The Arts

Pop Larkin on the Stage

Mr. Bates's May Day Dream

Pop Larkin Peter Jones Ma Larkin ELSPETH MARCH Mariette ... Antonia Gilpin
Mr. Charlton ... John Standing
Brigadier ... Kynaston Reeves
Miss Pilchester
ROSAMUND GREENWOOD
Tax Inspector Duncan Lewis
Directed by Jack Minster

Mr. H. E. Bates's The Darling Buds Mr. H. E. Bates's The Darling Buds of May, already popular as a novel and present with us as a film, came to boisterous and energetic life at the Saville Theatre last night. The audience, enthralled from its first glimpse of Mr. Timothy O'Brien's attractive set, played its part with an enthusiasm rivalling that of the actors.

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As an audience, we condone the evasion of income tax, for Pop Larkin's failure to acknowledge correspondence from the Commissioners of Inland Revenue is the mainspring of the action; we approve of the destruction of country mansions to enrich the opulent Larkins and are puzzled by Sir George Bluff-Gor's thow the name tells a tale!) reluctance to part with his home; we are simply amused when a 17-year-old girl is unable to decide who might be the father of her prospective child; we are delighted that Ma Larkin encourages her husband to bring a little (but only a little) love into lonely spinsters' lives; we have a genuine but amused pity for the brigadier, who conceives that he has a social duty.

Let us, so far as we can, excuse ourselves by blaming other people. Miss Elspeth March and Mr. Peter Jones career with infectious, jet-propelled enjoyment through the piece and convey a sincere love of the simple life with two television sets, a cocktail bar worthy of the Ritz, and a possibly ducal Rolls-Royce.

A good deal of blame can also be laid at the doors of Miss Antonia Gilpin and Mr. John Standing, Nothing that Mr. Bates demands of Miss Gilpin is likely to strain her capabilities as an actress, but she plays with verve and charm. Mr. Standing, after a beautifully convincing attack of drunkenness, provides the play with a good, stout lifeline to connect it with reality. Finally, in our exculpation, Mr. Jack Minster has produced the play with speed and vitality, and numerous small parts all score precise bull's-eyes.

Should a rough critical wind be allowed to arise and shake these buls' on all sides one heard that the play is "warm"; the escape from inhibitions is, one admits, the best sort of holiday. What, after all, is wrong with Mr. Bates's gently anarchic, wish-fulfilling day dream?

The gentleness, one may say, is in the spirit rather than the language or the performance; take away the boisterousness and th