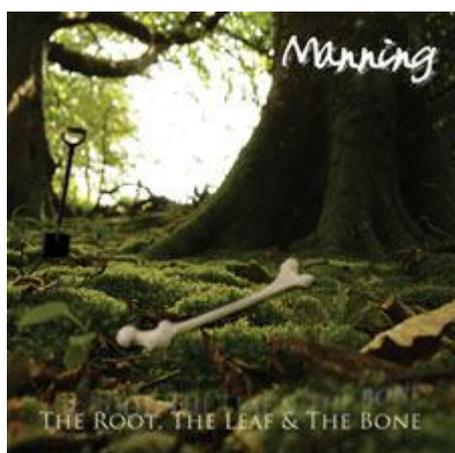


# DUTCH PROGRESSIVE ROCK PAGES ROUND TABLE REVIEW (NOV 2013)

# Manning

## Manning - The Root, The Leaf & The Bone



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|---------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Country of Origin:</b> | U.K.               |
| <b>Format:</b>            | CD                 |
| <b>Record Label:</b>      | F2 Festival Music  |
| <b>Catalogue #:</b>       | 201310             |
| <b>Year of Release:</b>   | 2013               |
| <b>Time:</b>              | 66:04              |
| <b>Info:</b>              | <b>Guy Manning</b> |
|                           |                    |

**Tracklist:** *The Root, the Leaf & the Bone* (11:59), *Decon(struction) Blues* (3:46), *Autumn Song* (7:06), *The Forge* (8:01), *Old School* (8:54), *Palace of Delights* (6:34), *The Huntsman and the Poacher* (5:39), *Mists of Morning Calling to the Day* (6:42), *Amongst the Sleepers* (7:23)

## Geoff Feakes' Review

With 14 albums in 14 years you could say that **Guy Manning** is a man on a mission. His dogged determination and creative talent has certainly been responsible for some of the most inspired music of the current century. Whilst his music began life as a one-man band affair assisted by a strong core of friends, the Manning band have been a going concern for several years now with the current nucleus of Guy (leads vocals, guitars, keyboards, drums), David Million (guitars), Kris Hudson-Lee (bass), Rick Henry (percussion) and Julie King (vocals). As always there is an array of guest musicians bringing their own unique talents to enrich Guy's expansive musical vision.

With the 12 minute title song *The Root, the Leaf & the Bone*, Guy leads us gently into the album with a beautiful flute passage from long-time collaborator Steve Dundon. A lively rocky section sees Dundon joined by fuzzed organ and Guy's vocals which have an air of cynicism before another Manning regular, Ian Fairbairn cuts loose with a rousing fiddle solo.

Flute this time leads a lively, rhythmic dance into Guy's play on words *Decon(struction) Blues* revealing his frustration with the city planners and his heartfelt plea of "Don't tear it down". In stark contrast is the lovely *Autumn Song* as Guy reflects on the passing of time with a rippling keyboard motif and lyrical bassoon and sax exchanges from guests Chl e Herrington and Marek Arnold respectively. In fact Arnold is a key player on this album with his saxophones taking a lead role on several songs.

Metallic percussive effects provide a suitable backdrop for the stately *The Forge* with Julie King joining her partner on vocals backed by another full-bodied synth and sax arrangement. *Old School* opens with the sound of children playing echoing **Cat Stevens'** *Remember The Days Of The Old Schoolyard* and **Supertramp's** *School* before stepping up several gears where electric piano provides a rhythmic backdrop for some excellent ensemble playing. A superb solo from guitarist David Million and a stunning organ solo from the always excellent John Young are intersected by more stirring sax playing and strident trumpet blasts from yet another guest Joss Allsopp.

The jazzy *Palace of Delights* races along at an energetic pace reminding me of *Reward* by **The Teardrop Explodes** with a driving sax arrangement and jazz piano supported by superb bass, guitar and drums from the Manning band.

Fairbairn's folky fiddle weaves a lively jig for the playful *The Huntsman And The Poacher*, one of the album's strongest songs thanks to an infectious melody.

Kris Hudson-Lee's incessant bass line sets the pace for the gutsy (and ghostly!) *Mists Of Morning Calling To The Day* with Guy's busy narrative supported by a driving riff before taking a tranquil diversion for a poetic flute and violin interlude underpinned by Mellotron samples. Another strong offering.

