

# 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

### Capturing Imaginations

*The Most Reluctant Convert*  
goes on tour. – PAGE 2

### C.S. Lewis in Love

FPA revives Tony-nominated  
*Shadowlands* in New York.  
– PAGE 5

### From the Desk of Max McLean

Responding to Critics – PAGE 6

## SHOW SCHEDULE

### C.S. LEWIS

ON STAGE

THE MOST RELUCTANT CONVERT

ATLANTA, CHARLOTTE & DALLAS

Summer/Fall 2017

### MARTIN LUTHER ON TRIAL

500<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY TOUR

CLEVELAND, CINCINNATI

HOUSTON, DALLAS

MINNEAPOLIS, TULSA

Fall 2017

### SHADOWLANDS

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

NEW YORK CITY

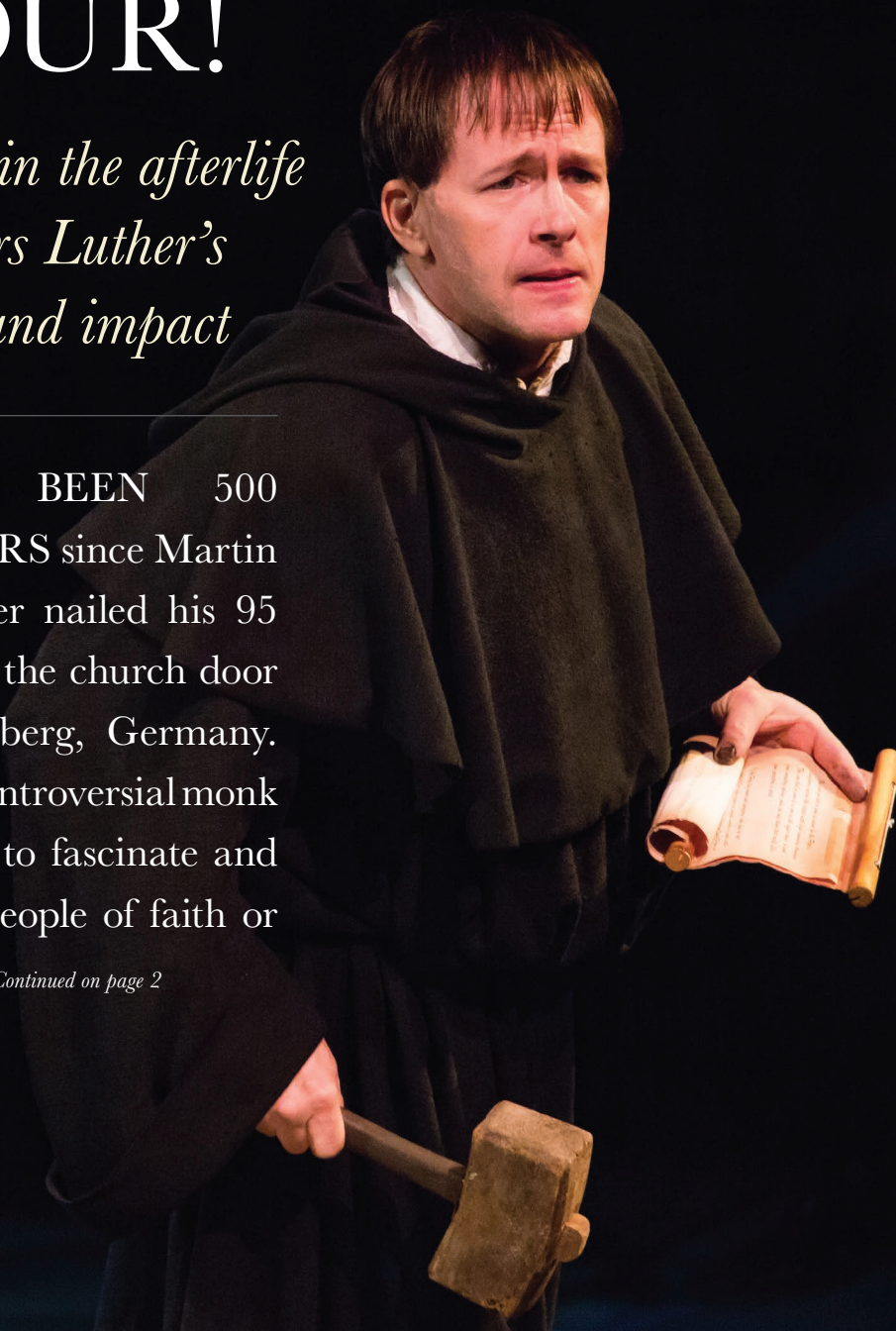
Oct 17 - Jan 7, 2018

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

# MARTIN LUTHER ON TRIAL 500<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY TOUR!

*A trial in the afterlife  
considers Luther's  
legacy and impact*

IT'S BEEN 500 YEARS since Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Yet, the controversial monk continues to fascinate and intrigue people of faith or no faith. *Continued on page 2*



# 500<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY TOUR

*Continued from front*

Marking this anniversary, Fellowship for Performing Arts is taking *Martin Luther on Trial* on the road this fall in a six-city, eight-week tour to Cleveland, Cincinnati, Houston, Dallas, Minneapolis and Tulsa.

For tickets and information, please visit [FPAtheatre.com](http://FPAtheatre.com).

"*Martin Luther on Trial* is a fantasy set in the afterlife where God (for reasons revealed late in the play) allows Lucifer to prosecute Luther (similar to what happened to Job), with St. Peter on the bench and Luther's wife, Katie Von Bora, acting for the defense," said FPA Artistic Director Max McLean. "Witnesses range from Hitler, Freud and Martin Luther King, Jr. Even the current Pope Francis is called to testify!"

The objective is to explore Luther's legacy and impact from the vantage point of 500 years later. After a two-year development process and a production in Washington, D.C., *Luther* premiered in New York in December for a nine-week engagement. *TheaterMania* called it "imaginative, intelligent and provocative." *World Magazine* said *Luther* is "witty and captivatingly creative." And *DC Metro Theater Arts* said, "*Martin Luther on Trial* joins the canon of great theatrical works about religious figures . . . and it's funny as hell. . . 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."

