

Fireworks Magazine Online 49 - Manning

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MANNING

Over the last five albums released by the band, named for its creative genius, songwriter, vocalist and multi-instrumentalist GUY MANNING, **PAUL JEROME SMITH** has become a firm adherent of the sometimes quirky but always intriguing narrative 'Britprog' they produce. He has seen the band on several occasions at The Classic Rock Society and with the imminent release of Guy's twelfth album 'Margaret's Children', felt it was about time to interview the Leeds-based musician and hopefully bring greater attention to his band...

Guy, it is a pleasure for me to introduce you to the readers of Fireworks Magazine and Rocktopia. I am sure there are a number for whom, like me, you are a household name, but for all the others please tell me a little about yourself and of your musical pedigree...

Hi Paul, thanks for having me here! A lot of my musical history/career can be found in a quite tongue-in-cheek biography on my website: but briefly: I played in a number of local Leeds / Manchester based bands (some better than others) in the 1980's and during this time started to work with another local musician (Andy Tillison), firstly, in a group called Gold, Frankincense & Disk-drive and then later in Parallel or Ninety Degrees (PO90). I then left to work abroad and upon my return turned my hand to recording a debut album of my own. I hawked this around various record labels but found a home eventually with UK independent label CYCLOPS. I went on the record five in total for them before a label change to Shawn Gordon's ProgRock Records based in San Diego, USA who seemed to have more resources to hand. I recorded three albums for PRR and used renowned graphics artist Ed Unitsky as the graphics artist on each of these. By the time I came to want to release a further album, I was hankering after a more local UK-based company to work more closely with, as the communications between UK and USA were proving frustrating. I found F2 (who were releasing a number of well know "prog" artists on their roster including Magenta at that time) and they seemed genuinely interested in working with me. The relationship has proven to be a happy one and 'Margaret's Children' is the fourth release on F2 (Festival Music). Of note, Ed Unitsky has reprised and updated his fantastic original Anser's tree artwork for this new album as well.

So, my discography comprises:

01. 1999 - Tall Stories for Small Children (Cyclops)
02. 2000 - The Cure (Cyclops)
03. 2001 - Cascade (Cyclops) [Limited run edition]
04. 2002 - The Ragged Curtain (Cyclops)
05. 2003 - The View from my Window (Cyclops)
06. 2004 - A Matter of Life & Death (PRR)
07. 2005 - One Small Step... (PRR)
08. 2006 - Anser's Tree (PRR)
09. 2007 - Songs from the Bilston House (F2)
10. 2009 - Number Ten (F2)
11. 2010 - Charlestown (F2)
12. 2011 - Margaret's Children (F2)

Whilst in the middle of all this, I also got invited to take part in an Andy Tillison solo project (...he thought it would be just that at the time!). Andy assembled a group of musicians to produce a more overtly progressive flavoured musical approach than that of PO90. With a cast including members of Sweden's The Flower Kings, PO90 and David Jackson (from Van der Graaf Generator), an album "The Music That Died Alone" was released to some critical thumbs up!

Although line-ups have changed over the years with the Swedes eventually being replaced by more local UK musicians, The Tangent has always had Andy driving it and writing 95% of the content and so it has remained faithful to its original path. However, in 2010, I decided that I really needed to concentrate on my own musical direction, output and band and therefore I left the band although not without much soul searching.

So twelve albums in as many years! That's some work rate (irrespective of all the other things you were often simultaneously involved with!! You sound like a very "driven" person to me, Guy...

I do get bored quite easily and the best part of all, in the whole album production process, is the song writing bit! So, after spending a large part of the year recording, producing, creating artwork and all supporting material for a Manning album, by the time of its release I really feel the urge (normally) to write songs again. So the annual cycle renews itself and I start again! I could simply decide not to release the output at the time it was ready to go out but I feel that I like to keep myself in the minds eye of my fan base and always try not to repeat myself and find new ways of creating some alternate slant / angle to my musical styling (such as is it is).

[Actually, that point itself is quite an interesting observation. Is it better to release often (annually) or wait and release more occasionally? Is there a factor of 'ennui' from the audience, a view that it is simply just another MANNING album and ignore it?]

For me, each set of songs have been successful - I would not have put them out if I felt this was not the case. Some songs in the bunch I have enjoyed more than others naturally, but each listener will have his/her favourite which may not coincide with mine of course. It could be argued cynically that by sitting on finished albums and releasing less often or even splitting up the band and having a well publicised reunion it would actually aid my album sales! But, if I have an album ready, I usually want people to hear it currently. I take my music seriously, it is my life's passion, my reason to get up and go to a day job and earn money (other than support my family).

