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Lantern Theater Company Announces Relaunch and Extension of *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* by Scott Carter

***New Digital Production Returns for a Limited Streaming Engagement
Now Through February 27, 2022***

PHILADELPHIA (January 11, 2022) – **Lantern Theater Company** announced today the relaunch of its digital premiere of ***The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord*** – the company's latest professionally filmed production, furthering its mission to engage audiences with plays that investigate and illuminate what is essential in the human spirit and the spirit of the times. A Founding Father, a Victorian literary celebrity, and a Russian aristocrat/anarchist clash in this provocative 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 while confronting their own hypocrisy and failings. Created by playwright and former stand-up comedian **Scott Carter** and directed by **Armina LaManna**, the new digital take on the Lantern's 2017 smash hit play features **Gregory Isaac** as Jefferson, **Brian McCann** as Dickens, and Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon** as Tolstoy. *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* **begins today and streams on demand through February 27, 2022**. Tickets and information are available online at **www.lanterntheater.org**.

Originally produced by the Lantern during its 2016/17 season, *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* was written by Scott Carter over the course of many years, following a nearly fatal asthma attack that set him on a path of spiritual exploration. Inspired by Carter's discovery that Jefferson, Dickens, and Tolstoy had all compiled their own gospels from existing biblical

literature, the play explores both their aspirations and foibles. Thrust together in death, three of the modern world's most influential minds grapple in spirited and witty debate about their beliefs and their ability – and failure – to live up to their own God's standards with nothing but a pen, a journal, and their squabbling roommates to judge them. Carter noted 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.” *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* is an exploration of the instinct to reach toward grace and the difficulty of living in it.

“The Lantern has long produced work that engages both the head and the heart, bringing to life explorations of human nature, philosophy, art, and literature,” said Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**, who also plays Tolstoy in the filmed production. “This play forces Jefferson, Dickens, and Tolstoy to confront the serious problems undermining their legacies and to ask whether the good they intended through their public actions excuse the real harms done to the people over whom they had power and sway.”

Director **Armina LaManna** met and talked with Carter throughout the process of rehearsing and filming his play. “To Scott, this play is like a living, breathing entity,” she said. “I really liked the play when I read it. When I met him, that changed into a more intimate relationship for me, because of the way that he talked about it. And the skill and the erudition that he used to write this play is absolutely stunning. Scott really, really wants his play to change people.”

Lantern Theater Company will further explore *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* on its **Lantern Searchlight blog**, available online at lanterntheater.org/searchlight. Articles will be published through the play's streaming run, delving into the history of Jefferson, Dickens, and Tolstoy and their gospels, plus behind the scenes interviews with the creative artists.

Tickets for *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* are **\$20 per household/device** and are available online at www.lanterntheater.org or by calling the Lantern Box Office at **(215) 829-0395**. Closed captioning is available. Ticket buyers will receive an email confirmation with their ticket access link, which will provide on-demand access to the play for one viewing during the extended streaming period, now through February 27, 2022. The production can be viewed on most internet-connected devices with email/web browser access, including desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, and select smart TVs. **A Digital Afterlife Pass is also available for \$35**, which includes one ticket for *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* and the world premiere digital production of Steve H. Broadnax III's *Me and the Devil* (streaming now through November 21, 2021).

About the Artists

Playwright and former stand-up comic **Scott Carter** served as executive producer and writer for the first 1,100 episodes of *Politically Incorrect* and the first 18 seasons of *Real Time with Bill Maher*. He has been nominated for 24 Primetime Emmy Awards and has won multiple PGA and WGA Awards. He also served as creator, producer, and/or writer for *Root of All Evil* with Lewis Black (Comedy Central), *Earth to America* (TBS), and *The Conspiracy Zone* with Kevin Nealon (Spike). *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* has been produced in 27 cities in four countries.

Director **Armina LaManna** returns to Philadelphia, where her world premiere translation/co-adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* was produced as part of the Lantern's 2008/09 season. A graduate of Temple University, LaManna is the founding artistic director of Imagine Theatre, the only Equity theater in LA County focused on theater for young audiences.

Reprising their roles from the Lantern's original 2017 production are **Gregory Isaac** and **Brian McCann** as Thomas Jefferson and Charles Dickens, respectively.

Isaac's Lantern credits include *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *Betrayal*, and this coming season's mainstage productions of *A Man for All Seasons* and *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine*. Other local credits include productions with Quintessence Theatre Group, 1812 Productions, and Delaware Shakespeare; he was a 2017 Barrymore Award nominee for his work as *Achilles in Iphigenia* at Aulis with the Philadelphia Artists' Collective. National credits include productions with the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, The Alliance Theatre, and Chicago Shakespeare Theater.

