

Gallery Players
present

The *Of* Importance Being Earnest

by oscar wilde



'A Trivial Comedy
for Serious People!'

SIR JOHN MILLS THEATRE
GATACRE ROAD
IPSWICH



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The Importance of a Play Called Earnest

Oscar Wilde gave *The Importance of Being Earnest* the sub-title: *A Trivial Comedy for Serious People*. He told Robert Ross that the play's theme was... "*that we should treat all trivial things in life very seriously, and all serious things of life with a sincere and studied triviality.*"

Earnest was superficially about nothing at all. *An Ideal Husband* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had dwelt on more serious wrongdoing but vice in *Earnest* was represented by Algy's craving for cucumber sandwiches.

But fashionable England – the very people who craved Wilde's attention and were soon to turn their backs on him - didn't realise they were being gently lampooned in Wilde's comedic mirror.

Nowadays the play is recognised as a clever satire on Victorian society. Wilde repeatedly mocks Victorian traditions and social customs, marriage and the pursuit of love in particular.

Wilde biographer Richard Ellmann writes that in *The Importance of Being Earnest* "*amusing as the surface is, the comic energy springs from realities that are being mocked...Deception is everywhere, cancelled by spontaneity and humour.*"

Wilde embodied society's rules and rituals artfully into Lady Bracknell: minute attention to the details of her style created the desired comic effect.

In contrast to her encyclopaedic knowledge of the social distinctions of London's street names, Jack's obscure parentage is subtly evoked. He defends himself against her "*A handbag?*" line with the clarification, "*The Brighton Line*".

At the time, Victoria Station consisted of two separate but adjacent stations sharing the same name. To the east was the ramshackle LC&D Railway, on the west the up-market LB&SCR—the Brighton Line, which went to Worthing, the fashionable, expensive town after which Jack was named.

The Importance of Being Earnest is indeed high comedy but it is also an intriguing slice of social history.



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Production Team:-

Director	<i>Helen Leeder</i>
Stage Manager	<i>Georgie Beard</i>
Lighting	<i>Will Dowe</i>
Sound	<i>Jonathan Terry</i>
Set Design	<i>Dave Borthwick</i>
Costumes	<i>Helen Leeder</i>
Props	<i>Judy Wadman</i>
Front of House	<i>Mike and Judy Wadman</i>
Programme	<i>Steve Taplin</i>
Publicity	<i>Steve Taplin and Andrew Clarke</i>
Producer	<i>Helen Clarke</i>

*Thanks to all friends and members of the Gallery Players
who have helped build and paint scenery and sell
programmes for this show.*



The Reclamation of a Play Called Earnest

In 1930 theatrical impresario Sir Nigel Playfair was looking for a sure-fire hit with which to wow West End audiences. He was also looking for a vehicle for a rising young star who was busily making his name with the Old Vic – John Gielgud.

He chose to revive Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

Cast opposite Gielgud as Jack Worthing was Mabel Terry-Lewis as the formidable Lady Bracknell. Terry-Lewis was not only Gielgud's aunt, she was also the niece of the great Victorian dramatic actress Ellen Terry.

The look of the production was hugely stylised with dramatic sets and a black and white colour scheme to echo the illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley who had become synonymous with Wilde's work.

The production was a huge hit, but only had a two month run because of Gielgud's commitment to The Old Vic.

Nevertheless, the experience stayed with Gielgud, and in 1939, during the dark days leading up to the outbreak of World War II, he produced and starred in a much more lavish production at the Globe (now the Gielgud) Theatre, with a cast that included Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell, Joyce Carey as Gwendolen, Angela Baddeley as Cecily and Margaret Rutherford as Miss Prism.

It was this production which secured the play's reputation and provided the basis for the 1952 film starring Michael Redgrave.

The declaration of war in September 1939 closed all London's theatre forcing Gielgud and *The Importance of Being Earnest* out on tour with Jack Hawkins as Algy, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Gwendolen and Peggy Ashcroft as Cecily, with Evans and Rutherford in their previous roles.