For the final song, *Amongst the Sleepers*, a haunting string quartet and electric piano arrangement conveys a mood of nostalgic serenity with shades of **Genesis'** *For Absent Friends*. Acoustic guitar and keyboards enrich the mood before electric guitar and strings combine for a majestic and quite stunning finale. Without question one of Guy's most mature offerings.

With all songs written, arranged and produced by Guy, this is another superb album from the master of musical ceremonies. One can only hope that one day the wider world will wake up to the fact that in the leafy suburbs of north Leeds, West Yorkshire there is a musical genius at work whose impressive output is there to be discovered.

## Alison Henderson's Review

Have you heard of that clich e about nostalgia not being what it used to be? Well, someone should have told **Guy Manning!** For his take on nostalgia is to construct what amounts to a parallel musical universe to depict a past that is both recognisable and tangible. That universe is all contained here on *The Root, The Leaf & The Bone*. There is something incredibly heart-warming about the album, which is ostensibly a trip down Memory Lane to familiar sights and sounds of childhood but Squire Manning creates some stunningly complex musical arrangements to bring them to life.

Perhaps it is his innate skill as a storyteller which breathes such life into his songs along with that distinct vibrato in his folkie voice which will always draw comparisons to **Ian Anderson**.

The title track and opener is a real gem, a gorgeous plaintive flute and keyboard opening before Manning starts telling the story of an ancient village, a metaphor for a lost world, now buried under "concrete tarmac driveways, a corporation leisure complex and carvery". Close harmonies, the occasional change of tempo from piano motif to pulsing rhythm, the incessant "tick tock" and Ian Fairbairn's piercing fiddle all add to the drama of losing so much of our past, but at what cost?

*Decon(struction) Blues* is a fast-paced work-out with Manning again bemoaning the tearing down of an historical market town to make way for another steel city. It is heavy on the flute and guitar, with a quick blast of wind instrument exotica towards the end.

So back to plaintive piano and Manning's marvellous vocals for the incredibly moving and sublime *Autumn Song* which records mainly the changes in nature during the changing season. Knifeworld's Chloë Herrington underpins the song with her bassoon lines which help to give it a slight other worldly quality.

Both *The Forge* and *Old School* introduce some familiar sounds from the past, including the smithy's anvil, children's voices and the school painting musical pictures from a much gentler age, the latter including a short but very effective organ solo from John Young. Picking up the pace again, *The Palace of Delights* is a jazzy box of treats, bursting full of interesting changes of tempo and which brims full of a child's nostalgic view of the world from Airfix models to balloons, Sellotape and elastic bands.

Then it is back to the folkie groove through *The Huntsman and the Poacher*, its hallmark being Fairbairn's fantastic fiddle and a plethora of instrumental flourishes which seem to come from out of thin air. It's a real toe-tapper too!

Keeping up the fast pace and fabulous fiddling is *The Mists of Morning Calling The Day*, embellished with some strong melody lines as Manning depicts the lives of the ordinary working folk back in the day.

The denouement is the achingly wistful *Amongst The Sleepers* that features the Burnside Quartet, whose nostalgic strings make it sound like a '40s black and white movie, but also in there are delicious acoustic and electric guitar solos from Manning regular, David Million. It is the perfect way to bring down the curtain on simply one of the most enchanting albums of 2013.

## André de Boer's Review

If you take a look at DPRP's massive list of album reviews, you will find thirteen of those written about **Manning** over the years. And almost all of those are recommended. I've got no idea what I did wrong, but I it seems to be something. A confession here. Despite his impressive back catalogue, Manning is new to me...and I found Manning's song writing so intimate that it resulted in a rather personal review.

The album starts off with the title track, *The Root, the Leaf & the Bone*, a long epic song that directly reaches to the listener's soul. I loved this song at first listen. It sketches an atmosphere that will keep you fully focussed all the way. The kind of song you just cannot interrupt, let alone stop before it ends - sacrilege. If ever there is a story in a song, it is this, both lyrically and musically.

Being aware of the connection the composer, multi-instrumentalist and singer Guy Manning has with Andy Tillison (Parallel or 90 degrees, The Tangent) it is obvious there are several elements that remind me of that. It shows, which is a good thing of course.

