The Importance of Being Earnest

by Oscar Wilde

8 PM • February 19 & 20
and 26 & 27
Johns Auditorium

Presented by the
Fine Arts Department
Hampden-Sydney College
The Fine Arts Department of Hampden-Sydney College presents

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

By Oscar Wilde

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CAST
(In order of appearance)

Lane, Mr. Moncrieff's Manservant .......... Sam Gibbs
Algernon Moncrieff ............................ Kevin Jones
John Worthing, J. P. .......................... Buck Paul
Lady Bracknell ................................. Jennifer Vitale
Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax ....................... Charity Thomas
Miss Prism, Miss Cardew's Governess ........ Shaunna Hunter
Miss Cecily Cardew ............................ Katie Robey
Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D. ................... Justin Smith
Merriman, Mr. Worthing's Butler ............. Jay Artis

CREW

Director ......................................... Matthew R. Dubroff
Assistant Directors ......................... Joshua Jarrett and Andrew MacIntire
Set Design, Technical Direction ............. Brad Stoller
Light Design .................................. Patrick Crandol
Assistant Light Design ....................... David Heatwole
Costume Liaison, Property Master ........... Benjamin M. Brown
Stage Manager ................................. Eduardo Soto, Jr.
Original Music Composition and Performance .... R. David Salvage

The scene takes place in Algernon Moncrieff's flat in Half-Moon Street, W., and at the Manor House, Woolton.

There will be one ten-minute intermission.
DIRECTOR'S NOTE

It is over one hundred years since Oscar Wilde created his masterpiece of wit, "The Importance of Being Earnest”. Notwithstanding the changes since the end of the 19th century to our present day, what is of interest to consider are the number of things that have stayed the same. The timelessness of this play is for others to ponder, but to be sure, many aspects of it are just as relevant as they were the day Wilde set pen to paper.

We no longer dwell in a time when wit is elevated to an art. Travel is so relatively convenient that escaping one's life to go from the city to the country or vice versa is easy enough for anyone to do. On the other hand, communication networks are so widespread that there is virtually no escape from one's life. Indeed, some of the crucial dramatic components of "Earnest” are by definition old-fashioned and quaint.

That said, substantive aspects of what the play presents are still relevant. Social standing, the norms and mores of proper behavior, and issues of breeding and family still affect our attitudes and perspectives on what is right and wrong. Through a seemingly inconsequential romp of mistaken identities Wilde hones in on (some might say skewers) these conventions elevating the characters' language to what critic Max Beerbohm termed "beautiful nonsense".

This nonsense reveals people clinging to fixed notions of the world about them on subjects ranging from love to muffins. But experience often clashes with characters' stated beliefs. In most cases people choose to hold on to their constructions in the face of reality.

The social hypocrisy presented is funny and was likely meant to entertain. But it is worth noting that in his own life, Wilde became the victim of this hypocrisy in anything but a laughable manner exposing the chilling consequences of the attitudes in this piece of apparent "fluff". We are excited to share this classic piece of theatre with you and hope that you will be able to enjoy both the sweetness of its "cake" as well as the nourishment of its "bread and butter".

DRAMATURG'S NOTE

"Seriousness is the only refuge of the shallow." - Oscar Wilde

Perhaps it is because it came hard on the heels of a time of great social change and turmoil, and the public yearned for straighter laces. Perhaps its genesis was merely dictated by the whims of the Queen. Perhaps there is no single explanation at all - but whatever the case, it is not without reason that the term "Victorian" is often synonymous with "prudish" in modern vernacular, signaling the intense conservatism that ruled the public sphere during the life of Oscar Wilde.

He, however, was anything but reserved. The Irish-born playwright lived a life ruled by his passions and the embracing of pleasures. Very much reflecting the underlying duality of the period, Wilde was both a celebrity and an outcast, loved and loathed, respected and reviled. But Wilde was unabashed concerning his "deviances," and though his very public persecution and downfall came swiftly on the heels of his tremendous success, Wilde's work stood as a voice dissenting against the stiffness of society, and a voice that was heard despite all attempts to silence it.

