

Arena: Harold Pinter

Nigel Williams's two-part film biography explores Harold Pinter's life, work, and political passions – his East End childhood; his work as an actor; his experience of both early critical rejection and adulation; his screenwriting; and his love of poetry and passion for cricket.

The two titles are taken from Pinter's first play and his latest.

Part One – The Room

Part One explores Pinter's key theme – the room – through the very rooms in which he wrote his first great series of plays. *Arena* reveals the links between the plays and the places, and meets the people who live there now.

Harold Pinter – The Room begins in the West London room where he writes today – his “superstudy” as his wife, Antonia Fraser, calls it. The film then visits the room where Pinter grew up and first wrote poetry, in an East London terraced house; the theatre dressing room where he began to formulate his ideas about playwriting and language; the sitting room in the London cold-water flat where he wrote his first hit, *The Caretaker*; and his study in the bow-fronted house in Worthing, where he lived with Vivien Merchant in the Sixties and wrote *The Homecoming*.

Pinter invited *Arena* to film scenes from the Almeida Theatre's acclaimed production of his first play, *The Room*. Directed by Pinter himself, it stars Lindsay Duncan, Keith Allen, Lia Williams and Pinter's lifelong friend Henry Woolf. All the themes that would come to distinguish Pinter's writing emerge in this extraordinary production.

Pinter has also given *Arena* exclusive access to a series of personal recordings in which he talks frankly to his biographer Michael Billington. Presented for the first time on television, they tell Pinter's story, in his own words, as he remembers it.

Part Two – Celebration

In Part Two, Pinter is out of the room and his acclaim as a playwright has made him a very public figure.

Having accompanied Pinter for two years to film plays and events in America and all over Europe, *Arena* explores the relationship between the private and the public dimensions of his life and work; the intimacy of his plays since the Seventies; his work in films and television drama; his passion for poetry and cricket; and his fervent “political engagement”, as he calls it.

As with *The Room*, Pinter invited *Arena* to film his most recent productions. *One For The Road* is one of his most directly political plays and his performance in the chilling central role is mesmerising. The wildly funny *Celebration* is directed by him and is seen here for the first time on television. A group of friends celebrate in a restaurant and, over the course of the evening, reveal details of their private lives in this very public space. *Arena* reunites members of the cast, including Lindsay Duncan, Andy de la Tour, Susan Wooldridge and Indira Varma, who discuss their working relationship with Harold Pinter.

Contributors to *Arena: Harold Pinter* include Pinter's wife, Antonia Fraser, talking for the first time on television about her husband, his lifelong friend Henry Woolf, Lindsay Duncan, Kenneth Cranham, Peter Hall and John Pilger.

BBC Four presents an extensive season of Pinter productions, past and present
Pinter Now: New Films, Drama and Documentary

The Dwarfs

BBC Four presents a screen première of this intriguing early work, adapted from Pinter's first and only novel, *The Dwarfs*.

The Dwarfs was written, as the author says, "in the early Fifties before I began writing plays". Set in the East End, it describes the interlocking lives of four young Londoners.

Directed by Christopher Morahan, and starring Daisy Haggard, Ben Caplan, Jamie Lee and Mark Rice-Oxley, the play is devised in association with the Royal National Theatre Studio and is produced by the BBC's drama innovation team at BBC Fictionlab.

The Dwarfs is adapted by Kerry Crabbe, who has worked exclusively as writer, producer and director in film, theatre and television. For Granada, Crabbe adapted Tennessee Williams's *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, which was produced by and starred Laurence Olivier. His five original screenplays include *The Playboys*, starring Albert Finney, for the Samuel Goldwyn Company. Crabbe received a nomination for the *Evening Standard's* Most Promising Playwright Award for his stage play *Rough Magic*.

Pinter: Actor and Director

The two-year period in which the filming of *Arena* took place, was among Pinter's most prolific, both as actor and director. He invited *Arena* and Lone Star's cameras to film his four most recent major theatre productions – *The Room*, *Celebration*, *One For The Road* and Pinter *Sketches*.

Arena and Lone Star also present *Politics & Pinter*, an examination of the playwright's political thoughts and opinions.

