

THE CITY THEATRE COMPANY

The Importance of Being Earnest

by Oscar Wilde

Directed by Fritz Ketchum

The Cast

Lane.....George Warren
Algernon Moncrieff.....Robert Slack
John (Jack) Worthing.....Clay Avery
Lady Bracknell.....Kara Bliss
Gwendolen Fairfax.....Jessica Riley
Cecily Cardew.....Jesselyn Parks
Miss Prism.....Maureen Slabaugh
Reverend Chasuble.....Steve Lawson
Merriman.....Donald Evans

"The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily.
That is what Fiction means." – Oscar Wilde

TIME Summer, 1895 PLACE London, and Jack's Country Estate

ACT I Algernon Moncrieff's flat in Half Moon Street, W.
ACT II The garden at the Manor House, Woolton
ACT III Drawing room of the Manor House, Woolton

Each act is approximately forty-five minutes.
There will be a ten minute intermission between acts.

Director's Notes.

Cucumber sandwiches, a black handbag, Victoria Station - all the familiar terrain of Oscar Wilde's most important comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, presents a unique challenge to any director tackling a masterpiece. How would I bring a fresh or unique perspective to the script? As always, I start with the language - full of rich metaphors, witty paradoxes, and epigrams. Wilde succeeds in mocking Victorian life by trivializing marriage, society and the English aristocracy.

The play is not, however, a museum piece that only exists in, and has relevance for the Belle Époque. When I hear Lady Bracknell chide her nephew Algernon for criticizing society - "*Only people who can't get in it do that*" - I find myself fully aware of today's zeitgeist, where we have replaced the old aristocracy with a world obsessed by celebrity, and the sheer vanity and shallowness of it all.

Social critique of the upper classes is always at the heart of comedies of manners like *Earnest* - even the double meaning of the name Earnest is a key to the darker undercurrents of Wilde's thoughts on Victorian society. And on the surface of the play is a glittering confection of love, lightning speed courtship, and the obstacles the characters must overcome to win the hearts of their lovers.

Wilde was the most important dramatist of his day, but his success was short lived. Accused of acts of "gross indecency," Wilde was brought to trial for homosexuality in a highly publicized case. His relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas was made public and Wilde was sentenced to two years of hard labor in prison. After his release, Wilde returned to London to discover that all his possessions had been auctioned off and his wife and two children had fled the country. Disillusioned, Wilde moved to France where he passed away at the age of 46 in Paris in 1900.

Happily for us, his legacy is preserved, and his works continue to resonate with audiences. Some of the many gems from *Earnest*:

- *All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man ever does. That's his.*
- *The truth is rarely pure and never simple.*
- *In matters of grave importance, style, not substance, is the vital thing.*
- *He has nothing but looks everything. What more can one desire?*
- *I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train.*

Earnest Cast and Crew.

George Warren (Lane) is a performer, director and playwright. Directing highlights include Alan Ayckbourn's *Taking Steps* for The Barnstormers in NH, America's oldest professional summer theater; it has since become part of the recurring repertory. He wrote and directed *The Chameleon* in NYC and was invited to join the Dramatists Guild. He holds an MFA in Directing from Wayne State University in Detroit. He has lived in Austin for 5 years.

Robert Slack (Algernon Moncrieff) is an actor, comedian, and writer from El Paso. He has made Austin his home the last two years, after working in Los Angeles, where he performed as Sonny Malone for DOMA Theatre Company's *Xanadu*, as well as making an appearance on screen introducing rock band Matchbox 20 for their "Changed" tour. Robert is happy to make his second appearance at City Theatre, having played Duke Orsino in last year's production of *Twelfth Night*. He is very active in the Austin improv community, recently performing in *Golden: Improvised Silent Stories* at the Hideout theatre, and *Late Night Time Machine* at the Institution Theatre as Groucho Marx.

Clay Avery (Jack Worthing) is thrilled to be back at City Theatre, having most recently appeared in *Julius Caesar*. Past shows at City include *Reckless, A Streetcar Named Desire, Wit, HAIR, Othello*, and *Into the Woods*, among others. He has performed locally with companies such as the Last Act Theatre Company and Austin Theatre Project. Clay is represented by The Atherton Group (TAG Talent) for film and commercial work. Huge thanks go out to Fritz and Aaron for all their hard work and leadership, as well as to Amanda and Scott for the added aid and expertise. Additionally, he would like to thank this wonderful cast and crew for making this show such a fun and rewarding experience. As always, Clay would like to specifically thank his friends and family, especially his amazing parents, for their continued support.

