

Interviews: Interview with GUY MANNING (Manning, The Tangent, PO90)

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Topic: Interviews

Guy Manning: Going for the One by Tommy Hash



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Anybody who has heard the music of **Guy Manning**, knows that his music features some of the most intricate melodies in progressive rock, not to mention that his lyrics possess a straightforward storytelling vibe. Having a rich history playing UK bands since the 1980's including Let's Eat!, Bailey's Return, brief involvement with Through The Looking Glass, and KingGlass, **Manning** certainly brings a lot a flavor to his art-rock mantra.

Having Met up with Andy Tillison to form Gold Frankincense & Disk Drive, the wheels were in motion for a full fledged career in prog, as he would continue to work with Tillison with both Parallel or 90 Degrees & The Tangent, however, his solo career would be heralded in 1999 with the release of *Tall Stories* for *Small Children* and since then, **Manning** has been busy making an impact after impact on the thought oriented music scene.

Now several albums later, *Charlestown* marks another high point for **Manning**, as his blend of various styles, including folk/prog, rock, modern singer/songwriter, and artistic pop sensibility that has given him a patented sound of his own through the years. Through lineup changes, various record companies, the climate of the music blueness, and any prog "flavor of the day," **Guy Manning** has moved forward through all of that - here he discusses the latest album, plans for another record, and his approach to making music.

Tommy Hash: After studio eleven albums, how is it that you feel you have evolved with your music and lyric writing?

Guy Manning: 1. Technology has evolved at a great pace and so the quality of the instruments, recordings, manipulation of sounds has allowed me far more freedom to express the ideas I hear in my head.

As a writer, I still just write songs. Some of them are lot longer than others that is all and some allow me more time to lyrically get into detail. With my more historical based collections (e.g. Anser's Tree) I do take care to try and research my 'characters' to bring these details to life and make the storyline more believable or having more gravitas. I get labeled 'Progressive' I think because of the length of the songs, the usage of a wide array of instrumentation/textures etc. but in reality I think of myself more like a Roy Harper or Al Stewart . My music rarely has any over "widdly" or over complex bits to it. Look for a well written lyric and a good tune at the heart of it
2. Downside is...as I get older, more bands are put there and there are only so many original things to be able to write about!

TH: What was it that you set out to do with 'Charlestown' that was different from other albums?

GM: Well the obvious thing is to create a very large scale epic and long suite of interlinked pieces to tell one story, i.e. this is my Thick As a Brick. I have written long pieces before (Ragged Curtains, Suite: Dreams, One Small Step (1-9) of course but this was the ultimate. There was no real change in direction for the album...I always write what I write for myself (hence Caliban & Ariel, T.I.C. stylings plus an instrumental only my second ever) I did the usual research into Charlestown its locale, trade, history, barquetines etc. as said to get that level of authenticity into it all. I think it works well.

I seems to have polarized the internet reviewers though

Some call it a 'masterpiece' (which is not) and some saw it is as really, really poor (which it definitely is not!)

People say my music sounds like Jethro Tull...well yep I guess it does have similarities...I feature Steve Dundon on flute (who has played in Tull tribute bands and with Mick Abrahams) and I sing in a similar tonal range to IanA. However, I think there is a lot more to me than Tull-isms and visa versa! I think Manning music sounds pretty eclectic and different to the majority of other bands on the 'prog' circuit today. Now you can embrace / love that or not, but that is the case. My voice is a love it or hate it factor for some. I love to do it so I do it...for myself! The website (www.guymanning.com) has a free to download track from every album (so far) to "Try Before You Buy"! So folks, please no complaints about my voice if you have not done the research!

TH: When you work with PO90 and The Tangent, how is it that you approach making music with those bands as opposed to Manning.

GM: Well PO90 was very early on before I left them to it I only guested on one album.

The "No More Travelling Chess" album (released as Po90) was in fact written and recorded well before Po90 came into existence.

When I was with The Tangent, this was very much Andy Tillison's baby and he wrote nearly all the music.

I added in touches, made suggestions, worked on the arrangements for it. It was fun NOT to be the centerpiece on which the whole thing turned for once!



