Gerald Barry
Soloists • Birmingham Contemporary Music Group
Thomas Adès conductor

The Importance of Being Earnest

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Thomas Adès conductor
Barbara Hannigan soprano  Cecily Cardew
Katalin Károlyi mezzo-soprano  Gwendolen Fairfax
Hilary Summers contralto  Miss Prism
Peter Tantsits tenor  Jack Worthing
Joshua Bloom baritone  Algernon Moncrieff
Alan Ewing bass  Lady Bracknell
Benjamin Bevan bass  Lane/Merriman
Joshua Hart speaker  Dr Chasuble
Birmingham Contemporary Music Group
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Alexandra Wood violin  •  Peter Campbell-Kelly violin
Christopher Yates viola  •  Ulrich Heinen cello
John Tattersdill double bass
Marie-Christine Zupancic flute/piccolo
Melinda Maxwell oboe/cor anglais
Joanna Patton clarinet  •  Mark O’Brien bass clarinet
Gretha Tuils bassoon
Margaret Cookhorn bassoon/contrabassoon
Nicholas Korth horn  •  Beth Randell horn
Jonathan Holland trumpet  •  Alan Thomas trumpet
Edward Jones trombone  •  Graham Sibley tuba
Julian Warburton percussion  •  Simon Limbrick percussion
Adam Morris percussion  •  Malcolm Wilson piano/celesta

Pre-recorded Choir
Benjamin Bevan  •  Joshua Bloom
Alan Ewing  •  Hilary Summers  •  Peter Tantsits
with  Matt Durkan  •  Rob Jenkins

Repertoire: John Paul Gandy
Opening off-stage performance of Auld Lang Syne played by Gerald Barry
Crockery provided by Red Rob Catering Supplies, Birmingham

Photo: Betty Freeman
Act 1

Algernon Moncrieff is playing his own arrangement of *Auld Lang Syne* for solo piano off-stage while his manservant Lane lays out afternoon tea, including cucumber sandwiches and bread and butter, for his master's expected guests: his Aunt Augusta, Lady Bracknell and his cousin Gwendolen.

Lane announces Algernon's friend Ernest, who is also known as Jack Worthing — and who is utterly besotted with Gwendolen. Algernon has come across Ernest's cigarette case inscribed with the message 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack'. He declares that Ernest may not marry Gwendolen until he reveals the true identities of Jack and Cecily. Ernest explains that he is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and that Cecily is his ward. As far as Cecily is concerned, Ernest is his ne'er-do-well younger brother who is always in some kind of trouble. So Jack is a Bunburyist, says Algernon, who also leads a double life by pretending to have an imaginary invalid friend called Bunbury who often requires his presence in the country.

Lady Bracknell and her daughter Gwendolen are announced. Lady Bracknell asks for cucumber sandwiches and declares her hatred of French music before bursting into her own setting of *Freude, schöner Götterfunken*.

With Lady Bracknell and Algernon safely out of the way, Jack proposes to Gwendolen and is accepted. How can she not love a man whose name is Ernest? Having discovered her daughter has become engaged to Jack, Lady Bracknell quizzes her future son-in-law about his lineage. When she discovers that he knows nothing of his parents and that he was adopted, having been found in a handbag at Victoria Station, she refuses to countenance the match. Jack manages to give Gwendolen his address in the country, which is also noted by Algernon who scribbles it on his cuff. As his guests depart, he tells Lane to put out his country clothes as he will be visiting his friend Bunbury.

Act 2

In the country Cecily is studying German with her governess, Miss Prism. German grammar, she declares, makes her look plain. Miss Prism, a composer and an ardent Germanophile breaks into her own setting of *Freude, schöner Götterfunken*.

Now Algernon, masquerading as her guardian's brother Ernest, arrives and quickly charms her. It is Cecily's dream to marry a man who is wicked and bad and called Ernest. Algernon quickly makes plans for Dr Chasuble, the rector, to rechristen him Ernest. Meanwhile, Jack arrives with the sad news that Ernest has passed away in Paris. But Ernest is here, says Cecily.

