

Manning "Margaret's Children" Durch Progressive Rock Pages DUO REVIEW

Tracklist: *The Year Of Wonders* (9:49), *Revelation Road* (5:10), *A Perfect Childhood* [Before The War, Abroad, Outbreak, Within The War, After The War] (17:05), *A Night At The Savoy, 1933* (5:05), *An Average Man* (6:31), *Black Silk Sheets Of Cairo* (7:57), *The Southern Waves* (8:48)

John O'Boyles's Review

Another year may have past but the rather impressive ambassador of prog folk rock storytelling has not been idle; Guy Manning has recorded another album that packs power and punch, which is what you would expect from a musician of this calibre. Manning's new album *Margaret's Children* picks up from 06' *Anser's Tree*, offering seven vignettes, little epic musical mini movies, each biopic having been created with the help of some musical and artistic license, stories that grow from the twisted branches of the aforementioned tree that stick firmly in your mind, memorable dalliances, something that makes Guy's music and albums so interesting and endearing in the first place.

The success of *Charlestown*, his previously and probably most challenging musical creation which received 10 out of 10 from these ears, could have been re-emulated, but Guy has chosen to travel a different road, to add some more character to *Anser's Tree*. He is neither one to follow trends or scared to experiment with different musical approaches. Sure Guy has a unique vocal phrasing that works well within the confines of his musical structure, a musical signature that most musicians try to seek all their lives, with few achieving a result as memorable as this.

The Year Of Wonders is a song that opens up the album with infectious rapidity that just pulls you into the storyline, melodic sweetness. The urgency of the song makes it both strong and memorable; the vocal approach that is Guy's signature is complimented by the participating musicians. This really is the way to open an album, a statement that is punctuated with stunning flute inflections, little flurries of excellence aligned with ornate an interesting keyboard manipulations that set the mood. As ever all the instrumentation that is included has been used to good effect, building blocks that heighten the emotions of the biography. The possessions of Margret Montgomery may have eventually found their way into the hands of Fleming Barras, but based on the balance of the grand opening, they have certainly found their way into safe hands.

Revelation Road upholds its part in the story strongly, a colourful and emotive semi acoustic phrasing, its deliverance never distancing itself too far from the electric soundstage, defined lines that Americanises the story of the medicine man that is concise and terse. Such is the power of the lyrical content you can close your eyes and see Jorgen plying his trade, black and white images annotating the scenes from a Steinbeck-esque world such as *The Grapes of Wrath*.

"Times are hard and many farming families feel so alone, their land is dry and their harvest over, no one watching over them now. The dustbowl dream just blows away as they look skywards hoping for clouds, no where to go, who can they turn to now?"

The piece de resistance for me on the album is the seventeen minute plus *A Perfect Childhood*. This really is a song that encapsulates what Guy as an artist is all about, the master of storytelling. Taking the story of an unbelievable human being, a story that needs to be told, a

story that defines unselfish choices, acts of humanity never showing distinction, leading to the humanist paying the ultimate and perverse price, her life. Although the song does take some artistic license, the whole construct has such sumptuous beauty, a piece that need to be heard to be believed. Musically it has everything that makes this style of intelligent music so powerful and rewarding, this really is Manning at is best a song that is built up of five acts. Each time I hear this song the hairs on the back of my neck stand up, especially on the closing sequences. I defy you not to be moved by this song too.

"With tears in her eyes she said it quite clearly *It's not over I'm not afraid to die for my country, my sanity, my love and my honour I am an innocent in Gods Eyes.*"

Phideaux proclaims the Savoy is proud to present Miss Harriet Horden. *A Night At The Savoy, 1933* has Julie King supplying the smoky jazz tones that are underpinned by a lovingly caressed piano. The sound of the 30's have been captured and emulated with precision and brought up to date featuring some beautiful clarinet passages by Marek Arnold. The guitar interactions that are swathed by subtle organ notations add the final depth to the whole proceedings creating an interesting and sublime song.

A heavy wall of sonics opens *An Average Man*, a song about an average man whose life changes when he is called up for service. A song about an average man is by no means a song with an average approach, its moody interludes are syncopated with a variety of rhythms which are pronounced and somewhat unexpected in the grander scheme of things making it a classy showcase, its pleading approach screams out to be recognised, musical grammar that is highly effective that comes to an abrupt end by gunshot.

The stage is set for *Black Silk Sheets Of Cairo* as the band meter out the Eastern tones. Its musical sexiness and unbound enthusiasm are highly rewarding, a marriage of catharsis that purifies and purges as it builds those intricate and convoluted scenes. Flutes, keyboards et al are stunning having really captured the moment. As the charm and perverseness of the subject matter works its magic, so does the music, something that is very apparent throughout the whole album. The passages just flow to their full crowning glories, powerful and yet again highly memorable.

The closing *The Southern Waves* is a song I first heard some time ago at one of his shows, which he played to the audience as a mark of respect to the Japanese people who suffered that devastating Tsunami, a song that held the audience captivated as they silently and respectfully listened on. The effectual and emotive musical language that was used to create this piece was the one thing that struck me immediately as those in attendance too. This song and *A Perfect Childhood* really sums up Guy, not only does he intelligently create music, he fills those notations with thought provoking words, very cleverly, something that makes his approach unique.

"The southern waves arise to forge the child once held in Pangaea's arm her southern waves with Gaia's voice reshape the land reshape our world."

