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UCSB DEPARTMENT OF THEATER / DANCE PRESENTS
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST BY OSCAR WILDE AND
DIRECTED BY SIMON WILLIAMS

Date: 1/20/2015

Santa Barbara, CA – The Department of Theater/Dance at UC Santa Barbara and
director Simon Williams presents a fresh take on Oscar Wilde’s famous play, The
Importance of Being Earnest. Among the funniest plays ever written, The Importance
of Being Earnest is a heady cocktail of mistaken identity, young lovers, hilariously
dated elders, high style and pithy social commentary – all reimagined for this
production in the 1930s. The Importance of Being Earnest runs February 13 – 21, 2015
in the Performing Arts Theater on the UC Santa Barbara campus.

Full of energy and bursting with humor, the cast of nine includes students from the
Bachelors of Fine Arts (BFA) program and one graduate student – with two of the
leads making their main stage debuts.

Comedy has been the major métier for director Simon Williams. Though he has
directed productions both at UCSB and elsewhere that lean heavily toward pathos, he
finds that pathos needs to be leavened with comedy, which is why he feels so at home
with Wilde. Williams has been longing to direct Wilde and this play has given him his
first opportunity to do so. “The Importance of Being Earnest is among the funniest
plays ever written and the opportunity to develop a staging that explores the comic
potential of the play to the fullest was irresistible.”

Williams has directed many plays in the English comedy of manners style and he
enjoys working on productions that are disciplined and precise. “As a director I
greatly enjoy working on the precise timing that is crucial to any successful
production of Wilde. It is also a beautifully structured play, which means that there is
a great pleasure in finding a staging that tells the story clearly, while extracting to the
maximum the irony in the words. Also, of all the plays I know it is the one that most
completely celebrates the comic muse and the comic view of life. It is a work in which
accepted social values are turned upside down; one comes away from the play with a far more irreverent view of the world of which one is a part, and irreverence is one of the greatest of human virtues.”

Simon Williams describes Oscar Wilde as one of the most challenging of all comic writers and is up against the challenge of trying to find the exact tone in which to pitch the dialogue. “Although the play glorifies nonsense, beneath the surface there is a very palpable sense of nihilism. It will be a challenge to find those moments where the nihilistic breaks through. In one way, many of Wilde’s characters live in a sense of existential Angst, in the truest meaning of that word, and it will be a challenge to find those moments where this Angst makes itself felt.”

Unique to this production was the decision to visualize the story set in the 1930s, an age associated in the minds of many with the novels of P.G. Wodehouse and the plays of Noel Coward. Oscar Wilde. Williams describes the production, “The visual style and fashions of the time are still very familiar to us today, but at the same time they date from a period when the customs, attitudes and social rituals that Wilde is poking fun at were still very much alive.”

_The Importance of Being Earnest_ has managed to speak to audiences all over the world, even those with little if any experience of British society. No special knowledge is needed to appreciate the action and the director hopes that he inspires audiences to take away a renewed sense of youth.

For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit our website at [www.theaterdance.ucsb.edu](http://www.theaterdance.ucsb.edu) or call the box office at (805) 893-2064 Monday through Friday 10:00 am – 5:00 pm.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST**

by Oscar Wilde

directed by Simon Williams

Feb 13 – 14, 17 – 20 / 8 PM
Feb 14 – 15, 21 / 2 PM

UCSB Performing Arts Theater

Tickets:
$17 General Admission
$13 UCSB Students/Faculty/Staff/Alumni, Senior/Child

**FOR INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT**

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