

# Contemporary classics shine at Dowling

by Kevin Molloy

Finally, locally produced dramatic plays you can sink your mind into.

With the Long Island theatrical landscape littered with campy Broadway musical revivals, Dowling College built a small performing arts center with a black-box theater on their Oakdale campus several years ago, and hired East Islip native John Monteleone to fill it with the contemporary dramatic classics local theatergoers now have to travel some 50 miles to see. And after a string of critically acclaimed performances there, the college's Artist-In-Residence once again achieves success in his direction of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* and Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*.

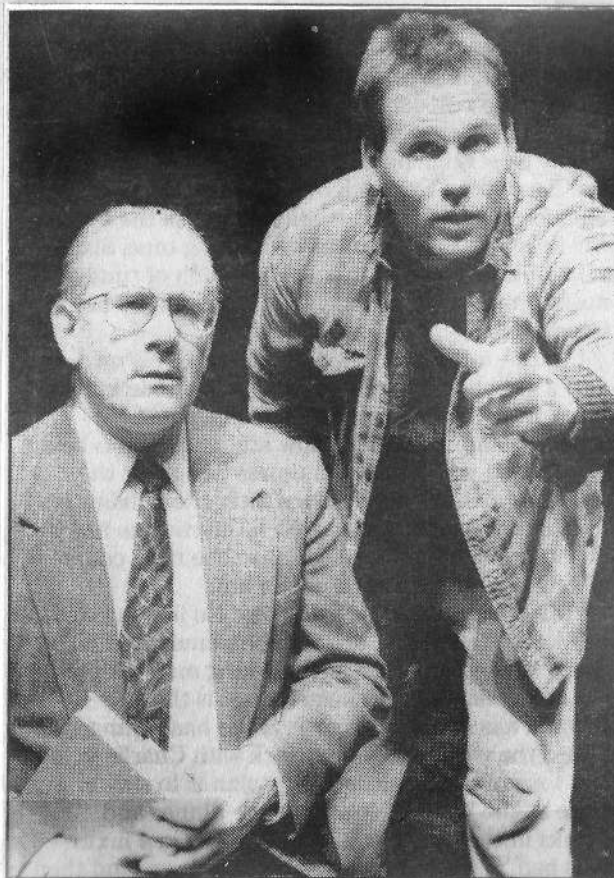
While not the usual fare you'll find in any of a number of local playhouses, the two one-act dramas provide captivating performances of intense storylines that draw in the theater's small audience like an old friend sharing a story.

It's the reaction that Monteleone, a playwright himself, has sought to bring to Long Island theater for so long, after seeing such works succeed across the country only to fail here.

"I think what theater should be is what college is - challenging and enjoyable. We're going to do challenging works for the Dowling community and for Long Island audiences here," he said. "To me, theater is a process of evolution. Audiences should be involved in someone else's truth. They can agree or disagree with it, but not be told a patronizing lie . . . [right now] theaters really have to do audience pleasers, because, let's face it, they have to pay the rent. Long Island audiences don't want to deal with intellectual ideas and humanity."

The two plays he's currently directing at Dowling, though, do just that. While not overly cerebral works at face value, both have a compelling story line that keep you entertained while at the same time force you to think about the world. And the performances by actors Rick Miller and Tom McCreesh are brilliant.

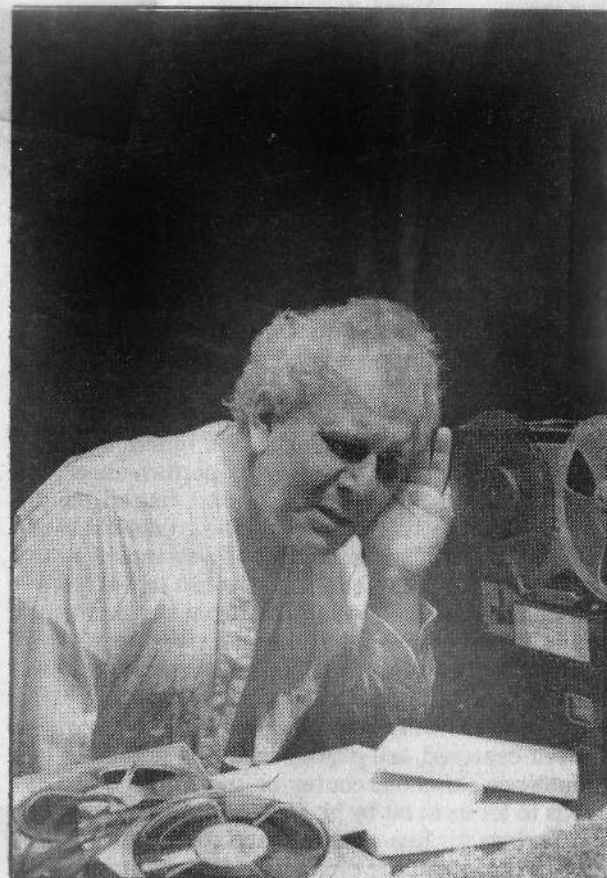
In *The Zoo Story*, set in New York City's Central Park, the story of two men's very different lives unfold before us in a conversation at a park bench. Peter (played with perfect minimalistic actions by Miller) is a middle-aged, middle-class



Rick Miller (left) and Tom McCreesh (right) star in 'The Zoo Story,' now playing at Dowling College.

family man feeling rather comfortable and secure about his life as he sits reading a book on his favorite park bench. But when Peter (fantastically performed in just the right off-balanced manner by McCreesh), a poor mid-twenties loner who lives in a nearby roominghouse, stops to talk to and question him with some untold purpose, we're drawn into a harrowing portrait of a young man alienated from the human race. And Peter, as he later discovers for himself, is just as isolated in his own world, only in a different way.

Miller returns with a solo performance in *Krapp's Last Tape*, turning in a wonderfully absurd and melancholy performance. With the entire play set around a desk holding a reel-to-reel tape recorder and boxes of tapes, we find a man in his twilight years listening to the tape-recorded diary he has kept and cross indexed for most of



Rick Miller as Krapp in Dowling's production of 'Krapp's Last Tape'.

his life. Now a bitter and senile old man, whose physical appearance and actions can't help but draw laughter, he alternates between listening to his innermost thoughts of 40 years before and making a new recording, both sounding hauntingly familiar without him ever really realizing it. Forty years apart, the same man tape records musings of what a fool he was when he was younger, when looking at life in retrospect.

Both performances, including the minimalist stage and lighting design by Monteleone, are highly effective in drawing the attention to the performers.

*The Zoo Story* and *Krapp's Last Tape* will be performed on February 4, 5 and 6 at 8 p.m. at Dowling's Performing Arts Center in Oakdale. Admission is free, but reservations should be made by calling 244-3155 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., and on Saturdays at 244-3399.