

## HANCHER



Dan Carraco

Roadside Theatre and Appalachia and Junebug Productions from Louisiana celebrated the cultural richness and kinship of poverty-stricken Appalachia and the black deep South in "Junebug / Jack" this weekend at Hancher.

## Joyful stories, songs in 'Junebug / Jack'

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The Daily Iowan

"The only war that's fair to fight is the war to fight oppression," sang the Junebug / Jack companies Saturday night at Hancher.

That line from one of the many songs they sang sums up their view on the world, really. The show comprised six people, and although a small company in appearance, when they sang it was like listening to a chorus of the wind whipping around before the storm sets in.

The Junebug Theater Project's main character, Junebug, a mythic African-American folk character, was created in the 1960s by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The Roadside Theater's character, Jack, represents a poor young man from the Appalachia. During the performance, it was told to the audience that these two characters are virtually the same. They both represent hope, the human spirit overcoming oppression.

Junebug's history was told to the audience by John O'Neal, who played the storyteller, Junebug. He revealed there wasn't just one Junebug, rather, hundreds. The first Junebug went from plantation to plantation, listening to stories people told and then retelling them at the next plantation to let people know what others were doing. This brought the people closer together and they were not alone. He gave them hope through his stories. He also kept his eye out for those that would make good storytellers themselves, then they would also be Junebugs. "You see," he explained, "Junebug's not a name, it's a title of sorts."

Jack's story was told as a David and Goliath tale where David gets the better of Goliath through his wit.

Through the tales and songs, we see that these two seemingly different people are really very much the same. They laugh and cry with their families and yes, they are hurt and oppressed by many, whether by calling them "hillbillies" or "niggers." It does the same

"I thought it was the promised land but I ended up believing in nothing and no one." This introduced the next song — "you can lose your very souls living in cities of gold."

The entire performance was a learning experience wrapped in decades-old folk songs and oral histories. It's too bad schools often dismiss folk tales and songs for the advantage of "higher learning." These stories didn't dwell in the distant past, they marched right up through the years, even through Korea and Vietnam with simple songs that carried very clear messages. "Brother, won't you come home soon," sang Kim Neal Cole of the Roadside Theater. "Brother, what's a hero and why do you have to go away to be one?" Michael Keck's sturdy voice rang out through the silent auditorium, "Vietnam, where the sweetest flower died on the vine; Vietnam, it'll steal your heart, it'll steal your mind."

The end of the performance brought up the inequality of the sexes, the inequality of everyone as long as someone is oppressed. These serious topics were broken up with jokes thrown in such as Junebug's Latteta Theresa's "and they still blame us (women) for original sin!"

In what the audience thought was the finale, Ron Short yelled out with his southern drawl, "Wait a minute, these people have been sitting still waaaaay too long." The group then managed to get the entire audience chanting while the performers continued the finale.

Of course they received a standing ovation, whereupon they brought people on stage to dance with them.

Ron Short thanked the audience with this speech, "I want to thank the community because it is the life blood of the theater. What happens here (on the stage) and what happens out there (points to audience) is the theater. That sounds like a Jimmy Dean sausage commercial, doesn't it?" While he was speaking, everyone in the audience was standing up, listening to him and waiting for the music to start