

Hqfruh

Nuanced performances highlight 'A Woman of No Importance' at TAM

David A. Sargent / Special to the Sun Journal

[Encore](#) | Wednesday, July 23, 2014

MONMOUTH -- Theater at Monmouth's production of "A Woman of No Importance" is a perfect fit among the wide range of shows offered in this summer's season. It maintains the excellence of TAM's actors and directors in a diverse collection of theatrical performances presented in repertory through August.

Victorian society and its secrets are the subjects of this comedy by Oscar Wilde. His infamous wit and sarcasm are abundantly employed against plentiful targets of that time and, by extension, the present. The clever epigrams fly thick and fast, but the final scenes bring stark reality back into focus.

The principal setting is an opulent estate where several aristocrats have gathered. Among them is Lord Illingworth, who flaunts an arrogant charm that appeals to the ladies, and he exploits it at every opportunity.

James Noel Hoban gives an outstanding portrayal of Lord Illingworth, a pompous, self-centered dandy who is defeated by his superficiality. Hoban, in his fourth season with TAM, gives the role an essential contemporary credibility. Wilde, when he wrote "A Woman of No Importance" in the early 1890s, said he patterned the part of Illingworth after himself and his notorious manner of dress and life of scandal. Hoban's characterization tones down the Wildean influence which might have seemed excessively flamboyant in a modern production.

Excellent performances in two key roles are given by Denise Cormier as Mrs. Arbuthnot and Leighton Samuels as Gerald, her son who has been asked to become Illingworth's private secretary. Their secret connection to Lord Illingworth leads to a dramatic finale which underscores the unfortunate impacts of Victorian upper class pretentiousness.

Other TAM performers give well-defined characterizations of the aristocratic guests.

Lisa Woods, in her TAM debut, plays the flirtatious Mrs. Allonby. She holds her own in witty exchanges with Illingworth and her colorfully overstated attire is a standout among the excellent costuming provided by Caitlin Cisek, who is also new to TAM this season.

Anna Doyle plays Hester Worsley, an American orphan and heiress. From her outside-the-upper-crust perspective, she launches some audacious

verbal attacks on English society.

Mark S. Cartier and Wendy Way as Sir Pontefract and Lady Pontefract provide plenty of humor. They are popular TAM veterans. Way plays the strong-willed and very vocal wife and Cartier is her meek husband.

Janis Stevens, another TAM veteran (13th season) appears as Lady Hunstanton, the party's hostess, whose opinions reveal a lack of general knowledge, though she jumps right into the conversations.

Lindsay Tornquist plays Lady Stutfield, another guest who doesn't let her intellectual shortcomings keep her silent.

Bill Van Horn, 13th season and TAM's associate artistic director, gives an appropriately smug performance as Mr. Kelvil, a member of parliament.

Will Rhys, director, provided excellent balance between the biting verbal jousting of the scenes at the luxurious estate and the seriousness of the final scene in Mrs. Arbuthnot's home. Rhys, in his third TAM season, has previously directed Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest."

Cumston Hall is the perfect venue for "A Woman of No Importance." This architectural gem on Main Street in Monmouth was built just a few years after Wilde wrote the play. Its 250-seat opera hall features exquisitely restored plaster ornamentation and an elaborate ceiling mural of cherubic portraits.

The remaining performances of "A Woman of No Importance" are scheduled for Wednesday, July 23, at 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, July 27, at 7 p.m., as well as Aug. 3, 6, and 16 at 1 p.m. and Aug. 13 and 23 at 7:30 p.m. The next TAM show in its repertory schedule is Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet" opening Friday, July 25, at 7:30 p.m. (preview performance at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, July 24).

For tickets call 933-9999 or go online to www.theateratmonmouth.org.

Go and do

What: "A Woman of No Importance"

Where: Theatre at Monmouth

When: July 23, at 7:30 p.m., and Sunday, July 27, at 7 p.m., as well as Aug. 3, 6, and 16 at 1 p.m. and Aug. 13 and 23 at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: General \$30; seniors \$27; students \$20

For tickets call 933-9999 or go online to www.theateratmonmouth.org.