

# 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.

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## NATIONAL TOUR

### THE C.S. LEWIS GREAT DIVORCE

**Atlanta** Alliance Theater, June 5 -15

**Los Angeles** Alex Theatre, July 12

**LA/Orange County** Barclay Theatre, July 17-20

**Houston** Wortham Center, Aug 15-16

**Chattanooga** Tivoli Theatre, Sep 20

**Tampa** Straz Center, Sep 26-27

**Durham** Carolina Theatre, Oct 3-4

**San Jose** California Theatre, Oct 10-11

**San Diego** Balboa Theatre, Oct 25

**Dallas** Eisemann Center, Nov 1

**Dallas** Majestic Theatre, Nov 8

**Indianapolis** Clowes Memorial Hall, Nov 15

**Washington D.C.** Lansburgh Theatre, Dec 19-28

Visit [CSLewisOnStage.com](http://CSLewisOnStage.com) for up-to-date tour info. Above dates as of June 1.

# CONNECTING WITH *THE GREAT DIVORCE*

## National tour draws praise from Audiences and Critics

From South Carolina to Kansas to Arizona, audiences at Fellowship for Performing Arts' stage adaptation of C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* echo a similar theme.

*"I was amazed." "Simply breathtaking." "It was excellent."*

And critics say much the same. A perfect example comes from a reviewer for an edgy, urban newspaper clearly impacted by excellent art and a Christian worldview occupying the same stage. This is what she wrote:

"What's the mark of a great piece of art? Is it beautiful? Should it make you think? Make you question your beliefs? Should it make you wonder? The stage adaptation of C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* produced by the New York-based Fellowship for Performing Arts, which tells theatrical stories from a Christian point of view, aims to answer those questions and more. *The Great Divorce* is about a person's journey from hell to heaven. Three actors, all Broadway veterans, portray 19 roles. They are brilliant; working magic and are a joy to watch.

"But make no mistake: this show has a strictly Christian agenda (no surprise given its creators)... As far as a standard theater-going experience goes it was surreal.

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Three actors bring nineteen of Lewis' most provocative characters to vivid life.



Christa Scott-Reed, Tom Beckett and Joel Rainwater in scenes from FPA's production of C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.

# CRITICS RESPOND

The appeal of *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce* to mainstream critics and theatergoers is one measurable indication that we are making progress toward bringing a Christian voice to the arts community.

## THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS

### The New York Times

Lewis's Tempters, Meticulously  
Paving the Road to Hell

The Devil has rarely been given his due more perceptively and eruditely than in C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, an epistolary novella that examines the Christian religion from the point of view of the other side. And in a humorous and lively stage adaptation by Jeffrey Fiske and Max McLean now playing at Westside Theater, he is every inch the cunning English gentleman he is often purported to be.

The humor of this stage adaptation is mostly cerebral, and a large part of what makes it successful is an energetic performance by Mr. McLean as Screwtape that brings some semblance of action to the stage. Karen Eleanor Wight is aptly reptilian as Toadpipe.

One doesn't have to be a Christian to benefit from or enjoy *The Screwtape Letters*. Whatever a person's faith may be, human failings and foibles are pretty much the same the world over. ■

“PURE GENIUS!”

NATIONAL REVIEW

### The Washington Post

A Riveting, Charming Adaptation

*The Screwtape Letters* clearly delights people of faith, including a guest of this reviewer, and all lovers of Lewis' spiritual writings. Even skeptics and followers of non-Christian faiths can relish his critique of Western man, channeled through McLean's acidic and quizzical interpretation.

It is Screwtape's puzzlement over the nature of the Deity that lends the show its riveting nub. C.S. Lewis — and his interpreter, McLean — try to view humanity through the Devil's lens, and then they try to see how the Devil views God. Screwtape finally admits that he doesn't understand how the Enemy, God, thinks. Even to nonbelievers, that boils down to a mystery about good and evil.

And McLean & Co. make it an entertaining conundrum to ponder. ■

## THE GREAT DIVORCE

### THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Fascinating...brings Lewis to life  
with lively wit and generous humor.

Best known for his children's fantasies *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in his writings for adults, C.S. Lewis couldn't rely on such fairy-tale bait, but he still had tricks up his sleeve to turn theology into entertainment, primarily his lively wit and generous sense of humor. And both of these shine through in *The Great Divorce*, a new stage adaptation of his 1945 allegory on the nature of heaven and hell.

