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Grateful Dead Listening Guide

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NOT SURE WHERE TO BEGIN?

The intro posts are always a good start, followed logically by my thoughts on Music & Being, which guide my writing. You could also try my current favorite show on the blog, plus there's good reading under the trading community label. Or, take a walk on a Listening Trail.



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2010

Jesse McReynolds - Songs of the Grateful Dead



Once in a while Grateful Dead tributes appear in the world of popular music. Given the subtle underpinnings of what actually makes Grateful Dead music worth honoring—that often being much more than the songs on a Grateful Dead record—the thought of a tribute album often struggles to appear as anything more than novelty.

This is not the case with Bluegrass legend Jesse McReynolds' Songs of the Grateful Dead: A Tribute to Jerry Garcia & Robert Hunter. Released earlier this week, here

the Dead seem to have been honored in a way that polishes a jewel with which we are already familiar but might not have studied quite so deeply.

The bluegrass roots of the Dead are well known to those who cherish their music, but might be something of a surprise to the mainstream. And while psychedelic jug band bluegrass music might be an eyebrow raiser to many, this element within the foundation of the Dead's musical spirit is clear. Introduce Jesse McReynolds working with David Nelson to produce a collection of Hunter/Garcia compositions, and we quickly see how naturally Garcia's music finds home in the Bluegrass genre.

I was lucky enough to receive an advanced copy of the CD, and to chat with Mr. McReynolds about the project. His approach is pure and without cliché. His song selection pushes the boundaries to a place where producing outright bluegrass versions of Grateful Dead songs would seem contrived. Wisely instead, tunes like Franklin's Tower and Fire On The Mountain showcase fine Bluegrass musician riffing into Grateful Dead territory. And Bird Song might be the finest example of where Bluegrass and the Dead find union.

For Deadheads, the entire CD offers an instant sense of familiarity—all of the songs are well known classics. To hear them presented in McReynolds' style, often with the addition of pedal steel (Stella Blue - perfect!) and other instrumentation well within the Grateful Dead universe, allows us a very intimate perspective on terrain we have traveled often. And the disc is capped off with the lovely and catchy "Day By Day," a tune written with Robert Hunter himself.

I recommend you check out Songs of the Grateful Dead for yourself and see the familiar in a fresh and naturally fitting light.

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Four placeholder boxes for related content with labels: Grateful Dead, Grateful Dead, The Ones That Get Away, While The Music Plays The Band.

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