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MANNING

The Root, The Leaf & The Bone FESTIVAL

The artist digs deep to unearth a real treasure.



Change. Whether you like it or not, there it is, everywhere, always, inexorable. Some adapt better than others; some see all change as progress, and others take the polar opposite view. The present follows at the expense of the past and history, to misquote Alan Bennett, is indeed one bloody thing after another. Prolific artist Guy Manning knows this, and has clearly been giving the matter some serious artistic thought. Here on his 14th album he explores this subject through song.

A trip through history and time - beautiful flourishes abound.

The more you listen to Manning's work, the more inclined you are to conclude that his talent for songwriting is as underrated as it is distinctive. The 12-minute title track that opens *The Root, The Leaf & The Bone* tells you all you need to know. Floating in on a plaintive flute line (he's still a Tull fan to the bone), he introduces the setting of an ancient village, trampled down, built upon and forgotten. And with it, the humans who inhabited it ('*Mapped within the space beneath our feet, are signposts to a progress now complete*'). Then we're off, on a trip through history, through time, with beautiful, clever and theatrical musical flourishes abounding. You'd be hard-pushed to find another artist who evokes an old village with copper kettles boiling on stoves and lamps lit by hand, which has been swept away over time to make way for '*a corporation leisure complex and carvery*'. It's that funny/serious attention to language detail, and his ability to make it musical, that's always elevated Manning's work.

Deconstruction Blues rocks along at a pelt to some of his freshest woodwind arrangements to date, with some odd tempos to keep us on our toes. Concerning time and our brief spot in it, *Autumn Song* evokes images of empty nests, in a world where every note of music has been played out. It's a real tearjerker. *Forge Song's* dark synth line uses the clank of hammer on metal as its industrial rhythm; we can probably all relate to the childhood memories threaded through *Old School*, and endearing, Tom Brown-style lyrics about Airfix models, sweets and balloons make *Palace Of Delights* a particular gem, along with its superb, modern wind chart.

Rising to the occasion, the band features a plethora of talented people, from Knifeworld bassoonist Chloe Herington to trusty guitarist David Million (really getting his teeth into proggy, tantalisingly open-ended closer *Amongst The Sleepers*). Due to financial constraints the production's not quite on the scale that the material deserves, but its auteur's skill with words and music transcends that, and so much more besides. May that never change.

GRANT MOON