

Manning: Akoustik for 'Sea of Tranquility'



Take Guy Manning (acoustic guitar and vocals), Chris Catling (guitar), Kev Currie (guitar and vocals), Stephen Dundon (flute), Rick Henry (drums and percussion), Kris Hudson-Lee (bass) Julie King (vocals and percussion), David Million (guitar) and Martin Thiselton (keyboards and violin) and select twelve songs from Manning's stunning back catalogue, manipulate their arrangements to suit the *Akoustik* mood.

The only brief for this recording being thus, you can only record parts that you could reproduce live, no overdubs, (the only caveat to this rule being that some extra vocals were added by Guy where some bands members were unavailable to record, something that one can forgive).

When you do this, what does one end up with? Well, firstly you get to see a different side of the band; secondly you get a semi-live album, songs that the bigger Elektrik band would not normally perform; thirdly and make no mistake of this music lovers, *Manning* offers up twelve absolutely stunning pieces that will ENTERTAIN.

I, as you, will have heard other bands having tried this approach, the results at times being mixed, certain songs working well and others just failing to hit the mark. *Manning* has successfully managed to evade falling into this trap as all the songs here work on so many differing levels; these arrangements add another dimension to the original versions. This approach has been seen by many, both bands and fans as a means to an end until their latest release hits the market. If I was to sum up *Akoustik*, then I would make the following statement, "*the album offers a perfect abridged document of their recording career with a twist*". This is an album that will please his existing fans and bring on board a new audience.

Both Guy Manning's music and vocal style lends itself to this approach where the lyrical prose really comes to life, this more than compensates for the perceived spring some of these songs may have lost presented this way. In saying that though, none of these songs have lost any of their power in presentation; in fact I certainly for one believe that these new arrangements take on a whole new life, displaying a mature character that is refreshing and rewarding. The annotated acoustic warmth is emotional, creating beautiful atmospherics which works on so many different levels. The stripping of music back to its most basic form airs all, for people to dissect, a nakedness that can be vulnerable, that can be painful, this is definitely not the case here. This music has strength and clarity, not embarrassed to display its vulnerability as it knows that it is only going to be embraced, knowing that it has power in its presentation.

The guitar and keyboard themes are present throughout as one would expect, but the real star of the show is the vocals, this is something that I can't emphasise enough, which offers emotional gravitas pinpointing the themes of each song, each telling their own story. The music alone is enough to capture ones imagination, but with the realisation of the lyrics the depth and beauty of each song stands high and proud, whether it is just Guy or the harmonies of Julie King and co. The lyrical inflections are intelligent, must be heard stories that seem like long lost family members. The songs are lifted *Tall Stories For Small Children*, *The View From My Window* and his last opus *Charlestown* offering a romanticism that one can only dream of, colourful soundstages that one would die for. You can jump into this album at any place and be fulfilled; you don't need to be an aficionado to appreciate the creations. The real cleverness of his music though is that the more you listen the more you realise that there is definitely a very dimensional approach happening, highly layered and intricate passages that don't intimidate.

Guy Manning for me is the master of this approach, an approach that he has been perfecting for the last thirteen years and an approach which has led to him creating thirteen stunning albums. *Akoustik* is a fascinating window into his world that will instantly convert those not in the know. The creation of a Manning album is more of an event than your ordinary run of the mill release as one is never too sure as to what one is going to be presented with. The only guarantee is that you can be safe in the knowledge that it is always going to be classy and that is in all honesty the

magic of Guy Manning's song writing ability and why he is so revered by music lovers and no one and I mean no one tells a story like him.

Ask me to pick a favourite track here and I honestly can't, as they all move me in different ways, well known songs that have return like the proverbial prodigal son. This is another Manning album that is getting massive thumbs up from this quarter. Do yourself a favour if you aren't already familiar with this band, jump straight into the pool and I will guarantee you will soon be swimming with a big smile on your face.

Tracklist:

- 1) In Swingtime
- 2) Antares
- 3) Clocks
- 4) Castaways
- 5) Silent Man
- 6) Margaret Montgomery
- 7) A Place To Hide
- 8) The View From My Window
- 9) Phase (The Open And the Widening Sky)
- 10) Tears In The Rain
- 11) The Night And The Devil
- 12) In My Life

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Reviewer: [John OBoyle](#)

Score: ★★★★★