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**Lantern Theater Company Presents the Philadelphia Premiere of *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens and Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* by *Real Time with Bill Maher* Writer and Producer Scott Carter, June 1 – July 2, 2017**

***Scott Carter To Appear at the Lantern on Saturday, June 3 for Special Post-Show In Conversation Series Program***

PHILADELPHIA (May 11, 2017) – **Lantern Theater Company** concludes its record-breaking 2016/17 season with the regional premiere of *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens and Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord*, an uproarious, razor-sharp exploration of legacy and faith from playwright, former stand-up comedian, and longtime *Real Time with Bill Maher* writer and executive producer **Scott Carter**. Award-winning Philadelphia playwright, director, and actor **James Ijames** will direct a cast that includes **Andrew Criss** as Count Leo Tolstoy, **Gregory Isaac** as Thomas Jefferson, and **Brian McCann** as Charles Dickens. Theater critics and members of the press are invited to attend **opening night on Wednesday, June 7 at 7 p.m.** *A full schedule is included in the fact sheet below.*

Scott Carter's provocative new comedy sets three of the world's greatest thinkers against each other in a battle of wits and wills. Founding Father Thomas Jefferson, Victorian literary celebrity Charles Dickens, and a Russian aristocrat/anarchist Count Leo Tolstoy find themselves locked in a room with no exit. Attempting an escape, they ransack the philosophies of their lives and work, searching for a truth that will set them free. This whip-smart comedy examines just what happens when great men of history are forced to repeat it.

Carter wrote *The Gospel According To...* over the course of many years, following a nearly fatal asthma attack that set him on a path of spiritual exploration. Inspired by his discovery that Jefferson, Dickens, and Tolstoy had all compiled their own gospels from existing biblical literature, Carter's comedy explores the noble aspirations

and comic foibles of these extraordinary men. Thrust together in death, these three remarkable minds grapple in spirited, hilarious debate about their beliefs and their ability – or lack thereof – to live up to their own ethical standards with nothing but a pen, a journal, and their squabbling roommates to judge them. Writing in Geffen Playhouse’s show program, Carter notes that after his near-death experience he “entered a bliss state – loving all whom I met and forgiving previous transgressions done to me. It lasted about a week.” **Carter will appear at the Lantern on Saturday, June 3 for a special In Conversation Series program to discuss his play and its inspirations.**

“Lantern Theater Company has long produced work that engages both the head and the heart, bringing to life explorations of philosophy, art, and literature,” said Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**. “With a bracing mix of wit and clowning, underpinned with a deep soulfulness, this fresh satire forces three of history’s most singular geniuses to confront the eternal question: ‘What happens when we die?’ and to reckon with the possibility that it ‘turns out you just go to a room. And not even a room of one’s own.’”

“This is just the kind of play that excites me,” said director **James Ijames**. “At first glance it appears very simple, but underneath is a tightly coiled play about faith. Not just faith in a higher power, but also faith in humanity. These three men are not so much theatrical depictions of writers that we all know and love; they are the personifications of the ways in which we reach up to God and reach out to each other.”

Tickets for *The Gospel According To...* are \$24 – \$42 and are available online at [www.lanterntheater.org](http://www.lanterntheater.org) or by calling the Lantern Box Office at **(215) 829-0395**. Student tickets are \$15 in advance; \$10 student rush tickets are available 10 minutes before curtain with valid ID. Discounts are also available for theater industry professionals (\$10 in advance or at the door), seniors 65 and up, groups of 10 or more, and U.S. military personnel. Lantern Theater Company is located at St. Stephen's Theater, 10th & Ludlow Sts. in Center City Philadelphia.

### **In Conversation: Playwright Scott Carter on Saturday, June 3**

As part of its ongoing In Conversation Series of fascinating discussions with theater artists and special guests, Lantern Theater Company will host **Scott Carter** for a post-show conversation immediately following the 8 p.m. preview performance on **Saturday, June 3**. Carter will participate in a talkback and answer questions from the audience in a program to be monitored by Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**. Admission is free with ticket purchase to the performance.

### **About the Playwright**

Scott Carter has served as executive producer and writer for *Real Time with Bill Maher* since its debut on HBO in 2003. He produced the first 1,100 episodes of *Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher* from its 1993 Comedy Central debut to its 1997 move to ABC. For his work at *Politically Incorrect*, Carter received eight Emmy Award nominations and three consecutive CableACE Awards for Best Talk Series. He has served as creator, producer, and/or writer for *Root of All Evil with Lewis Black* (Comedy Central, 2008), *Earth to America* (TBS, 2005), and *The Conspiracy Zone with Kevin Nealon* (Spike, 2002-03). In 2007, he was a co-recipient of the Producer's Guild of America's Johnny Carson Award for *Real Time with Bill Maher*. A former stand-up comic, Carter has written and performed two full-length monologues, *Heavy Breathing* and *Suspension Bridge*, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and other festivals around the world. He is former producing director and a founding member of The Invisible Theatre in Tucson, Ariz. He currently resides in Los Angeles.

