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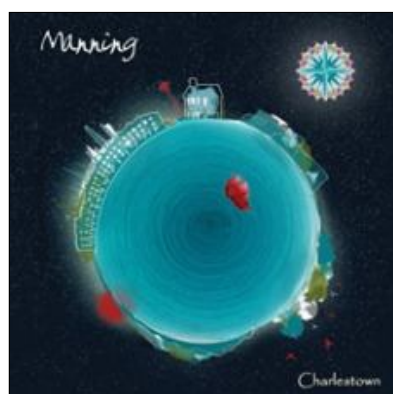
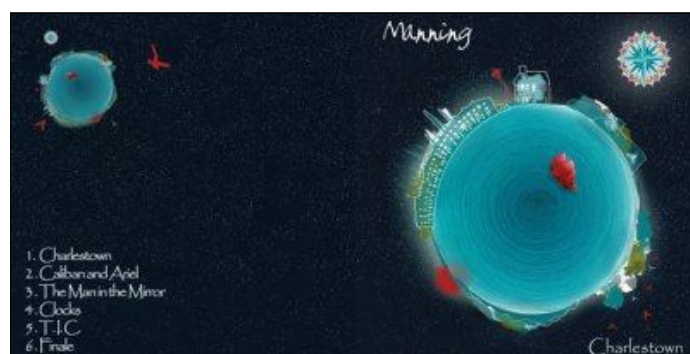
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### ROUND TABLE REVIEW



<b>Country of Origin:</b>	UK
<b>Format:</b>	CD
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<b>Catalogue #:</b>	201010
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<b>Time:</b>	61:35
<b>Info:</b>	<b>Manning</b>
<b>Samples:</b>	<b><a href="#">Click here</a></b>

**Tracklist:** *Charlestown* (35:10), *Caliban And Ariel* (2:58), *The Man In The Mirror* (6:26), *Clocks* (4:28), *T.I.C.* (5:14), *Finale* (7:17)

### Geoff Feakes' Review

Since reviewing the 2005 album *One Small Step* I seem to have adopted the mantle of unofficial DPRP representative for all things Manning related. Regular visitors to this site will be aware of my admiration for Guy Manning's music with this being my fifth consecutive review. More importantly its Guy's 11th album in as many years and on this occasion I'm delighted to be joined by my colleagues Jonno and Bob for a long overdue Round Table Review. If anyone deserves the additional attention it's Guy, an instigator and champion of quality progressive rock since his debut release *Tall Stories For Small Children* in 1999.

Back to *Charlestown* however which in my humble opinion is the strongest Manning album to date. I'll qualify that statement with the assertion that the music, arrangements, production and pacing are nigh on perfect. As is typical of his recording process the multi-instrumentalist Guy produced the framework for the album in his home studio and the resulting music was then fleshed out by his own band and sundry guest musicians. I say guest musicians although in several cases they have become familiar names in the extended Manning family of seasoned contributors.

The opening and title track *Charlestown* is an epic in the true sense of the word and I'm not simply referring to the length. Although at 35 minutes it is Guy's longest single piece to date it's the musical structure incorporating shifting

moods and tempos and reoccurring themes that give it that epic sweep. It opens with the evocative line "Coming home" and then backtracks to recount the perilous voyage of a merchant ship during the 1800's. A memorable main theme, lush orchestral sections, tricky instrumental workouts and a goose bump inducing finale all combine to make this a prog lover's delight. The lead guitar contributions from Chris Catling supported by Kev Currie have a **Floydian** flavour in places. There's even a snatch of 'Auld Lang Syne' at the end to complete that sense of bittersweet melancholy.

Guy explained in a **recent conversation** that it wasn't calculated in the way in which the album was constructed but it works a dream with the individual songs both contrasting and complementing each other at the same time. If *Charlestown* is the longest Manning track to date then the following *Caliban And Ariel* is one of the shortest and serves as the calm after the storm. Based on two characters from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' but with a twist, it's a poignant song with piano, classical guitar and multi-part wordless harmonies all courtesy of Guy himself. The moody cello accompaniment is the work of Kathy Hampson and during the opening verse I was curiously reminded of **Richard Harris'** version of the classic ballad *Macarthur Park*.

*The Man In The Mirror* is not as the title may suggest a tribute to the late Michael Jackson although it does have a funky upbeat vibe that belies the injustice unfolding in the lyrics. It also has a memorable choral hook supported by the lively saxophone and fiddle work of Alison Diamond and Ian Fairbairn respectively. The haunting and atmospheric *Clocks* further demonstrate Guy's talents as a writer of mature songs with its infectious mandolin motif and the lyrical flute playing of Steve Dundon. *T.I.C.* on the other hand is a chance for the band to let their hair down with its good time feel, blues-rock guitar soling and another catchy chorus. Guy's extended synth solo could have easily come from the fingers of his good friend and colleague from The Tangent, Andy Tillison.