Created by the New York-based Fellowship for Performing Arts, the world-premiere production is launching its tour at the Herberger Theater Center in Phoenix. In *The Great Divorce*, a trio of talented actors take turns playing the Narrator — an undisguised stand-in for Lewis himself — as he boards a bus to leave a desolate “gray town” that he learns is hell. Soon they reach, not heaven, but the outskirts of it, which is depicted using video projections as a beautiful wilderness filled with towering mountains and waterfalls.

The central theme is human pride, and although the message is aimed at believers, *The Great Divorce* raises questions about right and wrong and how we live that should provoke thought in anyone. And just as important, it never feels like a dry sermon. ■

“A JOY TO WATCH”

CHARLESTON CITY PAPER

WORLD  
MAGAZINE

Fantastic...raising questions of eternal  
significance with disarming ease.

It takes a good deal of cunning to “steal past watchful dragons,” but Max McLean's stage production of *The Great Divorce* rises to the challenge, raising questions of eternal significance with disarming ease, showcasing McLean's commitment to creating culture from a Christian worldview.

In order to recreate Lewis' abstract allegory, McLean's creative team utilized cutting-edge videography and set design. The plot was condensed to keep the story moving...but Lewis' wry humor was paced perfectly throughout, lightening the mood just enough for the mind to absorb the story's deep theological truths. ■

# THEATRE THAT TOUCHES LIVES

## FPA Production Helps Former Atheist See the Light

Adrienne tried it all—the synagogue of her parents’ faith, church with friends, Buddhism and more. Then friends invited her to see Fellowship for Performing Arts’ production of C.S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*.

“I had never heard of the book and did not know what the play was about,” Adrienne said. “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 29 years as an atheist. I’ve been trying

all kinds of stuff—from synagogue to churches to chanting—trying to get more God. The bit in the play where *Screwtape* says a mod-

erated religion is as good as no religion at all really hit me. I don’t want to just be a ‘spiritual seeker’; I want to be a spiritual finder.”

The Christian worldview presented on stage so engaged Adrienne that she traveled to another city to see *Screwtape* a second time and accepted and read a copy of Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* from a friend.

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

In *Mere Christianity*, Adrienne found this quote from Lewis: “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 the Power—it is after all this, and not a mo-

THEATRE FROM A CHRISTIAN  
WORLDVIEW THAT CAPTURES  
THE MORAL IMAGINATION  
AND ENGAGES  
A DIVERSE AUDIENCE.



‘YOUR WORK REALLY MATTERS. FPA IS ACCOMPLISHING ITS MISSION.’

ment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk.”

“I wanted to tell you all this to let you know that your work really matters,” Adrienne said. “FPA is accomplishing its mission.”

Stories like Adrienne’s that emerge from FPA’s productions get to the heart of what we’re about—theatre from a Christian worldview that captures the moral imagination and engages a diverse audience. Today, many people are searching for life’s answers beyond the walls of the church. FPA meets them in the theatre, at the intersection of art, entertainment and truth. And responses like this, from Adrienne, take the measure of FPA’s impact: “Thank you for a wonderful show ... and for so much more.” ■

# THEATRE FROM A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW ENGAGES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Research from the Barna Group shows six of 10 young people leaving the church permanently or for an extended period after high school. But a trip to the theatre offered one educator an opportunity to engage her students' minds with a Christian worldview.

Cheri Gregory, a California high school teacher, took a nine-hour field trip with her AP English Literature students to see *The Screwtape Letters*.

"The kids had just survived a busy week so it was no small thing that I robbed them of nine hours by requiring them to attend our

certain I'd ruined my students' chances of appreciating it."

Turns out Cheri need not have worried. *Screwtape* captured her students' attention and imaginations.

"They felt the stage challenged them to use their imaginations and their minds more," she said. "In a movie, everything is just given to them. A play demands more of them, gives them more responsibility to pay attention, to fill in the gaps, to agree or disagree."

Her students rose to the challenge and were rewarded with entertainment that made them think. "Stunning . . . amazing to watch," one student said. "It makes you really begin to question yourself," another wrote. "I

found myself being able to relate to almost all of it." (See sidebar for more student responses.)

The play not only captured the students' imaginations, it piqued curiosity, as shown by a Q&A

*Continued on back page.*

## Students Respond to FPA Production

FPA's *The Screwtape Letters* captured the minds and imaginations of Advanced Placement Literature students from Monterrey, Calif. Here are a few of their responses to the show.