So yes, I guess I AM driven!!

Anyway, looking across your impressive discography most of your albums seem to be conceptual or at least thematic, and there are two linked pairs of albums, including the new one which links back to your sixth release 'Anser's Tree'. What tends to provide your inspiration and would I be right in thinking you are something of a dreamer, or at the very least have a very fertile imagination?

Yes, to date there have been two of what I call 'Narrative' concept albums ('The Cure' and 'A Matter Of Life & Death') where the album follows a linear narrative story telling like 'The Lamb Lies Down...'; 'Snow, 'Tommy' and so on...four of what I call 'Container' concept album i.e. a set of pieces bound together by a container concept/conceit (e.g. a house in which each song is set in its own single room) or 'Anser's Tree'/'Margaret's Children' (where each song is the life story of one member of one single family lineage) plus the remaining six albums which normally feature longer multi-part suites ('Cascade' being the exception), though I could try and argue that 'Charlestown' (as one epic track lasting 35mins...the length of a decent 70s LP) is a narrative concept album in its own right (especially when coupled with its last track 'Finale'). I think all the albums however are vehicles for some quite elaborate or alternatively very simple story telling.

2006's 'Anser's Tree' as I said, featured stories behind members of the Anser family. The premise is that in the near future, Dr. Jonathan Anser (an archaeologist) is found digging in the highlands of Scotland researching his own lineage at the site where it all started with Margaret Montgomery (nee Fleming) in 1581. There has been some ecological disaster and the ocean levels have risen significantly leaving few places above water (his family seat being one such one).

'Anser's Tree' and 'Margaret's Children' are intrinsically linked (MC being the sequel to AT). There is a lot of cross-pollination and inter-dependencies found here. Cause and effect...If Jorgen Barras's (MC) father William had not been killed in the Wallsend Mining Disaster (AT) he would never have left for the US to seek his fortune; if Fleming Barras (MC) had not inherited Margaret Montgomery's Diary (AT) he would never have become the master of mystical cabbalistic magic; David Logan (MC) directly influenced his son Adams (AT) passion and obsession with Global Warming and ecological disaster research ...and so on. But this is not the first time I have looked back to early pieces of mine as inspiration for later designs...'A Matter of Life & Death' explores in much greater detail and colour the story first visited on 'Tall Stories...' called 'The Fall & Rise of Abel Mann?' It takes that vignette and expands it out fully to reveal the thoughts and events that underpin that earlier suite and what happened next.

Musically, I always want to create almost a visual tapestry with the arrangements and choices of instrumentation employed. I close my eyes and I can see the stories play out as if written down or in a film.

Sometimes a standard rock line-up is not quite going to 'cut it' and more extravagant instrumentation is required! I love the challenge of that stitching of the tapestry or that 'Tetris' approach to writing. I encourage/suggest parts from my collaborators and fit them in, move them around, edit them and build up a hopefully engaging arrangement over the skeletal outline of an embryonic song. This can then be finalised or enhanced, new sections added, sections removed as befits the piece. The actual song and its lyrics are the most important factors and all other elements must bow down before it, for me...

Lyricaly it is tremendously important to me that I draw the listener in (like being curled up with a gripping book). The more I can empathise with the story line / players, the more I can choose just the right word or phrase to bring it all to life. I have chatted to folks however, that have bought my albums and love them but have not bothered to really understand or listen to the words at all...which I think is a bit sad actually ...OK I love a good tune as much as the next man, but with my music, the lyrics, the artwork AND the music all come wrapped up to make the essential Manning package!

