

Iowa City

# Press-Citizen

## Hancher folks meet Appalachia 'South of Mountain'

By David K. Rod 5/11/92  
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Three performers, some songs, a few straight-backed chairs and the story of a mountain family. Roadside Theater's dramatic musical *South of the Mountain*, which played Friday and Saturday at Hancher, uses simple means to celebrate a simple way of life.

The story goes like this: On a hillside farm in the mountains of Virginia, brothers Thaddeus and Everett and their mama live an idyllic existence. They work hard. They make their own music and their own fun. They are self-sufficient and satisfied.

Trouble comes with the arrival of the coal company and the

Conservation Corps. Thad leaves home, first to earn money at the CC camp, later to support his family as a coal miner.

Money is the real villain of the piece, because money makes you want things you don't already have. The coal dust destroys Thad's health. In the end, he has to leave the mountains altogether.

Mama clings to the old ways, but eventually she dies. Everett stays behind on the farm, where the government pays him not to plant crops. "I don't want to go back," he says, "and I didn't much want to go on, so I guess I was stuck. At least, I knew where I was at."

Such nuggets of folk wisdom

seem to characterize playwright Ron Short's style. *South of the Mountain* is loaded with them.

This is a very good-natured show. The performers — Short himself, along with Tommy Bledsoe and Nancy Jeffrey — are all natives of the central Appalachian region, a fact that adds an aura of authenticity to the proceedings. They tell their stories with humor and grace, banter back and forth with one another and make a determined effort to build rapport with the audience.

It would take a cynic to find serious fault with a show that expresses so much good will.

The program says Roadside Theater hopes its work will help

"strengthen cultural resources," both in Appalachia and in the communities it visits. Thus, *South of the Mountain* is theater with a mission. Thad sums up the moral by saying of his family, "They was happy, because they was home." We in the audience are admonished not to lose touch with our own home, wherever it might be — not to use up its resources without giving anything back.

With these performances, Roadside Theater concludes a two-week residency in the Iowa City area.

They'll be back in September and October. Mark your calendar.

*David K. Rod is a former UI theater faculty member.*