The Importance of Being Earnest

2023–2024 Season / September 9 – October 15, 2023 / Wurtele Thrust Stage
Introducing our smaller-but-wiser programs.

We’ve loved sharing our signature magazine-sized programs with you for many seasons, but rising print costs and supply chain challenges sent us in search of more sustainable and cost-effective solutions. Play programs are a big part of the theatergoing experience — especially at the Guthrie. So instead of going 100% digital, we downsized. This win-win scenario allows us to spend our resources more responsibly while keeping printed programs in your hands.

Thanks for embracing this change with us, and we hope you enjoy our new program debut.
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STONES IN HIS POCKETS  
Jan 24 - Feb 25

THE COLOR PURPLE  
Mar 20 - May 5

JOHNNY SKEEKY; OR, THE REMEDY FOR EVERYTHING  
WORLD PREMIERE
May 29 - Jul 7

Music and Lyrics by William Finn  
Book by William Finn and James Lapine

Directed by Meredith McDonough  
Music Direction by Jason Hansen  
Choreography by Emily Michaels King

CHRISTMAS AT THE LOCAL  
Nov 21 - Dec 31
SEASON ADD ON

Featuring Dylan Thomas’ A Child’s Christmas in Wales  
Composed by Cerys Matthews and Mason Neely  
and “The Longing for Amazing Peace”*  
Music by Chastity Brown and Text by Dr. Maya Angelou

Production by Peter Rothstein and Larissa Kokernot  
Directed by Larissa Kokernot  
Music Direction and Orchestrations by Jason Hansen

FALSETTOS  
Sep 20 - Nov 5

NEXT Festival  
SEASON ADD ON
Summer 2024

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Welcome to the 2023–2024 Season! The first play always generates great excitement, but kicking things off with one of the most brilliant comedies ever written is especially thrilling. Oscar Wilde’s keen comedy of manners serves up an array of delights, from the amusing characters you can’t help but love to the witticisms you’ll be quoting long after you leave.

The Guthrie is well-versed in the charm that The Importance of Being Earnest delivers: We’ve produced it three times in the past, and it never ceases to be a bright spot in the season. Great comedy is incredibly fun to watch and unbelievably difficult to pull off. So we called on David Ivers — a superb director of comedy who returns to the Guthrie after previously helming Blithe Spirit and The Cocoanuts. If you were fortunate to be in the audience for either of those productions, you know you’re in good (and very funny) hands.

And then there’s the fantastic cast and creative team who have worked diligently to find the funny in every look, line and detail, down to what’s happening on top of those grand Edwardian hats. No potential for humor has been overlooked, and you’re about to reap the benefits.

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From Artistic Director
Joseph Haj
The Importance of Being Earnest
A Trivial Comedy for Serious People
by Oscar Wilde
directed by David Ivers

CREATIVE TEAM

SCENIC DESIGNER       Mikiko Suzuki MacAdams
COSTUME DESIGNER       Susan Tsu
LIGHTING DESIGNER      Philip Rosenberg
SOUND DESIGNER         Scott W. Edwards
RESIDENT DRAMATURG     Carla Steen
VOCAL COACH            Keely Wolter
INTIMACY BY            Alli St. John
RESIDENT CASTING DIRECTOR Jennifer Liestman
STAGE MANAGER          Karl Alphonso*
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER Matthew Meeks*
NYC CASTING CONSULTANT McCorkle Casting, Ltd.
CAST
in alphabetical order

JOHN “JACK” WORTHING, J.P.  Corey Brill*
HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX  Helen Cespedes*
LANE/REV. CANON FREDERICK CHASUBLE, D.D.  Bob Davis*
ALGERNON MONCRIEFF  Michael Doherty*
MISS LAETITIA PRISM  Michelle O’Neill*
MERRIMAN  Daniel Petzold*
CECILY CARDEW  Adelin Phelps*
LADY BRACKNELL  Sally Wingert*

