

Manning – Number Ten (8.5 / 10)

By Mike Flavin



Guy Manning has participated in a number of excellent musical projects over the years, but perhaps one of his most impressive feats is that in addition to stints with The Tangent and Parallel or 90 Degrees, he has managed to release an album of original Manning music every year for the past decade. That's a lot of music, but *Number Ten* proves it's not at all about the quantity. Along with keyboardist/co-producer Andy Tillison, Manning & Co. have crafted an album full of great melodies, storytelling and tasteful performances.

Number Ten starts off with a trio of tunes that, while not connected conceptually, work extremely well together. The first, "Ships", gets the album off to a rollicking start with a guitar & Hammond-driven riff that showcases the entire band. Following the cheerful opener is the bluesier "The Final Chapter", in which the demise of the toughest guy in town gets as much respect as he gave to others. The third number of the album is the exquisite "An Ordinary Day". With a beautiful melody and piano accompaniment, we're taken on a walk through any small village inhabited by 'ordinary people, living ordinary lives'. This is one of my favorite pieces of the album, especially for the string and piano arrangement.

"Bloody Holiday!" is a lighthearted romp about the trials & tribulations of modern travel as an 'extra roomy Guy' tries to make the most of his voyage in a 'pencil in the sky'. Shady blokes and plastic chicken notwithstanding, he comes to the obvious conclusion: 'there's nothing you can do, but enjoy the ride'. Musically, the horn section & Hammond give the tune a bit of a TV theme show feel. It's a bit of fluff, but delivered with the charm an old friend you never get tired of vacation tales from.

"Another Valentine's Night" is another nicely arranged ballad, with lyrics that have a darker side than the typical tale of loneliness. The piano & strings once again provide a nice backdrop to the acoustic guitars & mandolin.

"A Road Less Traveled" takes the listener along as the narrator reflects on the past and present of life. The lush instrumentation makes brilliant use of flute, soprano sax, and

violin, along with a healthy dose of Mellotron and Hammond for a classic 'prog' sound. The way all of the instruments seamlessly weave their way in and out of the arrangement is truly remarkable.

"Another Lazy Sunday" is a truly intriguing piece, with more modern electronic keyboard sounds mixed with funky solo sections and percussion-heavy breaks. It fits perfectly with the lyrics – as the narrator tries to amuse himself with one random activity after another, so does the arrangement. It all works amazingly well.

The final track, "The House on The Hill" is a truly magnificent piece. Spread out over four sections, our protagonist imagines himself drawn into the life he remembers captured in a photograph. Not finding his lost love in the underworld, he returns to the photograph, where she reappears and they walk hand in hand to the house on the hill.

Number Ten is chock full of great melodies and harmonies, with a wonderful blend of acoustic and electric instrumentation. On top of that, the imaginative songwriting never takes a back seat to showy or pointless soloing. It's a truly remarkable album!

Musicians:

- * Guy Manning: Acoustic 6, 12 and Classical and Electric Guitars, Keyboards, Bass, Bouzouki, Mandolin and Vocals
- * David Million: Electric Guitar
- * Laura Fowles: Alto Sax and Vocals
- * Ian 'Walter' Fairbairn: Fiddle
- * Phil Wilkes: Keyboards
- * Kris Hudson-Lee : Bass
- * Julie King: Vocals (including the duet on "Valentine's Night")
- * Kevin Currie : Vocals
- * Ed Neidhardt: Soprano Sax and Bass Clarinet
- * Hannah Hudson-Lee: Vocals
- * Danny Rhodes: Additional Drums
- * Andy Tillison : Keyboards and Drums
- * Steve Dundon: Flute and Tenor Sax
- * Pav Chana: Percussion