The show was later revived at The Phoenix Theatre in 1942 to boost morale and again toured. During a 1946 season at the Haymarket the King and Queen attended a performance, which, as the journalist Geoffrey Wheatcroft put it, gave the play "*a final accolade of respectability.*"

By the time of its centenary the journalist Mark Lawson described it as "*the second most known and quoted play in English after Hamlet.*"



The Story of a play called Earnest

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To quote Oscar Wilde's near contemporary Charles Dickens
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."

The Importance of Being Earnest, Wilde's greatest theatrical achievement, opened to a standing ovation on February 14 1895.

Just days later John Douglas, 9th Marquess of Queensberry, father of Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, publically accused Wilde of seducing young boys. Wilde sued for libel but had the tables turned against him and found himself centre-stage in the trial of the century.

Fifteen weeks after the opening night, Oscar Wilde found himself in Pentonville Prison sentenced to two years hard labour for gross indecency.

Over night Wilde had gone from the most celebrated man in London to the most reviled. The fallout for his latest play was disastrous.

After a run of sell-out performances, the increasing notoriety of Wilde's court appearances left a sour taste in the mouths of Victorian society and they no longer felt like laughing at Wilde's clever comedy.

Actor-manager George Alexander tried some damage-control by removing Wilde's name from the marquee but the play was too closely associated with its author for that to work. After just 86 performances *The Importance of Being Earnest* closed and was more or less forgotten for the next 30 years.

This would have been unthinkable when Wilde started writing the play in July 1894. Following the huge success of *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, London's theatre owners couldn't wait for a new Wilde comedy.

Wilde summered with his family at Worthing, where he wrote the play quickly. Inspired by events in WS Gilbert's 1877 farce *Engaged*, he swiftly developed an outline for the play – which he then decorated with names and places taken from the lives of those around him.

For example, Lady Queensberry, Lord Alfred Douglas's mother, lived at Bracknell and provided both name and force of character to Jack's Aunt Augusta.

During the rehearsals with Alexander and his company at The St James Theatre plot was tightened and dialogue sharpened. Alexander asked Wilde to turn his original four acts into three.

Wilde combined elements of the second and third acts, removing the character of Mr. Gribbsby, a solicitor who comes from London to arrest the profligate "*Earnest*". This scene was finally seen in Oliver Parker's 2002 film with Colin Firth and Rupert Everett.

On opening night, the expectant audience was full of the great and good – former cabinet ministers and privy councillors, as well as actors, writers, academics, and enthusiasts.

Allan Aynesworth, who played Algernon Moncrieff, recalled: "*In my fifty-three years of acting, I never remember a greater triumph than that first night.*"

Not even such success could survive the scandal of Wilde's trial. Even in America a Broadway production opened on April 22 1895 but closed after just 16 performances.

In 1909 Wilde's close friend Robert Ross, in partnership with George Alexander and Allan Aynesworth, tried to revive the play and Oscar's reputation but it was still too early.

It would take the charm and character of John Gielgud and distinctive personality of Dame Edith Evans to firmly restore the play and Wilde back in the public's affections.

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The Cast

(in order of appearance)

Algernon Moncrieff	Liam Gregory
Lane, Manservant	Peter Phillips
John Worthing, J. P.	Edmund Crosthwaite
Lady Bracknell	Tanya White
Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax	Emily Bennett
Miss Prism, Governess	Helen Clarke
Cecily Cardew	Molly Scurrell
Rev. Dr Chasuble, D.D.	Phil Cory
Merriman, Butler	Peter Phillips

Act 1:- *Algernon Moncrieff's flat in Half-Moon Street, W.*

Interval 15 minutes

Act 2:- *The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.*

Interval 5 minutes

Act 3:- *The Drawing Room at the Manor House, Woolton*



Our 'Earnest' Company!

