

Foxy Folks

By Arthur Sainer

RED FOX/SECOND HANGIN'. A theatre piece by the Roadside Theatre, presented recently at the Theatre for the New City, 113 Jane Street.

MACBETH. The Orson Welles adaptation of Shakespeare's play, directed by Edmund Cambridge for the New Federal Theatre, Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand Street, 766-9334.

The Roadside Theatre is based in the Appalachian town of Whitesburg, Kentucky, and the troupe thinks of itself as traveling storytellers. The story its several members are currently telling (performed recently at Theatre for the New City) is called *Red Fox/Second Hangin'*, and it's of old Doc Taylor, red-bearded mystic, sometime herb doctor, sometime marshal, preacher, and surveyor, who kills moonshiner Ira Mullins in 1892 and is eventually hanged for his deed.

Three performers pass the narration around from one to the other, somewhat in the manner of Faulkner's narrators spelling each other in *Absalom, Absalom!* except that the Roadside performers, using an oral tradition, break into oddly pitched choral sounds at intervals. Behind them, as they tell this tale of manhunts and ambushes and hangings, are projections of period photographs that seem to be all eyes and old boots and hangdog whiskers and ditches and pockmarked roads and lonely cabins clinging obstinately to the sides of seemingly eroding cliffs. The extraordinary photographs evoke the sense of spirits uprooted; vacant and starving eyes seem to peruse the elements; there is that haunting *Wisconsin Death Trip* sense of the doomed past memorializing itself, intimating that it is seeing its own past, seeing its own time, its own doom.

The company performs with good humor, with a rural heartiness. It is more positive than the photographs—the latter speak of doom, of that which is lost, while the narrators speak as if to encourage the dead to return for another round of hard male pranks.

Roadside is part of the regional network of southern theatres called Alternate Roots, born last fall after the "Nuts and Bolts" sessions at Baltimore's New Theatre Festival addressed the pressing need for such alliances for touring companies. To my knowledge, Roadside is the first of this network to reach New York and it's a pleasure to have seen them.

A word about the New Federal Theatre's *MacBeth*. It's based on the Orson Welles-Federal Theatre production of 1936, which transferred the action to the West Indies and made it a black tragedy. If the current producers had properly respected what Welles had done, they would either have found competent people to mount this work or kept their hands off. They chose to do neither. ■