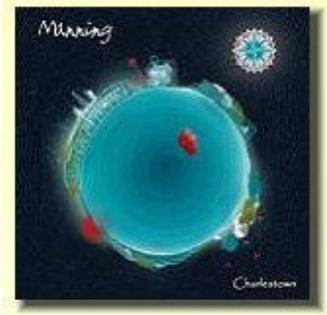


Review by Jerry Lucky



Title: "Charlestown"

Band Website: www.guymanning.com

Label: Festival Music Records

Label Website: www.festival-music.co.uk

Release Date: 2010

Truth is it's always a big day around the Lucky household when I receive a new release from **Guy Manning**. So when he sent his latest entitled *Charlestown* I was pretty chuffed. I'd actually heard an edited track on a sampler disc from *Classic Rock Presents PROG* magazine. It was a nice tease. This is his 11th release and dare I say it... I think it's his best yet. As on previous releases **Manning** is the guy in charge performing on acoustic 6, 12 and classical guitars, electric guitars, keyboards, bass, Bouzouki, mandolin, FX, percussion and lead, backing vocals. He then calls upon his regular mates to flesh out the sound and that includes; Dave Albone (drums), Chris Catling (electric guitars, backing vocals), Kev Currie (electric guitars, backing vocals), Steve Dundon (flute), Kris Hudson-Lee (bass) and Julie King (backing vocals). Then as if that weren't enough participation there are a few extra guests; Ian 'Walter' Fairbairn (Fiddle), Kathy Hampson (cello) and last but not least Alison Diamond (saxophone). So it's a pretty full house. But let me say this... it's all there on the disc. *Charlestown* sounds bloody marvelous!

The disc starts off in splendid fashion with the 35-minute epic title track. It weaves through many changes but I was struck with how seamlessly these segments blend together; each one transitioning into the next like a wonderful story. On top of that each segment of the piece retains a memorable melody that not only stands on its own, but knowingly or not fits into the larger work. If you've ever listened to a **Manning** disc, you'll have some idea what to expect, it'll rock a bit, it'll have some jazzy interludes, it'll have a strong acoustic element and many times there's even a hint of Celtic influences. All that is here in major doses and to top it off it's wrapped up in a grand symphonic fashion. Now I've spent all this time talking about the first track, but there are actually five other compositions here and each of them is worth a mention. The second track "Caliban and Ariel" [2:58] is really reminiscent of a type of song early Strawbs would write; "The Man in the Mirror" [6:26] has a strong hint of Al Stewart musically, "Clocks" [4:28] is vaguely reminiscent of some rare Roy Harper piece, "TIC" [5:14] is an acoustic rocker that is all Manning as is the last track "Finale" [7:16] an instrumental that brings the whole disc to a grand symphonic finish. But while all those sonic references are there, this is very clearly **Guy Manning's** work. After 11 albums he's crafted a unique and distinct sound that is very much his own.

I've been a fan for quite a while, but I say this with no embarrassment, *Charlestown* is **Guy Manning's** masterpiece! It's one of those CDs where everything fits so well. It's everything prog is all about. For the uninitiated **Manning** will remind you of The Strawbs, Roy Harper, Al Stewart and Jethro Tull all wrapped up into one. If you've yet to sample his music *Charlestown* is a great place to start. I highly recommend it.