Ideas for songs can come from anywhere really. A theme - played on guitar or keyboard. A rhythm - played on a drum machine or virtual instrument. A lyrical phrase - that might suggest a song title...'The Cure' came from my thinking a lot about the nature of perception, reality and madness; 'Ragged Curtains' as I floated face up, off the coast of Rhodes, musing on the relationship between man and the sea of the ages! 'One Small Step...' came from me seeing on the news that people would soon be allowed to buy tickets to go to the Moon and my musings on whether, as a race, we were suitable candidates as Earth Life Ambassadors to go out there into Space and perhaps meet other species. Should we not get our own house in order, I thought, BEFORE we pollute the far reaches of the Universe! I try to get inside the mind of the central characters and see their POV, the context in which their stories are set in times of history and also at the same time use the opportunity to get some of my own thoughts/feelings on subjects across, For example, there is quite a lot of coverage of ecological concerns throughout the back catalogue: 'Tall Stories...' ('The Last Psalm'); 'The Cure' ('Domicile'); 'The Ragged Curtain' ('Ragged Curtains'); 'Anser's Tree' ('Prof. Adam Logan' and 'Dr.Jonathan Anser') and 'Margaret's Children' ('David Logan'). The running joke in the Manning camp is that I write primarily about Water and Death! And with 'Charlestown' I managed for once to combine the two themes!

Am I a dreamer??...yes most probably! I certainly project the visual/emotional aspects of my various creations into the musical arena and hope they flourish and I work hard at it to improve!

So, tell me more about 'Margaret's Children', Guy...

Well, Paul on the website (www.guymanning.com) there are individual biographies created for each new character plus a view of the full Anser genealogical tree that is available to download.

I try to do quite a bit of research into the historical context behind the stories I do that so that I empathise more and therefore can select just the right words to bring the tales to life. From a more in-depth understanding, I can also decide which the salient pieces to include are and the bits which can be inferred or can be used in supporting documentation (such as the biographies now published).

Some of the 'yarns' for the new album were written before I had a clear idea as to the nature of the project ('Savoy' and 'Southerm Waves') These were important songs that I wanted to write specifically about. The others were written once I had a clearer idea as to the subject matter, historical context, names etc. I normally write and demo the pieces quite fully before letting the others get to them. Though pieces can change and the arrangement be amended, the basic song tune and initial lyrics are normally carried through to the end. The enhancements come through use of collaborators and the band bringing their own POV into the mix. The stories clearly show the level of inter-dependency between the 2 albums ('Anser's Tree' (AT) and 'Margaret's Children' (MC))

The tracks are as follows:

FLEMING BARRAS (1645 - ????) ['The Year of Wonders']

A friend of Isaac Newton, Fleming challenged his friend's view of the Natural and ordered scientific world with his own beliefs of a more mystical and magical set of forces. Fleming had inherited Margaret Montgomery's diary (AT) with her detailed notes on the subject and using this, he disappeared in as puzzling way as his Great Grandmother also did...

JORGEN BARRAS (1834 - 1900) ['Revelation Road']

Following his father and brother dying in the Wallsend Mining Disaster (AT), Jorgen emigrated to the New World to seek his fortune. There he takes up with a travelling medicine show and learns the ropes and how to dupe the public.

He starts his own 'business' promising to pray for rain in the poor dust bowl regions, taking the money and putting on quite a show, leaving town just before the farmers catch on to the scam.

AMY QUARTERMAINE (1862 - 1916) ['A Perfect Childhood']

This story is actually based very closely on that of a real person, Nurse Edith Cavell, a character I came across whilst doing my usual research for the history and context for a World War 1 piece. I used Edith's life story because it had all the heroic elements I felt that a listener would be beguiled with. To fit in with the already existing tree (which had been created for AT in 2006, I had to use the name Amy Quatermaine and change the date of death from 1915 (Edith) to 1916 to fit it in...

The story opens with Amy growing up in Norfolk and helping her mother tend to the aged and sick of the surrounding area. Amy then goes to London and become as nurse before being sent to Belgium to help set up new hospitals there.

She meets her journalist husband and settles into an idyllic life.

On a trip back to the UK, Amy hears the news that Germany has invaded Belgium and hurries back to her home. She decided to stay on behind the lines and keep the hospital running. She elects to treat Ally and Foe equally and nurses any that come to the door, but she also runs resistance and with a friend, Philippe, she helps young English boys to escape and return to England. She is eventually discovered and reported to the Germans who interrogate and then execute her.

HARRIET HORDEN (1912 - 1955) ['A Night at the Savoy, 1933']

The central character is a singer in the famous New York Savoy night club at the time of the US Great Depression. The song starkly contrasts the atmosphere and perception within the club to that of the struggling economy and social suffering in the real world outside its doors. Here, nightly, rich fat cats come to get away from all that 'misery' and to drink and spend extravagantly.

Harriet is the fragile voice of the illusion created here. Outside, a chorale / Greek chorus of voices 'tell it more like it is'. The style of the piece is that of a jazz troupe featured on stage at the Savoy.