Understudies
Understudies never substitute for performers unless announced prior to the performance.
Stephanie Anne Bertumen* (Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax/Cecily Cardew)
Dustin Bronson* (John “Jack” Worthing, J.P./Merriman)
Charity Jones* (Miss Laetitia Prism/Lady Bracknell)
Jim Lichtscheidl* (Lane/Rev. Canon Frederick Chasuble, D.D.)
Daniel Petzold* (Algeron Moncrieff)

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association

SETTING
July 1905

Act One: Algeron Moncrieff’s flat in Half-Moon Street, London
Intermission
Act Two: Garden at the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire
Intermission
Act Three: Drawing room at the Manor House
Cast

**Corey Brill** (John “Jack” Worthing, J.P.) **GUTHRIE Debut.** **THEATER**

Broadway: Tom Stoppard’s *Leopoldstadt* (2023 Tony Award for Best Play), Gore Vidal’s *The Best Man, Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo; National Tour: Cabaret; Regional (selected): The Kennedy Center; South Coast Repertory; Actors Theatre of Louisville; Seattle Rep; The Old Globe; Williamstown Theatre Festival; Hartford Stage; La Jolla Playhouse. **FILM/TELEVISION** HBO’s *The Normal Heart; “The Walking Dead,” “Chicago P.D.,” “You’re the Worst,” “Scorpion,” “Perception,” “CSI: Miami.** **TRAINING** M.F.A., University of California, San Diego; B.F.A., Otterbein College

**Helen Cespedes** (Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax) **GUTHRIE Debut.** **THEATER**

Broadway: *The Cripple of Inishmaan; Off-Broadway: Fefu and Her Friends, Timon of Athens (Theatre for a New Audience); Paul Swan Is Dead and Gone (The Civilians); The School for Scandal (Red Bull Theater); Regional (selected): The Old Globe; Goodman Theatre; Hartford Stage; McCarter Theatre Center. **FILM/TELEVISION** (selected): “Law & Order,” “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel,” “Search Party,” “The Knick.” **PODCASTS** “Isolated Incidents,” “Twits in Love.” **AWARDS** The Juilliard School’s John Houseman Prize. **TRAINING** The Juilliard School

**Bob Davis** (Lane/Rev. Canon Frederick Chasuble, D.D.) **GUTHRIE 88**

productions, including *Blithe Spirit, The Crucible, Othello, Nice Fish, Much Ado About Nothing, The Winter’s Tale, Macbeth and the History Plays.** **THEATER** West End/A.R.T./St. Ann’s Warehouse: *Nice Fish; Ten Thousand Things: Richard III; Jungle Theater: Betrayal; Park Square Theatre: Sherlock Holmes; Chanhassen Dinner Theatres: The Foreigner; Children’s Theatre Company; Mixed Blood Theatre; Torch Theater; New Classic Theater; Cricket Theatre; Theatre L’Homme Dieu; Illusion Theater. **FILM/TELEVISION** *Nobody, Factotum, A Simple Plan, Trauma, Fairy Tales; “Algo’s FACTory.” **AWARDS** McKnight Fellowship; Lunt-Fontanne Fellowship. **TEACHING** Brazil! School of the Arts

**Michael Doherty** (Algernon Moncrieff) **GUTHRIE Debut.** **THEATER**

Off-Broadway: 59E59 Theaters; Regional (selected): Berkeley Rep; Utah Shakespeare Festival; Denver Center; Cleveland Play House; Milwaukee Rep; Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park; Connecticut Repertory Theatre; Wilma Theater. **FILM/TELEVISION** Guest star on “Wu Tang: An American Saga” (Hulu); Voices of Rok and Mojo on “Take My Muffin” (Toonbox Animation Studio/linch Network); Co-Creator of “Los Jarochos” (Best Writing, 2013 Independent TV Festival). **OTHER** Peer-reviewed publications in *Mind, Brain and Education, PLOS One and British Journal of Educational Psychology*; Co-Creator of “Mythic Thunderlute: A D&D Podcast Musical” (Broadway Podcast Network). @thedohberman (IG), www.mikedoh.com
Michelle O’Neill (Miss Laetitia Prism) GUTHRIE 30+ productions, including *The Tempest*, *The Royal Family*, *The Crucible*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *Macbeth*, *The Intelligent Homosexual…*, *Peer Gynt*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Three Sisters*, *All My Sons*, *The Plough and the Stars*, *The Playboy of the Western World* and *You Can’t Take It With You*. THEATER Broadway: *The Heiress*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*; Regional: Jungle Theater; Penumbra Theatre; Pillsbury House Theatre; Ten Thousand Things. FILM/TELEVISION *The Devil’s Own*, *The Pelican Brief*, *Older Than America*; “Third Watch.” TEACHING University of Minnesota. TRAINING The Juilliard School

