

Kanata Theatre Presents

The Importance of Being Earnest

by Oscar Wilde

Ron Maslin Playhouse

May 8 - 11 & 15 - 18, 1996 at 8 pm.



Box Office 831-4435

All tickets reserved \$12. Students and Seniors half price. Wednesdays only.

The Importance of Being Earnest
by Oscar Wilde

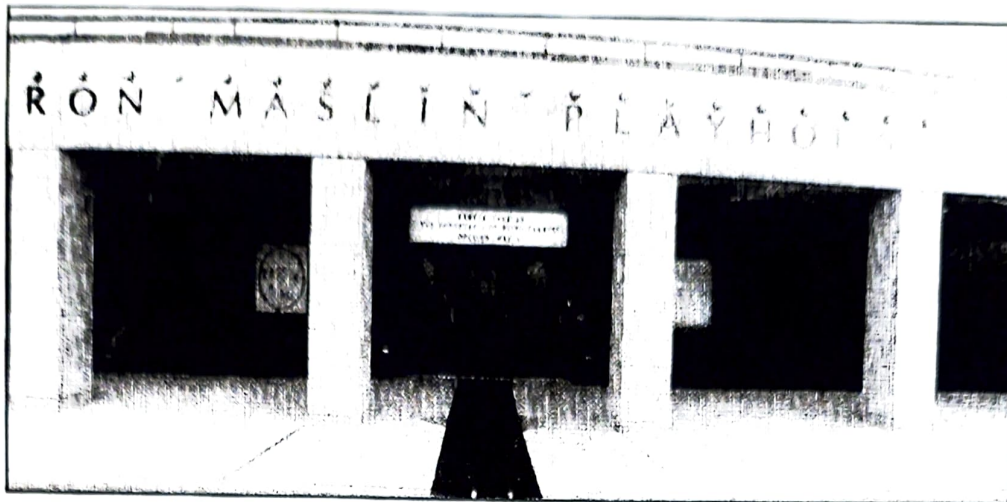
Directed by Sally Hallowell-Carew

CAST

HOUSEKEEPER	Joan McLaughlin
LANE	Jim Holmes
ALGERNON MONCRIEF	James Russell
JOHN WORTHING	Brett Kelly
LADY BRACKNELL	Doreen Boss
GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX	Michelle Sissons
MISS PRISM	Heather Moses
CECILY CARDEW	Erin Christy
REV. CANON	Wally McNinch
MERRIMAN	Colin Williams
HOUSEKEEPER	Elsie Bryant
MAID	Jane Clapham



ENTERTAINMENT



— Pat McGrath, Citizen

SPARK: Ron Maslin Playhouse, which opens Wednesday, has produced higher ticket sales and double the performances per show

New playhouse boosts Kanata Theatre

The Importance of Being Earnest

Kanata Theatre

Where: Ron Maslin Playhouse, Walter Baker Park, Terry Fox Drive, Kanata

When: May 8-11 & 15-18; 8 p.m.

Tickets: \$12 (adults) \$6 (students and seniors). Phone 831-4435

By Iris Winston

Citizen correspondent

The first performance in Kanata Theatre's new \$1.8 million home doesn't take place until Wednesday, but already the new facility in Walter Baker Park is making a difference.

Four of the eight performances of the opening production, Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*, are already sold out in the 350-seat playhouse. The new theatre has sparked a 50 per cent jump in single-ticket sales and a 37 per cent increase in its 400-person subscriber base for next season.

"It's a very exciting time," says Sally Hallowell-Carew, who directs the opening production.

"The first thing that must be said is that it is wonderful that we can come into the theatre any time of day we

want," says the group's publicist Annmarie Copple. Access to Earl of March High School, Kanata Theatre's home for 26 of its 28 years, was necessarily limited.

"We could only build the set or use the stage the weekend before a show," says Hallowell-Carew. "Everything had to be prepared at the last minute."

Hallowell-Carew says the fact that members can use the new theatre 24 hours a day is "making a great difference to the production, practically and emotionally."

"On the practical side, we have been coming in for the last two months to build the set and block the play. We have been able to try out sound and lighting effects and rehearse in costume."

"On the emotional side, the actors feel they belong. They know the relationship between themselves and the auditorium and feel as though it's their house and their garden (on stage). There's no question that all this is making a difference to performances."

"We feel much more like a professional theatre now," adds Copple.

The play also has significance. The Wilde classic is the only adult play the group has presented before. The last

time was in 1974, when Ron Maslin, the longtime Kanata Theatre member after whom the playhouse is named, played the part of Jack.

"And Ronnie is in every corner of the theatre," said Hallowell-Carew.

A portrait of Maslin, who died in 1992, is in the foyer. The \$100,000 he raised through his *Clownface* face-painting program was the financial base for the group's fundraising efforts which, with a federal/provincial infrastructure grant and the City of Kanata's support, made the theatre possible. His widow, Jane, is painting set pieces.

Other cast members have been involved in both productions. Doreen Boss repeats the role of Lady Bracknell. Jim Holmes, who directed the earlier production, plays the butler, Lane.

In the box office, Peter Jefferson and Gwen Knight must switch from four performances per show at the Earl of March to eight at the new theatre, designed by award-winning architect Peter Smith. Though the number of seats is approximately the same, close to half the seats in the old venue were too far from the stage or gave a limited view.

"Here there's not a bad seat in the house," said Knight.

Wilde's time-tested stage delight fitting vehicle for opening night

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Opening night had a special meaning for Kanata Theatre on Wednesday. On this, the first performance in the group's own theatre, it is no wonder that the atmosphere was a little wild.

The combination of excitement tinged with wonder in the air and Oscar Wilde's classic comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest* on stage made this an evening to remember.

The enduring charm of *Earnest* lies in its sparkling dialogue and its emphasis on *not* being earnest. Wilde gives cucumber sandwiches as much importance as social position. Young ladies' journals and Christian names have weighty significance, while important issues are trivialized as upper-class dandies mock the values they seem to support, and dowagers and innocents make merry with social niceties.

As Wilde laughs at the stilted nature of society and romance in 1895, he inverts the espoused values of the time and highlights their hollowness. The challenge is to maintain his mocking tone while remaining true to the style

of the period.

Director Sally Hallowell-Carew and her cast do just this in a fast-paced production that makes effective use of the broad stage. In underlining that appearance is everything, actors wear their chins high and drink tea with little fingers cocked. Butlers bow stiffly while their young masters try to escape the constraints of social obligation.

In an authoritative performance as the dragon dowager, Lady Bracknell, Doreen Boss exercises cool control of her daughter's suitor, Jack (Brett Kelly) and her nephew, Algernon (James Russell), though — appropriately — she has more trouble with daughter, Gwendolen (convincingly played by Michelle Sissons).

Erin Christy is charming as Jack's ward, Cecily, delivering the appearance of innocence with an edge of experience.

Jim Holmes captures the essence of formal "butlerdom" complete with straight back, stiff bows and turned-down mouth.

As the young gentlemen, Kelly and Russell are clear in their intent, though not always at ease in the atmosphere of Victorian England. Similarly, Heather Moses as Cecily's governess, Miss Prism, and Wally McNinch as her suitor, Canon Chasuble, while quite effective, didn't always step entirely comfortably into their roles.

The comfort level rises as the actors resist the temptation to cross the line from characterization to caricature.