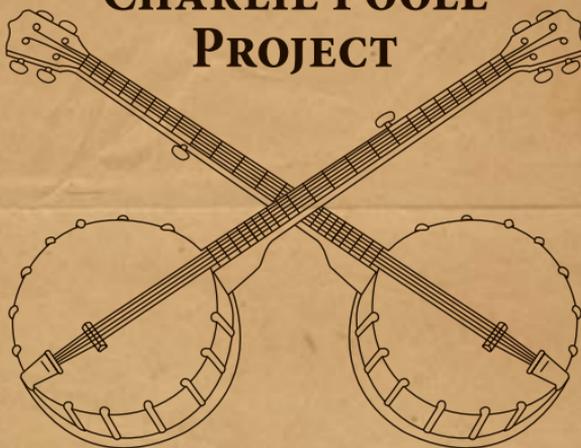


# HIGH WIDE & HANDSOME



the  
CHARLIE POOLE  
PROJECT



# LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III

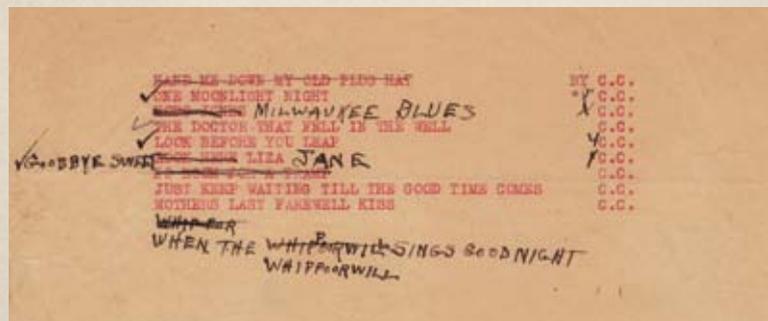
# THE CHARLIE POOLE PROJECT

## Volume 1

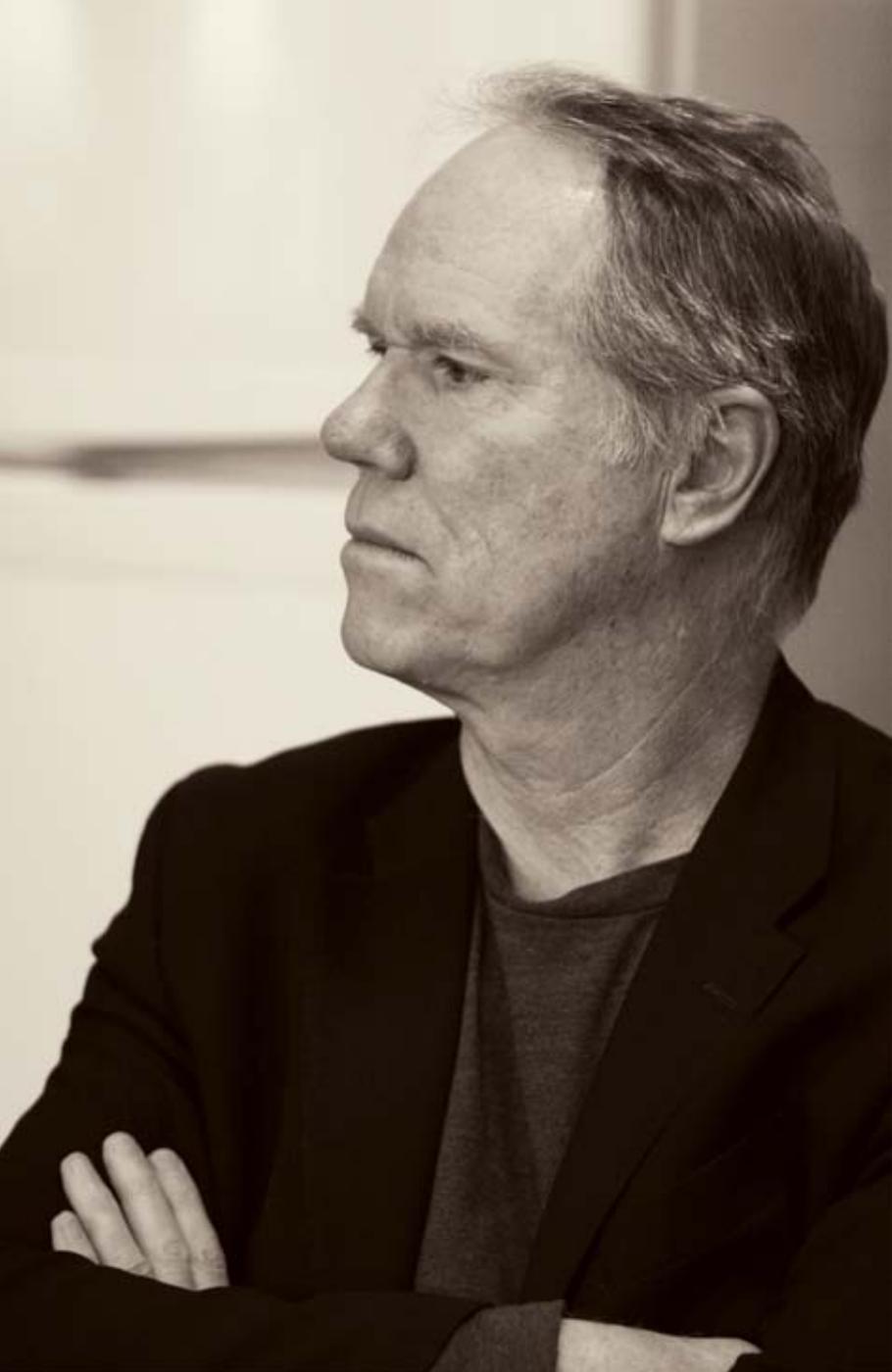
1. High Wide & Handsome
2. Took My Gal Out Walkin'
3. I'm The Man Who Rode The Mule  
Around The World
4. My Mother And My Sweetheart
5. Bill Mason's Bride
6. Goodbye Booze
7. Old Ballyhoo
8. Little Waterloo
9. I'm Glad I'm Married
10. Mother's Last Farewell Kiss
11. Acres Of Diamonds
12. Way Up In NYC
13. If I Lose
14. The Great Reaping Day
15. Where The Whippoorwill Is  
Whispering Goodnight

## Volume 2

1. The Man In The Moon
2. The Deal
3. No Knees
4. Moving Day
5. Old And Only In The Way
6. Ragtime Annie
7. Sweet Sunny South
8. The Letter That Never Came
9. Awful Hungry Hash House
10. Rowena
11. Didn't He Ramble
12. Ramblin' Blues
13. Charlie's Last Song
14. Beautiful
15. High Wide & Handsome  
(reprise)



Charlie's handwritten notes on his last recording session set list - September 9, 1930



## ME & CHARLIE

I think I was at Patrick Sky's house in Perryville, RI in the early 1970s when I first became aware of Charlie Poole. Pat picked up a guitar (maybe it was a banjo) and sang me a bit of *Awful Hungry Hash House* and the line "The beefsteak it was rare and the butter had red hair" immediately made me do two things, almost simultaneously: 1) laugh out loud, and 2) wonder "Who the hell wrote that?" Pat said it was a Charlie Poole song. Now, strictly speaking, that was incorrect - Poole didn't write the songs he performed and recorded - they were the popular, sacred, and standard tunes of his time. Some of the writers were well known (W. C. Handy), others were obscure (Barney E. Warren), and a few were a complete mystery. Please see Dick's notes on the songs.

During the folk boom of the early 60s I'd heard & loved The New Lost City Ramblers' cover of *The Baltimore Fire* and The Holy Modal Rounders' wild deconstructed take on *Flop Eared Mule*, but I hadn't dug the definitive versions, the Poole versions. Charlie may not have written the songs, but he certainly "owned them" - that is to say, made them his own. When I got back to New York from Rhode Island I bought a Charlie Poole LP put out by County Records and I found the source of this funny, strange, sad, powerful music. What a singer! More than that - what a presence!

By the mid 70s I'd learned other songs from the Poole recordings. In London's Portobello Road on Saturdays, mostly for the hell of it, I used to go busking with my (then) wife Kate McGarrigle and our friend Chaim Tannenbaum. The show stopper was *If I Lose*. At this time I had such a strong identification with the rambling, hard drinking, crazy southern showman, that I even thought I should write a major motion picture about Poole, in which, I fantasized, I would star as Charlie himself. That never happened, but, in a way, nearly four decades later, that's what Dick Connette and I have gone for with **High Wide & Handsome**. We and all the wonderful musicians and singers who worked on the project have, we hope, made a sonic bio-pic of sorts. It's impossible to duplicate the great Charlie Poole and it would be silly to try, but we've certainly enjoyed taking a shot at inhabiting his world.

- Loudon Wainwright III, Los Angeles, May 2009

## CHARLIE POOLE - THE NORTH CAROLINA RAMBLER

### A MAN OF HIS TIME



Charlie Poole at his home in Spray, North Carolina - 1925

There occasionally appear artists who epitomize the spirit of the age in which they lived. The Roaring 20s are usually seen as years of wild, reckless abandon, careening and headed for a crash. A semi-literate banjo-playing millhand from the Piedmont of North Carolina named Charlie Poole lived a life that embodied the Roaring 20s. There's the evidence of his songs, so many of which can easily be heard as autobiographical: *He Rambled*, *If I Lose, I Don't Care*, *Take A Drink On Me*, and *The Wayward Boy*, to name a few. No one who met Charlie Poole - no matter how brief the encounter or distant the occasion - could ever forget him. This lovable, charming rascal left in his wake enough stories, mostly humorous, for a double feature matinee, complete with newsreel, short subject, and a couple cartoons.

By the time the Great Depression bottomed out, he was gone. One of his last recordings, *Just Keep Waiting Till The Good Times Come*, was issued in the spring of 1931, just as Charlie was on what proved to be his final (and fatal) binge. He never lived to see the good times return. This personification of the Roaring 20s disappeared with the end of that age.

## EARLY YEARS

Charles Cleveland Poole was born in March of 1892 in the heart of the cotton mill belt in North Carolina. Though the state did not suffer, as did Georgia and South Carolina, the firestorm of Sherman's March to the Sea, it was, nonetheless, left impoverished. The collapse of the economy and the breakdown of the educational system meant that there were many poor and illiterate laborers available for work. The rise of the sharecropper and tenant farmer system produced a subsistence economy with little cash for its participants. The explosion of the cotton mill villages between 1880 and 1920 provided a new way to live, with real cash wages, houses, doctors, and schools. The "Lords of the Loom" ruled over many of these cotton mill villages, not unlike a medieval fiefdom with serfs that could be exploited for their cheap labor. It was into this rigid socio-economic system that Poole was born. Banjo in hand, Charlie did his best to escape the system.



Leaksville Woolen Mill,  
North Carolina - ca. 1900

Charlie's father, John, was a millworker. Together with his wife Bettie, and his children (there were eventually thirteen of them), he would move from town to town seeking gainful employment. Sometime after 1900 they settled in Haw River, the site of yet another complex of cotton mills. It was there that the twelve-year-old Charlie worked as a doffer boy, changing bobbins on the spinning machines. As a kid he put in about 60 hours a week for a \$3 total wage. But Charlie had a talent for music that would take him away from the noise and lint of the spinning room.