JAMES FAIRFAX (1922 - 1945) ['An Average Man']

The whole point of this story is that not everyone can live an extraordinary life (and it seems that most of my characters have done just that with daring tales of mystery, mysticism, murder, disaster etc.)

James had always lived under the radar, never amounting to anything but average. He lives an ordinary life but, when he received his WWII draft papers, he realises that no one will even remember him if (and he thinks that more likely is...when) he gets killed in the war.

So, he embarks on his own Odyssey, travelling back through his own family's lineage (much in the same way that Dr Jonathan Anser does in AT) and finds himself back where it all started at the ruins of Margaret' cottage in highland Scotland. Finding the inner James at last, he feels a sense of belonging and peace. He plants a small sapling by the lake in memory of himself and all the family. He then goes off to war where sadly he loses his life in the last battle in 1945. The tree however flourishes and can plainly be seen on both the album covers!

AMELIA FAIRFAX (1926 - 2010) ['Black Silk Sheets Of Cairo']

A flighty young lady! She had an unbelievable experience in becoming a "Mata Hari" secret agent for the O.S.S. (forerunner of the C.I.A.). She would use her considerable feminine wiles to charm people of 'political influence' or with critical war correspondence and then pass on that information to the U.S. government. In later life, she married and settled down and her earlier life was forgotten and never mentioned. It all came out upon her death much to her family's surprise!

DAVID LOGAN (1967 - 2022) ['The Southern Waves']

David is a fisherman, a boating skipper who is also fascinated by climatology and tidal patterns. He notices some anomalies and gets concerned about the effects of global warming, climate change, rising tides and the effects on the coastal regions (especially in the Southern hemisphere)

This is a contemporary song. I wanted to write about the Tsunamis I was witnessing hitting Japan, Australia, South Africa, and South America.

The terraforming of the World begun way back with Pangea, is still not over and the Worlds shape is always changing. Those that build on its shore lines must be prepared for almost inevitable results.

David influences his son Adam who goes on to prove his father theories but sadly cannot get anyone to take any notice of his analysis (AT), David never lives to see that his warnings were correct. Adam cannot make the World change and as a consequence we find Dr Jonathan Anser digging in the Highlands in some of the remote areas still above Sea level in 'Anser's Tree'.

Having now listened to the album several times, Guy, I must admit to being hugely puzzled by 'A Night At The Savoy, 1933' which highlights Harriet Horden. I'm very sorry, but I cannot get into this track and feels it completely spoils the flow of what is otherwise another delicious Manning album. I'm sure your decision to include this must have included a big tongue in the cheek and desire to go completely left field!

I am obviously disappointed by you not liking this track, Paul. In fact, several other reviewers have singled this one out for praise specifically and so I am indeed a little surprised. But, we cannot all like the same things after all!! It is certainly the most radically 'different' track on the album, but how else could you portray the events of a thirties US jazz nightclub without the atmosphere I have created?

It is not tongue-in-cheek at all; it eloquently (in my opinion) represents the style and times of the narrative, in song. As I say, I do not like to repeat myself and the song itself is the most important factor always. So is it a good song? I think so (smiles)

This is also the first time that I have been told that it feels like it breaks up the album flow...hmm...well it doesn't for me or those that I have checked with...sorry...each to their own (smiles again)

I am a song writer and story teller. This was a story I wanted to tell and I felt it had to be set in the style of the narrative i.e. a jazz club environment in the USA at the time of the Great Depression. I wanted to have the whole thing split between the contrasting inside and outside of the club and so I used two vocal approaches. Firstly the fragile solo singer (Harriett) inside the club where the more affluent would drink and 'play' to forget the realities of the challenges in that other World and secondly, more of a Greek chorus, grounding that fantasy by 'telling it as it is' outside the club walls. The backing band is a jazz troupe: acoustic piano, guitars, bass, jazz drum kit and clarinet (with some more modern synth. pads / mellotron to bolster where I felt it was needed for this album) Personally, I feel it works very well and more importantly is true to its subject matter/ historical context.

The bit of fun we had with this piece was to ask for contributions / entries for a New York accented voice to act as the "MC of the club" and to introduce the band. We advertised on Facebook and other networking sites and the bands website. We had quite a few entries, all pretty good actually, but when my old musical pal Phideaux gave me a sample, I felt that this could not be overlooked! (It might even help shift a few more copies...he said cynically!)