Kara Bliss (Lady Bracknell) is a veteran performer and 6th-generation Texan, part of a family of musicians covering musical ground from banjo pickers to opera singers. Also an accomplished violinist and photographer, Kara has performed regionally in more than 40 productions. Favorites include "Anna" in *Closer* (winner, B. Iden Payne and Critics Table awards for Best Actress), "Audrey" in *Little Shop of Horrors* (winner, B. Iden Payne Award for Best Actress), "Mabel" in *Pirates of Penzance*, "Marian" in *The Music Man*, "Titania" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and "Naomi" in the world premiere of the new chamber opera "*Tango*." In addition to numerous film and commercial credits, Kara fronts a popular jazz/cabaret act with Austin Haller, performing in various Central Texas venues. By day, she is Senior Vice President of Austin-based Independence Title Company, and a most grateful and doting mother to the beautiful Lucy.

Jessica Riley (Gwendolen Fairfax) is a recent BFA graduate from the University of Houston School of Theatre & Dance where she performed in their productions of *A Philadelphia Story*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Trojan Women*, and *Boston Marriage*. This is her third production with City Theatre, having previously appeared in *Julius Caesar* and *The Imaginary Invalid*. Other local credits include: *Hamlet* and *Comedy of Errors* (Houston Shakespeare Festival), *You Never Can Tell* (Unity Theatre), *Closer* (Vagabond Theatre Project), and *Our Town* (Generations). Jessica is represented by Wilhelmina Austin and is a group fitness instructor at Pure Austin and Fitness 360. Next up, she will be playing Helen of Troy in The Baron's Men production of *Trojan Women*.

Jesselyn Parks (Cecily Cardew) is thrilled to be in her second show in Austin, Texas after playing Pooty in City Theatre's 2014 production of *Reckless*. She is a 2013 University of Oregon graduate with a degree in Theatre Arts and Journalism. While acting in Portland, Oregon and Eugene, Oregon, Jesselyn Parks made appearances in: *Big River*, *The Crucible*, *The Syringa Tree*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Puss in Boots*, *Pineocchio* and *Playhouse Creatures* where she was a KC/ACTF Irene Ryan Nominee for her role as Nell Gwyn. Jesselyn also studied Classical Voice and Opera at the University of Oregon's School of Music and Dance. She would like to thank her friends and family both near and far for their support and love.

Maureen Slabaugh (Miss Prism) This is Maureen's first show at City Theatre and is "Absolutely delighted to be here." Favorite roles include *Veris*, *Dear Penelope*, (SWTP) *Beatrice*, *Effect of Gamma Rays*... (Austin Theatre Project), *Ouisa*, *Six Degrees of Separation* (Theatre Arlington) *Lola*, *Damn Yankees*, (Runway Theatre, Grapevine TX) *Madame Arcati*, *Blithe Spirit*, (Woodinville Rep, WA). She has also appeared in national commercials and independent films and received a Best Actress nomination from the 2013 International Guerilla Film Challenge. Maureen has a BFA in Theatre Performance from the University of Texas, Arlington. She is a founding member of SouthWest Theatre Productions and teaches Ballet at Synergy Dance Studios in Westlake. Thank you Fritz, Amanda, Scott, Madeline and City Theatre for your creative expertise and support. Lastly to my biggest supporter, my husband Kevin: Thank you my love, here's to the next 30 years.

Steve Lawson (Rev. Chasuble) wishes to thank Terri for her love and support. And fully recognizing the importance of doing so, he states with all earnestness that whether on stage together as Adam and Eve, or Elwood P. Dowd and his sister Veta, or Andrew Makepeace Ladd III and Melissa Gardner, or a host of other characters, or hiking on Hawaiian lava flows, or traveling in Arvie (the RV), he finds his center and his joy in her. Love and Thanks, S.

Donald Evans (Merriman) This is Donald's first show in Austin since moving from Orlando a little over three months ago. Originally from Richmond, Virginia, he started acting in high school productions before transitioning into Richmond's theatre scene. His past credits include: *Our Town*, *See How They Run*, *From Up Here*, and *Amirighty Bob*, for which he won Best Actor in a Supporting Role. He loves the stage, but eventually plans to make the jump to L.A to pursue a career in film acting. Donald would like to thank the cast and crew for making his first show a welcoming and hilarious experience, his family for always supporting him no matter how far away from home he gets, Chad, Megan, Haku, and Chihiro for giving him a place to stay while he found his footing, and Hilary Borges for being the greatest person he's ever met and for always being there for him.

