

The Importance of Being Earnest,

A TRIVIAL COMEDY FOR SERIOUS PEOPLE,
IN THREE ACTS,

BY

OSCAR WILDE.



Guest Director
Alistair Newton



In-person: November 9-25, 2023
Streamed: November 23-25, 2023

Presenting Sponsor



Creative Team

Director	Alistair Newton
Set Designer	Zoe Bechtold
Lighting Designer.....	Rebekah Johnson
Sound Designer	Theo Falkiner
Costume Designer	Carmen Alatorre
Stage Manager	Taylor Cormack
Accompanist/Musical Director	Emilie Shjarback
Intimacy Director.....	Treena Stubel
Stream Director	R. Davey
Vocal Coach	Dustin Wilde

Cast *in order of appearance*

Annie Lucas	Mrs. Vane
Syrah Khan	Gwendolen Fairfax
Eric Barnes	Lady Stella Clinton
Liam James	Lane
Jack Storwick	Algernon Moncrieff
Carter Lapham	John Worthing
Annalyn Kind	Lady Bracknell
Samantha Frew	Cecily Cardew
Judy Caranto	Miss Prism
Link Bechtold	Rev. Canon Chasuble
Claudia Fraser	Vesta Tilley

We acknowledge and respect the Lək'wəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'wəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Director Bio



Alistair Newton is a director of theatre and opera, as well as a dramaturge, educator, and playwright. Selected directing credits: *Love and Information* (Canadian Stage, co-director: Tanja Jacobs), *King Lear* (Canadian Stage), *Three Short Plays* by Samuel Beckett (Shaw Festival Directors' Project); *Of a Monstrous Child: a gaga musical* (Ecce Homo/Buddies in Bad Times Theatre); *Bella: The Colour of Love* (World Premiere at the Philadelphia Theater Company/Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts); *La Serva Padrona* (Canadian Opera Company Ensemble Studio); and multiple projects for the SummerWorks Festival. Alistair is an alumni of the Directors' Lab of Lincoln Centre Theater, holds a BFA from UVic, an MFA through Canadian Stage and York University's joint program in stage direction, and has created productions for George Brown College, Toronto Metropolitan University, and Dalhousie University. Next up, Alistair will be directing Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution* for the Shaw Festival.

This production is dedicated in loving memoriam to John Krich, and all of my former and current teachers near, and far.

Director Notes

"Rarely has the stiletto of dissident humour been driven so smilingly between the ribs of bourgeois convention." — Neil Bartlett, introduction to *In Praise of Disobedience: The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Other Writings* by Oscar Wilde.

In only the last two years, *The Importance* has been revived by the Shaw Festival, Theatre Calgary, and Edmonton's Citadel Theatre. Seeing that it made its debut at London's St. James's Theatre on Valentine's Day in 1895, the question must be asked: what is it about this particular play that seems to so deeply engage both theatre artists and audiences alike at our current moment? Perhaps the answer lies in Wilde's magnificent balancing act of populism and subversion.

When Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde began writing what many would consider to be not only *his*, but one of *the* great masterpieces of English comic theatre, he was on holiday in the seaside town of Worthing. His companions were sometimes his wife Constance and their two children, and sometimes his tempestuous lover, the minor poet (and evil twink) Lord Alfred Douglas. Under these circumstances Wilde composed a plot centred on two men who construct different methods by which they can escape from under the oppression of their respective societal expectations. Once free of the moral strictures of either town or country life, one might be able to run away to behave in a perfectly scandalous (and thoroughly liberating) manner.

It seems to me that productions of *The Importance* are usually accompanied by associations — heavy curtains, floral wallpaper, lace doilies — which are drawn more from our culture's received ideas about the late Victorian period than from an aesthetic universe whose dramatic language included melodrama and the transgressive queerness of the music hall. In fact, Wilde's plays have the potential to illuminate the 19th Century in ways that challenge many of these preconceptions, full as they are of secret codes, hidden symbols, double entendres, and perhaps above all, delightful paradoxes.

For this production, I have tried to stay true to Wilde in both his populism and his subversion; as Gilbert says to Ernest in Wilde's *The Critic as Artist*: "the one duty we owe to history is to re-write it."

