

FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

COMMUNICATING THE MISSION OF FELLOWSHIP FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Gifts from members of FPA's Fellowship Circle provide the means to produce compelling theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience.

THEATRE AS DIVINE SPARK

How theatre creates empathy, breaks down stereotypes and engages diverse audiences.

By MAX McLEAN

If a story is told well enough, the audience will follow it anywhere, even to places it had never intended to go. It may be a feeling that triggers an emotional response, a profound idea that challenges a long held assumption, or a bit of irony that initiates a laugh. You are sitting in a dark room minding your own business and suddenly you find yourself in another world. You are no longer 'here' but 'there'.

"Christianity should be presented as reasonable, profound and fascinating. It ought to suggest meanings beyond our grasp."

This is the magic of the theatre; the ability to make emotional connections to characters you don't know and ideas that you've never considered.

How do people respond after seeing a provocative theatrical experience?

This question is asked after almost every performance. In the case of *The Screwtape Letters* it forces us to look at the hidden spiritual forces that secretly influence the choices we make in everyday life.

One of the reasons we do a Q & A after each performance is to give the audience an opportunity to explore what they have just seen. Their imagination has been engaged by a supernatural story that is both meaningful and Christian. Now they have questions. "Why did this hit me in such a penetrating way?"

Theatre creates empathy that can ignite a divine spark; an interaction between the conscience of the person watching and the Holy Spirit who is challenging and convicting them.

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FROM THE AUDIENCE

One person's experience of theatre's divine spark

Thank you so much for extending a wonderful group offer to C. K. and her friends, one of which was me. We attended *The Screwtape Letters* on Sunday, January 15, 2012, in Thousand Oaks. I was profoundly affected by the play, so much so that I plan on traveling to San Diego to see it again.

I had never heard of the book and did not know what the play was about. As it turns out, seeing the show had a very large impact on me. I have been on what you might call a "spiritual journey" over the course of the last year, after spending some 29 years as an atheist. My Jewish parents took me to synagogue when I was a child, but I rejected it and religion and God altogether when I was about eight.

Over the course of the last year, I've been trying all kinds of stuff — from synagogue to churches, to buddhist chanting, to sufi healings — trying to get more God. The bit in the play where Screwtape says that moderate religion is just as good as no religion at all really hit me. I don't want to be just a "spiritual seeker." I want to be a spiritual finder. I want to go wherever the light is, and right now, as uncomfortable as it may be, the light is coming from Christianity.

One of my Christian friends gave me her copy of *Mere Christianity*. I am

I wanted to tell you all this to let you know that your work really matters.

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THE *Screwtape* LETTERS 2012 NATIONAL TOUR

Norfolk Virginia Arts Festival, May 1-6

Chicago Paramount Theatre, Aurora, May 19

Atlanta Alliance Theatre, June 7-17

Grand Rapids DeVos Hall, June 23

Charlotte Blumenthal Arts, June 29-30

Los Angeles Barclay Theatre, Irvine, July 12-15

Houston Wortham Center, Aug 10-12

San Jose California Theatre, Sep 22

Kansas City Kauffman Center, Sep 29

Milwaukee Pabst Theatre, Oct 6

Cleveland Playhouse Square, Oct 12-13

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Critics Respond to Screwtape

Screwtape's appeal to mainstream critics and theatergoers is one measurable indication that we are making progress towards bringing a Christian voice to the arts community.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

One Hell of a Good Show

Clowning about matters metaphysical is not the exclusive privilege of unbelievers. Fellowship for the Performing Arts, an organization that supports "the integration of faith and the arts," is currently presenting an Off-Broadway stage version of C.S. Lewis's "The Screwtape Letters," the wickedly witty epistolary novel in which His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape instructs his nephew Wormwood in the fine art of persuading unwitting humans to part with their souls. It is — if I may say so — one hell of a good show.

The production stars Max McLean, whose plummy, supercilious bass-baritone voice is ideally suited to *Screwtape*. McLean is clearly having himself a time-and-a-half, and no wonder: Lewis's topsy-turvy exercises in inverted moral theology were made to be read out loud, preferably with lip-smacking relish. McLean is so delightfully repulsive that you won't notice anything else. The New York press has mostly ignored it, though, and I can't think why (well, I can, but there's no point in beating that dead horse). ■

The Washington Post

The Devil is an Equal-Opportunity Entertainer

That smoldering scent wafting along Penn Quarter is not exhaust that's drifted over from traffic on Interstate 395. It's a whiff of infernal brimstone, courtesy of "The Screwtape Letters," the diverting, talky, handsomely

... audience members interested in spiritual reflection will certainly find food for thought — and mortification ...

produced dramatization of C.S. Lewis's book running at the Lansburgh Theatre.