The appropriately titled instrumental *Finale* serves both as a strong closer and an inspired way of bringing the album full circle. The opening sortie with drummer Dave Albone and bassist Kris Hudson Lee in full flight is evocative of 70's American jazz-fusion whilst the final bars has shades of the Canterbury scene from the same era, much loved by Guy. From **Weather Report** to **Hatfield And The North** you might say separated by a gloriously proggy mid section that revisits the themes from *Charlestown* as well as the melodic keyboard extravaganzas associated with the likes of Messrs **Banks** and **Wakeman**.

Whilst in the past Guy has often blended elements of folk, jazz and mainstream rock into his sound, *Charlestown* is for me his most fully realised prog-rock album to date. It's a skilfully produced, free flowing work and along the way classic bands like **Yes**, **Genesis** and **Jethro Tull** are hinted at without ever once resorting to plagiarism. Yes fans however will find the superb artwork by Guy's daughter Rosie vaguely familiar. Musically there is a wonderful attention to detail throughout whilst the lyrics tell stories that are both easy to absorb as well as being thought provoking. Instrumentally Guy is in full command throughout particularly in his abundant use of keyboards with stellar support from the aforementioned contributing musicians. My final rating therefore serves as both an acknowledgement of the excellence of this release as well as being in recognition of Guy's long and fruitful service to the genre of progressive rock.

## John O'Boyle's Review

*Charlestown* is the new album from the poetic Guy Manning. Can you believe that it's album number eleven? Since his first release in 1999 through to today, Mr. Manning has been creating and recording some rather fantastic albums. Well the rather stunning *Charlestown* is another album that can be added to his body of work, with it being able to respectably hold its own. Eight of his past albums have been DPRP recommended, only **Cascade** and **The View From My Window** narrowly missing out, which I would suspect maybe on another day it might have received the recommendation score!

For me, and I will make no bones about this, but British prog has two real stalwarts, The Tangent and Manning. I have gone on record stating that The Tangent is Britain's best prog band. Let me gone on record with the following statement, "Manning is Britain's second, it's not that one is better than the other per se, just different approaches, who should be playing to big audiences nightly. I can't understand as to why this isn't so?" I know that's a bold statement, but as far as I am concern it is bold, true and warranted. The interesting thing being that Guy was a member of The Tangent, working along side his best mate Andy Tillison. Just witnessing Guy live is an experience in itself; he totally immerses himself in his work. Anyway I digress.

I received this album the day it was released, and having spent quite sometime listening to it, as you may have gathered, I am very impressed. We are presented with six powerful tracks, with the opener coming in at just over thirty five minutes; a real fingerprint of the man's genius. The concept for the album came after the Manning family took their annual holiday to Cornwall, having decided to visit a place called Charlestown, near St. Austell. Such was the impact of what they experienced, boarding tall ships and investigating the history of the port, which in turn lead to the creation of this album.

*Charlestown* is a beautiful soiree of emotions, a journey that opens with, "Coming Home", from there on in you are left in no doubt that what you are about to experience is going to be nothing short of spectacular, boy does Guy and co. deliver. The song drives rhythmically and passionately, in the manner of how great prog classics use to be written in days of old, whether it's the music or the lyrics that is telling the story, you understand that no one part is more important than the other, but as a team they form perfection. The lyrical content is stunning throughout, poetic genius, proving that strong word play is just as important as fantastic musical structure. Musically this is a soundtrack with its building crescendos that really highlights the imagery. All the lead breaks are perfectly placed, whether guitar, keyboards, violin et al, the language and notation is perfect, having melody, form, structure and texture; when the mood needs to be changed, the meter and timbre steps up to the mark, offering dynamics and

articulation. I can honestly say that this is the most powerful track that I have heard this year. I closed my eyes and I was there, not only visually but I could smell the sea air, feel the wind, transported back to the days off old, such is the intensity of the piece. This is Manning' Magnum Opus, for me being the best song that he has written yet. Writing songs this good confirms to me that Manning should be huge.

*Caliban And Ariel* is a beautiful piano lead piece, with some very subtle cello work and again featuring some very intelligent word play, which looks at Prospero's servants Caliban the foul mouthed and abrasive, who serves out of fear and Ariel a graceful spirit, who has charm and is courteous, serving Prospero out of gratitude, due to his kindness towards her, both being polar opposites. The piece builds around the pair dancing in the sand by the sea as the tides ebb and flow, merriment being had by both, but you get the feeling of darker undercurrents, everything not seeming what they actual are. Such is the power of Guys emotional vocals, creating a very striking, powerful and stunning song.