Daniel Petzold (Merriman/US Algernon Moncrieff) GUTHRIE *Hamlet*, Sally & Tom. THEATER Off-Broadway: *Switzerland* (59E59 Theaters); *Pushkin* (the american vicarious); Regional: *Airness*, *Holmes and Watson* (Park Square Theatre); *American Son* (Florida Studio Theatre); *A Christmas Carol* (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park); *Macbeth*, *Twelfth Night*, *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (The Old Globe); *Three Sisters* (Berkeley Rep); A Bright New Boise (Aurora Theatre); Another Way Home, Any Given Day (Magic Theatre); The Coast of Utopia (Shotgun Players). FILM/TELEVISION “FBI” (CBS). TRAINING M.F.A., The Old Globe/University of San Diego; B.A., University of California, Berkeley. @_danielpetzold (IG)


Creative Team

David Ivers (Director) **GUTHRIE** *Blithe Spirit, The Cocoanuts.* THEATER  
Artistic Director of South Coast Repertory (five seasons); Former Artistic Director of Arizona Theatre Company (two seasons) and Utah Shakespeare Festival (seven seasons); Former Resident Artist with Denver Center Theatre Company (10 seasons); Regional (selected): Oregon Shakespeare Festival; Berkeley Rep; South Coast Repertory; Pioneer Theatre Company; Alabama Shakespeare Festival; Portland Center Stage; Portland Repertory Theatre (Associate Artistic Director); Seattle Rep; Artists Repertory Theatre.  
**TRAINING** M.F.A., University of Minnesota; B.F.A., Southern Oregon University

Mikiko Suzuki MacAdams (Scenic Designer) **GUTHRIE** *Into the Woods,* Sweat, *The Glass Menagerie,* The Legend of Georgia McBride, Hold These Truths. THEATER Off-Broadway (selected): 2nd Stage; Primary Stages; Working Theater; Epic Theatre Ensemble; Intar Theatre; Ensemble Studio Theatre; National Asian American Theatre Company; National Tour: Dirty Dancing; Regional (selected): Arena Stage; Berkeley Rep; The Old Globe; Oregon Shakespeare Festival; Long Wharf Theatre; Seattle Rep; Actors Theatre of Louisville; Cleveland Play House; PlayMakers Repertory Company; A.C.T.; Yale Repertory Theatre; Opera Theatre of Saint Louis; Boston Lyric Opera; Japan: Universal Studios Japan; Umeda Arts Theater; Nissay Opera; Nikikai Opera; Suntory Hall; Aichi Triennale; Biwako Hall.  
**TEACHING** Yale School of Drama

Susan Tsu (Costume Designer) **GUTHRIE** Debut. THEATER International: Godspell (also national); The Joy Luck Club (Shanghai People’s Art Theatre/Long Wharf Theatre); The Balcony (Bolshoi Theatre/Opera Company of Boston); Regional: Over 45 theaters, including Young Americans (Portland Center Stage/Pittsburgh Public Theater), The Merry Wives of Windsor (American Players Theatre) and Hamlet (Quantum Theatre).  
**AWARDS** Irene Sharaff Lifetime Achievement; Carol R. Brown Creative Achievement.  
**TEACHING** Boston University; UT Austin; Carnegie Mellon University.  

