

# Meadow Brook mounts a stylish 'Earnest'

Thursday, January 3, 1985 O&E (S-F-11A)O11B

Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest" continues Tuesday-Sundays at the Meadow Brook Theatre through Jan. 20. For ticket information call 377-3300.

Nobody can top Oscar Wilde for witty insolence and for taking cheerful pot shots at the foibles of the English upper classes. Style more than substance was Wilde's forte and the Meadow Brook production of his "The Importance of Being Earnest" appropriately reveals in style with splendid sets by Peter Hicks, glorious costumes by Mary Lynn Crum and an expert cast aptly directed by Terence Kilburn.

By Wilde's own admission, "The Importance of Being Earnest" is a play "by a butterfly for butterflies." It's an English drawing room comedy that's cheerful nonsense — complete with confused identities, a dour butler, chitchat over afternoon tea, and pretty, frothy females — nothing particularly original in the plot even for Wilde's era. There's even a baby of unknown parentage found in a large purse at Victoria Station. English writers, from Henry Fielding to William Gilbert of operetta fame, seem inordinately fond of lost babies who, we are later "surprised" to learn come of prestigious parentage.

What is unique in Wilde's writing and still enlivens this late-1800s play in his insolent, yet good-natured wit. Delightful one-liners liberally pepper every conversation.

A WEALTHY English playboy



**Cathie Breidenbach**

named Algernon Moncrieff diverts himself by making harmless trouble. "Trouble" in an English drawing room comedy amounts to nothing more significant than bickering about who ate the last muffin at tea and solving difficulties with ladies who can love a man if his name is Earnest, but cast off the same man if he goes by any other name.

Peter Gregory Thomson as Algernon Moncrieff never misplaces a line. With an arched eyebrow and boyish smile, this dandified, rich, wastrel insults everyone in sight, yet manages to remain lovely charming.

His dapper friend, Mr. John Worthing played expertly by Tom Spackman, has come to town to propose to Gwendolen Fairfax, a flirtatious bubble-brain. It's easy to see how Gwendolen could catch his eye as she trills chatter and kachays about in a glorious daffodil gown. Lynn Manabach shines as the butterfly Gwendolen.

Names, like style, have unquestionable significance in Wilde's "Earnest." John Worthing chooses to call himself Earnest when he's in the city and Jack when he's at his country estate. On top of his own two names, John invents a

renegade brother named — what else? — Earnest. The profligate, imaginary brother is a convenient ruse to enable John to go to London to romance pretty Gwendolen Fairfax.

On a whim, Algernon Moncrieff, who knows of John's imaginary brother, shows up at his friend's country estate

posing as the rebellious brother Earnest. There he meets Cecily, his friend's pretty 18-year-old ward, played with ingenious spriteliness by Maureen McDevitt.

IN THE COURSE of the comedy, Algernon proposes to Cecily who thinks he's Earnest; John proposes to Gwendolen who thinks his name is Earnest, and both ladies are in love with the name Earnest because, "it has vibrations." Such is the heavy drama of Wilde's comedy.

Confusion is heaped on confusion with the appearance of Lady Bracknell, Gwendolen's upper-crust bulldozer of a

mother played splendidly by Jean Arnold. The plot finally unravels with help from Miss Prism (Mary Benson), Cecily's spinster governess, and Dr. Chausable (Harry Ellerbe), a dear, doting cleric.

Benson's Miss Prism is first cousin to another spinster, Miss Prosperine, a role she played in Meadow Brook's revival last spring of Shaw's "Candida." Benson plays a dithery, dear Miss

Prism for laughs, and she gets them, even though she's not old enough to be cast opposite Harry Ellerbe's the Rev. Chausable.

Wilde flaunts his wit in "Earnest" and Meadow Brook shows its style with sumptuous costumes in jewel-colored satins and three stunning sets.

"Earnest" is trivial substance handsomely decked out and generously seasoned with enduring wit.