"Its 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."

"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."

"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."

"Screwtape was perfectly evil, but amazingly relatable."

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

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



LEWIS' WORK REACHES YOUNG AUDIENCES IN DEEPLY FELT WAYS.



field trip," she said. "To say our seats were plastered against the back wall of the theatre involves only slight hyperbole. Having seen the show from the 10th row, I was horrified when we sat down,

# CREATING CULTURE

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

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.” These words guide our efforts at Fellowship for Performing Arts. What does it mean for us to produce theatre from a Christian worldview for a diverse audience?

In the arts Christianity is often marginalized. FPA's challenge is to break through this stigma and produce theatre with excellence that engages the imagination. That is what it takes to get a fair hearing in the cultural marketplace. As a result, more than 400,000 people have seen *The Screwtape Letters* first in New York and then on national tour.

We also test the vitality of our faith by how we live and work within the theatre community of New York City. How does our work measure up against world-class artists, designers and theatre producing organizations? Their talent, resources, creativity and intensity of commitment impress us. Some of the best and the brightest people in the theatre industry helped make *The Screwtape Letters* the success that it is and helped launch our theatrical adaptation of C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*. These artists may not share our worldview, but they respect our work and that provides opportunities for dialogue and friendship.

Too often the Christian worldview is experienced by what it is against. By creating high-quality theatre, we ignite 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.”

The quality bar for theatre in the marketplace is very high. Attach the name “Christian” to it and



Brent Harris and Marissa Molnar in a scene from *The Screwtape Letters*.



Tom Beckett and Joel Rainwater in a scene from *The Great Divorce*.

that bar rises. Our task is to produce works that express Christianity as imaginative, multi-layered and appealing, and execute them so they deserve to be seen in the world's best cultural venues.

Lastly, we ask friends like you to help us. That is why we are called Fellowship for Performing Arts. It is a fellowship of people who believe theatre and art from a Christian worldview can capture the moral imagination and impact culture. Your prayers and support are integral to our work. ■

# CONNECTING WITH *THE GREAT DIVORCE*

Continued from front



Tom Beckett, Christa Scott-Reed and Joel Rainwater in a scene from C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.

"As I left the theater, I heard theatre-goers talk about heaven and hell and the play's merits and faults. If art is supposed to be beautiful, this production of *The Great Divorce* is certainly art. And if art is meant to stimulate discussion, to make you think, to make you wonder and talk to your neighbor about your doubts and fears, then I have to admit: *The Great Divorce* is certainly art."

"Such a response is so meaningful to me," said

FPA Founder and Artistic Director Max McLean. "This critic left the theatre wanting to talk about her experience. This is culture making. This is producing theatre at the highest levels that puts forth a vision of Christianity that is imaginative, multi-layered and convicting. We want those who attend our productions to receive an extraordinary C.S. Lewis experience: to be entertained, at times convicted and to consider the implications of what they have seen long after the curtain comes down."

Connecting with audiences like this helps us break down stereotypes of what Christianity is and can be. This is what drives Fellowship for Performing Arts forward. In 2014, for the first time, FPA put two shows on the road—the national hit *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*. Consider joining our Fellowship Circle of supporters and becoming "culture makers" with us as we offer thought-provoking theatre that captures imaginations and makes a difference in people's lives. ■

## STUDENTS RESPOND

Continued from page 3

after the performance with Fellowship for Performing Arts Founder and Artistic Director Max McLean.

"Several students specifically mentioned the Q&A session afterward as something that colored the entire experience," Cheri said. "My anti-theist loved Max's reply to the man who asked what he hoped an 'unbeliever' would take away from the play."

"They are here," Max answered. "Ask them. It's a good conversation to have."

FPA assumes audiences for its productions come from a variety of faith—or non-faith—experiences. Max's answer illustrated how shows like *Screwtape* and *The Great Divorce* can engage diverse crowds while avoiding an "us vs. them" paradigm.

The Fellowship Circle of FPA supporters makes it possible for theatre from a Christian worldview to engage seekers, students and the whole diverse array of audiences who attend productions of *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Great Divorce*. Consider partnering with us as we strive to create theatre that is excellent, always entertains and then engages our audiences. ■



"STUNNING...  
AMAZING  
TO WATCH."



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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