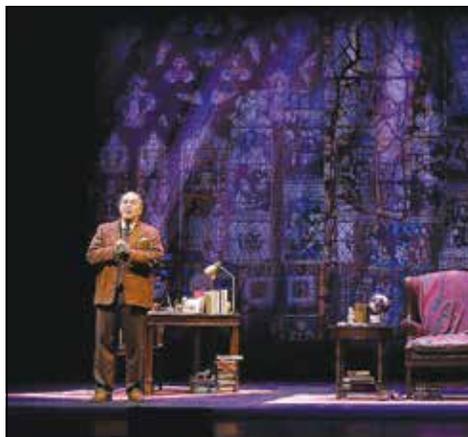


Three Minutes, Three Questions

Max McLean

BECCA MARTIN-BROWN

NWA Democrat-Gazette



FAQ

'C.S. Lewis On Stage: Further Up & Further In'

WHEN — 4 & 8 p.m. March 9
WHERE — Walton Arts Center in Fayetteville
COST — \$63-\$103
INFO — cslewisonstage.com;
waltonartscenter.org

I had a Christian conversion experience in my 20s," says Max McLean, the actor who is bringing beloved author C.S. Lewis to the Walton Arts Center stage. "I was already pursuing a theater career, so this experience redirected my thinking toward integrating my faith with my work."

McLean is the founder and artistic director for Fellowship for Performing Arts, a New York City-based production company whose mission is to "create theater and film from a Christian worldview to engage a diverse audience." "C.S. Lewis On Stage: Further Up & Further In," coming to WAC for two shows March 9, includes among other topics how Lewis' "profound insights on prayer, heaven and the second coming of Christ influenced 'The Chronicles of Narnia.'"

McLean answered these questions for What's Up!

Q. Was your passion for acting always in the context of your Christian journey and worldview?

A. [Attending drama school in] London, I was exposed to some of the best theater I'd seen. Much of it was at the National and at Royal Shakespeare Company, where they produced some of the greatest plays from the past 500 years of western civilization. Much of it had Christian themes, if you had "eyes to see." I did, and I was inspired to be intentional about that. That was the seed for Fellowship for Performing Arts.

Q. Most of us know C.S. Lewis for his Narnia books. Can you tell me more about him and his message in this show?

A. Given the hope C.S. Lewis brings to life in the Narnia stories, many people are unaware he endured deep childhood tragedy — a mother lost to cancer and an overbearing father — and suffered mightily in the trenches of World War I, where he was wounded.

It led him to a deeply held atheism. However, through his own rigorous and uncompromising intellect and the influence of friends such as J.R.R. Tolkien and Owen Barfield, he traveled a road from unbelief to Christian faith. With typical wit, the night he admitted that "God was God," he called himself "the

most reluctant convert in all England."

Lewis' use of language is unprecedented. He had a steel-trap mind that could remember everything he read and then translate that into magnificent prose and speech. This play shows the rise of Lewis from unknown Oxford don to perhaps the most influential Christian voice of the past 100 years. His vision of Christ, of heaven, the second coming, prayer and the divinity of Christ is so alarmingly compelling.

Q. What do you hope the audience is thinking about/talking about as they leave the theater?

A. Theater is meant to wake people up. It is designed to be compelling, engaging, visceral and emotional. 'Further Up & Further In' explores the limits of theatrical storytelling to create an unusual religious experience. I anticipate that most of the audience who see the play will tap into emotions and thoughts they have rarely if ever experienced. Lewis does that to us when we read him. We springboard that into a live multimedia experience that we believe will be profound and remembered for a long time.



"When [C.S.] Lewis moved from vigorous debunker to believer, it wasn't obvious he would become the most influential Christian writer of the past hundred years," says Max McLean, who stars in and also wrote the script for "C.S. Lewis On Stage: Further Up & Further In," coming to Walton Arts Center March 9. (Courtesy Photo)

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