Dominated by actor Max McLean as the eponymous demon, who'd pass muster in any Oxford University faculty lounge, the 90-minute show stays fundamentally true to Lewis's vision of Hell as a cutthroat bureaucracy. But Jeffrey Fiske, who directs the piece -- mounted by Fellowship for the Performing Arts, which creates theater from a Christian worldview -- prudently adds a few Dantesque touches, too.

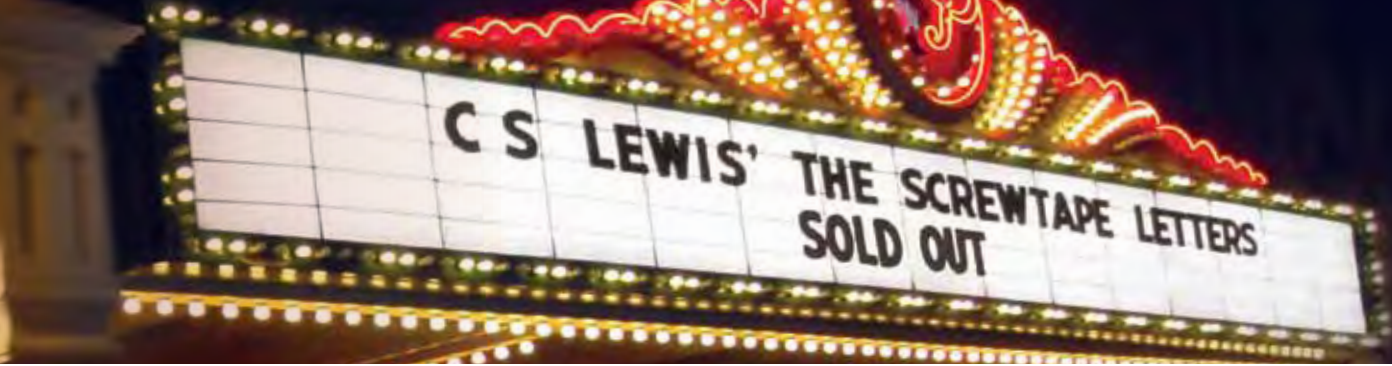
Best known for writing the children's series "The Chronicles of Narnia," Lewis also penned books that more directly expounded his Christian faith. "Screwtape" is one of these, and audience members interested in spiritual reflection will certainly find food for thought — and mortification — in this dramatization. But the fiendish reality the production conjures is colorful enough to appeal to theatergoers of any, or no, religious persuasion. The Devil is an equal-opportunity entertainer. ■

ORLANDO WEEKLY

Hell's Waiting Room

I can't speak for anyone but myself, but I can't think of a better way to celebrate the end of the Christmas season — and the dawning of what will surely prove to be yet another dark and twisted year — than by catching a performance of Fellowship for the Performing Arts' critically praised and popular theatrical adaptation of C.S. Lewis' "The Screwtape Letters."

The letters are highly satirical — and often hysterical and thought-provoking — suggesting a variety of devious ways by which Wormwood can complete his task of carrying the man "down the soft, gentle path to hell." The story takes place in a morally inverted universe in which the figure of God is depicted as the enemy, and greed and avarice are considered to be the greatest good, a world which pointedly reflects elements of our own. The creators of the play have overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacles that a stage adaptation of the novel would seem to present in order to produce a play that brings Lewis' novel to life and explores, as star and co-writer Max McLean puts it, "the



... highly satirical –
and often hysterical and
thought-provoking ...

banality of evil from a demon's point of view.”

Screwtape appeals not merely for its intellectually supported Christianity, but for its dark humor.

The story remains as applicable and timely today as it was when it first appeared 70 years ago. ■

Deseret News

A Riveting Stage Adaptation

“The safest road to hell,” Screwtape advises, “is the gradual one.”

Max McLean and his colleague Jeffrey Fiske faithfully adapted the novella for this riveting, expertly crafted stage show, and Salt Lake audiences were able to enjoy McLean's captivating portrayal of Screwtape for two performances at Kingsbury Hall.

Although eloquently persuasive, Screwtape slowly descends into madness as his frustrations with Wormwood grow with each new unheeded letter.

It's interesting to note that the initial production of this play opened off-off-Broadway in 2006, scheduled for only three weeks. The run was extended to 11 weeks, until forced to close by another show that contracted the theater. An expanded production opened the following year, and the national tour is now on stops through the country. The production company, Fellowship for the Performing Arts, has a mission statement to create theater from a “Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience.”

Critics have contended that “The Screwtape Letters,” with its epistolary construction and limited action, cannot be adapted. But this production is one step toward proving those critics wrong. ■

The Boston Globe

A Viperish Performance

Mark Twain once opined that when it comes to the afterlife, the desired destinations should be “heaven for the climate, hell for the company.”