While Charlie's father and his older brother, Lee Roy, played some, it was Charlie's second cousin Daner Johnson who was the real star in the family's banjo-picking crown. Twelve years older than Charlie, Daner played a three-finger classical style popularized in the late 1800s and early 1900s by the likes of Fred Van Eps and Vess Ossman. According to family lore, Daner Johnson beat out Van Eps in a banjo contest at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904.

Poole began playing in his pre-teen years using a banjo made from a gourd. Later he upgraded to a factory-made model that cost half a week's wages - a grand total of \$1.50. As a young man he would sneak out of the mill to a nearby bridge and play and sing for anyone who would listen. Fellow millworkers would lean out of their windows, just trying to get a wisp of Charlie's performance. Poole was fired for playing on the job, but was quickly rehired to keep the other workers from leaning out of the windows to hear him. It was better for business to try and keep him on the inside.

**Millworkers/Holt Granite Mill - 1912**



## RAMBLING AROUND

Charlie got married young and fathered a son, but it didn't take - he couldn't (or wouldn't) settle down. Busking with his banjo at train stations, courthouses, and general stores, he wandered as far west as Montana and as far north as Canada. During his ramblings he encountered a crippled young coal miner and fiddler named Posey Rorer. Rorer was a native of the hill country of Franklin County, Virginia and, like Poole, he had hand-made his first instrument, using a wooden cigar box. Poole and Rorer began playing for dances in and around Sophia and

Beckley, West Virginia. Poole got a job hauling groceries in a wagon while Rorer continued to work in the mines to help support his parents back in Virginia. In the fall of 1918 Poole accompanied Rorer back to his one-room log cabin home near Ferrum, Virginia. There they found the entire Rorer family suffering from the Spanish Influenza. The two musicians nursed the family back to health with a concoction of whiskey and coffee. During their stay, Charlie and Posey went into business with a local moonshiner named Homer Philpott.

Whiskey making was big business in Franklin County. There had been more than ninety government licensed distilleries in the area prior to 1914 when the state went "dry." Many of those thrown out of work by the closure of the distilleries simply went underground, continuing to utilize their ancestral German and Scots-Irish brewing skills. The cottage industry boomed during Prohibition - the N & W Railroad delivered over 19 million pounds of sugar (a critical ingredient) to the tiny village of Ferrum between 1928 and 1935. Poole, Rorer and Philpott cleared \$3,300 from their enterprise. Posey spent his money at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore getting his clubbed feet corrected. Charlie bought himself a real banjo - an Orpheum #3 Special, for over \$130.



**Spray Police Force - ca. 1925**



**Local police with confiscated whiskey Leaksville, North Carolina - ca. 1923**

## LIFE AROUND SPRAY

When Posey returned from Baltimore after his surgery, he and Charlie continued their busking, winding up in Spray, North Carolina, where both had family working in the local mills. In December of 1920 Charlie married Posey's older sister, Lou Emma. The two would make their home on Flynn Street until Charlie's death almost eleven years later.

Spray had a thriving community of traditional musicians that was inadvertently created by the mill system there. Recruiters were sent into the hill country of Virginia counties such as Franklin, Floyd and Patrick to bring in impoverished farmers to work in the mills built by B. Frank Mebane in the 1890s and early 1900s. These rural folks changed only their mailing addresses, not their culture. They brought with them their fiddles and banjos and mountain dance tunes. The Carolina Cotton Mill Company formed a string band from a number of these mountain emigrants and used them for community events.



Carolina Cotton Mill String Band - ca. 1905

Charlie Poole's forceful and charismatic personality quickly made him the leader in the local circle of musicians. Sometimes his antics got him into trouble. The police raided a bootlegger's joint on the North Carolina-Virginia state line and tried to arrest Charlie. Poole, never one to back down from a fight, knocked a couple officers through a window, beat a few others across the room, and took off for the mountains. Soon enough, however, he found himself standing before a judge in the Spray courtroom. It was packed with local millhands, as Charlie was one of their own. The judge asked Poole if he could use a good lawyer and Poole replied, "No, Your Honor, but I could use some good witnesses!" The courtroom erupted with laughter. His wife, Lou Emma, paid his fine - it was just as he sang in *If I Lose, I Don't Care*, "my baby she keeps money all the time."

By the winter of 1924-1925 Poole and Rorer, joined by Charlie's childhood friend, Clarence Foust, had fallen in with a preacher named Rev. Rufus Holder. Holder sponsored a series of fiddler contests across West Virginia, Virginia and Tennessee, supposedly raising money for an orphanage in Bluefield, West Virginia. Possessing considerable musical skills, Poole and Rorer were often the top prize winners. Holder withheld their prize money, saying he would pay off at the end of the tour. One memorable night, deep in the mountains of southwest Virginia, the good Reverend left Posey and Charlie in a drunken stupor and made off with all the money. A few months after this escapade, when they were back in the Spray mills working with guitarist Norman Woodlieff, Poole decided that the time had come to quit their jobs, strike out for New York City and try their hand at recording. For the last two years, traditional rural music had begun appearing on 78s in the South. Except for *Wreck Of The Old 97*, there had been no major hits by these musicians. Charlie Poole with the North Carolina Ramblers changed all of that.



Charlie Poole, Posey Rorer,  
Clarence Foust - ca. 1923

## PROFESSIONAL MUSICIAN

The band stayed with a friend of Posey's from Franklin County then living in Passaic, New Jersey. The three of them got jobs to support themselves while hoping for a break. Poole, who could barely read a stop sign, took a day off from work and went into the city to find the Columbia Records offices. He made an appointment for an audition on Monday, July 27, 1925 with Frank Walker, the Columbia A & R man for its old-time music series. A few bars of *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down Blues* so impressed Walker that he immediately set up a recording session. Four sides were cut that afternoon, once Woodlieff's nerves were calmed by "medicine" from a nearby pharmacy. Though the band received only \$75, the two releases were major money-makers for Columbia. While the earliest releases of Columbia's old-time music series averaged sales of around 10-12,000, Poole's first release - *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down Blues/Can I Sleep In Your Barn Tonight Mister* - sold an astounding 102,000 copies, a major hit in any series! The second release by the North Carolina Ramblers brought in another 65,000 in sales. Walker knew he had a hitmaker in Charlie Poole.

Upon returning to Spray, the band began to exploit their new-found fame. Ranging through Virginia, West Virginia and Ohio, the Ramblers played at schoolhouses, in theaters, and on street corners. Poole galvanized the act with somersaults and buck dancing. He'd place a chair in the middle of the stage and then leap over it, landing upside down, and, as Posey played *Chicken Reel*, he'd dance on his hands with his feet in the air. Charlie would also throw in some jokes, stories, and other humorous asides, including the recitation of the following homespun nonsense:

*Mister, would you lend a poor dime a cripple?  
I'm a thousand dollars away from home.  
Ain't got no mile in my pocket,  
No head to poke my hole through,  
No back to lay my bed upon.  
Don't know where I'm gonna die when I go to.*

No wonder that whenever Poole put on a show, his fans never forgot him!



The North Carolina Ramblers (l-r) Charlie Poole, Posey Rorer, Roy Harvey - 1927

More often, Poole was just as happy to play privately for dances and parties, and mountain fans welcomed him into their homes for weeks at a time. Shootin' Creek, a major moonshine-producing center in Franklin County, Virginia, was one of Poole's favorite haunts. He and Posey would make their headquarters at the home of kingpin moonshiner Pres Martin and they would travel out from there to play for neighborhood dances. Like a medieval troubadour, Poole not only entertained the people, but also brought news of the outside world to these isolated communities.

His wife back in Spray, Lou Emma, never knew where he was or when he'd come back. From time to time she might get a telegram - he'd be in some place like Ohio, asking her to wire him some money to get home. Or one day, without warning, he might stumble into the house carrying a sugar sack and dump piles of money on the bed - money he'd made out on the road. Lou Emma would count it out for him (as he couldn't) and hide the cash in fruit jars around the home for safekeeping.



Charlie Poole - 1927

Charlie's smash hits for Columbia Records had Frank Walker sending telegram after telegram, trying to entice him back to the New York recording studio. But having received a paltry \$25 for his share of the first session (which netted Columbia \$40,000 in sales), Poole was reluctant to return. He continued his merry music-making across the mountains until Walker made the right offer: \$75 per song, plus one-and-one-half cents in royalties for future recordings. Satisfied with the new deal, Charlie returned to New York in September of 1926, and, in four days, the Ramblers cut 18 sides, including the hits, *White House Blues*, *There'll Come A Time*, and *Budded Rose*. His record sales from his first two sessions approached a half million copies.

Over the next four years Poole lived "high, wide and handsome" in the words of his fans. His rambling ways and free-wheeling spirit led him further afield. A bitter split over royalties with Posey Rorer in 1928 was aggravated by the fact that the man (who was both his fiddler and his brother-in-law) lived directly across the street. Charlie had an ear for exceptional musicians, however, and he quickly filled Posey's position, first with Lonnie Austin and then with Odel Smith. Both were much younger and took a less traditional approach to the instrument. In 1929 Poole took Smith and Austin into the same New York studio and recorded fast-paced fiddle tunes complete with three-finger style banjo breaks. It was a sound that would not be duplicated until Bill Monroe and The Bluegrass Boys brought it back nearly a generation later. Poole certainly had his share of success in the music business - it may have seemed that his banjo had freed him from the spinning room, but it was not to be.

## THE LEGACY



Charlie's wife, Lou Emma, at his grave - 1931

By the spring of 1931 Poole's recording career seemed to be over. The spreading Great Depression had crippled record sales. His drinking had taken on marathon proportions and he found himself back in Spray where he started, in the noise and lint of the spinning room. But then an unexpected offer from a Hollywood film company seemed like it could bring his career back to life. They wanted Poole to take a band to California and play backup in a movie. He celebrated with a legendary drinking binge that lasted for thirteen weeks. His wife and twenty-year-old nephew (my father) pleaded with Charlie to restrain himself. Their attempts were futile. One Thursday night, a few weeks before his scheduled departure for the Golden State, Charlie died in an upstairs bedroom in his sister's log house. A mill company doctor's shot left him yellow and unconscious and he never woke up. He was 39 years old.

He may be gone, but he's not forgotten. What with all the stories of his antics on and off stage, a larger than life legend has grown up about the man. Somehow, even his own funeral was enlivened by his irrepressible spirit. In the middle of an otherwise somber service, a profane and drunken mourner shouted out that Charlie was going to be sorely missed because he was "a banjo picking son of a bitch."

He also left behind his songs, such as *White House Blues*, *If I Lose, I Don't Care*, *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down Blues*, and *Sweet Sunny South*. They've lived on in the recordings of bluegrass artists, and continue to be sung at their conventions. And whenever Old-Time musicians gather at Clifftop, West Virginia, someone is bound to sing and play at least a few Poole tunes before the festival breaks up. But Poole's lingering influence is more than just musical. When local folks gather at a family reunion or for some other social occasion, it's not uncommon for someone to tell the story of the time that Charlie Poole came to their home. Not a bad legacy for a millhand musician who never let his deal go down until his last gold dollar was gone.

