

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.

SCREWTAPE'S SURPRISE SUCCESS

“Most Successful Production in History of Mercury Theater”

The Chicago Tribune recently featured the work of Fellowship for the Performing Arts as the lead story in the Theater section. Here are excerpts by chief theater critic, Chris Jones:

“Here’s a show I never expected to be a big hit in Chicago, *The Screwtape Letters*...you don’t generally think of the jottings of C.S. Lewis as a box office smash. But according to Mercury Theater owner Michael Cullen, *Screwtape* (Continued inside)



WHY GOOD THEATRE IS NEEDED

By Max McLean

When I started Fellowship for the Performing Arts in 1993, many influential voices within the Christian community were lamenting the influence of the arts on our culture. From the right there was condemnation. This resulted in alienating artists from the church. The left seemed to affirm artists uncritically. They recognized the importance of artistic expression but failed to address the cultural impact of their work. Some churches were funding or presenting works that undermined the Christian faith.

“Audience members interested in spiritual reflection will certainly find food for thought — and mortification...But the fiendish reality the production conjures is colorful enough to appeal to theatergoers of any, or no, religious persuasion.”

The Washington Post

Secondly, very few serious Christians were actively engaged in artistic expression, especially in the theatre. If they did, they mostly kept it to themselves. Churches didn’t support it and the cultural elite marginalized any Christian

(Continued inside)

A **nytheatre.com** Review

Is Christianity Alienating?

NEW YORK — *The Screwtape Letters* is just about everything you want in a night at the theatre. Thought-provoking, engaging, entertaining, well produced, performed and directed, and all based around the wonderful words of C.S. Lewis...

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.

— Daniel Kelly, nytheatre.com

Chicago Critics Respond to Mark's Gospel

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

It Comes Down to Performance

• **RECOMMENDED** •

To begin, a confession: While I have never had much trouble understanding Shakespeare, I've always found a good deal of the Bible either baffling or impenetrable. Only after seeing *Mark's Gospel* this past weekend – the one-man show at the Mercury Theater in which actor Max McLean enacts one of the four canonical renderings of “the good news” – did I realize what had been missing. It comes down to a single word: performance.

“ONLY AFTER SEEING
MARK'S GOSPEL ...
DID I REALIZE WHAT
HAD BEEN MISSING.”

The Chicago Sun Times

With wit, humor and a multiplicity of voices and attitudes, McLean brings a dramatically rooted clarity to what is a profoundly mysterious odyssey. And the actor even manages to make the many parables Jesus spun – tales that frequently left his own disciples scratching their heads – seem more decipherable.

Along the way, this production also makes you realize how Shakespeare extracted (and transformed) much that is in the Bible.

Assuming the role of a scribe (neither wholly ancient nor modern), McLean chronicles the life of Jesus...The factional politics

that would eventually lead to Jesus' crucifixion are clearly explained, as are the events of the crucifixion, disposition and resurrection.

McLean is an actorly actor – his voice is a well honed instrument, his diction impeccable, his movements precise, his face expressive. And working with director Jeffrey Fiske, who also staged *Screwtape*, he sees to it that the pacing of this two-act, two-hour show is impeccable.

True, the devil of *Screwtape* was more delicious company. But devils serve up cheap thrills. Jesus inspires questions.

– Hedy Weiss, Chicago Sun-Times

Chicago Tribune

Mark's Gospel Speaks for Itself

• **CRITIC'S CHOICE** •

Whatever your feelings for, relationship with, or interest in Jesus of Nazareth, you'll have heard a great deal about him. And that knowledge will likely have filtered throughout your life, beginning when you were very young.



One of the great virtues of Max McLean's simple but surprisingly compelling one-man show, *Mark's Gospel*, at Mercury Theater, is that you get the chance to start over.

I don't necessarily mean that in religious terms (although for some it may afford that opportunity). I mean that you can settle back in your seat and think, 'I am going to experience the whole thing.'

When it comes to this particular story, you really can't beat the entire shebang at one sitting. Most of us never get to hear this great narrative in that fashion.