Never can the trains from London have been so busy. Hot on Algy's heels, Gwendolen arrives. As Cecily is giving her tea the two young women discover that they are both engaged to 'Ernest' and there is a violent storm over the tea cups. When Jack and Algy return they are exposed and Cecily and Gwendolen, united as sisters now, leave their two suitors to quarrel over Bunburying and a plate of muffins.

Act 3

Cecily and Gwendolen tell Jack and Algy that their Christian names are an insuperable bar to marriage. The men are agreed: Dr Chasuble will have to rechristen them both.

Lady Bracknell has also taken the train from London and on arriving in the country is shocked to discover that her nephew appears to have become engaged to Cecily without her permission. But when she discovers that this is a young woman in possession of a fortune her doubts are banished. However, Jack — in his capacity as Cecily's guardian — refuses to give his consent to the marriage until Lady Bracknell permits him and Gwendolen to be united.

This social Gordian knot is unloosed when Miss Prism reappears. Twenty-eight years earlier, when working as a governess in the Bracknell household, she had inadvertently confused a three-volume novel that she had written with her young charge and left the boy in a bag at Victoria Station and put the novel in the perambulator she was wheeling. Discovering her error, she had fled. Jack produces the handbag. He is Lady Bracknell's long-lost nephew and therefore Algernon's older brother. And his name? The same as that of his father General Moncrieff, says Lady Bracknell. A search of the army records solves the mystery. It is Ernest. Gwendolen is ecstatic. Now the two couples can be married and with them, Miss Prism and Dr Chasuble.

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Wilde Song by Paul Griffiths

Time – to mention one of Gerald Barry’s operatic characters, one who sings in his 1991 piece The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit and is rather unceremoniously dispatched there – encourages us to believe that what at first disturbs us as ‘unnatural’ will sooner or later be absorbed within the ever increasingly capacious realm of what we understand as normal. Perhaps Barry’s operas have not got there yet; they still seem edgy and strange, and perhaps they will for a while longer. But now that more than twenty years have passed since the first of them, The Intelligence Park (on NMC D122), was staged, and now that this singular example has been joined by four others, two of them full-length, the Barryesque is beginning to feel like one of multifarious opera’s possible modes.

What distinguishes it? High definition, yes. Sound in a state of tension, sound stretched, yes. Insistent pulse, certainly. But opera is always chiefly about voices, and it is Barry’s vocal style that most surprises, even discornts. Our operatic tradition – and not only that but the tradition of western classical music generally – encourages us to believe, contrary though this may be to anything like good sense, that people mean what they sing. Singing, this repertory by and large insists, is not mean, however, that his harmony is plain and pedestrian; it is a bitter sound in a state of tension, sound stretched, absorbing within the ever increasingly capacious realm of what we understand as normal. Perhaps Barry’s operas have not got there yet; they still seem edgy and strange, and perhaps they will for a while longer. But now that more than twenty years have passed since the first of them, The Intelligence Park (on NMC D122), was staged, and now that this singular example has been joined by four others, two of them full-length, the Barryesque is beginning to feel like one of multifarious opera’s possible modes.

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ACT I

Morning-room in ALGERNON's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of Auld Lang Syne is heard in the adjoining room. LANE is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, ALGERNON enters.

Algernon:
Did you hear what I was playing?

Lane:
No.

Algernon:
I’m sorry. I don’t play accurately. Sentiment is my forte, I keep science for Life.

Lane:
Yes.

Algernon:
Cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

Lane:
Yes.

He hands them on a salver. ALGERNON inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa. LANE goes out.

Enter LANE.

Lane:
Mr. Ernest Worthing.

Enter JACK. LANE goes out.

Algernon:
Ernest? What brings you up to town?

Jack:
Pleasure! Eating Algy?

Algernon:
Slight refreshment at five o’clock.

Jack:
Cups? Cucumber sandwiches? Who is coming?

Algernon:
Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

Jack:
I love Gwendolen. I want to marry her!

Algernon:
If ever I marry, I’ll try to forget it.