The Room & Celebration



In Pinter's 70th year, the Almeida Theatre presented the world première of his latest play, *Celebration*. Directed by the author, *Celebration* was performed alongside a revival of Pinter's first play, *The Room*. These two productions, formed part of the season of Pinter's work at the Lincoln Center Festival 2001.

The cast, for both plays, includes Keith Allen, Lindsay Duncan, Steven Pacey, Andy de la Tour, Lia Williams and Susan Wooldridge.

The Room was first presented at Bristol University in May 1957 in a production staged by Pinter's oldest friend, Henry Woolf, who appears this time as Mr Kidd.

Sketches

Sketches are quintessentially Pinter; acutely observed fragments of encounters in the all-night café, the newstand or anywhere in Pinter's landscape. In 1969, Canadian filmmaker Gerald Potterton animated a number of sketches with the voices of leading British actors at the time, including Pinter himself.

Sketches combined those with the recent production at the National Theatre, which included *Press Conference*, a new piece which was Pinter's most recent performance in the theatre.

One For The Road



Pinter gives a devastating performance in his most recent major stage role in the Gate Theatre's production of *One For The Road*, filmed last year in London. In an unnamed police state Nicholas, who has the power of life and death over his prisoners, interviews his victims one by one. Indira Varma plays alongside the playwright.

Politics & Pinter

Politics & Pinter was filmed at a tribute to Harold Pinter organised by English PEN to celebrate his 70th birthday.

In three parts, *Politics & Pinter* opens with Faraj Sarkhoi, an Iranian writer, recalling Pinter's role in saving him from execution. He'd been sentenced to death for his writing. Ken Wiwa, Ken Saro-Wiwa's son, describes how the playwright helped bring his father's work and persecution to the attention of the world; and Richard Eyre honours Pinter's greatness as a writer – the heir to Joyce, Beckett and Kafka – and also puts his work in its broad political context.

The second part features Harold Pinter in conversation with Nigel Williams, director of the two-part *Arena*. Williams talks to him about the role that politics has played in his life – particularly his reticence to make his politics public in the Sixties. Pinter acknowledges that his early work was not obviously political but was nevertheless driven by a broad, fundamental political engagement.

The third and final part is a reading of *The Dumb Waiter*, specially prepared for the tribute evening. Harold Pinter plays Ben, Ronald Harwood is Gus and Humphrey Burton reads the stage directions. This unusual presentation offers a completely new perspective on the play.

Pinter Classics: From the archive

The Dumb Waiter

Two hitmen – Ben and Gus – await instructions for their next hit in a basement of a Birmingham house. Kenneth Cranham and Colin Blakely star as the two colleagues, whose latest target is closer than they first anticipated.

Landscape

A man and woman – Duff and Beth – sit at either end of their kitchen table and reminisce about the past. Beth is locked in erotic memories, as Duff desperately tries to find a way to communicate with her.

This BBC production of 1995 stars Ian Holm and Penelope Wilton.

Landscape was first staged at the Aldwych Theatre on 2 July 1969.

The Collection

Laurence Olivier, Alan Bates, Malcolm MacDowell and Helen Mirren star in this production of *The Collection*. Stella meets Bill at a fashion trade fair and they embark on an affair – or do they? An unexpected visitor, in the

shape of Stella's husband, provokes upheaval when he arrives on the doorstep of the home Bill shares with his older, gay lover.

The Collection was first staged at the Aldwych Theatre on 18 June 1962.

The Basement



Harold Pinter plays Stott in this timeless television play written for the BBC, with Kika Markham (Jane) and Derek Godfrey (Law).

A dark, otherworldly piece which examines relationships, time and reality.

The Lover

Vivien Merchant plays Sarah, wife to Alan Badel's Richard, who bids farewell to her husband as he leaves for work with the news that her lover is expected later that day...

A frank and engaging examination of marriage and sexual relationships, years ahead of its time.

No Man's Land

Do Hirst and Spooner really know each other, or are they performing an elaborate charade?

The ambiguity – and the comedy – intensify with the arrival of Briggs and Fraser. All four inhabit a no man's land between time present and time remembered, between reality and imagination.

