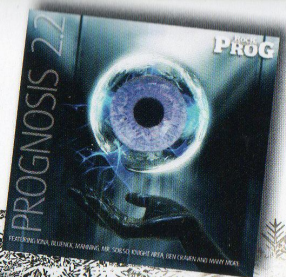


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## MANNING

“I like to think of us as a mini orchestra.” Yorkshire’s prog visionary assembles a brood!



8

### MANNING

The Southern Waves

Built around singer-songwriter Guy Manning, this band has been responsible for some interesting and eclectic music. Part-influenced by Jethro Tull, this is taken from the album *Margaret's Children*, following the fortunes of a family from the 17th century into the future. It has a bold, inventive approach that befits such an epic undertaking.

Taken from: *Margaret's Children* on F2.

[www.guymanning.com](http://www.guymanning.com)



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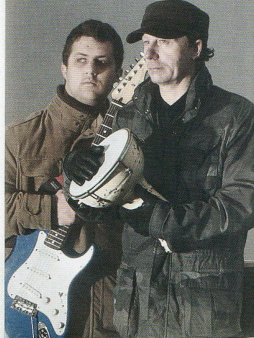
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**Prognosis 2.2**



# Brotherhood Of Manning



Eight people, twelve albums, one visionary force. **Manning** are Yorkshire's secret prog weapon, ready to take on the world if there's a stage big enough... **Grant Moon** books a minibus.

How d'you make a bandstand? Take their chairs away. Manning in Roundhay Park, Leeds, November 2011.



Even if you've never heard his recordings with The Tangent, even if his eponymous octet has eluded you these past 13 years, you've probably still benefited from Guy Manning's brain. Back at the dawn of the 80s he was involved in the development of the ULA, the microchip that ran early home computers such as the Spectrum ZX81 and the BBC Micro B. After graduating in psychology from Manchester University in the late 70s, the budding artist had declined to train as a social worker. "I had enough problems of my own," deadpans Manning now, in his dry Loimer brogue. "And I didn't have the patience to teach. I would have ended up killing someone. That's when I saw the advert for 'Graduates Wanted' at [electrical engineering firm] Ferranti. They needed people to do some problem-solving, basically moving these tiny lines of aluminium on a chip design. It was like playing Tetris really. There were three of us, this zoologist, a Russian graduate and myself all in this Portakabin, and it turned out we were good at it." Three decades on and Manning, now 54, is an IT Business Analyst by profession, but he's also steadily become one of prog UK's more beguiling and individual figures. A multi-instrumentalist, he's been a vital contributor to The Tangent with Andy Tillotson [see sidebar], and has amassed a large catalogue of literate, imaginative albums with his own band.

Manning's twelfth album, *Margaret's Children* is a companion piece to the band's ambitious 2006 work, *Anser's Tree*. Novelistic in its lyrical whimsy and eclectic in musical style, that powerful collection of vignettes focused on members of a fictional family, from 16th century ancestor Margaret Montgomery to her descendants living in the drowned world of the late 21st century. "It was inevitable I'd go back to it one day," says Manning. "The intention wasn't to write a sequel, it was to just write songs. I wanted to write a contemporary song about the Asian tsunami, another one about a nightclub during the Great Depression, but I didn't know I'd make it part of *Anser's Tree* until Julie [King, his wife and co-keyboardist] said, 'Maybe it's time to go back there. We'd sat down and worked out this big genealogical tree for it - from Margaret Montgomery in 1583. I wanted to write a song about World War One, so I checked to see who was on the tree around at the time, and there was Amy Quartermaine.'"

*"We're not a band defined by our soloists. We're like a mini orchestra."*

Guy Manning

Quartermaine inhabits *A Perfect Childhood*, a 17-minute, five-part piece based on the life of heroic nurse Edith Cavell, shot by German firing squad for harbouring British soldiers in occupied Belgium during the Great War. *A Night At The Sney*, 1933, is a jazzy, piano-led piece with King playing chanteuse Harriet Horden. "One reviewer told me he couldn't get on with it," sighs Manning. "He thought it was too leftfield. But, it's about a nightclub in America in the 1930s, how else was I going to do it, with a reggae beat? As a songwriter I try to tell a story and decorate it in the most evocative way." Poignant and elegiac, *The Southern Wines* reflects on the tsunamis that have wrought havoc on the planet in recent history. "The idea was to build it with more and more urgency, then once the vocals peak to take it out with what I call a 'thank-you-Wembley-and-goodnight' guitar solo. It's very Comfortably Numb. Chris Catling played that one."

