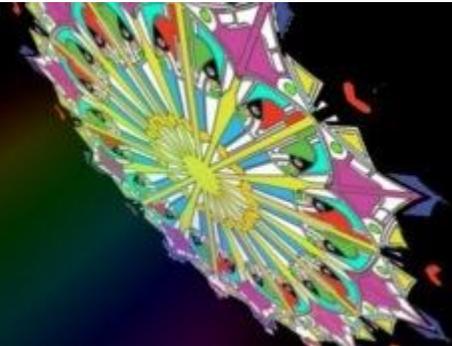


Dutch Progressive Rock Pages - Nov 2013

INTERVIEWS



Manning



Interview with Guy Manning

By

John O'Boyle

After hearing *The Root, The Leaf and The Bone*, Manning's new opus I seriously felt that I needed to speak to this prolific and very, very talented man. As ever *Guy Manning* was very accommodating and cordially invited me across to his abode to talk. On arrival, the door opened, I was graciously welcomed and in I stepped. What followed was an hour and a half of non-stop chat, believe me, I could of talked to Guy all night, as not only is his music / lyrical prose interesting, something that is very much mirrored in his personality, but he is also a very amusing man..... Put your feet up and enjoy

John: I would just like to say hi Guy and thanks for taking the time out to speak to *DPRP* about the release of you new album "*The Root, The Leaf and The Bone*"



Guy: No, it should be me thanking you really because there are so many artists out there, just to get a slot to talk to anybody about your album is quite a feat these days as there is a vast queue, I feel like we are all like planes waiting to land at an airport, all circling waiting for our time slot to land. It's just nice to talk to people about the album especially anybody who shows an interest in the album I am more than interested to talk to them about the album. I can talk about myself and my music all day long! (both laugh).

John: That's fair enough. So we are 14 albums in. Last year you released the album *Akoustik* album?

Guy: I did

John: Which was a bit of a different direction to what you have been doing on previous releases; so what was the reason and idea behind the latest release?

Guy: Well, we took a year out really with "*Akoustik*". I wanted to release something and I was keen that we continued to progress but I was getting a bit tired of writing a studio album, creating new things, so it seemed that the timing was right for an album like "*Akoustik*", the old band were splitting up, with Kev and Chris leaving and Steve going off to do more with his own band, *Molly Bloom*. I hope you don't mind me talking about "*Akoustik*" as it leads me into the next thing naturally



John: No that's fine

Guy: To look back on what we do acoustically, which is a different show altogether really and to give me a chance to go through the back catalogue and look for songs that I thought might be nice re-arranged, was quite nice and it was less pressured than making a studio album with the complexities of guest 'stars' and all the rest of it and so "*Akoustik*" was sort of a 'year off' although it wasn't really a year off, but it was a less pressured year for me. The thing about being a small recording artist is that you can't really do a *Kate Bush*. If I disappear for 10 years and come back no one would even remember who I was when I got back! (both laugh). No one is waiting for me to return, so I tend to keep going like a shark swimming and release things often in the hope that it all picks up momentum and gathers a few people as we go. I tend to keep things home grown as I don't have a huge budget and our record label is not a big label which can afford to invest heavily in the band, so everything around you here in this room is where "Root" was written and recorded apart from the parts from our Special Guests such as Marek Arnold (which were posted in from Germany!) So "*Akoustik*" was a year off; now I like writing the songs best, that's the best bit for me; demoing and getting new songs going; after they are finished and we've gone through the recording process which is again fun but more like hard work for me as I sit here with my fingers on the controls and everybody is sat there before me 'sweating buckets', trying to do what I have asked them to do under my watchful steely eye; so that's fun but a bit more pressured to get things done and then eventually, I am left alone with it again, everyone disappears and suddenly it is down to me again. The thing that turns it from being a series of recorded tracks and demos into an album is all the hard work that I have to put in to make it start to sound like an album, production wise plus the running order, the artwork. But the artwork can be fun, the production I hate.....!

John: Really.....?

Guy: Oh I hate it

John: Because?

Guy: Because I'm no good at it to be honest! You tend to like the things that you can do well and hate the things you don't. I don't think I'm a great producer, so I know it's a struggle when I go into that particular phase; that I am not going to enjoy that particular phase and it is going to take time. I have been asked before, why don't you like it? I liken the whole process to that of a man with a cantina of water about to step into the Sahara! I walk as far as I can go until the point at which I run out of water (*I run out of steam*) and then I fall face down in the sand and that's it, as far as I can get to with this album and the recording and producing, producing it to a point where I really don't want to do it anymore, I just can't do anymore and think, that's it. Down tools fella, it's never going to get any better! I'm not *Trevor Horn*, I'm not *George Martin*, it's just never going to be what it sounds like it does in here, (Guy points to his head), it's still some way away from it, but, if I can make it sound

reasonably well balanced and you can hear what's going on and it sounds pleasant, then I've done my job, but a producer is someone to me who is far more objective, as they are able to look at the whole thing without the emotional baggage that comes from writing and creating it all.

John: I supposed they are a step away from it or not been involved?

Guy: Yeah, they look at it hard and fast, you know that cello part you been hanging onto for dear life.....

John: ...Doesn't work!



Guy: Yeah, where I would go, it took a really long time to record and I really like it.... They would say "Yeah but it's not the most important thing in the song is it..... No....".

By the time I have got to that point, I have lost all objectivity to the point where I don't even know if I like the thing anymore. I started out liking the song some months ago when I started to write and thought, oh that sounds quite nice. By the time I have got to the production, I never want to hear it again in my life. I haven't listened to Root since the last mix... (Aug 2013)

John: Really?

Guy: No, I never do..... I can't stand to hear it anymore. It's like you having to write this interview and writing it again 15 times a day for about 4 months..... By the time you get to the finished article, you never want to see that line again you never want to write that line again.

John: Yeah, I can understand that

Guy: Yeah. Well it's the same war of attrition, it wears me down. I try to do as good a job as I can but I sort of know it's never going to be as brilliant as it could be to me and so it is just a bit disheartening.

John: So how does that relate then since you don't play the music once you've recorded it, the next time you see that creation is in the live arena, so how do you put that emotion back into the music because generically that is what your music is all about, it's about emotion, it's a story?

Guy: Well re-energising it for live performance is a whole new experience, a whole new process. When we are preparing things for live, obviously we are dealing with a band that isn't the full band that recorded it in most cases, we haven't got Marek there, we haven't got Chloe on bassoon or any of the added 'others', in fact we are simply the fabulous core Manning band! These wonderful supportive people are Kris Hudson-Lee (Bass/Vox), David Million (Guitars), Julie King (Keys/Vox/Perc), Martin Thiselton (Keys/Vox), Rick Henry (Drums/Perc). My thanks go to them for turning up every week, playing and learning this stuff! Also bear in mind the fact that I played all the keyboards on the album and Martin (our keyboard player) didn't, and that also that I could choose to play any keyboard I wanted in the recording which meant I could have 7 all going at once! Live, you have to make some quite hard decisions about which of the parts have to survive, which parts you have to ditch, simply because you don't have enough hands! Even with the three keyboard players we have to perform it, you still could not! I could not reproduce "Root" Live as recorded on the album without a 12 piece band I think, so it's a different experience.

Re-energising isn't a problem though as now you have finished the album, you put yourself and some distance between it and if the band decide they want to play '*Old School*' or '*Deconstruction* Blues 'or whatever, suddenly you start to look at it again afresh and decide how you are going to do it, how to perform this thing, who is going to do what, am I going to play the organ? Is Martin going to play the organ? What is Julie going to be playing/singing, is she going to playing the other strings part? OK, so Martin you do the piano bit here, I'll do the brass bits there... and suddenly it becomes an exciting process again as you start to put it back together again. When the recording process is finished it's done, the 'art' part is

done, now you are trying to work out the best way to get it immediately over to an audience without making an absolute arse of yourself because some of the stuff I write can be quite tricky to play....

