

The Importance of Being Earnest: Preshow Notes

Welcome to this introduction to **The Importance of Being Earnest**. This play was written by Oscar Wilde and is presented by Wild Rice.

The audio described performance is at 2:30pm on the 23rd of February, with the touch tour commencing at 1.15pm. Please have your own mobile device and earphones with you to access the service.

The performance will be approximately 2 hours 30 minutes, including a 20-minute interval. There is a prologue segment beginning at 2:15pm, when a quartet plays music on stage and the cast roams the theatre serving cucumber sandwiches.

Your audio describers for this show will be Seren Chen and Grace Lee-Khoo.

In this play, two romeos bend the truth to spice up their love lives. Jack has invented a brother, Ernest, whom he uses to escape his dull country life and to woo the ravishing Gwendolyn. His best friend, Algernon, also decides to take the name 'Ernest' to cosy up to Jack's beautiful ward, Cecily, in the country. But things spin hilariously out of control when their deceptions are discovered, threatening to spoil their romantic pursuits.

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* is one of the world's most popular comedies, boasting some of the funniest lines in the English language. In WILD RICE's award-winning production, celebrated theatre and film director Glen Goei puts a joyous spin on this comic masterpiece by casting an all-male ensemble – revealing fresh insights into this classic tale about courtship, hidden identities and the foibles of high society.

With a sensational international cast, dressed to the nines by renowned fashion doyen Frederick Lee and accompanied live by The Concordia Quartet, *The Importance of Being Earnest* promises to lift your spirits with an evening of sparkling wit, laughter and love.

The playwright is Oscar Wilde.

The director, Glen Goei.

Set Designer, Wong Chee Wai.

Lighting Designer, Tai Zi Feng.

Costume Designer, Frederick Lee.

And Hair Designer, Ashley Lim.

Daniel York plays the protagonist **John Worthing**, more often known as Jack. Jack is a seemingly responsible and respectable young man who leads a double life. In Hertfordshire, where he has a country estate, Jack is known as Jack. In London, he goes by the name Ernest.

We first see him dressed in a sleek, black tailcoat, so called because the knee-length coat has the front of the skirt cut away, leaving only the rear section of the skirt, known as the tails. Many characters in this play wear tailcoats, and it's important to note that these tails see quite a lot of action in this play. Jack's satin-lapel tailcoat is paired with a white shirt and black pants. Under his coat he wears an unusually scrunched, black satin ascot, a type of tie. He completes the look with a black waistcoat with black lapels and light brown and black geometric line pattern edging.

In Act 2, he makes a shocking entrance in a heavy, all-black ensemble to convey grief and mourning. He wears a black top hat, circular dark glasses, and a bulky double-breasted knee-length coat with a silver chain draped across his waist. In his black gloved hands, he clutches a black handkerchief.

He later sheds the mourning garb and reemerges in a white jacket with black collar and black lined white lapels. He matches his mostly white outfit with a white waistcoat patterned with closely intersecting black lines and black buttons. He wears the same black satin ascot from Act 1 and goes through the rest of the play in this outfit.

Brendon Fernandez plays **Algernon Moncrieff**, the play's secondary hero, often called Algie. A witty and idle bachelor, he is selfish and amoral, prone to paradoxical pronouncements that either make no sense at all or touch on something profound.

In Act 1, Algernon dons a black swallowtail tuxedo. Dressed in a white shirt, a silver tie, a waistcoat with silver and black horizontal stripes and black satin lapels, black dress pants and black leather shoes, Algernon is charming with his side-parted ear-length hair swept to the right.

In Acts 2 and 3, Algernon reappears in a dazzling white suit with its coat reaching his white pant-clad knees. The white jacket has black-edged lapels and black lining on its pockets. A long silver chain hints at a pocket watch on his person.

Crispian Chan plays **Lane**, Algernon's butler in his city residence, and **Merriman**, the butler in Jack's country manor.

