

REVIEW & INTERVIEW for ALBION MAGAZINE

Conducted by James Turner

Manning

The Root, the Leaf & the Bone

Festival Music 201310

Fourteenth album in, and Guy Manning (interviewed below) is showing no signs of slowing down. Based on the idea of a village changing over time and losing its identity, this album has a very wide scope. *The Forge* has a fantastic pounding, percussive beat and highly acute lyrics, while *Decon(struction) Blues* deplores the folly of getting rid of things just because they are old. Manning's folkier side comes to the fore on the closing trio of *The Huntsman and The Poacher*, the sinister *Mists of Morning Calling to the Day* and the reflectively beautiful *Amongst the Sleepers*. The core Manning line-up includes Kris Hudson-Lee, whose bass is sometimes funky, sometimes understated, providing the bedrock of every track, Julie King on vocals, harmonising nicely with Manning, the great guitar-playing of David Million and Rick Henry's percussion. The group are joined by special guests Marek Arnold, whose sax work really comes across on *The Forge*, whilst Chloe Herrington from Knifeworld adds her bassoon to the elegiac *Autumn Song*.

This is a far more folk rock-tinged album than some of Manning's earlier work. The album is a joy from start to finish, while the mini-suite that is the title track is particularly beautiful.

Guy Manning is a fantastic songwriter and instrumentalist. On this album he has surrounded himself with some of the best musicians around, who all contribute to making the record indispensable. Not only do you hear something new each time you listen, the lyrics also make you think about the recent pace of change.

Interview with Guy Manning

We started our chat by talking about last year's Akoustik project.

It was a half album. It was done for a number of reasons: I was tired and didn't want to do a full studio album then Kev [Currie, occasional Manning collaborator] suggested we record the songs in the Akoustik format. I thought it'd be simple but it took longer to do. The Akoustik idea is to revisit the back catalogue and play things that the full electric band doesn't play. It's nice to play things a different way and reduce them down to simple songs.

As Manning has an Elektrik and Akoustik line-up, was it a case of purely recording the Akoustik set?

Well, we looked at doing that. We also looked at the current (Elektrik) set, found a few we'd never done in that format, and breathed some new life into older songs. **The Root** is the fourteenth album, and there's a lot of music in my back catalogue. Even I go back to some of the older stuff and forget I've written it! The (Akoustik) album was a nice thing to do in a lazy year. We were playing live a lot, so it gave us something to promote, gave me a challenge to revisit older songs, and also gave us a well-earned break from writing a whole new set of songs.

Listening to the Akoustik album, it sounds like it was recorded live.

Not quite. I put restrictions on it, such as no overdubs, the only overdubbing was when I didn't get the parts in time so I had to do some backing vocals. So it wasn't quite unplugged, but it was a very simple set up. People like the Akoustik shows, there's less pressure, less equipment and the band can have more of a laugh.

***The Root, the Leaf & The Bone* came out in October and has been receiving some excellent reviews. Guy talked me through the album and the process.**

I started the writing last December and demoed it over Christmas, played it to the band in January, and we recorded it in May/June, finishing in July ready for the autumn release. With the final mixing, I struggle-- it's like crawling through the desert until you collapse in a heap. After a while you lose objectivity. I'm relying on the rest of the band to tell me how it sounds.

What is the album's overall concept?

When I started writing in November, I wanted to look at the way things have changed over the years and focus on a fictitious village, starting around the fifteenth century and on into the twentieth century.

I asked him to comment on some of the album tracks.

The Forge is a romantic vision of craftsmanship from the blacksmith to the air conditioned factory, looking at the loss of the craftsman's skills over the years. *Old School* borrows heavily from the film *If...*, a fantasy of one kid wanting to take over. *Palace of Delights*: if you go into the Dales and visit little village shops, it's like a time machine, with coronation mugs and other things from the 1950s. You shut the door and go back to your youth. *Amongst the Sleepers* is about contemplating people you've known whilst walking through the graveyard. It brings the album to a close and gives it flow.

Are you influenced by your location?

You write what you feel comfortable with-- there's a northern grit and romanticism in the lyrics. I can't imagine working in London. It's a long way to go, and if we

play in London it's like a day out. I write about things that interest me and I empathise with the characters. I like living where I am but I tend to write what I want to write, rather than by location.

Many thanks to Guy Manning for his time. The interview was conducted by James Turner.