*The Village Voice* commenting on Luther and the rest of FPA's season remarked that "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."

Throughout its run, *Luther* drew theatergoers, who during a show of hands at the Q&A, self-identified evenly between Protestant, Catholic or "none of the above."

A letter from the office of the Archbishop of Philadelphia by the Archbishop's Special Assistant commented, "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 people during the past week."

The same day we received the letter, a group of 80 Jewish prep school boys from a conservative yeshiva attended *Luther* and gave it a standing ovation.

"*Martin Luther on Trial* looks at several controversial moments in Luther's life including a powerful scene with a rabbi that had significant historical consequences," Max said. "In addition, the

play takes a deep look at God's costly grace and the nature of rebellion. This includes a profound look at Satan's rebellion (courtesy of C.S. Lewis and John Milton). It also explores Luther's monumental 'Here I Stand' speech. Audiences routinely gave the play a standing ovation and found it as moving and compelling as any piece of theatre FPA has ever mounted."

With six professional actors playing a dozen characters and several stage managers with multiple costume changes, *Martin Luther on Trial* is the most ambitious touring project Fellowship for Performing Arts' has ever produced.

"I'm particularly grateful to our Fellowship Circle of supporters as we take *Luther* on the road," Max said. "We literally could not afford to bring this important work to major cultural hubs around the country without your partnership."



Katie Von Bora (Kersti Bryan) shares a moment with Martin Luther King, Jr. (Jamil A.C. Mangan) after the civil rights leader is cross-examined by the Devil. MLK, Jr. was named after the great reformer Martin Luther.



The Devil (Paul Schoeffler) and Martin Luther (Fletcher McTaggart) engage in a battle of wits. In the rear from left are St. Peter (John Michalski), The Holy Roman Emperor (Jamil A.C. Mangan) and Pope Francis (Mark Boyett) in *Martin Luther on Trial*.