As explained before, I am not familiar with Manning's former work. So after this beautiful opener, which keeps going on both in my head as well as in my player, I thought the following songs would be similar. This is NOT the case. Oh, there are similarities to be found of course but the main thing is that several songs are so different. More straightforward, less complicated compositions, even easy listening at times. This way a brilliant song like *Decon(struction) Blues* keeps stuck in your head for days leaving me whistling it with some shreds of lyrics. A rather strange effect in the world of progressive rock! So on second thought, and it took me many spins to discover, they turn out not to be simple after all. It is true art. Magnificent and masterly how Guy Manning creates his compositions this way.

Take *The Forge*, or *Old School*, an 'old skool' song supported by Lifesigns' John Young on organ and Seven Steps to the Green Door's Marek Arnold on saxophone. Or folk songs like *The Huntsman and the Poacher*, with beautiful fiddling the way it should sound in its entirety. No fast lane simplicity, just brilliant compositions. And add the final track *Amongst the Sleepers* to that, building up towards a musical feast.

Such a wide range of styles, yet consistent and quite appealing. Here comes the link with Tillison again; I am convinced, I love it. And I'd like to mention the great artwork of the booklet by our former DPRP writer **Brian Watson** to complete it all!

So if you are anything like me, always searching for something exclusive like a multiple star restaurant serving progressive mixed grill, and even being ignorant of Manning up until now, go for it!

## John O'Boyle's Review

Guy Manning (Acoustic 6, 12 & Classical Guitars, Bass, Diddlybow, Drums, Incantation Bell, Keyboards, Mandolin, Percussion, Samples, Lead & Backing Vocals), David Million (Electric & Acoustic Guitars, Banjo), Julie King (Vocals), Kris Hudson-Lee (Basses) and Rick Henry (Percussion), Chlöe Herrington (Knifeworld) (Bassoon on "Autumn Song"), David Albone (Drums), Ian 'Walter' Fairbairn (Fiddle), John Young (Organ solo on "Old School"), Joss Allsopp (Trumpet), Kathy Hampson (Cellos), Kev Currie (Vocals on "The Root, The Leaf & The Bone" & "Autumn Song"), Marek Arnold (Toxic Smile, Seven Steps to the Green Door) (Saxophones), Steve Dundon (Flute)

2013 is well upon us now and as ever it is that time of year for **Manning** to unleash their new album, *The Root, The Leaf & The Bone*, album number 14, an album that I have had for quite some time which has allowed me time to be able to absorb its full impact.

There are a few things that are very evident with this group. Each release assures quality, the song writing craftsmanship is second to none both musically and lyrically, the band never fails to catch the emotion of the subject matter perfectly. Creatively they design a world which the listener is drawn into, a subjective landscape creating a conscious experience, as the music is absorbed into the pores and the lyrical prose occupies the full attention of the listener's mind as it builds cinematic landscapes.

The beauty of Manning's work is that on the surface he manages to create what would appear to be precise compact expressions. When one scratches beneath the surface, one realises that this is not the case, that there is much more going on, layered interactions, something more that completes the package making it whole and bringing it to perfection.

All great bands have a signature sound, Manning is no exception to this rule; I defy anyone who is familiar with his work to listen and not know who it is. One thing that Guy is not afraid of doing is experimenting with different approaches, something that keeps the music vibrant and fresh. We are presented with sedate, lamenting and boldly assertive musical interludes throughout the album which is punctuated with serene and deliberate vocal passages that are dignified in both phrasing and approach, full of consciousness that mark and add effect.

