THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST: LIVE IN HD

A conversation with
Brian Bedford, Director and Star of The Importance of Being Earnest
Todd Haimes, Artistic Director, Roundabout Theatre Company
Susan Loewenberg, L.A. Theatre Works
Julie Borchard-Young, BY Experience
Robert Borchard-Young, BY Experience

Why do you think this production is a great choice to be filmed and screened around the world?

TODD HAIMES: It’s a hilarious production of a true classic, with a gorgeous design and an unforgettable performance from Brian Bedford at the top of his considerable game. The show is so widely appealing that it is just perfect to be sent out into movie theatres around the world. Besides, anyone who has seen Brian’s performance in this production will testify that his Lady Bracknell cannot be confined to one stage, or even one theatre! It is truly an honor to bring the experience of live theatre to people all over the world and it is my hope that those who have never set foot inside a Broadway house will have the thrill of seeing a show live on Broadway. It’s also exciting to have the chance to make Oscar Wilde’s classic play accessible to students who live far beyond the reaches of Roundabout’s extensive Education program. Families and educators who have cultivated a love for Wilde’s work will have the chance to experience his most popular play the way it was meant to be seen.

SUSAN LOEWENBERG: Two words: Wilde and Bedford. Oscar Wilde had a gift for writing hilarious and urbane plays which also doubled as devastating social commentary, and The Importance of Being Earnest is Wilde at his funniest and his most subversive. Few actors are more capable of bringing out both sides of Wilde than Brian Bedford. Brian has commanded the stage for more than half a century - and with our HD broadcast of The Importance of Being Earnest, many thousands more will have the opportunity to see this legendary actor in his element. Bedford delivers a real tour-de-force in the part of Lady Bracknell.

JULIE BORCHARD-YOUNG: When we kicked off the digital revolution of events into movie theaters, we strongly believed that Broadway was a prime source of great quality shows for global cinema screens. BY Experience was approached by L.A. Theatre Works as a result of our work with -- and the phenomenal results of -- the National Theatre, the Metropolitan Opera and the BBC Proms and we are delighted to be working with LATW and the Roundabout Theatre Company to bring its hilarious Broadway production of The Importance of Being Earnest to audiences around the world.
Brian, as director & star, can you share some of your initial thoughts on this project The Importance of Being Earnest: Live in HD?

BRIAN BEDFORD: My best imaginable Valentine this year was from the drama critic of the London Daily Telegraph. On February 14 he wrote: “It is probably not possible to find absolute perfection in this sublunary world, but Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest comes tantalisingly close. One wouldn’t wish it a line longer or shorter, and it turns frivolity into high art, with the simple but admirable aim of creating a conspiracy of pure pleasure.” He then went on to say that our production of Earnest was the finest he’d ever seen.

And that in a nutshell is why I’m so grateful that Earnest is going to be seen outside of New York - even all over the world. “Pure pleasure!” Everybody at this moment in time deserves a couple of hours of that endangered experience.

Will there be changes made to the critically acclaimed production for the screenings?

TODD HAIMES: Brian has really created a masterpiece with this production, and there isn’t a moment of this performance that I would want Brian to adjust under any circumstances. Audiences all over the world will know exactly what it is like to walk into one of Roundabout’s Broadway theatres and attend the kind of first-class revival we are known for. I couldn’t ask for a better production to act as our ambassador to the world, just the way it is.

ROBERT BORCHARD-YOUNG: The intention is not to disrupt the enjoyment of the live audience in New York. We are not re-creating the work for the big screen but rather capturing the performance as it is happening on stage, without editing.

How does the filming work? How many cameras will be in the theater? Will there be an audience? Will it be edited?

TODD HAIMES: We plan to film three performances in all with seven cameras in the theatre, and of course, our live audience of patrons and subscribers. However, we do not plan to edit the performance footage together. Rather we will choose one of the performances and use the entire recording intact. I am very new to this whole process, but the experts at BY Experience are the best in the business, and I am sure this will give our as possible.

ROBERT BORCHARD-YOUNG: Working closely with the creative team, we have determined where the seven cameras will be positioned throughout the American Airlines Theatre to capture the show. The performance will otherwise be a “normal” presentation of the play, in front of a live audience. Our director for screen will sit in a production truck and watch the monitors of all seven HD cameras, and will cue a live cut. That live cut will be what cinema audiences see. Unlike a movie with multiple takes, the live cut will reflect the performance from beginning to end, without further editing.

Please tell us how the relationship of the company members has evolved from the first rehearsal through the critical success of the show. Is everyone having as much fun as they look?

TODD HAIMES: Is it possible to not have fun getting to say Wilde’s witticisms each night? Brian has built this company as both director and company member, and his incredible leadership has resulted in a cast that truly enjoys performing together each night. The overwhelming reactions from our audiences
have only helped to strengthen the company’s love for each other, and for this play. I think once you see *The Importance of Being Earnest*, that level of respect and camaraderie will be apparent in the unforgettable performances each cast member delivers.

**How did Roundabout, L.A. Theatre Works & BY Experience connect to make this project happen?**

TODD HAIMES: I have been interested in filming our shows for awhile now; after our wonderful experiences filming *The Man Who Came to Dinner & The Women* for PBS I knew this was a worthwhile avenue to bring the Roundabout experience to a wider audience. When Susan contacted me with her great enthusiasm for Brian and his production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, as well as a funder who shared her appreciation and was interested in underwriting the event, the stars aligned and it became apparent that we could share the production with people all over the world. Both Roundabout and LATW agreed that this would be a perfect way for the two not-for-profit companies to pool our resources and embark on filming this production, a first for both companies. This also allows our companies to further fulfill their missions, to make great theatre accessible to an even larger number of audiences including students. This is a really exciting partnership, and I’m honored to count Susan and LATW as the newest extension of the Roundabout family.

SUSAN LOEWENBERG: It was a happy set of artistic coincidences. L.A. Theatre Works had just completed a series of audio recordings of Molière starring Brian Bedford. The Sidney E. Frank Foundation, who funded the Moliere recordings, generously gave us the opportunity to continue our partnership with them. Since Brian had also enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the Roundabout Theatre Company, I called Todd Haimes, the Artistic Director of the Roundabout, and suggested we team up to bring his sterling production of *Earnest* to HD. And once BY Experience came aboard with their invaluable expertise in how to get us from stage to screen, we were on our way.

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