Emily Bennett:

Admirably skilled in the arts, both as an actress and musician, Emily had deportment classes at the *Guildford School of Acting*. Less conventionally, Emily also studied sitar and sarangi in the heart of Hindustan. With a love of all things sensational, and all things not, Emily is delighted to be 'wearing her chin high' with such a marvellous company of actors.

Helen Clarke:

As a long-time devotee of the three-volume novel, Helen has thoroughly enjoyed lending her maturity and ripeness to the joys of Mr. Wilde's estimable prose. She has unearthed a passion for making cucumber sandwiches, and hopes in time to discover the sensations of '*The Fall of the Rupee*' for herself.

Phil Cory:

Phil has had, theatrically, a very 'Wilde' year. Earlier this year Phil was in the Gallery Players production of *A Man of No Importance*, a show based around a man who attempted to put on an amateur production of Wilde's *Salome*.

Phil then followed that up with a 'wild' trip *Into the Woods* and is now lucky enough to be in this marvellous production penned by the man himself.

Wilde's writing is, in Phil's opinion, pure genius with not a word or sentence wasted and he trusts that that we will do the text justice.

Other theatre credits for Phil, include Norman in *The Dresser*, Frank in *Educating Rita*, Warnie in *Shadowlands* and Sammy in *Radio Times* being among his favourites.

Edmund Crosthwaite:

Edmund is 23 and has recently returned to Suffolk and to the stage following three years at university. While at university he directed shows for and contributed to the running of the Amateur Dramatics Society; before that he spent four years each with *Suffolk Youth Theatre* and *Common Ground Theatre Company*. This is Edmund's second show with the Gallery Players – he appeared as *Count Skriczevinsky* in *Flare Path* at the *Sir John Mills Theatre* in 2009.





Liam Gregory:

I achieved a BA (Hons) in Drama from the *University of Lincoln* in 2009 and have been involved in various theatre productions since. I had the opportunity to perform at the *Edinburgh Fringe Festival*; in a new piece of writing, 'Going Down' by Darren A. Furniss and Willy Russell's 'Blood Brothers'.

Most recently I have performed as 'Joey' in Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* and portrayed 'Tybalt' in Shakespeares '*Romeo and Juliet*' which was performed as part of the RSC Open Stages project with the *New Wolsey Theatre*.

Peter Phillips:

This is my 18th show with Gallery and I have enjoyed everyone of them. So impressed with all the new talent in this production which bodes well for the future of the company.

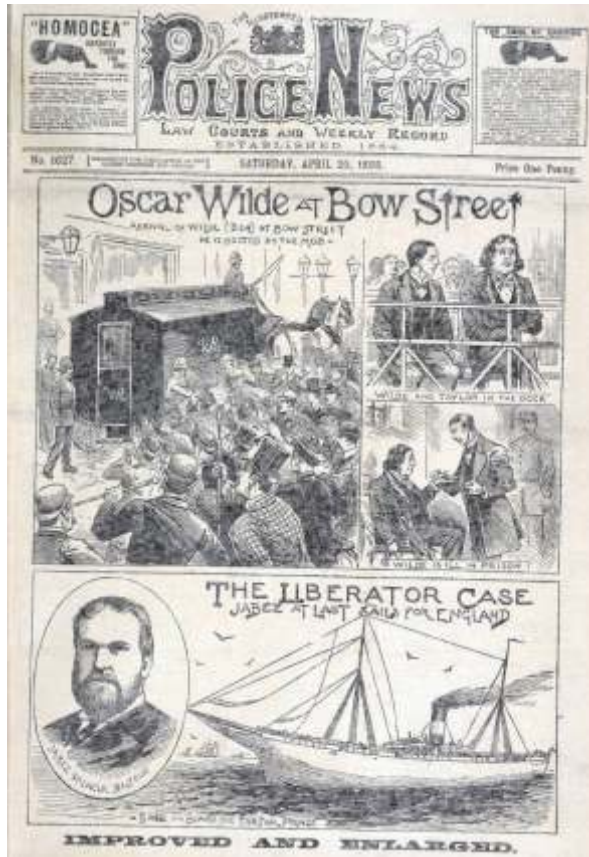
Enjoy the show - pity about the cucumbers.