John: Like *Charlestown* which is a perfect example of this as it's a complex piece, hence you play it as a medley?

Guy: Yeah and it's too long and nobody (at this time) wants to sit through 35 minutes of "*Charlestown*". Well, they might do one day, if we were to do a special and I was to hire out the Festival Hall with an orchestra and a choir and do the whole thing properly, then maybe as a one off, somebody would come and watch the full 35 minutes of "*Charlestown* live" but besides which, we have 14 albums and so dedicating 35 minutes in a set for one song is quite a chunk and some people dislike "*Charlestown!*" so, you are taking a big risk anyway. Is it best to do bits from the whole back catalogue? Well I think it is. You can't fit a track in from every album, but I like to look back and I like to try with each successive set to introduce things we haven't done before. When we come back in November, the next dates coming, there are a couple of pieces in the set that we have never ever played before and one of them is a bugger to play..... and the other one is also quite a bugger to play, but the former is quite a longish bugger to play. So... we are moving around so things we have played for a while like '*House on the Hill*' are now moved into the archive.

John: Semi retired?

Guy: So as we won't be doing '*House on the Hill*', we need something to replace it which is a difficult thing actually as '*House*' was always a lovely piece to perform live, it had everything I wanted from a long song as it moved from A to B perfectly IMO

John: absolutely

Guy: It was also a good finisher, so we have to find something that is fairly long, that has many parts to it and be quite emotive at the same time and we have found one from the back catalogue. So, when I came to do "*Root*" (going back to the original question so many minutes ago!), how have we got here from Akoustik? It was a year off, as I said, I like the writing process best, the production job finishes me off altogether, it's a matter of yearly cycle and I tend to keep it up because, as I say, my hope is that one day it clicks for a larger audience, I am for all intent and purpose, the "*Nick Drake of Prog*". Sometime after I croak, someone might find a cache of albums and go, you know what? He wasn't half bad after all and then the people will start buying it in droves, but at the moment, I don't compete really with the '*Bigger Boys*'! But, it's all about how you measure success I suppose. I stopped measuring success by the number of sales I made some years ago because all the albums I am happy to say (touch wood) have been very well received critically!

John: Today, buying music is a bit of a throw away commodity, everyone is wanting it free

Guy: Well, that's a separate argument, but yeah that is the way it is. Why would you bother paying for a CD and all the artwork and lyrics when

you can get it for nothing? Has it got any value any more if you are obtaining it for nothing? It becomes more throw away and transitory for many. I know some kids that have never bought a CD!

John: Absolutely

Guy: It has got great value for me as I spent a flippin' year writing it! But, to many others who listen to the first track which may not grab them instantly in the first two minutes, they can go "don't like that, bin it, delete..." and move onto the next album. My music takes a few times to fully get into IMO, it requires an investment of time and concentration.

John: If music is not immediate when you hear it do you relate to it? Or do you prefer albums that grow on you?



Guy: I prefer albums that grow on me because they are the ones that stay with you, however, that's great for the older demographic. Am I capturing younger listeners who are interested in progressive rock music? Not sure, many young 16 year olds coming along tend to like their music with a bit more metal in their PROG! I provide the rust!

John: Your *Dream Theater's*

Guy: Yeah, and I'm not that at all, I'm sort of old school to coin a phrase. What I do is slightly different and in fact I'm not even sure if it is 'Progressive'? We could have a whole discussion as to whether I think what I do is progressive if at all. I feel more akin probably to your *Al Stewart's*, *Roy Harper's* than I do to *YES* to be honest.

John: I would tend to agree with you there.

Guy: So am I progressive? I don't know. I could argue with you that Harper was very progressive on '*One of these Days in England*' and certainly *Al Stewart* on "*Past, Present and Future*", but it depends on how you define progressive, but that is another discussion. But has music any value when you download it for nothing? No it doesn't IMO.... and also it's very selective, I mean you've got to be very careful, if say my son comes to me and says dad, what music would you recommend?..... Well you quite like big music with lots of soaring guitar solos says I, so why don't you go and listen to some *Pink Floyd* and he says, alright and goes off to sample some, he looks up *Pink Floyd* and he downloads the track '*Seamus*'...

John: Laughs.....

Guy: And he comes back to me and says, what the hell are you talking about all I've heard is three minutes of barking dog? Is that what you call good music? Some people might judge the whole of *Pink Floyd's* back catalogue on that track!

John: Absolutely

Guy: The artist wants you to start at track one and go to the end and then make your mind up, but these days it's more about what your Nokia ring tone sounds like than getting into an album of music. Maybe I'm just getting old and grumpy! It seems to me that things have less value than when I was a kid. I seemed to invest more time in it, I'd go to buy an LP, go to town on the bus, buy it and sometimes I couldn't afford the bus fare back. I use to have to walk home with my plastic bag with my *Alice Cooper's School's Out* (complete with the paper knickers on it), or bringing home *Wishbone Ash's "Argus"*..... I can remember doing all these, walking the 6 miles home because I wanted this LP and I only owned 10 albums in those days, and I knew every note of those albums, playing them constantly, wearing them out, I held the sleeve, read the lyrics, I researched the lyrics, especially with things like '*Supper's Ready*', I went and had a read of the Book of Revelations to see if I could find the references! That was the sort of investment I did when I was a kid but it isn't the same today I find, on the whole.

John: No, that's been lost in translation today, buying LPs was an experience

Guy: The whole experience of sitting there with time to invest as I say. I got all these wonderful memories, going to town with my friend Simon and bringing home two copies of "...*Topographic Oceans*" and when he had to go downstairs for his dinner, I was left upstairs in his box room with his little stereo listening to this mighty double album for the first time, sat on his bed with this gate fold sleeve and this music was coming out and I was going, what the bloody hell is this about? But I have got that image, it's etched in my mind and it will go to my grave, because I remember the first time I heard a lot of things. It's because, for me, the music that stays with me, especially the music where I go, "I like it but I'm not too sure about this or I'm not too sure about that" and the next day I am saying, "I better listen to that again, I wasn't quite sure about it, let's see what I think about it now". Gradually, over a period of time, it really grows on you. With *Hootie and the Blowfish*, that didn't happen for me because everything was like a toe tapper the first time I heard it and I thought oh, that's smooth and sounds great and then next week it's like pffffff (sighs). And then, it's gone, back on the CD shelf and I have still got that Hootie album upstairs, so that is exactly what happened. It sounded great on first hearing or perhaps you hear a single and you think, oh that's great and you buy the album; yeah it's great, but then you find that the single is wholly representative of the whole album, three tracks in, the single and every other track sound exactly the same. So that's why I want to write music primarily just for me, I do it for my own enjoyment where I can put any old silly stuff in. Anything goes, I will do a reggae track, I'll do a sort of Stax / Motown souly bash track, and I'll do an acoustic little thing with a bassoon on it...

John: That keeps the music exciting



Guy: To me it is what makes it exciting and interesting.... But, my music is not to everyone's taste and that is what we have got to admit, that we are not in the market to make lots of money, You know, Progressive bands (unless they are at a huge level), they don't tend to make a lot of money, they just put out artistically, graceful products hopefully. If you get a good review, that should make your year, because what else will you get? Is it better to get three great reviews and no money or to get absolutely slated and make loads of money off it. I suppose I could write songs for *Celine Dion* or pop ballads, writing for the *X Factor* people if I really wanted to; (No...I don't think I could actually as they would end up in the bin before I sent them off), but, if I had to do it for a living and someone said, look I've got this young girl who wants to sing quietly, almost inaudibly, in mysterious meaningful way, very emotive, singer song type stuff, I could sit down and write some ballads and she would end up singing it, (Guy emulates what it could sound like by singing), and all that sort of stuff, I could do it, but I wouldn't enjoy it very much. I tend to write the rubbish I like and I hope other people like it too. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't.

