

# Jazz The Life Mandala

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## **Easy Access to Jimmy McGriff**

McGriff has several distinct periods and the quality of his recordings can depend upon which period you are listening in. For my money, his early stuff on the Sue label is his best and unique in organ jazz in that it typifies what every soul-jazz listener hopes to hear from early sixties Hammond organ. Albums like "Got a woman," "One of Mine," "At the Apollo," Jimmy McGriff at the Organ," and "Blues for Mr. Jimmy" -- all originally release on the Sue and now available on Collectables label. The Collectables material has terrible sound quality; probably pulled from vinyl -- who knows? In spite of the sound quality, the music is great and should be heard. These albums all have great cuts mixed in with mediocre or bad tracks. Even so, this is hi-impact driven McGriff that has little relation to much of his later work.

McGriff's work for Solid State and Groove Merchant under the production of Sonny Lester is for the most part well worth hearing. You can almost go by looking at how many players are on the session -- the less the better. In particular, in the late 1970s, McGriff's larger band material should be avoided since this is pop-oriented and has little jazz content..

Then comes McGriff's excellent work for Milestone, albums like "Countdown", "Skywalk", "State of the Art", "The Starting Five", "Blue to the Bone", "Steppin" Up", and his collaboration with Hank Crawford, "Soul Survivors" . Produced by blues-funk expert Bob Porter, this series finds McGriff playing jazz and soul jazz and catering less to the pop market. Although never reaching the searing intensity of his early work on Sue, this is all very listenable.

In the early 1990s, McGriff on Headstart is more synthesizer-drenched pop pap. His Telarc material in the mid-1990s with alto-saxist Hank Crawford is once again worth picking up.

~Michael Erlewine

## **(4 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- I Got A woman/Sue-Collectables**

McGriff's first album is great. The title cut was in the top 20 in 1962. Also on the same album is "M.G. Blues" and "All About My Girl. This session McGriff, Richard Easley on drums and Walter Miller on guitar. Hi-impact early McGriff is the still the best, and this is

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the album that started it all, on the Sue label. Three cuts available on the Collectable CD "A Toast to Jimmy McGriff's Golden Classics".~Michael Erlewine

### **(3 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- One of Mine/Sue-Collectables**

His second album, again on Sue. This has been reissued on Collectables. This session has McGriff with Morris Dow on lead guitar and harmonic, Larry Frazier on rhythm guitar, and Willie "Saint" Jenkins on drums. It features the title cut and "The Last Minute" -- ten hi-energy cuts. ~Michael Erlewine

### **(3 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- At the Apollo/Sue-Collectables**

The third album from McGriff on the Sue label was recorded live at New York's Apollo Theater in 1963. It features McGriff with Rudolph Johnson on tenor sax, Larry Frazier on guitar, and Willie Jenkins on drums. Contains a great version of "Red Sails in the Sunset" and "A Thing for Jug." ~Michael Erlewine

### **(4 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- Jimmy McGriff at the Organ/Sue-Collectables**

McGriff with Rudolph Johnson on soprano and tenor sax, Larry Frazier on guitar and Jimmie Smith on drums. This album contains the classic McGriff cut "Kiko," "That's All," and "Hello Betty". This is drum/sax driven McGriff at his best. ~Michael Erlewine

### **(2 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- Topkapi/Sue-Collectables**

This finds McGriff with pre-recorded tracks with a horn section, guitar, bass, drums and a string section. The material was arranged and directed by Fred Norman. The album consists of 12 movie and TV themes with McGriff and "orchestra." The orchestra sounds like Musac, but McGriff sounds like McGriff. How the two got together beats me. ~Michael Erlewine

### **(3 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- Blues for Mr. Jimmy**

His last date for the Sue label is a trio, McGriff with Larry Frazier on guitar and Jimmie

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smith on drums. Nine bluesy tunes including "Turn Blue," a classic McGriff instrumental.  
~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff -- Toast to Jimmy McGriff's Golden Classics/Collectables**

This is a compilation of ten cuts taken from the six early Sue albums, one or two from each. The sound is bad, but it will give you a taste of the Sue material -- all the best cuts. These early Sue albums are now all available on collectables and worth hearing, despite the sound. ~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff -- Funkiest Little Band in the Land/ LRC**

This is a collection of McGriff with small bands during the years from 1968 to 1974, before he went to the large orchestra format. Produced by Sonny Lester, many of these appeared on the Groove Merchant label. Includes a lot of funky stuff with titles like "Super Funk," "Fat Cakes," "Groove Fly," and "Dig On it." There are 13 cuts and plenty of vintage McGriff. ~Michael Erlewine

