

# Phideaux, Manning & Landmarq

Saturday, 16th November 2013  
Wesley Centre, Maltby, Rotherham, the UK

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Landmarq photo by David Webb*

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## Phideaux

On a mild but grey night in November, The Wesley Centre in Maltby, Yorkshire played host to a three band line-up of Phideaux, Manning and Landmarq at a CRS hosted event. From previous experience the Wesley Centre, has not impressed. Whilst being a suitable sized venue to host bands which would hope to sell 100-120 tickets, there are some difficulties with its layout. The back of the hall seating can mean that Prog fans, who like a sit down through a 20 minute epic, only occupy the back portion of the room, leaving an empty standing area between them and the band, a yawning gorge of nothing that leads to a feeling of disconnection between the audience and the players. However, on this occasion the space was taken up with a good turnout and the atmosphere was all the better for it.



Starting the evenings proceedings were the reduced but mighty **Phideaux** band from the U.S.A.. Returning to the U.K. for two shows, this was their first performance on these shores since their momentous appearance at **Summer's End in 2010**. Unlike the Lydney event, this was just three of the studio line-up, which usually totals 10 (!), comprised of Phideaux Xavier, Valerie Gracious and Ariel Farber. Smaller and more logistically feasible, this was nonetheless a gripping performance that dazzled and displayed their collective power through musicianship and lifelong

friendship. Leaning heavily on the material from their last three albums, it seemed the acoustic versioning on the night suited the songs from *Doomsday Afternoon* the most. The opener, *Micro Softdeathstar*, and *Formaldehyde* stood out as gems from the set list, the latter backed by the addition of Guy Manning who effortlessly slotted into the band for two songs. The warm and rich sound of four musicians as good as this is something distinctly rare and captivating.

The delicate aspects of the song material appeared to blossom in this format and indicates a potential for smaller, intimate, slightly secretive gigs that could happen in the future. Let's hope so.

## Manning

**Manning** on the other hand were in full force with an almost complete band, now kitted out with their new Steampunk stage outfits. Elegant and eccentric they looked striking in their knee high leather boots and waistcoats, albeit a bit on the warm side. However, (top) hats off to the band for making an effort and presenting themselves to the audience as quirky, theatrical storytellers. Although in the case of David Million on guitar, the Dickensian look was more 'Bruce' Dickensian, as I am sure that I haven't seen pants that tight since Maiden in '84. Reassuming the position centre stage again, Guy Manning looked the part. Previous gigs have seen his setup to the side of the stage for technical reasons but the move back to the middle was a welcome one. Flanked front and back by the rest of the Manning band, the layout worked well and it was good to see his skill and magnetism up front. The opening track *Deconstruction Blues* has yet to win me over live. One of the standout tracks on the recent *The Root, the Leaf and the Bone*, it seems to lack some of the smooth punch from the studio version, perhaps due to the lack of brass on the stage. There is an effort to cover these sections from a synth but as yet this has not felt enough.



On this occasion the essential flute usually provided by the charismatic Steve Dundon (side-lined through illness) was lacking and contributed to the less convincing outing. However that slight niggle aside the rest of the set was outstanding and stronger than a recent appearance at the Bury MET. The mix was balanced well throughout, something of a challenge with so many players, but

when it does come close to a good even sound on the night, it's a very satisfying result. The set was comprised heavily of material from the aforementioned new album such as *The Huntsman and the Poacher*, *Old School* and *The Forge*, with the inclusions of the epic *Charlestown* in a scaled down format and the surprise appearance of *Ragged Curtains* from the 2002 album. *Charlestown* appeared stronger on this outing perhaps by the inclusion of the band's costumes which seemed to give extra weight to the material. The latter track was a superb 25-minute encore which wowed the crowd, some of whom were unfamiliar with it.

New material and classics aside it was the brilliant *Revelation Road* that stood out as the highlight of the show. Relaxed and fun, Manning sounded their best on this song and joined by the Phideaux three, they all appeared to be enjoying the shared spirit of the moment.

## Landmarq

The final band of the evening, **Landmarq**, had a tough slot following on from the first two acts and there was a sense that the show had peaked with the last Manning number. Landmarq, whilst impressive from a live point of view had a sound that was poppier and less of a fit with the first two acts and this was notable in the people who drifted away or took the opportunity to leave a little early. Performing songs from their catalogue including some from the recent album *Entertaining Angels*, the band are slick as a live band and deserved more attention. *Mountains of Anglia* was a synth-heavy and poppy number, a standout from the new release.



Tracey Hitchings stage presence is notable and commands the audience's attention, perhaps let down a little when her powerful vocals are a little operatic, the sustained notes heavy on the vibrato; something that is hard to achieve but not always palatable. Even so, Landmarq are worth checking out and will tick a lot of Progressive Rock fans boxes. Uwe D'Rose is an exciting guitarist with a good range along with Mike Varty who combines keys with some good backing vocals.

Two of the three live acts seemed like an easy fit, partially due to their past joint endeavour on *Margaret's Children* plus the common ground from strong Tull-like influences and the liking for

the odd sea shanty which goes a long way to sealing the deal between them. The crowd appeared to recognise this and there was a notable liking from fans from both camps to each of the first two acts. However this aside it takes nothing away from the fact that the three bands on the night combined to make it a very enjoyable evening and hopefully some, or all of these acts will combine again in the future - when they do, you should prioritise it as must see event.