### **About the Director**

One of Philadelphia's most in-demand actors, directors, and playwrights, **James Ijames** has appeared regionally at Arden Theatre Company, Philadelphia Theatre Company, The Wilma Theater, Baltimore Center Stage, People's Light, and InterAct Theatre Company. Ijames' plays have been produced at Orbiter 3 and Flashpoint Theatre Company, and have been developed with PlayPenn, The Gulfshore Playhouse, The Wilma Theater, Azuka Theatre, InterAct Theatre Company, and Victory Gardens; the world premiere of his play *WHITE* is currently being staged by Theatre Horizon in Norristown. Ijames is a four-time Barrymore Award-winner, including one award for directing, two for acting, and the 2011 F. Otto Haas Award for an Emerging Philadelphia Theatre Artist. He is a 2011 Independence Foundation Fellow, a 2015 Pew Fellow, 2015 winner of the Terrence McNally New Play Award, 2015 Kesselring Honorable Mention Prize winner, and a 2017 recipient of the Whiting Award, which is bestowed annually by the Whiting Foundation to ten emerging writers who exhibit great promise. Ijames is an alumnus of the InterAct Core Writers Group, a mentor for The Foundry, and a founding member of Orbiter 3, Philadelphia's first playwright producing collective. He holds a BA in drama from Morehouse College and an MFA in acting from Temple University. He is an assistant professor of theater at Villanova University and resides in South Philadelphia.

### **About the Cast and Production Team**

**Andrew Criss** returns to the Lantern as Count Leo Tolstoy, following his appearance as Sir George Crofts in this season's production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Also a voiceover artist and painter, Criss' credits include stage, film, television, and radio with companies throughout the United States. Criss divides his time between Philadelphia and Rehoboth Beach with his partner and collaborator, artist Chad States, and their dog, Cleopatra.

**Gregory Isaac** will make his Lantern debut as Thomas Jefferson. A recent transplant to Philadelphia's Mount Airy neighborhood, his local stage credits include numerous productions with Quintessence Theatre Group. He

was previously based in Atlanta, Chicago, and New York City, where his credits include productions with Alliance Theatre, Georgia Shakespeare, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, The Secret Theatre, Wandering Bark Theatre Company, Writers Theatre, and TimeLine Theatre.

**Brian McCann** stars as Charles Dickens, fresh off his acclaimed performance as Menenius in the Lantern's production of *Coriolanus*. Previous Lantern stage credits include *Happy Days*, *Othello*, *Travels with My Aunt*, *King Lear*, and *The Lady from the Sea*. Other regional credits include Delaware Theatre Company, McCarter Theatre Center, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, George Street Playhouse, Arden Theatre Company, 1812 Productions, and numerous productions with the Philadelphia Artists' Collective. McCann is a 16-year member of ComedySportz Philadelphia and resides in South Philadelphia.

The talented design team for *The Gospel According To...* includes scenic designer **Lance Kniskern**, whose previous Lantern design credits include *Informed Consent*, *Oscar Wilde: From the Depths*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, for which he received a Barrymore nomination for Outstanding Scenic Design. The design team also includes costume designer **Millie Hiibel** (*Oscar Wilde: From the Depths* at the Lantern; costume director for Opera Philadelphia), lighting designer **Shon Causer** (Barrymore Award nominee for *Oscar Wilde: From the Depths* and *A Child's Christmas in Wales* at the Lantern), and sound designer **Christopher Colucci**, a seven-time Barrymore Award-winner whose many Lantern credits include *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Oscar Wilde: From the Depths*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and *Arcadia*.