Peter Hall directs this Granada production, which he first directed as a stage play at the National Theatre in 1975. John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson star.

The Birthday Party

The Birthday Party premièred at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge in 1958, followed by a run at the Lyric Hammersmith.

The scathing critical reception it received, with the exception of Harold Hobson's review, caused the play to close after just six days. It is now considered a masterpiece, and is, alongside *The Caretaker*, one of Pinter's most revived works.



In this 1987 BBC production, Kenneth Cranham plays Stanley Webber, a lodger whose birthday party turns into a nightmare when he is visited by two strangers, McCann and Goldberg. The cast also features Colin Blakely, Julie Walters, Joan Plowright and the playwright himself as Goldberg.

Old Times

Christopher Morahan directs this BBC production with Anna Cropper, Barry Foster and Mary Miller. Kate finds herself at the centre of a battle of wills as her old school friend Anna and her husband Deeley struggle to possess her.

Feature Films: Adaptations and Screenplays

The Caretaker (1962)



This play was first performed in 1960, and was to establish Harold Pinter's reputation as a major playwright. Clive Donner directs Alan Bates, Robert Shaw and Donald Pleasance.

Accident (1966)

Joseph Losey directs Pinter's adaptation of the novel by Nicholas Mosley. Dirk Bogarde is an insecure Oxford Don who embarks on a complicated web of adulterous affairs which indirectly lead to tragedy. The film also stars Stanley Baker, Michael York and Vivien Merchant. *Accident* was awarded the Jury Prize at the Cannes Festival, and the Union of International Film Critics' Prize.

The Homecoming (1973)

When Teddy, a professor at an American university, brings his wife Ruth to visit London and his family, he finds himself prey to old conflicts. But now it is Ruth who becomes the focus of the family's struggle for supremacy.

Peter Hall directs Ian Holm as Lenny in this 1973 film version, the role he created in the original stage version. Holm was to return to the play as the patriarch Max 28 years later.

Please note: The details above are not in order of transmission.

BBC Radio and BBCi programming

BBC Radio 3 and 4, and BBCi programming

Further details of the *Pinter at the BBC* Radio season will be confirmed shortly



Night Waves – Pinter Moments Monday 28 October-Friday 8 November

As part of *Pinter at the BBC*, *Night Waves* on BBC Radio 3 runs a series of *Pinter Moments* – short interviews with some of Pinter’s closest colleagues, collaborators and admirers. Each one focuses on a scene from Pinter’s stage or screen work, providing insights into both the man and his method of working.



The Birthday Party Saturday 2 November

Charles Lefeaux directs Sylvia Coleridge, Cyril Shaps, John Hollis, Barbara Mitchell, Lee Montagu and Norman Rodway in *The Birthday Party*, first broadcast in 1970.

For further details of *The Birthday Party*, please see page 8.

A Slight Ache Friday 15 November

Marion Greenwood, 020 7765 2629

Recorded in October 2000 as part of Radio 4’s week-long celebrations to mark Harold Pinter’s 70th birthday, this classic radio play stars Harold Pinter as Edward and Jill Johnson as Flora. *A Slight Ache* was first broadcast on the BBC’s Third Programme in 1959 and first staged at the Arts Theatre in 1961.

During a single day, the bucolic life of Flora and Edward is threatened by the appearance of a matchseller at their garden gate, endangering the safety of the study, scullery and garden.

Exclusive footage of the recording of *A Slight Ache* can be seen in *Arena: Harold Pinter*.



www.bbc.co.uk/pinter

Log on to www.bbc.co.uk/pinter (live from 14 October) for full details of *Pinter at the BBC*.

To accompany the season, BBCi shows exclusive clips of *Arena’s* interviewees, alongside video clips of a recent interview between Pinter and the programme’s director, Nigel Williams. The production team behind *Arena* share their insights on working with the playwright for the past two years.

Users can trace Pinter’s life and works through the last 40 years, examining the impact of his plays, poetry and politics on his world and the world around him. There is also an opportunity for users to join a discussion and add their thoughts on this timely celebration of one of the world’s greatest playwrights.