Molly Scurrall:

Molly seems to be walking on the *Wilde* side a lot this year. Firstly appearing in *A Man of No Importance* with Gallery in April then dancing with a very Wild Wolf in *Into The Woods* as Red Riding Hood at the Wolsey in July and now is about to have a frightfully delightful time as Cecily in Wilde's witty, wonderful, winsome comedy. Molly is at present studying Musical Theatre at Colchester and has been this summer performing professionally with *The Tigerlilys* in summer season on the Norfolk Coast.

Tanya White:

Tanya has been 35 for a number of years now. It is a suitable age, she hopes, to take on the challenges of Oscar Wilde and one never knows when 36 may finally arrive. She is particularly taken by the importance of being a first time member of the Gallery Players. It has distinct social possibilities.



Helen Leeder:

Helen Leeder studied drama and dance at Liverpool. She has had constant involvement with a wide variety of theatrical projects including many years of directing plays for schools, theatre companies, *Suffolk Youth Theatre* summer schools and community projects. Her most recent productions were *"A Midsummer Night's Dream"* (2011) and *"Honest Meg"* (2012). Helen first 'trod the boards' in Ipswich at the Drama centre (as the SJM was then known) in 1976 when she appeared in the Ipswich Youth Theatre productions of *"The Devils"* (playing Sister Jeanne of the Angels) and *"A Midsummer Night's Dream"* (playing Titania). After a short break from acting of about 30 years she was delighted to take a small acting role in The Gallery Players' production of *"A Man Of No Importance"*. She has always yearned to play the parts of Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism but has to make do with the memory of playing Jack Worthing when she was at school!

Debussy Discovers Ragtime

The development of classical music in the nineteenth century was dominated by composers working in Germany and Austria, and was seen by many at the turn of the century to have reached its height in the operas of *Richard Wagner*. Although in his youth *Claude Debussy* (1862-1918) had been an ardent admirer of Wagner's music, the French composer eventually broke away from Austro-German musical techniques by cultivating an innovative style of musical impressionism. In the process, he laid the foundations for the extraordinary diversity in composition that characterizes twentieth-century music.

Debussy probably heard ragtime when the famous band led by *John Philip Sousa* appeared at the *1900 Paris Exposition* as part of a European tour. The crisp clarity of the idiom must have appealed to Debussy's growing sense of anti-romanticism, and he went on to emulate the ragtime style in three piano pieces.

The best known of these is "*Golliwog's Cakewalk**" (part of his *Children's Corner* suite, completed in 1908). Debussy continued to use the ragtime style in two later piano preludes: "*Minstrels*" (1910) and "*General Lavine-excentric [sic]*" (1913). Debussy's music, and that of his younger contemporary *Maurice Ravel*, came in turn to influence a later generation of jazz musicians. The advanced harmonies of French Impressionism, which included the emphasis of attractive 7th, 9th and 11th chords in unconventional ways, became the staple harmonic vocabulary of both big band and bop idioms.

**The Cake Walk* was performed by slaves to mock their white masters' dance forms.
(Extract from '*The Chronicle of Jazz*' by Mervyn Cooke.)

Music

Scott Joplin	Heliotrope Bouquet
Debussy	Extracts from Children's Corner Suite Minstrels
Mendelssohn	Wedding March



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Gallery Players were formed in 1985 by Pat Taplin to produce rarely performed plays and musicals that larger companies would find uneconomic or which only use a few actors. The company quickly established a reputation for quality and excellence. Our aims are broadly speaking:

To exploit a niche for staging productions that are progressive and exciting in both content and execution.