One of the real joys of listening to a Manning album is the sheer variety that can be contained therein: light acoustic pieces, rockier atmospheric songs, instrumentals, jazzy moments, complex passages and pieces of sheer whimsy can all seem to rub shoulders along the way...

That is the point I think Paul, 'Savoy' is just a part of providing that sense of the unexpected and rich variety and EVERY Manning album has such a track on it, so this is nothing new! The rich arrangements employ diverse instrumentation set in a mix of progressive, classic rock, orchestral, folk, jazz styles hopefully well blended and which can move between styles in a few bars and back again.

I play a diverse mix of instruments and normally handle the more acoustic stuff (6 and 12 string guitars, classical, mandolin, bouzouki etc), keyboards and lead vocals on the albums, but do add in the bass, electric guitars and drums/percussion as needed too. The acoustic six string is my instrument of choice, the one I feel most comfortable with but I do love playing the keyboards too (Mellotron, Synthesizers, Hammonds, Orchestral./cello/violin samples and so on...)

The skills of the musicians I work with cannot be underestimated. They complete the journey that starts with my initial 'doodles' and then demos and turn them into fully formed items. I like (as have said) to use the performances rather like a collage/tapestry moving the right instrument/riff etc. into the places I want them to live so that it is very much like a 'relay race' of textures, each instrument handing over to others in quite a lot of what I do. Obviously I have some clear influences (as every artist has in my opinion). The music I grew up with and still love are forever with me and sometimes these voices are worn on my sleeve when I come to write my own original works. I do think now though that I have created a unique sound which is just Manning! There are not many out there that sound as we do. Building songs up, letting them fall to rebuild later. Playing with atmospheres, tempos, styles to allure the listener and pull them into my World for a little while (more smiles)...

I am aware that you are quite a fan of Jethro Tull (the band, not the inventor of the seed drill...although there's an idea for a future album!!) Anyway, the point I was wishing to make is that your singing voice and that of Ian Anderson have remarkable similarities at times! Doubtless I am not the first to have remarked upon this...

No, you are not! However, it is not by proactive design! I just have a similar timbre to that of Ian and use a flute player (Steve Dundon) who has also played in Tull tribute acts and in the Mick Abrahams band!). Is this folly? I think not, I love it! Yes I adore Jethro Tull! This is indeed well documented and at times I get close to that sound (as I also do to other bands that I have loved and infused) but only occasionally! My style is a mix of diverse blends, folk, progressive, jazz, rock, world, orchestral all mixed up with a big stick! Hopefully, there is a MANNING sound but as I said earlier. I try NOT to repeat myself where possible.

I'd also like to talk with you about what the band Manning actually is. Looking back over the entire recorded canon of twelve albums, you seem to have involved no fewer than 37 different musicians (plus yourself), some of whom have been properly identified as "guest players". However, band members seem to have come and gone with a frequency that should confer upon you the title of "The John Mayall of the Progressive Music Scene"...

[laughs!] Maybe?! but there have been 12 albums over 12 years!...if anyone was going to get that title maybe Robert Fripp / King Crimson or even the Tangent (never the same line-up twice!)? Members come and go as they wish and add to the overall direction and sound of the journey started in 1999. The current line-up is pretty stable though I am glad to say.

On this new album, the current Live Manning band members are featured very heavily and this is the same line-up that went out to perform at ROSFEST in 2010 (except for Dave Albone our drummer who retired in summer 2010 for mainly medical reasons).

In no particular order, the current MANNING live band includes:

Kris Hudson-Lee. Kris plays his growling Warwick Thumb 5 string bass throughout and also an electric upright bass ('A Night at the Savoy, 1933'). Kris has been with the band since 2008 and provides the solid timekeeping and driving crisp playing that underpins live Manning music. He is also our tour manager, working relentlessly to get us more live engagements and festivals and he is doing very well indeed for 2012!

Chris Catling arrived to join the band just before we set off for ROSFEST 2010. He is natural and versatile player who is at ease and happy doing Glimour-esque solos, odd more progressive things that I make him play and also funking it up when called for. Equally at home on Electrics or Acoustics, he really provides a fabulous array of styles and sounds to the electric guitar work on 'Margaret's Children' and the superb closing guitar solo at the end of the album on 'The Southern Waves'. That is a 'Comfortably Numb' moment if ever there was one! He also does a lot of the backing vocals live to reproduce in concert what I have built up in the studio.