As Lane, Algernon's butler, his relationship with Algernon is one of deference and politeness – the classic master–servant relationship. The balding, mustachioed Lane only features in Act 1, dressed in a black suit, pairing his long black tie with a white shirt, grey waistcoat and white gloves.

Merriman serves Jack in his country manor. He appears with a head full of side-swept black hair in Acts 2 and 3, dressed in a white suit with black accents on the breast pocket and pant. He

also wears black cuffs, a white bow tie, a black vest, white gloves and black leather shoes.

Chua Enlai plays **Gwendolyn Fairfax**, Jack's love interest. She is a practiced flirt and a social climber whose self-interest causes her to misread certain characters throughout the play.

It is notable that none of the all-male cast wear traditionally female clothing or long-haired wigs, despite playing female characters.

Gwendolyn has short, dark, spiky hair and first appears in a sleekly tailored black suit comprising a black tailcoat with black pants, white shirt, a black and red horizontally striped waistcoat, a black tie, and black leather shoes. Resting in her left breast pocket is a bright red rose.

In Acts 2 and 3, she appears in a full white tuxedo with black satin lapels, a black satin pocket square, and white pants with a black satin stripe down the side of the leg. Over her white shirt is a black and cream checkered waistcoat. The sophisticated black and white combination is accompanied by a white lace neckpiece with a large jewel in the centre and black leather shoes.

Gavin Yap plays **Cecily Cardew**, the object of Algernon's affection. Just 18 years old, she is imaginative, sensitive and also feels the repression of her governess Miss Prism's rules. Cecily has wavy chin length centre-parted curls framing her fair face. She wears a white three-piece suit with black borders on her waistcoat, sleeves, and pocket, as well as a black line down the side of her pants. Cecily's sophisticated outfit is completed with a frilly white lace neckpiece. She sports a shiny diamond ring on her left ring finger.

Ivan Heng plays **Lady Augusta Bracknell**, an imposing dowager. A domineering woman, Lady Bracknell is the embodiment of conventional upper-class Victorian respectability with her red and ash colored fur stoles. In Act 1, she wows with a fire-red tuxedo paired with a black pocket square, black shirt and black leather shoes. The piece de resistance is costume designer Frederick Lee's artistic interpretation of the fancy cravat, a layered cascade of small, fan-shaped black lace pieces and glittering gems serenely resting atop his red and gold brocaded waistcoat.

Lady Bracknell re-enters in Act 3 with grey fur stole around her shoulders and a jet-black swallowtail tuxedo, paired with a velvety baroque print waistcoat in beige and black. The look is completed with a multi-tiered black satin ribboned jabot - an ornamental ruffle not unlike a bejewelled bow tie.

Hossan Leong plays **Ms. Laetitia Prism**, Cecily's governess, or tutor. Straight-laced yet secretly sentimental, she is the main maternal figure in Cecily's life and appears in Act 2 and 3. Miss Prism is outfitted in a square, matronly white coat with double rows of big black buttons. The

clinical-looking coat is paired with black tie, black pants and shiny black patent leather shoes.

Lim Kay Siu plays **Dr. Frederick Chasuble**, a reverend. He appears in Act 2 and 3 dressed in a white suit and black shirt. A white collar tab signifies his clerical duty.

The Concordia Quartet, while not technically characters of the play, will play live music during the prologue and intermission. Singapore's newest string ensemble, it consists of four musicians – Edward Tan, Kim Kyu Ri, Matthias Östringer and Theophilus Tan. They will be playing the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

The play is set in the late Victorian era, and revolves around our two protagonists' mischief in the English city and countryside.

First, let me introduce the theatre space. The **Wild Rice theatre** is built around a six by six metre square stage that thrusts out into the auditorium, with seats on three sides across three storeys, providing an extremely intimate audience experience, as well as great height for the production to work with. On the first level, there are two audience entrances on either side, from where characters occasionally enter and exit.

The set for this play has been designed in entirely black and white, cleanly delineated with no blending, and with a very symmetrical design. While certain elements shift between acts to indicate changes in setting, there are several immovable elements that remain constant throughout the play.