McCann's Lantern credits include *Coriolanus*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Happy Days*, *Travels with My Aunt*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *The Lady from the Sea*. Other regional credits include McCarter Theatre Center, Delaware Theatre Company, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, George Street Playhouse, 1812 Productions, the Philadelphia Artists' Collective, and Arden Theatre Company.

Charles McMahan joins the cast as Leo Tolstoy. McMahan founded Lantern Theater Company in 1994 and serves as artistic director in addition to directing, writing, and acting for the company. He has directed all but one of the Lantern's annual Shakespeare productions, including recent productions of *Othello* (shuttered after one preview performance in March 2020 due to Covid-19), *Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, and *Coriolanus*. Other Lantern directing credits include the recent digital production of *The Plague*, and stage productions of *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry V*, *New Jerusalem*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *La Ronde* (also translator and adapter), *Richard III*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *King Lear*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, and *A*

Doll's House. Recent acting credits include reprising the role of Heisenberg in *Copenhagen*, and writing credits include *Oscar Wilde: From the Depths* and co-creating an original adaptation of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*.

The returning design team for *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* includes scenic designer **Lance Kniskern**, costume designer **Millie Hiibel**, lighting designer **Shon Causer** alongside new co-lighting designer **Isabella Gill-Gomez**, and sound designer and composer **Christopher Colucci**. Lantern Artistic Associate **Hannah Spear** was assistant director and longtime Lantern Stage Manager **Rebecca Smith** was the associate producer.

About Lantern Theater Company

Founded in 1994 and now in its 28th season, Lantern Theater Company's mission is to produce plays that investigate and illuminate what is essential in the human spirit and the spirit of the times. The Lantern serves the Philadelphia region with artistic and educational programming, notably partnering with middle schools and high schools in the Philadelphia School District to provide in-classroom residencies in support of curricular learning. Throughout the Covid-19 health crisis, the Lantern has continued to provide artistic programming on both a free and paid basis: livestreamed readings of Shakespeare plays in spring 2020; Plays from the Lantern Archives, which included professionally filmed and edited versions of its 2017 world premiere production of *The Craftsman* by Bruce Graham and three recent Shakespeare productions: *Measure for Measure* (2019), *The Tempest* (2018), and *Coriolanus* (2017); and newly created digital productions of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*, *Molly Sweeney* by Brian Friel, and the American premiere of *The Plague*, adapted by Neil Bartlett from Albert Camus' *La Peste*.

In addition to *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord*, the Lantern's digital programming continues with the world premiere production of *Me and the Devil*, co-written and directed by Steve H. Broadnax III and streaming on demand now through February 27, 2022. In its recently announced 2021/22 Mainstage Season, the Lantern will return to live performance with the Philadelphia professional premiere of Robert Bolt's award-winning classic *A Man for All Seasons*; the Philadelphia premiere of two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner Lynn Nottage's satirical *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine*; Tom Stoppard's Tony Award-winning comic masterpiece *Travesties*; and a fourth play to be announced in spring 2022.

More information about the Lantern is available online at www.lanterntheater.org.

Lantern Theater Company – Winter 2022 Digital Season
FACT SHEET

*The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson,
Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord*

WRITTEN BY:
Scott Carter

DIRECTED BY:
Armina LaManna

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

CREATIVE TEAM:
Lance Kniskern, Scenic Designer
Millie Hiibel, Costume Designer
Shon Causer and Isabella Gill-Gomez, Co-Lighting Designers
Christopher Colucci, Sound Designer & Composer
Hannah Spear, Assistant Director
Rebecca Smith, Associate Producer

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TICKET INFORMATION:
Online: www.lanterntheater.org
By Phone: (215) 829-0395

TICKET PRICING:
\$20 per household/device
\$35 Digital Afterlife Pass, which includes access to digital productions of *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson, Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord* and *Me and the Devil*
Closed captioning is available for all digital productions

STREAMING ON DEMAND:
Tuesday, January 11 – Sunday, February 27, 2022

PLAY SYNOPSIS for LISTING EDITORS:

A Founding Father, a Victorian literary celebrity, and a Russian aristocrat/anarchist clash in this provocative comedy that sets three of the world's greatest thinkers against each other in a battle of wits and wills. In this new take on the Lantern's 2017 smash hit play, 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 while confronting their own hypocrisy and dismal failings. This digital premiere production was filmed at St. Stephen's Theater in Center City Philadelphia with strict adherence to all CDC, state, and local health and safety guidelines.