The power of the song is matched by the interaction of the musicians who feel every note played, presenting a highly emotive and electrically charged construct of both music and lyrics. The stunning guitar solo really accentuates the whole mood and moment. This really is a touching tome that will bring a tear to the listener's eye.

Closing statements can sometimes be difficult when reviewing an album as one hopes that the essence of what has been created has already be relayed to the reader by the time they get to this point.

I highly rated *Charlestown* as an album as I do with all of Guy's works to be honest; as for me they are reverential in approach always inspiring me as an individual to analyse what he has written, which is what as I say intellectual music is all about. Twelve years and twelve albums

in Guy Manning continues to release material that is prolific, memorable and of the highest order. *Margaret's Children* as an album can proudly hold its own against any of his previous release and is a fitting and rewarding addition and complementation to *Anser's Tree*.

Guy has presented seven songs here that have had their roots firmly planted on *Anser's Tree*, remarkable vignettes that highlight his prowess as both a musician and wordsmith. As a concept, retreading a path that has been used before was a bold and brave step, it could have been fallen flat on its face, which has happened with other artists but something that Guy has definitely not allowed to happen. All the songs here are destined to become favourites with his fan base with one or two becoming firm classics.

For those of you who are already acquainted with Guy's work, you will embrace this album with open arms. For those unfamiliar I can only suggest that he is an artist you get to know as soon as possible as it really is artists like this that do make a difference in the world of music. The approach is all about his music and not his ego, something that I highly respect in an artist. I can only suggest that you play catch up and dig out some of his back catalogue which is also stunning.

Bob Mulvey's Review

Guy Manning and assembled cast return with album number twelve, released in as many years. One might wonder that, with such a prolific output, have standards dropped? Well, the contrary applies here and in recent times Guy appears to have honed his song writing skills and hit a rich vein of creativity. Last year's *Charlestown* was a strong release and therefore set the bar high for its follow-up and I am happy to report that *Margaret's Children* is more than equal to its predecessor.

Having been involved in last year's *Charlestown* RTR I'm little wary of repeating myself, I'm little wary of repeating myself, as *Margaret's Children* treads on familiar ground. I don't mean this in a detrimental way, there is something to be said for having a distinct and recognisable sound. Do we need to reinvent the wheel with every recording? So those elements that make up the Manning sound are there in abundance - strong story telling with thoughtful lyrics, rich vocal melodies and harmonies, catchy tunes, strong instrumental sections. What more do we need?

Earlier this year I was fortunate enough to catch the Manning band, (at the inaugural **Progmeister Festival**), which despite my early misgivings managed to cram all their large ensemble and equally impressive array of equipment onto the small stage area. I mention this concert as it was nice to finally to hear the music in a live setting. Again impressive to hear the band pulling off what are in essence multi-layered studio recordings in the this environment. Memory serves me the band performed one of the tracks from *Margaret's Children* at the aforementioned gig - although which one eludes me at the time of writing. Methinks - *Revelation Road*?

My DPRP colleague John 'Jonno' O'Boyle has given a detailed summation of the album so in customary fashion I'll just add a few thoughts on the music. So album number twelve opens with the up-tempo *The Year Of Wonders* - boasting an infectious chorus line that once heard rattles around in your head. The band is cooking here and once again the icing on the cake is the returning Steve Dundon adding his magical flute work to the proceedings. The middle instrumental is equally impressive with electric piano underpinned by organ - gradually some lilting flute is added - Marek Arnold adds sax and if I'm not mistaken there's also violin in there. That infectious chorus line returns to take the track towards the close. Worth buying the album for this track alone...

Always a sceptic when it comes to the "epic track" on any album, but once again Guy and fellow musicians have come up trumps. Bookended by lighter acoustic sections they act as a

perfect introduction and conclusion to the piece. The cello and violin adding greatly to the mood. Around the three and half minute mark the track picks up pace with Guy's clever crafting of Canterbury and folk elements taking up their places. Again another catchy chorus line sits in between the storyline punctuated by a whole gamut of instrumental interludes. The whole seventeen minutes of *A Perfect Childhood* passes very quickly.

Elsewhere the New Orleans' bluesy/jazz vibe of *A Night at the Savoy, 1933* is a nice diversion - similar to the sort of curve ball that **Queen** would add into their earlier albums. *An Average Man* is again replete with great instrumental passages and reminded me of the excellent **Jakko Jakszyk** album *The Bruised Romantic Glee Club*. The Eastern tones of *Black Silk Sheets Of Cairo* possibly encapsulates all that is Manning. The storytelling, the ever present catchy chorus and the interweaving of a multitude of instruments. Clarinets dance with violins - electric piano and percussion bounce - synthy keyboards and guitar harmonise - flutes and saxes blow... And all in just under eight minutes.

I mentioned earlier that I had caught Guy Manning in concert recently and what surprised on the day, whilst chatting with people in the interludes, was how many hadn't come across his music before. A shame really as I believe Manning is an important part of the current resurgent progressive rock music scene. I'm sure Manning fans will have already pre-ordered, but 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.

John O'Boyle recently spoke to Guy Manning - so check out what Guy had to say about the new album, (amongst other things), in his interview (*also published on this site Ed.*)

Conclusions:

JOHN O'BOYLE : 10 out of 10
BOB MULVEY : 8.5 out of 10