

# FELLOWSHIP CIRCLE

Summer 2011

Fellowship Circle is a key building block to help Fellowship for the Performing Arts achieve its mission of presenting Christian worldview theatre that engages the culture. As a Circle Member your gift provides the financial foundation for producing meaningful, compelling theatre from a Christian perspective that speaks to a diverse audience.

## HOW THEATRE IMPACTS CULTURE

Think how culture has changed in the last thirty years. Ideas and attitudes that were inconceivable then are mainstream now. Ideas are often legitimized through making emotional connections. Nothing does that better than theatre.

Theatre has the unique ability to create empathy; to feel for characters we don't know and experience ideas we've never considered. It gives us permission to put down our guard and enter another world.

In the 1930's, a small cell of artists created The Group Theatre. Its members are now the 'Who's Who' of American theatre. Their influence has been incalculable, empowering almost every Oscar or Tony winning writer, director, producer and actor since the 1940s. Their leader, Harold Clurman, the dean of American Theatre, famously remarked "Make them laugh, and while their mouths are open, pour truth in." Fellowship for the Performing Arts has co-opted that vision to create theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience. *Continued on back*

## BEHIND THE SCENES

*It often comes as a surprise to discover how many people it takes to produce a theatrical event like **The Screwtape Letters**. Fellowship for the Performing Arts is privileged to associate with some of the most accomplished people in the theatre industry. One such person is Noreen Heron Zautcke, president of Heron PR. We asked Noreen about her work and her thoughts on working with FPA.*

### **Can you tell us a bit about your background and what you do for *The Screwtape Letters*?**

My Chicago based agency handles the public relations, marketing, advertising and group sales for the national tour of *The Screwtape Letters*. We first started working with Fellowship for the Performing Arts in August of 2008 when the play was about to open in Chicago.

We worked very well together and were honored to be asked to represent the New York engagement at the

*Continued on back*

## FPA HAS MOVED TO BROADWAY!

Fellowship for the Performing Arts has leased office space near Times Square in the center of the theatre district in midtown Manhattan. The new offices are located at 1674 Broadway, across from the Broadway Theatre and the Ed Sullivan Theater, where "The Late Show with David Letterman" is taped daily.

"We are delighted to have a physical presence in the heart of New York's theatre district," said Max McLean, FPA's artistic director. The new offices will be used as an administrative base, as well as a creative space for developing new scripts, and collaborating with other artists.

"Being in the heart of the theatre district is part of our mission of producing theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience," said McLean. ■



*Times Square from outside FPA's new offices on Broadway.*

# Critics Respond...

C S LEWIS' THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS  
SOLD OUT

## ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

By Sarah Bryan Miller

*The Screwtape Letters* is a fast-paced 90 minutes of witty, thought-provoking drama.

As funny as it is, it's all aimed at exposing human sin, some which we're unaccustomed to considering (a different angle on gluttony, another aspect of pride), and there were occasional deep silences in the audience as a point hit home.

McLean, who has also performed one-man versions of the Gospel of Mark and of the Book of Genesis is founder of Fellowship for the Performing Arts, a not-for-profit "whose mission is to produce theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience." Judging from this entertaining show, they've succeeded in that aim. ■

## CLEVELAND Plain Dealer

By Tony Brown

Be ye Christian or otherwise and not familiar with C.S. Lewis's mini-masterpiece, get thee down to the Ohio Theatre today for an introduction to one of the wildest literary devils ever invented.

*The Screwtape Letters*, as the name implies, is an epistolary novel comprised of a series of missives by a senior demon named Screwtape to his nephew, Wormwood, advising the junior tempter how to best capture the soul of his "patient" and thus thwart the "Enemy," or God.

Through this simple enough conceit, Lewis creates an ironic apologia for Christianity. But it's Lewis's style of Christianity — brainy, ecumenical, compassionate. Just the sort of Christianity that scares the bejeezus out of the intolerant, the rigid and the haters.

So — because there is much lampooning of the church, and of people who take pride in their humility, and people who have the gall to believe they understand something as infinite as the concept of God — *The Screwtape Letters* appeals to all.

