

FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

SPRING 2016

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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2016 PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

C.S. LEWIS ONSTAGE: THE MOST RELUCTANT CONVERT

- Washington, D.C.
April 20-May 8
- San Francisco/Walnut Creek
June 24-26
- Los Angeles/Orange County
July 14-17

MARTIN LUTHER ON TRIAL

- Washington, D.C.
May 12-22

FPAtheatre.com

Current as of March 1, 2016. Check the website for most current show listings.

A Celebration & Look Ahead

FPA's First Theatrical Season Engaged Audiences, Filled Seats and Earned Critical Praise. What's Next?

The final curtain is down on Fellowship for Performing Arts' first full theatrical season in New York City that began Nov. 9 and concluded Feb. 21, and we're already selling tickets for shows in Washington, D.C., this spring.

From strong critical press to diverse audiences to friends of FPA, our four shows in New York engaged thousands of people with theatre from a Christian worldview. FPA Founder and Artistic Director Max McLean said, "We could not have made such a positive impact in the theatre capital of the world without the generosity and encouragement of our Fellowship Circle of supporters."

C.S. LEWIS ONSTAGE: THE MOST RELUCTANT CONVERT

In our New York season, we mounted a developmental production of our newest work—*C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert* about Lewis' agonizing journey from atheism to Christianity with Max as Lewis.

"This show has the feeling of something special," Max said. "It reveals Lewis as tough-minded, funny and vulnerable. It also clearly identifies the main objections that many secular people have about Christianity." Jon Borisch, a longtime supporter of FPA, called it "probably the best play I have ever seen. Truly." Jon made special mention of the profundity of the script.

Our immediate plan is to take the show to the Lansburgh

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A Celebration... Continued from front

Theatre in Washington, D.C., for three weeks (April 20–May 8). Then we will take it to Lescher Center in the San Francisco Bay area (June 24–26) and Barclay Theatre in Los Angeles/Orange County (July 14–17). Check our website as we continue to add new cities for this new work.

MARTIN LUTHER ON TRIAL

A second new work from FPA also debuted a developmental production in New York and also heads for D.C.

“There’re few artistic endeavors as risky as bringing an untested, newly written original play before a critical New York audience,” Max said. “Given the risk, the audience response to *Martin Luther on Trial* was beyond gratifying with standing ovations nearly every night. And given the gravity of the subject matter, I was heartened by how much humor and pathos emerged from the production.”

In 2017, the world will mark the 500th anniversary of Luther’s Protestant Reformation.

“To many, it was a revolt,” Max said. “Luther is a Shakespearean size personality whose influence on



John FitzGibbon, Victoria Frings, Paul Schoeffler, Fletcher McTaggart

spiritual and secular history in the last millennium is surpassed by fewer than half a dozen people. The play looks at both his greatness and his flaws through the lens of a trial set in the afterlife.”

In the play, the devil is the prosecutor, St. Peter is presiding and Katie Von Bora acts for Luther’s defense. Witnesses include Hitler, Freud, Martin Luther King, Jr., Pope Francis and Rabbi Josel among others. The supernatural dimension expressed in the play helps to stimulate the imagination and generate important dialogue toward repentance, renewal and reconciliation.

Washington performances of *Martin Luther on Trial* run May 12–22.



Victoria Frings, Paul Schoeffler, Fletcher McTaggart, John FitzGibbon, Leopold Lowe, Mark Boyett

“There’re few artistic endeavors as risky as bringing a newly written original play before a critical

The New York Times

THEATER REVIEW - C.S. LEWIS THE GREAT DIVORCE

In 'The Great Divorce,' Searching for Greener Pastures

By ANITA GATES Dec. 17, 2015

Here are some things C. S. Lewis wanted you to know about heaven. Walking on the grass hurts your feet at first. Waterfalls talk. Murderers can be friends with their victims. Nobody is famous — or rather, everybody is. (“The glory flows into everyone,” a resident explains.)

This all makes sense in “The Great Divorce,” which has been adapted for the stage by Max McLean and Brian Watkins from Lewis’s novella. At least it does after a few puzzling, artistically pretentious early scenes in the Fellowship for Performing Arts’ infinitely thought-provoking production at the Pearl Theater.

