

unamusing songs about the dream of a lovesick construction worker and the power of collective will. The liveliest music is in triple time, and Wasfi Kani in the pit stirs up an admirable clatter of unexceptional sound. The singing is uneven and most of the acting worse.

Paul Godfrey's new play **The Blue Ball** at the National is a 90-minute enquiry into the magic of space exploration and the private lives of astronauts. Godfrey directs his own cast of characters which includes a playwright called Paul (Peter Darling) researching this very play, the same way as Wallace Shawn played John Lahr in pursuit of Joe Orton in the film *Prick Up Your Ears*,

An astronaut, Alex (Dexter Fletcher), is selected for the Nasa moonshot in Houston, and Paul wants to know what it was like. His last play, he reveals, was about music (that is, Godfrey's *Once in a While the Odd Thing Happens*, a charming reverie on Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. Like Sam Shepard researching an earlier ace pilot, Chuck Yeagar, for his performance in the film *The Right Stuff*, Godfrey wants to get in really close. But his questions are too large and too vague and the answers are unimaginable and therefore unpronounced. This is the point: how can we define an experience that is beyond experience and, at the same time, part of so many

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