

CHARLESTOWN By Nuno (ProgGnosis site)

It is about time we begin to classify the current progressive rock as good or even better than that of the 70's. It is about time to abandon once and for all the numbness and selective amnesia that still moves a large portion of the lovers of this genre. The numbness not infrequently contemptuous, on principle without plausible reasoning, about what it is made today in terms of great progressive rock, both in its evolutionary aspect or in its recreation of the musical foundations that have defined the genre of symphonic music in the late 60's and 70's, the commonly classified greater years of the style.

The new work by **Guy Manning**, their 11th studio album, is the purest proof that the genre now commonly called regressive (meaning the progressive symphonic based on the teachings of the classics, though dressed in the clothes of modernity), still has much to offer. And it does so with brilliance and charisma.

Truth is that *Charlestown* is a work that takes us back to the magical world of the great works of 70's. It is a window in time in terms of style and architecture, leading us like the DeLorean from *Back to the Future* to a time when this genre was mainstream art. But as a traveller of this time machine, is presented with clothing of today, especially in what concerns the type of production.

The opening track, which names the album, is a 35-minute opus that revisits the history of the progressive symphonic, with its hints of **Jethro Tull**, **Yes**, **Genesis** and **England** well creased but at the same time presented in a subtle way. This is one of the most comprehensive, imaginative and well done tracks in **Manning's** career, though he has given us great works in the past. It seems he has taken particular care this time not only in terms of composition, but also interpretation. The use of a mini-orchestra (many are the guest artists and the instruments played) with woodwinds and strings perfectly stitched with the musical line, offering atmospheric and fragile melodies and an almost constant but subtle ambient folk that counterbalance some parts relatively more aggressive, particularly in soils of guitar or vintage keyboard. Making it a landmark in the already extensive and prolific work of **Guy Manning**. A track to remember, explore and enjoy on many auditions. The track itself tells of a maritime odyssey along the British coast, where the musical textures depict the various stages of the adventure. From concept to realization of it, the band offers absolutely everything to easily become a milestone in the recent history of symphonic progressive.

The remaining tracks on the album do not reach the same brilliance and individuality of the title track, which leads me to believe that it might have been better to reverse the order of the tracks in order to leave the listener with a sense of wonder that lingers after such a perfect start. However, individual listening of the other five tracks, turns it evident that there is also quality in them and that the album as a whole is an excellent offer and interpretation of diversity ... but the masterpiece that completely fills in during the first 35 minutes is actually and undoubtedly the most brilliant moment of the album.

Caliban and Ariel is a small piece of melodic sensitivity, just serving as interlude to the second part of the album where some different and diverse approaches are sequenced, moving the listener away from the shivering depths of the title track.

The Man in the Mirror brings me the album *One Small Step* to mind, like if **Manning** is revisiting some past propositions. The cello in the back is a great add, as the soprano sax and the fiddle sum points in favour of the track, especially when the fiddle escapes into completely folk grounds.

Clocks has that rural vibe that **Jethro Tull** so well developed in their *Songs From the Wood*, but semi-orchestrated and certainly calmer and personalized.

The strong Blues scent of TIC serves as a nice change, and even if I would not consider it a filler, I also would not put it as a classic and certainly not close to the quality of the rest of the album.

The closing *Finale* is an instrumental track in the good tradition of 70's progressive rock, with some Camel hints in some keys and a more modern and fusion-like rhythm section.

All in all this is a monster of an album with its somehow weaker points but in which you can listen to one of the best and more complete symphonic prog tracks of the new millennium. Do yourself a favour and check it out...now!