Wilde was perhaps the most famous adherent of Aestheticism, which was in many ways a prominent countercultural movement, buoyed by Wilde not only
in Britain but also through his extensive tours of the United States. Aesthetes, influenced by Romantics like Percy Shelley, believed that art should provide sensual pleasure and not be weighed by heavy moral messages. Life and art, said Wilde and other adherents, should be lavish and fun—no number of decorative peacock feathers is too many.

Wilde's Aestheticism is reflected in his plays' characters' witty banter and their absurd, uproariously fun plots. The great success they enjoyed, and the celebrity this gave Wilde, illustrates poignantly the duality of Victorian life: behind the straight-faced exterior, the people of Victorian England prized what they would be quick to label "debauchery" when in public. In this way, perhaps, Wilde meant to point out that all people of his time were quite serious Bunburyists.

CAST & CREW
(In alphabetical order)

JAY ARTIS (Merriman, Mr. Worthing's butler) was born in Washington, DC, and is a junior at Hampden-Sydney, back on the stage. Jay has done a few shows here—Twelfth Night, The Normal Heart, Medea's Tale, and recently a motion picture with Time Ried. I want to say thank you to God, my mom, dad, sisters, brother, my wife Jeni, best friend Nathan, Jerry, Jenny and Mirjam, Kaitie, Spanish House, cross country team, MSU brothers, and all those close to me. I love you all.

BENJAMIN M. BROWN (Costume Liaison) is a biology and fine arts major at H-SC. He plans to attend medical school after his graduation this spring to pursue an MD/PhD. He has been involved in a production every semester of his college career and currently serves as vice president of the Jingleers Club. He is very grateful for the chance to learn and grow through the acting community and hopes to continue his experience in the arts despite his grounding in the sciences.

PATRICK CRANDOL (Light Design) is a Junior at Hampden-Sydney this year, majoring in Fine Arts. This is the fourth main stage production he's been involved with since coming to Hampden-Sydney, and he'd like to dedicate his work in this play to the memory of a dear friend and the man who first inspired his love of theatre, Don Cox.

MATTHEW R. DUBROFF (Director) has been teaching theatre at Hampden-Sydney College since 1999. He has designed and directed numerous productions here. Recent directing credits include The Caucasian Chalk Circle (fall 2008) and A Streetcar Named Desire (spring 2008). Dubroff is a founding member of Theatre Nohgaku and performs with them regularly in a variety of roles. In August of 2009 he played the title role in Funabashi for the Noh Training Project 15 Year Anniversary Performance and in December he performed in Kyoishite and Pagoda as part of a tour to London, Dublin, Oxford, and Paris. Dubroff is a teacher of the Alexander Technique and the Wu Style of Tai Ji. He would like to thank all of the students, faculty, and community members for their involvement in and support of this exciting project and theatre at H-SC.

SAM GIBBS (Lane, Mr. Moncrieff's Manservant) is in his final semester here at
H-SC. He has art directed many shows and acted in Tartuffe during his junior year. This will be Sam’s final performance at H-SC and he would like to thank his family and friends for supporting his theatre interests over the years. Most of all he thanks Matt and Shirley for everything!

David Heatwole (Assistant Light Design) has worked with light control for Hampden-Sydney College theater for four years. He hopes that everybody enjoys the show.

Shauna Hunter (Miss Prism, Miss Cardew’s Governess) is pleased to make her fifth appearance on the Hampden-Sydney stage in The Importance of Being Earnest. Her most recent role, and one of her personal favorites, was Olivia in last year’s production of Twelfth Night. Her other favorite role is Belinda Blair/Hania Brent in the fall 2005 production of Notes Off. When not on the stage, Shauna can be found in the Bortz Library, where she works as the College’s Public Services Librarian.

Joshua Jarrett (Assistant Director) is an H-SC alumnus who has returned looking to pad his grad school resume. This show marks his third since graduation and hopefully only one of many more as he continues his theatrical career.

Kevin Jones (Algeron Moncrieff) is a senior here at H-SC. He is a fine arts theatre major and has graced the stage here many times. His last role was Mike Dillard in last semester’s production of Working. Other roles include Tartuffe in Tartuffe, Lord Hastings in Richard III, Brian Rumnikes in No Sex Please, We’re British, and Antonio in Twelfth Night. He would like to thank his parents, friends, and his true loves: Katie Robey and Jenni Abel. I love you guys! Enjoy the show!

