ANN ARBOR CIVIC THEATRE presents

June 5-8, 2003 Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre

Oscar Wilde's

Importance Importance Being Earnest

Directed by Wendy Wright

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April 29-May 4 · Grades K-5

Charlotte's Web is possibly the best loved of all American stories for children. Set in the rural Midwest, it tells the touching story of a rare friendship between a little pig, Wilbur, and Charlotte, a most uncommon spider.

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June 26-28 · Grades pre-K-2

Two of Arnold Lobel's most beloved characters, Frog and Toad, show how good friends help each other through thick and thin, cheering each other through the hard times and celebrating life's joys.

All performances are at Towsley Auditorium, Washtenaw Community College

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

A Trivial Comedy for Serious People by OSCAR WILDE

Directed by WENDY WRIGHT

Lighting Designer
THOM JOHNSON

Set Designer and Builder BRYAN CORT Costume Designer
Photographer
MARILYN GOUIN

Program
RON BAUMANIS
Poster Design
TIFF CRUTCHFIELD

Makeup Design for Mr. Phenix
ERIN WETZEL

Assistant Director Stage Manager JIMMY DEE ARNOLD

Producer TIFF CRUTCHFIELD





Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French Ltd, London,
Merlin Holland, grandson of Oscar Wilde
and the Stratford Festival of Canada

Dramatis Personae

John Worthing, of the Manor House, Woolton, Herefordshi	reRob Roy
Algernon Montford, his friend	
Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D., Rector of Woolton	Robin Barlow
Mr. Gribsby, of Gribsby and Parker, Solicitors, London	Brian Harcourt
Moulton, Gardener	Aaron Rabb
Merriman, butler to Mr. Worthing	Paul Bianchi
Lane, Mr. Montford's man-servant	Peter Christian
Lady Brancaster	Matthew Phenix
Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax, her daughter	Emily Phenix
Cecily Cardew, John Worthing's ward	Erin Wetzel
Miss Prism, her governess	Kaarina Quinnell

Scenes:

Act One — Algernon Montford's rooms in Half Moon St. W. Act Two — The garden at the Manor House, Woolton Act Three — Drawing room at the Manor House, Woolton Act Four — Same as Act Three

Time: 1895

There will be one fifteen-minute intermission between Acts Two and Three.

Special Thanks: Wendy Hiller for the Stratford information, Cassie and Suzi in the office, Matt and Em for introducing me to the four-act version and especially to a talented and committed cast and crew for giving it their all.

○ Please turn off all digital media including cellular telephones and one-way or two-way paging systems.

History of the Four-Act Version

In the summer of 1894, Wilde developed the idea for *The Importance of Being Ear-*nest. In chronic need of money, he wrote to London theatrical producer George Alexander, asking for an advance.

By the end of October, Wilde was satisfied with his farcical comedy. He sent one copy to Alexander and the other to Charles Frohman who acquired the American production rights.

Alexander had some objections to the play. He liked to start an evening's entertainment with a "curtain-raiser", a one-act play that allowed theatergoers to a arrive fashionably late. A three-act play would then follow. But Wilde had written a four-act comedy. Alexander also wanted a play in which he would be the star and Wilde had written a play with two leading roles, Jack and Algernon.

Some changes in the three-act version are minor: Algernon's last name was changed from Montford to Moncrieff; Lady Brancaster became Lady Bracknell. Other changes are more significant. Wilde fought with Alexander for nearly an hour trying to retain one scene, which was eliminated despite Wilde's protests.

In Wilde's four-act version, Jack shares the stage with Algernon. By cutting down the scenes in which Jack does not play a major part, Alexander increased Jack's importance relative to Algy and the other characters. Aunt Augusta, Canon Chasuble, and Miss Prism have much smaller roles in the three-act version and two characters, both appearing in Act II were entirely eliminated. Moulton, Jack's gardener, had only three lines, but Mr. Gribsby, the solicitor, was responsible for one of the funniest scenes in the play. (That is the scene Wilde fought over.) Alexander condensed Acts II and III to create his three-act version. The courting scenes between Algy and Cecily in these two acts also fell victim to Alexander's editorial scissors.