Philip Rosenberg (Lighting Designer) **GUTHRIE** *The Cocktail Hour,* My Fair Lady, Pride and Prejudice, Hay Fever, The Winter’s Tale. THEATER Broadway/West End: Mrs. Doubtfire, Pretty Woman, The Elephant Man, A Gentleman’s Guide To Love and Murder, It's Only a Play; Regional: The Kennedy Center; La Jolla Playhouse; The Old Globe; TheatreWorks; Hartford Stage; Alliance Theatre; The Huntington; Chicago Shakespeare Theater; Shakespeare Theatre Company; Dallas Theater Center; Denver Center; Alley Theatre; Arena Stage; McCarter Theatre Center; Portland Stage; Barrington Stage Company; Williamstown Theatre Festival; Bay Street Theater; Goodspeed Opera House; Two River Theater Company; George Street Playhouse; Westport Country Playhouse
Scott W. Edwards  (Sound Designer)  GUTHRIE More than 140 productions since 1997. THEATER West End/A.R.T./St. Ann’s Warehouse: Nice Fish; Seattle Rep; San Jose Repertory Theatre; Children’s Theatre Company (more than 40 productions); Jungle Theater (more than 15 productions); Penumbra Theatre (eight productions); Mixed Blood Theatre; Illusion Theater; Arizona Theatre Company; Ballet of the Dolls (Founding Member); Theater Mu; Eye of the Storm; Teatro Latino; Minnesota Opera. RADIO Production Manager and Live Sound Engineer for “A Prairie Home Companion.” AWARDS McKnight Fellowship; Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award; Star Tribune Outstanding Sound Designer; Helen Hayes Award nomination

Carla Steen (Resident Dramaturg)  GUTHRIE More than 75 productions since 1996, including Into the Woods, Hamlet, The Little Prince, A Christmas Carol, Sally & Tom, Sweat, The Tempest, Noura, As You Like It, Frankenstein, West Side Story, Familiar, Sunday in the Park With George, Disgraced, The 39 Steps, Peer Gynt, His Girl Friday and Sweeney Todd. THEATER Dramaturgy for The Acting Company; University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater B.F.A. Acting Program; Hammerstein Center; NYU Tisch School of the Arts; Augsburg University. PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS Member of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas (LMDA). TRAINING M.F.A., Columbia University; B.A., Augsburg University

Keely Wolter  (Vocal Coach)  GUTHRIE Shane, Blues for an Alabama Sky, Sally & Tom, Vietgone, Sweat, Noura, The Great Leap. THEATER Theater Latté Da: Chicago, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Five Points, Assassins, Man of La Mancha, Six Degrees of Separation, Peter and the Starcatcher, Ragtime, Lullaby, Sweeney Todd, All Is Calm; Jungle Theater: Georgiana & Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley, Is Edward Snowden Single?, Small Mouth Sounds, Ride the Cyclone, The Wickhams, Miss Bennet, Lone Star Spirits, Le Switch, Constellations; Penumbra Theatre: benevolence, Wedding Band; Minnesota Opera: The Fix. TRAINING Royal Central School of Speech and Drama; Viterbo University

Alli St. John  (Intimacy)  GUTHRIE Into the Woods, Hamlet. THEATER Intimacy: Head Over Heels (Children’s Theatre Company TAT); Spring Awakening (Utah State University); The Crucible, Light Switch (Arizona State University); Barefoot in the Park (Mesa Encore Theatre); Directing: Children’s Theatre Company (Assistant Director); Children’s Performing Arts; SteppingStone Theatre for Youth; Talespinner Children’s Theatre. OTHER Founder and Artistic Director of Thought Bubble Theatre Festival. PUBLICATIONS HowlRound Theatre Commons; The Journal of Consent-Based Performance. TRAINING M.F.A., Theatre for Youth and Community, Arizona State University; Intimacy Training, Theatrical Intimacy Education; Certified in Mental Health First Aid. www.allistjohn.com
Jennifer Liestman (Resident Casting Director) GUTHRIE Artistic Team member since 2003; More than 70 productions, workshops and readings since 2015, including Shane, Into the Woods, Murder on the Orient Express, Hamlet, The Little Prince, Sally & Tom, Vietgone, Sweat, A Raisin in the Sun, The Tempest, A Christmas Carol, Dickens’ Holiday Classic, Noura, Floyd’s, West Side Story, Familiar (with Seattle Rep), Watch on the Rhine (with Berkeley Rep), Native Gardens and Disgraced. FILM/TELEVISION Master Servant ( Casting Consultant). TEACHING Audition master classes for the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater B.F.A. Acting Program; Macalester College; SMU; Other universities in MN and the U.S. TRAINING B.A., Theatre, MSU Moorhead


