



Not many of the bands featured in this magazine have their base in the northern English city of Leeds, but therein lies the home of Guy Manning, the muse of his eponymously named band. My time of contact was, perhaps, not the best, as the band were due for rehearsals ahead of two live dates and Guy was also hosting members of the American prog band Phideaux.

The band's fourteenth album, 'The Root, The Leaf & The Bone', had just been released on Festival Music (see review elsewhere this issue) but knowing of Guy's annual cycle of work, I presumed that he was already underway with planning (if not conceptualising) the band's 15<sup>th</sup> release...

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Leaving the future to one side I suggested that the new album explores what I feel to be an inescapable link between progress and change and the loss of some (if not much) of what has gone before.

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village, sunk beneath the march of progress and building work. Lost beneath layers of new establishment but waiting to be re-discovered. Quickly, I realised that this was a bit too constricting and some songs did not really fit happily into that conceptual container, so I abandoned that and let the 'change' motif surface – rather than the 'village foundations!' He continued: "The basic building blocks for the songs were quite quick in being laid out, but themes needed to be sought out. The title track set the scene for the 'discovering the Past' idea by showing the process of digging down to find hidden treasures and what had been lost. The 'Village' songs – 'The Forge', 'Mists Of Morning...', 'Palace Of Delights', 'The Huntsman & The Poacher' – had pre-conceived storylines; 'Autumn Song' and 'Amongst The Sleepers' came next, with the socio-political rant 'Decon(struction) Blues' last up! A hit single that one!"

Do you head off into unrewarding cul-de-sacs at times? I wondered...

"No, I pretty much always know where I am heading if the 'light bulb' of inspiration has come on," at which thought a smile creeps across Guy's face... "Trying to shoehorn songs into the 'Village' plot slowed me down for a week or so, but I tend to make decisions

to allow the listener to empathise with the characters and words that I make come from their lips. In olden days I would have been a minstrel, I guess, producing poetry in song and telling tales...the Hans Christian Anderson of 'Prog' – that's me! If you do set store by the words, then it's obvious to me that the artwork should also accurately reflect what these are, it seems a sensible move!" and this is something I have commented upon in my review of the album, I remark to him.

I note that Manning, the band, has once again seen some changes and also remark upon the excellent usage of umpteen guest musicians.

"Yes – currently the band comprises guitarist Dave Million, bassist and gopher Kris Hudson-Lee, vocalist Julie King along with help from Martin Thisleton who is our main keys player, although he did not do the actual album keys this time, and Rick Henry, our drummer although he only did the percussion on this one! On the album David Albone handled the drums, Ian 'Walter' Fairbairn the lovely fiddle parts and Manning stalwart Steve Dundon featured, as always, on the flute Add to them Chloe Herrington on loan from the band Knifeworld on Bassoon, John Young providing a quick organ solo, Joss Allsopp some trumpet fillings for the brass plus

have 'haunted' the previous releases – when being reviewed, at least – and go for more of a horn section arrangement bias. The songs represented are probably more direct than some previous collections and I demoed the 'brass parts' on the keys before my special guest, Marek Arnold kindly gave me an expanded version of these, using multiple sax lines! In fact there were far too many and I had to pare it down somewhat or a sax solo would have been featured on every track!!" Clearly, Marek had provided far too much of a good thing!! "The idea really this time was to highlight a more straightforward rocky sound featuring the fabulous Manning Band; tracks that maybe would suit our live shows straight off the bat!"

Putting Guy on the spot somewhat I asked him whether he could select three of the stories on the album, and tell me why he finds them to be the most satisfying...

"That's a hard choice, Paul, but lyrically and musically I really like 'Autumn Song'; it is quite gentle and understated I think. The passing seasonally of things from Autumn to Winter, we are all part this natural cycle. I chose images of the time of year to heighten that sense of change. It was also a chance to redress the balance and address the mickey taking from within the band suggesting that I only write about the Sea and Death! Yes, it IS overtly about our mortality again, but this

time I have tried to accentuate the positive! "Next is 'Amongst The Sleepers'. Although quite 'word light' for me, they do set us, quite literally, on the path for this song! The setting is as one walks through a quiet graveyard being given the time to contemplate the people who have meant something to us in our lives and briefly re-awaken our thoughts of them and consider



that impact. I like how this one builds from its simple mournful opening into something a bit more triumphant!

"Finally, I should mention 'Palace of Delight'. This is a playful song. The theme is on two levels in my view. Firstly that of an old shop found in a back street and where the stock inside has been locked in a time bubble, again waiting to be discovered.

