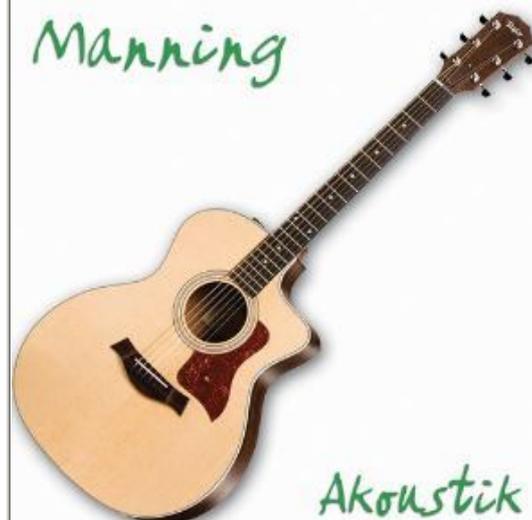


Manning – Akoustik For Background Magazine

(CD 2012, 59.34, Festival Music 201210)

The tracks:

1- In Swingtime	(4:30)
2- Antares	(5:31)
3- Clocks	(4:16)
4- Castaways	(4:07)
5- Silent Man	(4:31)
6- Margaret Montgomery	(4:51)
7- A Place To Hide	(4:31)
8- The View From My Window	(4:49)
9- Phase (The Open And The Widening Sky)	(4:55)
10- Tears In The Rain	(6:05)
11- The Night And The Devil	(4:53)
12- In My Life	(6:25)



Towards the end of 2011, I asked Guy Manning if we could expect a live CD or a DVD soon, but he told me that he had mixed feelings about such releases. The outlook of having arranged quite a hefty investment beforehand and to get shows recorded and filmed frightened him. Moreover, editing and mixing such a show takes a lot of time. However, Guy Manning told me as well that yet a live release could be expected in 2012. Well, having a great live band, many great songs from his twelve critically acclaimed albums and with a growing status in the prog scene, that would be something to look out for!

The live album was released after all, but not the one I had in mind. The CD title Akoustik clearly reveals that Manning recorded an album with only acoustic instruments. On this record twelve of his songs get a special treatment. They have been stripped of all the electrical instruments and bombastic keyboard parts that feature the studio versions. Although acoustic instruments, like the violin, acoustic guitars and flute dominate the album, he sparingly uses some keyboards, electric guitars and basses, but considerably less than during a usual concert.

The songs on Akoustik are performed by Guy Manning (acoustic guitar, vocals), Chris Catling (guitar), Kev Currie (guitar, vocals), Stephen Dundon (flute), Rick Henry (drums, percussion), Kris Hudson-Lee (bass), Julie King (vocals, percussion), David Million (guitar) and Martin Thiselton (keyboards, violin). To my surprise they sound very well in this setting; I didn't miss the full electric band at all. All of the twelve tracks are a real treat to my ears and still very recognizable.

The album contains quite a number of highlights like the Jethro Tull influenced track Silent Man which acoustically even reminded me of the early albums by Mostly Autumn. That also applies to Margaret Montgomery. On this wonderful acoustic version it seems as if former Mostly Autumn member Angela Gordon played the flute and Bryan Josh the acoustic guitar. Tears In The Rain is another highlight on which the organ and the acoustic guitars are dominant and on The Night And The Devil the backing vocals of Julie King work perfectly. Her singing strongly reminds me of another former Mostly Autumn member, namely Heather Findlay. I guess all tracks can be considered to be musical highlights. I even wished that I could have been present during these recording sessions!

This album proves again that great progressive rock music can be made without all those layers of keyboards, stunning electric guitar solos and bombastic orchestral parts. Sometimes less is more! My compliments to Guy Manning and his fabulous band! He not only rocks electrically but also acoustically!

**** **Henri Strik (edited by Peter Willemsen)**