Before Earnest opened, a journalist asked Wilde if he thought the play would be a success. "The play is a success," Wilde replied. "The only question is whether the first night's audience will be one."

The first night's audience was indeed a success. But Wilde was not yet willing to forget what Alexander had done to his play. When Alexander said to him, "Well, wasn't I right? What did you think of it?" Wilde answered: "My dear Aleck, it was charming, quite charming. And, do you know, from time to time I was reminded of a play I once wrote myself, called The IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST."

The promising run was cut short, however, when Wilde sued the Marquis of Queensberry for criminal libel. Alexander tried to extend the run by taking Wilde's name off of the playbill, but that expedient did not work. No respectable Victorian would go to see Earnest. It was Wilde's play; therefore, according to

the Victorian logic, it was improper.

Wilde's conviction, imprisonment, bankruptcy, and self-imposed exile came between the success of the shows opening and the eventual publication of the play in 1899. The long delay and the loss of Wilde's personal copies of Earnest in the bankruptcy proceedings further complicate the plays history. Early drafts and personal copies of all of Wilde's works were auctioned off in unmarked lots. He obtained a copy of the three-act version from George Alexander and quickly revised if for publication.

Meanwhile, the four-act typescript that Wilde had sent to Frohman in New York remained unnoticed and forgotten. When Frohman went down on the Lusitania in 1915, his associate Charles Dillingham acquired his collection of playscripts. In 1935, Dillingham was on the verge of bankruptcy. In order to hide valuable theater materials from his creditors, he gave them to a friend, R. H. Burnside, for safekeeping. Shortly before Burnside's death in 1953, the New York Public Library gained access to the materials and rescued them just a month before the scheduled demolition of Burnside's New Jersey home.

Having acquired over 4000 typescripts, the New York Public Library cataloguers spent years sorting out all the materials, including the four-act version sent to Frohman in November 1894. — Ruth Berggren, Editor, The Definitive Four-Act Version of Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, 1987.

The Stratford Version

"To mark the centenary of Oscar Wilde's death, the Stratford Festival of Canada decided to produce A Wilde Celebration: a mini-festival celebrating the life and work of Oscar Wilde. This summer long series included a production of the complete four-act version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

In doing this, the Stratford Festival was not attempting to replace the three-act version audiences all know and love. Many theatre-lovers regard it as a perfect play. We simply wanted to give audiences a chance to see the play that Wilde originally wrote, with its extra characters, more pointed social commentary, additional scenes and new dialogue." — Richard Monette, Artistic Director

"The Stratford Festival's decision to play the four-act Earnest in its 2000 season was a tribute to Wilde's memory. Broadly – very broadly – speaking, three different versions are in play here. There is the earliest complete manuscript, dating from August 1894; a typewritten manuscript of October 31, 1894 (the latest version we have of the four-act play); and finally the familiar three-act version. The Stratford text was based on the second of these but draws occasionally on the other two." — Alexander Leggatt, Professor of English at University College at the University of Toronto

The Story

Jack Worthing, who uses the alias "Ernest" to cover his escapades while visiting London, is in love with Gwendolen Fairfax, the cousin of his friend Algernon Montford – who has invented an invalid friend named Bunbury, to whose bedside he can rush whenever he needs to escape an unwanted social obligation – is intrigued to learn that Jack has a pretty young ward, Cecily Cardew, at his house in the country. Though Gwendolen accepts Jack's proposal, her mother, the formidable Lady Brancaster, withholds her consent when she learns that her prospective son-in-law was found abandoned as a baby in a handbag at Victoria Station. Meanwhile Algernon, posing as Ernest, Jack's fictitious younger brother, bluffs his way into his friend's country estate, where he and Cecily fall in love. Jack, however, refuses to permit the match unless Lady Brancaster allows him to marry Gwendolen. The resulting impasse is resolved only when Cecily's governess, Miss Prism, makes a remarkable confession.

