

Pain & beauty from the Kentucky mountainside

By MARILYN STASIO

"I'VE come to believe that everybody's got to have a place they can come home to."

That's a line from *South of the Mountain* (at the Dance Theater Workshop, 219 W. 19th St.), an extraordinary theater piece by the Roadside Theater of Whitesburg, Kentucky.

The story sung and narrated with such serenely beautiful simplicity by Ron Short, Nancy Jeffrey, and Tom Bledsoe was drawn by Short from the collective memories and experiences of his

own family.

Told in two movements that might be subtitled "Things We Learn and Things We Lose," it opens on the harsh but nonetheless happy life of a family of farmers, and progresses through marriages, births, and a lot of funny country-folk tales to the younger generation's defection from farm to minefields.

Although the sense of loss conveyed through the stark dialogue and haunting music is at times excruciatingly painful, the piece doesn't really look back to sentimentalize a bucolic past of church socials, barn

dances, and mountain fox-hunts. It is the country values dignifying this austere life that Roadside celebrates, and the dis-connectedness from these values that Roadside mourns, all the while attempting a re-connection through song and story.

The flinty humor that glints throughout *South of the Mountain* is more deliberately mined by Jo Carson, another storyteller in DTW's month-long series of narrative-theater programming.

A native of Johnson City, Tenn., Miss Carson is a regional poet who collects monologues and

dialogues based on real-life conversations with people she encounters in her home territory.

As delivered by the poet in a dusty twang, these richly humorous *People Pieces* offer an affectionate and understanding voice to the mechanics, farmhands, factory-workers, and porch-setters throughout the region who are just dying to speak their piece.

Visitors to DTW during its current celebration of down-home eloquence will also have the chance to view *Appalachian Women*, a remarkable photographic exhibit by Wendy Ewald, and to become acquainted with the valuable documentary films of Appalachian history and culture produced by Appalshop, the regional collective that is home base for all these artists.