John: Certainly, based on the back of the reviews of your albums, the opinions are that what you turn out is very, very good.

Guy: Well... I'm just lucky then aren't I! That is the way I look at it, I'm lucky that for a moment in time, what I like coincides with what everybody else likes.

John: Year after year.... Is that a moment in time?

Guy: Well.... It is, but you have to remember that you are dealing with a very small percentage of people in a very small pond in a much bigger lake inside an ocean. Am I in any danger of knocking the *Arctic Monkeys* out of the BBC charts? Not a chance. I'm not in any danger of knocking *Steve Hackett* out of any charts either. When it comes to the end of the year polls, do I think I am going to be up there with your *Steve Wilson's*? No, I normally don't because... well, I actually don't really know why? Is it still successful if people don't buy it? Well yes... creatively it still is and I am very grateful to the few hundred people that buy copies of the albums every year, but if you think about it, am I reaching a bigger audience? Yep, I think so, it's growing quite slowly but "Root" is selling faster up front than any other of the predecessors, which is what normally tends to happen with a Manning release, thankfully. If you are trying to measure improvement year on year, then if you get the same people who bought the last one, to buy the new one a lot faster or they pre order it faster... well that sort of means that you have succeeded I guess, To the point that when you bring a new one out they will buy it, rather than waiting for your reviews to be published or watching and waiting to see what everyone else is going to do. We all want to become an Auto-Buy! If your new album pre-orders are faster this year, then it means that you are slightly more successful than with your last one as it implies that the same people are more eager to buy this one. It doesn't suddenly mean you are going to sell 400 times more copies..... No it doesn't. So I will again be selling to a small very loyal fan base and I am very grateful they are there to be perfectly honest. I can only write what I write and much as I would like us to be offered to play Wembley or to go out on tour with *Genesis* (if they reformed), it is unlikely to ever happen, its' a very small genre/world these days. 2013 has been an extraordinary year for progressive music though. I've never seen so many good albums come out one after the other for many a year.

John: Absolutely



Guy: But it is a funny old business - Progressive rock; because the people who really, really like it, (and I may be doing some people a disservice here), tend to be getting older, they've got more commitments, other places where their money has to go, less time to go out to gigs, less time to actually get a moment to sit back with their feet up in front of the stereo to actually absorb the music as the artist would like them to listen to it. They tend to snatch bits of it, hear a track in the car on the way to a meeting, hear two tracks as they go to do the shopping, then hear the next track as they come back from shopping and so forth. So, they manage to stagger through the album without any real continuity.

John: Killing the experience?

Guy: Well, it sort of does! God knows what they did with "*Charlestown!*" They must have had to pause it.... "Alright they have got to the wreck now, I'll just pause it before the boat goes down", (both John and Guy laugh) "...and I'll be back from the supermarket, I've just got to get a couple of onions and a bag of potatoes and then I will find out what happens to the crew". (John and Guy laugh again).... who knows?

John: I don't want to dwell on *Akoustik* as that was your last release and we are here to talk about "The Root", but did you see a change in your audience with the different style that it was?

Guy: Yeah, It sold a hell of a lot less!

John: Really?

Guy: Oh yeah. Surprisingly, not many were interested in “Akoustik” really. It did sell copies, I don’t know if I am supposed to say all this, some people say be honest and be up front and tell it as it is and other people say basically promote yourself!!! Lie!..... Oh well, open and honest is the way to go IMO... so not like the hype ”yes, there were 500 at our last gig!!!” (when, in reality 20 actually turned up) Does it really matter if I tell everybody that “Akoustik” didn’t sell brilliantly? So, why did it not? Because, two reasons, one is that people think it is an album of greatest hits, redone...

John: Which it wasn’t!

Guy: ...which it wasn’t, but they think it was as these aren’t new songs, and so they tend to wait for the next “real” studio album, the brand new songs. Or maybe it was because - “Oh I like all the keyboard songs, where have all the layers of keyboards gone? It is just two guitars and a flute, a piano and some voices. How good can it be”, they think? “I like “Charlestown” they say, as it’s got masses in it, so why am I going to like something with two acoustic guitars and a flute?”... and they are wrong, because I think it IS an important album, it’s important for me because it shows that we are a flexible and versatile band, that we can perform and interpret things in another fashion and, if I have my, way we will do more Akoustik gigs next year on the back of all that album. I love it!

John: It does encapsulate what you do. I have seen you with just a guitar on your own, the Akoustik band and the full live electric band. There is a whole variation of your ensemble.

Guy: Well if the songs are any good you could get *Tiny Tim* to sing it and you would get away with it. We have even played “Charlestown” acoustically... you know it can be done, but there are some songs that just cannot be done, but those songs on “Akoustik” seem to be a happy bunch, they go together quite nicely and I might do a whole akoustik tour one day as there is plenty of other material that I could raid for that approach. I like the whole idea and it showed a favourable side of the band and that we were able to approach the material in a different way, a different slant/emphasis whilst looking at the same music, that we could do it this way or that way, that we don’t have to take out big banks of keyboards to be able to create an impact; but it didn’t sell very well and continues to be a slow seller and it tends to be the one people pick up when they haven’t got anything else of ours to buy when they are still looking for something. So we need to play more of those akoustik gigs! If we went out as the Akoustik band more we would sell a lot more on the back of those performances and I think that is what we need to do. I’m keen that we do that because it’s getting harder and harder to find good gigs for the big band.

John: Absolutely, 8 people on stage



Guy: Well 6 of us now (or 7 if Steve guests)..... but it's still hard, there are a lot of bands out there that are all competing and you can only play the *CRS* once a year (hopefully), and we're not going to go back to play *Summer's End* again as we have got to go around for another few years before they will consider us again and we won't go to *RoSfest* soon for the same reason, So, where can you play? We play the reliable and

supportive places like the *CRS* once a year, *the Peel* once a year, but we do need to find other places that we can play once a year! We cannot keep turning up and playing the same set time and time again in the back of pubs - it just won't work with this music.

John: People just don't turn out for that?

Guy: I'd like to tell everybody to get your tickets to Maltby fast because it's selling out.... but it isn't - well not YET! Actually we are doing very well on CRS sales this time around (I have just been told). Actually, we always get a good turnout at Maltby but it's never been fully rafters packed. So go buy your tickets now! I can guarantee that if *The Flower Kings* turned up they would get more people than we would. Absolutely! And that is a bit of a shame. I think that we are a good band live! The songs are the best things about it, just shut your eyes and listen to the songs, the stories and the music.

John: At then at end of the day that is what it is all about, the music itself.

Guy: Well I hope so. I want to be remembered for the songs, I don't want to be remembered for the Captains hat! (Guy and John laugh).... You know, I only do that because it is fun!!! And I like it. Its dramatic stuff and we throw our arms out and we point down and we pull the steering wheel...take the audience on a journey with us!
We do not take ourselves too seriously! We are not po-faced about it or all so serious because it is ART - we want to have a good time and we want the audience to have a good time too

John: ...Showmanship

Guy: Indeed, but if someone says "I like that song with the boat in it" afterwards, then that does it for me really

John: Yes

Guy: Mind you, there are a lot of songs with boats in them! (Guy and John laugh)



John: Ok, whilst we are talking about the live arena then, what are the potential of a full live album?

