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## Reviews: 'Pinter and Beckett,' 'An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein'

By Tom Keogh  
Special to The Seattle Times

### Theater reviews

"The nearer to Beckett, the more portentous Pinter gets," sniffed a 1968 government report in Britain temporarily barring Harold Pinter's one-act play, "Landscape," from public performance because of sexually explicit language.

Theater censorship eventually ended in Pinter's native England. But that disparaging remark about the early influence of Samuel Beckett on Pinter seems especially ironic given the current and inspired pairing of "Landscape," a haunting piece about uncoupled passions, with the psychological shadowgraph of Beckett's "Eh Joe" at New City Theater.

This double bill about the murky boundaries between imagination, memory, guilt and loss underscores what is unique about each writer as well as what both men — friends and fellow Nobel Prize winners — shared thematically.

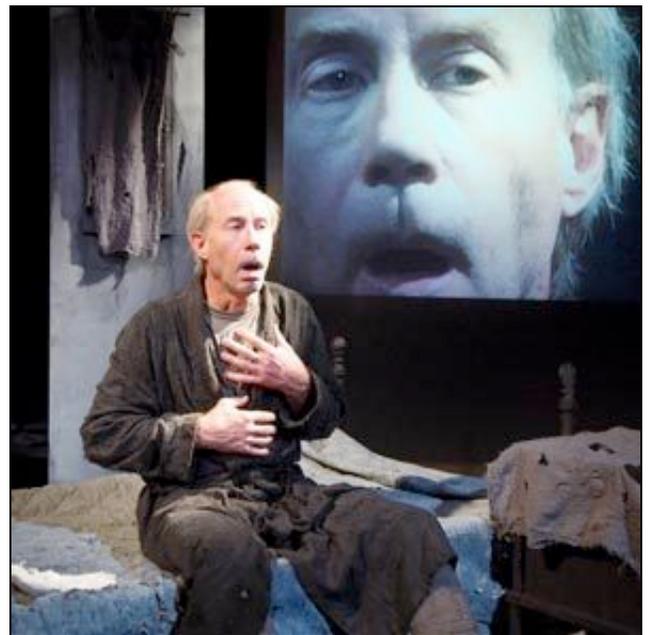
The spellbinding show is further enriched by the formidable talents of Janice Findley, a visionary filmmaker ("Beyond Kabuki") and stage director who created harshly beautiful yet piteous takes on Beckett's "Rockaby" and "Footfalls" a year ago at New City. Working with the same crew, Findley again directs the gifted actress Mary Ewald, who last time unnervingly channeled Beckett as in a waking dream.

In "Landscape," Ewald plays a married woman transfixed by her delicate if seemingly half-mad recollection of a distant, romantic encounter. Seated at a kitchen table, she alternates brief strands of her gauzy story with pointed chatter from her outwardly expansive yet subtly desperate husband (an outstanding Kevin McKeon). Typical of Pinter, much of this marital drama — layers of fear, mistrust, disorientation — is in what goes unsaid between intimates jockeying for a dominant version of shared history.



JYH-LURN CHANG

Kevin McKeon and Mary Ewald in Harold Pinter's "Landscape" at New City Theater.



JYH-LURN CHANG

Kevin McKeon in Samuel Beckett's play "Eh Joe" at New City Theater.

No such competition exists in "Eh Joe," starring McKeon as a tattered loner haunted by a woman's prodding and oddly colorless voice (Ewald offstage). Written as a teleplay instructing a TV camera to move in, by degrees, on the title character's face, "Eh Joe" naturally provoked questions before showtime about how Findley would achieve Beckett's ends in a three-dimensional space.

The answer proved as dynamic as it was unexpected, typical of Findley's penchant for pushing the creative envelope.

"Pinter & Beckett: 'Landscape' and 'Eh Joe,' " written by Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, through May 29, New City Theater, [www.brownpapertickets.com](http://www.brownpapertickets.com)

## **'An Adult Evening**

### **of Shel Silverstein'**

In the late Shel Silverstein's universe, it usually takes two to create a full-blown obsession. Theater Schmeater's smoothly staged "Adult Evening" of 10 of his skits demonstrates that there's a willing masochist for every like-minded sadist.

A manipulative father torments his daughter with the knowledge that he has shot the pony intended for her birthday. Or is he just an April Fool's prankster, and have they played this game before?

The creator of such social irritants as "Have a nice day" and "I need my own space" is tormented by anti-phrase-makers. An obnoxious laundry operator tortures a customer who finds herself drawn to abuse. A wife is so desperate to avoid becoming a bag lady that her husband can do little but watch her transformation into one.

Director Julia Griffin makes good use of a cast that enthusiastically clicks with the maniacal glee that underlies most of Silverstein's sketches. Alyssa Keene is especially nimble as a participant in a slave auction, and John Q. Smith and Sara Coates make the most of the bag-lady episode: an opening act that's tough to follow.

"An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein," through June 12, Theater Schmeater, [www.schmeater.org](http://www.schmeater.org)

*John Hartl, special to The Seattle Times*

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