

GUITARS FOR ALL OCCASIONS

CONNOISSEURS of Celtic music and aficionados of acoustic folk guitar will be mesmerised by *The Maker's Mark*, a novel and quite possibly unique collaboration between renowned Scottish fingerpicker Tony McManus and American Paul Heumiller, proprietor of one of the world's most respected guitar dealerships. Each of the 15 tracks on this superlative album showcases a different guitar, handpicked by the pair from Heumiller's Dream Guitars store in North Carolina. McManus described the project as "a kid in a candy store" situation. Recorded at Nashville's Compass Sound studio, the acoustic music equivalent of Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, the set offers one of the most mouth-watering, fingerlicking-good folk instrumental treats imaginable, with McManus's technical mastery and tune selection enhancing the inherent qualities of an array of instruments, crafted by the finest luthiers in North America from an international range of woods. A player of consummate taste, tone and tunings, the Scot, while eschewing ostentation, is one of the few Celtic-styled guitarists capable of matching the ornamentation and authority of the best violinists and pipers on airs, jigs, reels, slip jigs and strathspeys. This he confirms on the opening pipe pieces *Inveran* and *Locheil's Away to France* and in the mid-set fiddle tune medley *The Laird of Drumblair-The Margaree Reel*. Interspersed are other majestic



FOLK

The Maker's Mark
Tony McManus
 Greentrax/Planet

★★★★★

manifestations of the Celtic diaspora. *Chalaneru*, a haunting traditional song from Asturias on the northwest coast of Spain, is played on a nylon-string guitar. *The Maids of Mitchelstown* in classic DADGAD with the clarity of Marc Beneteau's Concert Standard guitar is truly outstanding. Two pieces emanate from French-Canada: *Reel de la Sauvagine*, played on an Angelus Cutaway, and *Valse des Belugas*, utilising a 12-string guitar with mandolin-like tones. McManus, who is based in Canada, handles the 9/16 time signature of a Bulgarian dance and the vibrating strings of a sitar guitar on Parov's *Daichevo* with characteristic aplomb. He finishes a beautifully phrased reading of the South African national anthem, *N'Kosi Sikelele Afrika*, on a baritone guitar with a flurry of harmonic notes, and elicits the beauty of an elegiac 17th-century Monteverdi madrigal, *Si Dolce e'l Tormento*, with assistance from low-C tuning.

Tony Hillier