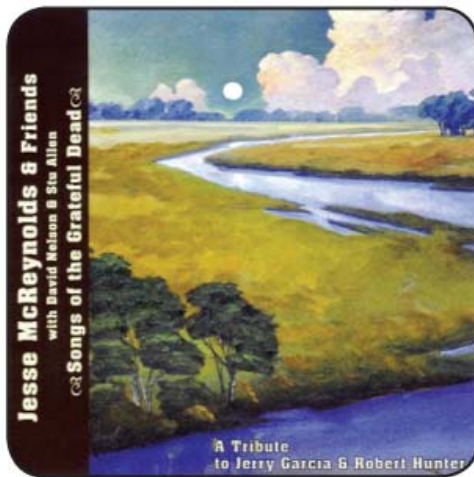




Jesse McReynolds & Friends – *Songs Of The Grateful Dead*

(Woodstock Records)

3.5



I've never been a fan of the Grateful Dead, but mandolin innovator and country and bluegrass legend McReynolds and friends are, and here they ably translate the Dead's material (songs written by Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter) into timeless songs that resonate with warmth and old-time country honesty. From the folksy Americana of the opener, "Black Muddy River," the songs of Hunter and Garcia are re-imagined in a fresh and enjoyable fashion, with a down-home flavor that wouldn't be at all out of place on a Tennessee stage. It's no surprise that Jesse McReynolds is a 45-year member of the Grand Old Opry and member of both the Country Music Hall Of Fame and the Bill Monroe Bluegrass Hall Of Fame.

Standouts include "The Wheel" (with some great harmonizing), the lament of "Loser," the elegant "Stella Blue," and the ultra-catchy "Deep Elem Blues."

"Day By Day" is a beautiful closer, and is actually a new song co-written by McReynolds and Robert Hunter. It works well to close out this cool collection of roots music that combines two unique legacies into a cohesive whole.

-- *Todd Zachritz*