Director's Note:

I first saw The Importance of Being Eamest in the late 1970s. I had begged my parents to take me to Stratford and they finally agreed. I saw Eamest at the Avon and Henry IV. Part One on the Festival Stage. They both made a huge impact on me. But what I remember most was William Hutt playing Lady Bracknell. He was so regal and funny in what, in my opinion, must be a dominating role. Flash forward many years. It is now my turn to helm this wonderful comedy; arguably the funniest play in the English language. Naturally, I decided to read both women and men for the role. As an actress myself, I hesitated to hand such a juicy role to a man, but Hutt had made my mind up a long time ago. I would like to personally thank Matt Phenix for being brave enough to put on the dress. Amazingly, the Stratford connection continued for this blessed production. Early on I was convinced that I should mount the four-act version of the play. but I really wanted to take the best of both the three-act and the four-act versions. I started making comparisons on my own (an arduous task), but then was lucky enough to stumble across the Stratford version of the script, which had pretty much done that for me already. Amazingly, we were able to obtain the permission of the Stratford Festival and Merlin Holland, the grandson of Oscar Wilde to do this version of the play. I am eternally grateful to both. The appeal of this piece is obvious; 55 people auditioned for it, because they know what great material it is. It has been an unmitigated joy to work with such great words and with such great interpreters of those words. Sit back and enjoy. I hope you'll be pleased, I'm confident Oscar would be.

—Wendy

WHOS WHO IN THE CAST AND CREW



Robin Barlow (Dr. Chasuble) recently retired from the University of Michigan, and now has more time for plays and other serious work. He forced his way into two productions of *Earnest*

over the past year and a half, the first done by the Friends of the Michigan League and the second by the Civic Theatre. He was president of the Civic board in 1988-89, and continues to feel relief that the organization survived that experience and indeed is now scaling new heights.



Paul Bianchi (Merriman) This is Paul's first official show with Ann Arbor Civic although you may recall seeing him in the New Voices Bijou which was a joint production between Ann Arbor Civic and Ann Arbor Play-

wrights. Since moving to Ann Arbor eight and a half years ago he has been seen in a few Orpheus Productions shows including Harvey. Of Mice and Men, and Lettice and Lovage. Paul enjoys all aspects of theater and was involved in other Orpheus Productions in a variety of roles including producer. lighting and sound tech, and director of Parked. He has taken classes at the Purple Rose Theatre including the PAD Lab as a playwright. When not involved in theater he is busy working as a Team Leader at The Medstat Group, here in Ann Arbor. Paul wishes to express his thanks to Wendy and the cast for making his Ann Arbor Civic debut such a great experience!



Stephen Cary (Algernon Montford) is a PhD candidate in Biochemistry at U of M, studying brain signaling. He recently starred as King Marchan in the WCC production of Victor/ Victoria. He also played Lad #2

in AACT's *Tommy* last summer. Before that, he starred as El Gallo in a Yale production of *The Fantastiks*. Stephen thanks all the cast and staff of Earnest for a thrilling learning experience. Stephen grew up in Zimbabwe, where theatergoing with his mom and brothers was a regular treat, especially when dad was performing. He is grateful to his friends and family for their candor and succor. He especially owes the deepest gratitude to his wife and inspiration, Jenifer, whom he first saw and fell for on stage, and who has taught him the vital importance of not being earnest, without

also levity and reflection.



Peter Christian (Lane) is appearing in his first show with A2CT. Peter is no stranger to the Mendelssohn stage. As a member of UMGAS, Peter has performed in more than 25 productions over the past 17

years. His favorite roles include Koko in *The Mikado*, Robin Oakapple in *Ruddigore*, Florian in *Princess Ida*, and Sir Joseph Porter in *HMS Pinafore*. By day, Peter is a Quality Engineer for NSK Corporation.



