

# Theater Groups Drive Home Message

## Performers Call For New Attitudes

By TIM PRESTON  
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Members of two well-known touring theater companies which performed Thursday night at Mount Airy High School say their message is an important one for people of small cities like Mount Airy.

Members of the Appalachian based Roadside Theater have long advocated discussion of the disappearing ways of mountain people and the adversity they face in the world outside their mountains. At the same time members of JuneBug Productions have long sought to enlighten audiences to the problems faced by black people in the south. The cooperative effort goes a long way to prove that people everywhere face problems when prejudice and greed become priorities in a modern culture.

"We are political only in the sense that we provide an impulse and try to clarify what people can do to improve their own situation," Junebug Productions troupe member John O'Neal said before the Thursday performance. "This applies everywhere. I just found out that here in Mount Airy you have a lot of people working for less than minimum wage. Without a broad movement there is no way to deal with those sorts of things. If our conditions are to change it is up to us to change them ourselves. I can't say to any oppressed group 'Your suffering is over', I can only support people in their struggle to change."

Roadside Theater director Dudley Coke agreed with O'Neal's comments and added that the show "Junebug/Jack" is merely a reflection of problems faced by people who are often considered different.

"We want to prompt a discussion in Mount Airy or wherever we are," Coke said. "We just present this play and hope it will cause people to make a pact to move ahead."



Tim Preston/The Mount Airy News

John O'Neal (center) plays an older black man in one of the plays presented Thursday in Mount Airy.

The team effort began as an idea many years ago as both theater groups shared stages across the country. Although both groups focused on the problems faced by people of their own racial or geographical groups, they found striking similarities in their messages.

After scheduling problems were eliminated, the two groups got together, using songs and passages from both group's shows, to create an entirely new production.

The group's cumulative talent creates an inspiring mood from the stage. The powerful singing voice and original compositions of Junebug's Michael Keck combine with music written by Roadside's Ron Short for a stunning effect. Vocal performances by Nancy Jeffrey, Kim Cole, John

O'Neal and Leteita Theresa add a choir-like charm to the mix of traditional, gospel and blues numbers in the play.

Issues such as prejudice, slavery, disappearing values, workplace safety, pride, war and commitment to family are dealt with in a head-on manner. The two groups often use subtle humor or strong music to introduce their topics, but they do not shy away once the issue is out in the open.

The various talents of the members of both groups is a credit to their art, but cast members say they hope their message is the main image which goes home with their audience.

In Mount Airy it would seem that the audience definitely got the point. Several people who spoke with the cast members after the Thursday per-

formance echoed similar sentiments to those of an unidentified woman discussing the play with friends. "It is the kind of thing all of our children need to see," she said. "This should be performed everywhere to as many people as possible. We have to start thinking more about everybody else out there who has it as bad or worse than we do."

O'Neal says the issues being dealt with require only a small amount of thought combined with individual action. "People are intimidated by things with strong passion," he said. "All they have got to do is speak honestly to each other. They will soon realize the world doesn't come apart when they say what they feel."