Lewis, the 20th-century British scholar best known as the author of “The Chronicles of Narnia,” took religion very seriously. He was an atheist turned Christian apologist, and his theology makes for fascinating if dense intellectualism. The plot of “The Great Divorce” takes some residents of hell (a gray place where it rains a lot) on a flying-bus trip to heaven, where they learn that being joyful for eternity isn’t that simple. They may not even choose to stay.

Three actors play all the characters. Christa Scott-Reed achieves the most distinctly different interpretations, in roles ranging from a serene spirit guide to a ghost who does nothing but grumble. (There isn’t much hope for her.) Michael Frederic is most memorable as George MacDonald, the Scottish author whose spirit tries to explain the nature of God. Joel Rainwater is the narrator and a ghost who is emotionally attached to a lizard; he can’t understand why the spirits want to kill it.

Jeffrey Cady’s grand projections make heaven a vista dominated by glorious green hills. Three strong performances and Bill Castellino’s direction leave us challenged to understand Lewis’s mind but with enough well-formed hints to be consistently intriguing.



From left, Joel Rainwater, Christa Scott-Reed and Michael Frederic in “The Great Divorce” at the Pearl Theater.
Joan Marcus



Joel Rainwater and Michael Frederic.

THE NEW YORKER

Jan. 25, 2016

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

The Screwtape Letters

Jeffrey Fiske and Max McLean’s 2006 adaptation of C. S. Lewis’s 1942 epistolary novel returns in a fine, funny, theologically thoughtful production, care of Fellowship for Performing Arts. Brent Harris plays the title character—an Abysmal Sublimity charged with securing souls for Our Father Below—with beautifully modulated Mephistophelian suavity. The correspondence is with his nephew Wormwood, a Junior Tempter stationed up above, whose job is to plant doubt and despair in the mind of the Patient, a Christian. Lewis’ examination of the moral laxity of humans (sin is just a bonus) is consistently pointed and amusing. Joining Screwtape in his subterranean study is the elfin Toadpipe (played by alternating actresses), providing secretarial services as well as marvellous commentary in vocalization and movement.

is bringing an untested,
New York audience,”



THE GREAT DIVORCE

“We launched our season with the New York premiere of C.S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*.

“After two years of presenting Lewis’ vision of eternity around the country, we felt it was time to bring it to New York,” Max said.

Theatre-goers agreed. Audiences grew throughout the eight-week run so that in the final two weeks, The Pearl Theatre

staff set folding chairs in the aisles to expand the capacity of sold-out houses.

Part of that was due to *The New York Times* review that appeared in the popular Weekend Arts section of the paper. The critic called Lewis’ work “Infinitely thought-provoking...consistently intriguing.” She also made mention of the “strong performances” and “the grand projection design.”

And members of the FPA “family” agreed.

“The play today was probably one of the three best theatrical performances I’ve seen in my life,” Ann English, a longtime fan of FPA, said.

THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS

FPA’s first season also marked a successful return of *The Screwtape Letters*. Audiences and critics responded strongly when it played in New York for nine months in 2010, so it was gratifying to see similar reactions with Brent Harris as Screwtape. *The New Yorker* called it “a fine, funny, theologically thoughtful production . . . consistently pointed and amusing.” They described Brent’s performance as “beautifully modulated Mephistophelian suavity” and Todapipe as providing “marvelous commentary in vocalization and movement.”

In March *Screwtape* will be in Portland, Ore.; Redding, Calif.; San Diego; and Phoenix with Max in the role of Screwtape.

“Both in New York and in years on tour, *Screwtape* still has a remarkable ability to attract and engage audiences,” Max said. “I’m amazed at the longevity and staying power of C. S. Lewis and *The Screwtape Letters* to explore the reality of spiritual warfare.”

The four-month season in New York has helped to establish FPA as a vital institution that contributes an alternative worldview to the vibrant and influential New York theatre community. “It’s no exaggeration to say that this would not have been possible unless our Fellowship Circle of supporters had come alongside us,” Max said. “I’m humbled by the support, prayers and encouragement from the many friends we have around the country. Thank you for standing with us. There’s so much more we can do.” ■

“I’m amazed at the longevity and staying power of C. S. Lewis and *The Screwtape Letters* to explore the reality of spiritual warfare.”