McCorkle Casting, Ltd. Pat McCorkle, C.S.A., and Rebecca Weiss, C.S.A. (NYC Casting Consultant for 2023–2024 Season) GUTHRIE 100+ productions since 1998. THEATER Broadway: 50+ productions, including On the Town, Amazing Grace, End of the Rainbow and A Few Good Men; Off-Broadway: 60+ productions, including Tribes, Our Town and Driving Miss Daisy; Regional: Hundreds of regional theaters, including Barrington Stage Company, George Street Playhouse and Connecticut Repertory Theatre. FILM/TELEVISION Currently casting six feature films for theatrical release; Previously, over 75 films, including three recent films for Hallmark, Premium Rush, Ghost Town, The Thomas Crown Affair, Die Hard With a Vengeance and Thirteenth Warrior; Select TV credits include “Twisted” (ABC), Humans for “Sesame Street,” “Californication” (Emmy Award nomination) and “Chappelle’s Show.” www.mccorklecasting.com
From Director David Ivers

I love that the greatest comedy about the English was, in fact, written by an Irishman. That alone is funny, and you’re just sitting here reading the program.

Oscar Wilde, born Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Wills Wilde, penned *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895 while he was on holiday in Worthing, a seaside town in Sussex. (Jack Worthing, anyone? Stay tuned.) No stranger to controversy, Wilde often lived on the fringes, was unjustly skewered for his sexual fluidity and found himself penniless and in exile on more than one occasion. His life, hardened by his quest for a kind of authenticity, was such a powerful contradiction. He studied at Oxford and found resiliency in the shadows, yet he wrote luminously with such clarity, passion and dexterity.

For me, *Earnest* is a masterpiece. It’s the finest example of “writing from what you know.” And Wilde knew a thing or two about style, sincerity, social structures and “covering your ass” (this will all make sense in the next couple of hours). His life experience is, without question, on display. As such, the play continually surprises, offers a bit of danger (in that anticipatory, fun way), is forever relevant and is anything but stuffy. In fact, it’s the opposite of stuffy. It’s wildly muscular. Wilde’s respect for women elevates the play. His understanding of young men grounds the comedy in truth. No comma is wasted, no surprise is telegraphed and no character is spared from Wilde’s snare. And, it’s funny. Gloriously so.

Well … we hope.

Our production moves things ahead a bit to 1905 during the last period in England named for a monarch. Moving *Earnest* into Edwardian England allows us to more fully explore the “excesses” so famously part of Wilde’s DNA and so clearly on display during King Edward’s eight-year reign. It’s in this container that Wilde skewers preconceived notions of the proper England as he deftly builds facade after facade.

The pursuit of love (and all that goes along with it) is at the center. Family is of paramount importance here. There are strict rules and rigorous societal structures on display. Break one, and things get tough quickly at home and

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worse in the social sectors. Rules are important. Doubly so for comedy. The setup must be deft. Wilde nails that, too. And he manages, during all the madness and scrambling, to find a bit of magic.

Fate is working in our favor as we careen toward the inevitable conclusion. Look, you’re about to see it, so I’ll spare you the details and instead offer a personal thought: I’m so deeply moved being back at the Guthrie. It’s a powerfully important institution to me, and it’s chock-full of terrific people. And we’re all sort of “Bunburying” as we build these plays. And we need you. Like Jack and Algy in Earnest, we are nothing without our brilliant Bracknells and Gwendolens and Cecilys (that’s you). So thanks for your support, and thanks for believing it’s all possible. There is as much magic in that as there is in Earnest.

