



## BEING EARNEST

Music by Paul Gordon and Jay Gruska  
Book & Lyrics by Paul Gordon  
From the play by Oscar Wilde

April 3–28

MINDY LYN, HAYDEN TEE, MAUREEN McVERRY, EUAN MORTON, & RILEY KRULL / PHOTO BY TRACY MARTIN

### REMINDER:

POST-SHOW  
DISCUSSION  
WEDNESDAYS

4/10, 4/17, 4/24

with cast and artistic staff

## Designing *Being Earnest*

The mere mention of the date 1965 conjures up all kinds of images. From Beatles tunes to the first miniskirts to pop art it was a time of radical change in most aspects of life. How then does one design a play set in that time? With so many styles and colors to choose from, how does one begin?

The clothing of the 1960s was a marked change from the previous decade. Cinched waists gave way to “sack” dresses, knee-length skirts to miniskirts, and pantyhose arrived on the scene for the first time. Costume designer Fumiko Bielefeldt says her design was inspired by the very first lines in Paul Gordon’s description of the setting for this musical, “London, Summer, 1965...Carnaby Street, Twiggy, miniskirts and mod fashion. The very image of swinging London of the 1960s.” However, she soon realized that not all of the fashions we associate with the 1960s existed in 1965, some of them came later. This is theatre, however, so she explains,

*[Director Robert] Kelley and I decided we’d be flexible on historical detail, in order to bring to the stage a vivid image of the new mod fashion. Just a small exercise of artistic liberty, given that the play mixes the Victorian dialogue of witty Oscar Wilde with Paul Gordon’s contemporary setting and ‘60s-inspired music. So I felt free to put young girls in Yves Saint Laurent’s Mondrian dress (1966), Algernon in The Beatles’ collarless jacket (1964), Gwendolen in a Courrèges-inspired coat ensemble (1965), and so on. Lady Bracknell’s conservative suit ensembles show us the contrast with the earlier fashion of the ‘50s.*

Continues on page 2



COSTUME RENDERING BY FUMIKO BIELEFELDT



## Designing *Being Earnest* Continued from page 1

Of course, one of the main things people remember about clothing of the 1960s was the color. Since the scenic design was done first, Bielefeldt needed to coordinate her wardrobe with the scenic designs for the show which designer Joe Ragey saw in purples and silver. Bielefeldt used not only purples, but bold reds, oranges, and other colors of the period, to make costumes that would stand out.

Ragey also researched the 1960s in London looking for ideas. He has to take us to several locations, including Carnaby Street, a “hip” yet sophisticated apartment (or “flat”) in London (inspired by the colors of graphic artist Peter Max), a large formal country English manor garden, a hallway in the manor, and finally, into the manor library. To complicate matters, Oscar Wilde’s play on which *Being Earnest* is based, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is in three acts which accommodates the three main locations, but Gordon and collaborator Jay Gruska’s musical is in two acts, so Ragey’s design had to be more flexible, easily moving from one locale to another. He and Kelley decided,

*to “retro- frame” the musical in a simple, colorful yet elegant series of very large portals designed as picture frames. These elegant picture frames allow us to change the furniture and overall color scheme for each scene inside of them, very quickly. The concept of using silver and mauve picture frames as the stage portals came out of the idea of “framing our memories” of the 1960s. The stage portal frames also support the use of the many projections that we use to enhance all of the scenes from the very first collage of images that take us back to the 1960s on Carnaby Street, to each of the locations.*

★ Vickie Rozell



COSTUME RENDERINGS BY FUMIKO BIELEFELDT



SET MODELS BY JOE RAGEY



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THE CAST OF EMMA (2007)

## Gordon and TheatreWorks

**B**eing Earnest marks the fourth show by Paul Gordon that has been seen on TheatreWorks' stage, and the third world premiere. He adapted the novel *Jane Eyre*, for which he was nominated for a Tony Award, with director John Caird (TheatreWorks production 2003). They collaborated again on *Daddy Long Legs* from the young adult novel by Jean Webster, which had a joint world premiere at TheatreWorks and Rubicon Theatre (TW 2010, three Ovation Awards). Gordon also wrote the book, music, and lyrics for *Emma* (TW 2007, Bay Area Critics Circle Award), from Jane Austen's novel, which had its world premiere at TheatreWorks and became the company's most attended show ever, surpassing Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods*.

