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M E D I A R E L E A S E

WILDE'S WITTY, WONDERFUL WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING COMES TO PCS

*Oscar Wilde reminds us that to be prominent is to keep secrets...
And that to be inadvertently honest is the most vulgar fate imaginable
in **The Importance of Being Earnest**,
playing February 24th to March 29th on the PCS Main Stage.*

February 5, 2009 – PORTLAND, OR. It's frothy, witty, and delightfully gay (in both senses of that word)...and it was the stylish weapon one prominent gay cultural leader used to both flatter and skewer the Victorian aesthetic elite while distracting them from the pretty boy "Cecily" hiding in his own closet. Good thing our public figures don't have to do that anymore... [*The Importance of Being Earnest*](#) will preview February 23rd through 26th, with the **Gala Opening Night Performance on Friday February 27th, 2009**. The production will run **Tuesday through Sunday through March 29th**, with 7:30 pm evening performances Tuesday through Saturday and matinee performances at 2 pm on Sundays. There are alternating Sunday evening and Saturday 2:00 pm matinee performances, plus weekday matinee performances at noon on Thursdays. Go to www.pcs.org/earnest for a complete list of show times. Tickets range from **\$30.00 to \$66.50**, with Student and Rush tickets available. Tickets can be purchased through the box office by calling 503.445.3700 or online at www.pcs.org.



photo: Owen Carley

An incredibly stylish wolf in sheep's clothing, [*The Importance of Being Earnest*](#) opened to great acclaim to an audience largely unaware they were being made fun of, while secretly signaling to the lavender underground about the hidden pleasures and harsh compromises of a society that forced its sexual minorities to maintain a double life. In it, a gentleman named Jack Worthing (who goes by Ernest while in town, presumably to ensure his city exploits don't reach country ears) decides to come clean about his name games to the woman he wants to marry. The catch? She insists she could only ever marry a man named Ernest. Meanwhile, Jack's friend Algernon decides to utilize Jack's alter ego to go visit Jack's ward, the beautiful young Cecily. Smitten,

he proposes, only to discover that Cecily too is obsessed with marrying a man named Ernest. Complications, discoveries, quarrels and artful plot devices ensue, leading up to the moment that Jack, who was found abandoned in a handbag at Victoria Station, discovers that he is actually the son of a gentleman named Ernest, and therefore has been inadvertently *earnest* all along.

Like a breath of fresh spring air, this well mannered comedy can be enjoyed as the palate cleanser of the PCS season, taking a lighter look at the problems of identity and society that the season has so far investigated.



photo: Owen Carley

(continued)

Still, for those who like a little food for thought: embedded throughout the play are intriguing bits of Victorian gay slang. The name Ernest is itself a code- in London gay circles, to ask “Is he earnest?” is the same as to ask “is he gay?” A “Cecily” was a young gay man kept by an older gay man, usually quietly out of society. The silver cigarette case was a common present given by gentlemen to a male prostitute...it was a form of payment that could later be pawned for cash without suspicion. If the “young man” was a favourite, the gentleman would engrave the cigarette case. Finally, the meaning of the term “bunburying” should be evident with a moment’s examination of the word itself.

Wilde wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest* to earn some quick cash while on a seaside holiday in Worthing. He was inspired by a news story in the Worthing Gazette of a real baby who was discovered in a hamper in London’s King’s Cross Station.



Playwright **Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wilde** was born on October 16, 1854, the son of a prominent doctor and a literary mother. Wilde attended Trinity and Oxford, where he excelled in classics but developed a reputation for his indifference to the rules (famously showing up three weeks after the start of term one semester). After Oxford, Oscar delivered a series of lectures across America on aesthetics. Oscar married Constance Lloyd and had two children, causing him to accept a job revitalizing the *Woman's World* magazine, where he worked from 1887-1889. He published two collections of children's stories, “The Happy Prince and Other Tales” (1888), and “The House of Pomegranates” (1892) and a novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Oscar's first play, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, opened in February 1892. His subsequent plays included *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). In the summer of 1891, Oscar fell in love with Lord Alfred 'Bosie' Douglas, the son of the Marquis of Queensberry. In April 1895, Oscar sued Bosie's father for libel after being accused of homosexuality. Oscar withdrew his case but was himself convicted of gross indecency and sentenced to two years hard labor. Oscar spent the last three years of his life wandering Europe, staying with friends and living in cheap hotels. He died of meningitis on November 30, 1900.

The cast includes visiting artists **Nikki Coble** as Cecily, **James Knight** as Algernon, **Kate MacLuggage** as Gwendolen, **Matthew Waterson** as Jack, **Jill Tanner** as Lady Bracknell, and three local favorites **Tim True** (Chasuble), **Sharonlee MacLean** (Miss Prism) and **Todd Van Voris** as Lane and Merriman.

Scenic design is by **William Bloodgood**, costume design will be by **Jeff Cone**, sound design will be by **Casi Pacilio** and lighting will be designed by **Nancy Schertler**.

The Main Stage Series is sponsored by **Key Private Bank**. This production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* is sponsored by the Dream Envision Foundation, the James F. and Marion Miller Foundation, and Ellyn Bye.

[PORTLAND CENTER STAGE](#) inspires our community by bringing stories to life in unexpected ways. Established in 1988 as an off shoot of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, PCS became an independent theater in 1994 and has been under the leadership of Artistic Director Chris Coleman since May 2000. The company presents a blend of classic, contemporary and original productions in a conscious effort to appeal to the eclectic palate of theatergoers in Portland. PCS also offers a variety of education and outreach programs for curious minds from six to 106, including the PCS GreenHouse, a school of theater.

THE GERDING THEATER AT THE ARMORY houses a 599-seat Main Stage and a 200-seat black box Studio. It was the first building on the National Register of Historic Places, and the first performing arts venue, to achieve a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certification. The Gerding Theater at the Armory opened to the public on Oct. 1, 2006. The capital campaign to fund the renovation of this hub for community artistic activity continues.

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