Jack:
Advancing to table and helping himself.

Very good bread and butter.

Algernon:
Do not eat all. You cannot marry Gwendolen.

Jack:
Why?

Algernon:
Who is Cecily?

Rings bell. Enter LANE.

Algernon:
Bring me that cigarette case.

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repercussions comes in Miss Prism’s examination of her long-lost handbag, where her line about a stain ‘caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage’ is stopped at ‘explosion’. This brings back the shock-horror tritone in the orchestra that was heard when Bunbury was ‘exploded’, and the word ‘explosion’ is then repeated by the entire cast a further three times later in the act, when the Army Lists are being consulted, with the same debased musical gesture. As with much in the score, the effect is at once powerful and puzzling. This could be the explosion that brings to the surface the last and most vital link in the plot, or it could be a premonition on the characters’ part of the explosion of their social world. Or perhaps they are at last becoming conscious, somehow, of what has happened to the perfectly fabricated dramatic construct in which they have been living their lives with so little trouble for well over a century.

Meanwhile, of course, that original play will be playing in our minds. A swirling introduction to the last act seems to wipe away a couple of pages of text to leave just Cecily’s ‘They have been eating muffins’ angelically intoned on a high A, after which all the orchestral players join the two women in shouting: ‘Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!’ There are other occasions, too, where the orchestra or a chorus (also pre-recorded) takes part, and where tiny fragments signal the disappearance of lengthy passages. There are also places where Barry adds to the text, not just by reiterating a single word but by shoving in a whole raft of Schiller. Both Lady Bracknell and Miss Prism, we are to understand, are composers, and one after another, in the first act and the second, they rattle off their settings of the ‘Ode to Joy’.

Yet, for all the verbal echoes that are inevitably summoned, whether of Wilde or of Beethoven, it is, as always, the music that steers, through whatever swerves it wants, shaking the characters off the page and sending them hurtling. Barry’s alert zigzags, crazed colours and musical-dramatic undermings spring from various sources: opera seria (especially Handel’s), the mechanical Stravinsky of Les Noces, the extreme intervals of Webern’s songs. A keen operatic zest has taken this wonderfully off-centre composer to diverse situations: the eighteenth century in his first two stage works, The Intelligence Park and The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit, both to librettos written for him, by Vincent Deane and Meredith Oakes respectively, then to a play by Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Petra von Kant), and from there to a monodrama by Strindberg (La Plus Forte), followed now by the classic comedy of The Importance of Being Earnest. He does all these differently, his settings as diverse as the original pieces. But we are everywhere in the same world, where emotion is all over the place and unplaceable, alien even to the characters who feel themselves to be feeling it.
Lane: Yes. LANE hands him the cigarette case and goes out.

Algernon: Opens case and examines it. A present from Cecily.

Jack: Cecily is my aunt.

Algernon: Reading "From little Cecily with her fondest love. 'Little Cecily' your aunt??

Jack: Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it. "As Cecily's guardian I adopt a high moral tone, not good for health or happiness. In order to escape to town I pretend to have a younger brother called Ernest. That is the whole truth pure and simple."

Choir: The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

Algernon: You are a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

Jack: What?

Algernon: Now that I know you to be a Bunburyist I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

Jack: I'm not a Bunburyist. If Gwendolen accepts me, I will kill my brother.

Choir: A man who marries without knowing anybody I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd to talk to him as if your name wasn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them.

"Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany." I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else.

Puts the card in his pocket.

Jack: My name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

Algernon: You are a secret Bunburyist!

Jack: Bunburyist? What do you mean by Bunburyist?

Algernon: Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

Choir: Who is Cecily?!

Jack: Cecily is Mr. Thomas Cardew's granddaughter. I am her guardian. She lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

Algernon: Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

Jack: As Cecily's guardian I adopt a high moral tone, not good for health or happiness. In order to escape to town I pretend to have a younger brother called Ernest. That is the whole truth pure and simple.

Choir: The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

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Algernon: You are a secret Bunburyist!

