

# FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

SPRING 2017

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.

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## SHOW SCHEDULE

**C.S. LEWIS**  
ON STAGE  
THE MOST RELUCTANT CONVERT  
**NEW YORK CITY**  
Winter/Spring 2017

**MARTIN LUTHER**  
ON TRIAL  
**U.S. TOUR**  
Summer/Fall 2017

**SHADOWLANDS**

The love story between C.S. Lewis and Joy Davidman inspired by Lewis' classic book, *A Grief Observed*.

**NEW YORK CITY**  
Fall 2017

Check [FPAtheatre.com](http://FPAtheatre.com) for updates.

# 'EPIC THEATRE'

## *FPA's 2<sup>nd</sup> New York Season Draws Diverse Audiences and Opinions*

C.S. Lewis took to the stage in New York City as Fellowship for Performing Arts continues its second full season of shows in theatre's world capital. It marked the New York premiere of a revamped *C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert*.

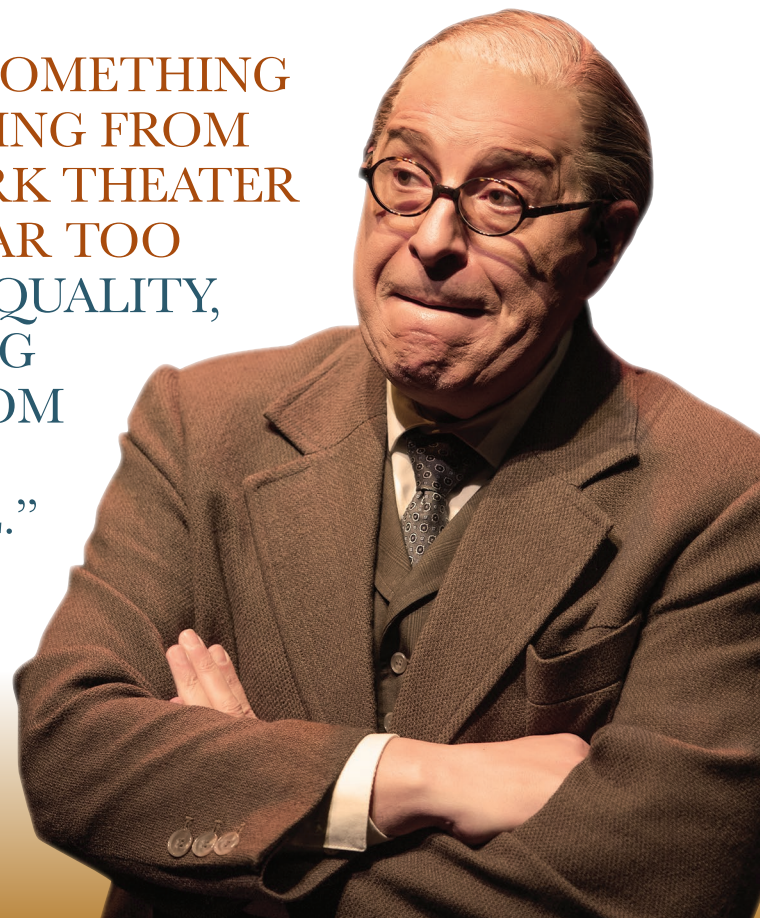
"We made substantial enhancements in the production throughout the past year to tell the story of C.S. Lewis' extraordinary journey from atheism to faith," said FPA Artistic Director Max McLean, who tackles the role of Lewis. "We felt ready for a New York premiere after the extensive developmental process and regional productions."

*The Most Reluctant Convert* had enjoyed a developmental production in New York in FPA's first season; a regional premiere in Washington, D.C.; tour stops in LA, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Indy, Tulsa, Cleveland and a month-long run in Chicago. *Continued on page 2*

**"FPA OFFERS SOMETHING SORELY MISSING FROM THE NEW YORK THEATER SCENE FOR FAR TOO LONG: HIGH-QUALITY, CHALLENGING THEATER FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE."**

*TheatreMania*

Max McLean embodies C.S. Lewis in *The Most Reluctant Convert*.