There’s never been a better time to laugh.
Oscar Wilde: An Author Who Defies Time

By Carla Steen
Resident Dramaturg

When *The Importance of Being Earnest* premiered at the St. James’s Theatre in London on the frigid evening of February 14, 1895, it became Oscar Wilde’s second play to open in the West End in six weeks. *An Ideal Husband* had opened in early January at the Haymarket Theatre, mostly to accolades, and the initial responses to *Earnest* promised another triumph for Wilde.

H.G. Wells celebrated the “rare holiday” *Earnest*’s humor provided in the drama critic’s dismal life. While thoroughly recommending seeing the play, William Archer lamented the critic’s job to analyze a play “which raises no principle, whether of art or morals, ... and is nothing but an absolutely wilful expression of an irrepressibly witty personality.” The *New York Times* critic had not “heard such unrestrained, incessant laughter from all parts of the theatre” since *Charley’s Aunt* opened three years before. Only George Bernard Shaw, who adored *An Ideal Husband*, found *Earnest* wanting: While amused, Shaw also wanted to be moved, and *Earnest* was not up to that task.

Besides the two West End plays running simultaneously (a rare authorial achievement), Wilde’s comedies from 1892 and 1893, *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*, were soon revived in productions elsewhere in London. Wilde’s earlier plays could be described as social comedies or comic dramas that treated serious topics with humor: a member of parliament’s wealth built on insider trading, a woman who abandoned her child, a child born out of wedlock.

*Earnest*, however, was a departure for Wilde. It shared significant DNA with the earlier plays — it, too, was a comedy set in a drawing room and filled with his observations of British society. But as Wilde declared with the play’s subtitle, “A Trivial Comedy for Serious People,” the play wasn’t *about* something. As Archer noted, it appeared determinedly to be about nothing.

Wilde wrote the bulk of the play (originally in four acts) while summering in the seaside town of Worthing with his wife Constance, their two young sons and a governess, plus the ever-present Lord Alfred Douglas (called “Bosie”). A few years earlier, Wilde had befriended Bosie and become...
enamored. The relationship quickly went from infatuation to love and was in many ways complicated beyond the scope of this essay. For Wilde, the relationship would prove disastrous.

That summer, as was typical for Wilde, he needed money and knew producer George Alexander was interested in his next play. Wilde intended to write a full-on comedy, perhaps even a farce, and delighted in its writing. Alexander produced the play and convinced Wilde during rehearsal that *Earnest* would be more effective in three acts.

Some observers noted the play’s kinship to the work of W.S. Gilbert (of operetta fame) while Wilde described it as a contemporary comedy in the tradition of fellow Irishman Richard Brinsley Sheridan from a century earlier. But *Earnest* was also undeniably something more than familiar farce: It was an attempt by a serious artist to use modern English commercial theater as a vehicle for personal expression. Unapologetically modern and urban, it offered a look ahead to new forms as well as a callback to old.

February 1895 was spectacular, and the future looked limitless. But whatever Wilde had planned for his future was not to be. Bosie’s father, the Marquess of Queensberry, was a volatile man who believed Wilde was corrupting his son. He made good on a longstanding threat

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_Earnest was also undeniably something more than familiar farce: It was an attempt by a serious artist to use modern English commercial theater as a vehicle for personal expression._
to create a scandal when he left a card at Wilde's club accusing the playwright of being a sodomite — then against the law in the U.K. — which prompted Wilde, at Bosie's urging, to sue Queensberry for libel.

Unfortunately for Wilde, Queensberry could prove in court that the accusation was not libelous — evidence that prompted the Crown to arrest Wilde on charges of “gross indecency.” On the day Wilde was arrested in April, An Ideal Husband closed its West End run. The Importance of Being Earnest ran until May 8, and New York productions of both plays closed shortly after opening. His name was being dragged through the mud, and his sources of income were rapidly disappearing.

