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by Brian Robbins

### Jesse McReynolds: Old, but New in the Way



Jim and Jesse McReynolds in the 1960s

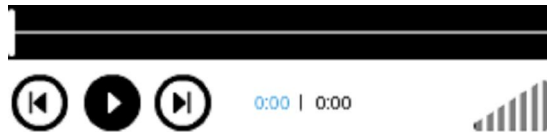
This journey is part of the Grateful Dead legend, a combination of a holy vision quest and a Sal Paradise/Dean Moriarty road trip—only instead of a 1949 Hudson, the vehicle of choice was a '61 Corvair and the intrepid travelers were Sandy Rothman and Jerry Garcia. Armed with a massive reel-to-reel recorder and a case of blank tapes, the pair struck out from California in May of 1964, heading east on Route 66 in search of *real* bluegrass music played by folks such as Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys and the McReynolds brothers, Jim and Jesse.

Fast forward to the fall of 2004, to a world without Jerry Garcia, Bill Monroe and Jim McReynolds. Sandy Rothman starts thinking about that '64 trip and he takes it upon himself e-mail Jesse McReynolds, just to let the mandolinist know how much he meant to the two young bluegrass enthusiasts. Jesse's wife and webmaster Joy—who happened to be a Deadhead from way back—knew exactly who Sandy Rothman was when she read the e-mail. A new journey began.



Video / Audio

### Cold Weather Instrumentals



STS9: Equinox	8:03
The Motet: Cheap Shit	9:18
Derek Trucks Band: Afro Blue	8:20
Jazz Mandolin Project: Nozanina	10:59
Steve Kimock Band: Tongue N' Groove	9:52

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- ◊ Jesse McReynolds: Old, but New in the Way
- ◊ Paper Diamond "From Now Till..."



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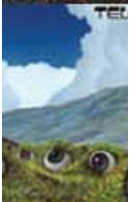
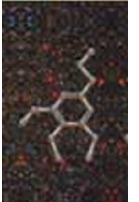
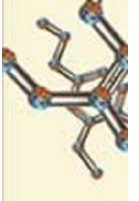
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*Songs of the Grateful Dead* by Jesse McReynolds & Friends isn't just another Pickin' On tribute album that sets an artist's music to a stomping bluegrass tempo and lets it rip. It is a fresh collection selected by McReynolds and recorded by Grateful Dead world staples like NRPS guitarist David Nelson, new JGB guitarist Stu Allen and, yes, Rothman himself on banjo and production duties.

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One of the many heartwarming aspects of Jesse McReynolds—who describes himself as “81 going on 50”—is his excitement in “discovering” the music of the Grateful Dead at this point in his life. “Sandy and Joy came up with the idea of the tribute album,” he confirms. “When they asked me, I said, ‘Well, I’d have to listen to the music and see, ‘cause I don’t really know it.’”

Though new to the Grateful Dead’s music, once he listened, Jesse was hooked. “We went in the studio and recorded ‘Black Muddy River’ and everybody told me it was one of the greatest things they’d heard me do. I knew I just had to keep going with it.”

Songs like “Loser” and “Ripple” naturally lend themselves to acoustic-based settings. But picture “Franklin’s Tower” or “Fire on the Mountain” chugging along at a Dead-style pace with a mandolin leading the way through the jam. “I might have to get [my mandolin] fixed so I can plug it in if I need to,” says McReynolds. “You never know—if I ever had the occasion to go to Bonnaroo or something, I’d probably have to plug it in so they could hear me.” McReynolds captures the emotions of each song, whether it’s the lonely romanticism of “Standing on the Moon” or the soulful sweetness of “Stella Blue.” “Those songs make such great pictures in your mind,” he says.

McReynolds is just beginning to discover what it’s like to be embraced by the Grateful Dead community. At the Philadelphia Folk Festival in August, he debuted his versions of “Black Muddy River” and “Deep Elem Blues,” casually mentioning to the crowd that he’d brought a hundred or so copies of the new CD to sell. “When I came off the stage a half hour later, the CDs were all gone and there was a line of people stretched plumb across the field waiting for my autograph. I said to myself, ‘Boy—this is unusual!’”

The irony about *Songs of the Grateful Dead* is that McReynolds and Garcia never actually met. “Sandy told me that he and Jerry were at some of our shows back in ‘64, but they were too bashful to come up to talk to us,” says McReynolds.

“I wish we’d got to know each other. It sure feels like

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we have a lot in common.”

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