

The Root, the Leaf & the Bone

Manning Eclectic Prog

PROGARCHIVES Review by [platform](#)

★★★★☆ I thoroughly enjoyed last years 'Akoustik' CD from Guy Manning the stripped down versions of his songs from his catalogue admirably highlighted Guys proficient and melodic song writing skills Although owning and enjoying all of Guys releases his most recent releases of 'Charleston' and 'Margaret's Children' did not really connect with me. Would I be enchanted by The Root , The Leaf And The Bone ? This album is a series of compositions that reward the listener as it reveals its many facets. I have heard this CD on a number of occasions and each play has provided an extra nuance or subtlety to be appreciated. It has many references to a wide variety of musical genres and artists, but is totally unique in its breadth and execution. 'The Root, the Leaf and the Bone' is adventurous in its musical vision and takes the listener on a journey that is never predictable, but often memorable and exciting. One of the major and most apparent differences to much of Guys previous compositions is the dominant part that keys play throughout the release. I have recently been revisiting Guys first CD 'Tall Stories for Small Children'. In 'Tall Stories for Small Children', acoustic guitar creates the framework for many of the tunes in 'The Root ' the acoustic guitar has been replaced by a large extent by various keys. The other notable difference in 'The Root ' is that Guy has chosen the Saxophone to be the means to usually carry the melody and explore the themes that he has created.

Here are my thoughts on the nine tracks that make up this wonderful and highly recommended release.

The title track 'The Root , The Leaf and The Bone' is an inspired piece of work and one can only begin to imagine the time that Guy must have invested to create a piece that is both complex, and melodically accessible at the same time. It is an intriguing piece of music that incorporates so many different styles and moods. This piece starts with a beautiful pastoral introduction featuring flute and keyboards Guy gently sings "Strip away the layers overgrown , down beneath the underside it lies alone" In this track words such as Down and Underground are sung with double effect vocals which add to its atmosphere and are used to create rhythmic sections. The subsequent parts of this track are very reminiscent of William Barrass from Anser's Tree. I especially liked the keyboard section at 5.02 which moved into a memorable instrumental break featuring the organ and flute. The piece includes a very inventive section using the words ' tic toc' ,, before the main melody of the tune is reprised. The latter stages of this lengthy piece features some great fiddle playing and synth accompaniment before a repeat of the spoken words ' tic toc' with flute. The piece climaxes with a slow organ and flute section reminding of the opening melody before pastoral choir vocals take over. The title track is probably one of Guys most progressive pieces. It epitomises what Manning is about: superbly crafted melodies and a totally eclectic style that cannot be categorised

Deconstruction Blues Imagine hearing a fluteless Tull playing with Buddy Rich. 'Decon(struction) Blues' might well be the nearest that you will ever get to hearing such a thing. It starts with a riff that a Benefit era Anderson would have been envious to have written. It has great brass instrumentation and a killer chorus and if that was not enough David Million comes to the fore with a excellent guitar break This is another five star tune and it will go down a storm if it is played live

Autumn Song .This is great tune featuring some tasteful bass and a Flute and bassoon accompaniment I enjoyed the repeated ripple like keys in the chorus. This is one of the few tracks to feature some very tasteful acoustic guitar. It is memorable The Instrumental outro with the sax was beautiful and at times it reminded me of Jan Garbarek's work. Marek Arnold's sax work throughout this release is outstanding and fully compliments Guys vision. The decision to end the tune on a hum was inventive and worked really well

Forge The piece begins with a metallic beat providing a musical link with the title track that once again reminded me of Anser's Tree. This provided an excellent way to build the track as the organ and rhythm section combined to give this opening section a feel of ' money' from Pink Floyd. The backing vocals of Julie King worked particularly well as the track progressed .The track repeats its rhythmic start before continuing with a synth and an instrumental interlude featuring the flute. The extended sax solo within this piece is also very enjoyable and helps to reinforce my view that this album may well be regarded as Manning's most accomplished yet. Old School I was surprised by the beginning of this track. The discordant background of kids voices gave me an audible reminder of the intro of the title track from Alan Gowen's Before a Word is Said. The opening part and the vocal and backing vocals work well to create a sinister atmosphere in this tale of repression and school. The track features a wonderful sounding guitar tone at 5.20 and an inspired organ solo from John Young at 6.54. Another very enjoyable track, although at times I thought I was listening to Klaus Doldinger as the repeated sax phrasing reminded me of Passport.

Place of Delights Although Guy is not known as a fusion or jazz rock musician sections of this excellent composition had me thinking about two giants of Jazz Rock Weather Report and Return To Forever This track

features a great opening riff that could have been something that Weather Report featuring Wayne Shorter might have played. The saxophone parts and chorus with backing vocals by Julie King reminded me of the Music Magic era of Return to Forever. The bass playing of Kris Hudson Lee is a feature of this track. He lays down a great groove at before Marek Arnold once again shines. The piece concludes with a wonderfully constructed guitar solo and ends with a thunderous drum and percussion conclusion

The Huntsman and the Poacher This is a tune that has a memorable chorus and is a testimony to Guys abilities as a tunesmith. It is a classic 'folk rock tune' featuring lots of solo fiddle and great lyrics The chorus of 'At The end of the day' has been my ear worm all day. The production on this tune is very good, it includes a section that has handclaps and the staged introduction of different instruments in a way that had me thinking this is Guys 'Velvet Green'

Mists of Morning Calling to the Day I enjoyed the opening bass section and the repeated riff that dominates this track. Stephen Dundon is featured in the early parts of the tune and provides some lovely flute before a change of tempo occurs and a Floydian guitar sound gives this track a vintage feel.

Amongst The Sleepers This track features some of Guys best vocals on the album and some warm acoustic guitar. Its pastoral end with a whispered vocal reprise 'caught in deep contemplation of all the people I have known' was a fitting end to a fine album.

Overall, this is a stimulating, innovative and thought provoking release. It will be interesting to see how Guy arranges these tunes in a live setting and I for one am looking forward to his forthcoming gig at Rotherham to see this work performed.