

## Masters of Bluegrass #12 – Jim & Jesse – Elegant Bluegrass

Brothers Jim and Jesse McReynolds kept the classic sound of the 30s brother duets in country music during the 1960s and beyond. The immensely talented duo featured lead vocals and mandolin by Jesse while Jim provided guitar and clear tenor vocals. They began their career in 1947. The team stayed busy performing radio programs and performances across the South until 1952 when they were signed by Capitol Records.

Jesse's unique mandolin style deserves special attention. He developed an original cascading solo style that on first impression sounds like the rolling three finger 5-string banjo style of Earl Scruggs. The style is produced with a flatpick and uses open strings in a repeated "crosspicking" pattern. Although some modern players have duplicated the style, there is no school of McReynolds style players like Monroe style mandolin or Scruggs style banjo. Jesse also developed a "split-string" approach on some solos which allowed him to produce two different notes from a single pair of unison tuned strings.

Jesse also developed a unique echo technique used on electric instruments. During experiments for a more commercial sound, Jesse recorded with an electric mandolin with single strings that sounded very much like an electric guitar. The technique requires skill and has been adopted by guitarists Albert Lee and Ricky Skaggs during his country music career in the 1990s.

In 1960, their first single for Columbia, "The Flame of Love" backed by "Gosh I Miss You All The Time" spent weeks climbing the top 100 national charts. Their other classic songs include "Cotton Mill Man" (banned from radio in many mill towns as anti-mill), "Diesel On My Tail" (a truck driving comedy song), "Are You Missing Me", and John Prine's "Paradise".

Jim & Jesse appeared at the Newport Folk Festival in 1963 indicating their success with the folk crowd and they were made members of the Grand Old Opry in 1964. Jim died in 2002.

### Jim & Jesse Legacy

J & J featured many high quality fiddles and banjo players over their many years of performing. The brother duet sound they achieved was impressive. Jesse's unique addition to the mandolin made waves still felt today.