



(L-R) Sabrina Manac'h and Frédérique Fouché in *The Importance of Being Earnest*/
L'Importance d'être Constant at Melbourne French Theatre.



(L-R) Louis Bernard, Eddy K Fatha & Julien Monnier in
Earnest. Photos by Richard Markowski.

As the action takes place over a 33 year period, the aging of the characters through costumes and wigs was well done and not caricatured.

In this, their 25th anniversary year, *The Dixie Swim Club* was a superb production to mark the 100th full-length play to be staged by Peridot Theatre. I wish them well for the next 100 over the next 25 years!

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST/L'IMPORTANCE D'ÊTRE CONSTANT

by Oscar Wilde

Melbourne French Theatre

Directed by Stig Wemyss

Reviewed by Deborah Fabbro – 7 May 2010

Having long loved this wonderfully witty piece by Oscar Wilde, I was curious to see how it would work in French being such a comedy of English manners. I'm pleased to say that under the direction of Stig Wemyss the transition would not have given Mr Wilde any cause for concern.

The first act did not entirely suspend my disbelief. Although it had good pace it seemed a little bland. This was not enhanced by a sparse and oddly decorated setting for Algernon's town dwelling. However, from the start of Act 2 with its representational but most appropriate depiction of the garden and view into the country house of Jack Worthing (which was reversed for Act 3), and the gracing of the stage with delightful performances from Frédérique Fouché as Gwendolen Fairfax and Sabrina Manac'h as Cecily Cardew, the play really came alive and was most entertaining.

Director, Stig Wymess, stated in his notes that "on the first page of the original text ... the very last line reads, Time: The Present. Who are we to disobey the great man's request?" This occasionally presents some inconsistencies as some of the social mores and intellectual aspirations of 1895 do not quite fit with 2010. However, the wit and clever observation of human nature (which remains unchanged since forever) in Wilde's writing still stands the test of time. The costuming by Vivian Luan and Leah Barlow worked well in this context, although Lady Bracknell's Act 1 gown seemed a little incongruous.

The projected backdrops beautifully conveyed the location and lighting enhanced all the scenes. There were a couple of glitches with projection on the night I attended but they were promptly

rectified. Sound design by Julian Fatha enhanced the production and was excellent when Jack was searching for the handbag.

Each of the characters were well developed. I particularly enjoyed Merriman, and his interaction with the other characters, as presented by Eddy K. Fatha. There was a good contrast from his portrayal of Lane in Act 1.

Le Chanoine Chasuble (Gweltaz Jacq) and Miss Prism (Monique Monnier) worked well together and captured the essence of their characters. Congratulations to Monique Monnier who is new to the stage. She had a great stage presence and sense of Miss Prism but just needed to watch her voice which did tend to fade at times.

Margot Knight performed for the first time in French; congratulations on that. I have seen her in many other roles and have always enjoyed her performance. However, as Lady Bracknell I felt she did not quite capture the character. She looked too young and the costuming did not help her presence.

Louis Bernard as Jack Worthing and Julien Monnier as Algernon Moncrieff both displayed the languorous bearing, wit and upper class superiority that befits these characters.

I do have one quibble and that was of the Stage Manager appearing from the wings prior to the start of the Act, not as part of any scene changing—a big No!

2010 marks Melbourne French Theatre's 33rd anniversary and, having seen a number of their productions, I wish them well for the next 33 years and beyond.



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