



2010 Festival - F2 Music

When it comes to storytelling in progressive rock, it doesn't get more real and down to earth than it does from the penmanship of **Guy Manning**. Musically, he has always done the polar opposite of what most modern prog bands do, by not metalizing his sound - no feeble heavy metal attempts, no contemplation at becoming extreme, and no overbearing or jarring musical elements as his eleventh studio album *Charlestown* follows the tradition that is his own.

Charlestown has a very 'English' feel to it, not quite all out 'neo' and not quite prog folk, yet the music finds itself wrapped within the two sides being a bridge between both neo and folk - where this is another example of the diversity of modern melodic art rock. Opening up with the thirty-five minute title track, it's a carefully constructed epic that enhances the storyline (a an account of a sailing journey around England taking place in the 18th century), the tracks begins with layered synthesizers, **Manning's** soaring vocals and guitar interplay leading into the overture section of the tune, introducing the number with host of other fashionable exquisite tinges - but it's at about the three and a half minute point, the music plays into a more laid back piano, acoustic guitar, and flute driven section, complete with orchestrations building up to a crescendo with more intractably laced soloing while moving the pace up and down again throughout the song's course. With the rest of *Charlestown*, it's as if you have physically flipped a vinyl LP record over, not that these tunes are completely detached, but there is something definite with the title track and the five others. "Caliban and Ariel" plays out as a more tender piano ballad, complimented by the layered vocals, mandolin, and classical guitar while "The Man in the Mirror" is reveled in jazz tinged neo-prog, again delicate instrumentation such as sax and Celtic fiddle. You have the atmospheric passage of "Clocks," with fretless bass standing out; a more bluesy edge on "T.I.C." as a little more rock vibe can be heard; and then you have "Finale" capping off the record with a big proggy feel rooted in the electric assortment of melodies.

Manning has again produced a prog marvel filled with all of the elements that necessitates technical and melodic songs upon the ears. With all of the instrumentation present, the sound remains bright and you can hear everything played by all musicians (ten members altogether including both core and guests) - so even if this is from the mind of **Manning**, he certainly lets everybody shine on this album making it multi-dimensional. A solid release for those who want to get away from the heavier scheme of things and more into melodically challenged music that has an easier flowing aura. Longtime fans of **Manning** as well as The Tangent and Unitopia dare not miss out.

Added: March 26th 2011

Reviewer: Tommy Hash

Score: ★★★★★