

by Neil Greal

The Mimes and Mummies' production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* clearly states Oscar Wilde's satirical piece, although it does have some problem with the accent.

Wilde originally gave the play the subtitle "A Serious Comedy for Trivial People" and sought to satirize the English upper classes of the 1890s. The story revolves around two gentlemen: Algernon, whose heritage would appear in any peerage; and Jack, whose only pedigree is a black handbag found in Victoria Station. They are accomplished "Bunburyists," having created fictitious characters whom they "visit" to escape relatives and responsibilities.

From that point, the plot constantly becomes more complicated, but essentially centers on the attempts of the two to extricate themselves from the web of deception they have created and link up with the girls of their dreams. Wilde weaves a classical plot of discovery and uncovering of the past which is tied together by a strange, but somehow expected coincidence.

But the dynamism of the play comes from the language that Wilde uses to clothe this somewhat deficient plot. It is Wilde's wit and ability to create the *mot juste* which make *Earnest* timeless. And the best moments in the Mimes' production come when the players treat their lines in a way such as to highlight these sophisticated one-liners.

Michael Healy, as Algernon, was easily the most comfortable with transferring the verbal playfulness to the audience. He came into the production with a double advantage: he had performed the play before and could rely on his Irish upbringing for his accent.

Wilde Time In Collins



NEIL GREALY

Steve Love and Gabrielle Sorapure

Complementing Healy's reserve was the vigor of Stephen Love's performance as Jack. While starting out a little stiffly, he soon slipped into a precise delivery and confident posture which carried the play as Healy's character moved more into the background. The sense of melodrama he communicates, especially in the scene where he appears mourning his brother, add to the humor of the evening.

Gabrielle Sorapure and Julie Scott give good performances as the two girls who are both in love with love and nominally in love

with the mythical Ernests. Sorapure's portrayal of the one-dimensional, almost cardboard Gwendolyn is effectively overplayed; Scott balanced the coyness and effrontery of Cecily Cardew in her interchanges with Healy.

Mary Dunn enlivens the stage and provides a lot of laughs with her striking performance of the old-maid tutor, Miss Prism. Never dropping a line, she graces Wilde's dialogue with a frantic energy. In contrast, Barry Walters falters as Rev. Canon Chasuble. He seemed unable to decide on the voice for his

character, so the audience suffers the loss of parts of his repartee with Dunn, which includes some of the funniest material in *Earnest*.

The same problem with voice and accent afflicted the performance of Maryellen Gordon, whose performance as Aunt Augusta captured the stuffiness, but not the sophistication, of the character. Some of her lines were blurred, and the problems with her interpretation became apparent when the character assumes center stage with Jack and Prism in the third act.

Andy Stefany makes his presence felt during his fleeting appearances as the butler, while Michael Chimenti could have had a more effective delivery of his few lines as Jack's valet.

The set has a simple elegance and is well coordinated with the costuming. In the first scene this is exhibited in the predominance of blue right down to Healy's smoking jacket. Set designer Jim Mannousos and costume designer Joseph Harding create a beautiful visual setting for the dialogue.

Taped music introduces each act and closes the play. The introduction to the first act is too long and adds to the problem of length the whole production suffers from. The length of the two intermissions detracts from the effect and continuity of the production, although the night I attended an electrical short created added delay.

The acoustics in Collins are an initial handicap for a language play like *Earnest*. But the main players overcome this, and the audience can appreciate Wilde's verbal ability in what is, overall, a fine production under the direction of Terry Bronckbank.