

Today's Irish Music

BY KEVIN C. MADIGAN

Martin Hayes / Dennis Cahill • *Welcome Here Again* (Green Linnet)



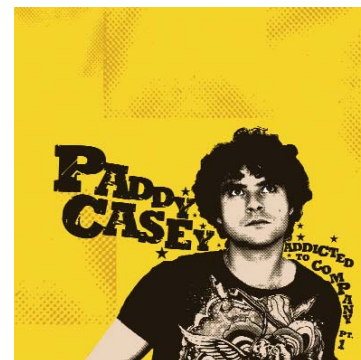
They're all here: reels, jigs, slip jigs, set dances, airs, and slow airs too. Just about every track on this collaboration is a traditional piece of Irish music. And these two respected gentlemen of the genre are masters at all of it. Their first release in a decade finds Martin Hayes (fiddle and viola) and Dennis Cahill (guitar, mandolin and bass) in splendid form, attacking with verve an array of tunes that would overwhelm lesser mortals. But for all that rampant virtuosity there is a subtle deference to the material. The liner notes explain: "It is about inhabiting the world of musical intangibles—the place that is governed by heart, soul, feeling and instinct. The humility necessary to play this music meaningfully arises from a continuous struggle to enter that place."

Hayes has been playing the fiddle since the age of seven, and has a slew of major awards to prove how good he has become since then. Cahill is an innovative musician whose work is acknowledged as exemplary for guitar in the Irish tradition. Although he works mainly with Hayes, Cahill has performed with other respected fiddlers such as Eileen Ivers and Liz Carroll.

Paddy Casey • *Addicted To Company* (Sony BMG)

Having left school by the time he was a teenager, Paddy Casey has plenty of stories to tell. Playing as a busker on the streets of Dublin, Casey got his break when a passing record company executive spotted him. These days he's a pretty big deal in Ireland, having sold millions of copies of his two previous albums, though he remains relatively unknown on this side of the pond. That could change with *Addicted To Company*, and the album certainly has the artistic potential to do so.

Addicted is consistent in its passion, though not defined by any one style. The Philly Sound comes through loud and clear in the title track, complete with swirling strings and shuffling rhythm. Echoes of Prince surface throughout the record, including his peculiar spelling habits. "U'll Get By" has an irresistible hook ("Maybe you're an angel with enough room in your heart for everyone / Maybe you are only a fire for the lonely sun") while "U and I" is the closest thing to an anthem that Casey's ever done, and "Refugee" is a poignant lament. Whether it's a wrenching ballad that offers hope amid the turmoil, as in "Tonight," or the sensuous R&B of "I Keep," Casey has assembled a stirring collection of songs that could well turn him into a big deal away from home as well.



Heidi Talbot • *In Love & Light* (Compass)



Heidi Talbot made her name as a member of the renowned Celtic ensemble Cherish The Ladies, establishing a considerable reputation within the folk community. Hailing from Kildare, Talbot was enveloped in music as a child, learning to sing in a church choir led by her own mother. She went on to take classes at the esteemed Bel Canto singing school in Dublin (alumni include Sinéad O'Connor) at the age of 16.

Things start out very quietly on this, her second solo album, but an intensity soon emerges. The wispy voice and plaintive sadness that encompass the openers "If You Stay" and "Cathedrals" don't dominate the entire album. There are powerful versions of the Irish jig "Bedlam Boys" and the Ink Spots' "Whispering Grass," as well as a touching rendition of the old hymn "When They Ring The Golden Bells."

Not a composer herself, Talbot does a fine job of choosing songs and artists to accompany her. Members of Capercaillie and Fairground Attraction make an appearance, as do singer Eddie Reader and fiddler John McCusker.

The album is produced by English singer-songwriter Boo Hewerdine—no slouch when it comes to crafting songs.

Worthy of Mention: Compass Records has several other new releases worth pursuing, among them: Beoga's *A Lovely Madness*, Martin Simpson's *Prodigal Son* and The Waifs' *Sun Dirt Water*.

Kevin C. Madigan writes about music and other artistic matters from his home in Atlanta.