Jack: Bunburyist? What do you mean by Bunburyist?

Algernon: Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?
Lady Bracknell: SITTING DOWN
You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.
LOOKS IN HER POCKET FOR NOTE-BOOK AND PENCIL.
Jack: Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

Lady Bracknell: PENCIL AND NOTE-BOOK IN HAND
I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. Do you smoke?
Jack: Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

Lady Bracknell: I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

Jack: Twenty-nine.

Lady Bracknell: A very good age to be married at. I have always been of the opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

Jack: PANICKED
I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. Fortunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square.
You have a town house, I hope?

Jack: Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell: The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution.

Are your parents living?

Jack: I have lost both my parents.

Lady Bracknell: Both? That looks like carelessness. Who was your father?

Jack: I am afraid I really don’t know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I don’t actually know who I am by birth. I was... well, I was found.

Lady Bracknell: Found!
Jack: The late Mr. Thomas Cardew found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

Lady Bracknell: Where did he find you?
Jack: GRAVELY
In a hand-bag.

Lady Bracknell: A hand-bag?

Lady Bracknell: In what locality did this Mr. Thomas Cardew find me?

Jack: The cloak-room at Victoria Station.

Lady Bracknell: The cloak-room at Victoria Station?
Jack: Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell: The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution.
Lady Bracknell: I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing, to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.
Jack: How can I do that? I can produce the hand-bag! I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.
Lady Bracknell: Me, sir! What has it to do with you? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!
Jack: Good morning!

Lady Bracknell [reprise]
I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing...
LADY BRACKNELL SWEEPS OUT IN MAJESTIC INDIGNATION.
ALGERNON, FROM THE OTHER ROOM, STRIKES UP THE WEDDING MARCH. JACK LOOKS FURIOUS, AND GOES TO THE DOOR.

Will you stop!
The music stops and ALGERNON ENTERS CHEERILY.

ACT II
GARDEN AT THE MANOR HOUSE. A FLIGHT OF GREY STONE STEPS LEADS UP TO THE HOUSE. THE GARDEN, AN OLD-FASHIONED ONE, FULL OF ROSES. TIME OF YEAR, JULY. BASKET CHAIRS, AND A TABLE COVERED WITH BOOKS, ARE SET UNDER A LARGE YEW-TREE.

MISS PRISM DISCOVERED SEATED AT THE TABLE. CECILY IS AT THE BACK WATERING FLOWERS.

Miss Prism Calling
Cecily, Cecily! Your German grammar is on... Miss Prism: Ah no! The manuscript was lost. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Miss Prism: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means. Cecily: You can put out all the Bunbury suits... Miss Prism: Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.
Cecily: I hope it did not end happily? I don’t like novels that end happily.
Miss Prism: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means.
Cecily: Was it published?
Miss Prism: Ah no! The manuscript was lost. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Goes down the garden.

Cecily: It is perfectly phrased. Did you tell Gwendolen about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

ACT II
JACK AND GWENDOLEN GO OFF. LANE PRESENTS SEVERAL LETTERS ON A SALVER TO ALGERNON. IT IS TO BE SURMISED THAT THEY ARE BILLS, AS ALGERNON, AFTER LOOKING AT THE ENVELOPES, TEARS THEM UP.

Algeron: A glass of sherry.
Lane: Yes.
Algeron: Tomorrow, I’m going Bunburying.
Lane: Yes.
Algeron: I shall probably not be back till Monday.
You can put out all the Bunbury suits... Lane: Yes.
Jack: Tragically
My brother.

Chasuble: Still leading his life of pleasure?

Jack: Shaking his head
Dead!

Chasuble: Your brother Ernest dead?


Chasuble: He will be buried here?


Chasuble: Paris!

Shakes his head, astonished

Jack: Dr Chasuble, I would like to be christened
this afternoon. Would half-past five do?

Chasuble: Admirably.

Enter Cecily from the house

Cecily: Uncle Jack!

Cecily goes forward to Jack; he kisses her in
a melancholy manner.

Your brother is in the dining-room!

