



Press Release
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A BATTLE BETWEEN FEAR AND COMPASSION IN

THE CHRISTIANS

BAY AREA PREMIERE

By Lucas Hnath

Directed by Bill English

Press Opening: Saturday, January 28th, 2017, 8pm

January 24th to March 11th, 2017

Tues, Wed, Thurs 7pm / Fri, Sat 8pm / Sat 3pm, Sun 2pm

Preview Performances: January 24th, 25th, 26h and 27th at 8pm

San Francisco, CA (December 2016) – **San Francisco Playhouse** (Bill English, Artistic Director; Susi Damilano, Producing Director) kicks off the new year with the off-Broadway hit *The Christians* by Lucas Hnath.

In just ten years, Pastor Paul's modest ministry has grown into a massive megachurch, with thousands of believers coming through its doors each week. But as Paul wrestles with his own faith, he moves to preach a sermon that will shake the foundation of his congregation's beliefs. Backed by a live choir, *The Christians* is both epic and intimate, an unflinching look at faith in America — and its power to unite or divide.

"This play had a profound impact on me when I saw it off-Broadway in 2015. I could not stop thinking about it," said San Francisco Playhouse Artistic Director Bill English. "It took me back to my childhood, when I spent a great deal of time in church with my mother, who was an organist, and my father, who led the choir. I was full of questions about the meaning of being a Christian then, and this play explores those same questions in the context of today's society."

The Christians will be directed by **Bill English** and feature San Francisco favorites **Anthony Fusco***, **Lance Gardner***, **Stephanie Prentice***, **Millie DeBenedet** and **Warren David Keith*** along with a 16-member volunteer choir from the **First Unitarian Universalist Church Choir** led by choir directors **Tania Johnson** and **Mark Sumner**.

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE

The Christians

Continued:

San Francisco Playhouse's production of *The Christians* is made possible by Executive Producer Susan Atherton; Producers Bill & Marsha Adler, Richard & Terry Horrigan / John & Catharine Kalin; and Associate Producers Valarie Barth, Steven & Karin Chase, and Ellen & Bruce Hall; and Artistic Underwriter David Shuh.

Bill English (Director) is a co-founder of San Francisco Playhouse, and in fourteen years with Susi Damilano, has guided its growth from a bare-bones storefront to the second-largest theater in San Francisco. He designed the first theater space at 536 Sutter Street and personally reconfigured a barn-like 700-seat hall to the current gracious and intimate 200-seat venue. Along the way he has served as director, actor, set and sound designer, winning SFBATCC nominations or awards in all those categories. Bill is also an accomplished musician and builder. Milestone accomplishments include bringing Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Adly Guirgis to the Bay Area by directing three of his plays, commissioning twelve playwrights and moving world premieres from workshop to Sandbox to Mainstage to New York (including the recent New York transfers of the San Francisco Playhouse productions of *Bauer* and *Ideation*) and presenting the very first production of *Grounded* by George Brant, which recently opened at the Public Theater. He coined the phrase "the empathy gym" and it drives everything at the Playhouse.

Lucas Hnath (Playwright)'s plays include *The Christians* (2014 Humana Festival), *Red Speedo* (Studio Theatre, DC), *A Public Reading of an Unproduced Screenplay About the Death of Walt Disney* (Soho Rep), *nightnight* (2013 Humana Festival), *Isaac's Eye* (Ensemble Studio Theatre), *Death Tax* (2012 Humana Festival, Royal Court Theatre), and *The Courtship of Anna Nicole Smith* (Actors Theatre of Louisville). Lucas has been a resident playwright at New Dramatists since 2011 and is a proud member of Ensemble Studio Theatre. Lucas is a winner of the 2012 Whitfield Cook Award for *Isaac's Eye* and a 2013 Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award Citation for *Death Tax*. He is also a recipient of commissions from the EST/Sloan Project, Actors Theatre of Louisville, South Coast Repertory, Playwrights Horizons, New York University's Graduate Acting Program, and the Royal Court Theatre.

Founded in 2003 and boasting 2500 subscribers, **San Francisco Playhouse** is the premiere mid-sized theatre in downtown San Francisco, an intimate alternative to the larger more traditional Union Square theater fare. Presenting a diverse range of plays and musicals, **San Francisco Playhouse** produces new works as well as re-imagined classics, "making the edgy accessible and the traditional edgy." And with its bold Sandbox Series, dedicated to nurturing World Premieres, the Playhouse has become a significant player in developing new works as well. **San Francisco Playhouse** is committed to providing a creative home and inspiring environment where actors, directors, writers, designers, and theater lovers converge to create and experience dramatic works that celebrate the human spirit.

**Actors appear courtesy of Actors' Equity Association.*

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: In just ten years, Pastor Paul's modest ministry has grown into a massive megachurch, with thousands of believers coming through its doors each week. But as Paul wrestles with his own faith, he moves to preach a sermon that will shake the foundation of his congregation's beliefs. Backed by a live choir, *The Christians* is both epic and intimate, an unflinching look at faith in America — and its power to unite or divide.

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No matinees January 28th and 29th.

WHERE: 450 Post Street, San Francisco, 2nd Floor of the Kensington Park Hotel.

TICKETS: For tickets (\$20-\$125) or more information, the public may contact the San Francisco Playhouse box office at 415-677-9596, or <http://sfplayhouse.org/sfph/2016-2017-season/the-christians/>