

## Caerllysi Music Interviews Guy Manning



1. Your new album “Charlestown” is going to be released on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2010. What are your hopes and aspirations for this release?

**That:**

- a) It is well liked mainly!
- b) Maintains the high quality / standard that I feel the other have had or have at least been working towards
- c) Selling lots of them would also be very nice :0)

2. Is there a concept or story associated with “Charlestown”?

Not with the album as a whole, but certainly around the title piece, which centres around one voyage made by the Barquette, the WATERWITCH in and around 1805? These boats regularly left the port of Charlestown in Cornwall to make their way around Lands End and up to Bristol or Liverpool delivering China Clay. Now most of these voyages were event free but that would not make a good sea faring yarn for an epic ‘prog’ piece and so lots of events happen along the way!

My band and supporters often comment that a lot of my compositions are based on the topics of ‘Death’ or the Sea (which I think is right when I look at the back catalogue); with Charlestown I was able to combine the two at last! I did some research into the boat etc and port via the Charlestown maritime museum plus visited the port myself.

It was walking on the decks of the Tall ships in the port that set my mind wandering on this as a theme in the first place

3. Does the new album build on the last in a natural way or do you think it moves further ahead or takes a different path?

Hmm, that is tricky...not sure really. In some ways it draws upon lots elements from all of the previous albums and yet in others places goes beyond in the use or orchestral sections and arrangements. I think any progression from the last one is organic and natural but as I really only write to please myself (which ensures I do not have to reproduce any previous style or move in any pre-directed direction etc) I can only hope it moves us long nicely.

**4.How do you normally begin the song writing process, I know a lot of musicians have little notebooks full of jottings that they keep over the years and refer back to them from time to time for lyrics and inspiration?**

Well, I think an idea for a new piece can arise from any number of situations for me. A musing on a storyline or hearing a passing comment, a nice chord progression on the guitar or keyboard, a leading drum or percussion rhythm which sets the cogs in motion, a title for a piece that pops in my head.... The lyrical or narrative content may follow on from a musical doodling or precede them.

The truth is I don't really know but I am just glad I keep getting ideas!

With some musical ideas I can use a 'stream of consciousness' method for lyrics writing which is a pompous way of saying having got a tune/rhythm going I sit with a mike and just make stuff up and record it...some of this later will be used or discarded depending on quality. Sometimes, very occasionally, I can get to the end, listen back to it and it all makes some sort of sense (if you know what I mean?)

**5.What has been your biggest challenge during recording, and have you been able to overcome that challenge? If so, how?**

This time around it was getting the guys together and actually putting time in to record their parts! Normally, I do most of it myself and just overdub the others on. This time Dave Albone wanted to real drums but could not commit time until much later in the process than I normally like. Of course then, I had to book a studio and spend a few days recording his parts, then, bring these back and integrate them on my PC. I think the fact that Dave actually recorded his drums though does back a lot of difference on how the album sounds and is all the better for it, IMO.

Likewise, the others in the live band are busy, busy so I had to grab the odd hour here and there or do it myself in the end!

All time consuming for one man who has a normal day job and a family too.

The other factor was that some of the arrangements had been conceived with a view to how we could possibly perform them...perhaps...so this accounting in places made instrument choices more difficult.

**6.The cover art for the new album looks very striking, how important do you feel that it is in the presentation of the album as a whole.**

The artwork and the lyrics are so very important to me, nearly as much as the music. They provide the whole package, the whole clue and insight into the stories (they add that 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension) - something you cannot really appreciate if you download it (legally or illegally).

Plus, you should always have an album cover that leaps from the CD case at you. This helps if you want to get noticed in a wave of other CDs on stalls, shops etc. I always seek to try and make an Iconic front cover image!

**7. How do you normally deal with any negative comments or criticism towards your music?**

What negative comments????....come on, show me where ...name them!!

Joking!!!!

