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UC Santa Barbara Staff

‘The Importance of Being Earnest’

It’s a heady cocktail of mistaken identity, young love, hilariously dated elders, high style and pithy commentary. It’s Oscar Wilde’s “The Importance of Being Earnest,” making its UC Santa Barbara debut Friday at the campus’s Performing Arts Theater.

Directed by Simon Williams, a professor in the Department of Theater and Dance, the production features a cast of nine, including students from the Bachelor of Fine Arts program. Two of the leads are making their main stage debut.

Williams has directed many plays in the English comedy of manners style. “I greatly enjoy working on the precise timing that is crucial to any successful production of Wilde,” he said. “It is also a beautifully structured play, which means that there is a great pleasure in finding a staging that tells the story clearly, while extracting to the maximum the irony in the words.

“Also, of all the plays I know it is the one that most completely celebrates the comic muse and the comic view of life,” Williams continued. “It is a work in which accepted social values are turned upside down; one comes away from the play with a far more irreverent view of the world of which one is a part, and irreverence is one of the greatest of human virtues.”

Unique to this production was the decision to visualize the story set in the 1930s, an age associated with the novels of P.G. Wodehouse and the plays of Noel Coward. “The visual style and fashions of the time are still very familiar to us today,” said Williams, “but at the same time they date from a period when the customs, attitudes

and social rituals that Wilde is poking fun at were still very much alive.”

Performances are set for Feb. 13-14 and 17-20 at 8 p.m. and Feb. 14-15 and 21 at 2 p.m. More information is available at http://www.theaterdance.ucsb.edu.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.