

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1993

T H E A T E R

REVIEW

Alienation in Its Sad and Comic Modes

THERE AREN'T many theaters, among Long Island's many, where you might see an absurdist/existential doubleheader of drama, exploring alienation, isolation and a lot of other stuff we all feel but rarely admit to.

Edward Albee's "The Zoo Story" and Samuel Beckett's "Krapp's Last Tape" may sound like pretty rough going. On the surface, yes, both one-act plays are unconventional and depressing.

But they're also very funny.

You may notice, as you're watching, they're a lot like life.

"The Zoo Story" is one of Albee's early works — before "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" made him famous. It's a frightening story, mostly because it is so believable and, in a way, ordinary. Peter is a nebbishy, middle-class family man with a wife, two daughters, two cats and a parakeet, not to mention a home. He's attempting to read a book in Central Park. This is Peter's bench. He comes here often to read. But today, he is approached by a talkative transient named Jerry. If "The Zoo Story" had been written more recently than the '50s, Jerry would be homeless. As it is, he lives in half a room in the back of a fourth-floor walk-up populated by other marginal citizens.

Jerry feigns passivity and pacifism. But we discover as he talks — and talks and talks — with little encouragement from Peter — that he's really quite aggressive. And probably dangerous. Peter, who by nature is reticent to offend anyone, avoids offending Jerry, at first out of politeness, later out of fear. This shift from tedium to tension occurs incrementally and almost imperceptibly until Jerry sets himself up for the shocking result he has sought all along.

Rick Miller, as Peter, is a comic nerd. And Tom McCreesh, while convincing in his controlled derangement, is a little *too* annoying as Jerry. His constant pacing, while very much in character, becomes a distraction.

Maybe there's a way to pace his pacing.

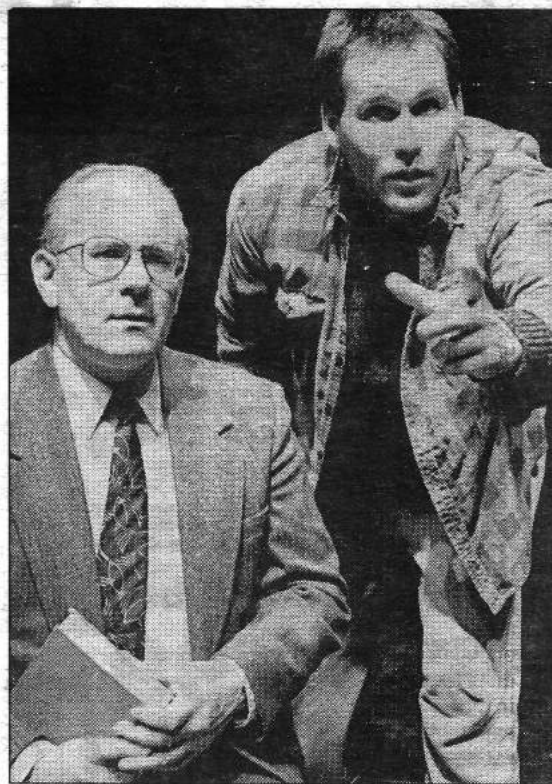
The second one-act, Beckett's "Krapp's Last Tape," is typically minimalist for the author of "Waiting for Godot."

There is no monologue at all for the first several minutes in this one-man play. And little is spoken throughout. Most of the language is delivered by playing back a spool of reel-to-reel tape.

Rick Miller conveys the senility and physical restrictions of a lonely, old man with the poignancy of a sad-face clown. The disorder of the old man's life is reflected both in his comic forgetfulness and in the disorder of the tapes strewn about his desk.

John Monteleone, artist-in-residence at Dowling College, has directed both one-acts with an obvious love and sensitivity for the material.

And besides, the price is right. / ■



Rick Miller and Tom McCreesh in Albee's 'The Zoo Story,' top, and Rick Miller in Beckett's 'Krapp's Last Tape,' below



THE ZOO STORY and KRAPP'S LAST TAPE.

A pair of one-act plays by Edward Albee and Samuel Beckett, respectively. Starring Rick Miller and Tom McCreesh. Directed by John Monteleone. At Dowling College's Performing Arts Center, Oakdale. Through Sunday night. Free admission. Seen Jan. 28.