## ‘EPIC THEATRE’ Continued from front

FPA’s season kicked off with a return production of *The Screwtape Letters*, followed by the New York debut of its first original work *Martin Luther on Trial*.

With a mission of theatre from a Christian worldview to engage a diverse audience, *Luther* drew patrons from a range of faith (and non-faith) perspectives and garnered widely divergent critical response.

“Epic Theatre. Our Highest Recommendation!” was the rave from New York Theatre Buying Guide.


The respected TheaterMania website called it “imaginative, intelligent and provocative,” and said, “With *Martin Luther on Trial*, Fellowship for Performing Arts offers something that has been

sorely missing from the New York theater scene for far too long: high-quality, challenging theater from a Christian perspective.”

“Not every reviewer saw Luther so positively,” said Max, who co-wrote the work with Chris Cragin-Day. “*The Village Voice* felt we let Luther off too easily for his later-in-life anti-Semitic writing.”

*The Voice* said—FPA produces from a place of total religious conviction...[these] productions enjoy making Christianity a kind of bout between God and the Great Adversary, and that can be a surprisingly watchable contest....The show’s main problem is a side effect of its courage: It opens a door to questioning God’s judgment in bringing such a man into Heaven, but then it doesn’t quite walk through... Luther’s core philosophy held that Jesus didn’t save

“GOOD THEATRE  
CREATES TRUST  
AND A DESIRE  
TO UNDERSTAND.”



Kersti Bryan (from left), Paul Schoeffler, John Michalski, Mark Boyett (top) and Fletcher McTaggart bring *Martin Luther on Trial* to life on The Pearl Theatre stage in New York.



souls for their earthly ‘works’ but rather out of pure divine generosity. When the arguments ... get really heated, the play returns to the notion of salvation—just-because and lets Luther slide neatly off its hook.

“The production clearly engaged her,” Max said. “But just as clearly, the writer had a limited concept of how costly is the grace available to us all—Luther included—because of Christ’s sacrifice.”

Interestingly, on the same day that review appeared,

a group of 80 Orthodox Jewish prep school boys with their teachers came to the performance and joined in a standing ovation, and FPA received a laudatory letter from the special assistant to the Archbishop of Philadelphia. (See story page 2)

“At talk-back sessions after Luther performances, I asked audiences, ‘How many of you self-identify as Protestant? Catholic? None of the above?’ The response to each was almost identical,” Max said.

## “OUR GOAL IS TO ENGAGE THE IMAGINATION OF ALL PEOPLE **REGARDLESS OF THEIR BACKGROUND BELIEFS OR LACK THEREOF.**”



“That diversity, and the diversity of opinion the play sparked, encourages me. Our hope is by engaging audiences’ imaginations with the story of Luther’s whole life—the good and the bad—we move toward constructive and reconciling dialogue..

“Our goal is to engage the imagination of all people regardless of their background beliefs or lack thereof,” Max said. “We want to do it to the point where it causes folks to re-examine their own settled assumptions about God, Christ and faith. Good theatre creates trust and a desire to understand. Given our highly-polarized political climate, that might be more needed than ever.”

Prior to *Luther*, Max returned to the role of “His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape” in *The Screwtape Letters*. The show served as a tune-up in preparation for FPA’s first international production, *Screwtape* in London. (See story on next page.)

The entire run quickly sold out as Lewis’ wit and insight continued to prove their ability to showcase a Christian perspective on stage in a way that invites discerning theatregoers.

“Our Fellowship Circle of supporters affords us this opportunity of bringing a Christian perspective to theatre in leading cultural centers like New York and London,” Max said. “We’re grateful for that partnership and aware of the great privilege.” ■

# TOUCHING LIVES, STIRRING IMAGINATIONS

## FPA Makes Connections in NYC and London With a New Work and an Old Favorite

*The Screwtape Letters*—Fellowship for Performing Arts’ international hit seen by more than 500,000 people in London, New York and across the U.S.—continues to capture imaginations and engage audiences. And *Martin Luther on Trial*, FPA’s first wholly original work, drew thousands of theatregoers from every point on the “theological map” to our second New York season.