While nothing in this opinion centered world comes without some kind of an ideological filter, McLean and his director, Jeffrey Fiske, aim for a mostly unobtrusive presence, letting the words and the vivid biblical characters say what they have to say and the hearers take what they will.

One of the greatest virtues of this well-known performer is his refusal to imbue his words with great spiritual significance, thus upstaging the narrative itself.

That's not to say he doesn't speak these words uncommonly well. McLean, whose last show at the Mercury Theater was *The Screwtape Letters*, is formidably articulate and he is a sufficiently skilled man of the theater to know that even the story of Jesus needs to be injected with some pace.

Any life-changing moments will come from the text rather than the theatrical values. But *Mark's Gospel* bops along nicely revealing the events of this earth-shattering life.

– Chris Jones, Chicago Tribune

FPA OPENS NEW YORK CITY OFFICE

The Board of Directors authorized the establishment of an FPA presence in New York City. The space is at 350 W. 42nd Street in the heart of the NYC theatre district. It is a mixed-use apartment with a home office, meeting space and a recording studio.

“It is important for FPA to be in the thick of the theatre community where artists can meet, share, pray and interact about their faith and art,” said Max McLean, FPA President and Artistic Director. “The theatre is a small community. Relationships need to be established and nurtured. FPA needed a space that is accessible to the theatre community, safe enough

to nurture new relationships and flexible enough to hold rehearsals, meetings, staged readings and social gatherings.”

Recently the FPA office hosted a staged reading of a new play, a rehearsal for readers who present the Scriptures for Sunday morning worship, a small reception, several meetings and a group of Broadway actors and stage hands who meet weekly between matinee and evening performances for Bible study, fellowship and prayer.

FPA’s principle office will remain in Morristown, New Jersey.

The power of theatre is that it flies “under the radar.”



Screwtape’s Surprise Success

Every performance at or near capacity

Continued from page one

has become the most successful show in the North Side venue’s history.

“It is doing phenomenal,” Cullen said, sounding especially cheerful. “Every performance has been at or near capacity.”

Along with the farce *Don’t Dress for Dinner* at the Royal George Theatre and the musical *Million Dollar Quartet* at the Apollo Theatre, *Screwtape* is part of a trifecta of Chicago shows that are doing surprisingly good business, given the economic climate.

Why? They are all decent, well-marketed shows (all have been attracting out-of-town producers over the last few weeks). And, perhaps more important,

they all appeal to a distinct niche of theatergoer.

In the case of *Screwtape*, that niche is the Christian audience...

“Those who want to influence men’s minds have long recognized that the theatre is the most powerful medium through which to make the attempt.”

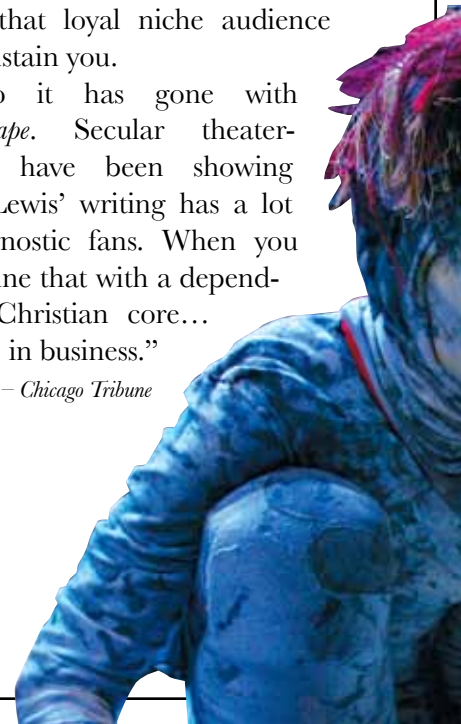
Paul Johnson, Historian



Conventional showbiz wisdom has it that a niche show can’t survive just on its niche audience. But if you can add just a little crossover appeal into the mix, then that loyal niche audience will sustain you.

So it has gone with *Screwtape*. Secular theatergoers have been showing up—Lewis’ writing has a lot of agnostic fans. When you combine that with a dependable Christian core... you’re in business.”

