

Manning

The Wesley Centre, Maltby, Rotherham, March 20th 2010

This, of course, was a re-arranged gig: having had to postpone their original intended visit to us last year due to a shift in personnel, Manning finally made it to the Wesley Centre, to give us a very rewarding evening's entertainment. Providing support after being roped in at very short notice was guitar troubadour Patrick Hankinson-Kempf, who acquitted himself well, giving us several languid acoustic pieces during which he seemed very assured and organised. He was received with polite applause from the audience, and the whole experience will no doubt have stood him in good stead for the future.

After a short interlude, there appeared the new line-up of Manning, who, with their forthcoming Rosfest date in mind, wisely used the opportunity to road-test a few ideas, not least, their set of drapes, black with gold insignias, as well as some visual props.

It's long been a bone of contention with me that many bands who play for us don't pay quite as much attention as perhaps they should to visual presentation. It was delightful to see, therefore, instead of the standard female vocalist in gothic dress backed by guys in jeans, trainers and football shirts, a band resplendently kitted out in black, and their presence was all the stronger for it. They have two new members, too: both Chris Catling (lead guitar and backing vocals) and Tim Leadbetter (keyboards) showed that they are shrewd signings, each giving us some very stylish work, and dovetailing nicely into what has become the recognised Manning sound.

The band gave us a nice, varied selection of material from their repertoire, opening with 'A Strange Place', and featuring my personal Manning favourite, 'Antares'; and it was during this number that we had the aforementioned visual props: a pair of 'candles', and a red light (ooer!) representing the star of the title. Guy was in great vocal form and assisted by Kev Currie and augmented by the backing vocals of Julie King and Chris Catling, they tore through the set with gusto, ending the main part of the doings with favourite 'The House On The Hill'. Their music showed all of the ingredients that we've come to expect from the band, with elements of folk, rock (and indeed folk-rock), and prog; being by turns soulful, hard-edged, melodic, powerful and spunky; and this continued into their encore, which tonight featured 'In My Life' and 'Lost In Play', before they took their leave of an appreciative audience.

A very enjoyable evening, and on the evidence of this, Manning can look forward to expanding their fan-base at the forthcoming Rosfest event.

Dave Winstanley