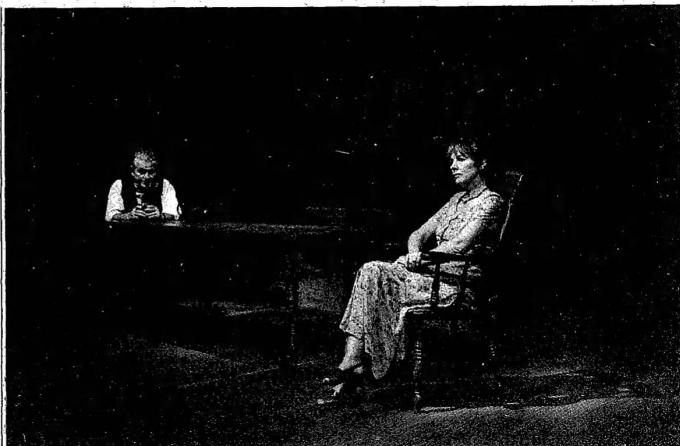


ew, borrowed, blue:  
ney's varied week  
**NIGHT WITH REG and  
DSCAPE**

that why 'Eric' is called 'Eric'?), we can expect further deconstructions with reference to pop music, football and the French cinema. Does Elton John have an Auntie Maude, with whom he might have gone into the garden, or at least the conservatory, or perhaps even the conservatoire?

Harold Pinter defeats decoders by the unanswerable simplicity of his writing. **Landscape** (1968) is a short, poetical piece for two domestic servants in the scrubbed and silent kitchen of a great country house. Ian Holm and Penelope Wilton, as Duff and Beth, are trapped in an intercutting, and thoroughly riveting, reverie.

Peter Hall's unforgettable original RSC version (with David Waller and Peggy Ashcroft) was perhaps chillier, more monumental. Pinter's own production is entralling, and immediate. Holm and Wilton play with precise accomplishment and dreamy fervour. Duff, the chauffeur and handyman, is recalling a walk by a pond, an argument in a pub over the quality of the beer, Beth banging a gong; Beth is re-living a day on the beach, and moments of tenderness with a man who may be Duff, or indeed the house's owner, Mr Sykes, or someone else altogether. Duff represents the urgent instinct for memorialising the past. He leans forward and tries to break the membrane of Beth's protective lyricism. She never looks at him. This glistening little gem of a production (ten more early evening performances, this week and early next) was first seen at the Gate Theatre in Dublin during the Pinter festival last May. Perhaps the National should have paired it with its usual companion, *Silence*. But you do not feel short-changed or under-



nourished after a mere 38 minutes.

For that response you need to sample two hours of **Out of the Blue** (which, I suspect, will soon be into the red), the dreariest musical in the West End since, oh, last week? At least Copacabana evinced a grisly/cheery second-rate tattiness, and *Only the Lonely* had a few Roy Orbison classics. David Gilmore's efficient production assembles an oratorio-like dispute over the parenting of a child in Nagasaki in 1945; mother died of radiation sickness in 1953; the father (now a priest involved in the 25th anniversary Memorial Day) was an American soldier. Lightly mobile screens, an onstage band, the recriminations of conflict, through-singing, novelistic revelations: all this signals a computerised, cynical synthesis of Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures*, Lepage's *Seven Streams*, *Les Misérables* (David Burt, the outraged Japanese brother, was the original Enjolras) and *Miss Saigon*. But there is not a single moment of inspired melody in Shun-Ichi Tokura's score, and the book by Paul Sand is

white background, designed by Nigel Hook, and to leave the music to an adroit and single pianist, Nick Finlow. Gary Cady and Fiona Sinnott sing sweetly as the romantic couple, and Michael Medwin chips in amiably in the Roger Livesey role of the mediating neurologist. Martin Connor is an acceptable substitute for Marius Goring's amazing French aristocrat, the man sent by heaven to get Carter.

One question: why do young writers want to sound so old? The movie's avant-gardism is reclaimed as material for cosy revue. Some of the self-conscious Cole Porter-ish rhyming and twee musical jauntiness become tiresome. But Morgan and Metcalf could well be a partnership to watch. I look forward to hearing their next songs.

Samuel Pepys thought that John Dryden's **Sir Martin Mar-All** (1667), a crummy conflation of Molière's *L'Etourdi* and Quinault's *L'Amant indiscret*, with invented sub-plot, was a hoot. Pepys also thought that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was the

Penelope Wilton and Ian Holm in Pinter's **Landscape**. Photograph by Neil Libbert

silliest play he ever saw. Never trust a critic. But trust me when I say that the Magnificent Theatre Company's valiant, but breathily over-apostrophised, revival does nothing for my revered Dryden's reputation as a practical man of the Restoration theatre. I shall treasure only a climactic farcical masque, 'the frolic of the altitudes', with old buffers stranded on high stools, and the odd exclamatory insult, such as 'A pox on her mouldy chops!' Not enough.

**My Night with Reg** Criterion Theatre, London WC2 (071-839 4488); **Landscape** Cottesloe, Royal National Theatre, London SE1 (071-928 2252); **Out of the Blue** Shaftesbury Theatre, London WC2 (071-379 5399); **Stairway to Heaven!** King's Head, London N1 (071-226 1916); **Sir Martin Mar-All** Lillian Baylis, London EC1 (071-278 8916)

## Coveney On Landscape

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ianharris

Tue, Jan 7, 2020