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Poughkeepsie, NY

# 'Tales' intrigue youngsters

By JAMES G. SHINE  
Reviewer

**POUTHKEEPSIE** — They talk about tall and strong sycamore trees. Then describe the sound of rustling leaves.

There is an imitation of the howling wind as it speeds up the mountains and down into the valleys.

In fable form, there is a step-by-step description of what happened to a kind and trusting opossum that gave a helping hand to a mean snake. It got bitten. Terrible thing for the persimmon-loving opossum!

Roadside Theater's Mountain Tales and Music, a Bardavon 2000 presentation, offers all these simple but magical features to children.

Three players of a 12-member company are the central figures. Tommy Bledsoe, Angelyn DeBord and Ron Short are the recounters. They also play a spirited banjo and a melodious guitar.

The players sing wonderful songs and children are urged to join them. The small ones cheer, laugh heartily and eagerly plead to join the performers on stage to play impromptu roles.

With enormous determination and admirable self-confidence, a 5-year-old may stand stage center and imitate a nanny goat. Another one will be dead serious while imitating a horse.

Roadside Theater does not solely aim at entertaining. The ensemble has the commendable mission of preserving a nationalistic tradition — the art of folk-story telling, and

## Review

musical interpretations.

Based on material passed from generation to generation in the southern Appalachian mountains, the tales are based on love, human relations and the beauty of flora and fauna.

The folk group's home is in the central Appalachian coalfields of eastern Kentucky and southwestern Virginia. All of the group

performers are natives of that part of the country.

The show's most attractive quality is its uncomplicated theatrical concept. The performers are champion mimics, but their approach to the audience is direct, unencumbered by acting complexities.

Fortunately, the group has not been limited to its homeground, having toured the United States as well as the Scandinavian countries.

The show's importance rests in its spirit of American heritage and the effort to keep it alive.