

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.

CREATING CULTURE

FPA's commitment to excellence gives Christian worldview a fair hearing in cultural marketplace

By MAX McLEAN



The Screwtape Letters fifty city tour has played in the finest performing arts venues in the country, including the Majestic Theatre in Boston (above) and the Kauffman in Kansas City (outside envelope).

produce theatre that engages the imagination to the point where one is challenged to evaluate their assumptions about truth and reality. In

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Elton Trueblood, the Quaker theologian and former chaplain at Harvard wrote, "The test of the vitality of a religion is seen in its effect upon culture." At FPA we try to think through this litmus test and apply it to the work we do.

What does it mean for us to produce theatre from a Christian worldview for a diverse audience? In the arts Christianity is often marginalized. Christian fiction, media, and theatre are rarely taken seriously. FPA's challenge is to break through this stigma and

STUDENTS RESPOND TO SCREWTAPE

Teenagers inspired by imaginative production

According to the Barna Research Group, 6 in 10 young people will leave the church permanently or for an extended period after high school. The reasons for this range from "church is boring" to "Christianity is irrelevant to my life" to cultural influences that bring into their lives worldviews that are alien to their Christian upbringing.

So how does our work at Fellowship for the Performing Arts influence the next generation of young people to consider the Christian worldview?

We chatted with Cheri Gregory, a teacher at Monterrey Bay Academy, about an hour south of San Francisco. The

last two times *Screwtape* visited the Bay Area Cheri brought her

students to see the show. "I took my twenty-two AP English Literature and Composition students to see C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*. The kids had just survived a busy week so it was no small thing that I robbed them of 9 hours by requiring them to attend our 'field trip' to San Francisco...To say that [our seats] were plastered against the back wall of the theater, involves only slight hyperbole. Having previously seen the performance from the 10th row, I was

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6 IN 10 YOUNG PEOPLE WILL LEAVE THE CHURCH. CAN THEATRE CHANGE THAT?

THE *Screwtape* LETTERS NATIONAL TOUR

Dallas Majestic Theatre, Nov 3-10

New York City Skirball Center, Nov 15-18

Boston Cutler Majestic Theatre, Nov 30 - Dec 1

Washington DC Lansburgh Theatre, Dec 19-30

Durham Durham PAC, Jan 19

Birmingham BJCC Concert Hall, Jan 26

Orlando Bob Carr PAC, Feb 2

Greenville Rodeheaver Auditorium, Feb 5-7

Chattanooga Tivoli Theatre, Feb 9

Austin Bass Hall, Feb 16

Jacksonville Moran Theater, March 9

Salt Lake City Kingsbury Hall, March 23

Lincoln Lied Center, April 6

Modesto Gallo Center, April 10

Colorado Springs Pikes Peak Center, April 27

Sacramento SCC Theater, May 4

Minneapolis Pantages Theatre, May 10-11

Portland Newmark Theatre, June 14-15

Visit ScrewtapeOnStage.com

for up-to-date tour info.

STUDENTS RESPOND

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horrified when we sat down, certain that I'd ruined my students' chances of appreciating the show. I was wrong." Here, in their own words, are their responses to the play.

"The production from a visual standpoint was stunning...amazing to watch."

"It's demonic point of view is not only insightful, but spine-chillingly realistic."

"Toadpipe's actions, body language, everything about her was not only wildly entertaining, but profound in regards to the story itself."

"I never before realized how my little habits and thoughts are like play-dough in the hands of the devil... It makes you really begin to question yourself."

"It makes me sad that Satan can take something as beautiful as love and use it to his advantage."

"Many of the points hit home for me, but the mood allowed me to laugh as well."

"He had the most soothing yet irritating voice. It was a voice that you wanted to stop because of what it was saying, but you wanted it to keep going forever because of how it sounded."

"Screwtape was perfectly evil, but amazingly relatable."

"I've found myself being able to relate to almost all of it, and I felt like I was a horrible person. Like I was being tempted by all the things the demons are trying to tempt me with."

"I realized we all think the complications in life happen without reason, but many things happen just to keep our eyes off the truth."

"It makes me a little angry that the demons think they can toy with me without me doing anything back... I am with their Enemy, and he is strong in me."

"When I am in church, I always get an instant shot of drowsiness, no matter how energized I was right before I walked in. I never knew why, but it always happened. It could be a tactic the devil is using, because he knows how defenseless I am when tired and uses this to prevent me from hearing the word of God."



LEWIS' WORK REACHES YOUNG AUDIENCES IN DEEPLY FELT WAYS.

Cheri went on to say, "They felt that the stage challenged them to use their imaginations and their minds more. In a movie, everything is just given to them and they are expected to buy the director's version of the story hook, line, and sinker. A play demands more of them, gives them more responsibility to pay attention, to fill in gaps, to agree or disagree. One of my students said, 'I always fall asleep in movies. I would never have fallen asleep in *Screwtape Letters!*'" Others said that seeing *The Screwtape Letters* on stage was akin to "the good kind of 3-D" and that "movies expect us to be stupid... This play was not only unique, it was an intellectual challenge that forced the audience to question their very existence."

"Several specifically mentioned the Q&A session afterward as something that colored the entire experience," said Gregory. "My anti-theist and agnostic students LOVED Max's reply to the man who asked what he

hoped an 'unbeliever' would take away from the play!" [Note: FPA assumes "unbelievers" are in the audience. Therefore, we try to stay clear of "us" versus "them" paradigm in the Q & A. In this case, McLean responded simply. "They are here. Ask them. It's a good conversation to have." He also points them to the newsletter that has more detail about FPA's objective.]