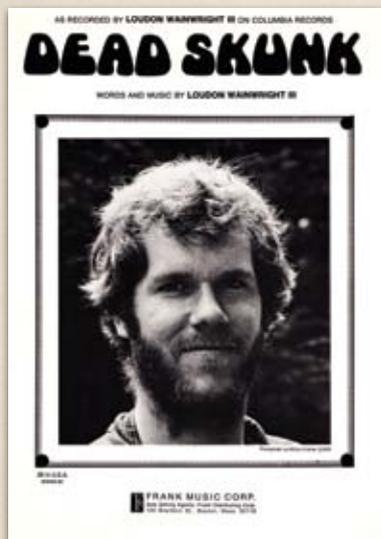
- Kinney Rorrer - Danville, VA/April 2009



IN MEMORY OF HUSBAND AT REST

## NOTES TO *THE CHARLIE POOLE PROJECT*

Charlie Poole is singing on the street in Spray, North Carolina, resolutely drinking himself to death, singing his way through the days in 1925 when his first record sold over a hundred thousand copies to 1930, when his last, one of his best, a loose, rangy, deadpan “Milwaukee Blues,” sold a cool 878, sending him back to the cotton mills he’d come from. “If I Lose, I Don’t Care!” he shouts, then taking his own request, now half-leaning away from the words, giving them an odd curl, “If I lose a hundred dollars, while I’m trying to win a dime,” then yelling for the sleeping residents of the town to shut up their mouths while he’s singing, bouncing from lamp post to lamp post: “I can’t walk, neither can I talk,” he sings, as if he’s lived his whole life to reach this moment, to catch the lift in the steps of the melody on the banjo he’s not playing precisely as he does now.



As Recorded On Columbia Records - 1972

When I heard that Loudon Wainwright was going to address himself to what Charlie Poole left behind—nearly a hundred recordings, with his band the North Carolina Ramblers on Columbia, sometimes under other names on other labels, in nine sessions in New York, Chicago, and Ashland, Kentucky—to address himself to Poole with Poole’s songs, his own songs, putting on the dead man’s clothes to tell his story, walk his walk—I didn’t know who was luckier. Poole might have been waiting all these years for someone to talk back to him so completely in his own language; Wainwright might have been waiting since he first heard Charlie Poole to get up the nerve to do it.

In 1973, Loudon Wainwright had what remains, so far, his only radio hit, “Dead Skunk.” Whole families sang it at the top of their lungs on vacations all that summer: “DEAD SKUNK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD! AND IT’S STINKING TO HIGH, HIGH HEAVEN!” It was of a piece with the clowning jujube he’d loved in the Jim Kweskin Jug Band in the mid-sixties, and for that matter with the vaudeville hokum of so many Charlie Poole crowd pleasers: “Awful Hungry Hash House,” “I’m the Man Who Rode the Mule Around the World.” But it was of a piece with “If I Lose,” too. The more you heard “Dead Skunk,” the funnier it got, but out of the blood and guts on the back road where someone five minutes or five hours before you had hit the thing you could feel an undertow, a self-loathing, a wish to disappear and never come back, to lose even your own name. Then the song laughed itself off its own back and you sang along again.

In 1925 the kind of music Charlie Poole was making was most of all familiar. He was in on the game early, before Jimmie Rodgers or the Carter Family, just two years after Fiddlin’ John Carson of Georgia, with his “Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane,” proved there were people all over the south eager to buy phonograph records of what was already called old-time music—because those records reminded people of themselves, made them feel real, bigger, as if they, or the town in which they’d grown up, were nothing to be ashamed of, that they might not be forgotten, at least not just like that. Carson was as familiar as a piece of furniture, but the musicians whose music outlived them only seemed to be.

What was different about Charlie Poole? What was it that led more than a hundred and fifty thousand people to buy the two 78s that came out of his first session, when for old-time music five thousand was a hit and twenty thousand was a smash? He set you up. His banjo invited you into the music as if to a little party at the neighbor’s next door, and then his easy voice took you into a back room and asked if you wanted to see something “interesting” and before you decided led you out the back door to look at the moon, as if it were something only you and he could see. That was it, maybe: on his records, he seemed to be pulling back from the lyric, letting the tunes take him up to your ear, whispering secrets, bringing out selves you’d never acknowledged, never named, but now for two or three minutes at a time recognized, as if for a moment you were the sum of all disappointments, your parents’, your spouse’s, your own. If, as Robert Cantwell wrote in *When We Were Good* of singers featured on Harry Smith’s 1952 *Anthology of American Folk Music*—which brought so many forgotten or never-known performers back into history, and which included Poole’s 1926 “White House Blues”<sup>\*</sup>—the Kentucky ballad singer Buell Kazee “bellows like a Rotarian,” the North Carolina songster Clarence Ashley sounds like “a candidate for some local political office,” or the West Virginia guitarist Frank Hutchison “sings with gruff self-importance, like a policeman,” then Poole, with the soft, friendly tones he took from his hero Al Jolson, is sly, sardonic, bringing you into his confidence, stepping out of an alley to convince you that you’re brothers, that you got drunk together that night in Leaksville four years ago, or maybe it was in a past life, and somehow walking off with all your money, and your address, so he can be sure to pay it back.

<sup>\*</sup> Smith announced in his notes to the set that he was omitting records made before 1927, when electronic recording was introduced, with vast improvements in sound reproduction, and then went ahead and included “White House Blues” (along with Uncle Dave Macon’s “Way Down the Old Plank Road” and Blind Lemon Jefferson’s “Rabbit Foot Blues,” also from 1926), presumably because he liked Poole’s what-me-worry account of the assassination of President McKinley too much to leave it out. Along with “Shootin’ Creek,” “Roll in My Sweet Baby’s Arms,” and a whitewater take of “Milwaukee Blues,” the Poole Project version is available as a bonus track via a free download at <http://www.thecharliepooleproject.com>

Loudon Wainwright has run this con for years, the difference being—in tunes from “Down Drinking at the Bar” in 1973 to “White Winos” in 2001—he’s run it mainly on himself. His cynicism isn’t cheap, and it may not be cynicism at all—rather a kind of alcoholic fatalism, where a belief that everything will be different tomorrow coexists with a faith that nothing will ever change, which frees you to make every promise honestly and betray each one with honest regret. Wainwright isn’t the first to take up Charlie Poole—pulling him out of the alley where he’s been sleeping for nearly eighty years, getting him on his feet and brushing off his clothes, telling the old man, so much younger than you are when he died, that you’ve come to take him home. The Holy Modal Rounders

recorded Poole’s “Moving Day” and “Flop Eared Mule” in 1964, but his firefly spirit was all over their music. Levon Helm of the Band recorded an Arkansas version of “If I Lose” in 1968 at the tail end of the basement tapes sessions. In 2003, with “To Washington,” John Mellencamp redid “White House Blues” as a soft moan of disgust over a new president “with a familiar name.” Amateur and professional string bands at festivals and fiddlers’ conventions have shot up “Ragtime Annie” and “I’m Glad I’m Married” for decades. But they shied away, too, and Wainwright doesn’t.

They shied away because Poole’s glee can be scarier than his nihilism. In *Rambling Blues*, his self-published, ground-breaking 1982 biography of Charlie Poole, Kinney Rorrer tells a story too perfect to believe, or disbelieve—a story that seems to come from somewhere else, like a dream, or the life flashing before your eyes at



**Columbia Records Promotion - late 1920s**

the moment of death, a life boiled down to a single song no one ever sang. “On one occasion,” Rorrer writes casually, as if what he’s about to tell you is the most obvious thing imaginable, “a man carried a long pole balanced across his back with a five-gallon can of liquor hanging at either end, and walked behind Charlie for miles across Franklin County . . . he would stop when Poole stopped and offer everyone liquor in a dipper. The man would then burst out crying, begging Poole to ‘play “There’ll Come a Time” just one more time.” It’s that tiny detail, the “can of liquor hanging at either end” (never mind the five-gallon can—who was this guy, Houdini?), that takes the image into the mystical: the picture of an unholy symmetry, of a man, or the whole world, one man’s whole way of being in the world, poised between extremes: joy and despair, love and self-hate, the free ride of music when it’s as if it’s playing you and the curse of music when you can no longer hear it, the kiss of whiskey and suicide.

Loudon Wainwright doesn’t go as far toward the sunken, drowned bottom of “If I Lose, I Don’t Care” as Charlie Poole did; no one could. But as he does with “I’m The Man Who Rode the Mule Around the World,” “Rambling Blues,” and “Didn’t He Ramble,” he touches the thrill of escape—from work, family, whatever anyone else might think of you and for that matter what you think of yourself—in the way he turns what might be the truest lines Poole ever sang toward himself.

“If I Lose, I Don’t Care” is an odd song. Supposedly based on a vaudeville act, or derived from “The Battleship of Maine,” about the Cuban campaign in the Spanish-American War, you know, when you hear the first lines of the chorus—

If I lose, let me lose  
I don’t care, how much I lose

—that these lines are much, much older than that. They go back to a card game in a bar in Deadwood, or a horserace in New York, or as Constance Rourke calls up the early nineteenth century in *American Humor*, a time when “men of the backwoods joined in mortal combat stark naked, strapped within a few inches of each other to a bench, armed only with bowie-knives.” The American spirit that the song makes a home for is as old as anything in the country that speaks English; you feel that. But the absurdity of the song, a comic Gothic quality that links it to tall tales on one hand and ghost stories on the other is just as old—which is to say that it is permanent.

Everything that happens in the song takes place at night—or “just before day,” and, at least in the song, day never comes. The lights are out. You’re not just strapped to a bench stark naked, you’re blindfolded too. This strikes you as funny, given that you don’t know if you have a minute or an eternity to live. So you sing lines that, perhaps, did come from the Spanish-American War, or some other war—

The blood was a-runnin’  
I was runnin’ too

—and then, in the middle of your escape, you stop, to think it over, to laugh at yourself, to revel in the freedom of, for the moment, not caring about God or your fellow man or eternal life or eternal damnation or even the pursuit of happiness. “To give my feet some exercise,” Poole sang in his freest flight of not caring, as Wainwright sings as if this is the most familiar feeling he knows, and the best: “I had nothing else to do.”

- Greil Marcus, Berkeley, CA, June 2009



# VOLUME 1

## 1. HIGH WIDE & HANDSOME 2:53

LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III

High wide and handsome - that's how I like livin'.  
High wide and handsome - that's how life should be.  
Low skinny and ugly - that's for other people.  
High wide and handsome suits me to a tee.

Song, wine, and women - they're my 3 favorites.  
Beer, gin, and whiskey - that's 5, 6, and 4.  
Saturday night I like eatin' and dancin'  
And I sleep all day Sunday so's I'm ready for more.

High wide and handsome - you can't take it with you.  
High wide and handsome - that's one way to go.  
Let's live it up - might as well, we're all dying.  
High wide and handsome - let's put on a show.

Can't quit what will kill me, so why even bother?  
I love this hard livin', so why even try?  
I'll be high wide and handsome when I kick the bucket.  
I'll be high wide and handsome on the day that I die.

High wide and handsome - you can call it my motto.  
High wide and handsome - call it my creed.  
Money's just paper, liquor's thicker than water -  
High wide and handsome in thought, word, and deed.