Putting on the drag

From Shakespearian boy players in Elizabethan London, to the dame in a Christmas panto, through the sketches of Monty Python and pop stars like Boy George and Marilyn, drag has always been a mainstay of British popular culture. The term 'drag' — though there is still no definitive agreement among historians — likely comes from a 19th Century term for engaging the brakes of a horse drawn carriage (to "put on the drag"), and the way in which the long skirts of female impersonators of the time would trail behind them. In this production, I have added two historical drag artistes who achieved fame in Wilde's cultural milieu.

Lady Stella Clinton, Star of the Strand

Lady Stella Clinton (née Ernest Boulton) became a sensation when the exploits of herself and her best friend Fanny were splashed across the covers of the Fleet Street tabloids in 1870. One April evening, Fanny and Stella were arrested for appearing in full drag at a performance at the Strand Theatre. At their subsequent criminal trial — which took place 25 years before Wilde's own — legal council mounted a defence which explained away the pair's transgression as play-acting, arguing that such practices simply don't occur in England (queerness was more of a French problem...). Like any good queen, when the 'not guilty' verdict was read out in court, Stella fainted. Following her exoneration, Stella managed to parlay her brush with infamy into a decades-long career on the stage, and can be viewed today as one of the many unsung heroes of the pre-history of the LGBTQ movement.

Vesta Tilley

Another famous 'Lady' of Victorian drag was Vesta Tilley, stage name of the Music Hall sensation Lady de Frece (née Matilda Alice Powles). At one point in her illustrious career as a male impersonator, Vesta commanded high appearance fees and released popular recordings of her many subversive hits, sung in her distinctive soprano voice. One of her best loved songs was Leigh and Lyle's queer-coded *Jolly Good Luck to the Girl That Loves a Soldier*, which Vesta loads with plenty of double entendres. According to performance artist and winner of Season 9 of RuPaul's Drag Race Sasha Velour, Vesta's male drag was so renowned that it helped to popularized a "black and white suit worn with silk details and a top hat, called 'the tuxedo.'" Despite her fame, Vesta's act still had the ability to generate scandal, such as at a 1912 Royal Command Performance when Queen Mary and Grand Duchess Georgievna of Russia clutched their pearls and turned away from the stage in haughty outrage.

"Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways."

—Oscar Wilde, *The Critic as Artist*

...but, should you be interested anyhow: the colour scheme of this production has been carefully chosen. The green of Act 1 comes from the code of the dyed carnation flowers which Wilde and his set put in their lapels to identify one another. The yellow of Act 2 is the same hue as the covers of "decadent" French literature of the period, as well as of the Yellow Book, a publication of the Aesthetic Movement edited by Wilde's contemporary Aubrey Beardsley. The red of Act 3 is taken from Wilde's vermillion office at his family's London home on Tite Street; a blast of shocking, subversive colour amidst an otherwise tastefully minimal, and mostly white, interior.



Creative Team



Zoe Bechtold

Set Designer

Zoe (she/her) is a fourth-year undergraduate student studying theatre and writing at the University of Victoria. Hailing from Mohkinstis (Calgary), she now resides on the unceded territory of the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ nations. Zoe has experience as a playwright, director, actor, stage manager, and set designer. Past set design credits include *Archive of Our Unknown* (SATCo, 2023) and *Peter Fechter: 59 Minutes* (independent project, 2023). Zoe's first foray into *The Importance of Being Earnest* was directing a scene from it for her high school drama class, and she is very happy to be once again working with Wilde's witty dialogue. She earnestly hopes you enjoy the show.



Rebekah Johnson

Lighting Designer

Rebekah is a proud graduate of the UVic Theatre Department, graduating in 1983 with distinction. Since then, she has worked across the country for theatre companies such as Prairie Theatre Exchange, Western Canada Theatre, Persephone Theatre and here on the island for The Belfry Theatre, Chemainus Theatre and Blue Bridge Theatre. She also has an MFA (Visual Art) from UVic. Rebekah lives in the beautiful Cowichan Valley, the traditional territory of the Coast Salish People and home to the Cowichan Tribes.