To embrace both new and established works.

To act as vehicle for engaging new talent as well as established members.

To foster a group of actors and technicians that are truly a community.

To foster links with schools and colleges.

We generally stage three productions a year.

Performing lesser known shows is always difficult, particularly when it comes to building an audience and balancing the books, but by sticking to our aims we have grown an audience, that, hopefully, trust us to produce interesting work.

Although we have a strong pool of performers new blood and talent is always welcome as are people who want to work on the technical side.

The company is run by a small steering group: Dave Borthwick, Helen Clarke, Richard Healey, Steve Taplin and Steve Wooldridge .

We encourage other directors to take the reins of their own pet projects, allowing them to cast freely and create individual shows with the backing of our excellent technical and production crew. Our only insistence is that the final show should entertain and stimulate our discerning audience and should exude that sense of professionalism we strive for.

Gallery have won several awards including the NODA Eastern Area Shield for Best Production with 'Carnival' & 'Putting it Together' and the Councillors Cup for 'The Bakers Wife' and 'Kiss Me Like You Mean It'.

Please visit our website at www.galleryplayers.co.uk for details of all our shows past and future. Please sign up with your email address if you would like us to keep you informed of what we are doing and receive our 'newsletters' which will give details of any workshops/auditions we may be holding.

Our Motto is '**Making Theatre Exciting**' which we like to think we do, most of the time!

Past Shows:-

1985 Cowardy Custard, 1986 Happy as a Sandbag, 1987 Sail Away, 1988 Something's Afoot, 1989 Company, 1990 The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, 1991 The Hired Man, 1992 Snoopy - The Musical, A Little Night Music, 1993 Stepping Out, Cabaret, 1994 Assassins, The Ghost Train, Into the Woods, Hobson's Choice, 1995 Man of La Mancha, Steel Magnolia's, City of Angels, Scent of Flowers, 1996 Little Shop of Horrors, The Most Happy Fella, Blue Remembered Hills, 1997 Dancing at Lughnasa, Pacific Overtures, Chicago, Hard Times, 1998 The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Sweeney Todd (The Demon Barber of Fleet Street), Shadowlands, Something's Afoot, 1999 Carnival, Trip to Bountiful, The Boys From Syracuse, Tons of Money, 2000 On Golden Pond, The Bakers Wife, Kiss of the Spiderwoman, A Slice of Saturday Night, One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest, 2001 Mrs Warren's Profession, A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum, Billy, Breezeblock Park, 2002 The Memory of Water, Flora The Red Menace, A Slice of Saturday Night, Radio Times, 2003 Kiss Me Like You Mean It, Days of Hope, Honk!, And A Nightingale Sang, 2004 Bouncers, Merrily We Roll Along, Talking Heads, You're A Good Man Charlie Brown, 2005 Kindertransport, She Loves Me, A Night At The Dogs, 2006 Amy's View, Passion, With Love, Colder Than Here, 2007 This Happy Breed, Grand Hotel, You Want Chilli Sauce With That & Marry Me A Little, The Sunshine Boys, 2008 Oh Kay!, Spend Spend Spend, To Kill A Mockingbird, 2009 The Long Road, Follies, Flare Path, 2010 Ordinary Days, Rent, Spring & Port Wine, 2011 My Mother Said I Never Should, Our House, Heroes, 2012 Putting it Together, Love Story, Be My Baby, 2013 A Man of No Importance, Into the Woods, The Importance of Being Earnest.

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OH, WHAT A LOVELY WAR!

by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop,
Charles Chilton, Gerry Raffles
and Members of the Original Cast



to mark the centenary of the
commencement of the 'Great War'
1914-1918

Sir John Mills Theatre,
Ipswich
26th March - 4th April

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**GALLERY
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present

Summer 2014

Gallery Players are excited to announce the arrival of:-

GALILEO

a brand new musical play
by Martin Waddington