

Nick Drake - Five Leaves Left (1969)

Written by bluelover

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01. *Time Has Told Me* 02. *River Man* 03. *Three Hours* 04. *Way To Blue* 05. *Day Is Done*
06. *'Cello Song* 07. *The Thoughts Of Mary Jane* 08. *Man In A Shed* 09. *Fruit Tree* 10.
Saturday Sun Nick Drake - Guitar, Guitar (Acoustic), Piano, Vocals Kwasi "Rocky"
Dzidzornu - Percussion Tristan Fry - Drums, Vibraphone, Vocals (Background) Paul Harris -
Piano Robert Kirby - Bass Arrangement, String Arrangements Clare Lowther - Cello Danny
Thompson - Bass Richard Thompson – Guitars

It's little wonder why Drake felt frustrated at the lack of commercial success his music initially gathered, considering the help he had on his debut record. Besides fine production from Joe Boyd and assistance from folks like Fairport Convention's Richard Thompson and his unrelated bass counterpart from Pentangle, Danny Thompson, Drake also recruited school friend Robert Kirby to create most of the just-right string and wind arrangements. His own performance itself steered a careful balance between too-easy accessibility and maudlin self-reflection, combining the best of both worlds while avoiding the pitfalls on either side. The result was a fantastic debut appearance, and if the cult of Drake consistently reads more into his work than is perhaps deserved, *Five Leaves Left* is still a most successful effort. Having grown out of the amiable but derivative styles captured on the long-circulating series of bootleg home recordings, Drake imbues his tunes with just enough drama -- world-weariness in the vocals, carefully paced playing, and more -- to make it all work. His lyrics capture a subtle poetry of emotion, as on the pastoral semi-fantasia of "*The Thoughts of Mary Jane*," which his soft, articulate singing brings even more to the full. Sometimes he projects a little more clearly, as on the astonishing voice-and-strings combination "*Way to Blue*," while elsewhere he's not so clear, suggesting rather than outlining the mood. Understatement is the key to his songs and performances' general success, which makes the combination of his vocals and Rocky Dzidzornu's congas on "*Three Hours*" and the lovely "'Cello Song," to name two instances, so effective. Danny Thompson is the most regular side performer on the album, his bass work providing subtle heft while never standing in the way of the song -- kudos well deserved for Boyd's production as well. --- Ned Raggett, Rovi

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