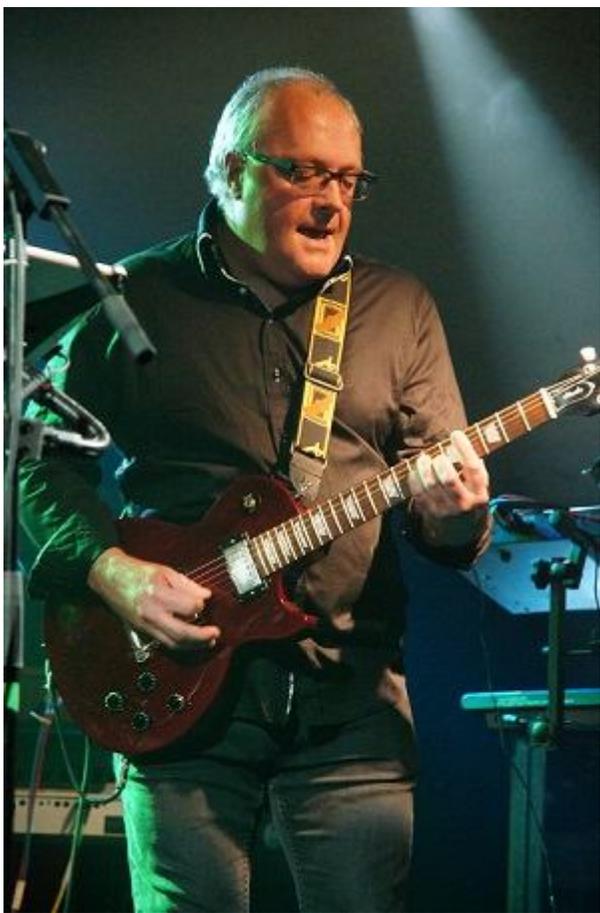
Guy: (pauses)... Yeah it's overdue isn't it really? Mind you Tull waited a long time before doing "*Bursting Out*". They did a bit on "*Living in the Past*", but that doesn't count J

The problem with a live album..... and these are the real reasons why I shy away from it; The first is the cost, you've got to hire a load of equipment up front, recording, mics, desks, crew etc. and if you are going to record a live album then you are probably going to try end up filming it, so now you need a camera crew as well, so, there is a big outlay right up front when you know that there is no guarantee of selling a load of new albums off the back of it. So, someone has to be speculatively rich to put the money in, we are a good semi pro band, we all work full time and we haven't got a lot of money. The record company is a small independent label with not much flexibility in the purse department, so all they can do for us is produce the album and distribute it for us really. There are no large amounts of money about to promote us. Secondly, you have got to play it right! Most sensible bands that want to do a live album will tend to record three or four nights and take the best takes of each song, if they were really going to do it properly. Some bands manage to pull this off. You are either going to be absolutely phenomenal and playing it well where there is no need to edit or you are going to do multiple recordings and use the best take with a bit of stitching or you do what a lot of bands do, you play the gig and the next day you sneak into the studio and record it live when nobody is there and they can take their time over it, which I think is a right old cheat and I don't want to do that at all. So, there is a lot of pressure to get it right on the night otherwise you spend a load of money and you come back with stuff and you go....can't use that one. So, I tend to be fearful of it; I would love to do a live album and if we were to do a number of dates and somebody wanted to spend the money and travel round with us and do all that stuff and the documentary and the making of and all that stuff, we would do it, but we have not got the money and I'm frightened. I think we play well live but we have never played any song absolutely perfectly and I would personally want to hear it without any bum notes, (Guy chuckles), and although you do a 'Lamb live' and correct things afterwards, it is never the same and the bloody DVD editing is an arduous process especially if you don't know the software very well. I am OK with audio side now but I remember when Andy Tillison and I were sat there as he was doing "*Going Off On One*" for the first time, just how much work you have to put in to get the multiple camera angles against the music; the effects that you want to put in and I just haven't got the patience for it. I would have to give that one to somebody else, please come in, film the gig, record it, take it away and let me see the results, but it is a costly business. The fear of the performance and the cost up front for us as a band is what has prevented us from doing it so far really, although I think it would be a good idea!

John: I know some bands have done it via pledging/ donations?

Guy: I don't think there is anything wrong with that, but for me I feel it's a bit like going with my cap in hand, "please give me some money and I will record you an album". I personally don't tend to do that.

John: Yeah you are tending to please other people as opposed to yourself



Guy: It's like paying to play. We will play *The Peel* tonight if you all put in £100 in this hat; I would rather play and take our chances and come back covering our expenses. I don't like going to the fans and saying, I want to make an album could you please give me some money. I don't know why I don't like it, there's just something about it that I just don't like. I prefer to say, I've spent a year doing this, there it is, buy it or don't buy it, it's up to you!

John: As I said, 14 albums in. A question I have been meaning to ask you for quite some time is how do you manage to be quite so prolific?

Guy: Well it's easy when you like writing songs, it's the rest of it, like I explained earlier, that I don't like. Actually doodling around playing keyboards and guitar I find fun especially when I am not learning something to go and perform it. Just messing round with a few chords, I find it all fun and what happens is that if I am very lucky a song comes out and then the hard work starts. Being prolific is the easy bit. Writing songs is easy, some of them are good and some of them aren't, (Guy and John laugh), some of them are great and some of them are fillers. Finding something to write about is the problem for me. I mean, what can I say? I'm a middle class middle aged bloke, hasn't had much hardship in his life (thankfully), goes to work every day, comes home, and the 'going to work' theme for me was already covered off on "*Number Ten*" and "*The View from My Window*".

So, what have I got to write about? Have I been living in a cardboard box on the streets and I want to tell everybody about that, what it is like to be homeless, no.... I'm not *Phil Collins*. That's the hardest part for me every year, is having something that I want to write about. Once I get the idea, I'm off. I had lots of little ideas for little musical bits for "*Charlestown*";

I knew in my head what it was going to be about musically, but I went to Cornwall on holiday to get away from it all, left it sitting there on my hard drive, happened to wander into Charlestown, went onto the tall ships, looked around, looked at the maritime museum and thought, bloody hell it must have been a hard life on these boats, all the way from Cornwall to Bristol, even though it was just taking clay, it must have been a hard slog. Kaa-Ding!!!..... hello... there's something to write about, came back... whoosh, 35 minutes written in about a week, because if you know what you are writing about it's easy and it was the same thing for "*Anser's Tree*" and "*Margaret's Children*", the ideas - I knew each person in detail and I sort of knew what the story was going to be about, so that meant I could write the song!

John: That makes it easier to write?

Guy: Yes definitely for me, that does make it easier as you know what you are writing to. So you say right, here we go, this is the fella who was killed in the Wallsend mining disaster, I want it to be fairly traditional, folky, it's going to have that sort of feel to it, it's going to be quite long as I want it to go through them getting set up, experience going down the mine and then I want the aftermath. OK, so it's not hard to write as it's going to be based on knowing roughly in what time period it is set and (with those two particular albums I had a fixed time line and chronology to the whole thing). I did not want to make a song about the Wallsend mining disaster sound like *Nik Kershaw* or *Human League*, it had to sound sort of, of the time, although I was using synthesisers and everything, it didn't want to be overtly modern, it should have something that makes you feel like it has authenticity. The arrangement should lead you to not disbelieve the storyline.

John: That goes back to that cinematic show

Guy: Yeah, you have got to visualise it, you could actually do the video before you do the song

John: On the new album, the stand-out track for that is the album closer '*Amongst the Sleepers*' where if you closed your eyes, you could

picture yourself walking through it.