The first criminal trial ended in a hung jury, but after a second trial, Wilde was found guilty and given two years’ imprisonment with hard labor. Upon his release in May 1897, he went to France, never to return to England. He and Bosie lived together for a short time in Italy before parting for good; Wilde never fully reconciled with Constance before her death in 1898. Wilde died in Paris in 1900.

Wilde could have no better legacy than The Importance of Being Earnest. His other ample writings — poetry, essays, criticism, fairy tales and novels — live on, but Earnest was his masterwork, a theatrical embodiment of his own personal philosophy: “That we should treat all the trivial things of life very seriously and the serious things of life with sincere and studied triviality.”

Earnest’s triviality — “serious” social issues of the time treated with a light, cavalier touch — belies its keen depiction and shrewd analysis of upper-class British society. Familiar tropes of an orphaned child or a lost parent are given fresh vigor in Earnest’s nonchalance. A heavy dose of comic sugar has allowed Wilde’s critique to outlast its own period.

Wilde’s effervescent language (“perhaps the only pure verbal opera in English” according to poet W.H. Auden) gives the play its rhythm and music, with characters as witty as Wilde himself. At least one of the characters is so indelible as to have a life outside the play. As Hamlet has meaning and personhood beyond his play, so Lady Bracknell has become a person unto herself.

As a serious artist, a PR specialist cultivating an image and a challenger to the status quo, Wilde was arguably ahead of his time. It’s fitting that Director David Ivers chose to set this production in 1905 rather than the 1890s. If nothing else, it signals that Wilde was a man out of time, ahead of time and perhaps for all time.

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An *Earnest* Look Back

Oscar Wilde wanted nothing more than for theatergoers to enjoy his “trivial” new play *The Importance of Being Earnest* when it was first staged in 1895. We think Wilde would be delighted to know that Guthrie audiences have reveled in his seriously funny comedy three times over — and we figured you’d be delighted, too. To celebrate our fourth version of the classic, please enjoy these archival photos and far-from-trivial facts from our three preceding productions.

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**2009**

Directed by Joe Dowling

- Scott W. Edwards was the Sound Designer then — and now.
- The set, designed by Walt Spangler, featured oversized flowers crafted from foam (the largest was 12 feet wide and weighed 50 pounds). Spangler returns as Scenic Designer for *Dial M for Murder* later this season.
1998
Directed by Joe Dowling

- Local acting legend Sally Wingert, who plays Lady Bracknell in our current production, played Miss Prism.
- Rainn Wilson played Algernon before he was cast as Dwight Schrute in the U.S. spinoff of the smash TV hit “The Office.”
- The late, great Barbara Bryne gave an unforgettable performance as Lady Bracknell.

PICTURED: AMANDA DETMER AS CECILY AND RAINN WILSON AS ALGERNON (MICHAL DANIEL)

1984
Directed by Garland Wright

- Wright doubled as both Director and Co-Scenic Designer with Michael Miller.
- Just like the cover of this program, a teacup was central to the show art.
- J. Smith-Cameron, perhaps now best known for playing Gerri Kellman in HBO’s “Succession,” was cast as Cecily Cardew.

PICTURED: ROBERT BURNS AS JACK AND ROBERT CURTIS-BROWN AS ALGERNON (JOE GIANNETTI)
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The Guthrie is a member of the American Arts Alliance and Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, government advocacy groups at the federal and state levels, respectively.

The actors and stage managers employed in this production are members of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the U.S.

Directors and choreographers are members of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

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Guthrie scenic artists are also represented by United Scenic Artists, Local USA 829.

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All scenery, props and costumes are designed specifically for Guthrie productions and built in the theater’s shops.

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The Guthrie Theater engages exceptional theater artists in the exploration of both classic and contemporary plays connecting the community we serve to one another and to the world. Through its extraordinary artists, staff and facility, the Guthrie is committed to the people of Minnesota and, from its place rooted deeply in the Twin Cities, influences the field as a leading 21st-century arts organization.

OUR VISION
The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

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