Have high wide and handsome carved on my head stone,  
With the date I was born plus the date that I died,  
Then take one from the other - all that's left is a number.  
Just remember I laughed twice as hard as I cried.

High wide and handsome - that's how I like livin'.  
High wide and handsome - that's how life should be.  
Low skinny and ugly - that's for other people -  
High wide and handsome suits me to a tee.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *banjo, vocal*

## 2. TOOK MY GAL OUT WALKIN' 2:34

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

*This is one of those songs that sure sounds like somebody wrote it, even if no one knows exactly who.*

I took my gal out walkin' -  
It was on one Saturday night.  
I took my gal out walkin'  
And the moon was shining bright.  
I asked her if she'd kiss me  
And this is what she said -  
She said she wouldn't kiss me,  
So I kissed her instead.

I ain't got nobody, just as blue as can be.  
I ain't got nobody to make a big fuss over me.  
If I don't get somebody, I'll go back to the farm,  
Milk the cows and the chickens -  
I don't give a golly gosh darn.

I took my gal out walkin' -  
It was on one Saturday night.  
I took my gal out walkin'  
And the moon was shining bright.  
I asked her if she'd marry me  
And this is what she said -  
She said she wouldn't marry me  
If the rest of the world was dead.

I ain't got nobody, just as blue as can be.  
I ain't got nobody to make a big fuss over me.  
If I don't get somebody, I'll go back to the farm,  
Milk the cows and the chickens -  
I don't give a golly gosh darn.

### Martha Wainwright



Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*

Martha Wainwright *back vocal*

Paul Asaro *piano*

Matt Munisteri *lead guitar*

Tim Luntzel *bass*

Stefan Schatz *drums*



### Paul Asaro

Poole, accompanied by a piano player, set up headquarters at a place called "Black Annie's" and stayed there two weeks. Black Annie was a black woman who had 13 black and white girls working for her. She hired Poole to play for the customers who frequented the establishment. Charlie got his biggest tips from his raucous rendition of *Take Your Leg Off Mine*.

### 3. I'M THE MAN WHO RODE THE MULE AROUND THE WORLD 3:35

TRADITIONAL

*Our version of what has become a standard American bragging song. Folkniks out there will notice how the lyrics have been cherry-picked from all over the place. Gotta say, though, that the introductory verses, derived from the Poole recording, even (or especially) considering the context, can't be beat for outright wiseguy wackiness.*

I promised to meet her when the clock struck twenty-three,  
Down in the village just four miles out of town.  
She runs the local tavern and the liquor's always free,  
But the pickles sell for nineteen cents a pound.

Oh she's my daisy, she's black-eyed and she's crazy -  
The prettiest girl I thought I ever saw.  
Now her breath smells sweet, but I'd rather smell her feet,  
For she's my freckle-faced consumptive Sara Jane

He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
I rode in Noah's ark and I'm as happy as a lark -  
I'm the man who rode the mule around the world

I was born about ten thousand years ago  
And there's nothing on this earth that I don't know.  
I saw Peter, Paul and Moses playing ring around the roses  
And I can whup the man that says it isn't so.

He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
And for Pharaoh's little kiddies I built all the pyramiddies -  
I'm the man who rode the mule around the world

Queen Elizabeth she fell in love with me -  
We were married in Milwaukee secretly.  
But I rose up and I shook her, and went off with General Hooker  
To shoot mosquitoes down in Memphis, Tennessee.

He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
I set the flags a-flying, when George Washington quit lying -  
I'm the man who rode the mule around the world.

I'm a very highly educated man -  
There's not a thing that I don't understand.  
I've been around so long that I used to sing this song  
When Abraham and Isaac rushed the can.

He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
He's the man who rode the mule around the world.  
I rode in Noah's ark and I'm as happy as a lark -  
I'm the man who rode the mule around the world.

I promised to meet her when the clock struck twenty-three,  
Down in the village just four miles out of town.  
She runs the local tavern and the liquor's always free,  
But the pickles sell for nineteen cents a pound.

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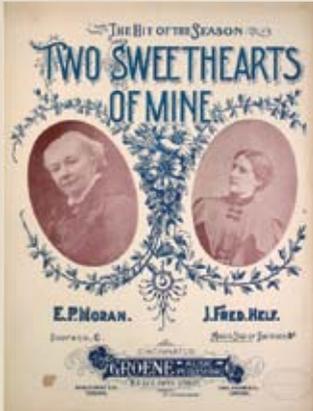
Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*  
David Mansfield *violin, back vocal*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *banjo, harmonica, back vocal*



**David Mansfield**

## 4. MY MOTHER & MY SWEETHEART 3:13

E. P. MORAN/J. FRED HELF



Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, vocal*  
Paul Woodiel *violin*  
Gabriel Kahane *piano*  
Tim Luntzel *bass*

Arrangement by Dick Connette

A crowd of young fellows one night at a club  
Were telling of sweethearts they had.  
All of them jolly, except one young man,  
Who seemed downhearted and sad.  
"Come, Ned, won't you join us?"  
His comrades then asked,  
"For surely some girl has loved you."  
Raising his head, he so proudly then said,  
"Why, boys, I'm in love with two."

One has hair of silvery gray,  
The other's is just like gold.  
One is gay and youthful,  
While the other is bent and old.  
But dearer than life are they both to me -  
From neither would I part.  
One is my mother, God bless her,  
I love her, the other is my sweetheart.

My sweetheart, you see, is a poor working girl,  
The one I'm determined to wed.  
My father says, "No, it can never be so,  
Go marry an heiress instead."  
I've won mother over, she knows how it is,  
When father met her, she was poor.  
She says, "Ned don't fret, she'll be your wife yet.  
Your father will consent I am sure."

One has hair of silvery gray,  
The other's is just like gold.  
One is gay and youthful,  
While the other is bent and old.  
But dearer than life are they both to me -  
From neither would I part.  
One is my mother, God bless her,  
I love her, the other is my sweetheart.

## 5. BILL MASON'S BRIDE 3:00

BRET HARTE

Half an hour 'til train time, sir,  
And a fearful dark time, too;  
Take a look at the switch lights, Tom,  
Fetch in a stick when you're through.  
On time? Well, yes, I guess so -  
She left the last station all right;  
Bet she'll come around the curve a-flying;  
Bill Mason's on tonight.

You know Bill? He's engineer,  
Been on the road most of his life -  
I'll never forget the morning  
He married himself a wife.  
Bill hadn't been married an hour,  
When up come a message from Kress,  
Ordering Bill to go down there  
And bring out the night express.

And Maggie sat down by the window  
To wait for the night express;  
And, sir, if she hadn't 'a done so,  
She'd 'a been a widow, I guess.  
For it must 'a been about midnight  
When the mill hands left the Ridge;  
Down came those drunken devils,  
And tore off a rail from the bridge.

But Maggie heard them working  
And guessed there was somethin' wrong,  
And in less than fifteen minutes,  
Bill's train would be along!  
She couldn't 'a come here to tell us,  
A mile - it wouldn't 'a done;  
So she just grabbed a lantern,  
And made for the bridge on the run.

By God! Bill saw the signal,  
And he stopped the night express,  
And he found his Maggie crying  
On the track in her weddin' dress;  
Cryin' and laughin' for joy, sir,  
And holding on to the light -  
Well here's the train - good-bye, sir,  
Bill Mason's on time tonight.

Loudon Wainwright III *vocals*  
Chris Thile *mandolin*  
Rob Moose *tenor guitar, violin*  
Erik Friedlander *cello*

Arrangement by Rob Moose

Charlie did not learn to read and write well until after he married Posey's sister Lou Emma. She sat on the side of the bed, held Charlie's hand and helped him practice writing "C. C. Poole" so he could sign a contract with the Columbia Record Company.

## 6. GOODBYE BOOZE 2:56

JEAN C. HAYEZ

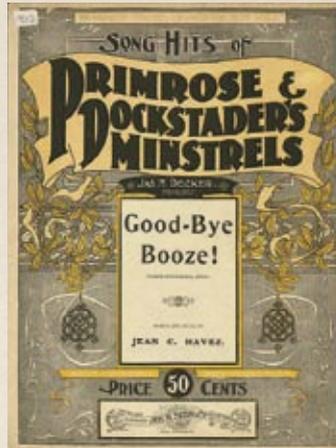
Oh, goodbye booze, for evermore,  
My boozing days will soon be o'er.  
Oh, I had a good time, but we couldn't agree.  
You see what booze has done for me.

She swelled my head, she broke my heart,  
So goodbye booze, we now shall part.  
Oh, I had a good time, but we couldn't agree.  
You see what booze has done for me.

Oh, goodbye booze, for evermore,  
My boozing days will soon be o'er.  
Yes, I had a good time, but we couldn't agree.  
You see what booze has done for me.

She whispered low - how sweet it sounds!  
Please take another ride on the merry-go-round.  
Yes, I had a good time, but we couldn't agree.  
You see what booze has done for me.

So goodbye booze for evermore,  
My boozing days will soon be o'er.  
I had a good time, but we couldn't agree.  
Now see what booze has done for me.



Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, vocal*  
David Mansfield *dobro*

He said that when he first arrived in New York, his voice was very hoarse as a result of a recent drinking binge. When Frank Walker asked him what might help his voice Poole replied, "Lemons and liquor!" Walker ordered an employee to go get Poole a lemon and a pint of liquor. As the runner went to the door, Poole yelled to him, "Make that a dozen lemons and a gallon of liquor!"

## 7. OLD BALLYHOO 2:03

DICK CONNETTE

Mister, won't you lend a poor dime a cripple?  
I'm about a thousand dollars from my home.  
Ain't got no mile in my pocket, no head to poke my hole through,  
And I don't know where I'll die when I go to.

I have tried living in the valley and working at the mill -  
I like bootlegging better, running whiskey through these hills.  
Now I'm back down from the mountain, and living on the bum.  
If you've got change for five dollars, why don't you give me some?

Mister, won't you lend a poor dime a cripple?  
I'm about a thousand dollars from my home.  
Ain't got no mile in my pocket, no head to poke my hole through,  
And I don't know where I'll die when I go to.

Hey, I could play in your theater, local church or corner bar -  
Long as there's fun and money, I ain't too particular.  
I can sing and dance and whistle, turn cartwheels through the air,  
And if I get too tight to stand upright, just tie me to a chair.

Mister, won't you lend a poor dime a cripple?  
I'm about a thousand dollars from my home.  
Ain't got no mile in my pocket, no head to poke my hole through,  
And I don't know where I'll die when I go to.

Now when this song is over, gonna pass around my hat -  
So won't you reach down deep inside - Hey, quiet in the back!  
Did you come to talk or listen, folks? Now everybody hush!  
'Cause when I hit that high note, I can make a statue blush.



Rob Moose

Loudon Wainwright III *vocal*  
Rob Moose *acoustic guitars, violin*

Arrangement by Rob Moose

## 8. LITTLE WATERLOO 3:00

DICK CONNETTE

There comes a time in a young man's life when he should settle down,  
But I've gotta catch that next fair deal before it hits the ground -  
I'm on my way, I'm gonna make it pay.

Go ask anybody, it's happened more than once -  
I'll step out for a minute and be gone for seven months -  
Got a little bit lost, I forgot my watch.