Brent Harris, Marissa Molnar.

FPA'S HEART... TOUCHING LIVES WITH IMAGINATIVE ART

Critical response helps to determine whether or not our plays are reaching a diverse audience. Audience engagement reveals whether we are capturing their imagination. But the heart of Fellowship for Performing Arts is touching lives by creating theatre that opens doors to thoughts of eternal significance.

"I talked to a woman after a performance of *The Great Divorce* in New York," FPA Founder and Artistic Director Max McLean said. "In her mid-50s, she was an actress and English major.

"She told me, 'I was so engaged both mentally and spiritually. But I'm not sure I enjoyed it. It was unsettling. I've never heard of C.S. Lewis, and I want to know more about him. What do you recommend I read?'"

Max recommended *Mere Christianity*, which was right there among other Lewis works on the book table in the lobby.

The woman said, "But I'm Jewish."

"Lewis is very respectful of other religious views," Max told her. "*The Great Divorce* is about the universal idea that none of us lives up to the way we know should. All of the major religions believe that. The difference in Christianity is that it offers help."

She sort of sighed a bit, Max recalled, and said, "Jesus."

"Yes," Max told her. She picked the book and said, "I'll try it."

At FPA, our passion is putting stories on stage. But our heart is stories like these happening off stage. Your partnership allows us to connect with this dear woman and many, many more like her across the country. ■

"*The Great Divorce* is about the universal idea that none of us lives up to the way we know should. All of the major religions believe that. The difference in Christianity is that it offers help."





ART CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

With our first theatrical season behind us and another first—a two-show season in Washington, D.C.—just ahead, I’ve been reflecting on how art can make a difference for both individuals and communities.

At Fellowship for Performing Arts, we want to engage the moral imagination of our diverse audiences with imaginative theatre from a Christian worldview produced at the highest level of excellence our budgets allow.

I’m grateful—and to no small degree humbled—at the results in that regard from our New York season. Critics from the mainstream media had insightful, positive comments on *C.S. Lewis’ The Great Divorce* and *The Screwtape Letters*. Audience feedback was truly gratifying. But a more concrete example of our patrons’ enthusiasm could be found at the ticket booth. Audiences grew throughout the run of each show with *The Great Divorce* selling out its final weeks and the entire run of *Screwtape*, *Martin Luther on Trial* and *C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert* sold out.

My takeaway from that is people want to have a place to reflect on spiritual issues that are thoughtful, entertaining and safe. As far as I know we are the only theatre company in New York that is rooted in the Christian worldview and makes artistic choices as a result of it. That has helped to create a kind of buzz theatre companies hope for. In other words, we engaged our audiences.

But as I look back (and as I look ahead), I’m realizing we did more than engage—we made a

difference in many lives and in New York’s theatre community.

My conversation with an audience member on Page 3 of this newsletter is just one example. She was a Jewish woman challenged—even disturbed a bit—by *The Great Divorce* and willing to explore Lewis’ writings as a result. She’d never heard of Lewis. Many other audience members told me of bringing friends with little or no interest in Christianity and

finding conversations opening up.

I don’t know where the critic for *The New York Times* stands in terms of spirituality, but she clearly “got” the message of *The Great Divorce* and so

shared it with *Times* readers everywhere.

We had the chance to work with new people at The Pearl Theatre—where we were so graciously received, new actors, a new promotional team. We

provided employment for numerous theatrical professionals—those on stage and behind the scenes.

This is what art can do. Ignited by a creative spark, it spreads benefit. That benefit is quite material in some instances. But it is quite personal, emotional and spiritual in others.

In the wake of these reflections, I find the word “grateful” often coming to mind. Grateful that we had the opportunity to perform in New York City. Grateful that we appear to have made a positive and widespread difference. Grateful that even now we’re at work attempting to do it again in Washington, San Francisco and Los Angeles. We also plan to return to New York next fall for our second season.

And, of course, I’m grateful for you, our Fellowship Circle of supporters. We are making a difference, and you make that possible. ■



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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