Guy: Well that was just an easy one, from that first opening line, I knew what was going to happen, "*I come in search of Eleanor Rigby...*",

immediately you have got it in the first person, you have got a purpose, '*Eleanor Rigby*' (for anybody who recognises their *Beatles* references) will know that as the name on a gravestone in a cemetery. It centres the piece exactly where it is. The idea of it being set in a graveyard was the key for me, I had often done that walk, and it's usually one of the quietest places you will ever find, even if there is a motorway running alongside it, for some reason when you get to the middle of the graveyard you don't hear the traffic and you are walking slowly down this path, usually between all these old stones and memorials, you know the Sleepers are dead, but you don't think of them as being creepily dead, you just think of them being there with you. So that was a fairly easy one to write, poetically from the lyric it is quite short, there aren't that many words in it. It sets the scene and lets it build up musically.

John: Although there aren't that many words in it, it succinctly catches that moment perfectly in my eyes

Guy: Hopefully! The thing I do like about what I try to achieve is the poetry in the lyric and I think '*...Sleepers*' and '*Autumn Song*' on this new album are two where I did more right than wrong IMO. '*Autumn Song*' to me has got some very nice rustic references to the countryside growing older without having to say, "Oh its autumn now and the leaves are falling off the trees and Winter will be here soon". Basically, the references about empty nests, the hedgerows, the leaves blowing into town, it all sets the scene without having to be so prescriptive about it.

John: Again '*The Forge*', that was another classic, with the sound of the anvil going, under pinning the music

Guy: Well that percussive section was the first thing I envisaged, that was the first thing I wrote. I wanted to incorporate it, it sounded a bit like *Peter Gabriel* (who I like a lot), so I thought that the back drop percussion thing was going right back to *Gabriel 3* and *4* days and it was very nice that I could write a song over the top of all that, but, what was it going to be about? Well, it's metal bars and clanging, so it's about craftsmanship, about the change in the way we perceive the old days where everything was done to create a unique pot and now everything is changed and done to make a non-unique pot! Nobody seems to want that unique pot, everybody just wants one just like all the others and the conditions to do that have changed too, it's not just one craftsman anymore, it's just a homogenous assembly line under the control of automaton machinery under a ceiling of piped Muzak. So, that part was easy, it's a very romantic view though as it was, in truth, a bloody hard life being a blacksmith; I've got this vision of this big brawny bloke in a leathers silhouetted against the glowing embers of a furnace battling with the iron, all very romantic, but it was bloody hard work though, the poor sod who actually did it, I don't envy him at all. It's still a very interesting story to tell. It doesn't have to be real does it? I mean I have never done that job, so I wouldn't know would I? I've never had to make a pot and I've never sailed a ship to Bristol either (John laughs). You just try to make an interesting story line that will engage whoever is listening to it and drag them into it for a while.

John: It's all about story telling?

Guy: I hope so, that's what I tend to do. I can't write love songs, "oh baby! I love you", because I... well I just can't do it.

John: To me that is just throwaway, real music needs to be thought about, musically and lyrically

Guy: Well there are some good love songs, I just couldn't write one. I would be giggling before I got to line 3! I wrote about that on *'The Calm Absurd'*, about that topic exactly. I just can't do it. Julie looks at me sometimes and says, "Why don't you write a song like that for me". I say I kind a do, it's just not in the first person! You know, things like *'The Widow's Tale'* (on "Tall Stories...") started out being a love story (and still is if you think about it). In this case it is sad because the Widow is looking back on her dead husband, the whole emotional resonance at looking at the picture and remembering them as they were and all that, was an attempt at writing a love song for Julie, originally.



John: Another song that really caught my imagination was *'Decon(struction) Blues'*, where you say it was your attempt on *Joni Mitchell's 'Big Yellow Taxi'*

Guy: It is. I have gone on record many times before that I am not very good at social commentary, I don't pull out the "well this is the way life should be" very well, I tend to put my points of view into the mouths of other people, characters. If I want something to say, if I think we are ruining the planet through ecological misuse of resources, I'll write '*The Southern Waves*'. 'Decon...' was a different thing. The title, well I'm starting to regret the title, as at first I thought it was a bit clever/funny! When I wrote the original title it was called '*Deconstruction Blues*' and then I started to refer to it in shorthand as '*Decon Blues*' and I thought that was funny (as a play on the Steely Dan song, but it isn't that funny is it?)

So that is why there are brackets around inside it. So to everybody, I do apologise, it's not funny, but I thought it was. It's the one song on the album where I explicitly say that we really do need to start to do something; it's not actually a call to arms, it isn't saying STOP, PROGRESS IS BAD, OLD TIMES ARE GOOD...what I am saying is that if we are in progress and moving from A to B, just think about what A is about and what you are losing and at the same time, what you are gaining. No one wants to go back and get typhoid again and I certainly don't want to send my letters by the Pony express, I like email, it's fast! So I am not saying that all progress is bad and we should be looking back to the past if we have lost something. What I am saying is, everything in change comes with a consequence, now that can be good or bad, but that we should at least acknowledge it's passing. That's all! 'Decon...' was a bit like that, "Don't tear it down!" When you are tearing something down to make something else just remember what you are doing and just give it some consideration. So, it is a little bit like *Big Yellow Taxi*, "you don't know what you have got till it's gone", that's the line with the resonance and it is a similar theme to that and it is one of the only times on my albums where I do sort of pin my own colours to the mast. It is the shortest song on the album and it is punchy and I wanted it to be just that; the chorus with the incessant cowbell, sort of like a "*The Commitments*" moment, it's one of those, that's what I wanted to write, a perky pop song and it just happen to fit what I wanted to say at the time. So it was lucky for me really!

John: When I last saw you it was at the Robin 2 in Bilston and that was one of the songs that you played live along with '*The Huntsman and the Poacher*'. Both those songs for me sounded heavier than your other material live, whether that was just my perception, I'm not too sure?

Guy: What do you mean heavier? Do you mean in a tonal sense?

John: Yes

Guy: '*The Huntsman...*' shouldn't really be heavy, it should be fairly folksy in theory. I don't know... whether it was familiarity or not? I mean for the next show these new songs are still in the set. Obviously we can't ditch the new songs yet. But it IS a new line up isn't it. I mean anyone who saw us do '*Charlestown*' with Key, Chris and Steve will have a completely different experience than with '*Charlestown*' as a 6 piece and that's just the way it is, they were/are different players. The way Dave Million plays guitar is completely different to the way Chris Catling used to play it and so things will change. Dave has been in Manning before though, he was great on "*...Bilston House*", "*Number Ten*" and "*Answers Tree*", so if we play any numbers from those albums then we should have a feeling of authenticity, because he played the parts in the first place. He didn't play

on 'Charlestown'. I think it's a combination of tonality within the band and it is because of the people that are in it, the way we are playing and the parts we have taken on. I mean, traditionally, when I started out, I played the acoustic guitar most of the time. Now because of the complexity of the music I tend to spend most of my time playing the keyboards and there are three of us, three keyboard players, so things have changed from a performance point of view and hopefully, as long as we sound good, it doesn't matter if it's heavy, I don't mind, I don't know, we try and just rehearse them up to do justice to the pieces and hope that they work. Some songs we tried to play, like 'Understudy', we only performed it once, because it was OK and we played it alright but the thing about it was that it is definitely an album track, you get to that middle section, there is a whole ponderous set of keyboards coming up and keyboards going down, but as a live thing it just doesn't have that live excitement, that spark. Yes, it's beautiful when you are sitting in front of a stereo and it's all left and right, but live, half of us were just left sat around listening to the mellotron coming up and down because we were being faithful to the recorded version and to cut it out, didn't make any sense. Some songs we attempt inevitably don't translate well to live. 'The Southern Waves' (although it a great song IMO), never really worked live, because it got to the point where the whole middle section (nicknamed the *King Crimson* section) arrived, which sounds lovely on the album, but just didn't translate to live. Another one we had an attempt at was 'The Year of Wonders' which didn't last too long in the live set either. It could have worked if we had cut out that atmospheric middle section and just played the choruses and verses but that was not right to do so. There's an argument to say that that wasn't what the piece is about, so to cut huge swathes out just so you can just play a few verses and chorus just didn't quite work. Maybe you should pick the right songs then mate!!!! (I hear you say).... So it's very much by trial and error that we find which work and which do not.