Gregory believes that Lewis' work reaches young audiences in deeply felt ways. One female student said,

"What really hit home for me was when *Screwtape* was telling Wormwood how the media influences what is hot or not [in terms of women's body type and weight]. This really struck me because that's something that a lot of people deal with including myself."

We are grateful that Cheri Gregory felt *Screwtape* was worthy of a 'nine hour field trip' so her students could engage in the magic of theatre from a Christian worldview. Our hope is that FPA's work will inspire young people around the country; that they, too, will experience the wonder of theatre and how fascinating and relevant Christianity really is when presented with creativity, imagination and excellence. ■

CREATING CULTURE Continued from front

other words, theatre from a Christian worldview is meant to wake people up.

When we do our work with excellence and respect we receive a fair hearing in the cultural marketplace. Since last summer 122,000 people have seen our work in some of the greatest theatre and performing arts venues in the country.

We, also, test the vitality of our faith by how it relates to young people (See *Student's Respond To Screwtape*) and by living and working within the theatre community of New York City. We want to see how our work measures up with world-class artists, designers and theatre producing organizations. Their talent, resources, creativity and intensity of commitment impresses us. Some of the best and the brightest people in the theatre industry have helped to make *The Screwtape Letters* the success that it has become. These artists may not share our worldview but they respect our work and that provides opportunities for dialogue and friendship.

One of the challenges we face in New York is that many artists perceive Christianity as a political ideology. This means that they often experience the Christian worldview by what it is against. By creating high quality theatre, the wonder of Christ is conveyed under more favorable conditions. It ignites the imagination so that people can see what Christians are for. Like one theatre director said after seeing *Screwtape* in New York: "It is almost shocking to see something so morally and ethically correct on stage."



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The quality bar for theatre in the marketplace is very high. When you attach the name "Christian" to it the bar is even higher. Our task is to select the right scripts that will express Christianity intelligently, inspirationally and persuasively, and execute it so that it can be seen in the best cultural venues in America.

Lastly, we ask the Christian community to support it. This is why I am sending you this newsletter. To help you see that your partnership is an integral part of our work. You make this ministry possible.

The Screwtape Letters is now in the second year of a fifty city national tour. Our plans for 2013 include a new cast for the American tour as well as a U.K. production. We are also developing new productions of *The Great Divorce*, *Genesis* and *Luther*. Thank you for helping us to produce great theatre from a Christian worldview for a diverse audience. ■

CRITICS RESPOND

From reviews in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* (see Spring 2012 newsletter) to alternative *Village Voice* type publications like the ones below, the Christian perspective is receiving a fair hearing in the marketplace of ideas.

Houston Press

CS Lewis's Fight Between Good and Evil

To paraphrase that famous commercial for Levy's Jewish Rye Bread, you don't have to be Christian to like this dramatization of C.S. Lewis's ironic apologia to faith. Anyone can understand the battle between good and evil, and what it means to be a decent person, whatever one's beliefs, whatever one's religion.

Adapted by McLean and co-director Jeffrey Fiske for the Fellowship for the Performing Arts, a theater company formed "to produce compelling theater from a Christian worldview," *Screwtape* is visually exciting theater that adds spice

to what is essentially a staged sermon, albeit a highly entertaining one.

Screwtape discourses wittily on marriage, mothers, the power of prayer, churchgoing, the evils of war, pop culture, the courage of ordinary blokes

and the ease that most people possess to do nothing, which clearly leads one downward fast. Lewis hits every Christian high point, and forcefully debates them with intelligence, wit and clarity. It's the small sins that'll hurl you into the fiery pit, Lewis posits with evocative simplicity; it's on the gentle slope when you don't even realize you're sliding.

Screwtape makes you think seriously about how you're living your life, but going to hell couldn't be more fun. ■

"You don't have to be Christian to like this dramatization... Lewis forcefully debates with intelligence, wit and clarity."

NASHVILLE SCENE

Immediately Identifiable

This stage adaptation of the brilliant C.S. Lewis' rumination on the devil's devious ways first played Nashville in late September 2011. Veteran actor Max McLean re-creates his acclaimed performance as the Prince of Darkness's essential PR man — aka His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape — who explains how

the spiritual weakness of humans can be exploited to fulfill Beelzebub's master plan. The irony of this piece will be immediately identifiable to thinking students of God and morality, yet Lewis' enduring way with words also results in sharp humor and the kind of stern intellectual challenge characteristic of his many other writings. Although Lewis (1898-1963) is probably best-known to the contemporary public as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, his allegories and more direct religious works remain highly respected. This staging is a presentation of the Fellowship for the Performing Arts, which produces theater from a Christian perspective but is committed to engaging with diverse audiences. ■

"Lewis' enduring way with words result in sharp humor and stern intellectual challenge."



THEATER | Good Temptations

The theatrical adaptation of C.S. Lewis' popular book, **THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS** is currently on tour and coming to a city near you. The wickedly funny play follows one of the devil's top demons (His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape) as he trains his nephew (Wormwood, a junior tempter) on how to corrupt a human. An instant success when it opened in 2006, the production kicked off its current national

tour in January 2011, playing to sold-out audiences in Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C., and entertaining more than 200,000 people in 50 cities across America. Which is exactly why you need to head to a theater to see it before it's too late. (The delightfully skin-crawling portrayal of Screwtape by the award-winning Max McLean is another reason.) Tickets from \$28. www.screwtapeonstage.com

RECENTLY SEEN IN



AMERICAN WAY IN FLIGHT MAGAZINE

This article and the complete fall tour schedule of *Screwtape* was included in the September 2012 issue. American Airlines serves seven million passengers each month.

Please make your tax-deductible gift to FPA using the enclosed card. With any gift of \$200 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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