*“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 VILLAGE VOICE*



# LEWIS IN LOVE

## FPA REVIVES TONY-NOMINATED *SHADOWLANDS* IN NEW YORK



In Fellowship for Performing Arts' second New York season, *C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert* charted Lewis' remarkable journey to faith. This fall, FPA returns to the New York stage with *Shadowlands*, a moving story of late-in-life love—and devastating loss—that shook Lewis' faith to the core.

"This is the first New York revival of William Nicholson's Tony-nominated play, it also received the prestigious Evening Standard Award in London," said FPA Artistic Director Max McLean. "Late in his life, Lewis fell deeply in love with Joy Davidman, Jewish American, communist, divorced single mother, who had converted to Christianity largely as a result of reading Lewis. She brought unexpected depths of joy to his life and just four years later, died of cancer. How Lewis dealt with love, pain and loss makes for gripping theatre."

Broadway veteran Christa Scott-Reed will direct *Shadowlands* at The Acorn Theatre on Theatre Row. Friends of FPA know Christa well for her critically acclaimed performance in *The Great Divorce*, plus she serves as FPA's Literary Manager.

"I'm thrilled to be able to help bring *Shadowlands* to life onstage for FPA," Christa said. "Absolutely everyone, regardless of faith background or belief, will find something that resonates deeply for them in this show. Whether relating to the feeling that love and pain seem so intertwined, or to how we all at one point or another struggle with the meaning of suffering,

there is so much in this stirring play to speak to every human being."

Many are familiar with the work through the 1993 film starring Anthony Hopkins as Lewis. Both the play and the film are based largely on Lewis' *A Grief Observed*, a painful and poignant reflection on the process of his grieving Joy's death.

*"How Lewis dealt with love, pain and loss makes for gripping theatre."*

"It's outstanding timing that FPA audiences will see *Shadowlands* so soon after seeing Max's wonderful show *The Most Reluctant Convert*," Christa said. "On so many levels, *Shadowlands* is the

natural next step for an audience member who is learning more about C.S. Lewis' journey of faith. In *The Most Reluctant Convert*, we see Lewis slowly, and, yes, reluctantly, opening himself up to God and then Christianity. In *Shadowlands*, we see him slowly and as reluctantly opening himself up to love and then marriage. In *The Most Reluctant Convert*, we see him find his faith. In *Shadowlands*, we see him at risk of losing it."

One theme of the play is to show that great people of faith often face profound grief and have only the grace of God to carry them.

FPA's Fellowship Circle of supporters makes it possible to bring works like *Shadowlands* to the stage, taking audiences from every faith perspective deeper into Lewis' compelling spiritual journey.

# C.S. LEWIS CAPTURES IMAGINATIONS IN NYC

## 'The Most Reluctant Convert' Coming to Charlotte and Dallas

After an extended 15-week, 90-performance run in New York City, Max McLean takes his acclaimed portrayal of C.S. Lewis on the road as *The Most Reluctant Convert* comes to Charlotte July 14-15 and Dallas, for a two-week run Sept 27 - Oct 8.

For ticket information please visit [FPAtheatre.com](http://FPAtheatre.com)

We were delighted to have Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the Archbishop of New York, attend the play. He invited Max to be his guest on his national television program. "What's powerful is [the play's] insistence that [Lewis' conversion] was God's doing . . .," Cardinal Dolan said. "It's filled with humor. It's filled with tears. But most of all it's filled with this symphony, this wedding of faith and reason, of mind and soul."

A group of 28 students and faculty from Ivy League's Brown University in Providence, R.I., took the train down to see a matinee performance. The group leader reported that the group "had a blast."

"That might seem an unusual response to such a heady piece," Max said. "However, it is the key to how theatre works."

David Baggett, in his blog *Moral Apologetics*, agrees: "One of the most recurring descriptions of the play is how 'funny' it is; especially all the references to self-deprecating humor. Does this function as an ice breaker and bridge builder?"