Even if you have read Lewis, this tight, fast-paced adaptation will give you new insight into those letters thanks to McLean's exactly pronounced and insidious reading. Letters have rarely been this scary, or entertaining, or profoundly informative. ■



By Kristen Hamill

From the skull and bones set that adorns Screwtape's office in hell to the rich darkness of the lighting and opulent costumes of Screwtape and his personal secretary, Toadpipe, the audience's 90 minutes is spent — humorously but at times uncomfortably — being wooed by the underworld's top salesman.

Lessons I didn't notice when reading the book jumped out at me during the performance: How a religious person's life is being constantly tested by the seduction of evil, particularly during trying times. How Toadpipe embodies the various flaws of human behavior Screwtape so voraciously capitalized on. And how Lewis portrays a devil who believes human beings are weak, puppet like and highly influenced by their circumstances. ■

MINNEAPOLIS

## StarTribune

By Lisa Brock

Fellowship for the Performing Arts' "The Screwtape Letters," which played at Minneapolis' Pantages Theatre this weekend as part of its national tour, provides an in-depth look at Lewis' wry interpretation of Hell and one of its most well-known spokespeople, His Abysmal Sublimity Screwtape.

Max McLean brings a showman's panache to the role of Screwtape, savoring every drop of Lewis' wit and providing an outsized characterization that's entertainingly theatrical. For the first half of the show, Screwtape is an urbane and charming pragmatist, providing his pupil with meticulous

coaching and curbing Wormwood's excesses with the advice that "the safest road to Hell is the gradual one."

"The Screwtape Letters" is an ambitious undertaking, and this production offers an intriguing, if chilling, tour of Hell that's worth the trip. ■





# CITY PAGES

By Brad Richason

With its thematic inspiration steeped in Christian orthodoxy, a staged adaptation of *The Screwtape Letters* might be greeted with understandable skepticism by anyone holding contrasting — or simply nonexistent — theological views. Such religious wariness certainly isn't relieved by the knowledge that the source novel by C.S. Lewis was written as a celebration of piousness, or that this touring adaptation is being produced by the Fellowship of the Performing Arts, an organization founded under the mission "to produce theatre from a Christian worldview that engages a diverse audience."

Thankfully the emphasis on engaging a diverse audience isn't mere lip service; for rather than preaching to the converted or lobbying for new believers, *The Screwtape Letters* entertains with the universally experienced (and generally nondenominational) sensations of lust and temptation. Whatever one's religious doctrine (or lack thereof), there's something undeniably appealing about moral turf wars pitting virtue against vice, especially when the nefarious side is argued with so much guile and wit. ■

## The New Criterion

By Kevin D. Williamson

The theology of *Screwtape* and its adapters is really of no interest here except to the extent that it bears on the dramatic qualities of the play, which of course it does, in an important way that might have been overlooked in a more secular-minded production.

The subject of *Screwtape* is what the baptism liturgy describes as "the glamour of evil," a choice that reveals Lewis as a clever propagandist: There may be a good deal of banality in Christianity, but Lewis sets out to show that there is even more banality in the life of the lukewarm smart set, the skeptics and the scoffers. The cool kids aren't as cool as they think they are, he argues — you can see why the traditional New York theater organizations have ceded the field on this one. ■

## THE HUFFINGTON POST

By Fern Siegel

In the service of evil, *Screwtape* gleefully enlists the tedium of good. "The safest road to hell is the gradual one," he notes, advising his nephew to push the seven deadly sins.

Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters* in 1942 and dedicated it to his friend J.R.R. Tolkien, no stranger to literary cosmic battles. While satiric, the play's warring tones, aided by

a backdrop of skulls and skewed set, are unmistakable. *Screwtape* is bent on damnation, a position he navigates with clever, occasionally scathing missives.

At heart, *The Screwtape Letters* is a cautionary tale on Christian complacency. However, one need not be any particular religion to appreciate its thrust or occasional eloquence...smartly staged and passionately performed. ■

## nytheatre.com

By Daniel Kelly

Perhaps the most overwhelmingly alienating part of *The Screwtape Letters* for people in the age group of my companion and myself — ironic post-college twentysomethings — is the play's strong identification with Christianity.

Among many of my peers, Christianity is something for bible-thumpers and right-wing conservatives — something that we are predisposed to mock rather than venerate. In the sketch comedy world, where I work frequently, sketches featuring Jesus Christ are so common they are cliché. It is therefore doubly important that ironic post-college twentysomethings like myself go and see *The Screwtape Letters*.

