

# Manning – Akoustik

## Dutch Progressive Rock Pages

**Tracklist:** *In Swingtime* (4:31), *Antares* (5:32), *Clocks* (4:17), *Castaways* (4:08), *Silent Man* (4:32), *Margaret Montgomery* (4:52), *A Place To Hide* (4:32), *View From My Window* (4:50), *Phase (The Opening & The Widening Sky)* (4:56), *Tears In The Rain* (6:06), *The Night And The Devil* (4:54), *In My Life* (6:27)

In theory the premise of *Akoustik* is a simple one - from a recording career spanning 12 years and 12 albums, select 12 songs deemed most appropriate for the all-acoustic treatment. Given the wealth of material to choose from however, the task for Guy Manning could have been a daunting one. Democratically the selection spans the entire **Manning** back catalogue with each song re-arranged to accommodate the current band in unplugged mode. It also gives both Guy and the listener the opportunity to revisit some favourite songs although several have already featured in the band's acoustic shows.

On disc Manning is of course no stranger to acoustic instrumentation, over the years his arrangements have been enriched with acoustic guitars, mandolin, piano, flute, violin, cello and clarinet in a variety of combinations. A talented multi-instrumentalist, this time around Guy restricts himself to guitar and lead vocals (as he often does on stage) with partner Julie King providing backing vocals and regular collaborator Steve Dundon responsible for some impressive flute playing. Given that in addition to Guy there are three guitarists credited (Chris Catling, Kev Currie and David Million) more information in the sleeve notes as to who actually played what would have been advantageous I feel. Completing the line-up is Rick Henry (drums, percussion), Kris Hudson-Lee (bass) and Martin Thiselton (keyboards, violin).

To open, they revisit the heart (or at least the middle) of the Manning recording career with *In Swingtime* which similarly opened the 2005 [One Small Step](#) album. Whilst this version of *In Swingtime* perhaps lacks some of the spring of the original it does find Guy in fine vocal form with instrumentation sounding suitably crisp. From here they spread out in both directions taking in the 1999 debut [Tall Stories For Small Children](#) album (*Castaways*) and the more recent 2010 [Charlestown](#) album (*Clocks*). Even though in their stripped down form the melodies are laid bare they stand-up extremely well to the exposure.

*Antares* is most welcome here with its familiar and memorable piano/guitar theme and a touch of flute for the chorus. The same goes for the moody *Clocks* and the delicate *Castaways* which sit comfortably side by side despite the 11 year gap that separates the original versions. The strident *Silent Man* with its staccato rhythm and flute motif draws comparisons with **Ian Anderson** and **Jethro Tull**, but Guy won't mind, he's become very used to the association over the years. My two favourite tracks follow, the lilting *Margaret Montgomery* with its lyrical flute melody and the poetic *A Place To Hide*. Following a deceptively hesitant start the latter blossoms into one of Guy's most beautiful choral hooks which exhibits his more romantic side.

Two songs from the 2003 album [The View From My Window](#) are next up including the familiar title song and the less familiar *Phase* which benefits from haunting wordless harmonies. The chugging rhythm of *Tears In The Rain* is reminiscent of **Peter Gabriel's** *Solsbury Hill* which nestles comfortably alongside the brooding *The Night And The Devil*. Bringing this collection to a fitting close is *In My Life* which is very atmospheric in a *Stairway To Heaven* kind of way with a particularly nifty guitar break around the midway point.

*Akoustik* is not an album for the casual listener, requiring a degree of commitment and concentration to be fully appreciated. Your patience is well rewarded however with beautifully crafted music that's lovingly played and superbly recorded. Whilst numerous artists over the years have gone down the unplugged route, in Manning's case you feel that this is not so much a departure from his normal approach rather it's an affirmation of the musical style he's been championing for the past 13 years.

**Conclusion: 7 out of 10 [GEOFF FEAKES](#)**