



KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

By Samuel Beckett, New Ambassadors Theatre.

JOHN Hurt has received a lot of praise for his performance in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* and it has much to recommend it, but it falls short of the highest standards.

Hurt's banana-munching old man Krapp, listening to tapes of younger incarnations of himself, is a broken, morose and desperate man. Hurt's craggy features, similar to those of Beckett himself, and his gravelly, sombre voice, create a tragic impression of a lonely figure, sifting the wreckage of his life. But, compared to other performances, particularly those taped for the BBC by Jack MacGowran and Max Wall, he overstates the tragic elements.

One questions whether he has a strong feeling for Beckett's language, which combines pathos with humour as his performance underplays the latter.

As he delivers the line "what with the fire in me now" it is with such resignation that we do not laugh at Krapp's absurd optimism. He fails, too, to get across all the poetry of the language. His reading is too flatly prosaic.

However, his performance is

one valid interpretation, probably fuelled by his own tragic life experiences, including three broken marriages, a drink problem and the recent death of his father.

But when Hurt has discussed the play he has emphasised its "heavy, monumental" quality and not mentioned humour. *Krapp's Last Tape* runs until March 11.

DAVID SMITH

■ *Krapp's Last Tape* is at the New Ambassadors, WC2 until March 11.



ONE-SIDED: John Hurt as Beckett's Krapp.