*The Man In The Mirror* carries on the process of proving that Guy can write stunning, layered songs, which, with what has already been witnessed, is not something that should be called into question. The opening saxophone work is underpinned by Guy's acoustic work, featuring some very emotional and at times subtle keyboards; the bass line featured is to die for, really holding the song together; I also love the fiddle work incorporated in this piece, giving it a Celtic flavour, a reel. This really is a poignant looking at how people can perceive individuals, who deem to live in isolation, during times of pressure and strife, never taking time to understand the indifferences of individuals. How it's easy to target and form opinions, being misinformed in the same breath. The music just builds the emotional soundscape, one minute bouncy and jaunty the next menacing and somewhat sad, a platform which is punctuated by poetic perfection.

*Clocks* is an impassioned love song that will bring a tear to your eye, a ghostly scene of one watching their love one, a distant memory, recounting all the emotional experiences. The opening of the track features a clock ticking; musically the piece has a pastoral, religious feel to it. The word play is astounding;

*"Time to turn against the tide and let me live again, feel you close beside, one more chime, and then we'll weep for the memories, Oh make me live make me breathe, don't let me slip away from you"*

The song is very sedate in its approach, the musical approach and mix is perfect, wistful, the harmonies and melodies meld their passionate tones into your heart. The flute passages and piano runs really add depth, which when you scratch beneath the surface, you realise that there is just more going on than you first imagined, which is a factor that has been used lyrically too.

*T.I.C.* sees the band moving into a more dynamic rockier direction, being the only track to have been co-written. The whole piece has a bluesy, rock feel to it, featuring some complex interaction, giving you a reality check, showing the audience that Manning are a multi dimensional band, not afraid to mix their soundstages up. Even though the guitar is the star, having a **Wishbone Ash** sound in places, we still get the rather enigmatic saxophones and flute, which will no doubt draw comparisons to **Jethro Tull**. In saying that, the five minute plus song presented is memorable and will have you humming along. I just love the way it sits in opposition, to the previous tracks, the compositional approach is really intriguing.

*Finale* sadly brings the whole affair to a close, an instrumental that is both dynamic and challenging, which works with some of the themes that were created in the title piece. But don't expect a carbon copy of what has passed, as the band work hard presenting this absorbing, complex passage. All the instrumentation is driving, tonally hitting all the right spots, presenting a modern approach, although retaining a retro 70's sound and feel. Each musician is allowed to breathe, which enables absolute and stunning interaction, each taking turns leading then falling back into the ensemble, making a more than emotional and fitting closing track. Some bands can only dream of writing music of this quality, in Manning's world, this is a reality.

This is British prog at its best, intelligent and traditional, English in every sense, the twist being as an artist, he isn't afraid to mix it up and challenge the listener. Vocally Guy is unique, as his interaction and approach is both soulful and emotional; you get the feeling that he is living every word that he is announcing to his listener. He has the full package really, as he can write a damn fine tune, he is a great lyricist, an adept musician and boy can he sing.

The album has a concept running through it, which at first would simply appear to be a seafaring theme in differing manners, (which to some degree I think is true), but ultimately, I strongly believe that the true concept is emotion. Throughout the whole album, we see descriptive passages built around personality, happiness, love, sadness, loss, loneliness, indifference and the consequences of these actions, the rising emotions of those who survive.

I would like to tip my hat here to the Guy and the band for what they have created here. I strongly believe that you are not going to come across another album as good as this in 2010, although there have been some quality contenders. This is the first 10 out of 10 that I have rewarded, EVER and I strongly believe that this masterpiece truly deserves that accolade.

It is time that the world sat up and paid attention to Manning and to what has been created here.

### Bob Mulvey's Review

It has been a long time since I have participated in a DPRP RTR and even longer since I have put qwerty to screen to review a Guy Manning album, with 2002's **The Ragged Curtain** serving as the last occasion. Although it should

be noted that I have followed Guy's career throughout by adding each annual release to my collection. I was so intrigued by Geoff's and Jonno's overwhelming appreciation of this latest effort from Guy that I felt compelled to add my thoughts. Although I'll try to keep it brief as my DPRP colleagues seem to have covered pretty much all of the bases already.

Manning has a distinctive voice, or signature if you wish, like Anderson with Tull, Anderson with Yes, Gabriel/Collins with Genesis, Lee with Rush or Latimer with Camel - so it doesn't take long, with any new recording, to realise that you are in familiar territory. And here with the first opening bars of *Charlestown* we know we are in safe waters. Guy's distinctive layered vocals, **Oldfieldian** guitars, gentle strings and flighty flute - all set the scene. Now there are many proggers who salivate at the mere mention of the word epic, so with this new release from Guy clocking in with a thirty five minute opening track, then surely the album has to be a winner. But, being of an age where such an epic would have filled both sides of an LP, (a bit like a CD, but bigger and black), I tend to be a little more cautious. I don't have many LPs that feature just one track and are wonderful throughout. But that was some, ahmmm, years ago and it seems much more the norm to offer epics of this length. On this subject I will merely say that some work and some really don't...

