

# Mastering the Light Touch

By Kevin Madigan

## John Hiatt—*Master of Disaster* (New West)

This jaunty, passionate exercise in resilience makes it plainly obvious that John Hiatt's chops remain undiminished. Recorded in Memphis with producer Jim Dickinson, Hiatt has made a record that has, what he calls, "a real funky quality" — and that much is indisputable. On "Wintertime Blues," his musicians sound like a street band in New Orleans. "When My Love Crosses Over," with its mournful harmonica solo, is a lament on the distance, real or imagined, in a relationship. The violin solo in the tortured "Love's Not Where We Thought We Left It" is another gem. As usual, he's handy with a lyric and, underneath the gruff demeanor, you always get a little tenderness. In "Howlin' Down The Cumberland," Hiatt sings: "Caught like a deer in my own headlights / Frozen on this road tonight / I had a fix on the brightest star / Now I'm not sure where you are." More typical, though, and just as good, is "Back On The Corner": "Well, I'm back on the corner / With the pimps and the whores / 'Least I know what they're standing here for / She smiles, tips me a dollar, and I play her one more." Great stuff.

## The Five Browns—*The Five Browns* (RCA Red Seal)

The Five Browns are young siblings who play classical piano, and they pack quite a wallop on their self-titled debut CD. The combined dexterity of the quintet is shown to great effect, as in that tricky piece, Dukas' "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." A light touch is essential when five musicians are pounding away on the same instrument, and Desirae, Deondra, Melody, Ryan and Gregory have learned that lesson. The pianists recorded their parts simultaneously and from memory, no mean feat. Duets and solos are taken as well, most effectively by the nimble-fingered Ryan, who handles both Rachmaninoff's "Moments Musicaux, Op. 16, No. 4" and the "Sonata No. 3 in A minor, Op. 28" by Prokofiev with confident aplomb. The video portion of this clever "dual disc" release contains two ensemble pieces, "Flight of the Bumblebee" by Rimsky-Korsakov and "Scenes from West Side Story," a snappy medley on parts of Bernstein's classic. There's also an interview with the players and endearing footage of them as small children, tickling the ivories at home in Houston. That they would all graduate from Juilliard and become accomplished professionals probably never entered their little heads.



## Ciaran Tourish—*Down The Line* (Compass)

Ciaran Tourish is an Irish fiddle and whistle player best known for his work with the band Altan. With reels, airs, jigs and waltzes, both original and traditional, *Down The Line* needs to be heard by anyone remotely interested in Celtic music. Tourish's well-known friends help out: singer and composer Paul Brady contributes "Dreams Will Come," a fine ballad he wrote and on which he sings. The old standard "Are You Tired Of Me My Darling?" features mandolin player Tim O'Brien, dobro master Jerry Douglas and vocalist/violinist Alison Krauss. Tourish's own "Carlisle Bay Waltz" showcases the great Phil Cunningham on accordion, and the gorgeous traditional "Slán Le Maigh" is sung to poignant effect by the amazing Maura O'Connell.

But for all that, it's the man himself who shines brightest on "Down The Line." In "Port Na Bpucaí," Tourish and his whistle deliver what the album liner promises: "A beautiful and haunting air from the Basket Islands off the coast of County Kerry. Believed to resemble the sound of the wind blowing through the islands." He closes with two reels, and they are a simple joy.

Other worthy releases: *Suit Yourself* (Capitol). Former country singer Shelby Lynne continues her career makeover with an album of intensity, grit and beauty. *Dreams Come True* (Water). This retrospective of '60s-era singer-songwriter Judee Sill, reflects her tormented soul. *Austin City Limits* (New West Records). The latest episodes (on DVD and CD) of this long-running PBS series feature the stellar talents of Richard Thompson, Lucinda Williams and Son Volt. ▶

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