# A fresh take on Wilde's final play brings contemporary flair and queer hues



The latest production of Oscar Wilde's final play has brought a fresh perspective to the classic comedy, infusing contemporary elements that resonate with the LGBT community. Premiering shortly before the anniversary of Wilde's own legal troubles stemming from his sexuality, this interpretation vividly showcases the subtext of homoerotic desire that pervades the work.

Directed by Max Webster, the production captures the essence of the late 19th-century comedy of manners while embracing its queer undercurrents with flair. Starring Ncuti Gatwa as the flamboyant Algernon and Hugh Skinner as the comically vulnerable Jack, the characters navigate their secret identities amidst a sea of colourful costumes, with Algernon donning a striking hot pink gown reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe. The playful energy extends to the romantic interests, who engage in same-sex kisses, further broadening the boundaries of Wilde's narrative in a modern context.

The design elements are lively and well-crafted, taking cues from the popular aesthetics of contemporary series like *Bridgerton* while incorporating a blend of pop culture references, including musical nods to Snoop Dogg and mentions of London's LGBT-friendly venues like Dalston Superstore. This playful mélange creates a setting that balances fidelity to Wilde's text with a vibrant 21st-century sensibility, offering an engaging experience without losing the essence of the original material.

The cast carries the comedic torch with a spirited performance that pokes fun at upper-class pretensions and social mores. Gatwa's portrayal melds the wittiness of his previous roles with a cheeky charm, while Skinner adeptly balances physical comedy with emotional depth. Notably, Sharon D Clarke's turn as Lady Bracknell is a highlight, presenting a formidable character whose extravagant wardrobe reflects her sharp critiques of Victorian class snobbery.

Rae Smith's set design enhances the visual appeal, with bright country garden elements juxtaposed against elegant white-panelled townhouses. The costumes, which blend traditional Victorian attire with modern influences and traditional African prints, are a spectacle, contributing to the show's thematic resonance as well as its aesthetic delight.

Wilde's incisive wit is delivered with impeccable timing, retaining its critical lens over societal superficialities without becoming overly heavy-handed. The deliberate pacing and avoidance of farcical overacting allow the satirical elements of Wilde’s writing to shine through, showcasing the frivolity of the characters' romantic entanglements alongside their indulgent lifestyles.

Despite a minor technical glitch during the preview performance, the overall atmosphere pulsed with jubilance and carefree exuberance. The production stands as a stylish and engaging festive offering that not only honours Wilde's legacy but also enriches it with a contemporary interpretation that is both fun and thought-provoking. It paints a vivid tableau of mischief, laughter, and the exploration of identity, appealing broadly to audiences, particularly those within the LGBT community.

nationaltheatre.org.uk

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/earnestcommentary/chapter/towards-the-millenium/> - Corroborates the subtext of homoerotic desire in Wilde's work and the critical analysis of his plays, particularly 'The Importance of Being Earnest'.
* <https://pridesource.com/article/64002-2> - Provides context on Wilde's legal troubles due to his sexuality and the contemporary relevance of his story to the LGBT community.
* <https://irishrep.org/newsletter/wildewednesdays-a-spotlight-on-oscar-wilde/> - Details Wilde's imprisonment for his sexuality and his significance as a literary figure, highlighting his impact on the LGBT community.
* <https://www.onstageblog.com/reviews/2021/7/22/review-the-importance-of-being-earnestly-lgbtq-at-actors-temple-theatre> - Describes an adaptation of 'The Importance of Being Earnest' with a focus on LGBT relationships, similar to the contemporary elements in the latest production.
* <https://lambdaliteraryreview.org/2019/06/queer-stages-messages-from-the-past/> - Discusses the integration of queer themes in theatre productions, aligning with the modern interpretation of Wilde's work.
* <https://www.onstageblog.com/reviews/2021/7/22/review-the-importance-of-being-earnestly-lgbtq-at-actors-temple-theatre> - Highlights the use of vibrant costumes and modern pop culture references in adapting Wilde's play, similar to the described production.
* <http://openbooks.library.umass.edu/earnestcommentary/chapter/towards-the-millenium/> - Analyzes the comedic elements and social critiques in Wilde's writing, which are retained in the latest production.
* <https://irishrep.org/newsletter/wildewednesdays-a-spotlight-on-oscar-wilde/> - Mentions Wilde's wit and his critique of societal superficialities, which are key elements in the latest production.
* <https://www.onstageblog.com/reviews/2021/7/22/review-the-importance-of-being-earnestly-lgbtq-at-actors-temple-theatre> - Describes the blend of traditional and modern elements in set and costume design, similar to the described production.
* <https://pridesource.com/article/64002-2> - Emphasizes the importance of Wilde's legacy and its continued relevance to the LGBT community, reflected in the latest production.