This is not bible-thumping, this is serious meditation on issues having to do with the human experience — and it is an important reminder of what Christianity can be.

Whether you're Christian, Muslim, Jew or any other religion under the sun, *The Screwtape Letters* explores fundamental questions about how we live our lives, and make the decisions that we make. ■

## THE Screwtape LETTERS

### NATIONAL TOUR

**ATLANTA** Alliance Theatre, June 9 - 12

**IRVINE, CA** Irvine Barclay Theatre, July 21 - 24

**HOUSTON** Wortham Center, Aug. 12 - 13

**BIRMINGHAM** BJCC Concert Hall, Sep. 17

**NASHVILLE** Polk Theater (TPAC), Sep. 30 - Oct. 1

**TAMPA** Straz Center for the Arts, Oct. 7 - 8

**MEMPHIS** Orpheum Theatre, Nov. 5

**BOSTON** Cutler Majestic Theatre, Dec. 2 - 3

New cities are added regularly. Visit **ScrewtapeOnStage.com** for up-to-date tour information. Dates as of June 20, 2011.

# BEHIND THE SCENES

*Continued from front*

Westside Theatre, which ran for nine months in 2010 and the national tour that was launched in early 2011.

## **Has your experience in promoting *The Screwtape Letters* differed from other shows you've worked on?**

My agency represents numerous high profile concerts, national tours, and large commercial theaters.

I have to admit that I was skeptical about *The Screwtape Letters* at first. Most theatrical productions, whether it be in Chicago, New York or elsewhere don't sell out immediately. The marketing and PR requires careful planning, constant evaluation and attention to detail. We certainly did that but I haven't experienced anything quite like the response to this show. In Chicago, *The Screwtape Letters* extended four times and ran for six months! It brought thousands of people to the theater and could have run much longer if FPA wanted to.

In a feature that our agency secured for the production, Chris Jones, the chief theatre critic for the Chicago Tribune, called *The Screwtape Letters* "the most successful show in the history of the Mercury Theatre." We are delighted to be part of that success.

## **Why do you think mainstream audiences have responded to the show?**

When media organizations such as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and CNN (to name only a few) embraced the New York production, the general public took notice. To fill the kind of large theaters that we are playing on the national tour, we need audiences of all kinds and they are coming! From teenagers to senior citizens, church-goers to atheists, seasoned Broadway theatergoers to first timers, this is a Broadway quality production that appeals to all audiences.

## **How have the people that run the venues for the national tour responded to the show?**

They are often cynical. "A play?" (Musicals are usually easier to promote). "Is it Christian?" (Truly, all audiences enjoy it). There are hurdles that we need to jump, but once the word gets out respect starts to build. As we approach capacity and even sell out, there is actually admiration. Then we often hear, "Well, I was behind it the whole time!" Several venues have told us that *The Screwtape Letters* has exceeded the attendance of some well-known Broadway touring productions. We are not surprised. ■


# HOW THEATRE IMPACTS CULTURE

*Continued from front*

With a hit New York run and national tour, audiences are responding to FPA's production of *The Screwtape Letters* in unique ways. A teacher who brought 25 students to see the play said, "The show was unlike anything I'd ever

When audience members attest to the power of self-reflection in our plays, the truths of the Christian faith are experienced anew. And it goes beyond the audience. Our influence reaches the mainstream media as well. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote, "As funny as [*The Screwtape Letters*] is, it's all aimed at exposing human sin, some which we're unaccustomed to considering (a different angle on gluttony, another aspect of pride), and there were occasional deep silences in the audience as a point hit home."

Fellowship for the Performing Arts is impacting culture. Through your support, FPA will continue our efforts with upcoming productions like C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, *Mark's Gospel* and new works currently in development. Please consider giving today. Your gift can help us continue to bring transformative theatre to your community and to the culture at large. ■



*Time and time again, FPA hears from audience members who attest to the power of self-reflection, rather than escapism, in our plays.*

'participated' in.... Usually drama/film leads us to escape into another reality. This one did just the opposite; it caused one to focus back on the reality within... It was a very powerful tool for revelation and conviction."