Jack: Who?

Cecily: Your brother Ernest.

Jack: Nonsense! I haven't got a brother.

Cecily: Oh, don't say that.

Runs back into the house. Miss Prism and Dr
Chasuble are astonished.

Enter Algernon and Cecily hand in hand.

They come slowly up to Jack. Jack motions
Algernon away.

Algernon: Brother John's coldness is peculiarly
painful to me.

They all go off except Jack and Algernon.

Jack: I don't allow Bunburying here.

Algernon: Cecily is a darling.

Jack: You are not to talk of her like that. I don't
like it.

Algernon: Well, I don't like your clothes.

Jack: This Bunburying has not been a great
success for you.

Goes into the house.

Algernon: It has been a great success. I'm in love
with Cecily, and that is everything.

Enter Cecily at the back of the garden. She
picks up the can and begins to water the flowers.

He's going to send me away.

Cecily: It is always painful to part from people
whom one has known for a very brief space of time.

Algernon: Thank you.

Enter Merriman

Merriman: The dog-cart is at the door.

Algernon: Tell it to come round next week, at the
same hour.

Merriman: The dog-cart is waiting.

Algernon: Yes, exit Merriman.

Merriman: You are the visible personification
of absolute perfection.

Cecily: Ernest, I will copy your remarks into my diary.

Go to table and begin writing in diary.

Algernon: Do you really keep a diary? I'd give
anything to look at it. May I?

Cecily: Oh no. Puts her hand over it

It is meant for publication. I have reached 'absolute
perfection'. You can go on. I am ready for more.

Algernon: Somewhat taken aback, coughs

Cecily: Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is
dictating one should speak fluently and not cough.

Writes as Algernon speaks.

Algernon: With burning passion
Cecily, ever since I looked upon your wonderful and
incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly,
passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

Cecily: I don't think that you should tell me that you
love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense,
does it?

Algernon: Cecily!

Enter Merriman

Merriman: The dog-cart is waiting.

Algernon: Tell it to come round next week, at the
same hour.

Merriman: Looks at Cecily, who makes no sign
Yes.

Merriman retires
Algernon: I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won’t you?

Cecily: Of course. Why, we’ve been engaged for the last three months.

Algernon: The last three months?

Cecily: Yes.

Algernon: But how?

Cecily: Ever since Uncle Jack confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, I fell in love with you, Ernest.

Algernon: CROSSING TO HER AND KNEELING

Darling! He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.

Cecily: I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

Algernon: Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

Cecily: His hair... if my name was Algy, couldn’t you love me?

Algernon: Oh, any name you like – for instance – Algernon.

Cecily: I am so glad.

Algernon: I must see Dr Chasuble on a most important christening. I kiss her and rushes down the garden.

Cecily: I like his hair so much.

Enter MERRIMAN

Merriman: Miss Fairfax.

Enter GWENDOLEN. Exit MERRIMAN

Cecily: ADVANCING TO HER and speaks through it.

My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLEN: TAKES HER OWN MEGAPHONE and speaks through it.

Yes, I am Mr. Worthing’s ward.

Cecily: Of course. Why, we’ve been engaged for the last three months.

GWENDOLEN: Stung

Yes. Mister Worthing is engaged to me.

Cecily: May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

Gwendolen: Sugar? I suppose. No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more.

Cecily: Sweetly.

Gwendolen: Superciliously

No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. Cecily looks angrily at her, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup.
Enter ALGERNON.

CECILY: Here is Ernest.

ALGERNON: Goes straight over to CECILY without noticing anyone else.

CECILY: Drawing back.

A moment, Ernest! Are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGERNON: Looking around.

Gwendolen!

Laughing.

Of course not!

CECILY: Presenting her cheek to be kissed.

You may.

ALGERNON: Kisses her.

GWENDOLEN: Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Algernon.

CECILY: Breaking away from ALGERNON.

Algernon! Oh!

GWENDOLEN: Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Algernon.

CECILY: To GWENDOLEN.

Is your name really John?

Jack: Standing rather proudly.

