

24 SEPTEMBER 2010

(More than) 10 questions with...Guy Manning



One thing can certainly be said of a number of modern progressive musicians; they can be every bit as active and prolific as the past masters. Consider for a moment the fact that a band like Yes released 8 albums' worth of material in just a three year stretch. Then look at like musicians like Roine Stolt of The Flower Kings...or Guy Manning.

Guy's released 10 solo albums since 1999, with his eleventh release, *Charlestown*, due out next month. He's also appeared on all five studio (and 2 live) albums by The Tangent, though that association ended this year as Manning found himself busy with finalising both *Charlestown* and the associating promotion and supporting tour for that album.

With the new album imminent, it was a fine time to sit down with Guy and see what insight he'd be willing to share on this release, as well as what the future might hold for him.

1. As we start off, when did you first discover a love for music?

Guy Manning: From about 13, I liked to listen to the radio. I had had piano lessons earlier on but did not enjoy them at all. I then discovered a Spanish guitar (still wrapped in a plastic bag) in my parent's wardrobe at the age of 14 and it all started from there with Wishbone Ash, Alice Cooper & Lindisfarne song books!

2. What were your earliest influences musically?

GM: I can remember seeing the Beatles on the TV, but it was not until I made some friends with musical interests that I really started to listen. Early bands I loved (and still do) Jefferson Airplane, Wishbone Ash, Alice Cooper, Lindisfarne, ELP, Grateful Dead.

At 15, I met my best friend Simon who was a drummer and really into his music. From there I found Jethro Tull, Led Zeppelin, King Crimson, Caravan and much more and we rapidly took in more of the Canterbury scene plus more folk based stuff like John Martyn, Roy Harper, Nick Drake, Joni Mitchell and fusion Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return to Forever, Weather report etc

3. How did you and Andy Tillison first meet up, and how did you decide to start working together musically?

GM: We met when he engineered a BBC session I recorded in 1987

4. Do the two of you plan on working together in the future?

GM: Maybe. Who knows?

5. What can you tell us about the recording of your first album, *Tall Stories for Small Children*? Were you at all nervous or worried about your material not coming across as you wanted?

GM: I worry with each and every album that it may not be perfect and that people will not like it or at least give it some time to permeate...because it, inevitably, is not perfect. What I hear in my head and the physical manifestation onto disc etc is never the same (I wish it was).

The state of home recording setups was very primitive back then and so the sound quality was never going to be as out of Abbey Road. There were no 'in the box' superb virtual instruments. Keyboards had all to be linked together and sequenced to be able to play back through mixing desks and recorded onto tape or later onto mini disc.

The mix was a case of choreography as there was no mix automation and you had to remember to turn things up and down as the piece played onto the recorder.

I had quite a few songs that had been building up and I liked them so that bit was OK. When it came to release time, CYCLOPS records wanted me to take some of the ballad like pieces off and replace them with "proggie" epics. So I did that to get it out there.

The extra pieces are either now bonus tracks or have been re-recorded for subsequent albums or awaiting a future anthology release

6. How would you say your solo material has changed over the years?

GM: It changes every year I think, as I try not to repeat myself if possible. So all those wanting another *Number Ten* or *Bilston House* from *Charlestown* had better be wary!

The quality of the recordings has got a lot better over time that's for certain! The artwork has got more colourful (since the old days of the CYCLOPS black and white booklets because it saved money) and important.

7. Are there any moments that you look back at as highlights or high points in your solo career?

GM: a) The release of *Tall Stories* - 1st album out there 'professionally'
b) Summers End 2006 - Being invited to partake was great and it was a very good festival. We started to get noticed a bit
c) ROSFEST 2010 - what a brilliant few days and again we were very glad to be asked. Vindication of all the hard work we had been doing as a band and also staying true to what I wanted to write and record

8. Tell us a little bit about your newest album, *Charlestown*.

GM: Well it is different again. The title track is a long multi-sectioned track of about 35mins length.

