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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, PLEASE**



Debra Ann Byrd



Kevin Connell

**Take Wing And Soar Productions receives NEA Grant to support its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mainstage Production of THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST, directed by Kevin Connell**

[New York, NY- December 4, 2012] -- **National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Rocco Landesman** announced today that **Take Wing And Soar Productions** is one of 153 not-for-profit organizations nationwide to receive an **NEA Challenge America Fast-Track grant**.

Take Wing And Soar Productions is recommended for a \$10,000 grant to support performances of **Oscar Wilde's THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST**, directed by **Kevin Connell**. This adaptation of Wilde's play will be set in Harlem during the 1920s, drawing parallels to the original play and black bourgeoisie manners of that era.

In this FY 2013 funding round, the NEA received 393 eligible Challenge America Fast-Track applications, requesting a total of \$3,930,000. The NEA will award 153 Challenge America Fast-Track grants totaling \$1.53 million awarded to organizations in 41 states, Washington, DC, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These include 49 first-time Arts Endowment grantees. The Challenge America Fast-Track category offers support primarily to small and mid-sized organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to populations whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability.

Take Wing And Soar Productions is honored to have served its community for the past 10 years, giving center stage opportunities to classically trained actors of color." said founder and producer Debra Ann Byrd. "We are fortunate to have **Kevin Connell** on this project. It is so nice to learn that the national grants panel has acknowledged his past work and is supporting him as the director for EARNEST." "We are also so very grateful to our congressman **Charles Rangel** for his many years of support and very happy about receiving our first federal grant. It will go a long way towards helping us to provide quality programming to the communities in which we live, work, and serve."

**THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST** is scheduled for a limited run from **June 14<sup>th</sup>** through **June 30<sup>th</sup>** at the **Poet's Den Theater** in East Harlem. Tickets for the show can be purchased at 212-352-3101 or [www.takewingandsoar.org](http://www.takewingandsoar.org)

"The **NEA** was founded on the principle that the arts belong to all the people of the United States," said NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman. "We're proud that Challenge America Fast-Track grants bring more opportunities for arts engagement to underserved communities." See the complete listing of projects recommended for Challenge America Fast-Track grant support at [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov).

**TAKE WING AND SOAR PRODUCTIONS INC.** [Producer of EARNEST] founded in 1999 by classically trained actress Debra Ann Byrd, now celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> season is a women-led, New York State, 501(c) 3 Professional Theatre Arts Corporation, dedicated to supporting women, youth & especially classically trained actors of color. In its brief history, Take Wing And Soar Productions has enjoyed many successes including the

creation of The TWAS Theatre Project, The TWAS Classical Lab Reading Series, The Take Wing And Soar “Spirit of Excellence Awards”, the Harlem Shakespeare Workshop, and the Hackney Harlem International Youth Project. The theatre company is the 2009-2010 recipient of the LPTW Lucille Lortel Award, presented in recognition of the theatre’s body of work in the community, audience development in Harlem – and in celebration of the “International Exchange Program” between Take Wing And Soar Productions and London’s Hackney Empire Theatre. Other honors include five AUDELCO Awards & 27 AUDELCO Award nominations for its mainstage productions of *Richard III*, *The Darker Face of the Earth*, *Hamlet*, *Medea*, *King Lear*, *Pecong*, *ANTONY & CLEOPATRA* and *MASSINISSA*. *EARNEST* will be Take Wing And Soar’s 34<sup>th</sup> production and 11<sup>th</sup> mainstage project. For more information about Take Wing And Soar visit us online at [www.takewingandsoar.org](http://www.takewingandsoar.org)

**KEVIN CONNELL** [Director of *EARNEST*] is currently an Associate Professor of Theatre Arts at Marymount Manhattan College, where he serves as the President of the Faculty Council and Coordinator of Junior and Senior Acting. Directing credits include: Lawrence Dukore and Jim Campodónico’s new musical *Virgin Territory* (2011); Christopher Durang’s *Baby with the Bathwater* (2007) for Ground UP Productions (NYC); Shakespeare’s *Romeo + Juliette* (2007) for the Collective Company (NYC); Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband* (2010), Marivaux’s *The Triumph of Love* (2009), Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The Rivals* (2005) and Constance Cox’s adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s *Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime* (2004) at the National Black Theatre for Take Wing and Soar Productions (NYC); J.B. Priestley’s *Time and the Conways* (2011), Oliver Goldsmith’s *She Stoops to Conquer* (2009), Michael John LaChiusa’s musical *Hello Again* (2008), Tennessee Williams’ *Approaching the End of a Summer* and Edward Albee’s *Finding the Sun* (2007), A.A. Milne’s *The Ugly Duckling* (2006), an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* titled *The Holy Terror* (2005), James Valcq and Fred Alley’s musical *The Spitfire Grill* (2003), Seneca’s *Trojan Women* (2002), Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2001) and Tony Kushner’s *Reverse Transcription* (2000) all at Marymount Manhattan College. He performed in the play *Temporarily Yours*, (also playwright) at the 2001 Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Scotland). Additionally, Kevin has performed in productions at The National Theatre (London), La Jolla Playhouse (San Diego, CA), Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Chicago, IL), TheatreWorks USA (NYC/Tour), The Wayside Theatre (Winchester, VA), TheatreFest, NJ (Montclair, NJ) and Pinewood Film Studios (London), among other credits. Kevin is co-adapting the stage version of Kathryn Harrison’s novel *Exposure* and his play *The Holy Terror* is published by Stage Voices Publishing. He attended The Ohio State University (B.F.A.) and the University of California, San Diego (M.F.A.).

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**SHOW TITLE:** THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

**DATES & TIMES:** June 14<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013  
Fridays @ 8pm | Saturdays @ 2pm & 8pm | Sundays @ 3pm

**THEATRE:** The Poet’s Den Theater  
309 East 108th Street [Just Off 2nd Avenue]

**TICKETS:** General Admission \$18 / Students & Seniors \$15  
Opening Night Gala Performance \$35 [Thursday, June 20th @ 7pm]

**RESERVATIONS:** OvationTix.com (212) 352-3101 [www.takewingandsoar.org](http://www.takewingandsoar.org)



# THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Written by Oscar Wilde || Directed by Kevin Connell

**JUNE 14 thru 30**

THE POET’S DEN THEATER  
309 East 108<sup>th</sup> Street – NYC  
[www.takewingandsoar.org](http://www.takewingandsoar.org)

**BUY TICKETS**