

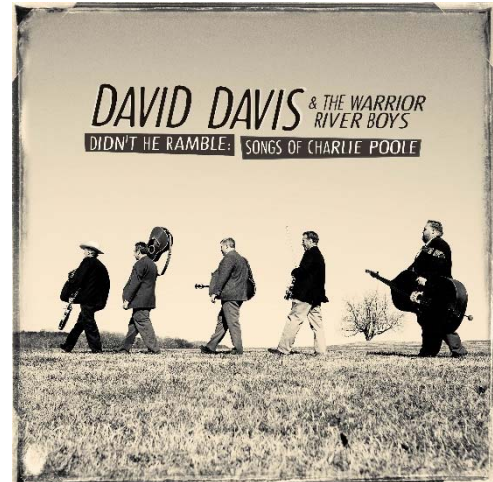


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David Davis and the Warrior River Boys *Didn't He Ramble: Songs of Charlie Poole* June 1, 2018

David Davis and the Warrior River Boys have long been recognized as modern leaders in traditional bluegrass, but on their latest release *Didn't He Ramble: Songs of Charlie Poole* they throw genre boundaries aside by delving deeper into the roots of acoustic music. They have produced a masterful and exciting collection of songs originally recorded in the 1920s by the legendary Charlie Poole and his North Carolina Ramblers, a generation before Bill Monroe is credited with founding bluegrass music. "Our intention was to evolve the songs, yet leave the strength and essence of the original feel as our foundation and build on that," explains Davis.



Didn't He Ramble is eagerly anticipated in bluegrass circles, as well as more widely among fans of folk and acoustic music. Co-producer David Davis is leading the charge, he is a veteran picker appearing on numerous classic bluegrass recordings and a recipient of countless awards in bluegrass and country music. Davis was partially inspired by one of Rounder Records founders, Ken Irwin, to consider a whole album of Charlie Poole material. First generation bluegrass masters Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys recorded a version of Poole's "White House Blues," and Poole's music was a common source of repertoire for many other early bluegrass bands. It's a practice that has sadly fallen into disuse, and is here revived by Davis and the Warrior River Boys.

"The idea of recording a tribute to Charlie Poole was very interesting to us," says Davis. "For a number of years we had mentioned him as our candidate for 'Grandfather of Bluegrass Music.' The best tribute that we could offer was to try to take the key elements from Poole's music and evolve that into more modern forms of traditional music, stating our case for Poole being not only a worthy candidate for 'Grandfather of Bluegrass,' but actually 'Grandfather' for a much broader roots music family." Davis continues, "This particular recording contains the most extensive variety of traditional roots styles that we have ever included on one recording, it's a marriage of old-time tunes melded with bluegrass instrumentation, rhythm, and harmonies."

Interest in Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers has never entirely ebbed, proven by Poole's inclusion on the classic Harry Smith Anthology of American Music; in the collectors' reissue set from Sony in a faux cigar box; and Loudon Wainwright III's reprise of Poole on *High, Wide, and Handsome*, which won the Traditional Folk Grammy Award in 2010. This music may not be widely-known, but it is deeply venerated among an ardent few, including Bob Dylan, who mentioned Poole in his Nobel Prize for Literature acceptance speech.



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Being that Poole and his music is the subject of such admiration, this is a musical repertoire some would find daunting to delve into with the Warrior River Boys energy, commitment and pure bluegrass spirit. Davis' own deep musical roots played a part in taking on this project, with his uncle Cleo Davis having been an original Blue Grass Boy with Bill Monroe. He grew up hearing bluegrass and early country music at his father's knee. From those early influences in rural Alabama, Davis went on to sing with his dad, everything from the Monroe Brothers, the Blue Sky Boys, to Cowboy Copas, and Ernest Tubb. At the impressionable age of twelve, with his family, he first heard Bill Monroe play live and his life was destined never to be the same.

Bluegrass music has been Davis' life-long calling, and he brings the same intensity to interpreting Charlie Poole material as he does to the world of traditional bluegrass. However, more than a single man's dedication is required, with bluegrass unquestionably being about the band as a whole entity. Collectively, the depth and breadth of the Warrior River Boys' ability is a bandleader's dream and brings *Didn't He Ramble* to life.

Banjo player Robert Montgomery, a 10 year veteran of the group and fellow Alabamian with a deep knowledge of and affinity for Poole's music, helped greatly in co-producing the album with Davis. His multi-tasking banjo, Travis-style guitar and high baritone vocals on "Old and Only in the Way," as well as his lead vocals on "Sweet Sunny South" and "Where the Whippoorwill Is Whispering Goodnight" complement the arrangements perfectly.

Marty Hays and Davis blend vocally like brothers, having sung together for more than two decades. Here Hays sings lead on most of the duets and sings tenor along with Davis' tenor on one tune, all while playing an inspired bass fiddle throughout. Stan Wilemon brings his masterful guitar-playing to the table, spiced with exciting but tasteful runs he provides a foundation for the Warrior River Boys own musical identity.

On fiddle, special musical guest Billy Hurt proved to be an inspired choice for capturing the feel and melodic touch for this music. Davis brings his dynamic and powerful Monroe-styled mandolin to the mix. Together the band digs deeper than any other modern band into the roots of bluegrass.

Recorded by Gary Gordon at Inside Out Studio, *Didn't He Ramble* is much more than a simple tribute or revival of an earlier style of music. The repertoire in these 14 songs runs the gamut of classic Charlie Poole, including several ballads and story songs, mid- to up-tempo humorous songs, and nostalgic tales of loss and home. This set of material is brought to life in a new form with all the fire and energy of the original recordings.

"Selecting fifteen songs from Poole's 80 recorded song repertoire was not easy, but we know that a number of different styles are represented on the recording, giving it a broader palette," says Davis. "Originally drawn from Tin Pan Alley, blues, old time and popular early twentieth century music, all these morphed easily into Poole's own unique style and just as easily into our current offering."

Davis sums up his feelings about his inspiration and motivation for the record, "We took Poole's songs and made them ours. We played them our way, with our own strengths, from our heart, head, and belly." This is the very definition of what feels true and authentic in traditional music. *Didn't He Ramble* not only breathes new life into old songs, but brings a spirit of rollicking fun and good humor that is as infectious as the music itself.