

# “AKOUSTIK” by Manning

## FIREWORKS MAGAZINE Review

### **MANNING – ‘AKOUSTIK’ (Festival Music)**

When I interviewed Guy Manning for Fireworks #49, at the time of the release of his band’s twelfth album in twelve years - the wonderful ‘Margaret’s Children’ - he commented upon the cycle of development that each album undergoes and I was curious to find out what his plans might be for album thirteen. “As we talk, Paul” he told me “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 the label) Manning Live album?”

So here is the, er, er.....‘Acoustik’ album instead! Indeed, I was fortunate enough to catch the band at one of their “acoustic” shows in my home town at the end of June and Guy was able to update me with his plans for album thirteen, and so the evening took on an additional dimension of interest for me as a consequence. So, what we have here are twelve tracks and a running time of almost an hour, comprising acoustic interpretations of material drawn from right across Manning’s discography. With compositions written years apart snuggling next to one another, this album wonderfully showcases Guy’s song writing prowess and its consistency over time. However, in addition to that, the album reveals accomplished performances from the nine people involved and there’s also a warmth and resonance about the whole album courtesy of a fine production. Finally, the way in which the songs have been arranged for the acoustic setting has also provided them with a fresh and wonderfully dynamic aura and Guy’s ever more confident vocals (they’ve had more than their fair share of criticism from some quarters in the past) are a major contribution to this. Oh, and by the way, this is not exactly an “acoustic” album in the accepted sense, for keyboards provide an underlying foundation to many of the tracks.

Of highlights there are very many, and in fact one could argue successfully that the entire album is a triumph. Nevertheless, opening gambit ‘In Swingtime’ is as magnificent a way to begin an album that might be categorised as “folk rock” or “soft rock” as could be imagined, with fine vocals and crisp instrumentation. The following two songs, ‘Antares’ and ‘Clocks’ maintain the momentum while the moody and more downbeat refrains of ‘Castaways’ changes the atmosphere. Then, there’s the wonderful ‘Silent Man’, very redolent of Jethro Tull as a consequence not only of the pre-eminent flute, but also of Guy’s very Anderson-esque phraseology. Indeed, the Tull similarities emerge time and time again during the album.

‘The View From My Window’ and ‘Phase’ are also absolute corkers, but I’m sure I’ve said enough to hook you into this marvellous album, if its style appeals. It’s available at “mid price” so what are you waiting for?

Paul Jerome Smith