The good news is that the thirty five minutes that is *Charlestown* does work. And this for me is down to Guy's crafted story-telling, ear friendly and catchy melodies and his ability of melding differing styles and shifting moods. Like many great epics the strength of this track is drawn from it **not** being one continuous piece of music, but rather several carefully interwoven pieces around a common theme. Much like chapters in a book. The characters, (the assembled cast of musicians), are also strong, adding greatly to the whole.

So to the music, which throughout takes on board many influences - Canterbury, folk, rock, ethnic, to name but a few and then these are crafted into something rather unique. Whether this be in the lengthy title track or equally engaging shorter pieces.

As mentioned above *Charlestown* opens in a distinctive fashion and as the epic voyage unfolds so does the music. Tales of perilous journeys and sea faring adventures of old are described by tricky rhythms and catchy melodies. Steve Dundon's Eastern flavoured flute bring notions of *Roots To Branches Tull*, whilst the darker strings move us to more mysterious waters. Ian Fairbairn plays some **Stéphane Grappelli** inspired violin, Alison Diamond's saxes bring a jazzy, Canterbury edge. This really is a voyage of discovery that rekindles 70s prog at its finest. Acoustic guitars, Hammondy organs, sweeping synths, mellotrons - you name it *Charlestown* has it all on board. The thirty five minutes passes very quickly... *Charlestown* aside, the melancholic *Clocks* is excellent with strong folk-like choruses, delectable flute, mandolin and darker keyboard sounds make this one of my favourites from the CD. The piano lead *Caliban And Ariel*, with its fragile vocal and subtle cello work, is also strong.

Of the more up tempo songs *The Man In The Mirror* hosts another strong hook-line chorus, subtle Hammondy organ, equally subtle cello and a catchy sax theme. The middle instrumental adds yet another dimension to the track with a nifty fiddle solo courtesy of Ian Fairbairn. *T.I.C.* at first seems a bit of oddball - acoustic bluesy rock with a hint of country rock thrown in for good measure. As always though the melodies are strong which carries the piece. Highlight here is the lengthy instrumental section with a synth intro, trade off guitar licks, followed by similar excursions from the flute and sax... Great stuff! Last of the up beat tracks is the aptly titled instrumental, *Finale*. Strong Canterbury influences here with early **Caravan** and **Camel** and the keyboard sounds bringing memories of **Pete Bardens** flooding back. Bassist Kris Hudson-Lee and Dave Albone on drums really nail this one with Alison Diamond's saxophone being the icing on the cake...

Whilst mentioning the musicians - once again an impressive cast has been assembled. A testament to multi-instrumentalist Guy who seems to have the knack of finding the right people to compliment what he does without ever losing the essence that is Manning. I was pleased to see the excellent Steve Dundon (Molly Bloom) brought back in for *Charlestown*. I have long admired his work and his presence here is superb. The two "new" electric guitar players, Chris Catling and Kev Currie offer contrasting styles and a greater dimension to the music. As mentioned above Kris Hudson-Lee and Dave Albone are strong throughout and add a cohesiveness to the rhythm section. Excellent contributions also from Ian Fairbairn (fiddle), Kathy Hampson (cello), Alison Diamond (saxes) and Julie King (vocals).

Like all of Guy Manning's albums they have that air of familiarity from the outset which is further enriched by subsequent listens - each album is a grower - and so is this one... For those who still haven't dabbled in the Manning waters, then this album would be an excellent starting point.

If I still haven't quite convinced you to travel to *Charlestown* then let me offer some additional spices, (those things I hear fleetingly in the music), that just might take your fancy. Traces of (early) **Yes**, **The Strawbs**, **Barclay James Harvest**, **The Moody Blues**, **Supertramp**, **ELP**, **Gordon Giltrap**, **Procol Harum**, **King Crimson**... **The Tangent**.

Concluding my review of *The Ragged Curtain* I said: "So the burning question is would I spend my hard earned cash on this album?" Yes was the answer then and yes is the answer now. A fine piece of work that deserves to reside in any self respecting prog collection...

...(ten, ten, four indeed ;0)

#### Conclusions:

**GEOFF FEAKES : 10 out of 10**  
**JOHN O'BOYLE : 10 out of 10**  
**BOB MULVEY : 8.5 out of 10**

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