

Produced and Annotated by JOHN R. CRAIG TAM Productions

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 31094

# CLAWHAMMER BANJO DAVID JOHNSON



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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N85  
J66  
C618  
1983

MUSIC LP

**CLAWHAMMER BANJO****SIDE ONE**

- |                           |      |
|---------------------------|------|
| 1. Old Joe Clark          | 1:58 |
| 2. Shout Little Luly      | 2:04 |
| 3. Red Wing               | 2:08 |
| 4. John Hardy             | 2:30 |
| 5. Bile Them Cabbage Down | 2:35 |
| 6. Sugar Hill             | 2:38 |
| 7. Cumberland Gap         | 2:40 |
| 8. Mississippi Sawyer     | 1:45 |

**SIDE TWO**

- |                      |      |
|----------------------|------|
| 1. Cripple Creek     | 2:05 |
| 2. Johnson Boys      | 1:53 |
| 3. John Henry        | 1:36 |
| 4. Sourwood Mountain | 2:30 |
| 5. Pig In The Pen    | 2:20 |
| 6. Cindy             | 2:55 |
| 7. Groundhog         | 2:26 |
| 8. Mountain Dew      | 2:28 |

Produced and Annotated by JOHN R. CRAIG  
Recorded at STAR RECORDING COMPANY,  
Millers Creek, North Carolina.

Recording Engineer:  
Marshall Craven  
Photography: Kevin Rash

The selections heard on this album are primarily a collection of fiddle tunes and mountain melodies common to Western North Carolina. With the turn of the century the five-string banjo began to find its way into more and more homes in the Southern Appalachians and soon became a real favorite among the mountain folk. There had not been much need for the four-string or tenor banjo of the flatlands but with the addition of the fifth string, the banjo became a solo instrument that had a new voice all its own. With the increasing popularity of this "new" instrument, both the homemade and store bought kind, it followed that these mountain melodies found their way to the banjo.

Clawhammer refers to the method the player uses with his right hand while plucking the strings of the banjo. This style of playing is also known as frailing or drophumb style and is what the early mountain musicians first learned. This style was taught to David by his grandfather Bill Johnson of Millers Creek, North Carolina who learned from his father in a tradition handed down from generation to generation.

David is also an expert at the three-fingered, "Blue Grass" or Scruggs style of banjo pickin' but prefers clawhammer because of the historic link to the past generations of mountain musicians.

David has worked hard to "imitate" the clawhammer style by using the left hand to produce the distinctive sound instead of the right but this technique, though effective, is not only difficult but frowned upon by mountain musicians as being "not right."

In addition to his grandfather, David's favorite performers of the clawhammer style of playing are Ralph Stanley, the late Dave Macon and Doc Walsh.

Most of the songs performed on this album are tuned G or "in tune" or "regular" as the mountain folk say. This is the most prevalent tuning in use in the Appalachian Mountains. The following selections found on this album are in G:

Old Joe Clark; Shout Little Luly; Red Wing; John Hardy; Bile Them Cabbage Down; Cumberland Gap; Cripple Creek; John Henry; Sourwood Mountain; Pig In The Pen; Groundhog; and Mountain Dew.

The next most often used tuning in old time banjo playing is C or "high." The selections played in C are:

Sugar Hill; Mississippi Sawyer; Johnson Boys; and Cindy.

The most widely found type of homemade banjos in Western North Carolina were constructed of a wooden rim, usually poplar, mahogany or maple, with a head made of hide (usually calf). The neck was fretless and most often made of maple. It was on just such an instrument as described here that David learned and to this day he still owns this banjo as well as newer factory models, some of which have been modified to fit the needs of the many types of sounds and music played as well as to obtain various effects.

It should not be forgotten that there are even more primitive banjos made of pine or any other wood available and strung with wire from an old piano or screen door. No matter the construction, the banjo has a quality all its own and just like the wind, continues to ring throughout the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

David Johnson was born and raised in the Western North Carolina mountains and is no stranger to the many varied forms of musical expression found there. Since both his parents played guitar, he didn't have far to go for lessons and at age four, David was playing along with the family band.

While still in his early teens, he was playing all the mountain instruments as well as developing a unique, progressive style on the steel guitar.

David has done extensive performing and recording throughout the South and his playing can be heard on the Folkways Album FW 8779, SCOTTISH & ENGLISH EARLY BALLADS with vocalist Shanna Beth McGee.

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