All the action takes place underneath a tall black frame arching across upstage. Painted in white on this frame are four massive trumpet flowers, two on each side. Their stalks and long, reedy leaves frame the sides of the stage, extending up to the height of the second storey seats before they bend towards each other, blooming a third of the way across the stage. In the centre third is a white, swirling motif reminiscent of an open book to complete this arch.

Upstage and directly underneath the flowers are two white staircases with banisters descending towards each other from the sides, like two jagged wedges taking up the left and right thirds of the stage. The sides of these white wedges facing us are adorned with black patterns emphasising the right-angle shapes of the steps. The stairs converge at a platform in the centre, from which four steps spill out towards the audience. About 10 steps tall in total, characters often enter and exit via these stairs.

The floor has been made up to look like it has been covered in square, white marble tiles, with small diamonds of black marble adorning each white corner. A line of black marble runs parallel to the edges of the stage, and it is inside this border that all furniture is placed.

The play opens in Algernon's flat in the city. At the top of the short, centre flight of stairs is an imposing pair of double doors, set into the black backdrop with a thick white border. Within this border, each door is then further bordered in black, followed by three white rectangles set vertically down each door, inside which three black rectangles are inlaid. Above these doors are painted two white peacocks perched facing each other, a decorative damask pattern between them. The shape of their bodies echo and are set below the shape of the trumpet flower frame. Their magnificent tails curl inwards to fit neatly above the side staircases. Everything so far is symmetrical. On the left side of the stage, placed in front of the left stairs, is a round black tea table, just large enough to fit a tray of tea and biscuits, in a traditional style with the flat top supported by a voluptuous stem, from which extend four S-shaped table legs. Opposite this table, on the right side of the stage, is a black armchair with plush arms and a quilted back. Four short, S-shaped legs support this chair.

After the intermission, Act 2 opens in the garden of Jack's country manor. The backdrop with the doors and peacocks has been lifted to reveal a white, arching trellis set in front of a black backdrop with two white trees, one on each side, each sporting more flower bulbs than leaves. From their bases extend long roots reaching towards the centre, with little stems from which dangle small white hearts. The black indoor furniture has been replaced by white outdoor furniture - an ornate, wrought-iron tea table set in the centre, in front of the centre steps, with two matching armless chairs placed on either side.

In Act 3, we find our characters in a room inside the country manor. For the first time, the sheer height of the theatre is used to full effect as a glittering chandelier is suspended far above our characters' heads, giving the impression of a luxuriously tall ceiling. A wall has descended in front of our side staircases, leaving only the centre stairs visible through an archway. The space behind the archway is illuminated in baby pink. Door-sized rectangular panels of black glass are inlaid into the wall, two doors tall, bordered by the white wall between them. Black damask swirls adorn the white borders. In this space, the white tea table has disappeared, while each of the white chairs are placed on either side of the stage.

Wild Rice aims to provide an excellent experience and service for all patrons who may require additional support to access our venue and enjoy our events.

Wild Rice at Funan is located on the 4th floor of Funan Mall, at 107 North Bridge Rd, Singapore 179105. The nearest parking option is in Funan Mall itself.

For Public Transport options, the nearest Bus Stops are 04249, Opposite the Treasury; 04168, Aft City Hall Stn Exit B, 04149, Grand Park City Hall, and 04223, Old Hill St Police Station.

The nearest MRT station is City Hall, on the East-West and North-South lines.

The Box Office is located on the fourth level, close to the lifts near the North Bridge Road entrance. Say hello to the friendly Box Office manager and they will gladly assist you.

Wild Rice at Funan and Funan Mall are accessible for wheelchair use and assistance dog friendly.

An accessible toilet is available on the same floor as the theatre, near the lifts.

A bar serving a variety of snacks and drinks is located next to the box office, and is open both before the show and during the intermission. You may place your drink orders before the show to avoid the intermission queue.

If you have any questions, do contact our venue team at 69711051.

We look forward to welcoming you and hope you have a wonderful time with us!