For this musical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Gordon teams with his friend and collaborator Jay Gruska, himself an Emmy-nominated and ASCAP Award-winning composer who has written for artists including Bette Midler, Chicago, and Michael Jackson.

The two actually met in high school, but didn't start writing songs until college. They both became staff songwriters at Screen Gems Publishing, which was followed by similar jobs at Warner Brothers/Geffen and MCA Universal. They were also writing their own songs throughout this period but, as Gruska says, "I became busy scoring movies and TV shows, while Paul put 100% focus on musical theater." Eventually, they did start writing musicals together. *Being Earnest* is their third foray in that genre after *The Front* and *Lucky Break*.

They first approached TheatreWorks Artistic Director Robert Kelley with the piece in Fall 2011 and TheatreWorks did a one-week workshop of the piece that December. Gordon and Gruska did more work on the show during TheatreWorks' New Works Festival in 2012, and have been hard at work fine tuning it for its world premiere ever since.

★ Vickie Rozell

## Being Earnest Plot Synopsis

It is 1965 in London, in a flat just off Carnaby Street, the capital of mod style. Country bachelor Jack Worthing is visiting his fashionable friend Algernon when conservative Lady Bracknell arrives with her free-thinking daughter Gwendolen. Jack proposes to Gwendolen but her mother objects to his questionable genealogy. Learning that Jack supervises a beautiful ward named Cecily at his estate, Algernon plots to meet her and eventually a gaggle of mods and moralists converge in the countryside. As the complications increase it seems that no one will have a happy ending—or will they?



EUAN MORTON & RILEY KRULL

### THE CAST

In order of speaking

Algernon Moncrieff	<b>Euan Morton*</b>
Lane/Rev. Chasuble/Merriman	<b>Brian Herndon*</b>
Jack Worthing	<b>Hayden Tee*</b>
Gwendolen Fairfax	<b>Mindy Lym*</b>
Lady Bracknell	<b>Maureen McVerry*</b>
Cecily Cardew	<b>Riley Krull*</b>
Miss Prism	<b>Diana Torres Koss*</b>
Stage Manager	<b>Jamie D. Mann*</b>
Assistant Stage Manager	<b>Emily Anderson Wolf*</b>

\* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

Actors' photos and bios can be found on the *Being Earnest* page on TheatreWorks' website.

[theatreworks.org/shows/1213-season/beingearnest](http://theatreworks.org/shows/1213-season/beingearnest)

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# Earnest Reimagined

It is no secret that TheatreWorks relishes the opportunity to breathe new life into literary works—in the last two seasons alone, novels ranging from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* to Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* have been brought to life on our stage. TheatreWorks' commitment to innovation is also very apparent, both through our support of New Works and the ways we use technology to create art and connect with our audiences. So for a company that thrives on new ideas and invigorating the classics, producing the world premiere of *Being Earnest* is tantamount to a dream come true.

If what you've seen and read thus far hasn't made it immediately apparent, *Being Earnest* isn't your run-of-the-mill adaptation.

First, Paul Gordon and Jay Gruska have written amazing music for the show, turning the original play into a musical. This is not at all uncommon—in the aforementioned examples *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was musicalized, resulting in the hit *Big River*.

Also, the setting has been altered. Rather than Victorian England, *Being Earnest* places the story in 1965. Again, changing the time and place of the source material is not unheard of. *West Side Story* is one very notable example of an adaptation that relocates the story; Shakespeare's feuding families became 1950s New York street gangs.