John: So when you put your live set together, do you do it as a band or do you say these are the 5 or 10 songs we are going to do?

Guy: No I don't. I tend to lead but I ask everybody if there are any particular songs they would like to do? And what we did for this Set was to vote for our favourite songs and if there was one that everyone really liked, then, we tried to see if there any way we could play it live? So we found a couple of oldies and there was quite a strong argument for the pieces that we are about to attempt to do, and I was going "Nooooo!!...you don't want to do that one". (I won't give away which song that was for you folks coming to the gigs, but it is worth the entrance fee to witness it being attempted!) It's a big piece as it goes through a hell of lot of transitions and each section is quite different to the other, so it is going to be hard to do and we are working very hard on it, some parts are working well and some parts aren't quite working yet.

Live, I tend to throw it out to the rest of the band, because I didn't want to say that "these are all my favourite songs and we are going to play them" what I want to say is, "what are your fave songs?" because the band (and we've already covered it), are not making a vast amount of money, so they are not doing it for the cash, so they have to be happy with what they are playing, so their opinion on what we play is equally if not more valid than mine. I've got some artistic decisions to make about whether I think it could work and whether I am satisfied with the end result once we start working on it (unless I think from the offset it really is a 'no goer'). We have attempted some songs three or four times in rehearsal and never quite got to playing them live. I always wanted to play 'An Ordinary Day', I thought it would be a lovely piece to play, but it never seemed to work live. It might do if I sat on a stool and Martin just played the piano...who know may try it like that next?

John: Part of the akoustik set?

Guy: It could be, but then, there is another argument which says these guys are putting all their time and effort into it, so not fair to take up a large part of the set where they are doing very little; the thing about guitar players is that they find it very difficult to stand there with a guitar in their hands and not to be actually playing! I know myself! I've had that argument with Chris Catling a lot as he would insist on putting in a few slides and harmonics that were not there on the album (they were pretty good ad libs mind you!). You'd have this lovely opening piano and voice and then all these little things coming in, because he couldn't just stand there with a guitar as he felt embarrassed with the instrument hanging around his neck, just standing there doing nothing. Sometimes the needs of the song outweigh the needs of the few (oh and live long and prosper while I'm at it) and that's the way it goes. So, the live set is not dictated by me, but I do tend to be the artistic director on everything we do and I will put my foot down if I think it really isn't working like I did with '*Understudy*'. I say, let's find something better there is plenty to choose from. There is another oldie included the new live set that we have never done before, but sometimes it is simply a matter of time to get them rehearsed up. There may be slight disappointment over the ones we have picked, because the ones that I think people would want us to do are not necessarily the ones that we want to do. We had a go for example at '*Autumn Song*' and part of it worked beautifully and other parts were crap to be perfectly honest. So, I have said, we can't do that yet, we are not ready for that, we will come back and try it again in another day.

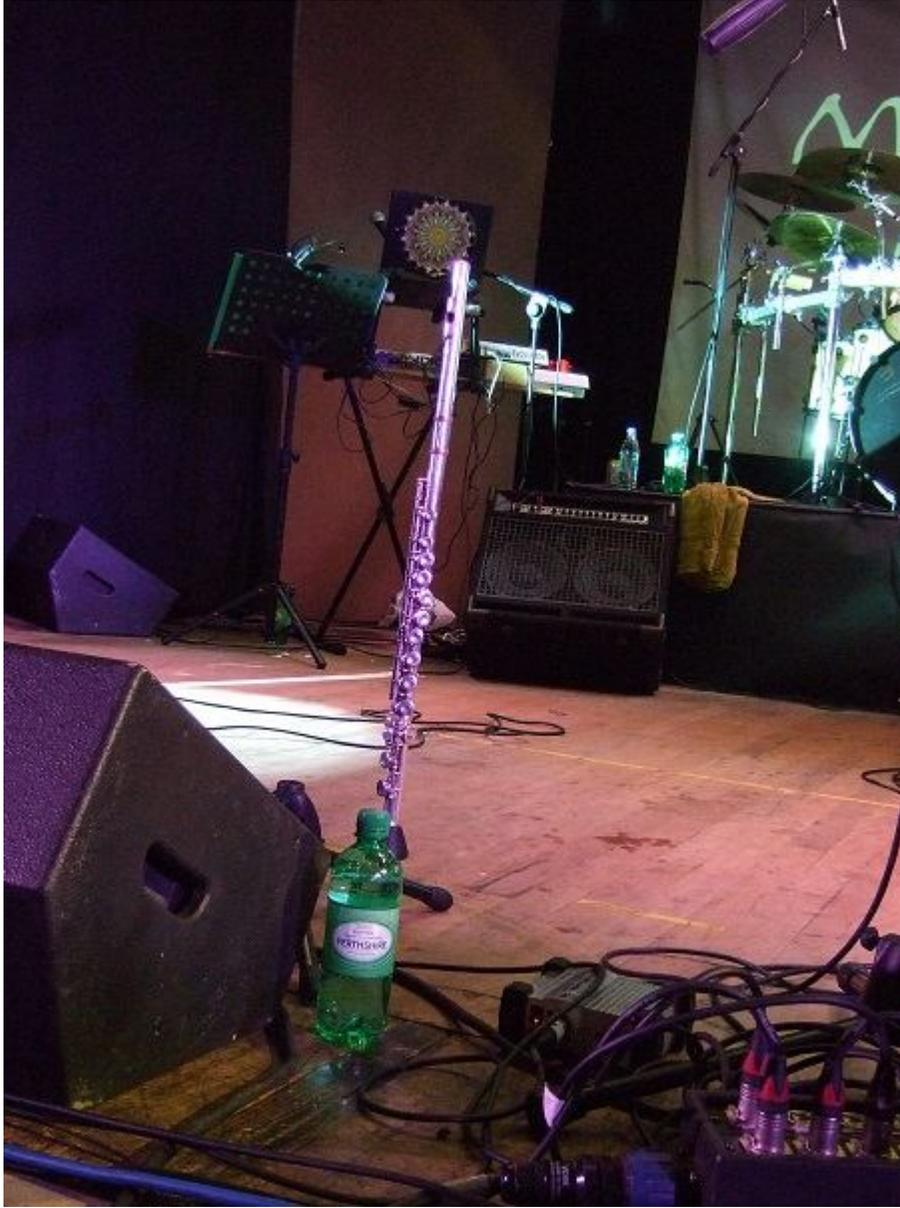
John: Well there is no point in throwing something out there that doesn't work

Guy: No, as you have to make a decision quickly and I know a lot of people would probably like to be able to hear the title track as well but we are just not ready to do that yet or '*...Sleepers*' either. If you think about, '*...Sleepers*' would take an inordinate amount of effort from the keyboard players and everyone else would be virtually doing nothing. Again it's keeping everybody with something to do and interested which is the key to keeping us as a band together, doing what we do for love not money.

John: The album itself is not a concept album?

Guy: No, not really

John: But there is a theme in there?