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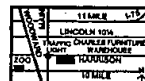
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## upcoming things to do

### • LASER LIGHT

A new laser/light concert continues at the Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills. "Lasera VII: Pink Floyd," a rock concert incorporating music from three Pink Floyd albums, will be shown at 7:30, 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. Fridays and 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. Saturdays. "Fireworks," designed for family audiences, will be shown at 3:45 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays. Each concert is \$1.25, in addition to regular museum admission of \$3 for adults, \$2 for students and senior citizens. Children under 5 are not admitted. For more information call 645-3230.

### • AUDITIONS OPEN

A casting call for "Play It Again, Sam" has been issued by the Franklin Village Players for its 1985 spring production. Auditions will be held at 7:30 p.m. Sunday-Monday, Jan. 6-7, in the Village Hall, 32125 Franklin Road at Carol Street. The three-act play, a comedy by Woody Allen, will be directed by Sharon Hoff of Southfield. There are roles for three men and eight women. For more information call Rose Galley, president, at 626-7478.

### • TROY HILTON

Normandy, a top-40 dance group, entertains at Fanny's in the Troy Hilton, 1455 Stephenson Highway at Maple, from 9 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. Monday-Saturday, Jan. 7-19. For more information call 583-9000.

### • SHERATON-SOUTHFIELD

Air Command, a five-piece '60s band, plays top hits and a Neil Diamond medley from 9 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. Tuesday-Saturday, Jan. 8-19, at Yesterday's Classic Oldies Club in the Sheraton-Southfield Hotel, 17017 W. Nine Mile. For more information call 557-4800.

### • YMCA AUCTION

Oakland Mall in Troy and the Pontiac YMCA will sponsor the YMCA Auction from 1-3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 12, in the mall's Center Court. Featured will be memorabilia donated by players from the Detroit Pistons and Lions. Many of the items are autographed.

### • "THE FANTASTICKS"

Nancy Gurwin's dinner theater production of Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt's musical "The Fantasticks" begins its regular run Saturday, Jan. 12, and continues Fridays-Saturdays through March. Doors open at 8:30 p.m. for cocktails, with dinner at 7:30, show at 8:45 p.m. Dinner and show is \$17.95 per person plus tax and tip. The show is directed by Edgar A. Guest III of Birmingham. Area residents in the cast include Joe Lannen of Farmington Hills as El Gallo, Vince Dunn of Southfield as Hucklebee and Duke Dweilley of West Bloomfield as Henry. For reservations call 386-1300.

### • VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS

An exhibit called "A Victorian Christmas" continues at the Plymouth Historical Museum, 155 S. Main, through Sunday, Jan. 6. Call 455-8940 for more information.

### • CHOIR AUDITIONS

The Schoolcraft College Community Choir will hold auditions for its winter-spring season prior to its first rehearsal of the new semester Tuesday, Jan. 8. Auditions will be held from 8:30-10 p.m. in Room 310 of the Forum Building at the college in Livonia. Director is Robert Ballard, who is also choral director at Livonia's Franklin High School. The choir is composed of 45 experienced singers of all ages representing 15 metropolitan area communities.

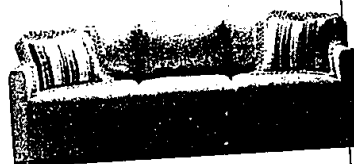
### • HANSEL AND GRETEL

The play "Hansel and Gretel" will be presented by Crossroads Productions at Madonna College's Activities Center, 38800 Schoolcraft in Livonia, at 3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 13. The production will utilize such theater techniques as mime and improvisation. Tickets are \$2 for adults, \$1 for students, senior citizens and children under 12. School and youth groups are welcome. For more information call 591-5058.

# We've got ten days to clear out!

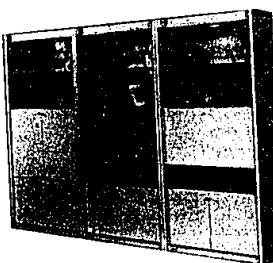
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