Theo Falkiner

Sound Designer

Theodore is a sound designer, improviser, and technician in their third year studying theatre at UVic. Working on *The Importance of Being Earnest* has been an exciting opportunity to marry their passions for comedy and sound design. Theo has been doing improv for eight years and loves to spread joy through comedy wherever they go. In the past, they've taught improv at The Canadian Improv Games' Improv Camp and Kaleidoscope Theatre for Young People. Past sound design credits include *Horse Girl* (Timetheft Theatre), *Of Theseus* (Timetheft Theatre), *On Guard* (SATCo), and assistant sound designer for *Shakespeare's Women* (Phoenix Theatre). Theo is overjoyed to be part of this silly show!



Carmen Alatorre

Costume Designer

Originally from Mexico, Carmen has a Licenciatura (BFA) degree in Art History from Centro de Cultura Casa Lamm in Mexico City and earned her MFA degree in Theatre Design at the University of British Columbia (2010). She is currently based in Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Territories (Victoria, BC). Having designed over 90 productions, some of her recent costume design credits were seen in companies such as: Arts Club Theatre Company, Bard on the Beach, Globe Theatre Regina, Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, Citadel Theatre, Electric Company, Milwaukee Rep Theater and Chicago Shakespeare Theater. She co-curated the Canadian Exhibition at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space in 2023. Carmen is an Assistant Professor in Performance Design at the University of Victoria. She is also a recipient of four Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards. For more information visit carmenalatorre.com.



Taylor Cormack

Stage Manager

Taylor has been a Production and Management student since moving from Calgary in 2019. In Calgary, she spent five years working with the Liffey Players Drama Society, stage managing seven of their shows, including *Spinning*, which was brought to Listowel, Ireland, as part of the AIITF (Acting Irish International Theatre Festival). She is also passionate about scenic painting and design. She is proud to be working on this show in her final year at UVic and hopes you enjoy watching it as much as she does.



Emilie Shjarback

Accompanist/Musical Director

Emilie (she/her) is a third-year production and management focused student from Anacortes, Washington. Since starting university, Emilie has worked on many productions, notably *Spring Awakening* as an Assistant Stage Manager (Phoenix Theatre), *Peter Fechter: 59 Minutes* as an Assistant Stage Manager (independent project), and *My Own Soul* as Co-Set Designer (SATCo). She is also looking forward to taking on the role of Deputy Stage Manager in this season's next mainstage production, *100 Years of Broadway*. Emilie has had a wonderful time combining two of her favourite hobbies—piano and theatre—in working closely with her fellow students for this production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*.



Treena Stubel

Intimacy Director

Treena has worked in theatre for over thirty years as a choreographer, dancer, actor, movement director, and most recently, as a director and intimacy director. She has appeared in numerous stage productions and has created physical theatre works for festivals in Canada and abroad. Treena is also a movement instructor and holds an MFA in Lecoq Physical Theatre from LISPA in London, UK.



R. Davey

Stream Director

Davey (they/she) is a third-year stage management student from North Vancouver, Canada. Previous credits include *Vinegar Tom*, Livestream Switcher (Phoenix Theatre), *im:print* (2022), Props Assistant Stage Manager (Phoenix Theatre), *Shrek Jr.*, Assistant Stage Manager (Kay Meek Theatre), *13*, Assistant Stage Manager (Kay Meek Theatre) and *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, Livestream Camera Operator (Phoenix Theatre). Davey will also be working on the Phoenix Theatre's Spring production of *HOT L Baltimore* as Deputy Stage Manager. When not in the theatre, Davey enjoys cooking, concerts, and long walks with a good podcast. They are excited to play a role in making *The Importance of Being Earnest* accessible for patrons who might not be able to see the show in person.

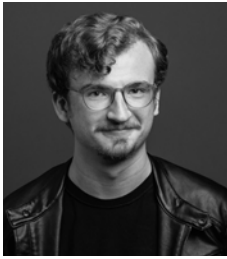
The Cast



Carter Lapham

John Worthing

Carter is a third-year student at the Phoenix who was born and raised in Victoria, BC. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is Carter's second mainstage show. His first show at the Phoenix was last year's musical production of *Spring Awakening*. Carter had an incredible time in the creation of this production and hopes you enjoy the show.



