

## About 'Of Wardrobes & Rings'

*It is October 1963, and two lions of British literature have agreed to meet. J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis have been friends for decades. It is a relationship that helped spawn two of the great fantasies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – The Lord of The Rings and The Narnia Chronicles.*

*In the early days these two gifted storytellers were sounding boards for each other as they penned their works. Over the years, however, pressures of work and unexpected events saw them drift apart to the point where their relationship was as cool as it was casual. Lewis' heart attack in July Of 1963 (from which he made a partial recovery) has prompted Tolkien, aware that there are bridges to mend before it is too late, to initiate a meeting at their favorite Oxford haunt – The Eagle & Child pub. Though they do not know it, this is to be their last encounter.*

*In this touching (and at times hilarious) meeting, they reflect on the past and give the audience a unique insight as to what made these men tick and the reasons behind their writings. The encounter is not all smooth sailing as they honestly address some of the issues that drove them apart. In doing so, these two men reveal the joy of mending a friendship that was both unique and so influential in their lives and writings.*

### **About David Payne**

*"Auditions for Shadowlands, British accents a help!" So read an advertisement for this theatrical production to be staged at Nashville's prestigious Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC) in 1996. Payne, who had never been on stage before but did have a British accent, decided to audition, hoping for a minor part. He staggered everybody (including himself) when he won the lead role of C.S. Lewis. Though he did not know it at the time, a successful acting career had been launched! The TPAC production sold out, and Lewis' stepson Douglas Gresham flew in for the opening night. Director, Sylvia Boyd, said of Payne afterwards, "I took a chance on someone who had never acted before but was rewarded with a performance of great power and sensitivity – I felt we had found the real C.S. Lewis!"*

During rehearsals for Shadowlands, Payne was given a copy of *A Grief Observed*, Lewis' diary of grief following the death of his American wife, Joy. Captivated by the brutal honesty of a man bearing his soul, Payne memorized the whole book and then adapted it into a one-man show, ***Mist in the Mourning***. It premiered at TPAC, where all three performances sold out. This led Payne to tour this production extensively throughout the US. Following these performances, where Payne was very often peppered with lots of questions about Lewis, a thought struck him: *"Wouldn't it be fun if Lewis himself could answer these questions."* That's

when he wrote ***An Evening with C.S. Lewis***, basing the show around the most popular questions and the pivotal occurrences in Lewis' life. Now, it has become his flagship production with over 500 performances.

Payne's first encounter with C.S. Lewis was when, as a teenager, he was given a copy of Lewis' best-selling book ***Screwtape Letters***. Little did he realize that some 40 years later he would be gaining a reputation for his portrayals of its famous author. He has played Lewis in a number of productions, including ***Shadowlands***, his self-penned ***Weep for Joy***, numerous presentations of ***An Evening with C.S. Lewis***, and ***St Jack & The Dragon***, a touching yet sometimes hilarious account of the relationship between Lewis and his adopted mother, Janie Moore. It was his re-reading of ***Screwtape Letters*** that inspired him to write the musical, ***Target Practice***. Set in the academy of Fiends, this energetic show features a cantankerous professor (Payne) attempting to teach unruly junior fiends on the art of tripping up Targets (humans).

Payne has not limited himself to Lewis-related ventures. Having completed a commission to record an audio version of a new Bible translation, he was then commissioned to write a play featuring the new translation text. The result was ***Prisoner of Passion***. Set at the time when the Apostle Paul was under house arrest in Rome, it portrays his encounter with servant girl and secret believer, Sempronia, that leads Paul to acknowledge his past as a persecutor of the growing band of Jesus followers, inspiring his dramatic conversion. He then thrills Sempronia by reflecting on many of the things he has written to the churches. Using dialog almost entirely taken from Scripture, ***Prisoner of Passion*** brings to life many of the famous passages from the Pauline epistles, taking on a captivating dynamic.

Payne, who was born in London and recently widowed (his wife, Marilyn Joy Payne, died in Dec 2014), has two sons and three grand children.