Yes.

CECILY: To GWENDOLEN.

We have been deceived.

GWENDOLEN: My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY: My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN: Slowly and seriously.

You will call me sister, will you not?

They embrace. JACK and ALGERNON groan and walk up and down.

GWENDOLEN: I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone. Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

CECILY: No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

They retire into the house with scornful looks.

GWENDOLEN: Slowly and seriously.

You will call me sister, will you not?

They embrace. JACK and ALGERNON groan and walk up and down.

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CECILY: No, men are so cowardly, aren’t they?

They retire into the house with scornful looks.

JACK: And this is what you call Bunburying?

ALGERNON: Yes, and a wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

Jack: Do not Bunbury here.

GWENDOLEN: Absurd. One can Bunbury anywhere. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

Jack: Serious Bunburyist? I love Gwendolen.

ALGERNON: I adore Cecily.

Jack: You cannot marry Miss Cardew.

ALGERNON: I was christened at a quarter to six.

GWENDOLEN: I am being christened at 5.30. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd.

Jack: Rising.

JACK: Picking up the muffin dish.

ALGERNON: Jack, you are eating muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left.

Takes them.

Jack: But I hate tea-cake.

ALGERNON: Rising.

JACK: But I hate tea-cake. Algernon! I don't want you here. Why don't you go!
Jack and Algernon
Speaking together
That is all!

Speaking together

Gwendolen, Cecily and the Orchestral Players
British Opera.

Enter JACK followed by ALGERNON. They
Cecily:
looking out into the garden.

ACT III
We are.

Jack:
men are infinitely superior.

Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned,
How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes!

Gwendolen, Cecily, Orchestral Players

Algernon:
we women know absolutely nothing. Darling!

They have moments of physical courage of which

Lady Bracknell:

The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live,

Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out!

Algernon:
Oh! Poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

His death must have been extremely sudden.

Lady Bracknell:

Bunbury is dead.

Lady Bracknell:

Yes, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell:

Bunbury doesn’t live here anymore.

Bunbury is dead.

Lady Bracknell:

Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die?

His death must have been extremely sudden.

Lady Bracknell:

Oh! Poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

Lady Bracknell:

What did he die of?

Algernon:

Bunbury? Oh, he was exploded.

Lady Bracknell:

Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage?

Algernon:

Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out!

The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live,

Lady Bracknell:

Pointing at Cecily

Mr. Worthing. Who?

Jack:
That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward.
Lady Bracknell: There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

Algeron: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: Cecily, you may kiss me!

Cecily: KISSES HER

Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell: You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

Cecily: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Lady Bracknell: The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

Algeron: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Cecily: Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

Jack: I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will allow your nephew to marry my ward.

Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

Untruthful! My nephew Algernon?

Lady Bracknell: I hardly dare suspect, Dr. Chasuble.

This noise is extremely unpleasant.

I wish he would arrive at some conclusion!

Enter JACK with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.

Jack: Who has been listening attentively? But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

Miss Prism: Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

Jack: Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

Miss Prism: I left it in the cloak-room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

Jack: What railway station?

Miss Prism: Victoria!

Jack: I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

Gwendolen: If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life.

Exit JACK in great excitement. Noises heard overhead as if someone was throwing trunks about. Everyone looks up.

Miss Prism: What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

Chasuble: What you think this means, Miss Prism?

Miss Prism: Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in the perambulator. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. MISS PRISM STARTS IN INVOLUNTARY IRRITATION. But the baby was not there! Prism! EVERYONE LOOKS AT MISS PRISM. Where is that baby?

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Miss Prism: Hums to herself while examining the handbag. It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of an omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion.

Lady Bracknell: Explosion!

Miss Prism: And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

Jack: In a pathetically voice Miss Prism, I was the baby you placed in it.

Miss Prism: Amazed You?!

Jack: Embracing her Yes... mother!

Miss Prism: Recoiling in indignant astonishment Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

Jack: Unmarried! That is a serious blow. But cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you.