— *Chicago Tribune*



Chicago Critics Respond to Screwtape

Chicago Tribune

Screwtape Makes Persuasive Case

• CRITIC'S CHOICE •

The Christian allegorist C. S. Lewis is to agnostics what the conservative writer David Brooks [of the New York Times] is to liberals. He's about the only one they can stand. Even those who abhor religiously oriented literature — people who wouldn't be caught dead reading "Left Behind" — are ready to give Lewis space in their lives. McLean who stars in the piece...lets it rip...This colorful behavior serves this florid and distinctive piece very nicely...A

"Fellowship for the Performing Arts, an organization that supports 'the integration of faith and the arts,' is currently presenting a stage version of C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*...It is — if I may say so — one hell of a good show. 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 WALL STREET JOURNAL

very smart, crystal clear and honestly intended reading of Lewis' richly rewarding prose by the compelling McLean. The exuberant theatricality leaves you wiping your brow in the end.

— Chris Jones, *Chicago Tribune*

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

A Hot and Wicked Descent

• HIGHLY RECOMMENDED •

This dense but superbly orchestrated 90-minute show — previously seen in Washington and New York — opened Sunday at the Mercury Theater, where the intellectual temperature surely has shot up, even if the revelations about the state of man's soul (and Satan's machinations) are enough to cause a big chill.

Adapted by Jeffrey Fiske and McLean, and directed with enormous panache by Fiske — with sensational design work by Cameron Anderson (set), Michael Bevins (costumes), Tyler Micoeau (lights) and Bart Fasbender (heart-stopping sound) — the show is a twisted sensualist's delight.

This is one of those prose texts

that demands absolute attention. Happily, its adapters and performers have deployed a slew of theatrical tricks to enhance the work's brainy delights, and the whole thing grows more lucid and perversely delicious as it unfolds.

Max McLean — supremely larger than life in his portrayal of a character who is part bristling ham actor, part self-styled psychologist and part shrewdly calculating anarchist — never flags in his sweaty, tongue-twisting, stomach-turning, lip-smacking performance. He does all the verbal heavy-lifting.

Meanwhile, Yvonne Gougelet — a phenomenal actress whose physical eloquence speaks volume — not only brilliantly suggests Everywoman (from Bible-clutching priggish wife to runway model), but also supplies the stinging punctuation for each and every letter in this smart, sizzlingly hellish entertainment.

— Hedy Weiss, *Chicago Sun-Times*



WHY GOOD THEATRE

Theatre hits us in our imagination – the place where a “knowledge of God” already exists.

Continued from page one

expression in art as “quaint” or “irrelevant.” Most mocked at the low quality of the work.

That was the world into which FPA was born. My vision was to find a way to break through. This involved three criteria: First, I would carefully select and produce work that would capture Christianity’s intellectual integrity and dramatic power which naturally led to looking at the Bible and C. S. Lewis for source material; second, we would execute at a level worthy to be produced in mainstream cultural venues where a diverse audience would see it. This meant that we had to set the quality bar very high. Third, we would ask the Christian community to support it.

The power of theatre and storytelling is that it flies “under the radar” and hits us in our imagination – the place where a



“Fellowship of the Performing Arts — a group devoted to producing ‘theater from a Christian worldview that is engaging to a diverse audience,’ as their mission statement goes — has hit the bull’s-eye, making a Screwtape for the stage that’s nearly as incisive and funny as it is on the page, and one that should appeal to the aesthetically-discerning atheist as well as to a wide swath of religious folks.” — dcist.com

“knowledge of God” (Romans 1:19) already exists. Art draws people in. After a while they begin to wonder if the ideas that inspired the work are really true.

That is the mission of Fellowship for the Performing Arts. Over the years a circle of friends have partnered with us to bring this vision into reality. That is what the Fellowship Circle is all about.

Last year 45,000 people saw *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mark’s Gospel* in over 150 performances in multiple locations. In Chicago both shows were well received by the mainstream press. *Mark’s Gospel* received the 2009 Jeff Award (Chicago theatre’s highest honor) in the category of best solo performance.

