

Phantoms perform earnestly

By STAN KLICH

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* has entertained audiences for 90 years and last Friday's matinee presentation by Phantom Productions at the Samuel Beckett theatre (in the bowels of Stong College) was no exception.

Phantom Productions, consisting of York alumni and students from both York and U of T, put on an admirable performance of the comic predicaments that arise when two men take on double identities in order to fulfill the romantic dreams of their lives.

The plot is complex and at times confusing, but this is one of the traits of Wilde's comedy, providing for hilarious interchanges between the characters. Set in the high society of 1895, the principal characters, John Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff, have each created dual identities in order to free themselves from their respective social constrictions. Fortunately, this proves successful because they find themselves in love with the women of their dreams, Gwendolyn Fairfax and Cecily Cardew, but in doing so they have become the same person—Mr. Earnest Worthing—and find themselves in a complicated situation.

The portrayal of John Worthing by Robert Devry is the strongest performance in the production, followed by John Huston as Algernon Moncrieff. Devry, convincingly comes across as an aristocratic, proper gentleman of the period and Huston effectively portrays the mischievous Moncrieff who is the primary cause of all the confusion.

Pamela Bustin, a first year theatrical student at York, plays the eloquent Gwendolyn Fairfax and Beata van Berkomp plays the spoiled Cecily Cardew.



LET'S GO WILDE! Actor-director John Huston (no, not that John Huston!) is left holding the bag while Robert Devry looks on.

Huston, who directs *The Importance of Being Earnest* (formerly a York student and now studying for his masters in theatre at U of T) pointed out that this production was a Stong College production and was in no way associated with the theatrical department at York.

When asked why the Samuel Beckett theatre was chosen for this production, Huston made his answer quite simple: "It's the finest comedy in the English language and we wanted to do it in a very intimate setting." With the newly refurbished facilities at the theatre, it is easy to see his point.

Originally formed as the Stong Titwillow Ensemble in 1980, Phantom Productions has produced four Gilbert and Sullivan musicals: *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Iolanthe*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *Mikado* and one original musical production, *Genesis*, by Canadian playwright Ken Mitchell. Tentative plans for the future production include a production of *Grande Duke* which Huston says "is almost never performed."

Huston also made extra efforts to enhance the play by developing the relationship between the secondary characters Miss Prism (Cecily's governess) and her intimate friend Dr. Chasuble. This was done by giving them lines from the four act production that are not included in the more frequently produced three act version.

"We have restored some of the lines from the original four act production in order to flesh out the relationship between Dr. Chasuble and Miss Prism," Huston said, and this adds tremendously to the humourous content of the play.

Given the strong performances by Devry and Huston backed by the "intimate" setting of the Samuel Beckett Theatre and the good performances by the supporting actors and actresses, *The Importance of Being Earnest* made for an enjoyable afternoon. Hopefully we will see more of Phantom Productions in the future, but for now, as Wilde would say, "That is all."

Talented Keobke makes jumping turn into fine art

By JUAN ESCOBAR

An enthusiastic and captivated audience filled the Elmina Eliot Atkinson Hall Friday, October 31 for the reading of Ken Keobke's new one-act play *Jump-Don't-Jump*. Dealing with the absurdity of such organizations as men's support groups, the play examines the almost ludicrous situations that can arise from the interaction between couples.

In the play, two couples—Victor and Luanne, Trish and Simon—get together to talk about their innermost feelings and desires in a somewhat modified men's-only support group. As long as the talk remains trivial, everything is normal. While Luanne speaks of her supermarket phobia, Victor recognizes his inner hatred towards a post-office worker who refuses to sell him stamps other than those displaying the queen's profile.

Everyone is comfortable until Trish, who deems such meetings useless and those who attend them as wimps, reveals that she has deliberately murdered someone in a hit-and-run car accident. The story is fabricated, but it is enough to break the group's easy-going stability.

A first-year student in the theatre department's Masters program, Ken Keobke comes to York with a BA in urban geography, as well as a B.Ed., a degree in linguistics and five years teaching experience in different parts of the world. Although still not fully recognized as a playwright, his work has found its way into various cities

across Canada.

Keobke writes without a structured plot, discovering the characters and their predicaments in the process of writing itself, making certain aspects of the theatre department's Masters program indispensable to his work.

Keobke said that in a typical creative writing workshop, criticism tends to be subjective, based more on differences in character rather than an objective look at the work at hand. Writing for theatre, he said, allows the writer to see and hear his work being performed in front of a live audience, giving him a clear indication as to what does and doesn't work in the play.

The language of his new one-act play is extremely versatile and dynamic, blending humour with satire, mixing the entire work with witty one-liners. In Trish's description of men's relationships with their cars, for example, the language takes on a sexual quality as it depicts the greasy engines, the long black wires, the stick-shifts and the rhythmic pumping of the cylinders.

The characters are vividly portrayed, and although when Keobke writes he is unaware of what is going to happen in the next scene (let alone the next line), he is able to bring such colour into the play through his use of language that makes the situations seem thoroughly believable.

York University boasts many promising young writers, both in its creative writing program as well as in other disciplines—Ken Keobke is definitely one of them.

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