There's no gainsaying that the title character of “The Screwtape Letters” is pretty lively company, if you can overlook the fact that he wants to snack on your soul. As played by Max McLean, Screwtape is the kind of maliciously debonair fiend who could make Alan Rickman sneer with joy.

“The Screwtape Letters” - a stage adaptation of the C.S. Lewis novel that arrived at the Cutler Majestic Theatre last night for a run that ends tonight - is a none-too-subtle allegory and argument on behalf of Christianity. For all its transparent didacticism, though, “Screwtape Letters” manages to be both engrossing and entertaining, largely due to McLean's silky, viperish performance as His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape. ■

Orlando Sentinel

A Grandiose Performance

McLean charms the pants off the audience as the oily devil Screwtape, but the real fun is watching him unravel as his nephew's hold on his human “patient” begins to weaken. It's a lovely visual interpretation of Lewis' prose, which strikes a hopeful note that the devil has to work pretty damn hard to obtain the soul of one who has found God's light.

The best part... all the thoughts Lewis plants about how we live — that the path to hell comes just as much from minor offenses as the big sins. False pride, petty pickiness and most of all selfishness get their turn in the spotlight, often in vignettes mimed by Screwtape's creepy and loose-limbed demonic secretary (Beckley Andrews and Tamala Bakkensen alternate in the part).

It's the time of year when many of us become more reflective about good and evil, how we treat people, the little slights that can add up to a life not lived as well as it should be. If “The Screwtape Letters” leads its audience to be a little kinder to their neighbors, a little more compassionate to those in need in 2012, so much the better. ■

THEATRE AS DIVINE SPARK

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It is because of this divine spark that many people who experience *Screwtape* see, for the first time, why Christianity is so compelling. Why it has so many intelligent and convinced followers. And some ask, "Could this be true?"

In the world of theatre and culture, Christianity should be presented as reasonable, profound and fascinating. It ought to suggest meanings beyond our grasp. In developing a theatrical adaptation, our desire is to present the Christian case

under the most favorable conditions so that the wonder of its message is expressed with clarity, beauty, humility and conviction.

Some people have an ingrained prejudice against Christianity and need a different vision of what Christianity is and can be. There is a moment in the play when *Screwtape* complains to Wormwood that the Patient is "meeting more and more Christians everyday... and INTEL-LIGENT Christians, too!" That moment always gets a laugh. Why

is that funny? We all know the stereotype of naïve believers, who lack nuance, and who come across as narrow-minded and culturally out of touch. The reality is that there are many Christians who are as creative, as good at their jobs, and have as high a degree of emotional intelligence as people making that claim. *Screwtape*

wants to make sure that skeptics don't meet these people. Because if they find out who we are, what we do, the quality of the art we

make, and the contribution Christians make in other parts of society, there will be a realization that Christians aren't crazy; that the stereotype doesn't hold. *Screwtape* sees this as a dangerous situation that needs to be avoided because it could draw people to his "Enemy" [God].

This is why we want believers to feel confident to invite unbelievers to see our show. We want to offer up great work that ignites a divine spark in a neutral arena. We want to leave an open door for thoughtful conversation about this new world they have just experienced.

Your partnership helps us to continue this work of presenting theatre from a Christian worldview at the highest levels to a diverse audience. Thank you for standing with us. With your support, FPA will continue our efforts through upcoming productions of C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, Mark's *Gospel* and new works currently in

development. Please help us ignite a 'divine spark' into a culture and world that really needs it.

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.)

"If they find out who we are and the quality of the art we make there will be a realization that the stereotype doesn't hold."

FROM THE AUDIENCE

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about 60 pages in. I have started praying in Jesus' name and asking God to please cover me in his light and protect me from the evil forces. I believe spiritual warfare is real and that not too long ago, I was corrupted by the darkness. That is what brings me here. I am now clawing my way toward the light.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes, "It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power—it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk. When you know you are sick, you will listen to the doctor. When you have realised that our position is nearly desperate you will begin to understand what the Christians are talking about."

I wanted to tell you all this to let you know that your work really matters. FPA is accomplishing its mission. Thank you for a wonderful show and for so much more.

—Adrienne, *Hollywood CA*

THE *Screwtape* LETTERS 2012 NATIONAL TOUR

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Philadelphia Kimmel Center, Oct 19-20

Tampa Straz Center for the Arts, Oct 27

Dallas Majestic Theatre, Nov 2-11

New York City Skirball Center, Nov 15-19

Boston Venue TBA, Dec 1-2

Washington D.C. Lansburgh Theatre, Dec 19-30

Visit **ScrewtapeOnStage.com** for up-to-date tour info.

