

REVIEW OF MANNING "NUMBER TEN" BY JERRY LUCKY

They say time flies when you're having fun. If that's the case I gotta think Guy Manning is having some fun. He's just released his latest musical offering entitled Number Ten; it's his 10th release in 10 years. That's a pretty active schedule in anyone's books. And like his other releases, the multi-instrumentalist Manning has surrounded himself with a host of musicians to help execute his eight new compositions.

The new disc starts out with a rocking good tune entitled "Ships" [5:34]. It's an up-tempo, verse-chorus affair that sets the tone for a disc that is a little edgier than some previous outings. There is still the prerequisite mix of acoustic and electric guitars, plenty of keyboards such as Hammond organ and saxophones, fiddles, clarinets and flutes. It's still possible to hear significant elements of Manning's other musical adventure The Tangent coming through here and there. That's especially true of some of the longer pieces where the songs go through any number of musical twists and turns. The track "The Final Chapter" [7:44] offers a great Celtic flute/fiddle musical motif that repeatedly intersects other more complex sax and organ interludes. Manning's influences continue to be on display with a little jazzy flavour here, and little softer acoustic tone there. If anything stands out on Number Ten it is perhaps a slightly rockier edge on some of the compositions. Track three, "An Ordinary Day" [6:03] starts out soft, with vocals against solo piano, then gradually strings appear, then drums and organ all the while building until the well crafted vocal chorus crescendos into a lush and majestic subdued climax before resolving to solo piano and voice. It is poignant and yet pleasing. The Celtic flute sounds return on "A Road Less Travelled" [10:34] to introduce the piece before the fiddle joins in overtop of Mellotron strings. Again this is tune that builds slowly, adding new sounds at each turn, unfolding like a flower. It's a musical pattern that Manning uses to good effect on many of his compositions creating drama and resolution. The disc concludes with the Jethro Tull inspired "House on the Hill" [15:52] particularly with its opening flute line. Although for my money Manning's progressive compositional style is more to my liking and I particularly love the majestic melodic theme he's created to finish this piece. It's exquisite!

For most, Guy Manning no longer needs an introduction. Ten albums in 10 years pretty much says it all. His solo work, along with his involvement with The Tangent speak for themselves. Needless to say, if you've enjoyed his previous efforts, this is a no-brainer, you'll want to pick it up right-away. All the previous influences still apply such as The Strawbs, Roy Harper, Al Stewart and Jethro Tull. Number Ten will be a great addition to your musical library.