Lots of light & shade and funny time signatures in there but hopefully very melodic and of a narrative nature again (which IMO are my trademarks). I use more orchestration and other wider ranges of instruments (real Cellos, Flutes, Soprano Saxes etc). It is also the first time when I actually do all the keyboards too although I did do lots on all the other albums in reality.

It is based on true stories about the often-perilous voyages out of Charlestown (in Cornwall, UK) around Lands End and up to Bristol delivering China Clay.

The supporting pieces are shorter but still narrative! A mix of pretty tunes and rocky ones.

The final piece FINALE is an instrumental as the rhythm section asked me to write them something tricky. I hope I succeeded! It echoes the themes from the title track. The front cover artwork was again designed

by my daughter Rosie (Who also did all the *BILSTON HOUSE* artwork)

It should hopefully be released on October 25th 2010

9. How did you hook up with F2 Records?

GM: After having been on CYCLOPS (until they started to decommission the label) and then ProgRock Records based in San Diego, I wanted a UK based label that I could easily contact and that showed a real interest in my music, Dave Robinson (at Festival Music F2) was that man! We get on well and I hope we can continue to work together.

10. What do you find more challenging to compose...an epic like the 25-minute 'Ragged Curtains' or a more compact piece like 'Another Lazy Sunday' (just to pick two pieces of wildly differing length)?

GM: I find it all the same really. If I have good ideas then it is no problem. Long epics are only that way because I have more to tell (in story terms etc) than in a shorter piece. If it is a true concept album (which to me, means a continuous story line like *The Lamb* or *Tommy*), then sometime I have to try write to order (i.e. to tell a specific part of the storyline)...but, that CAN be helpful as well as it scopes and focuses what has to be said

11. *Charlestown* is due out soon. What plans do you have for touring/supporting the release?

GM: Yes indeed. Dates are already in the book for 2011 and we have 2 more dates to do in 2010 which will feature material from it

12. I've been asking this question recently, and I'll offer it up to you as well...how has the move to a more digital world changed things for you with regard to releasing music?

GM: It is now far easier to work collaboratively over distances (i.e. countries) or even to share demos amongst the band members via MP3s and websites etc and to keep recording quality.

Getting music heard is a lot easier (But this can lead to piracy and loss of sales if it gets out of hand)

13. How much has downloading affected you and your options for releasing your music?

GM: I do offer my albums for official download now but I think the listener does miss out on the artwork, which I take a lot of time over & pride in. The lyrics are there to read and these are VERY important to me and the music.

There are a lot of sites out there offering my music for unofficial download. This is more of a volumetric problem if you are PINK FLOYD, but, it can still eat quite a bite into any revenues that makes the recording of a subsequent album possible.

14. Tastes change and influences change over a life. Are there bands or musicians you look to now for inspiration that are different from the past?

GM: No not really, I have forged my own path for a long time now, writing music that I like for myself and just hoping that others get it and embrace it.

I do not have ties any longer.

15. When you're not actively writing or performing, who do you listen to for enjoyment?

GM: LOTS!! Far too many to mention individually really but just to say I have always been a collector of music and have over 5000 CDs plus LPs, tapes etc.

If it is good and out there I hope to find it! I try to find time to listen to them all but NOT when I am writing

16. What other things do you enjoy outside of music as a way of recharging?

GM: I love watching films and reading

17. In closing, do you have any final words for our readers?

GM: It has been a great ride so far, I do hope you enjoy or at least give **CHARLESTOWN** a fair chance to get under your skin. It is not as immediate IMO as the last 2 albums and so more of a challenge for you. Please invest some time with the pieces - I do think you are all up for it!

Find out more:

<http://www.guymanning.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=14122996660&ref=search>

(Photo by Esa Ahola. Used with kind permission. See more of her photos at <http://photopit.ning.com/profile/esa>)