

TENNESSEAN *Nashville*  
LIVING

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## Red Fox Worthy Yarn To Spin

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**T**HE ENGAGINGLY durable art of storytelling—"yarnspinnin", to use the Kentucky vernacular in which *Red Fox/Second Hangin'* is told, was employed with style by the Roadside Theater in its three weekend appearances here.

Brought to Nashville by the Metro Board of Parks and Recreation, the 3-man company presented two performances of *Red Fox* at the Looby theater, and a Saturday morning staging of *Jack Tales* in Centennial Park.

**USING THE** vocal mannerisms and body gestures of rural Kentucky yarn spinners to tell the story of Doc Taylor (the Red Fox of the title, who was the second man to be hanged in Letcher County, Ky.), and his friends and enemies, Frankie Taylor, Don Baker and Gary Slemph re-

created the "born storytellers" who instinctively dramatize, build suspense, and weave backwoods humor into folk legend and history.

Being skilled actors, the three men made this form of theater seem easy, unstudied, and spontaneously natural.

Doc Taylor was a mountain hero to some, a con- niver to others. He knew a lot about medicine, was a preacher too, a woman's man, a spell caster who knew every inch of his county and trained himself to be a surveyor.

He didn't take part in feuds, didn't take part in the "Silver War" (Civil War), and would have lived a long and contented life in all probability, but for taking a job as U.S. marshal. This made him a natural adversary in a rough county marked by "killin', moonshine, and Silver War grudges."

Their long recounting of the story of Doc Taylor, with the three tale tellers taking all the parts (hilarious as the women, amusing as the children, touching as the elderly men), is a delicious tour de force, part ghost story, part characterization, and part marvelously quiet storytelling.

**GARY SLEMP** especially, had a low key way of repeating a tag line by Don Baker, and Frankie Taylor could whoop into a rowdy evocation of Bad Talt Hall or Devil John Wright, with all three braiding their lines into a fascinating plait of words.

Early Kentucky scenes from the area in which the story is set were projected on a screen behind the actors, and there was a film strip of the mountain road and the ambush killing of Bad Ira Mullins and his family—the murders for which Doc Taylor was to be framed and hanged—that looked as if it had actually been made at the time. The time being the early 1890s, that couldn't be, but sepia washed, the artful film erased any doubts of its "authenticity."

Antiphonal, authentic in style, warmly human, *Red Fox/Second Hangin'* is a full length evening of theater, but as the tale tellers say, "the yarn it takes a long time to spin and a long time to weave the fabric."