

Dead Central

A Blog for the UC Santa Cruz Grateful Dead Archive.

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Evolving Musical Traditions: Jesse McReynolds and the Grateful Dead



In 1964, a young Jerry Garcia and his friend and later musical collaborator **Sandy Rothman** embarked on an extended road trip East, traveling to see their bluegrass heroes in the South, North, and Midwest. Scholars and fans tend to focus on their meeting with **Bill Monroe**, immortalized in a homemade recording that Jerry made of one of Monroe's sets at **Bean Blossom**, but just as important to the young musicians was seeing brothers Jim and Jesse McReynolds, the already famed bluegrass duo from **Dothan, Alabama**.

Garcia's path would stray far from the roots music he heard on that trip, but his heart remained close to that wellspring for the rest of his life, returning to it periodically to refresh and renew his eclectic muse. Some of the wonderful results of those periodic renewals can be heard in releases documenting his work with **Old & In the Way** in the 1970s, the **Jerry Garcia Acoustic Band** in the 1980s, and his later work with **David Grisman** (whom he also met on that 1964 trip) in the 1990s.

By then, of course, Garcia's own contributions to music had been recognized, critically and collegially, and after his death, efforts like *Pickin' on the Grateful Dead* made clear the ease with which his compositions could be reinterpreted from a bluegrass perspective. Now, 46 years after he met Garcia, Jesse McReynolds makes the definitive case for that with his new release, **Songs of the Grateful Dead: A Tribute to Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter (Woodstock Records)**. It represents a remarkable achievement artistically, and for Dead scholars, it also demonstrates the degree to which the Dead's artistic achievement is thoroughly and inextricably interwoven with the broader currents of American music.

Grateful Slug



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