There have been many across the 10 albums, after all, this is not music that will appeal to everybody (even within the 'prog' community). People have to make a judgment call because there is a vast amount of music and bands out there now. Some people don't like my singing voice, some people prefer their 'prog' more smooth, more AOR and with lots of widdly, widdly virtuoso soloing going on all the time. Me? I tend to place the solos I want into the songs and metre their length and feel. Put them into some sort of context, more like a lead

instrument in an orchestral arrangement.

If you are a big YES fan you may not like CARAVAN or you may not like GENTLE GIANT or HENRY COW. "Progressive" covers a hell of a lot of music and there are many arguments on sites on the Net where these sorts of genre classification battles take place all the time!

And I like my singing, so tough! Can't please everybody and so why worry if you can help it.

The only things I really detest are unqualified criticisms, like just stating "it is awful" but not saying why it is awful in their opinion or a review which tells you absolutely nothing about the music at all but is written purely to make the reviewer appear intelligent, clever or witty!

**8. How do you decide that the time is right to go into the studio to record an album? Or is it an ongoing process?**

Ongoing really, I like the writing phase best of all so am always itching to go get into that, the rest of it....the recording, mixing and production phases etc are a necessary evil I think if you want to release it commercially. As you can see from my track record I normally have an album released every year and this is number 11 (if you don't count the work I have done with the Tangent and on the Colossus Project discs in there as well)

**9. Finance always comes into play when you record a new album, would there be anything that would have been different with the album or you would have changed if money was not an obstacle?**

Oh lots!!!!

- a) To be able to take time getting the musicians away from the daily grind and into recording / rehearsing mode easier, somewhere ("getting your head together in the country" as was) with no worries about expense
- b) Better and more professional recording facilities
- c) A real producer!! Oh bliss!
- d) Real strings and choirs etc

**10. There seems to be an obsession amongst journalists and some music fans with trying to pigeon hole artists into a particular genre, are you comfortable with the progressive rock label you have been tagged with, or do you not feel that you fit into a particular genre and are happy as long as you are making good music?**

On one hand I can state for the record that IMO I think some of my songs are not really 'prog' but just songs of no genre really or at least transcending boundaries and other most definitely are. Depends again on your definition of 'prog' see earlier!

I see myself as a song writer, pure and simple nothing more nothing less.

It is however very difficult to argue that you are not a 'prog' band when you release 3 albums on the ProgRock label and then go on to release with a label who also runs progrock.co.uk mail order!

**11. What would you like to achieve musically that you haven't done yet?**

A few more sales would be good!!!! I think a lot of people may like my stuff if they got to hear it more (Who knows?)

Musically though, I am reasonably pleased with what I have done (although I do think they could have sounded better if I was a better producer).

I would like us to perform in more countries. The chance to go to ROSFEST in 2010 was a dream come true for us. I also would like to do Europe if we ever get the offers that would help us break even on it...but venues where we can do this sort of stuff now are harder than ever to secure.

**12. I have noticed on a few forum posts that you have mentioned that your fans need to give your new album a few listens before they judge the music as it is not as immediate as your last album "Number Ten" can you explain this in a little more detail?**

The world of the CD and prog is a funny old thing! In the old days (Yes, I am that old), we used to get about 21 mins. of music on a side of an LP and then have to turn it over (a nice little break in the middle) to continue (or not). Along comes the CD and woe betide if you put only 40 mins. of music on it....no, it has to be c. 60 mins. else you get accused of short changing the buyer! In other words, nearly a double album each time!...quite a feat to achieve regularly.

With Charlestown, the title piece is 36mins long and in many sections to tell the narrative tale. These go from rocky fast bits to very quiet introspective portions. It is a long listen especially IF you do not know it. The funny thing about long pieces is, the more familiar you get with them, the shorter they feel! OK Charlestown is not another "THE WHIRLWIND" (Transatlantic), but it is not another SONGS FROM THE BILSTON HOUSE either!

However, there is lot of music out there and so it's a big risk putting a long suite on. The listener may not hear what they are looking for in the first 5 mins. and it may go in the bin!

