

# Del McCoury career highlights on 'Blue'

## **HIGH LONESOME AND BLUE by Del McCoury (Rounder Heritage Series)**

Few musicians represent bluegrass's distinctive high-reaching vocals as does Del McCoury.

"High Lonesome and Blue" samples McCoury's recordings for Rounder Records in the late '80s and 1990s.

### **CD REVIEWS**

The 16 tracks feature signature songs like Ola Belle Reed's "High on a Mountain," the Grammy-nominated "The Cold Hard Facts," the sparse, bluesy "Lonesome Wind" (a duet with brother Jerry McCoury) and David Olney's "Queen Anne's Lace."

The CD recalls a prolific period in the life and career of McCoury, a guitarist who gained initial recognition in 1963 as a member of Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys. Though McCoury played the banjo at the time, Monroe, considered the "Father of Bluegrass Music," hired him instead to sing and play guitar, an instrument he had played as a child.

McCoury has since garnered 40 awards from the International Bluegrass Music Association and is a member of the Grand Ole Opry.

This set includes many of the best tunes of the Del McCoury Band. Not surprisingly, Del is in great voice. Bluegrass fans won't be disappointed.

## **THE GOOD LIFE, by Railroad Earth (Sugar Hill)**

Railroad Earth has gained in popularity because of the bluegrass sextet's youthful drive and superb talent.

Their drum-driven bluegrass may turn off traditionalists, but no one can question that as musicians the members excel musically, and their latest CD, "The

Good Life" is a decent third effort.

They are not the next New Grass Revival, but their style variations and willingness to experiment put them on a tier well beyond jam bands.

Railroad Earth's songs are a blend of rock, country, folk and bluegrass and express tender sentiments in songs like "In the Basement."

Lyrically, they can be obtuse, as in the fast-paced "Bread and Water," a song I enjoyed but have yet to decipher. Others, like the rocking traveling tune "Long Way to Go" and the "The Good Life," a story set to calypso rhythm about working hard and living off the land, are more accessible.

## **BIG TIME by Rob Ickes with Blue Highway (Rounder)**

Fans of dobro will revel at this release from Rob Ickes, joined here by his band, Grammy-nominated Blue Highway. The six-time dobro player of the year from the IBMA, Ickes plays solid, fast-paced, hard-driving bluegrass. From breakdowns to instrumental ballads (the only song with vocals is the rapid-fire lead-off track), with passionate insertion of dobro breaks, this CD includes several Ickes originals, along with covers of Bill Monroe's "Lonesome Moonlight Waltz" and Merle Travis' "I Am A Pilgrim." Ickes plays tenderly in the traditional instrumental "Matt Hyland," his dobro sweetly interspersing with fiddle (Shawn Lane). He then launches into an intense fast original breakdown "Born in a Barn." His jazzy blues playing in "Wayfaring Stranger" and the dobro's melodic voice in Ickes' own "Like Water" demonstrate his mastery of the instrument's nuances.

— STEPHEN A. IDE  
The Patriot Ledger