"Well, laughter is a reaction. It doesn't lie," Max responded. "Humor tears down barriers; theatre is built on it. So much of modern comedic humor is based on anger and putting somebody down. Lewis' humor is based on wit, surprise and making fun of himself."

*The Most Reluctant Convert* also provided a connection to many skeptics in the audience. At the Q&A



During post show Q&A Max McLean (top) encourages skeptics to voice their opinions. Cardinal Timothy Dolan (center), the Archbishop of New York, interviews Max on his national TV show. Students and faculty from Brown University on the set after a performance.



after each performance, Max invited "skeptical opinions" from those who see the world differently.

This opened wonderfully engaging dialogue. A smartly dressed, articulate older woman admitted during a Q&A that she "had not experienced Christianity presented in such a compelling way." Her view of it was stigmatized by soundbites she saw on television. The play offered a more thoughtful, multi-layered expression of what belief in Christ looks like that appealed to her.

Another person expressed how the play and the Q&A triggered a series of meaningful dialogues with her skeptical mother. The mother expressed alarm at the nihilism behind Lewis' pre-Christian atheist worldview. It opened her eyes to the reality of what life without God really means. This provided an opportunity to dialogue and share the good news of Jesus.

With the support of our Fellowship Circle, FPA is able to bring Lewis' words to life on stage and engage audiences with his long, well-considered (and reluctant) journey to faith in Christ.





## RESPONDING TO CRITICS

One of the measurables of FPA's mission and how it reaches into the cultural marketplace is to evaluate how we are perceived in the mainstream and alternative press.

In our world, a theatre review is like a clinical trial or peer review. Theatre critics can make or break a production. They can legitimize or ignore it. Give it life or kill it. They are the gatekeepers. Two early adaptors who were key to giving life to *The Screwtape Letters* were Terry Teachout of *The Wall Street Journal* and John J. Miller of the *National Review*.

Teachout was actually interested in our mission. It was telling that his review included this comment: "The NYC critics have largely ignored it. I don't see why. Well, I do but there's no point in beating that dead horse."

This was followed by key reviews in the *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*, and finally the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* came on board. Then we started getting attention all over the country—CNN, Associated Press and Huffington Post, even a feature in *American Way*, American Airlines' inflight magazine.

A theatre critic's responsibility is to experience a play's underlying meaning, describe the story, assess the production's merits and faults, consider it in the context of current cultural trends and then render a judgment to the public. Few if any in the secular press write from a Christian worldview. So these are a good barometer of how a non-Christian audience responds to our work.

Most reviews have been positive and even express a need for art and theatre from a Christian worldview to

be part of the culture conversation. Others offer a caution that though this work is worthy, it has an agenda and one should be prepared to see work from "a place of total religious commitment." Finally, others see FPA's work as nothing more than pure proselytizing or mindless propaganda and, therefore, it has no place in contemporary theatre.

This comes as no surprise. Jesus warned that we should expect this; it comes with the territory. The key question is how do we respond?

Creating a successful theatre company in a competitive, highly-segmented entertainment environment is an enormous challenge. To make it known that we create from within a Christian ethos increases the challenge exponentially. Last, to attempt to accomplish this mission in a way that speaks to a diverse audience within a skeptical and even cynical cultural landscape makes it near impossible.

That is our reality, and it drives us to remain faithful to our mission and continue to "up our game" as we strive for excellence.

Since contemporary theatre "built the arena," I realize that they make the rules. We must play by them. It's their party, so to speak. And we should be respectful of our hosts without compromising our worldview.

It is not for us to be cultural critics but to be culture makers. And a commitment to craft and good storytelling is respected. This requires that we work with the best people to produce the best work that our budgets can afford.

In saying all this, I realize it is harder to get a fair hearing. We're pleased when the reviews are good. We're humble when they're not. And in both cases, our response is the same—get back to work and continue to get better. "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord." Col. 3:23

We couldn't do it without you. Thank you for making it possible for us to bring our work to a diverse world.

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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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