Brian Harcourt (Mr. Gribsby) has recently appeared as Theseus in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Woodenshoes in The Front Page, and in several locally produced commercials. He hopes that you will enjoy

this show as much as he's enjoyed being a part of it.



Emily Phenix (Gwendolyn) is thrilled to be sharing the stage with her husband Matthew for the very first time. Ann Arbor credits include Man of La Mancha (Maria) at the Performance

Network, Carousel (Julie Jordan), 1776 (Abigail Adams), The Lucky Spot (Sue Jack Hooker), Steel Pier (Rita Racine) and Light Up The Sky (Irene Livingston). In February, Emily returned to her hometown (New York City) to appear in a staged workshop production of the new musical Stand By The River. She recently co-produced a landmark reunion concert of Stephen Sondheim's musical masterpiece, Follies, at the Michigan Theater where she is the Director of Marketing. Emily and Matthew live in Saline with their dog Rudy.



Matthew Phenix (Lady Brancaster) is delighted to make the acquaintance of Ann Arbor theatergoers, and to return to the stage after more than a decade away. For the audacity to play Wilde's great lady.

thanks go to Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis, Dustin Hoffman, Robin Williams, and every other actor who has accepted the astonishing challenge of crossing over. Thanks go, as well, to the many marvelous women who have inspired this Lady Brancaster, including Edith Evans, Gloria Swanson, Julia Child,

and Matthew's late mother-in-law, Shirley. Most of all, however, he is grateful to his wife, Emily, without whose words of encouragement and relentless pestering he'd never have dared to cross back over to the bright side of the proscenium.



Kaarina Quinnell (Miss Prism) is delighted to return home to the A2CT stage after many years of living in San Francisco and the NY area. She was last seen as Diana Trapes singing and

swigging ale in the Comic Opera Guild's production of *The Beggar's Opera*. She has come to realize (after having been surrounded by this truly talented bunch of actors for the past month) that "there is always hope even for the most depraved"!



Aaron Rabb (Moulton) would like to thank you all for making him feel welcome. Enjoy the show.



Rob Roy (Jack Worthing) is an Ann Arborite from way back, graduating from Pioneer High School and pursuing the acting profession with degrees from both Wayne State and Southern Methodist Universities. He

has worked professionally in Dallas, New York, Washington D.C. and Baltimore. He appeared last season with A2CT as Reed Hooker in Wendy Wright's acclaimed production of *The Lucky Spot* and was recently seen as Arlequin in MCRT's *The Game of Love and Chance* at the Riverside Arts Center. He lives happily with his lovely wife of eleven years, their two beautiful children, and the assorted menagerie while pursuing his ambition of being a teacher. He is pushing 40 and is just fine with that except for the receding hairline thing.



Erin Wetzel (Cecily Cardew) is fairly new to theater in this area, but has had a wonderful time working with Wendy and the whole talented cast of Earnest. Prior to her move

downstate, Erin lived in Traverse City where

she has done shows at the Old Town Playhouse. In this area, she has done both radio and commercial voice-over work, as well as several stage and film productions. Some of her past favorites include see How They Run, Dracula, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Moonlight and Valentino, and The Vagina Monologues. Currently, Erin is finishing her studies at UM and planning next to study abroad in London with her marvelous husband, Gary. Lastly, kudos to Oscar, the fabulous rake, who declared, "If you were wise you would learn life only by inexperience. That is what is always unexpected and delightful."

Jimmy Dee Arnold (Assistant Director and Stage manager) is delighted to be working again with Wendy. This production marks the first time for him as Stage manager at the wonderfully charming Lydia Mendelssohn Theater. This season he appeared in Enter Laughing and worked backstage for Smile. He is looking forward to directing next season's The Scarlet Pimpernel and encourages you all to audition since, God and his costumer willing, he plans to stage a "cast of thousands" for the crowd scenes. A special thanks to this talented cast who made his job especially easy and thoroughly enjoyable. Much love to his wife Linda and son Jimmy.