The items found in this musty place on the dusty shelves hark back to the – hopefully – happier more simple times of childhood and resonate with the discoverer, which in this case is me! Secondly, everyone has their own 'Palace of Delights' which are discovered in sounds or smells or touches of artefacts that transport us immediately back in time! But the items that make me want to squeal with pleasure are not the same as anybody else's. Someone born in my era would find some of these having intrinsic emotional value, but someone born much later would have no attachment to a set of old commemorative stamps, as I do, whereas a set of Pokemon cards...well that's another matter!" and as a collector of historical artefacts, I could certainly understand and appreciate his comments, for the items that I collect (details withheld to protect my anorak!) have very little interest to the younger generation.

To complete our discussion, I asked Guy to peer into the future as I was keen to hear how much longer he can see the annual releases from the band continuing?

"Not sure really! I will stop when I feel like I have nothing more to offer or when I feel the quality of what I have produced in my opinion, is not up to snuff" he smiles. "Meantime I like the writing process so that is always the fun part and so if I get that far into it, then I may as well finish them off!"



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"I do believe that as a species we are invariably drawn to the past, acutely aware of where we have come from, with one eye over our shoulder as we step forward. The pieces on this album deal with some aspects of the manifestation of that sense of change." This time around, rather than producing an album with an underpinning concept linking each of the songs together it has this overarching idea that has found its way into each of the nine songs, and I suggest to Guy that his band's approach this time around may be interpreted as being that of 'musical archaeologists'!

So, I enquired what the genesis of this album was and of how it developed in his consciousness...

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I reveal to Guy that I am always hugely impressed by the quality of the lyrical content of his albums, and of his usage of language. Unlike other singers, I suggest, what he sings is also precisely the words included in the booklet and not a rough approximation of these...

"Well I think the lyrics are one of the things I do best in my opinion and so I spend extra time hunting down the correct phrase, expression, way of saying things

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I suggest that this time he seems to have gone overboard for wind and brass instruments, but there's also a 'Diddlybow'...

"Ah yes, that's a one string slide guitar, a sort of Appalacian style instrument... think Ry Cooder-like 'Paris Texas' sounds, but played like a Dulcimer! For the sound of the new album I definitely wanted to move away from the Tull influences that

*Paul Jerome Smith*

1. **Royal Hunt** – A Life To Die For
2. **Manning** – The Root, The Leaf & The Bone
3. **Eyevory** – Euphobia
4. **Clannad** – Nádúr



5. **Cheetah** – Rock & Roll Woman



## **MANNING – ‘THE ROOT, THE LEAF & THE BONE’ (Festival)**

There’s always something very comforting about a new album from the band Manning, whether it be the carefully considered lyrical content or the masterfully assembled musical ideas and variety of instrumentation used. This, their fourteenth recorded foray, is no different in these respects.

Unlike previous albums such as ‘Charlestown’, ‘Songs From The Bilston House’ and ‘Anser’s Tree’, this one does not have an overall conceptual basis, and yet does have an underlying theme of “change” and I do like the way that the opening imagery within the album booklet includes all the elements brought out within the nine songs comprising this release.

Here you will find little in the way of lead guitar passages, but you will find electrifying “fiddle” sections, exquisite flute passages, languid saxophone infusions, some great keyboard moments (John Young’s organ solo on ‘Old School’ is one of many such delights here) and even Bassoon on the mysterious and introspective ‘Autumn Song’ from among the cabal of guest musicians. The core band (again changed somewhat from the previous assemblage) provides sterling support to their leader Guy Manning, and of course the album is really his latest “baby”. Not only providing vocals and flexing his multi-instrumentalist skills (must find out what a “Diddlybow” is!!) he also oversees recording and production duties and within limited budgetary constraints this is yet another triumph.

Is this a progressive rock album? Insofar as most of the tracks are quite lengthy (the opening, title track impressively weaving to a smidgeon under twelve minutes) if that is the definition of “progressive” then yes it is. But from my perception it is simply a magical, if quirky series of stories set to music that are full of surprises, unusual instrumentation and fascinating ideas and characters (Eleanor Rigby, Mr Jones, Mrs Crowther, the Man from U.N.C.L.E, foreign bankers taking their girlfriends for sex and afternoon tea) melded together to produce an album that is worthy of being heard by anyone who is not generically blinkered but simply adores beautiful, mainly quite gentle rock music.

As a collector of certain memorabilia, I found 'Palace Of Delight' a particular lyrical and musical gem, but you will undoubtedly find your own favourites within this album and I suspect that 'The Huntsman & The Poacher' with its fabulous singalong chorus will be a highlight for many. Please try and grab a listen...

Paul Jerome Smith