There have been attempts to personalize, dramatize and recreate the tradition of orally transmitted history, legends and tales, but most of the attempts have been undertaken by people whose approach is based on intellectual, academic stimuli for the purpose of recording the spoken account before it completely disappears or simply as another exercise in academic diversity. Instead of preserving the tradition, this process often destroys the very quality which it is trying to save.

For the past few years a group of young Appalachians working through the Appalshop, an organization gathering the traditions and culture of Appalachia on film as well as making sensitive statements about Appalachia’s culture of today, have been attempting to revitalize the oral tradition with their recreation of “Jack Tales.”

The Roadside Theatre is an unusual effort to carry on the art of storytelling. In the past they have drawn their material from the great wealth of stories still carried in the minds of many old people who live in the areas of southwest Virginia and eastern Kentucky. Living in Whitesburg, Kentucky, they have collected and memorized dozens of tales that were once familiar to most of the residents of that area. It is their latest effort that culminates their search for the roots and the role of the storyteller, a search that has produced a new storyteller, not a copy of the past, regardless of the quality of authentic reproduction, but a new storyteller rooted in the traditions of the past, raised in the present, with a unique ability to combine both elements to produce original art.

_Hangin’ Red Fox_, written and performed by Don Baker and the Roadside Theatre is a blend of written and oral history, fact and fiction, with recollections of both, films and photographs and most importantly, eyeball to eyeball contact with four talented storytellers as they relate the story of “Doc” Taylor, the “Red Fox,” an honest-to-God folk hero whose life and time bursts into this modern age with a vitality unimagined possible, through the art of the new storytellers.

—Ron Short