Catling shares guitar duties with Kev Currie in the band. With his producer hat on, Manning has them both provide their own solo for each space where one is required, and then decides which contribution is the most fitting. Working in a home studio where his garage once was, his production technique has clear parallels with his erstwhile microchip mindset, that 'Tetris' approach. "I write the songs and demo them, put them on a secret page of the website for the band to upload. I'll have parts as the structure evolves, and all the time parts are coming in from the band, and I'm moving things around. Bit-by-bit the parts get added into the mix, like a big ball of wool. In *An Avenger Man*, four saxes come burbling in together. Marek [Arnold] gave me much more than that but I had to take it in. I used just the most interesting bits that worked with the song. I'm not the greatest instrumentalist, but I recognise it in other people. When I listen to things I've got a spider sense for it's right or not. It's time-consuming but you get the best bits out of everybody that way. We're not a band defined by our soloists. It's about the



*"1972 is my era.  
If I can get a Manning  
album sounding like  
Thick As A Brick  
my job is done."*



song and arrangement, the way parts hand over, from the piano, to the flute, to the violins. Half the charm for me is in the diverse instrumentation, I do like to think of us as a mini-orchestra."

The opening track, jaunty Enlightenment tale *The Year Of Wonders*, is a case in point. With its rasping, overblown flute and echoes of *Locomotive Breath* in both its key and chords, this is the closest Manning's ensemble come to emulating his touchstone band, Jethro Tull. "It wasn't intentional," he says, "but my flute player's Steve Dundon and that's how he plays, and I sound like Ian Anderson when I sing, so you're bound to get accused of that. I get it all the time. But you're only a product of your influences after all."

Coming of age in the early '70s, Guy Manning's first LPs were Lindisfarne's *Nicely Out Of Tune*, and *School's Out* by Alice Cooper. As a child he'd railed against enforced piano lessons, but salvaged a souvenir Spanish acoustic guitar his mum had bought then dumped unwrapped in a cupboard. He learned chords from a Wishbone Ash songbook, swiftly moving on to a proper, 12-string guitar, and then through friends and their older brothers was introduced to Jefferson Airplane, ELP, The Grateful Dead and Yes. But it was Tull's *Aquilone* that really hit a chord. "I was into Roy Harper, John Martyn—people who could write simple songs, brilliant tunes with great lyrics. Ian Anderson's right in the middle—great songwriter, an instrumentalist with a rock band around him. Tull were the band for me."

The homage to that band's organic sound is also present in Manning's homegrown production. His orchestration technique may be piecemeal and aleatory, but *Margaret's Children* still sounds like eight people playing in a room together. "I'm a songwriter and old, so 1972 onwards is my era. If I can get the latest Manning album sounding like *Thick As A Brick*, then I've done my job."

There's talk of a live album and DVD next year, but the prospect scares the singer to death. "You've got to get everything alright on the night, from the performance to the camerawork. You don't want to come back and re-record, like a few prog bands I could mention, who record a live concert and the next day they're in the studio."

Manning are also scheduled to play Cambridge Festival and Summers End in 2012, though few prog-friendly venues have a stage large enough to accommodate an eight-piece band at their cult level. "We find it hard to get dates in the UK let alone mainland Europe," he says. "We're a big band, and we don't pull in big, big crowds."

And therein lies the rub. While Manning's band is self-sufficient, survival for mid-range bands is tough these days. As if to hit the

**Child's play:**  
Guy Manning,  
wife Julie and clan  
spread out while  
they can.

point home, during our conversation he gets an email from the label. The release of *Margaret's Children* is weeks away, and there's already a copy up on a Russian pirate website. Guy Manning audibly deflates at the news. Prog does too. Bloody technology, talk about biting the hand that bred you. "Thing is, if you're Dave Gilmour you don't need the money, but even that's still not okay. And for Andy and The Tangent it's worse—they're a professional outfit, and they lose so much revenue it's hard for them to carry on. Even for a semi-pro like me it could be the end. It's a labour of love at the best of times."

*Margaret's Children* is out now. See [www.manning.com](http://www.manning.com) for info.

**"WE FIND EACH OTHER INCREDIBLY FRUSTRATING!"**  
The Tangent's Andy Tillison offers his honest view on why Guy's the man.

"I first met Guy at a recording studio I ran. We found many similarities in what we were aiming for musically, and we traded a lot of albums. I provided the Van der Graaf, he provided the Gentle Giant. We started learning from each other straight away. We find each other incredibly frustrating, but opposites can often help creativity."

Guy has a very keen ear for how a piece could sound. Whereas many people can only identify the problems, he's pretty good at finding the problem and solving it. Sometimes the amount of work this causes is so large I want to kill him. He has a lot of ideas and in my experience it's the musicians job to work to Guy's plans, like the site foreman must work to the architect's plans. He's a lyrical genius, I don't know where it all comes from. I also don't know how he's so amazingly well respected in the computer world when every time his PC goes wrong he rings me!

Guy's played his strong hand on *Margaret's Children*, it's focused and concise with more emphasis on the songs rather than big epics. My favourite album of his would probably be his first, *Tall Stories For Small Children*. There was a breathtaking quality to some of the music that can only be found in some of Hammill's best work.

No human being has ever made me laugh as much, frustrated me as much, or done as much for a friend as Guy has done for me. Once I innocently asked him about what was actually wrong with what seemed to be a perfectly good car he owned. The list he embarked on was unbelievably long, delivered in the style of Marvin the Paranoid Android reading a Haynes manual. By the time he'd started going on about the rear exhaust manifold I was begging him to stop, my body in pain with the laughter, but he persisted!" **GM**