TH: You music has always had this laid back folk element to it rather than being all-out electric, why this musical approach? GM: Not sure I agree! The music covers quite a lot of territory from out and out riffy rocking passages/songs to gentle acoustic pieces; from reggae to pop, folk to jazz ; orchestral pieces to World music. However, that being said, my main instrument of choice is the acoustic guitar and so a lot of that personality will shine through.

TH: You have done quite a bit of quest appearances, is there anything in the pipeline for the future?

GM: Well, Mark Trueack from Unitopia has asked me to provide some music for his HOPE Project and I have sent him a prototype song for that. Other than that, I am open to offers!

TH: Are there any other projects that you are working that you will be deeply involved with as opposed to guest appearances?

GM: Not at present unless the HOPE Project requires it.

TH: Over the course of the release of your albums you have been involved with Cyclops, ProgRock, and Festival Music - how has it been dealing with the business side of things over the years?

GM: Each of the labels has had a different approach in terms of locale, usage of technology, budget limitations. Unreservedly, each has been great! The business side is not something I have to worry too much about, as I am not a bigger selling artist like Spock's Beard, Dream Theatre, Transatlantic etc. My sales are small but my critical success via feedback and reviews is big! It would be very nice to be able to dedicate more time to my music (as this was always my dream) but as it will not pay the bills, I do have a day job to keep the family fed, mortgage paid etc.

There is a perception that this therefore makes it a 'hobby' (a term which diminishes the whole thing IMO). It must be fabulous to be a full time musician, IF you can earn enough to cover your costs of course and live...but as I have a day job, IMO, I have to try even harder (in some aspects) as I have to find the time to write, record, hold sessions etc. all outside of a normal day's work/weekends and to do that, I have to organize work/play/family time which is heavily constrained.

Yes, I do have extra funds to draw on (because I work) that other working bands may not have, but to do this I have had to sacrifice my own wishes and put them into second place in order to be able to provide.

As soon as TOYOTA use one of my songs in a commercial and I get boosted into the Top Ten, I will quit the day job and go full time!



TH: Having played live at various festivals, how is it that you like to present your music live as opposed to the studio?

GM: In the studio I am only limited by my own abilities to play, conceive and record. Given I can find the inspiration and sounds I can create my own world and a vast amount of vocal and instrumental overdubs (to the limit of my PC hard disk recording system).

Live, we have to reduce that grand scale vision into a performance, which means inevitably arrangement compromises. It is great to feature recorded passages with Sax, flute, cello, horns, electric guitars, acoustic guitars, mandolins, bouzoukis, pianos, moogs, FX, etc. but live we are a band and only have so many hands!

I have an 8 piece band though so that we can attempt some of the more complex arrangements if possible.

TH: Are there any live dates planned for the near future?

GM: We return to Live work with the Elektrik (full band) line-up in October 2011. Meanwhile we are pleased to be able to do Akoustik (cut down) sets for events such as the Cambridge Rocks Festival 2011. This allows me to perform songs which are not suitable for the big line-up too which is a lot of fun.

We are holding auditions soon to replace our last drummer who has left recently. So, with that and the new album recordings, busy days ahead!

TH: And the follow up to Charlestown, are there any ideas on the table at this time and if so what can we expect from it?

GM: The album is written and is called "Margaret's Children". It is the sequel to the MANNING 2006 album "Anser's Tree".

There are SEVEN new stories relating to members of the ANSER family tree, all brought to life...

1. FLEMING BARRAS (1645 - ????) [The Year of Wonders]
2. JORGEN BARRAS (1834 - 1900) [Revelation Road]
3. HARRIETT HORDEN (1912 - 1955) [A Night at the Savoy 1933]
4. AMY QUARTERMAINE (1862 - 1916) [A Perfect Childhood]
5. JAMES FAIRFAX (1922 - 1945) [An Average Man]
6. AMELIA FAIRFAX (1926 - 2010) [Black Silk Sheets In Cairo]
7. DAVID LOGAN (1990 - 2048) [The Southern Waves]

The live band is featured heavily on it plus guest contributions too!!

[CLICK HERE](#) to read a review of *Charlestown*

[CLICK HERE](#) to read a review of *Anser's Tree*

[CLICK HERE](#) to read a review of *One Small Step*

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