

American ★ songwriter

Preservation Hall Jazz Band & Del McCoury Band: American Legacies By Jon Stone April 12th, 2011, American Songwriter

Preservation Jazz Hall Band & Del McCoury Band
American Legacies
(McCoury Music)

Rating: ★★★★★



“The band’s in town; they come to play.”

Last year Del McCoury appeared on The Preservation Hall Jazz Band’s star-studded benefit record *Preservation* singing “After You’ve Gone.” Despite the spirited contributions on that release from both old and new-guard artists (Merle Haggard, Steve Earl, Jim James, Andrew Bird, etc.), McCoury’s weathered “high-and-lonesome” bluegrass voice finds immediate and arresting chemistry with the now 50-year-old Preservation Hall jazz tradition. There must have been a lightning-

rod moment sometime during that session where both parties knew that an additional album project was an inevitable necessity. *American Legacies* is the happy result. The record elaborates on the formula that worked so well on the initial team-up, but this time brings Del McCoury's band to the party completing the crossover circuit and proving once and for all that ideological and traditional borders between bluegrass and jazz are not only mutable but are largely imaginary.

American music is funny that way. One doesn't have to go back very far before the faded musical familial lines between estranged cousins become undeniably distinct. In this way, when Del McCoury and his band start playing with the musicians in the Preservation Hall at New Orleans, there is an easiness to the collaboration – one due, surely, to the talent of both bands, but also with a sense of ease that sounds and feels like musical reunion.

That kinsfolk familiarity also gives way to lots of play on *American Legacies*. Beginning with the lines I quote above on “The Band's In Town,” the record pushes American standards in several interesting directions: McCoury fronts “Jambalaya,” imbuing the Creole-inspired Hank Williams tune with unapologetic hillbilly ethos. Even better, the Jazz Hall band takes the classic “I'll Fly Away” and reinserts it into the church — starting in a gospel mode but then modulating out, first into jazz, then bluegrass and back. Other songs show off the virtuosity of the players. The jazz standard “Sugar Blues” highlight the talents of trumpet-muting master Mark Braud from Preservation Hall and the fiddling of Jason Carter from McCoury's. The two make for an unlikely but lovely duet. Another standout is the aptly titled “Banjo Frisco” which reminds us that the banjo was a jazz instrument long before Bill Monroe ever had a Bluegrass Boy.

American Legacies is a gem. And while it may lean just a tiny bit on programmatic nostalgia, it's a welcome trip down a path not treaded nearly enough.