## About Lantern Theater Company

Founded in 1994, Lantern Theater Company is closing its twenty-third season with a record number of subscribers, its largest-ever operating budget at \$1.3 million, and a growing community of theater artists engaged in its productions and audience enrichment events. Last season, the Lantern launched its **Theater Artist Fair Pay Initiative**, which was recently featured in *American Theatre* magazine as a leading national success story for increasing artist compensation through a combination of fundraising and higher ticket sales. The Lantern seeks to be a vibrant, contributing member of its community, exposing audiences to great theater, inviting participation in dialogue and discussion, engaging audience members on artistic and social issues, and employing theatrical language and techniques to enrich learning in the classroom. Since the inception of the Barrymore Awards for Excellence in Theatre in 1995, the Lantern has received 94 nominations and 19 awards, including the 2009 Excellence in Theatre Education and Community Service Award for its innovative education program, *Illumination*. The Lantern's upcoming 2017/18 season includes the Philadelphia premiere of *Red Velvet* by Lolita Chakrabarti, the world premiere of *The Craftsman* by Philadelphia playwright Bruce Graham, *Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn, *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, and the Philadelphia premiere of *Don't Dress for Dinner* by Marc Camoletti and adapted by Robin Hawdon. More information is online at [www.lanterntheater.org](http://www.lanterntheater.org).

**FACT SHEET**  
**The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens**  
**and Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord**

WRITTEN BY:  
Scott Carter

DIRECTED BY:  
James Ijames

CAST:  
Andrew Criss as Count Leo Tolstoy  
Gregory Isaac as Thomas Jefferson  
Brian McCann as Charles Dickens

PRODUCTION TEAM:  
Scenic Designer – Lance Kniskern  
Costume Designer – Millie Hiibel  
Lighting Designer – Shon Causer  
Sound Designer – Christopher Colucci  
AEA Stage Manager – Rebecca Smith  
Production Manager – Meghan Jones

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TICKET INFORMATION:  
Online: [www.lanterntheater.org](http://www.lanterntheater.org)  
By Phone: (215) 829-0395  
In Person: Lantern Box Office, 10th & Ludlow Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19107

TICKET PRICING:  
Tickets are \$24 – \$42  
Discounts available for students, seniors, military, and groups of 10 or more

PREVIEWS:  
Thursday, June 1 at 7 p.m.  
Friday, June 2 at 8 p.m.  
Saturday, June 3 at 8 p.m. [ICS: Scott Carter]  
Sunday, June 4 at 2 p.m.  
Tuesday, June 6 at 6:30 p.m.

OPENING:  
Wednesday, June 7 at 7 p.m.

REGULAR RUN:  
Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. on June 13 [ICS], June 20, and June 27

Wednesday at 2 p.m. on June 14 and June 21  
Wednesday at 7 p.m. on June 14, June 21, and June 28  
Thursday at 7 p.m. on June 15, June 22, and June 29  
Friday at 8 p.m. on June 9, June 16 [PUB], June 23, and June 30  
Saturday at 2 p.m. on June 17 and July 1  
Saturday at 8 p.m. on June 10, June 17, June 24, and July 1  
Sunday at 2 p.m. on June 11 [AIC], June 18 [AIC], June 25, and July 2

**CLOSING:**

Sunday, July 2 at 2 p.m.

**SPECIAL EVENTS:**

- **[ICS: Scott Carter] In Conversation: Playwright Scott Carter**  
Post-show discussion and audience Q&A with *The Gospel According To...* playwright Scott Carter immediately follows the 8 p.m. preview performance on Saturday, June 3.
- **[ICS] In Conversation Series**  
Post-show panel discussion and audience Q&A immediately follows the 6:30pm performance on Tuesday, June 13; special guest panelists will be announced shortly.
- **[PUB] Lantern Pub Night**  
Lively conversation over a complimentary pub beverage immediately follows the 8 p.m. performance on Friday, June 16.
- **[AIC] Artists in Conversation**  
Post-show discussions with the cast immediately follows 2 p.m. performances on Sunday, June 11; Wednesday, June 14; Sunday, June 18; and Wednesday, June 21.

**PLAY SYNOPSIS:**

A Founding Father, a Victorian literary celebrity, and a Russian aristocrat/anarchist clash in a provocative new comedy that sets three of the world's greatest thinkers against each other in a battle of wits and wills. Jefferson, Dickens, and Tolstoy find themselves locked in a room with no exit. Attempting an escape, they ransack the philosophies of their lives and work, searching for a truth that will set them free. From playwright and former stand-up comedian Scott Carter (writer of HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher*), this whip-smart comedy examines just what happens when great men of history are forced to repeat it.

**PERFORMANCE VENUE:**

St. Stephen's Theater, 10th & Ludlow Sts., Philadelphia, PA 19107

**PARKING/TRANSPORTATION:**

Ample parking is available at nearby lots and garages, including The Autopark at Jefferson (10th & Ludlow Sts.) and LAZ Parking (10th & Chestnut Sts.). Metered street parking is available during posted hours. Venue is also accessible by taxi, SEPTA buses and trains, and the PATCO Speedline.