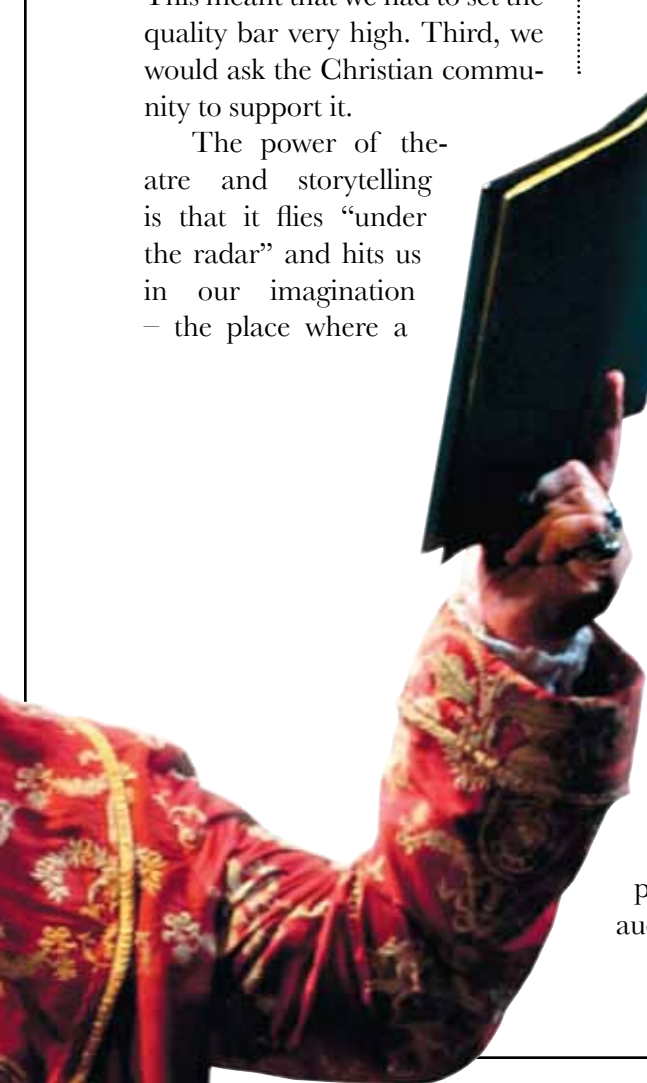
We just concluded a return visit to Washington D.C. where we completed 31 performances to enthusiastic audiences. Our next objective

is to locate a suitable theatre in New York City to establish a long run in the heart of the theatre district. We hope to have something to report shortly.

Your support provides the resources to build relationships with cultural gatekeepers in order to give the Christian message a thoughtful, artistic expression in the marketplace of ideas at a level of excellence the arts community demands.

Since late 2007 we’ve devoted almost \$4,000,000 to producing *The Screwtape Letters* and *Mark’s Gospel*. Ticket revenues have returned only 70% of that amount. We need your support to make up the difference and help us continue our work. I believe good theatre from a Christian worldview needs to be produced. With your support we can continue to engage and stimulate a broad and diverse audience. Will you help?

— Max McLean, President
Fellowship for the Performing Arts
info@fpatheatre.com 973.984.3400



National Tour of THE *ScrewTape* LETTERS

Tour Schedule

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|---|-----------------------|
| CALIFORNIA • San Francisco Bay Area - Leshner Center | Oct 1-3, 2009 |
| ARIZONA • Phoenix - Herberger Theater | Oct 30 - Nov 1 |
| KENTUCKY • Louisville - Brown Center | Nov 6 - 7 |
| FLORIDA • Ft. Lauderdale - Coral Springs Center for the Arts | Nov 14 - 15 |
| TENNESSEE • Chattanooga - Tivoli Theatre | Nov 21 - 22 |
| WASHINGTON, D.C. • Lansburgh Theatre | Dec 16 - Jan 17, 2010 |
| TEXAS • Houston - Hobby Center | Jan 28 - 31 |
| TEXAS • Austin - Paramount Theatre | Feb 6 |



For more information visit
screwtapeonstage.com