Tries to embrace her again

Miss Prism: Recoiling in indignant astonishment Mr. Worthing, there is some error. Pointing to Lady Bracknell There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

Lady Bracknell: You are Algernon’s elder brother.

Jack: Algernon’s elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily! How could you have ever doubted that I had a brother?

Seizes hold of Algernon Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algernon, you have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

Algernon: I was out of practice.

Shakes hands

Gwendolen To Jack But what is your name?!

Jack: Your decision on my name!

Cecily: Gwendolen!

Jack: Aunt Augusta! When Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, what was my name?

Lady Bracknell: You had your father’s name.

Jack: Impatiently But what was my father’s name?

Lady Bracknell: Meditatively The General was a man of peace, except in his domestic life. His name would appear in the Army Lists.

Jack: These delightful records should have been my constant study. Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.

M. Generals...

All: Explosion!

Mallam, Maxbohn, Magley, Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff!! Lieutenant 1840, Captain. Explosion!


I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn’t it? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

Gwendolen: Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

Jack: My own one!

Chasuble To Miss Prism Laetitia! Embraces her

Miss Prism: Enthusiastically Frederick! At last!

Algernon: Cecily! Embraces her

Cecily: At last!

Jack: Gwendolen! Embraces her

Gwendolen: At last!

Lady Bracknell: My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

Jack: On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I’ve now realised for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

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Gerald Barry

Gerald Barry was born in Ireland in 1952 and after attending University College Dublin went to Amsterdam and later Cologne to continue his studies. His time in Germany, where he studied with Stockhausen and Kagel, proved to be a liberating experience and he soon came to public attention in 1979 with radical ensemble works ‘________’ and Ø.

Barry has received a number of commissions from the BBC, including Chevaux-de-frise for the 1988 Proms, given its Russian premiere by the Mariinsky Orchestra in 2007; The Conquest of Ireland, given its German premiere by the Bavarian RSO in 1998; Day for the BBC Symphony Orchestra (2005); The Eternal Recurrence, a setting of Nietzsche for voice and orchestra (2000); and Hard D (1995) for the Orkest de Volharding.

Barry’s first opera The Intelligence Park (recorded on NMC D122), was commissioned by the ICA and first performed at the 1990 Almeida Festival. A second opera, The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit, written for Channel 4 Television, opened the 2002 Aldeburgh
Festival, followed by performances in London and the Berliner Festwochen conducted by Thomas Adès. A new staging took place in 2013 at the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe. The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant was given in 2005 at English National Opera and in 2008 at Opera Basel. La Plus Forte, a one-act opera for soprano and orchestra on the Strindberg play, was commissioned by Radio France for the 2007 Festival Présences. Sung by Barbara Hannigan, it by Radio France for the 2007 Festival Présences. Sung by Barbara Hannigan, it

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(2013) for Ensemble 7Bridges. His Piano Concerto, written for Nicolas Hodges and co-commissioned by Musica Viva and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra was premiered in Munich in November 2013 with further performances in the UK with the CBSO and in Finland with Avanti! Chamber Orchestra.

The Importance of Being Earnest (2010) was jointly commissioned by the LA Philharmonic and the Barbican in London, and received its world premiere staging at Opera national de Lorraine, Nancy, in 2013. Two further productions were staged the same year at the Royal Opera House Linbury Theatre, and on tour with NI Opera. Earnest received a 2013 Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Large-Scale Composition. Barry’s latest opera, Alice’s Adventures Under Ground, will be premiered in 2016 at the Barbican London, followed by performances in Los Angeles and Amsterdam.

His music has been recorded on the NMC, Black Box, Marco Polo and BVHaast labels.

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Back cover photo: Algernon (Phillip Addis), Jack (Chad Shelton) and Gwendolen (Wendy Dawn Thompson)
Reverse inlay photo: Top tier, L-R: Jack (Chad Shelton), Algernon (Phillip Addis); bottom tier, L-R: Lane (José Luis Barreto), Lady Bracknell (Alan Ewing), Gwendolen (Wendy Dawn Thompson), Cecily (Ida Falk Winkland)
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