

# JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY: THE HOOSIER POET



**“The rhythms are familiar on the page to most Hoosiers, but there’s nothing like hearing the beloved James Whitcomb Riley verse, full of dialect and cadence, out loud — especially if you’re hearing it from the lips of Danny Russel, Riley impersonator extraordinaire. After more than a decade of playing the famous scribe, Russel’s got the poems (and the poet) down pat.”**

**— Indianapolis Monthly**

*He once claimed he possessed “neither intellectual brilliance nor physical prowess” and “cared nothing for school, and deserted it at the first opportunity to take up a wandering life,” so how did Riley become the most popular poet in America?*



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**Mark Twain called his friend James Whitcomb Riley “the funniest man in America!” With his depictions of Hoosiers as a kindly and wholesome people, Riley’s vast output made him nationally famous — the best-selling poet of the 19th century.**

Danny Russel will bring this whimsical portrayal to your venue as he captures our Hoosier Poet’s playfulness and sense of mischief. He initially spent months researching and compiling the show during visits to Riley’s boyhood home in Greenfield (built by his father Reuben during the 1850s), his adult residence in Indianapolis at Lockerbie Square, and in Bloomington at the Lilly Library, which features the world’s largest collection of manuscripts and published information about the poet. Mr. Russel’s years of performing have given him a wealth of material to draw from, and if desired, he will also field questions after the program.

James Whitcomb Riley looks back at his difficult childhood, his work as an itinerant sign painter, his time as a musician and actor with traveling medicine shows, his newspaper stints, overwhelming popularity on the lecture circuit and unprecedented book sales. In a sentimental, humorous and completely captivating manner, he also recites and performs “Little Orphant Annie,” “The Raggedy Man,” “When the Frost is on the Punkin” and many other favorites.

Mr. Russel has carefully constructed the show to include every major aspect of our Hoosier Poet’s life and career, along with many arcane and surprising facts. The experience he delivers proves to be exciting for the Riley aficionado and novice alike.

Riley’s dialect poetry inspired the creation of Raggedy Ann, and with his gift to the Indianapolis/Marion County Public Library, he

revealed how important it was that future generations have free access to books. The Riley Memorial Association, Riley Hospital, and Camp Riley for Youth all still operate in his name, making the poet’s legacy unique because of what he symbolizes for the children of his home state.

His esteemed friend Booth Tarkington wrote, “Riley had a literally unmatched power over his audience for riotous laughter or for actual copious tears.”



*In addition to his illustrious acting career and numerous tours, Mr. Russel is a five-time grant recipient honored by the Indiana Arts Commission for theatrical excellence. “James Whitcomb Riley: The Hoosier Poet” is a charming portrait of one of Indiana’s most cherished figures.*