

'Junebug/Jack' explores power, exploitation

BY LARRY L. KUBERT
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Songs, stories and anecdotes presented through the voices of Appalachia mountain folk and Southern African Americans comprise "Junebug/Jack: A Play of Stories and Songs from Two Cultures," currently running at the Johnny Carson Theatre in the Lied complex.

The 80-minute production — which is a collaboration between the Junebug Theatre Project of New Orleans and the Roadside Theatre of Kentucky — features a small company of five black and white performers who edify and enlighten, as well as entertain, while exhorting the importance of self-dependence and commitment.

The production's title comes from a collaboration of the characters of Junebug — a mythical black

On stage

- **What:** "Junebug/Jack: A Play of Stories and Songs from Two Cultures"
- **Where:** Johnny Carson Theater, 11th and Q streets
- **When:** 8 p.m. today
- **Tickets:** \$20, \$10 students; 472-4747 or (800) 432-3231

folk character created by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the 1960s civil rights

activities to represent the wisdom of struggling African Americans — and Jack — the archetypal Appalachian hero who utilizes wit and human spirit to overcome unfair adversities.

Opening with a seeming informality that belies the depth and resolution of the production, the company of Adella Gautier, John O'Neal, Ron Short, Kim Neal and Nancy Jeffrey Smith initiate the evening with some broad homespun humor and laughter, but gently move their audience members into more subtle and somber topics until ultimately, they numbingly, yet disturbingly expose the offensive exploitation of the weaker — black or white — by the powerful and strong.

In song stylings that conjure up the folk imagery and political liberalism of Woody Guthrie, the cast

performs inspired a cappella harmonies and tunes accompanied by guitar, banjo and fiddle, or they tell stories about slavery, pride, prejudice, disappearing values, labor organization, Vietnam and civil rights.

O'Neal opens the show with the story of Junebug, relating how the character is really not a person, but rather a title representative of collective, massed peoples.

As the wily and resourceful Jack, Neal impishly relates the vanquishing via cunning of the cruel and greedy county "king," whose subjugation and abuse of those weaker than he has turned him into a petty despot.

The show's cast is tight and motivated in their performances, with the production arousing the often slumbering passions of equality and righteousness.