toadpipe, well performed by Marissa Molnar, entertained and delighted those whose thunderous applause and standing ovations at the climax of this two-demon show echoed throughout the theater." The Birmingham News described Harris' portrayal of Screwtape as "a tour de force, spellbinding performance."

Harris is best known for his portrayal of Scar in the National Tour of *The Lion King*. Other notable roles include Lucifer in *Dr. Faustus*, Iago in *Othello*, Salieri in *Amadeus*, Olivier in *Orson's Shadow*, Atticus Finch in *To Kill A Mockingbird* and the title role in *Macbeth*. He is regularly seen in many of America's great theatre companies.

"*The Screwtape Letters* has an uncanny understanding of human behavior," says Harris. "In performance, the descriptions of human tendencies provoke gasps of recognition from the audience, which is dramatic and exciting. Lewis' language is like music or poetry... It is a joy and a privilege to be able to try and give a living dramatic voice to this great writing."

McLean wrote, directed, and acted the lead role of Screwtape since the stage adaptation's off-Broadway

*"Brent is tearing it up as Screwtape," said Max McLean.*



debut in 2007. The show subsequently enjoyed extended runs in New York, Chicago, and Washington D.C., and continues to tour the nation's most prominent performing arts centers, where Harris will perform.

"Brent is tearing it up as Screwtape. He's a smart actor with a magnetic presence and a subtle approach to Lewis' language that works its way into your subconscious, McLean said. "FPA is thrilled to have audiences experience Brent's brilliant performance." ■



## COMING ATTRACTIONS

FPA sent playwright Chris Cragin Day to Germany as part of her research to write a play on the controversial life of Martin Luther. The photo shows the playwright at Wartburg Castle. FPA plans to develop this new play in 2014.

*FPA's appeal to mainstream critics and theatergoers is one measurable indication that FPA is bringing a Christian voice into the cultural arts conversation.*

## Commanding Theatrics

LINCOLN  
JOURNAL & STAR

Those who attended “The Screwtape Letters” at the Lied Center for Performing Arts on Saturday night saw the transformation of C.S. Lewis’ provocative epistolary meditation on good and evil from a witty book to an enveloping theatrical experience.

With light, sound and exceptional use of electronics, bravura performances by two -- only two -- actors filled the Lied Center performance hall.

Brent Harris appeared as Screwtape, a senior bureaucrat for the Devil, and Marissa Molnar as Toadpipe, his slavish assistant in non-human form. Harris, in stentorian tones, delivered the communication between Screwtape and Wormwood, a Junior Temptor, known only from the reports he sends. Toadpipe augmented the piece by serving as a non-speaking secretary, illustrative puppet and comic sidekick.

Played against an ossuary wall of human bones, a full range of sounds supported the text from delicate church bells and mysterious underground noise to the sounds of crumbling buildings and war. In one instance, sound was used to illustrate the horrible idea that hell may be not just fire and brimstone but never-ending noise.

Though the theatrics were commanding, the concepts were subtle. The text held that it is the Devil’s constant task to undermine faith and prevent the formation of virtues in humans. But, that work is not done in dramatic and obvious ways but little by little and in ways hardly noticed.

Saturday’s offering was by the Fellowship for the Performing Arts which describes itself as theater “from a Christian worldview to engage a diverse audience.” ■

## Theatrical Magic Deseret News

Based on the C.S. Lewis book of the same name, the Fellowship for the Performing Arts’ stage adaptation of “The Screwtape Letters” conjured theatrical magic during its one-day stay in Salt Lake City.

For 90 minutes, only two characters inhabited the stage: the wily devil Screwtape (Brent Harris) and his groveling assistant, Toadpipe (Tamala Bakkensen). There was no

intermission, and much of the dialogue came straight from the book an Irish-born Lewis wrote in 1942.

Despite the confluence of challenging circumstances that easily could’ve proved disastrous in lesser hands, this adaptation of “Screwtape Letters” felt fresh, urgent and three-dimensional. Much of that momentum was attributable to Harris, whose energy level never wavered even as the emotional stability of Screwtape began to fluctuate. ■

## A riveting adaptation of ‘The Screwtape Letters’

The Washington Post

Max McLean cuts an impressive figure as His Abysmal Sublimity, Screwtape, one of the Devil’s own. He crows about the spiritual and moral failings of us “hairless bipeds,” whom the “Enemy” (i.e. God) seems to love so much, and how easy it is to collect our souls for Satan — especially those of film and pop music stars.

McLean’s portrayal can’t help but charm an audience. His well-traveled stage adaptation of C.S. Lewis’s 1941 novel, “The Screwtape Letters,” at the Lansburgh Theatre, clearly delights people of faith, including a guest of this reviewer, and all lovers of Lewis’s spiritual writings. Even skeptics and followers of non-Christian faiths can relish his critique of Western man.

Screwtape warns Wormwood that he mustn’t allow the “patient” to think too much. Ideas about the goodness, selflessness and eternity might waft into his mind. “Keep him out of the way of experienced Christians — an easy job nowadays,” he adds. Later, Screwtape cautions Wormwood not to allow his target to fall in love with a Christian woman, because then “it would be quite impossible to remove spirituality from his life.”

It is Screwtape’s puzzlement over the nature of the Deity that lends the show its riveting nub. C.S. Lewis — and his interpreter, McLean — try to view humanity through the Devil’s lens, and then they try to see how the Devil views God. Screwtape finally admits that he doesn’t understand how the Enemy, God, thinks. Even to nonbelievers, that boils down to a mystery about good and evil.

And McLean & Co. make it an entertaining conundrum to ponder. ■

Please make your tax-deductible gift to FPA using the enclosed card. With any gift of \$250 or more, your name will be included in our playbill as a member of FPA’s Fellowship Circle. (See insert for level details.)

Fellowship Circle is a publication of Fellowship for the Performing Arts • Max McLean, Founder & Artistic Director  
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