Oh, I'm going away, I'm going to stay, and never coming home.  
Gonna miss me, honey, in the days to come,  
When the winter wind begins to blow, the ground is covered up with snow -  
You'll think of me, gonna wish me back, your loving man.  
You're gonna miss me honey in the day, days, days to come.

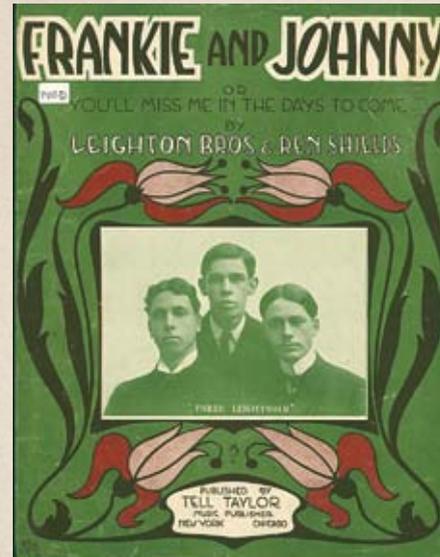
I'm livin' in the highways, just tryin' to catch a car.  
It's "Where you going, buddy?" "Well, I'm going wherever you are -  
I'm satisfied, just to take a little ride."

Life's a lot like poker, you can't win if you don't play -  
Gonna bankroll my tomorrow and pawn my yesterday.  
I'll trust in God, but I'll cut the cards.

Oh, I'm going away, I'm going to stay, and never coming home.  
Gonna miss me, honey, in the days to come,  
When the winter wind begins to blow, the ground is covered up with snow -  
You'll think of me, gonna wish me back, your loving man.  
You're gonna miss me honey in the day, days, days to come.

I'm going round the world, what do you think of that?  
Going all the way around the world, I'm never coming back -  
Never comin' home, goin' away to roam.

Oh but I won't go to San Antone or anywhere near France -  
That's two last things, I said that's two,  
That I'm never never never ever ever gonna do.  
So can't you see? It's guaranteed - there isn't any chance  
I'll meet my Alamo, my little Waterloo.



The melody and some lyrics for "Little Waterloo" came from this classic, which Poole recorded as "Leaving Home"

Loudon Wainwright III *lead vocal*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *back vocal*  
Rob Moose *acoustic guitar, National guitar, mandolin*

Arrangement by Rob Moose

## 9. I'M GLAD I'M MARRIED 3:31

JACK NORWORTH/ALBERT VON TILZER



**Erik Friedlander**



**Rayna Gellert**

*Into this 1908 novelty song we've interpolated "Cherokee Rag," which, as recorded by Big Chief Henry's Indian String Band, is said to have been Poole's favorite 78.*

I'm glad I'm married, my wife is a dream  
She lets me stay out late at night, she don't care if I get tight.  
Don't have to worry, tell her where I was;  
She just says good morning dear, like she usually does.

Loudon Wainwright III *lead vocal*  
Dick Connette *back vocal*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *back vocal*  
David Mansfield *mandolin, back vocal*  
Rayna Gellert *violin*  
Matt Munisteri *banjo*  
Erik Friedlander *cello*

Arrangement by Dick Connette

Maude Poole (Charlie's first wife) wanted Charlie to move with her and her parents to Danville, Virginia to work in the textile mills there. When Charlie failed to meet the family at the Greensboro train depot, Maude went looking for him. She found him locked up for drunkenness in the Greensboro jail.

## 10. MOTHER'S LAST FAREWELL KISS 4:48

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

I was sitting in a station one day,  
When I heard a splendid young lad say,  
"I've no money for my fare, but I'm longing to be there  
And a letter from my sister tells me this:  
'Mother's dying, please come home at once,  
If you want a mother's farewell kiss.'"

Was my mother's farewell kiss I now remember -  
How I'd love to see her smiling face once more.  
With her hand upon my brow, I can feel her touch just now -  
It's a memory of my mother's farewell kiss.  
It's a memory of my mother's farewell kiss.

As the train pulled in that day,  
From behind the lad a voice replied,  
"Take this money, pay your fare, it's enough to get you there -  
It's a twenty dollar bill I'll never miss."  
So the lad came safely home in time  
To receive his mother's farewell kiss.

Was my mother's farewell kiss I now remember -  
How I'd love to see her smiling face once more.  
With her hand upon my brow, I can feel her touch just now -  
It's a memory of my mother's farewell kiss.  
It's a memory of my mother's farewell kiss.

Loudon Wainwright III *vocal*  
Matt Munisteri *guitar*  
C. J. Camerieri *trumpet, french horn*  
Michael Davis *trombone*  
Tim Luntzel *bass*  
Ben Perowsky *drums*

Arrangement by Matt Munisteri  
Brass arranged by C. J. Camerieri



**Matt Munisteri**

## 11. ACRES OF DIAMONDS 2:54

DICK CONNETTE

*A man (unfortunately? providentially??) named Russell H. Conwell (1843-1925) wrote a speech called "Acres of Diamonds." The basic idea was that you didn't have to look far to find your fortune - there were acres of diamonds buried in your back yard. As one of the country's most popular platform orators, he delivered the lecture more than 6,000 times, and, in the time-honored tradition of inspirational speakers, got rich off of telling others how to make a buck.*

You have a right to be rich – you've got no reason to be poor.  
You simply must have overlooked what you've been looking for.  
So step right up, my friends, cross your fingers, close your eyes,  
And let me introduce you to the poor man's paradise.

Acres of diamonds are there for the taking,  
Shining in the silver lining of a dream that comes true.  
Over the rainbow, three miles beyond Christmas,  
Acres of diamonds are waiting for you.

My friends, I'm here to tell you love's the grandest thing on earth.  
You shouldn't worship money, except for all it's worth.  
'Cause if you take a man in love - give him some spending green -  
It won't be long 'fore he finds out what do wah ditty means.

Acres of diamonds are there for the taking,  
Shining in the silver lining of a dream that comes true.  
Over the rainbow, three miles beyond Christmas,  
Acres of diamonds are waiting for you.

Over on the corner in the middle of the block  
There's a stairway going nowhere built above a vacant lot,  
Where money grows on trees watered by a wishing well -  
This must be heaven - or the Fontainebleau Hotel.

Acres of diamonds are there for the taking,  
Shining in the silver lining of a dream that comes true.  
Over the rainbow, three miles beyond Christmas,  
Acres of diamonds are waiting for you.

Friends, if you've got the proper amount of determination,  
You can overcome almost any kind of a physical handicap.  
Why, I once knew a man that didn't have a tooth in his head,  
And yet that man learned to play a bass drum better than anybody I ever listened to.

Acres of diamonds are there for the taking,  
Shining in the silver lining of a dream that comes true.  
Over the rainbow, three miles beyond Christmas,  
Acres of diamonds are waiting for you.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*  
Maggie Roche, Terre Roche, Suzy Roche *back vocal*  
Matt Munisteri *lead guitar*  
David Mansfield *violin, bass*  
Dick Connette *bass drum, cymbals*

Back vocals arranged by Terre Roche



**Suzy Roche**

He lived by using his charm. He would use humor to persuade a stranger to part with some of his money. Charlie was able to get along with people on all levels of society. When he bummed money off a total stranger on the streets, the stranger apparently felt it had been a great privilege to "loan" money to such a charming fellow as Charlie Poole.

## 12. WAY UP IN NYC 4:10

LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III/DICK CONNETTE

Way up in New York City - that's where we did go -  
A fella called Frank Walker there - he owns a studio.  
We made us a recording right there on old Broadway,  
And for a week or 2 we got the hell away from Spray.

Way up in New York City - that's the place to be,  
Where the buildings are so high the sky is hard to see.  
In a city full of strangers humanity's a show -  
No, it's not like Spray where everyday you meet the folks you know.

Way up in New York City - pretty women everywhere -  
After awhile a married man forgets who isn't there.  
Those city gals in New York town can turn a cracker's head,  
And a wife in Spray's so far away she might as well be dead

Way up in New York City - all those taverns and saloons -  
You never saw so much sawdust or so many spittoons.  
There's a cop on every corner - he's there to keep the peace,  
And there's lots of trees in Central Park, well, two or three at least.

We wound up in Passaic - that's a town in New Jersey,  
And we stayed with Posey's pal from Franklin County, Jim Holley.  
We took jobs in Jersey just to make a little dough,  
Then we had our audition - into New York we did go.

We rode an elevator - poor Posey, he got sick -  
He threw up in a fire bucket, not a pretty trick.  
But we got to the audition and we played Frank "The Deal" -  
He said, "Boys, let's make a record" - good was how that made us feel!

They paid us for 4 numbers, greenback dollars, cash in hand -  
More than a week's wage in the mill - 25 a man.  
3rd class was all we could afford on the train back home to Spray,  
But we stayed drunk inside that car for 2 nights and 1 day.

Back home from New York City, we were heroes back in Spray,  
So guilty and hung over there was not a lot to say.  
It got a little awkward, talking to the wives,  
'Cause we couldn't tell 'em how we had the best time of our lives.



In September Frank released "The Deal" and, yes, it was a hit.  
We never got another penny - just enough to make you wanna quit.  
If you've ever been bamboozled, you know how I feel -  
From now on the new name of that song is "The Raw Deal."

Way up in New York City - that's the place to be -  
Where the buildings are so high the sky is hard to see.  
If I go back to New York town, next time I'll go alone.  
I'll keep all the money - I won't bother goin' home.  
I'll keep all the money and I'll make New York my home.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *banjo, vocal*  
David Mansfield *violin*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *guitar*

## 13. IF I LOSE 4:02

TRADITIONAL

*As this song is about (among other things) the boys coming home from fighting the Spanish-American War (1898), it was already old news by the time Charlie recorded it. Not so old, however, that most of Poole's audience wouldn't still "Remember the Maine" - it was fresher for them in 1927 than Vietnam is for us in 2009.*

If I lose, let me lose. I don't care how much I lose,  
If I lose a hundred dollars while I'm trying to win a dime,  
For my baby she keeps money all the time.

I can't walk, neither can I talk -  
Just getting back from the state of old New York,  
One morning, before day.

Flossie, oh, Flossie, now what is the matter?  
Walked all the way from old Cincinnati,  
One morning, before day.

If I lose, let me lose. I don't care how much I lose,  
If I lose a hundred dollars while I'm trying to win a dime,  
For my baby she keeps money all the time.

The blood was a-running - I was running too,  
To give my feet some exercise - I had nothing else to do,  
One morning, before day.

The peas was so greasy, the meat was so fat,  
The boys was fighting the Spaniards, while I was fighting that,  
One morning, just before day.

If I lose, let me lose. I don't care how much I lose,  
If I lose a hundred dollars while I'm trying to win a dime,  
For my baby she keeps money all the time.

You ought to see them boats, comin' round the bend -  
Every one was loaded down with American men,  
One morning, just before day.

If I lose, let me lose. I don't care how much I lose,  
If I lose a hundred dollars while I'm trying to win a dime,  
For my baby she keeps money all the time.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *banjo, back vocal*  
David Mansfield *mandolin*  
Tim Luntzel *bass*



**Chaim Tannenbaum**

## 14. THE GREAT REAPING DAY 2:50

R. E. WINSETT

There is coming a day when to judgement we'll go,  
There to reap as in life we have sown.  
Death eternal we'll reap if we sow to the flesh -  
Heaven's joy then will never be known.

