

<p>studio-scale staging.</p> <p>The RSC still commissions plenty of new work, but in a worryingly haphazard fashion. They go shopping, not digging. All of a sudden, Alan Ayckbourn has become an RSC writer, though Wildest Dreams (Barbican, Pit) is not one of his best recent plays. At least a London audience does at last have a chance to see a simulacrum in the Pit of the Scarborough in-the-round conditions which inform all Ayckbourn's plays.</p> <p>This one begins around a Dragons and Dungeons game board. Stanley and Hazel Inchbridge, a loveless,</p>	<p>childless couple who work, respectively, in a school and a building society, are facing the quasi-mythological unknown with Warren (Gary Whitaker), an emotionally retarded, computer-freak schoolboy, and Rick (Jenna Russell), a taciturn lesbian.</p> <p>The differing conditions of loneliness are schematically indicated. Warren inhabits an attic, wired up to his escapist fantasies and his imprisoned, unseen mother below. Rick lives in basement squalor, with an emergent history of child abuse and neglect; she gives shelter to an unlikely workmate, a gushing daughter of married MPs, in flight from a violent husband.</p> <p>This last character, Marcie Banks (Sophie Thompson), is included in the board game as 'Novia the Newcomer' and assumes the status of a dangerous</p>	<p>catalyst: Warren becomes obsessed with her, so does Stanley, and she slips into a relationship with Rick. Marcie is committed to nobody. While the girls fend off the sinister intrusions of Marcie's husband (Paul Bentall), the Inchbridges are driven to the limit by the jeering pedantry of Hazel's widowed brother (Peter Laird), with whom they share their house, and the galloping breakdown of Hazel herself.</p> <p>The acting is uneven, though the central couple are superbly taken by Barry McCarthy (a survivor of the Scarborough premiere in 1991) and Brenda Blethyn. McCarthy's Stanley is a typical Ayckbourn ditherer, wrapping up his inadequacies in a dressing gown, while Ms Blethyn, whose ability to colour comic excess with inner tumult is comparable to Maggie</p>	<p>performance by Sheila Hancock.</p> <p>Bondagers (Traverse, Edinburgh, 031 228 1404). Last chance, today and tomorrow, to see Sue Glover's gripping, poetic play.</p> <p>The Merry Wives (Lyric, Hammersmith, 081 741 2311). Broad Yorkshire version led by Barrie Rutter's Fred Trueman-ish Falstaff.</p> <p>The School For Wives (Almeida, 071 359 4404). Marvellous Molière with Ian McDiarmid lustling hilariously after Emma Fielding in a rain-drenched provincial town square.</p> <p>Moonlight (Comedy, 071 867 1045). Ian Holm and Anna Massey in Pinter's moving, nocturnal idyll with jokes.</p> <p>Sweeney Todd (RNT Lyttelton, 071 928 2252). Denis Quilley returns as the demon barber in outstanding Sondheim revival.</p>
<p>David Suchet Lia Williams</p>			
<p>at makes couples talk about it in the</p>			

Coveney On Wildest Dreams

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