### **(3 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- The Jazz Collector Edition Jimmy McGriff**

This is a reissue of two 1970s McGriff albums, "Groove Grease" (1971) and "Main Squeeze" (1974) originally released on the Groove Merchant label. The first has McGriff with Jimmy Ponder (g) and Eddie Gladden (d). The second album has mixed personnel including Everett Barksdale (g), Cliff Davis (sax), Murray Wilson (tpt), and Johnny Board (Baritone sax). In general, nice, laid-back playing. ~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff -- Georgia on My Mind /LRC**

This is a compilation of sixteen selections from six sessions in the late 1960s and early 1970s, tunes from McGriff albums like "Let's Stay Together" (1966 and 1972 versions), "Fly Dude" (1972), and "Groove Grease" (1971). All small or smallish combos. Mostly standards; some few kickers. ~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff -- The Starting Five/Milestone**

Here is McGriff with two terrific blues Honkin' sax masters -- Rusty Bryant and David

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“Fathead” Newman. Add Mel Brown and Wayne Boyd on guitar plus Bernard Purdie on drums and you have a recipe for funk. Produced by Bob Porter, this is perhaps the best of McGriff’s Milestone output. ~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff -- Blue to the Bone/Milestone**

McGriff with Bill Easley on sax, Melvin Sparks on guitar, Bernard Purdie on drums, and Al Grey on trombone. The trombone is not that often found in the small-organ combo format and may not appeal to everyone. Smooth, yet funky. ~Michael Erlewine & Ron Wynn.

### **Jimmy McGriff -- Countdown/Milestone**

His first for Milestone. Produced by Bob Porter, McGriff with two saxes, trombone, guitar, and drums for what the liner notes call a “big band sound” combo. Plenty of good funky organ. Some of the numbers are a little too smooth (too many horns) for my taste. ~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff -- Steppin’ Up/Milestone**

Jimmy McGriff with Hank Crawford on alto sax, Jimmy Ponder on guitar, Billy Preston on piano, and Vance James on drums -- an excellent group. Produced by Bob Porter, this has tunes like “Something for Bubba,” and Percy Mayfield’s “River’s Invitation” that are standouts. This combination of players is all that you need for some funky jazz. ~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff -- In a Blue Mood/Headfirst**

One of his albums on Headfirst, after leaving Milestone and the great production work of Bob Porter. McGriff on organ and keyboards plus a group with synthesizers, sax, guitar, drums, vocals, and what-not make this more pop-oriented fare than organ funk. Where’s Bob Porter when you need him. ~Michael Erlewine

### **(3 stars) Jimmy McGriff -- Tribute to Basie (recorded 1966)**

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Recorded in 1966 with the Jimmy McGriff Big Band, and it is a VERY large group. At the center of all these instruments is the one-man band organ sound of McGriff. This is a salute to Count Basie and includes 10 songs that he wrote or made a part of his repertoire. Actually, this works quite well. ~Michael Erlewine

### **Jimmy McGriff/Hank Crawford -- Soul Survivors/Milestone**

Can't beat the lineup: McGriff with Hank Crawford on alto sax, George Benson (or Jim Pittsburgh) on guitar, and Bernard Purdie (or Mel Lewis) on drums. This is another of the fine Milestone recordings of McGriff produced by Bob Porter. No disappointments here. Includes version of "One Mint Julep," "Because of You," and the Crawford original "The Peeper." Very nice. ~Michael Erlewine

### **(3 stars) Jimmy McGriff/Richard Groove Holmes -- Double Exposure**

This album contains two albums, one by Groove Holmes and the other by Jimmy McGriff. They do not play together here. McGriff is with George Freeman on guitar, Eddie Gladden on drums, and James Peacock on conga. Six cuts by McGriff and five by Groove Holmes. ~Michael Erlewine

### **(3 stars) Richard Groove Holmes/ Jimmy McGriff/ -- Double Exposure**

This album contains two albums, one by Groove Holmes and the other by Jimmy McGriff. They do not play together here. Holmes is with Kwasi Jay Ourba on bongo/congas, Garald Hubbard on guitar, Jerry Jemmott on bass, Larry Willis on piano, and drums. Six cuts by McGriff and five by Groove Holmes. The tunes "Catherine" and "Rainy Day" are very nice. ~Michael Erlewine

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Photo: Atael Weissman

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