

Corduroy Road breathes fresh life into traditional sounds

By [KERRY BOYLES](#) on February 4, 2012

The Corduroy Road is back.

Newly reformed, [the band showcased its bluegrass-folk flare](#) in a triumphant comeback opening for the Carolina Chocolate Drops.

With a sweet sound closer to Charlie Daniels than Rascal Flatts, the recently-revived band captivated the audience with its “good ol’ boy” Southern charm and a vintage Appalachian musicality.

To those scared off by a few chords of a banjo, the scene was more reminiscent of “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” than “Deliverance:” evocative of The Soggy Bottom Boys, the band hearkened back to traditional bluegrass with the twang of a banjo, the quaver of a fiddle and the trill of a harmonica.

The Corduroy Road also featured an upright bass plucked expertly by longtime band member Elijah NeeSmith. The fiddle was in the sure hands of newcomer Russel McCumber, while Matt Dyson strummed an electric guitar, moving the music from nostalgic bluegrass to fresh “newgrass.”

Providing rich vocals and some harmonica skills was original band member Drew Carman. NeeSmith and Carman switched off on the banjo, illustrating the group’s musical dexterity. Finally, Garrett Chism contributed a rousing beat on the drums.

Lacking the over-produced veneer of modern country musicians, the band breathed lively energy into every pounding minute of its performance. Playing more new songs than old, the musicians opened with a song set-off by a sprightly banjo and a cacophony of upbeat string and percussion instrumentation.

The band played with tempo throughout the show, beginning slowly then raising the rhythm or slowing down a fast song at the bridge.

Its “Three Friends” began as a melancholy musing on missing friends, dominated by a languid fiddle melody but suddenly transformed — with an upbeat guitar riff — into the celebration of their reunion. Other songs sped up or slowed down unexpectedly, adding greater complexity to the music.

Despite the overall liveliness of its sound, The Corduroy Road didn't shy away from more maudlin topics. Reminiscent of traditional folk ballads like "The Wreck of the Old 97," the narrative ballad "1889 Johnstown, Pa." describes the drowning of a man in a flood.

But these songs were balanced out by the foot-stomping melodies and country humor of other songs detailing drinking whiskey and disobeying mama's wishes.

While all band members made beautiful music with their instruments, NeeSmith and Carman made stunning music with their voices. They layered harmonies on top of each other, adding further complexity to songs bursting with instrumentation. The result was a deep and overwhelming sound that filled the theater.

And it was an example, much like the band or its night of music, of an inspiring combination of new and old.



Opening for Carolina Chocolate Drops at the Georgia Theatre last night, The Corduroy Road was lively and emotionally powerful in its rendition of folk and bluegrass songs, new and old. SEAN TAYLOR/Staff