Guy: Yeah the thing is that if you read the release notes (PDF) for the album (on Manning Web Site), I start out with the idea for a concept album about this old village, that had faded away and been built over, so we started out in the 1600's and over time and progress people built over it till the layers grew up and now here we are where the once village green is now a car park for a leisure centre and as you dig down through all the roots, leaves and bones, you find the old village waiting for you and that that was going to be the concept theme.

The title track and '*The Forge*' were both part of that, I wrote '*Mists of Morning...*' too for that as it was a ghost story about the early days of the village and how the village elders saw off the trading folk that used to come up the river and cause trouble, but then, later it all came back to haunt them (quite literally); '*The Huntsman and the Poacher*' was about the early times and the people in the village, the past and the way things were. So, these were all good ideas, but it became obviously to me early on that it wasn't really a great concept, it wasn't an "*Anser's Tree*" or like a "*...Bilston House*" where the pieces were all set in individual rooms and it certainly wasn't a big "*Charlestown*" type of thing, so, I abandoned the idea of making something really containerised and went for just a more general idea. Plus, things like '*Autumn Song*' and '*...Sleepers*' didn't fit in with the "village" idea really other than there was a graveyard in there somewhere in the village. '*Autumn Song*' has got nothing to do with the village; it's got to do with the changing of the seasons. '*Decon...*' didn't fit either other than that it was an overview of the village disappearing (i.e. the village is gone and now here we are). '*Decon...*' tells you about warnings of that. So it was all more about the state of change and the way things evolve and once again an acknowledging the past, some things being good and some things being bad, craftsmanship, the '*Old school*' life as was now being moved away from, with its narrow corridors and being slapped on the knuckles with rulers whilst we were sitting there with our hands neatly folded and everybody behaving the same. Things have changed and that's what it is all about and '*The Palace of Delights*' is one of the more humorous tunes on the album because it's about a mad shop, in essence. In narrative it's about going into a shop (and I have found a couple of these shops when I go off to somewhere in the middle of the Dales), that hasn't seen anybody passing across its thresholds for years. There is always one of these shops where you go in and you hear the clanging of the bell on the door and it is dark and musty in there, there is loads of shelves with stuff piled on them and some of that stuff has been on those shelves since 1965 and you are suddenly shouting out loud "I used to have that Beano album, I used to have those stamps" standing next to a bloody commemorative mug for Charles and Diane's wedding, and you are now jumping up and down, going "I used to have that Waddington game "Rail Roder", I got that for Xmas when I was 7!"

John: I think there are a lot of references in that song that may be a lot of people of the younger generation won't understand?

Guy: No, quite right, they won't get it, as everybody has got their own '*Palace of Delight*'. It's about finding things that resonate with you emotionally and take you back in time, someone born in the 80's will be jumping up and down when they see a packet of Pokémon cards? it wouldn't mean anything to me, but if I see a packet of "Man From U.N.C.L.E." bubble gum cards that I use to collect in the school ground and swap, I'll have a moment where I will scream "..... Ahh!! Look at that!" or maybe it's a James Bond Aston Martin DB6 car still in its dinky box - "I had that and if you press that button the ejector seat comes out". '*Palace of Delights*' is about just shutting the door on the real world and going back

in time and seeing things recalled that effect you and remind you of the past and to that end, ‘...*Sleepers*’ is also a reminder of the past. So the whole album is about ‘Change’ really in various guises I guess.

John: Something I thought about with the album and maybe I was just thinking outside the box was that it was very Northern as opposed to being Southern centric?

Guy: Well I don’t know much about being Southern centric as I have always been based in the North. I think some of the images (if I closed my eyes and try to picture these people) well I couldn’t see them in Surrey, I would see them in York or Skipton or Ripon or even further out in Swaledale and that’s because that’s where I am from. I think of the roots, of rural life, about the moors and an old country house in the wilds. I don’t think about it being in a well-kept beautiful estate in Windsor and I suppose if it has got any Northern grit to it then that’s only because I am the one writing, I suppose, writing about what I know and the things that I reference in the songs are the things that pop into my head because I have experienced them or know about them. Although, I can obviously write about things that I know absolutely nothing about, and with a cocky self-confidence. “Charlestown”, for example. I do tend to do a lot of research however (I learned that one from Al Stewart).

John: That is quite evident when you hear the lyrics and you start working your way through them.

Guy: Yes. You can’t write about “*Charlestown*” really without understanding about the boats /times themselves. You have to understand what type of vessel it was to be able to visualise it. It was a 3 mast Barquentine, that’s the boat that they used to do it and also knowing how many people were normally on the crew. Naturally, you don’t put all that in the lyrics, but you have to know all about it in order to be able to put the right words in the right order and come out of the right people’s mouths (if you know what I mean). And so if it’s Northern, that’s just because I am from the North and quite proud of it, I’ve been a Yorkshire man all my life and I haven’t been away that much really over the years, I have only been kept away from Yorkshire probably for an elapsed 18 months period really.

John: Well for me you certainly caught the essence of that really well. Another interesting one for me going back was ‘The Huntsman’ where the hunter becomes the hunted; I just love the ideology of that

Guy: I just found that funny. ‘*The Huntsman*’ was probably a poacher 4 years earlier and he is now working for the master of the manor and he knows all the tricks of the trade, he used them himself all those years ago and he is not exactly whiter than white. It is about Karma and it is funny how things come around that go around. I think it was just an interesting tale to tell, it’s a story of fate and destiny and that is just the way things were, just because you have set out with these intentions doesn’t mean that everything is going to go the way you think it is going to go. It was just an interesting story to tell.

John: Another important facet of your albums is the artwork? They are quite iconic, you look at it and you know it’s a Manning album?

Guy: Well I want it to be recognisable; there is a practical reason for that. What you definitely want is that in a stack of CD's on a stall, you want your cover to stand out! That's one of the reasons and also I really like iconic images anyway. Some of the booklets have been quite elaborate over the years and some of them have been quite stark. "*The Root...*" comes under the latter really, the booklet itself is quite minimalist as was "*Charlestown*" as opposed to something like "*A Matter of Life and Death*", "*Anser's Tree*" and "*Margaret's Children*" where the backdrop to each of the songs were nicely painted out and pictorially graphic because we had *Ed Unitsky* involved in that. I think the artwork is very important, the way the whole thing is packaged, I mean personally, I do miss the LP gate-fold sleeve, especially with my eyesight and I have to get a magnifying glass out on some of these CDs, (Guy and John laugh), and because I put a lot of store on the lyrics I want people to hear the lyrics, understand them and read them because I think that it does make a difference, the lyrics are not incidental to me, the artwork, the music and the lyrics form the triangle that is the package. I did ask Ed to do "*The Root...*" actually, but he had a lot of other jobs on and I couldn't afford to wait, so I thought I would just do it myself (with some help from Brian Watson's excellent print artwork and Kris Hudson-Lee's abilities in Photoshop layering and Kevin Brudenell-Maylin's photos).

John: When you work with Ed do you give him a remit of what you want and he comes up with the idea or....?

Guys: Ed is a child of nature! I tend to be descriptive about what I want (especially if I am telling a specific story). On "*A Matter of Life and Death...*", I wanted the pictures to match the story. I had to tell him exactly what I wanted. On something like "*One Small Step...*", where the centre piece to that is about whether we are fit enough ambassadors to go into space, with all our inherent problems, and what makes us think that we should go out as explorers carrying all our 'baggage' with us, shouldn't we make peace with ourselves first? It was an exploration of that whole idea. So, I had the idea of the guy going on holiday into space (like booking a seat on the first space shuttle). I said I wanted a guy in a Bermuda shirt with a suitcase packed looking out and getting ready for the shuttle to arrive. However, if you notice that sleeve, he also gave me a clown in a bathtub which has go nothing to do with it! I did manage to get rid of the cash register he wanted to put on the back cover though! Things just seem to appear in the artwork because he is just....