May we sow righteous seed for the reaping,  
Which is coming to everyone.  
Oh what joy on that day when we hear Jesus say,  
"Come ye blessed, a crown you have won."

Every day passing by you are sowing a seed -  
Fruits of life or of death will bear.  
When you reap what you sow, to that land may you go,  
To that bright happy home over there.

May we sow righteous seed for the reaping,  
Which is coming to everyone.  
Oh what joy on that day when we hear Jesus say,  
"Come ye blessed, a crown you have won."

If you'd win life eternal, there's no time to lose -  
Look around you, the fields are white.  
Go you forth to the fields, go and reap golden grain -  
Soon will fall the dark shadows of night.

May we sow righteous seed for the reaping,  
Which is coming to everyone.  
Oh what joy on that day when we hear Jesus say,  
"Come ye blessed, a crown you have won."

Every act you perform is a seed to someone,  
For the influence will never die.  
Then be careful each day what you do, what you say,  
For you'll meet it again, by and by.

May we sow righteous seed for the reaping,  
Which is coming to everyone.  
Oh what joy on that day when we hear Jesus say,  
"Come ye blessed, a crown you have won."



*Poole never recorded this gospel song, but bandmate Roy Harvey did in 1931.  
Also Charlie was said to have closed his musical programs with this number.*

---

Chaim Tannenbaum *lead vocal*  
Dave Roche, Lucy Wainwright Roche,  
Maggie Roche, Suzy Roche,  
Loudon Wainwright III *back vocal*

Vocal arrangement by Dick Connette

## 15. WHERE THE WHIPPOORWILL IS WHISPERING GOODNIGHT 3:25

RUFE K. STANLEY

When the sun sets far away beyond the mountains,  
And the silvery moon is peeping through the trees,  
Shadows gently gather round the old plantation,  
While the bells are chiming softly on the breeze.  
Then in dreams I wandered back to home and mother,  
Where daisies turn the meadow green to white,  
And the mockingbirds will greet me in the morning,  
And at eve the whippoorwill bids me goodnight.

Where she's sleeping now the whippoorwill is calling.  
O'er her grave the flowers are blooming fair and bright.  
Pearly dewdrops on the ivy leaves are falling,  
Where the whippoorwill is whispering goodnight.

Round that door the same old ivy vine is clinging.  
Now sweet daisies in the meadow are in bloom.  
In the treetops I can hear those night-birds singing,  
But the old homestead is wrapped in silent gloom.  
By the fireside one familiar face is missing -  
That tender smile no longer greets my sight.  
In that quaint old-fashioned home tonight I'm listening,  
Where the whippoorwill is whispering goodnight.

Where she's sleeping now the whippoorwill is calling.  
O'er her grave the flowers are blooming fair and bright.  
Pearly dewdrops on the ivy leaves are falling,  
Where the whippoorwill is whispering goodnight.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *vocal*

Paul Asaro *piano*

Paul Woodiel, David Mansfield *violin*

Danielle Farina *viola*

Erik Friedlander *cello*

String arrangement by David Mansfield

# VOLUME 2



# 1. THE MAN IN THE MOON 2:33

LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III/DICK CONNETTE

It was hard bein' married to Charlie -  
It was no kind of regular life.  
He never stopped ramblin' or drinkin' or gamblin',  
At least not while I was his wife.

I never knew what he was up to,  
Except for those postcards he'd send -  
Just a coupla lines to say he was fine,  
And he'd sign them "C. Poole, your old friend."

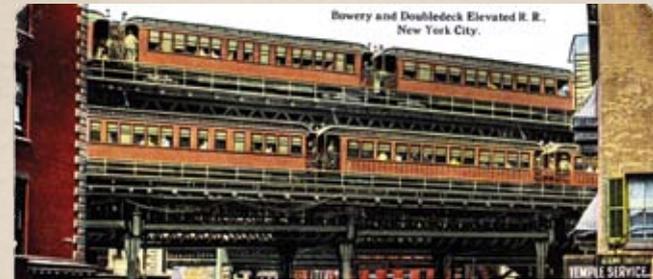
Now and again out of nowhere,  
He'd come back with his hat in his hand,  
And I could never stay angry  
With that dear sweet impossible man.  
Sometimes he'd sing in the kitchen,  
Sometimes we'd cuddle and spoon,  
But mostly I couldn't help feeling  
Like I married the man in the moon.

He always had his explanations -  
Like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.  
It was never his fault, and when he got caught,  
He'd call me to come bail him out.

No matter how much I pleaded,  
He just wouldn't take care of himself.  
He collapsed in the street, so broke down an' beat,  
There was nothin' I could to help.

Now and again out of nowhere,  
He'd come back with his hat in his hand,  
And I could never stay angry  
With that dear sweet impossible man.  
Sometimes he'd sing in the kitchen,  
Sometimes we'd cuddle and spoon,  
But mostly I couldn't help feeling  
Like I married the man in the moon.

It was hard bein' married to Charlie.



Maggie Roche *vocal*  
Rob Moose *violin*  
Matt Munisteri *banjo*



**Maggie Roche**

## 2. THE DEAL 4:11

### TRADITIONAL

I've been all around this whole wide world,  
Down to Memphis, Tennessee.  
Any old place I hang my hat -  
It looks like home to me.

I left my little girl crying,  
Standing in the door -  
Threw her arms around my neck,  
Saying, "Honey, don't you go."

Don't let your deal go down,  
Don't let your deal go down,  
Don't let your deal go down,  
'Til your last gold dollar is gone.

Where did you get those high top shoes?  
That dress you wear so fine?  
Got my shoes from a railroad man,  
And my dress from a driver in the mine.

Don't let your deal go down,  
Don't let your deal go down,  
Don't let your deal go down,  
'Til your last gold dollar is gone.

Who's gonna shoe your pretty little feet?  
Who's gonna glove your hand?  
Who's gonna kiss your sweet little lips?  
Who's gonna be your man?

Papa may shoe my pretty little feet.  
Mama can glove my hand.  
But no one can kiss my sweet little lips,  
'Till you come back again.

Don't let your deal go down,  
Don't let your deal go down,  
Don't let your deal go down,  
'Til your last gold dollar is gone.

I've been around this whole wide world -  
I've been down to Memphis, Tennessee.  
Any old place I hang my hat  
Looks like home to me.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*  
Chris Thile *mandolin, back vocal*  
Rob Moose *violin*  
Erik Friedlander *cello*

Arrangement by Rob Moose

They came early in the morning, before the looms started, to draw their last paychecks. Bringing their instruments into the mill with them, they sat down at the end of one of the rows of looms. As their fellow millworkers gathered around, they played *Don't Let Your Deal Go Down*. When they finished, Poole spoke up and said, "Goodbye, boys, we're gone!"

## 3. NO KNEES 2:23

### LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III

I ain't got no knees no more - I can't walk around.  
Keep me off that killing floor, Lord, and above the ground.  
The doctor says my heart's alright, and that's alright with me.  
I guess the poison's in my system and it's settled in my knees.

I ain't got no knees no more and I can hardly stand.  
Livin' life flat on my back, it's hard to be a man.  
I don't know what it's gonna take to get back on my feet.  
Lord, I'm only 28 years old and I feel damn near beat.

You know, I guess it was my drinkin' - I was drinkin' day and night.  
Now I've stopped, but it's too late and that just don't seem right.  
Why stay in the city, if you can't paint the town?  
What's the use of standin' up when you keep fallin' down?

I ain't got no knees no more - I'm not worth a dime.  
I spent all my money, Lord, and I used up my time.  
I should pray to heaven, and beg for mercy, please,  
But Lord knows it would kill me just to get down on these knees.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, vocal*  
Peter Ecklund *trumpet, whistling*  
Geoff Muldaur *banjo*  
Paul Woodiel *violin*  
Dan Levine *trombone, euphonium*

Arrangement by Geoff Muldaur

Posey and Charlie went to work making liquor for two prominent bootleggers in the county. Hours were often spent waiting for the liquor to condense and it was during those long waits that Charlie and Posey perfected their style of playing.

## 4. MOVING DAY 2:38

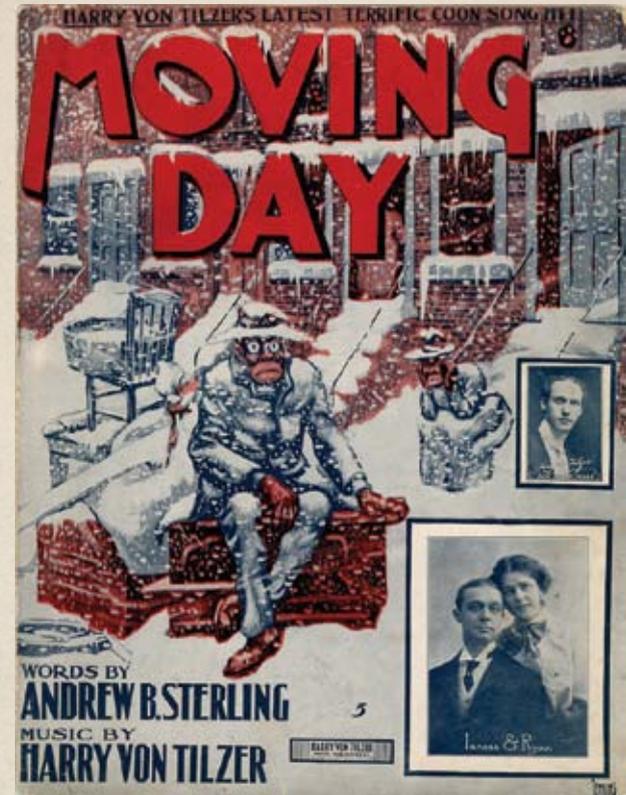
ANDREW B. STERLING/HARRY VON TILZER

Landlord said this morning to me,  
"Give me your key, this flat ain't free.  
I can't get no rent out of you -  
Pack up your rags and skidoo."  
I said, "Wait until my Bill comes home -  
He's my honey from the honeycomb.  
He'll have money 'cause he told me so this morning."

Because it's moving day, moving day -  
Rip the carpet up off of the floor,  
Take your oil stove and out the door.  
It's moving day -  
Pack your folding bed and get away.  
If you've spent every cent you can live out in a tent,  
Because it's moving day.

Bill came in all covered with snow.  
I said, "Hello, gimme some dough.  
Here's the landlord waitin' for rent."  
Bill says, "I ain't got a cent.  
Here's two chickens I brought home for stew -  
Landlord take them for the rent that's due."  
Landlord said, "My chicken coop was robbed this morning."

And so it's moving day, moving day -  
Rip the carpet up off of the floor,  
Take your oil stove and out the door.  
It's moving day -  
Pack your folding bed and get away.  
If you've spent every cent you can live out in a tent,  
Because it's moving day.



Loudon Wainwright III *rhythm guitar, lead vocal*  
Maggie Roche, Terre Roche, Suzy Roche *back vocal*  
Paul Asaro *piano*  
Matt Munisteri *lead guitar*  
Tim Luntzel *bass*  
Stefan Schatz *drums*

Vocal arrangement by Terre Roche

## 5. OLD AND ONLY IN THE WAY 3:51

P. J. DOWNEY/L.T. BILLINGS

When you walk along the street, how oftentimes you meet  
Some poor old man who's gotten old and gray.  
With age his back is bent, in his pockets not a cent,  
And for shelter he has no place to stay.  
His relations by the score, they'll turn him from the door -  
They'll see him on the street and pass him by.  
If you ask them why they do, they'll turn and say to you,  
"He is old, he's gray, he's only in the way."