Jack Storwick

Algernon Moncrieff

Jack is an actor and sound designer who is ecstatic to be once again sharing the stage with the wonderful team at the Phoenix Theatre! Past Shows include *Vinegar Tom* (Jack), *Spring Awakening* (Melchior), and *The Waste Land* (Ensemble). Elsewhere: *A Christmas Carol* (Theatre Calgary).



Link Bechtold

Rev. Canon Chasuble

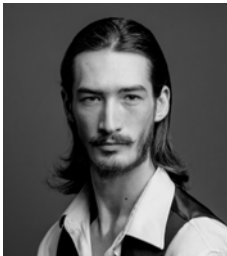
Link (he/they) is an actor, playwright and visual artist. His past acting credits include *Spring Awakening*, *Shakespeare's Women* (Phoenix Theatre), *Peter Fechter: 59 Minutes* (independent project), and *Archive of Our Unknown* (SATCo). In their spare time, Link enjoys bouldering, drawing, table-top games, and playing the ukulele.



Annie Lucas

Mrs. Vane

Annie is a third-year performance student and is excited to be performing in her first Phoenix mainstage! Past credits include *Archive of Our Unknown* (SATCo), *Little Women* (Theatre Al Dente), *The Presence of All Hidden Things* (SATCo), and *Concord Floral* (luvenis Productions). She hopes you enjoy the show!



Liam James

Lane

Liam is a second-year performance student who moved from a small town in Alaska to attend school in Victoria. Liam is excited to return to the stage as Lane, Algernon's Butler, and would like to thank the director, Alistair Newton, for bringing such a fun show to UVic.



Annalyn Kind

Lady Bracknell

Annalyn is a fourth-year performance student and is ecstatic to be a part of this production. They've been a part of many projects like *On Guard*, *Weightless* (SATCo), *Phantom Pains* (Victoria Fringe Festival: Spotlight Series) and *What People Do in the Dark* (independent project). She's also developed her skills in physical comedy and clowning.

The Cast



Syrah Khan

Gwendolen Fairfax

Syrah is beyond excited to perform in this wonderful production! Their past credits include *Vinegar Tom*, *Spring Awakening*, *The Waste Land* (Phoenix Theatre), *Of Theseus* (Timetheft Theatre), and a number of Paper Street Theatre's Improv Cabarets. They hope you have as much fun watching the show as they have performing it!



Samantha Frew

Cecily Cardew

Samantha is a third-year student focusing in performance and comes all the way from Newfoundland. This will be her fourth Phoenix mainstage production. Previous credits are *Vinegar Tom*, *Spring Awakening*, and *Shakespeare's Women*. Samantha gives thanks to the cast, crew, and to everyone who laughs "too loudly."



Judy Caranto

Miss Prism

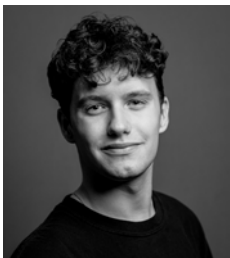
Judy Caranto is a third-year self-directed student at the Phoenix Theatre. Their most recent performances include Shireen/Ensemble in *Homecoming: A Queer Journey* (2022) and Tita in *Mojada* (2023). Now, they are excited to step on stage as Miss Prism in *The Importance of Being Earnest*.



Claudia Fraser

Vesta Tilley

Claudia is twenty-four, raised in Abbotsford and is being educated as a self-directed student with a specialization in Production and Costume Design. Although this is their first Phoenix show as an actor, they have appeared in a three-week production of *The Mousetrap*, various independent film projects and have staged Vancouver Fringe productions such as *The Wake of Leroy McGuinness*.



Eric Barnes

Lady Stella Clinton

Eric Barnes (he/him) is a third-year performance student. He is excited to be performing in his first mainstage production here at the Phoenix Theatre. His past credits include SATCo's *When Was The Last Time You Said Hello?* (2022) and The Belfry One Act Play Festival's *Abandoned* (2023).



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Streaming Show Caller
Streaming Switcher
Streaming Camera Operators

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