Kevin Currie provides much of the electric rhythm work on the new album but does also provide some of the memorable lead lines and electric solos too (so, these are not all Chris!). Live, he is a star, backing me up on 12 string as well as adding the solid electric power chords and riffing we need to incorporate plus adding to the backing vocal layering.

Julie King (aka Julia Manning) contributes the lead vocal parts (when allowed) to some more female orientated first person pieces such as 'Valentine's Night' from the 'Number Ten' album and 'A Night at the Savoy, 1933' on the new one where she takes the role of Harriett Horden, the central chanteuse featured in the club. Live, Julie provides additional keyboards, percussion and the well needed female vocal harmonies!

Steve Dundon features on flutes (and the sax when allowed). He has his own band, Molly Bloom but is still a permanent member of Manning. Steve provides the icing on the cake parts for the songs. It also draws us more towards the Jethro Tull comparison because his flute playing is fabulous and he can do a mean overblown Ian Anderson! (He is yet to stand on one leg however). He is equally at home though playing in a more classical flute timbre and has played some of the more beautiful and emotional solos featured on Manning tracks.

Tim Leadbeater provided the hard to play Grand Piano parts on the new album namely 'A Night at the Savoy, 1933' and 'The Southern Waves'. He also provided the quirky electric piano solo in the middle section of 'The Year of Wonders'.

Tim arrived to go to ROSFEST with us and in his own words, "...never left". Sadly, now, however, he has now decided it is time to move on and quieten his life down a bit! We have found a very good player to step into Tim's shoes and so Tim's last gig with us will be on Saturday December 10th at the Corporation in Sheffield.

Very much a placid gentleman, he is the John le Mesurier of Prog Rock!

The SONG is King with me. The lyrics and music go together to provide an almost visual presentation...the needs of the song and arrangements are catered for above all other things (such as soloing, musical dexterity for the sake of that alone...you'll find no real twiddling or fret board shredding for the sake of it on my albums as a rule!) Special Guests are drafted in to help where I need to augment the musical arrangement with specific skills such as wind instruments, better keyboards playing, cello, fiddle, drums/percussion and so on...whatever I feel is needed to complete the sonic picture.

Here are some of those that have answered the call:

Ian 'Walter' Fairbairn. Ian has a venerable past! He was in Hedgehog Pie and Jack the Lad / Lindisfarne (leading lights of the North Eastern School of song writing bands of the 1970's). Ian first appeared on the 2000 album 'The Cure' has been on most of the Manning albums ever since. He provides the rustic and folkie injections into many of the pieces and also is embedded often into the more ensemble band playing that is the backbone of my arranging style.

For the new album I was desperately seeking a wind player. I put adverts on Facebook and other sites and waited. Shawn Gordon, my old 'boss' at PRR got in touch to say that they had been using a German player (Marek Arnold) on some PRR sessions and that he was great! Shawn kindly put me in touch with him. Marek (luckily) had heard of me and my music and agreed to take part with Saxes and Clarinet so long as it did not take forever. Not being familiar with Marek's work with bands Toxic Smile or Seven Steps To The Door, I initially approached our collaboration cautiously. I did not want to promise any album credits and then find that his contributions were not very good after all!

So, firstly I asked for a clarinet solo for "Savoy",

Marek has his own recording set up so he said he'd record something and then send it by Dropbox (...isn't technology wonderful!!!). He also stated that his Clarinet playing was nowhere as good as his keyboards playing...which made me even more nervous. When the Sound file arrived, I gingerly took it down to my studio and placed it carefully into the '...Savoy' mix...I had no need to worry...if his keyboard playing was better than this, then he must be a genius on them. This part was wonderful - melodic, memorable, well recorded...I had fallen on my feet!

I rushed back to the PC to fire off an email and to send the other 7 song demos over to him immediately. He worked his way through each one and provided layered Saxes and solos (Soprano, Alto) on a lot of the album. His playing was wonderful! I would love to play Live with him (and a few of the other special guests too) at a big line-up gig one day! Marek says he is certainly up for it!

Laura Fowles provided the superb sax parts and lilting backing vocals for Manning albums from 'The Cure' right up to 'Number Ten' before being lured into the life of a night club artist in Ibiza and getting her own CD out!

She was always very popular with the audiences at live gigs too. When she stepped into the spotlight for a sax solo many cameras and camera phones would flash simultaneously within the adoring male prog fraternity! I watched all the crowd veer to her side of the stage often during the shows!