I definitely feel that this album is more of a challenge to appreciate quickly and does not speed to give up a sugar rush to the listener...it has to be allowed to permeate and become familiar to really get into it. There is enough in the way of good old Manning lyrical and narrative content and melodies though to make this a strong album but, there are bits where it does go more into the 'what is going on here?' territory.

I personally like a challenge, I love the fact that TOPOGRAPHIC OCEANS or A PASSION PLAY were not an immediate hit, but had to worked on and invested in....that is why I love them now as much as I did then....they have stayed with me all these years!

**13.Are there any other projects you are working on at the moment that you wish to share?**

Not at the moment. All eyes and ears are on MANNING right now and getting it ready to perform  
Next year, who knows? I may do something off left of field to this ....not sure yet.

I am open to offers for the exploration of collaboration if anyone wants to work with me??

**14.How difficult do you find it balancing your family, work, and music together?**

Sometimes it feels harder than others, but I have been doing it for so long now that I am used to it.  
I would love to devote more of my time to it and not have to go to a daily job to earn the mortgage payments, but sadly, that is the way for a lot of us out there today.

**15.In your opinion who would you name as the one person or band that has had the biggest influence on the music you make?**

Oh dear...another tricky one...just ONE?

Who made me want to do what I do...do you mean? Probably Ian Anderson / Jethro Tull.

I have a long an enduring love for all their music, which I will take to my grave!

**16.Is there any music artist or band you are currently listening to that you would recommend to your fans to listen to and are you prepared to name a band or artist you would consider as a guilty pleasure?**

Well lots, but I only get to hear new music when I am not in the throws of making my own, so in brief periods in the annual album production cycle!

Tinyfish's newie "THE BIG RED SPARK " ticked all the boxes for me

Moon Safari's "BLOMLJUD" is fabulous

Big Big Trains' "THE UNDERFALL YARD" is excellent. I now want to hear the new EP!

I also have lots of artists that I love that may not appeal to everyone

I have some ELO, MEATLOAF, BARRY MANILOW, CARPENTERS albums in my vast collection and even a CLIFF RICHARD album or two as well !!! Hee Hee

**I love lots and lots of music really so it is hard to not have a 'guilty' pleasure in some cases, but I like them, so I am NOT feeling at all guilty!**

**17. You will be playing a number of live dates in the near future in support of "Charlestown" is this something you really enjoy or do you just see it as necessary as far as promoting the new album?**

**OK, this again is multi parter....**

**I love to meet and perform for people!!! BUT the bits I do not like are the amounts of rehearsing we have done in order to just play only one date in 3 months and also the loading /unloading of the gear into the cars / homes at passed Midnight to drive back again! Oh, for some roadies!!!!**

**At ROSFEST we were spoiled rotten, we stayed back in the hotel or chatted with everyone at the gigs and then all we had to do was turn up and help set the gear up and then rest up and then go on...it was all done for us...Oh! the joy!!!!**

**18. Outside of music are there any other hobbies that you have?**

**Well I love watching films and Sci-Fi stuff plus lots of reading**

**19.How do you feel about the electronic distribution of music and do you ever envisage a time when eventually there will be no physical product as in a CD to distribute?**

**Yes, I can see a time when no one releases something you actually get to hold in your hands!  
Which is a real shame (See my comments on artwork/lyrics)  
I still miss the gatefold sleeve LP cover myself!**

**Does it make it easier for people to hear it.??? .....YES!**

**Does it I mean that you get a fair hearing???...NO!. You can choose to just download ONE track and then make a judgement call on the band from that....  
Imagine someone recommending PINK FLOYD and you went to a download site and downloaded the track "SEAMUS" from MEDDLE and made a judgement call on the band from that – dangerous!!!**

**Does it make it easier for people to get hold of it and not pay anything for it???...YES!**

**Thank you for spending the time to do this interview I wish you all the best with your new album and hopefully you will get the recognition you deserve with "Charlestown"**



Interviewed by [Adrian Jones](#) Caerllysi Music