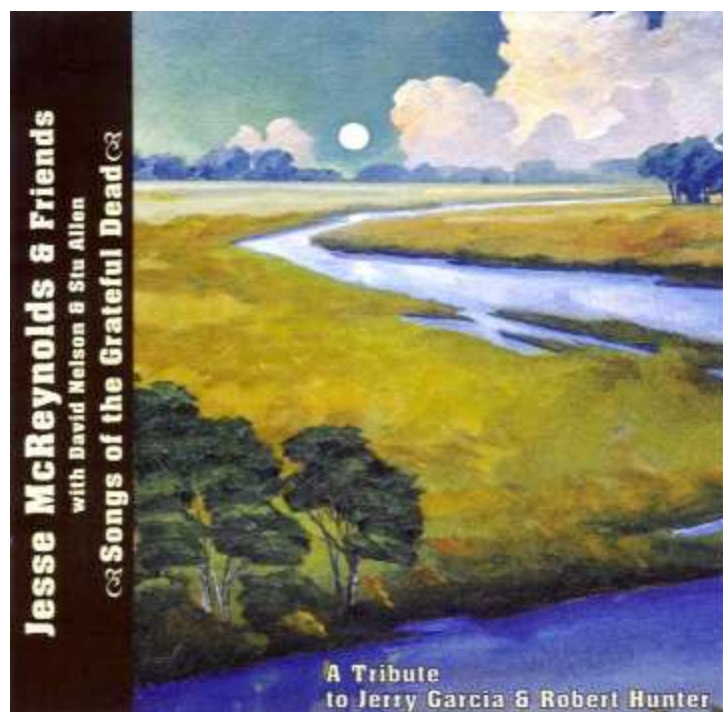


Jesse McReynolds & Friends: *Songs of the Grateful Dead*

By Rick Moore on October 26th, 2010



Jesse McReynolds & Friends
Songs of the Grateful Dead
Woodstock Records
Rating:

For more than half a century, Jesse McReynolds and his brother, Jim, set the standard by which so many of today's bluegrass acts are measured. As a mandolin innovator, Jesse influenced everyone from David Grisman to Rhonda Vincent, and although Jim died in 2002, Jesse continues to perform with vigor into his 80s. On *Songs of the Grateful Dead*, McReynolds plays and sings with grace and style that come only with the wisdom of age, but with the chops of a man half his age.

Joined by David Nelson of the New Riders of the Purple Sage and Stu Allen of the JGB Band (which keeps the music of Jerry Garcia alive) on guitars and vocals, McReynolds tackles some of the Dead's best-known songs, as well as some that aren't necessarily favorites. The album opens with an excellent version of "Black Muddy River," with McReynolds' tasteful mandolin and in-tune vocal (it's hard to imagine Jesse using auto tune) carrying the song. "Bird Song," which lyricist Robert Hunter supposedly wrote for Janis Joplin, gets a wonderful treatment here, with instruments in harmony and Jesse taking a signature solo

that's somewhere between the mountains of Virginia and the South Side of Chicago.

Other tracks on the album include "Loser," "Ripple," and "Stella Blue," from the Dead's classic *Wake of the Flood* album. The lyrics to all these songs, of course, came from the pen of Robert Hunter, San Francisco's answer to Bernie Taupin, and he and McReynolds actually collaborated to write the final track on this album, the introspective, almost Everlys-ish "Day By Day." But then, the Everlys comparison probably comes to mind because of the family vocal harmony blend of McReynolds with his grandchildren, Garrett and Amanda.

If you're a Deadhead, you should love this record, if for nothing more than the spirit in which it was recorded. If you're a Jesse McReynolds fan, you should love it because you're used to Jesse's penchant for doing things a little differently than, say, Bill Monroe (Jesse actually played mandolin on the Doors' *The Soft Parade* album). And if you're just looking for a nice, mostly acoustic record for a lazy Sunday afternoon or a drive in the country, you won't go wrong with this one. Thanks again, Jesse.