John: Like a free spirit?

Guy: Yeah a free artistic spirit! But I tend to be descriptive. I think when Andy used him for *The Tangent* he allowed him far more free range. Me, I say this song is about a hermit so I want a picture of an empty cave and I want a fire outside, but do what you like!

This is a song about a guy who has crossed the border to Mexico and is writing a "Dear John" letter to his girlfriend and it has got a lyric about a big red moon hanging in the night sky, so please try and use that. So we got the guy lying on the bed writing things where the walls just disappear and you can see out into the desert and it is a beautiful picture. I give him those sort of leads, "this is what I want it to be about Ed"; he will send it back, and I'll go love that bit, love that bit, get rid of the cash register and the *Liberace* candelabra that has to go too, but the clown in the bathtub (for whatever reason he is there), I quite like him and he can stay, (John laughs). So the clown in the bathtub stayed and the cash

register went. So I tend to give him direction on what I want, that's the way I write. When we are recording I sort of know what I want. I can be surprised and we can try things out that I wouldn't have even thought of and they work, but most of the time I'm directing from a point of view. I make decisions very quickly, I play something and I go nah.... that for me doesn't work or yeah.... that sounds interesting, it's not quite there yet, instead of doing that, why don't you just go up there and down there. Try playing that..... Yeah that sounds better, now we are onto something. I tend to make very bold decisions very quickly because I haven't got the patience to wait. If you talk to Andy about how he writes, he will wait, everyone will put their own spin on it and he will spend weeks listening to everyone, letting it infuse into him till he gets to like what they have done (or not). Me, I just hear it first time and go no I don't like it....out! It's just different ways of working, both are equally valid, if you are confident that your decisions are right, if not then you are in the wrong role really.

John: I have notice and it has popped up on one or two new albums, the artwork of my good friend *Brian Watson*. How did this occur?

Guy: I've seen a lot of Brian's work (as I said earlier), I like a lot of what he is doing. I said to myself that I could do with something for the booklet just to set the lyrics upon and he showed me this print and it had a leaf in it and I thought, that's beautiful, it's pastel, its light coloured and it's got a leaf motif, what else could I need? So I asked him if I could you use that and he said "yeah, knock yourself out". So I said right, I'll have it and put it on every page of the booklet, it was as simple as that. He said, use it and I said thanks. I just hope he gets a lot more work for the work that he is doing.

John: Absolutely, he has done some great work. When you are recording do you just write enough material for the album or do you have lots of material left over?



Guy: Normally I have a set of songs on the go and I will know that is enough. I don't tend to write loads of extra songs and pick the ones out. There have been occasions where stuff has been left over or something has developed into something longer than I thought it was going to be and therefore there is a piece left over. I mean, when we did "Akoustik" for example, (which isn't a good example as it was more of a revisiting), we recorded tracks that didn't make it on to the album because it was already too long and I didn't think that they worked as well as the others. There are very few occasions where there are lots of left over spare material. There are things knocking about that I manage to put on as Bonus material on albums. I tend to write and concentrate to get a batch of songs together and I sort of know how they are going to be as an album, I don't quite know the running order, but I know that I quite like them and I should really dedicate my time to make them the best I can, rather than having a fishing expedition of 30 songs where I can pick out 10.

John: We talked about imagine earlier, the image on the album is steampunk?

Guy: Coming soon... that is featured in PROG magazine - November 2013. It was fun... we had a real laugh doing it, it was the hottest day of the year and we went to Elsecar Railway Heritage Museum for that shoot. I have always felt that when you are doing material like this you have got two choices...you either do it completely anonymously, in other words you play and there is a big screen showing everything else but you and you just hide in the back or you have got to have some sort of image and truthfully, we are not one of those bands that just tend to turn up in their T-Shirts and jeans, take their jumper off and go on and play. When we play, even in recent years, I have always said we should have some dress code so it looks like we have made an effort when we turn up, but of late, I have felt that it looked really drab, that we looked like waiters or

hairdressers on stage, hence our putting on of the silly hats and stuff to bring it to life. I always thought we should do something different and I think it was Kris who said that he was really getting into steampunk, he'd been watching the film of *The Golden Compass* and stuff like that, plenty of brass, pipes and that sort of stuff and I said that I'm not sure that we could do all that, but he said well let's have a go. So then we started getting into the idea where we were looking around for bits and pieces for the costumes and I sort of knew what I wanted to look like, I wanted to sort of look like this old Victorian professor, so I got myself a long leather coat, a red waist coat, these thin brass glasses (rather than the more modern ones I already had); I got myself a 1930's 'Genevieve' car driving hat, a walking stick, gloves and pirate boots that came up to my knees. So, I had this look that I wanted and Julie had the sexy *Mary Poppins* thing going for her with the red umbrella and red Top hat; everyone just really got into it. Rick had to go and hire his (the poor sod). He went around everywhere, but in the end he looked pretty damn good on the day. He looked like something out of Dickens, he could have been in the *Pickwick Papers* and that was the sort of look that we went for and we are going to try and wear some of that on tour in November. It's going to be really hot though and that's the thing that worries me - sweating like a pig!

John: Live, when you go out on tour, how do you choose the bands that are going to play with you? Are you approached? Do you approach? Are you open to play with bands that are at the other end of the scale to what you are?

Guy: There isn't any real game plan in it. Do we get headhunted to play??? No, nobody ever asks us to play with them normally! We have to make our own way. We try and get our own gigs and try and make an interesting package with someone else. We are always looking for a partner band; we went to Europe with *The Tangent*, we decided we wanted to do it; we talked with Andy and decided we both wanted to do it. We would indeed like to be rung up, we would like for bands to contact us but it's not happening. Live is a funny business at the moment anyway in terms of availability and places you can play. We want to put an interesting show on, so I think we probably steer away from putting somebody on the bill that sounded too much like us. Although I think it would be different, at the same time we don't want to go out with a thrash metal band either, it's got to be an even keel thing that works together, we don't want to play our nice gentle stuff and then someone come along and blows us off with monstrous power chords, so it's got to be an interesting bill, it's got to somehow work and feel right, it's normally all about who is about at the time, who is touring. We are an independent Northern band away from the Muso epi-centre, we are up on border patrol away from the 'Smoke', we are nearly on the 'Hadrian's wall of Prog', we are out and forgotten in the sticks (John and Guy laugh)..... but, we seriously forge our own path really and hope it works.

John: Well my closing question is, what can the fans expect from this up and coming tour?

Guy: Well this time we have certainly added one number more into the "Root" section of the set, we are going to play a set of numbers, like I said, that have never been performed before, one that is longer than the other. There are certain numbers that we can't get rid of yet, the '*Charlestown*' edit for example as it is still too important to drop, we have now dropped '*House on the Hill*' because we have been playing it since *RoSfest 2010* in nearly every performance, and although we love it, it had to go as it was time for something else.

If anybody saw us last year, there will be some of that set and some new numbers, that's the best we can do because we are a very busy lot, we only get together once a week, we can't do a whole load of brand new songs as we are not a full time professional band; if we were doing it full time we would have a whole new set, so what we have had to do is to drop one number and bring in another to replace it and so forth. When we go into next year (2014) things may go further and we may drop some more numbers and bring in other numbers we haven't done before again. I like to see change but we can only do it gradually because we haven't got enough time together to be able to pull it off quickly, we only get about two hours a week.

John: I would just like to thank you for your time Guy speaking to DPRP

Guy: No. Thank You

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Classic Rock Society

The Wesley Centre,
Blyth Road, Maltby,
Rotherham, S66 8JD

17th NOVEMBER 2013

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The Peel,
160 Cambridge Road,
Kingston