There are stark contrasts laid before your feet. The barren and mournful emptiness of *The Root, The Leaf & The Bone*; the fast tempo of *Decon(struction) Blues*, Guy's own take on **Joni Mitchell's** *Big Yellow Taxi*; the beautiful *Autumn Song* that looks at the passing of seasons and lives; the tonally heavy opening of *The Forge* that fondly looks at the loss of craftsmanship and individualism in favour of mass production, all underpinned by some rather clever percussive work whilst the other contributions build a solid musical foundation. The menacing *Old School* that tips its hat to Lindsay Anderson's controversial movie *IF* and its depiction of a savage insurrection at a fictitious boarding school which houses some stunning Hammond B3 keyboard chicanery. The playful *Palace of Delights* will prick your subconscious mind, raising a smile or two at the quoted references while the ironic Celtic tinged *The Huntsman and The Poacher* sees the hunter becoming the hunted as the soundscapes switch between the characters heightening the emotion. The ghost story that is *Mists of Morning Calling to the Day* that sounds like it could have slotted in perfectly on the **Charlestown** album and the stunning album closer *Amongst the Sleepers* with its poetic prose that is second to none and filled with grandeur that for me matches the like of *House on the Hill*. Such is the power of the song, if I close my eyes I can see myself walking through the graveyard, feeling and experiencing the ghostly figures as if I have known the individuals all my life.

*The Root, The Leaf & The Bone* is not a concept album as such in my eyes and I don't believe that Guy wanted the album to be perceived that way either; what it is, is an album that is constructed of perfect emotional and poignant thematic vignettes dealing with change whether that be in attitudes, progress, social upheaval, nostalgia or natural cycles and states.

As ever Manning as a songwriter and musician has hit the nail perfectly and squarely on the head adding to his stunning repertoire. The contributing cast have helped make his vision come alive and breathe allowing each song to have its own individuality and identity. Very few artists have an ability to be consistent in their approach to continually producing albums that are consistently stunning. Manning is definitely in that league, without a shadow of doubt. 2013 has seen many great albums being release, and *The Root, The Leaf & The Bone* can be added to this list.

### Conclusions:

**GEOFF FEAKES : 9 out of 10**

**ALISON HENDERSON : 8 out of 10**

**ANDRÉ DE BOER : 8 out of 10**

**JOHN O'BOYLE : 10 out of 10**

**From the DPRP Archives...** Previous **Manning** CD & DVD Reviews:-

**Tall Stories For Small Children**

(1999)

"...an album that you should really listen to. It is subtle in both music and lyrics..." **(Remco Schoenmakers, 8/10)**

**The Cure**

(2000)

"...this is clearly the album of a song-writer not that of a band focussed on superficial music repeating the same trick over and over again." **(Remco Schoenmakers, 8/10)**

**Cascade**

(2001)

"...I personally think it is rather flat, but that again is a personal opinion. The general impression of the album is positive..." **(Remco Schoenmakers, 7/10)**

**The Ragged Curtain**

(2003)

"I suppose one of the primary functions of a review is to either encourage, or discourage, the reader to buy the album. So the burning question is would I spend my hard earned cash on this album - Yes!" **(Bob Mulvey, 8+/10)**

**The View From My Window**

(2003)

"In Manning's favour is the warm, full sound he's captured here, and the obvious skill of himself and his band as musicians and arrangers" **(Tom De Val, 7/10)**

**A Matter Of Life And Death**

(2004)

"Manning's strongest effort to date, with an excellent sense of pacing and structure, and I have no hesitation in once again awarding a DPRP recommendation." **(Dave Sissons, 8.5/10)**

**One Small Step**

(2005)

"I cannot recommend this album highly enough. A copy should be in everyone's stocking this Christmas." **(Geoff Feakes, 9/10)**

**Anser's Tree**

(2006)

"His music never fails to surprise and delight with melodic invention around every corner." **(Geoff Feakes, 8.5/10)**

**Songs From The Bilston House**

(2007)

"Despite Guy's prolific output it's evident that this is the result of many hours of meticulous labouring by the man and his band." **(Geoff Feakes, 9+/10)**

**Number 10**

(2009)

"...without doubt a man for all seasons always bringing a variety of different moods and musical colourings to the prog-rock table and none more so than on this release." **(Geoff Feakes, 8.5+/10)**

**Charlestown**

(2010)

"It is time that the world sat up and paid attention to Manning and to what has been created here." **(John O'Boyle, 10/10)**

**Margaret's Children**

(2011)

"...for those out there who haven't dabbled then there are a number of fine albums to choose from. Margaret's Children is as good a place as any to start." **(Bob Mulvey, 8.5/10)**

**Akoustik**

(2012)

"...not an album for the casual listener, requiring a degree of commitment and concentration to be fully appreciated. Your patience is well rewarded however..." **(Geoff Feakes, 7/10)**