Bryan Cort (Set Designer) has just graduated from MSU with a Bachelor's in Theatre. While there he studied all areas of technical theatre as well as doing the lighting designs for Crimes of the Heart, and the scene designs for No Exit and True West . Previous productions with A2CT include Assistant Director for Evita, and Set Designer and Technical Director for Tommy . Some might remember Bryan from on stage at WCC in Fiddler on the Roof and Finian's Rainbow. Bryan would like to personally thank his parents, Tiff Crutchfield and Kyle Matthews for all their help and support over the last few years and a special thank you is given in memory of Ron Fracker for giving him such a wonderful start into the theatrical world.

Tiff Crutchfield (Producer) Tiff previously produced A2CT's Evita in 2001 and was co-producer of Adjective Arts' Little by Little in 2000. He has served as a designer for the A2CT productions of A Chorus Line (2000) and Tommy (2002) and has appeared onstage from time to time as well, most recently in Jekyll & Hyde (2002) and WCC's Victor

Victoria (2003). He thanks Wendy, Jimmy, the staff and especially the incredibly talented and funny cast for making Earnest such a great show.

Marilyn Gouin (Costume Designer) is working on her 3rd show for A2CT and 2nd show for Wendy Wright. She won Best Costume Design for Dancing at Lughnasa. She also designed costumes for last season's The Lucky Spot. She has also done the promotional photography for several A2CT productions. She has also designed costumes for UMGAS, Chelsea Area Players, Red Bud Productions, and Comic Opera Guild. She works at the Ann Arbor District Library planning, photographing and videotaping events. When not working on costumes, she enjoys singing in costume with The Arbor Consort at renaissance festivals across the state.

Thom Johnson (Lighting Designer) returns to the Lydia Mendelssohn after a long absence. His most recent designs for Enter Laughing, The Front Page, The Lucky Spot, etc. have all been at A2CT Downtown. Previously at the Mendelssohn, he designed lights for Play it Again Sam, Sweet Charity, Diary of Anne Frank and many others. Outside the theatre, TJ works for a living, smokes an occasional cigar, and does not jog.



Wendy Wright (Director) is the award-winning director (Picnic, Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Brighton Beach Memoirs, Twelfth Night, and Laundry & Bourbon/Lone Star) of eleven A2CT productions. Her most recent show was the 2002

critically acclaimed production of The Lucky Spot. This past year she has branched out to direct plays for the City of Wayne and the Ann Arbor Public Schools (Huron Players -Our Town). She is also an accomplished actress. most recently seen in the 2000 AACT production of The Crucible as Elizabeth Proctor. She devotes her time to creating her weekly radio show on WEMU. She is the current host of 89.1 Jazz with Wendy Wright on Sunday mornings from 5-8 a.m. She has been a participant in The Purple Rose Theatre Company's Playwright, Actor and Director Workshop for the past two years, once as an actor and once as a director; an experience that was both fulfilling and enlightening. She would like to thank a truly gifted and giving cast, her father for his ceaseless support, and Tiff and Jimmy for being by her side.

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Please come for an informative meeting with our Board of Directors and fellow members, and stay for a complimentary dinner and \$2 off the Singer Songwriters Showcase which will follow at 8:00 pm

Call our office at 734-971-0605 for additional details

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A2CT will hold auditions for the first production of the 2003-2004 season

CHICAGO

June 28th, 29th, callbacks June 30th 111 Third Street Rehearsal Studio

More audition information can be found at www.a2ct.org

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Ann Arbor Civic Theatre thanks its many on-stage and off-stage volunteers that helped bring you the 2002-2003 theatre season. Without the help of each and every one of these community members, the wonderful season of theatre would not have been possible! We apologize in advance if we missed someone. Thank you for sharing your time and talent with A2CT!

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A2CT takes this moment to thank it's ushers at the Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre for this production:

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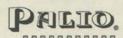
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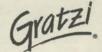
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