Fritz Ketchum (Director, Production Designer) This is Ms. Ketchum's second turn at Guest Directing for City Theatre, having directed the highly acclaimed production *A Delicate Balance*, in last year's season. Recently, she directed *Rapture*, *Bliester*, *Burn* for Southwest Theatre Productions, at Salvage Vanguard's Studio. Also an actor, she appeared as Peer's mother, Aase, in Last Act Theatre's *Peer Gynt*, and as Betty Chumley in ZACH Theatre's recent production of *Harvey*. Prior to relocating to Austin, Ms. Ketchum served on the Theatre faculty of Texas Christian University (TCU) for six years, and prior to that, also served on the Theatre faculty at the University of Texas at Arlington for three years. She also has ten years of teaching on the Theatre faculties for Cedar Valley College, and El Centro College within the Dallas County Community College system. Ketchum directed and acted in many productions in the DFW area and served as Production Manager for New Arts Theatre in Dallas. She holds a M.F.A. in Directing and Acting from the University of Georgia; and prior to moving to Dallas, she served as the Artistic Director for a number of theatres in Atlanta, Athens and Savannah, Georgia. Ketchum has a specialty in teaching Period Styles and has conducted numerous workshops on this topic. She was a Guest Artist under Ming Cho Lee at the Kennedy Center in 2008 and is a Membership Candidate with Actors' Equity Association.

Aaron Derton (Stage Manager) This is Aaron's third show as Stage Manager for City Theatre. Others include *Farce of Nature* and *Julius Caesar*. Aaron has been involved with the technical side of Theatre since 2011 when he served as Stage Manager for Vista Ridge High School's *Seasonal* Currently, Aaron is taking classes at ACC and will transfer to the University of North Texas next spring. Chocolate chip cookies are his favorite. *wink*

Dean Mitchell (Sound Design) is a student at Texas Tech University currently on a break. He works as a stage hand, sound and light engineer for school, which led him to design for all three. He enjoys music, movies, and a great stage play.

Production Crew.

- Production Director – Fritz Ketchum
- Scene and Costume Design – Fritz Ketchum
- Stage Manager – Aaron Derton
- Sound Design – Dean Mitchell
- Light Design – Andy Berkovsky
- Costume Mistress – Madalyn Bond
- Scenic Painting – Jennifer Cunningham
- Set Construction – Andy Berkovsky
- Light Board Operators – Carol Dye and Jennifer Fielding
- Dialect Coach – Amanda Cooley Davis
- Movement Coach – Scott Kelly Galbreath
- Lady Bracknell's Wigmaker – Allison Lowery
- House and Box Office Management – Kate Knappek
- Publicity Design – Rachel McGinnis Meissner
- Show Photography – Aleks Ortynski

Amanda Cooley Davis (Dialect Coach) is a dialect coach, actor, and theatre educator. A newcomer to Austin theatre, she's worked extensively in San Diego and New York. Favorite credits include performing with La Jolla Playhouse, Inkshuk Productions, Cygnet, Diversionary, Compass, and Moxie Theatres, and teaching for The Old Globe, Playwrights Project, North Coast Repertory Theatre, SDSU, and BMCC. Amanda holds an MFA in Acting from Brooklyn College and MA in Theatre Arts from San Diego State University.

Scott Kelly Galbreath (Movement Coach) Scott is taking a turn behind the scenes, assisting with movement, style and fight choreography for *Earnest*. Scott received his BFA in Theatre from the College of Santa Fe, where he was awarded the Carol Burnett Scholarship for Outstanding Theatre Student. He studied acting in London with the Ithaca College Theatre Program. Scott then moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in film and television. He was cast in a number of pilots, the series *Will and Grace*, and several independent films, starring in the budget indie film, *Able Edwards*, which premiered at the SXSW Film Festival in 2004. He was most recently seen as Tobias in City Theatre's production of *A Delicate Balance*, and as Don in Southwest Theatre Production's *Rapture, Blister, Burn*.

Andy Berkovsky (Artistic Director) is a drama graduate of Sam Houston State and a three-time Austin B. Iden Payne nominee for Outstanding Director (*The Boys Next Door*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Agnes of God*.) Andy began City Theatre in 2008 and has directed over fifteen shows including *Frozen*, *Into the Woods*, *Cabaret*, *Reckless*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Ramona*, *The Miracle Worker*, *Come Back to the Five and Dime*, *Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean* and *Steel Magnolias*. He has been involved in theatre arts as performer, director, choreographer, designer, and teacher for over thirty years and has worked with Texas theatre companies The Hilton Dinner Theatre, Theatre under the Stars, Stages, and Miller Outdoor Theatre. He has directed on the stages of the UT Bass Concert Hall, SHSU, West Texas A&M University and Victoria College. He has taught classes and workshops at SHSU, West Texas A&M, Austin Lyric Opera, and is twice honored as a Texas state champion director in one-act play competition. Andy is thrilled to serve as Artistic Director and to work with such outstanding theatre professionals in Austin.

The City Theatre
Twice Voted "Best Theater Company"
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A special thanks to Texas State University Costume Shop, Carl Booker and Monica Pasut Gibson, Amanda Cooley Davis, Scott Kelly Galbreath, David and Vickie Jessich, Dean and Molly Ketchum, Lisa Howard, Kara McGregor, David Ketchum, Terri Bennett, Talena Martinez, Teresa Carson, Sharon and Bart Davis.



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