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Staff Report

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Jesse McReynolds & Friends with David Nelson and Stu Allen

"Songs of the Grateful Dead: A Tribute to Jerry Garcia & Robert Hunter"

Mandolin great Jesse McReynolds and his late brother Jim, billed as Jim and Jesse, were idols of a young Jerry Garcia, who set off on a bluegrass pilgrimage to the South in 1964 with his banjo-playing buddy, Sandy Rothman, to hear them play live.

They managed to make it to a couple of Jim and Jesse shows, but Garcia was too shy to meet them. Forty-six years later, he would undoubtedly be thrilled that his onetime hero would record a dozen of the classic Grateful Dead songs he wrote with lyricist Robert Hunter.

McReynolds, a multiple Grammy award winner who's been a member of the Grand Ol' Opry for more than 45 years, took on this project in 2004 at the suggestion of his wife, Joy, who just so happens to be a Garcia fan and acquaintance of Rothman's.

Rothman helped McReynolds' pick out the songs for this remarkable CD, which will be released Oct. 5 - "Black Muddy River," "Ripple," "The Wheel," "Bird Song," "Franklin's Tower," "Standing on the Moon," "Loser," "Fire on the Mountain," "Stella Blue," "Deep Elem Blues," "Deal" and "Alabama Getaway."

McReynolds made the package a baker's dozen, collaborating with Hunter on a new song, "Day by Day," a sweet country ballad with his daughter, Amanda, adding goose-bump high harmony vocals.

Known for his innovative crosspicking style on mandolin, McReynolds was joined in the studio by a

team of crack Nashville session players as well as New Riders guitarist David Nelson, a Garcia friend from back in the day, and Stu Allen of Melvin Seals' JGB Band. Rothman plays banjo on "Deep Elem Blues."

It's always refreshing to have musicians of this caliber covering the Garcia/Hunter catalog, making them their own. These bluegrass/country renditions are like hearing these tunes for the first time, with new ears.

McReynolds' voice is a revelation. Hunter calls it Garcia's "long-lost brother voice." Somewhere Jerry is smiling.

Buy It: "Songs of the Grateful Dead: A Tribute to Jerry Garcia & Robert Hunter," Jesse McReynolds & Friends with David Nelson and Stu Allen, Woodstock Records, [www.woodstockrecords.com](http://www.woodstockrecords.com); \$13.99

- Paul Liberatore

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