Now let us cheer them on, for they won't be with us long.  
Don't sneer at them because they're old and gray.  
Just remember while you're young that for you the day may come,  
When you'll be old and gray, and only in the way.

Now my message, I am sure, is for rich as well as poor,  
For take a rich man when he's growing old -  
His relations 'round him stand, and take him by the hand -  
They all want him to die, they want his gold.  
And what it's truly worth to own the riches of this earth,  
He'll discover at the closing of the day.  
After all he's like the poor when his journey's nearly o'er -  
He finds he's old and gray and only in the way.

Now let us cheer them on, for they won't be with us long.  
Don't sneer at them because they're old and gray.  
Just remember while you're young that for you the day may come,  
When you'll be old and gray, and only in the way.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*  
Martha Wainwright *back vocal*  
Rufus Wainwright *back vocal*  
David Mansfield *mandolin, violin*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *mandolin*

**Rufus Wainwright**



## 6. RAGTIME ANNIE 3:39

TRADITIONAL



**Dana Lyn**



**Chris Thile**

---

Dana Lyn *violin*  
Chris Thile *mandolin*  
Rob Moose *acoustic guitar*

Arrangement by Rob Moose

In the words of his first wife, when asked if Charlie liked to ramble, "Ramble! He couldn't be still! He loved to go .... You couldn't have a conversation with him. He was gone!" And she added, "Bet he never stayed over a month in any place in his life."

## 7. SWEET SUNNY SOUTH 2:43

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

*This lament dates as far back as the 1840s, but lives on to this day in the hands of various old timey, folk, and bluegrass musicians. The author is unknown, but someone was surely feeling something deeply - it tells.*

Take me home to the place where I first saw the light,  
To the sweet sunny south, take me home,  
Where the mockingbirds sang me to sleep every night -  
Oh, why was I tempted to roam?

Oh I think with regret of the dear home I left  
And the warm hearts that sheltered me then,  
Of the wife and dear ones of whom I'm bereft,  
And I sigh for the old place again.

Take me home to the place where the orange trees grow,  
To my cot in the evergreen shade,  
Where the flowers on the river's green margins once bestowed  
All their sweetness on the banks where we played.

The path to our cottage they say it has grown green  
And the place is quite lonely around,  
And I know that the smiles and the forms I have seen  
Now lie in the cold mossy ground.

But yet, I'll return to the place of my birth,  
Where my children used to play at the door,  
Where they pulled the white blossoms that garnished the earth,  
Which will echo their footsteps no more.

Take me home to the place where my little ones sleep  
And their mother lies buried nearby -  
O'er the graves of my loved ones I long there to weep  
And among them to rest when I die.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *vocal*  
Matt Munisteri *banjo*

## 8. THE LETTER THAT NEVER CAME 3:09

PAUL DRESSER/MAX STURM

"Is there any mail for me?" was the question that he asked  
Of the postman at the closing of the day.  
Then he turned away and sighed, while a tear stood in his eye,  
As he bowed his head and slowly walked away.

Was it from a gray-haired mother? Or a sister or a brother?  
Had he waited all those many years in vain?  
From the early morning light, he would watch 'til dark of night  
For the letter, but, at last, it never came.

So one day upon the shore, he was found, but life was o'er -  
His poor soul, it must have gone out with the tide.  
In his hand they found a note with the last words that he wrote:  
"Should a letter come, please place it by my side!"

Was it from a gray-haired mother? Or a sister or a brother?  
Had he waited all those many years in vain?  
From the early morning light, he would watch 'til dark of night  
For the letter, but, at last, it never came.

Sweet flowers twine around the tombstone o'er his mound,  
Upon which was scrawled his age, also his name.  
Many years have gone, they say, since his spirit passed away,  
But the letter that he longed for never came.

Was it from a gray-haired mother? Or a sister or a brother?  
Had he waited all those many years in vain?  
From the early morning light, he would watch 'til dark of night  
For the letter, but, at last, it never came.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, vocal*  
Paul Asaro *piano*

## 9. AWFUL HUNGRY HASH HOUSE 4:32

TRADITIONAL

*I'm not exactly sure what or where Bingen-on-the-Rhine is, but, as with "hambalonia," I think you get the idea.*

Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side,  
Keep on the sunny side of life.  
It will help us on our way, it will brighten all our days,  
If we keep on the sunny side of life.

There's a hotel in this town of dubious renown,  
Where they serve the hash up on the second floor.  
There's a graveyard in the cellar, doctor's office in the parlor,  
And the undertaker's got his shop next door.

I'm a boarder and I dwell in that second-class hotel,  
And the way they run their business isn't fair,  
'Cause I'm stuck here on my bunk and I cannot get my trunk,  
And the rent I owe would break a millionaire.

"Touch-Me-Not" is on the teacups, skeleton crossbones on the plates,  
"Warning: Poison" is on the menu every day.  
Oh, the biscuits they are named, and I'm going to have them framed,  
At that awful hungry hash house where I stay.

Oh, the doughnuts, they are wooden, and we have Limburger puddin' -  
We kneel in prayer before we go to grub.  
If you chance to get a breeze of that hambalonia cheese,  
You'd have swore somebody'd hit you with a club.

The sausage, they are marked, if you touch them, they will bark -  
They are relics sent from Bingen-on-the-Rhine,  
And the boarders have the croup, from drinking frozen soup  
At that awful hungry hash house where I dine.

And I'm never fully rested 'cause the room I rent's infested,  
And the critters all have nested in my clothes,  
And the fleas, they hold me down, while the chinchies creep around,  
And the bedbugs play pinochle on my nose.

They have India-rubber pickles, extra sizes for the cripples,  
And a dinner bell and gong they can't afford.  
When they open up the gate, we come rolling in on skates  
At that awful hungry hash house where I board.

There's a woman called the Duchess, brings the coffee in on crutches,  
And the cake looks like a sponge that's petrified.  
The pies are old and gray, and they're only in the way,  
At that awful hungry hash house where I bide.

Oh, the beefsteak it was rare and the butter had red hair,  
Baby had its feet both in the soup.  
The eggs they would not match and if you touched one it would hatch,  
And double back for safety in the coop.

It will help us on our way, it will brighten all our days,  
If we keep on the sunny side of life.

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*  
David Mansfield *dobro, violin, back vocal*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *banjo, back vocal*

Columbia New Process Records

CHARLIE POOLE WITH THE NORTH CAROLINA RAMBLERS



CHARLIE POOLE is unquestionably the best known banjo picker and singer in the Carolinas. A dance in North Carolina, Virginia, or Kentucky isn't a dance unless Charlie and the North Carolina Ramblers supply the pep. People, everywhere, dance all night when these favorites supply the music.

THE HIGHWAY-MAN HUNGRY HASH HOUSE—Vocals } 15160-D 10-in. 75c

CHARLIE POOLE WITH THE NORTH CAROLINA RAMBLERS

## 10. ROWENA 2:34

LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III/DICK CONNETTE



Rowena Long - ca. 1910

*Loudon's maternal grandfather wrote a sheaf of love letters to Rowena, the woman who became Loudon's maternal grandmother. Evidently, she found them convincing, and it's a good thing, too, for all presently concerned. A lot of this song came from out of those letters.*

Rowena, my darling, please don't let me down -  
A few words from you can lift me off the ground.  
Your letters are treasures, you don't know their worth.  
Days I don't receive one, I fall back to earth.

Rowena, my darling, just a word or two -  
It means the world to me, those few words from you.  
But when you don't send them, why can't you see?  
It's as if the whole world had gone back on me.

Tonight when I'm sleeping, I will dream of you -  
Wishfully thinking, what else can I do?  
Then in the morning, it's always the same,  
When dreaming is done, then I call out your name.

Tonight when I'm sleeping, I will dream of you -  
Wishfully thinking, what else can I do?  
Until tomorrow, I can only hope  
For my heart's deliverance in an envelope.

Rowena, my dear, yours to hand this a.m. -  
I'm holding your letter, in heaven again.  
A few words from me now, to make sure you know,  
As ever, I'm yours, yes, and I love you so.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, vocal*  
Paul Asaro *piano*  
Paul Woodiel, David Mansfield *violin*  
Danielle Farina *viola*  
Erik Friedlander *cello*

String arrangement by David Mansfield

## 11. DIDN'T HE RAMBLE 4:00

WILL HANDY

My mother raised three grown sons, Buster, Bill, and me.  
Buster was the black sheep of our little family.  
Mother tried to break him of his rough and rowdy ways,  
Finally had to get the judge to give him ninety days.

And didn't he ramble, ramble.  
He rambled all around, in and out the town,  
And didn't he ramble, ramble.  
He rambled till the butchers cut him down.

He rambled in a gambling game, he gambled on the green.  
The gamblers there showed him a trick that he had never seen.  
He lost his roll and jewelry, he like to lost his life.  
He lost the car that carried him there and someone stole his wife.

Didn't he ramble, ramble.  
He rambled all around, in and out the town,  
And didn't he ramble, ramble.  
He rambled till the butchers cut him down.

He rambled in a swell hotel, his appetite was stout,  
And when he refused to pay the bill, the landlord threw him out.  
He looked to smack him with a brick, but when he went to stoop,  
The landlord kicked him in the pants and knocked him for a loop.

And didn't he ramble, ramble.  
He rambled all around, in and out the town,  
And didn't he ramble, ramble.  
He rambled till the butchers cut him down.

He rambled to the racetrack, to make a gallery bet.  
He backed a horse called Hydrant, and Hydrant's running yet.  
And when he took his ladder out to go and paint the town,  
They had to run get megaphones to call that Rambler down.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, vocal*

## 12. RAMBLIN' BLUES 4:00

W. C. HANDY

I've seen the lights of old Broadway,  
And Market Street down by the Frisco Bay.  
I've strolled the Prado, I've gambled on the Bourse in gay Patee.  
Now, the seven wonders of this world I've seen,  
There's many other different places I have been.  
Take my advice, folks, please see Beale Street first –  
It's in Memphis, Tennessee!

Oh, you'll see pretty browns in beautiful gowns,  
You'll see tailor-mades and your hand-me-downs.  
You'll meet honest men, and pick-pockets skilled,  
And your business never closes 'til somebody gets killed!

Oh those Hog-Nose restaurants and Chittlin' Cafes -  
Talk about your whiskey and your bygone days.  
And places, once places, but now just a sham -  
You'll see Golden Balls enough to pave the New Jerusalem.

If Beale Street could talk, if Beale Street could talk,  
Married men would have to take their beds up and walk,  
All except one or two, who never drink booze,  
And the blind man on the corner who sings "The Memphis Blues."

I'd rather be here than any place I know,  
Rather be here than any place I know -  
It's gonna take a Sergeant for to make me go!

I'm goin' down to the river, baby, by and by,  
Goin' down to the river, Mississippi, and here's the reason why,  
'Cause that river's wet, and Beale Street's done gone dry, bone dry.

