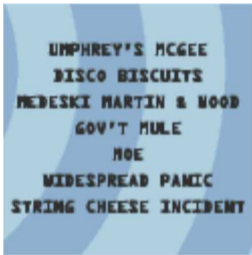




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## Jesse McReynolds & Friends

### Songs of the Grateful Dead

Woodstock Records

Archive

Oh, it's a funny ol' world – with a long, long road that runs in a great big circle around it.

Back in the days when a young Jerry Garcia was immersed in the world of bluegrass music, his list of picking heroes included the McReynolds brothers, Jim (guitar) and Jesse (mandolin). In fact, when Garcia and his buddy Sandy Rothman took off on their now-legendary cross-country bluegrass vision quest in 1964 (on the wings of a snow white '61 Corvair), one of their goals was to track down "Jim & Jesse & The Virginia Boys" – the McReynolds and their band of ace players. Although the young crusaders did manage to hear the brothers live, a moment of post-show shyness kept them from actually meeting the McReynolds brothers in person. Rothman and Garcia soon went back home to California (Garcia eventually fell in with a different crowd – but that's another story) and Jim and Jesse kept on rolling and picking. And that was that.

46 years later, the road has come around in one of its karma-guided circles. Jerry Garcia may be gone, as is Jim McReynolds (who passed away in 2004), but Jesse McReynolds is still making music. His newly-released *Songs of the Grateful Dead* finds the 81-year-old McReynolds paying tribute to a friend he never met, with folks such as the New Riders' David Nelson, Stu Allen (JGB), and even Garcia's long-ago co-pilot Sandy Rothman, joining in on the fun.

Right off the bat, you need to know two things: this is not another "Pickin' On ..." -style tribute album loaded with high lonesome versions of the subject's tunes set to a bluegrass tempo. What you have are songs played in a manner respectful to the original arrangements with the payoff being moments like when the break on a nicely-chugging "Franklin's Tower" opens up and Jesse McReynolds' sweet little mandolin leads the jam – it'll make the hair stand up on your arms.

Secondly, McReynolds doesn't sound his age – not at all. His voice is strong and full of emotion throughout the album. For someone who wasn't familiar with the Dead's music (it was Rothman and McReynolds' wife Joy who convinced him to consider the project), ol' Jesse simply *nails* the sadly-sweet emotion of "Standing On The Moon" and "Stella Blue". At the same time, he's totally comfy with the rapid-fire barrel-assing charge of "Alabama Getaway", becoming the character in each song much the way that Garcia used to.

McReynold's mandolin is the star of this collection, however, easily meeting the challenge of playing everything from the already-grassy "Deep Elem Blues" and the mando-ready "Ripple" to the rollicking swagger of "Deal" or the slow hip-sway of "Fire On The Mountain". Simply put: it all works.

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