

'South Of The Mountain' Comfortable, Homely

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"South of the Mountain" opened last night (just north of Broad) at the Dock Street Theatre.

"South of the Mountain" is the third production in the Events series. Events is produced by Jim Kearny, and he must be congratulated for bringing in professional, high calibre and entertaining theater. The variety of the series is totally refreshing.

Historically, drama began with story-tellers relating tales to any assemblages gathered anywhere. After a time, motions were added to the stories, as well as more people. Soon, the people traveled and told their stories on wagons, in town squares winding up, eventually, in churches and amphitheatres.

Produced by Roadside Theatre, "South of the Mountain" takes a step back dramatically and relates in downhome story-telling fashion, the escapades of several generations of a mountain-country family. The yarns spun by author Ron Short, Tom Bledsoe and Nancy Jeffrey are interlaced with 12 musical

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numbers. Tale and tune are well-knit, and the fabric of the production is strong, comfortable and homely.

The musical numbers are performed primarily in ballad style, accompanied appropriately by guitar, banjo, fiddle and harmonica. The songs are tales in themselves and punctuate the mountain celebration. The audience is treated to a range of numbers from foot stomping huck-a-buck (that's what its called in North Carolina) to melancholic airs (from the upbeat "I'm Going To Change My Style" to the "Wedding Bell Waltz").

Each performer has the opportunity to solo, duo and trio. The blend achieved on stage was marvelously warm. Although the voices were not vocally sophisticated, the free and easy open style singing was appreciated, judging from the spontaneous audience response after each number.

The show is presented in two parts. The first part is a celebra-

tion of life in the mountains as it was in the early 1900s. The love of the land was evident. Some of the lyrics state "Land of a million secrets, land that gives us life." In the plaintiff "This Old Farm" the lyrics state that the land is as much as part of life as breathin'; there's nothin' more precious than this land. Part I is also extremely humorous. The various tales told by the three proficient performers include incidents of country humor that have the audience chuckling, then laughing out loud.

Each performer readily establishes rapport with the audience. In story-telling fashion eye contact is made and maintained with the audience. In fact, if you are not careful you may even wind up on stage. What fun!

Following intermission Part II provides a look at the second generation and the industrialization and materialization of even the mountain people. The bucolic settings so reverently related in Part I becomes blackened coal camps where one sells one's soul to the company's store. However, the inevitable modernization of the area leads not to disap-

pointment but, perhaps, to a greater appreciation of that which was. Part II seemed to lose the intensity of the previous portion, and there were some problems hearing the spoken lines of the performers. The home-spun lines are too good to be missed,

and chances are the performers will adjust to the nuances of Dock Street Theatre.

If you are looking for family entertainment, audience participation and a delightful evening, "South of the Mountain" is for you. It was for me.