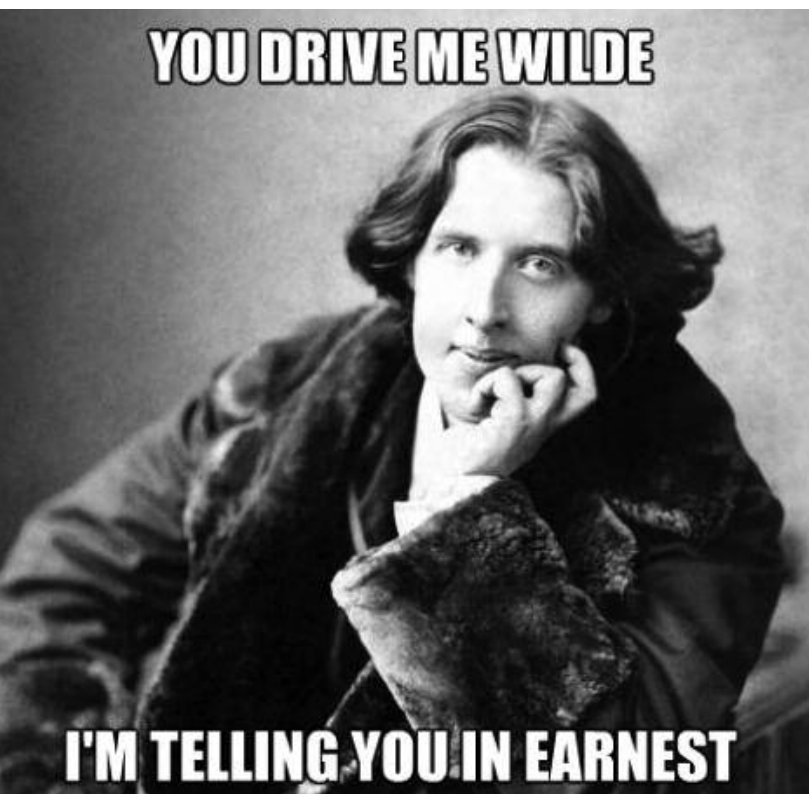
Perhaps the most surprising element of this adaptation is what wasn't changed—the words. Gordon has eliminated anachronisms and made cuts to allow for songs, but despite

the change in era, the spoken dialogue is essentially as Oscar Wilde wrote it in 1895. Gordon has even added additional Wilde quotations from his many works. This may seem counter-intuitive at first—when you're adapting the play, why not update the language?—but the result is magnificent.

If you're having a hard time wrapping your head around mods speaking in Victorian tongues, just think of Shakespeare. Nowadays it's extraordinarily popular to set his works in different eras, but seldom does anyone change the text. Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film adaptation *Romeo + Juliet* is perhaps the most widely known example, setting the story in modern-day "Verona Beach," using guns rather than daggers and a news anchor to deliver the prologue, but the actors delivered lines straight from the folios. In 2007, TheatreWorks employed the same method with *Twelfth Night*. Though our production was set in the 1960s, the script was unaltered.

If audiences can accept modern teenagers speaking in iambic pentameter, they should have no trouble with mods delivering Wilde's quips. His language is, after all, much more familiar to us than Shakespeare's. And his dialogue is so incredibly witty, it would be a shame to lose it.

At the end of the day, what we have with *Being Earnest* is an entirely new kind of adaptation—a wildly creative production that enhances the story while simultaneously celebrating the brilliance of the original text. ★ Katie Dai



## AudienceWorks: Get in on the Art!

AudienceWorks is TheatreWorks' new audience engagement initiative. The program provides an opportunity for our audience to actively participate in creative projects related to our main stage productions.

For *Being Earnest*, we're bringing together the worlds of Oscar Wilde and internet memes.

Visit [facebook.com/TheatreWorksSV](https://facebook.com/TheatreWorksSV) to choose a picture. Then email us at [audience@theatreworks.org](mailto:audience@theatreworks.org) with your wittiest, wickedest, Wildest caption. We'll meme it and post it to our Facebook album for all to see.

Don't forget to check out the MVCPA lobby when you come to see *Being Earnest*—you might even see your meme featured there!

For tickets, call 650.463.1960

For more info, visit [theatreworks.org](https://theatreworks.org)