

Review by **Tarcisio Moura**

PROG REVIEWER (PROGRESSIVE ARCHIVES)

★★★★★ When I heard Guy Manning's new work would be a kind of Anser's Tree second part I must say I was not very excited about it. After all, Anser's Tree is not one of my fave's Manning albums. Ok, I gave it four stars, and it was surely his most dense and elaborated work to date, but I much rather have his more melodic and accessible stuff. But I did not have to worry: in fact, Margaret's Children combines the complexity of Anser's Tree with the highly enjoyable side of his latter day output of Songs From The Bilston House and Ten. The results are, again, a very powerful collection of songs done by one of the most prolific and talented singers/songwriters to appear by the new millennium.

I still wonder how Manning manages to write, play, arrange and record so many good songs in such short time. I mean, how many artists do you know that have released 12 albums in 12 years? And not only just albums, but high quality ones. Curiously his recent work is the best he has ever done. And Margaret's Children is definitely one of them. His well known mix of folk, symphonic and classic rock (plus a few jazz, world music and even soul bits here and there) is quite original. And this CD shows more of his 70's progressive trait than lately, with hints of King Crimson, Jethro Tull and even Yes in parts. Ok, this is not symphonic per se (remember, he is more on a singer/songwriter mode than a guitar or piano virtuoso), but clearly he pays homage to various of his heroes through the use of vintage sounding keyboards, lush, tasteful arrangements and brilliant musicians to help to him out.

The results are the usual: perfectly crafted songs with intelligent and unusual lyrics. Guy Manning is a great storyteller. But he also has the knack for fine melodies to fit in with the words. His care for the right sounds to go with his tunes is amazing: not a single note goes wasted on the entire record, every instrument and voice coming in and out at the right moment. So, if you're looking for long, bombastic instrumental parts or 1000 miles per minute solos, look somewhere else. But if you like rich, subtle and varied tunes, this is THE place. Besides, he puts in good use not only excellent keys and guitar parts, but also violin, sax, flute and various percussion. And to wrap it up, production and artwork are also top notch.

There are not really highlights on this album. Every track is a little jewel on itself. It all depends on your personal taste. And I fell in love with David Logan (great guitar solo at the last part, in the vein of Al Stewart's Modern Times), Amelia Fairfax (terrific eastern rhythms and melodies) and Amy Quartermaine (very good lyrics with several musical sections).

Conclusion: another prog rock masterpiece done by one of today's finest songwriters. May thy muse stay with ye!