

**Magpie****John Brown: Sword of the Spirit**

Sliced Bread 71201

Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino who perform as Magpie, have long been two of the most under-appreciated artists in the contemporary folk idiom... perhaps because they stand by their beliefs and imbue every recording with their conviction. *John Brown: Sword of the Spirit* is akin to a folk opera, like the old ballad operas Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd used to record. It traces, in song, the lives of abolitionists John Brown and his wife Mary Brown (who helped foment the Civil War), and the historical period around the Civil War. While most of the eleven songs are by Artzner or collaborations with Leonino, Si Kahn, Kim and Reggie Harris, Woody Guthrie, and Peggy Eyres also contribute songs. Guthrie's song is "The Ballad of Harriet Tubman." As with all of Magpie's recordings, the musical values are very high. Greg and Terry are in great voice and their musicianship is strong. While Artzner plays guitar, Leonino holds forth on harmonica, dulcimer, mandolin, and guitar. They're joined here throughout by Ralph Gordon on acoustic bass, and guest appearances by five other artists including Jay Ungar and Kim and Reggie Harris. Leonino and Ronnie Freeland produced this acoustic CD (The only "non-folk" sound is Alan Sherwin's soprano sax on "Heaven Is Less Than Fair.") *John Brown* is a rich, deep, and wide creation. While each song can stand on its own, the CD is meant to be heard as a

whole. Artzner and Leonino have taken a risk for the sake of creating a rare work in the folk idiom. This recording should be assigned to every student studying American history, because it brings history to life as no textbook can. Whoever thought real history could be so entertaining?

—Rich

Warren