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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 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

RACHEL CRANDALL

Community Relations Manager

rcrandall@theaterdance.ucsb.edu

(805) 893-3022

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