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Junebug/Jack: unity, uniqueness

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POP MUSIC CRITIC

REVIEW

If the lines separating blacks and whites were as discernible as the slash in the name Junebug/Jack, it would make things a lot easier.

The groups — Junebug Theater Project from New Orleans and the Roadside Theater from the Appalachians in Whitesburg, Ky. — joined hands Friday and Saturday nights in the Metropolitan Arts Center's Loft Theater and will do so again at 3 p.m. today. Junebug/Jack was brought to Dayton by Cityfolk.

In story and song, the traditions of both African-American and Appalachian cultures blend Junebug Jabbo Jones — Junebug being a common African nickname for junior, or runt — and Jack, a common Appalachian name depicting hard-headed wisdom and perseverance.

The five-member troupe began by mumbling all the stereotypes that both cultures can think of

to call the other.

Kim Neal tells the audience she's glad to be in Dayton and that we share a common road, Interstate 75, or "hillbilly highway."

"Now I can say that," she said. "It's real important who says that."

Smiles, chuckles of recognition and moving detail are woven into the 90-minute production, as both sides give insights into the commonality of struggle and oppression.

"That line's important," Junebug's Carl LeBlanc said, calling attention to the slash again. "We're separate but joined at the hip."

Illustrating that point was the song *Dixie*, "a story that can start somewhere and end up somewhere else."

The tune, rife with Confederate imagery, with a few minor changes became *Jubilo*, a song

sung by slaves hearing the Emancipation Proclamation.

Nancy Jeffrey tells a compelling story, as a mother who loses a son to a war, although he returns alive.

Ron Short's beautiful voice and electrifying story of Vietnam, as can be told only by one who served there, is matched only by the storytelling of John O'Neal as Junebug Jabbo Jones.

The company will be returning to Dayton several times in the next few years for The Dayton Stories Project, a series of workshops and storytelling sessions that will culminate in 1996 with a theater work based on our stories and produced by Dayton's Human Race Theatre.

Troupe members mingle with show-goers afterward, for those who want to share their histories.

"The theater isn't the end, but the stimulus of the conversation," O'Neal said. "We're trying to build a unity from the uniqueness of each of us."