Andrew MacIntire (Assistant Director) lost all his wit last year and is doomed to produce prosaic puffery in place of pith. That said, he is Captain Duboff’s committed Lieutenant Commander for this play and is endlessly devoted to helping make sure this greatest of plays runs smoothly. In another world, Andrew is a Hampden-Sydney junior and English major, a penniless rock’n’roll musician, and an impaired superhero.

Buck Paul (John Worthing, J. P.) is a senior here at Hampden Sydney College. He is a fine arts major and secretary in Theta Chi fraternity. He has appeared in such plays as You Can’t Take It With You, Into the Woods, The Laramie Project, The Dining Room, and Philadelphia Here I Come (2004-2006). He has also appeared in Richard III and Working here at H-S-C. Thanks mom and dad for everything. I will truly miss my time here.

Katie Robey (Miss Cecily Cardew) is a sophomore theatre major at Longwood University. Her previous Hampden-Sydney productions include The Cruciam Chilk Circle, Christmas Carol, The Normal Heart, Twelfth Night, Working, and various one act plays. She has had a great time working with the cast and crew and would like to thank her family and friends, Kevin, Ben, Buck, Jay, The Longwood Theatre family, the C-Dorm and Blake’s boys (including Thomas), and Jason for their constant support, friendship, and entertaining Shenanigans. She would most
especially like to thank her parents, David and Cynthia. Also, Katie would like to extend a huge thank you to Professors Dubroff and Kagan. She hopes you enjoy the show.

R. David Salvage (Original Music Composition and Performance) is Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Hampden-Sydney College. He taught previously at the Brooklyn College Conservatory of Music, while finishing his PhD in Music at the City University of New York. A graduate of Harvard and Manhattan School of Music, Salvage is an alumnus of the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau, France, and has been in residency with the Atlantic Center for the Arts. He is a three-time recipient of the ASCAP Plus award from the American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers. He currently serves as a Senior Editor of Sequenza21.com, one of the Internet's most popular new music websites. A composer of over fifty works for a wide variety of ensembles, within the last year he has fulfilled commissions for the Rosetta String Trio and the principal clarinetist for the Columbus Symphony Orchestra (OH).

Justin Smith (Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D.) is a Spanish major at H-SC and has been in two main-stage productions here at H-SC: Tartuffe (as Valere) and Caucasian Chalk Circle (as Simon). He has been building for the theatre since his freshman year (he is now a junior). After spending six months in Buenos Aires, Argentina (and missing out on that wonderful musical, Working <sniff>), he is ready to get back into action, and look good doing it.

Eduardo Soto, Jr. (Stage Manager), "Stage Captain Extraordinaire," is a junior religion major who has helped the theatre department since his sophomore year. The Importance of Being Earnest is his second production as stage manager. Edgar loves the theatre, finds it an exciting venture, and hopes to continue to help the theatre department at Hampden-Sydney.

Brad Stoller (Set Design, Technical Direction) has an MFA in playwriting from UVA. He has been designing, teching and teaching at H-SC for several years now and is finally getting to know the dimensions of the stage. He lives in Charlottesville where he practices the Alexander Technique, dance, and improvisational theatre.

Charity Thomas (Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax) enjoys a little acting on the side and has previously appeared on the H-SC stage in Tartuffe, A Christmas Carol, and A Midsummer Night's Dream. She graduated from James Madison University and now works as a pediatric nurse. In her free time she enjoys helping her husband lead the young adult ministry at their church, singing, playing keyboard, hiking, cooking, and eating peanut butter. She would like to thank her husband, family, cast, and the enthusiastic audience members!

Jennifer Vitale (Lady Bracknell) is an associate professor of psychology at Hampden-Sydney College. The role of Lady Bracknell marks her seventh turn on the H-SC stage and she is grateful, as always, for the opportunity to work with the men and women of H-SC theater. She is especially grateful that they allowed her to bring her new baby to rehearsals.