Kathy Hampson volunteered bravely to offer her Cello skills to 'Charlestown' and to 'Margaret's Children'. Kathy is a quick learner, full of good ideas and always knows her cello stuff!

For 'Margaret's Children' I thought it would be fun to involve a musical comrade who plays with London based mates, Tinyfish. Mr. Leon Camfield. A wildly exuberant and enthusiastic bloke, he is also a very, very good drummer and inventive percussionist.

I invited Leon up from London for the weekend and we got to work. We started with the traditional floor congas, bongos, wind chimes, tambourines etc and then started into the more esoteric areas of newspaper ripping / crumpling and then percussion sequences built upon kitchen utensils such as cheese grater, spatula, forks, pans etc (this can be heard on the 'Black Silk Sheets of Cairo' track under the Electric piano solo!). A top fellow, he was great to work with and I hope to repeat the experience soon!

Andy Tillison of course has featured on many of my albums. We started out on those very early albums with him doing a lot of the keyboards and then I took over more as I became more confident leaving just the hard parts eventually for him to come up with ideas for. Andy is a naturally gifted keyboards player who also has a lot of musical influences and progressive leanings so it was really not hard of him to get just the right parts to make the songs shine!

When I needed flute & recorders to decorate 'Cascade' I contacted Angela Gordon from Mostly Autumn (who I had met a few times), she graciously agreed to step in and also she subsequently contributed to the next 'The Ragged Curtain' album as well. She was a very good player and got the ideas very quickly indeed.

I wanted yet more flute adding to the 'One Small Step...' album as I had arranged some flute parts and needed a great, natural player to reproduce and enhance these initial ideas. Angela was sadly not available but Martin Orford from IQ agreed to help me out and that album's success was greatly increased through his work.

Moving onto Live Manning performances, I guess the most significant one was the appearance at the Rites Of Spring Festival (ROSFest) in 2010, but you also headlined the inaugural Progmeister Progfest in Teesside too and there was also an acoustic appearance at the Cambridge Rock Festival. What plans are there for further Manning gigs?

We have been very fortunate to have picked up some very nice gigs along the way. We have played many good ones for the Classic Rock Society both as headliner and support, appeared at the very first Summers End Festival in 2006 (and * Stop Press* - we are due back there again in 2012!) and also twice at the Cambridge Rock Festival (Also *Stop Press* - we are due back there again in 2012!)

We were asked to headline the very first Progmeister festival in 2010 and it is fabulous to be there right at the start of a new event as we did with Summers End (we all hope this will continue annually). If we were to ask ourselves though what our best personal gig moment was, it would have to be ROSFEST 2010!

To get the band together and fly out to the USA for 3 days ...what an adventure and a great band bonding experience! Sadly (along with members of DeeExpus) I succumbed to laryngitis while I was there so missed a lot of the 'hob nobbing' and seeing some of the other bands I had been looking forward to meeting. The day of the performance I was really worried because my voice was hoarse...minutes before going on stage I was so anxious...but the adrenaline must have kicked in as I sang pretty well for an hour and half and no one afterwards said they even noticed, happily!

The rest of the band however had a hoot!

It certainly broke us into the USA where we now have many fans and sell many more CDs. We would love the opportunity to go back there again.

For closer to home, we would like to do some European dates. We have our own 9 seat band van ("The MannVan!") so are self sufficient...all we need are some provisional dates or festival invites

Note: Oy! promoters please get in touch!!

We would also like to play some more UK venues and areas we have not reached so far! 2012 is certainly going to be far more active for the band in terms of concert performances IF we can get the bookings! Sadly, more and more of the old haunts/venues are now closing down or will only book big bands stopping off on large tours or the tribute acts. We will endure though and try our best to get to see as many people as we can!

Finally, Guy, any hints on what album 13 might have in store?

As we talk, Paul, there are no plans for a number 13 yet, but I may start to get ideas by the end of the year (as per the normal annual cycle/time scales). Maybe it is in fact time for the long overdue (and much discussed between band and F2) MANNING Live album?

Perhaps you should call it 'Unlucky For Some', Guy!! Anyway, thank you for spending so much time with me. Your new album will have been released by the time this interview is published, and my review of it will be found elsewhere on this web site...

Thank you Paul for allowing me the forum and opportunity to say a big "Hello!" and "Thanks!" to people who may listen to or buy my music!

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