

Review by [Tarcisio Moura](#)  
**Prog Reviewer**

★★★★★ When I heard that Guy Manning had released another album I was eager to get it. And I was a bit skeptical too, I should say. After all the man had released two masterpieces in a row (Songs From The Bilson House and Ten) and I was wondering if he could keep such pace in such a short time span. You know, Manning has released an album per year since his debut in 1999. Unlike many of his peers, he was able to grow with each release and after all these years, he is on the peak of his powers. And, fortunatly, Charlestown only confirms his excellent phase.

Guy manning is defintly a one of a kind songwriter: a craftsman who knows his job like few nowadays. In part he reminds me of the work of Al Stewart (specially his Modern Times and Year Of The Cat albums): like Stewart Manning has the rare hability of putting words and music together without losing neither the power of his clever lyrics nor the high quality of the songs melodies. More importantly, both men work the arrangements to perfection: every note, every instrument and voice is perfectly placed to enhance the message, both lyricly and musically. I wonder how Manning can write, produce and arrange an album of this caliber every year. There is not only no fillers, but also in no time you can say `this song could be better if he did this or that`. A rare breed indeed!

The album starts with one of his best compositions ever: a 35 minute suite telling the story of a sailor lost on sea. Although the theme is hardly original, the delivering is. Very few people could make such a long track sound not only marvelous, but also leaving the feeling it is very short. His long time sidekick Laura Fowles is missing for the first time since the Cure (2000), but she is replaced here by the very capable Alison Diamond, who does a great job not only with the tenor sax but also widening the musical palette with some fine soprano solos. The extensive use of the flute (alongside with violin and cello) are another plus on his music. The usual mix of prog rock, celtic folk and symphonic prog now has some jazzy overtones added. Nice!

While the title track opus is the main feature here the remaining tracks are excellent too. The delicate Caliban and Ariel shows some great multi tracked vocals that work very well on the storyline. The Man In The Mirror is another highlight with exquisite soprano sax lines and uptempo rhythms that conceal the rather sad lyrics. Clocks is among his best ballads in the vein of Ten's Valentine's Night (nice mandolin and flutes. The comparisons with Jethro Tull will be inevitable!). The more ordinary blues rock of T.I.C. may not be on par with the remaining of the tunes, but it is good anyway. Charlestown finishes with the first instrumental track I heard so far on a Manning album: called Finale (a bit redundant but fitting) it is quite interesting too and again the soprano sax solo makes it sounds different from anything GM has done before.

Conclusion: He did it again! Another masterpiece of progressive music, no less. My rating is something between 4,5 and 5 stars. Guy Manning is defintly one of the most important songwriters to appear on the new millenium and Charlestown is defintly a must have for anyone who thinks they don't do great albums like they used to do in the 70's. Highly recommended to all music lovers.