If Beale Street could talk, if Beale Street could talk,  
Married men would have to take their beds up and walk,  
All except one or two, who never drink booze,  
And the blind man on the corner who sings "The Memphis Blues."

I'd rather be here than any place I know.



*Charlie and the North Carolina Ramblers thoroughly Poolerized the 1916 W. C. Handy standard, "Beale Street Blues." Hell, they even changed the title. We saw no reason not to follow their lead. By the way, the Bourse was (and is) the Paris stock exchange. It's also a handy near-rhyme for "first," as in "Please see Beale Street ..."*



**Sloan Wainwright**

Loudon Wainwright III *lead vocal*  
Sloan Wainwright *back vocal*  
Rob Moose *acoustic guitar, tenor guitar, mandolin, violin*  
Wade Schuman *harmonica*  
C. J. Camerieri *trumpet*  
Michael Davis *trombone*  
Marcus Rojas *tuba*  
Tim Luntzel *bass*  
Ben Perowsky *drums*

Arrangement by Dick Connette  
Brass arranged by C. J. Camerieri

## 13. CHARLIE'S LAST SONG 5:07

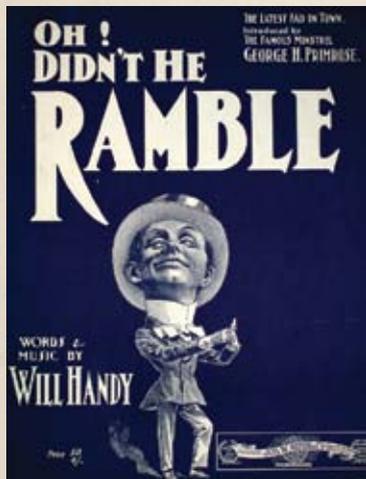
LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III/DICK CONNETTE

Old Charlie could drink you under the table,  
Old Charlie could sing all night long.  
Old Charlie had fun, but his rambling is done,  
And this is old Charlie's last song.

Old Charlie would fight, once he hit a policeman -  
They threwed him jail 'cause that's wrong.  
And when he broke out, the cops took him on home,  
And old Charlie, he played them a song.

Old Charlie could drink you under the table,  
Old Charlie could sing all night long.  
Old Charlie had fun, but his rambling is done,  
And this is old Charlie's last song.

Old Charlie made moonshine for the local bootleggers,  
Charlie, he had him a still.  
And the money he made paid for a good banjo -  
You can't make that wage down at the mill.



*"but his rambling is done ..."*

Old Charlie could drink you under the table,  
Old Charlie could sing all night long.  
Old Charlie had fun, but his rambling is done,  
And this is old Charlie's last song.

Old Charlie could never hold on to a dollar -  
He got famous, but he never got rich.  
And he never amounted to much of a husband,  
That banjo playing son of a bitch.

Old Charlie could drink you under the table,  
Old Charlie could sing all night long.  
Old Charlie had fun, but his rambling is done,  
And this is old Charlie's last song.

Old Charlie once said that he had a black heart,  
All except a small spot that was red.  
If he drinks any more that red spot will turn black,  
And Old Charlie at last will be dead.

Old Charlie could drink you under the table,  
Old Charlie could sing all night long.  
Old Charlie had fun, but his rambling is done,  
And this was old Charlie's last song.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *guitar, lead vocal*  
Chaim Tannenbaum *banjo, harmonica, back vocal*  
David Mansfield *dobro*

Since Charlie had sold his banjo to Preston Young, he had to borrow one, a Gibson, from Reid Rakes, a friend in Patrick County, Virginia. On the trip back home from New York City, Poole got drunk and pawned the instrument. Rakes finally got the pawn ticket from Charlie and had to take the train to Beckley, West Virginia to retrieve his banjo.

## 14. BEAUTIFUL 4:01

BARNEY E. WARREN

*Charlie never recorded this 1897 gospel song, but is said to have played it as a regular part of his shows.*

Beautiful robes so white,  
Beautiful land of light,  
Beautiful home so bright,  
Where there shall come no night.  
Beautiful crown I'll wear,  
Shining with stars o'er there,  
Yonder in mansions fair,  
Gather us there.

Beautiful robes, beautiful land,  
Beautiful home, beautiful band,  
Beautiful crown, shining so fair -  
Beautiful mansion bright, gather us there.

Beautiful thought to me,  
We shall forever be  
Thine in eternity,  
When from this world we're free -  
Free from its toil and care,  
Heavenly joys to share,  
Let me cross over there,  
This is my prayer.

Beautiful robes, beautiful land,  
Beautiful home, beautiful band,  
Beautiful crown, shining so fair -  
Beautiful mansion bright, gather us there.

Beautiful things on high,  
Over in yonder sky,  
Thus I shall leave this shore,  
Counting my treasures o'er.  
Where we shall never die,  
Carry me, by and by,  
Never to sorrow more,  
Heavenly store.

Beautiful robes, beautiful land,  
Beautiful home, beautiful band,  
Beautiful crown, shining so fair -  
Beautiful mansion bright, gather us there.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *banjo, 1st lead vocal*  
Lucy Wainwright Roche *2nd lead vocal*  
Dave Roche, Maggie Roche,  
Suzzy Roche *back vocal*  
Rayna Gellert *violin*

Vocal arrangement by Dick Connette



Lucy Wainwright Roche



Charlie Poole's House in Spray - 1966



## 15. HIGH WIDE & HANDSOME (*REPRISE*) 2:08

— Loudon Wainwright III —

High wide and handsome - that's how I like livin'.  
High wide and handsome - that's how life should be.  
Low skinny and ugly - that's for other people.  
High wide and handsome suits me to a tee.

Song, wine, and women - they're my 3 favorites.  
Beer, gin, and whiskey - that's 5, 6, and 4.  
Saturday night I like eatin' and dancin' -  
I sleep all day Sunday so's I'm ready for more.

High wide and handsome - you can't take it with you.  
High wide and handsome - that's one way to go.  
Let's live it up - might as well, we're all dying.  
High wide and handsome - let's put on a show.

---

Loudon Wainwright III *vocal*  
Rob Moose *acoustic guitars, National guitar*

Arrangement by Rob Moose

# ME & LOUDON & CHARLIE

Loudon once told me that when he was starting out, Charlie Poole meant a lot to him. So for his 59th birthday, I bought him the **You Ain't Talkin' To Me** 3 CD set (and one for myself). A couple years later I got around to listening to the collection, and imagined I knew just how it was that Loudon particularly related to Poole - the humor, the clarity, the simplicity, the wise guy attitude, and, occasionally, an unapologetic emotional sincerity. I also thought I heard how Poole, who may not have written his own material, but was, nonetheless, an enormously creative song shaper and interpreter, had influenced Loudon, both as a writer and a performer.

So in December of 2007, I proposed, for fun, that he and I make a Poole album, recording songs that Poole recorded, plus writing new songs from Poole's point of view or about his life and times. I also suggested that we not worry about trying to recreate the Poole sound, that we just respond to what we loved in the recordings and see where that took us. Loudon, being pragmatic, suggested we start off recording demos and see how it went. Well, it went! Before long we had dozens. When I heard his demo of *The Deal*, I knew we were on to something. And when, soon after, he wrote *High Wide & Handsome*, the project just took hold.

Pretty much, we've carried on just like we planned, involving all sorts of great musicians and arrangers, and recording the songs as our ears, hearts, minds, and hands took us, from string quartet to swing trio, from old timey string band, to acappella gospel. What we've found in the Poole repertoire, besides the expected nascent country and bluegrass, has been astounding in its range - sentimental songs, vaudeville songs, minstrel songs, early jazz songs, British Ballad variants, Dixie melodies, comedy routines - it's like a condensed compendium of all the strains that have created and continue to create American popular music.

Sometimes it seems, at least as far as the music goes, that this project has been running itself, or, as a friend of mine says, "making its own gravy." Well, whatever, it's been my pleasure to be a part of it.

- Dick Connette, New York City, May 2009



## Produced by Dick Connette

Recorded and mixed by Scott Lehrer and Alex Venguer  
May 2008 - June 2009 at 2nd Story Sound, NYC  
Additional Engineering: Jeff Cook and Stewart Lerman  
Assistant Engineer: Jeff Cook

Additional recording at Ultratone Studio, Studio City, CA  
Recording engineer: Johnny Lee Schell

Mastered by Scott Hull at Masterdisk, NY

Notes on the songs by Dick Connette  
Charlie Poole biographical clippings from Rambling Blues by Kinney Rorrer

Design by Adam Tuck  
Photos of Loudon Wainwright III and Dick Connette by Paula Court  
Video stills of High Wide & Handsome musicians by Michael Grenadier  
Photograph of Charlie Poole gravesite by Chuck Levey  
Photograph of Rowena Long and "Dead Skunk" sheet music (photo by Milton Kramer)  
Courtesy of Loudon Wainwright III

All other images, excepting period sheet music, courtesy of Kinney Rorrer

Special Thanks to Ritamarie Kelly, Bonnie Rorrer, Kinney Rorrer, Michael Grenadier, Chuck Levey, Peter Christ, M'Finda Kalunga Community Garden, and David Patterson

Rufus Wainwright appears courtesy of the Decca Label Group

Bonus Tracks - available for free download at [www.thecharliepooleproject.com](http://www.thecharliepooleproject.com)

"Milwaukee Blues"  
"Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms"  
"Shootin' Creek"  
"White House Blues"

"No Knees" and "High Wide & Handsome" are published by Snowden Music (ASCAP)

"Acres Of Diamonds," "Little Waterloo," and "Old Ballyhoo" are published by Two Fourteen Music (Administered by Spirit One Music) (BMI)

"Charlie's Last Song," "The Man In The Moon," "Rowena," and "Way Up In NYC" are published by Snowden Music (ASCAP) and Two Fourteen Music (Administered by Spirit One Music) (BMI)

"Ragtime Annie" is Public Domain and, as adapted and arranged, is published by Penumbra Music (ASCAP)

All other songs are Public Domain and, as adapted and arranged, are published by Snowden Music (ASCAP) and Two Fourteen Music (Administered by Spirit One Music) (BMI)



[www.thecharliepooleproject.com](http://www.thecharliepooleproject.com)

[www.lwiii.com](http://www.lwiii.com)

LW3 management: Tim Bermet/Deep Blue Arts  
Booking: Mike Kappus/The Rosebud Agency (USA) & Paul Charles/Asgard Agency (International)

[www.dickconnette.com](http://www.dickconnette.com)

[www.2ndstorysoundrecords.com](http://www.2ndstorysoundrecords.com)



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## CHARLIE POOLE WITH THE NORTH CAROLINA RAMBLERS

**C**HARLIE POOLE, the first man on the left in the picture, is the leading banjo picker and singer in the Carolinas. But the other two Ramblers, with their fiddle and guitar, are good, too, and all three ramble 'way outside Carolina to supply the pep for many an all-night dance. Their Columbia *New Process* Records are equally popular.



CHARLIE POOLE WITH  
 THE NORTH CAROLINA RAMBLERS

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HANGMAN, HANGMAN, SLACK THE ROPE I ONCE LOVED A SAILOR—Vocals	} 15385-D
JEALOUS MARY HUSBAND AND WIFE WERE ANGRY ONE NIGHT—Vocals	} 15342-D
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