“Our mission is to create theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience,” FPA Founder and Artistic Director Max McLean said. “Those words—engagement and diversity—describe the results of our second season in New York.”

After seeing *Screwtape* for the first time, one woman wrote Max about the show’s impact on her.

“I just wanted to express how incredibly moving a performance of *The Screwtape Letters* was. I traveled to NYC for the first time, specifically to see this, and was just as impressed as I imagined that I would be. What a phenomenal, passionate display of Truth.... I recently went through an intense spiritual discovery, and seeing this theatrical depiction has only furthered my Faith and discovery of Truth. Thank you for providing this opportunity to myself and countless others.”

In London, where *Screwtape* transferred after the New York run, the show drew these encouraging words from Mark Greene, the Executive Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity:

*Screwtape* “made us even more grateful to you for offering it to us here in England where the spiritual need is so great.

“It is the kind of show that we could bring anyone to... and the kind of challenge to holiness that

is particularly pertinent in a culture that normalizes so much that is toxic.”

The results for *Martin Luther on Trial* were similar.

One person—describing herself as a devout Catholic—hadn’t seen the show but wrote to share her concerns that the Catholic church would be treated fairly.

“I was able to share with her a letter I received the next day,” Max said. “It was on the stationery of the Archbishop of the Diocese of Philadelphia and written by his special assistant.”

In part, the letter said: “I’ve sat through so many well-intended but mediocre Christian films and plays over the years that my expectations were modest. That made the actual experience of [*Martin Luther on Trial*] doubly enjoyable. Congratulations. It’s a wonderful piece of work. I’ve recommended it to at least a dozen other people over the past week.”



Max McLean (left) as *Screwtape* with Karen Eleanor Wight as Toadpipe. Kersti Bryan (above, from left), Jamil A.C. Mangan and John Michalski in *Martin Luther on Trial*.

A matinee performance welcomed a group of 80 Jewish prep school boys and their teachers.

“I was pleased to see them rise to their feet with the rest of the audience and give *Luther* a standing ovation,” Max said.

Theatre from a Christian worldview that can further a spiritual journey, attract praise for excellence and welcome those from other faith perspectives ... this is why Fellowship for Performing Arts exists. And why the partnership with our Fellowship Circle of supporters is so vital. ■





# SPIRITUAL HUNGER IN LONDON

## *The Screwtape Letters* Sells Out Its Run

As Fellowship for Performing Arts prepared its first international production—*The Screwtape Letters* in London—experienced theatre professionals on the ground there offered this caution: Don't expect C.S. Lewis to be the draw that he is in the U.S.

The reason behind the warning was clear—London, and all of Europe, is more deeply post-Christian than much of the United States.

For the theatre critics, it was a good heads up. They did not embrace the show.

But audiences were a different story. The entire run of *The Screwtape Letters* sold out.

"Had we been in the United States, we would have extended the run," said Max McLean, FPA's founder and artistic director. "If the theatre had been available on an open-ended basis, there's no telling how long *Screwtape* could have run."

But beyond the fact that audiences turned out at the Park Theatre to see the show, the talk-back sessions after each performance were deep, lively and challenging.

"Questions ranged from the nature of free will versus determinism to whether a theatre company should accept corporate donations," said Max, who performed the role of Screwtape. "One of the many things I learned is despite its deep secularism, there also is deep spiritual hunger in England."

FPA's mission of producing theatre from a Christian worldview to engage a diverse audience

was certainly on display. For 2017, we're focusing on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and the opportunities for impact by *Martin Luther on Trial*.

But what of the future?

"We'll carefully weigh whether FPA's work can make a difference in London or in other international venues," Max said. "I think there's much for us to do there."

Being able to take *Screwtape* "home" to the United Kingdom is possible because of our Fellowship Circle of supporters. You are making a difference on an international scale. ■



Max McLean as Screwtape and Karen Eleanor Wight as Toadpipe.



C.S. Lewis' stepson Douglas Gresham came from his home in Malta to see the London production of *Screwtape*.



## THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF C.S. LEWIS

Over the past months—since November—I’ve had the opportunity to go on stage and perform the words of C.S. Lewis three times. Fellowship for Performing Arts staged productions of *The Screwtape Letters* in New York and London, and our newest work—*C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert*—is up in New York now.

These productions bring to mind just how enduring Lewis’ thoughts are, how relevant they remain. “Astonishing” is not too strong a word for it.

Lewis published *Screwtape* in 1942.

Think for a moment what has happened since. The bulk of World War II. The Korean War. Vietnam. The Cold War. Political swings to the left and right and back again ... and again. The ‘60s. The technological revolution. Iraq.

Someone from 1942 would find the world unrecognizable today. And yet, Lewis remains relevant. The words he put in the mouth of *Screwtape* ring as true now as the day they were penned.

“A moderated religion is as good as no religion at all.”

WHILE EVERYTHING  
CHANGES AROUND US,  
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DOES NOT CHANGE.

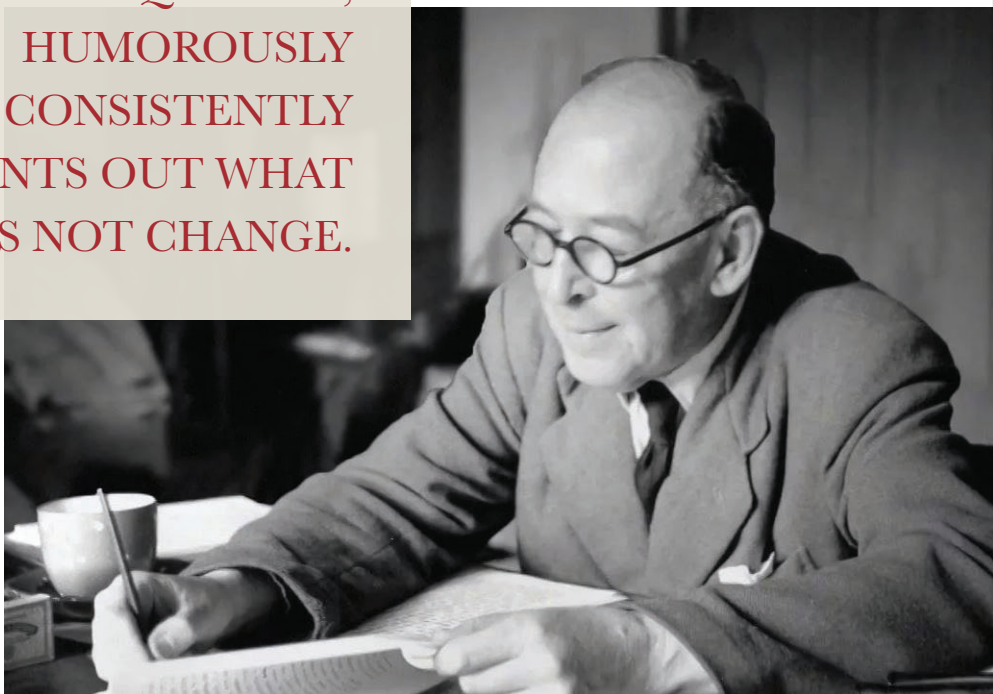
“The safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without milestones or signposts.”

“We must never forget what is the most repellent and inexplicable trait in our Enemy (God); He really loves the hairless bipeds He has created.”

Speaking as one on those “hairless bipeds,” I’m grateful for that love. And I’m grateful that rare men and women like Lewis have an ability to see past the dazzling trappings of the present and tap into something foundational and unchanging.

Isn’t that the explanation for Lewis’ enduring legacy? While everything changes around us, he eloquently, humorously and consistently points out what does not change.

It is such a privilege to bring his words to life on stage, particularly for audiences who may not agree with him, or even know of him. And it’s a privilege to have you along with me in that endeavor. ■



Please make your tax-deductible gift to FPA using the enclosed card. With any gift of \$1,000 or more, your name will be included in our playbill as a member of FPA’s Fellowship Circle. (See insert for level details.)

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