

New Release - 'The Root, the leaf and the bone' - Manning (Oct 2013)

A review by Eric Perry for Progarchy

Manning, is the self-titled band name of the ridiculously talented and very modest Guy Manning, the singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist and former member of The Tangent, very ably backed by a large assembled cast of musicians.

It's the eve of Manning's latest album release, the mysteriously book sounding "The Root, the leaf and the Bone" a collection of stories and ideas which predominately centre round the concept of 'Change'.

For those unfamiliar with his work, this is the fourteenth (!) release in a very impressive and diverse catalogue of albums, that started with the 1999 debut of "Tall stories for small children".

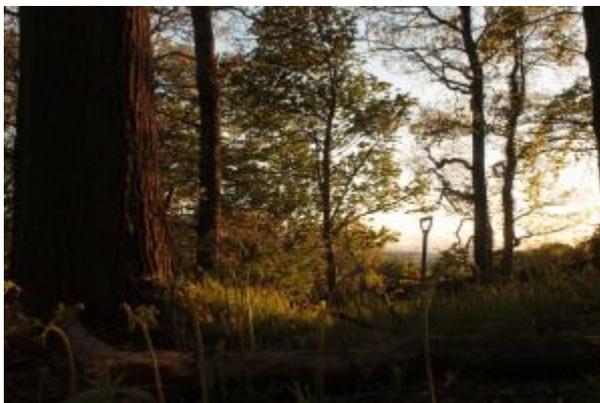
Over a very prolific decade and a half where he shared his creative time and energy with The Tangent, Manning has crafted his art and production skills and worked as many modern musicians do, on a minuscule budget and with limited time and resources. It's one of the many things that are to be admired about him and his work.

Key to Manning's charm and appeal are the ingredients that have not changed much since his first solo outing. Guy is a storyteller and a damn good one at that. From tragic tales of doomed ships to World War one nurses shot for treason, we have a rich library of characters and tales to enthrall the listener.

"Root" is no exception. Several of the tracks on this release are from an original conceived idea of a English village and the stories that centre around that. During the writing phase of the album it was clear that the concept was too limiting for Guy and the village theme was side-lined for a larger overarching theme instead. That said the village stories are there such as the Huntsman and the Poacher, a tale of the hunter becoming the hunted and the Old School which deals with the oppressive systems in the old English boarding school and the desire to overthrow them.

It's the title song, the album's 12 minute epic opener that detracts from the village theme and sets the stall for the wider theme. 'The root, the leaf and the bone' is the key to the whole and deals with the ideas of what is lost in the midst of time, and more importantly, the perceived progress of mankind in the pursuit of improvement. Guy questions, as we all do, perhaps more so as we age, if things are actually better now with our gleaming clean lines of glass and concrete instead of what was before. The charms and the individuality of what came before us has been buried over time, and yet he points us to the truth that eventually the circle comes round and we again look for what was lost and dig it up. Philosophically it looks at our need to keep revisiting our timeline. Where are we going and where have we been?

A potent idea. that reoccurs again and again throughout the album, finishing spectacularly with the monumental 'Amongst the Sleepers'. A slow building song which ends in true elevated and grand fashion, similar to the 'The Southern waves' from the 2011 release, 'Margaret's Children'.



Capturing the beauty of change as well as the loss.

Musically this album is true to the sound of Manning, in so far as it is anything but clear cut and unafraid to entertain the listener with a vast breadth of influence and style. From Prog to pop to folk, Guy draws on his expansive musical taste and ability and crafts it effortlessly together. A great example of this can be found in the track 'Decon(struction) Blues'; Guy's - "Paved paradise and put up a parking lot" - "moment. "Don't tear it down." pleads Guy. Ranging from a Tull-esque opening riff to a feeling of Northern soul with pop single sensibilities to a storming rock out moment and a brilliant brass section which evokes lost classic TV theme tunes from a sixties detective series. Guy throws so many elements into the air and seamlessly stitches them together. From the off, this track appeals and has you tapping your foot enthusiastically.

The following track 'Autumn song' is a brilliant piece that continues with the theme of change. Less story and more poetry, the lyrics explore the beauty of the change of season which draws the writer into a moment of self-reflection, a feeling we all get from time to time as we ask "So...Is this all there is?" And yet Guy doesn't want to wallow in melancholy, instead he points us back to the appreciation of the beauty that is all around. Rich in brassy sounds and in particular a lovely bassoon which provides a woody, dark tone this track stands out for its richness. It's the whiskey liqueur in a box of dark chocolates, a delightful melting quality which feels like something that should be enjoyed in front of an open log fire. Credit goes to the superb Chlöe Herrington for providing this new addition to the Manning palate. The song in some way defines the differences in this release in that Guy has used the wind instruments to a greater extent this time around.

The oak like flavour of Autumn song gives way to the industrial clanging of 'The Forge' which revisits an industrious time of craft and manufacture in the heat of the furnace and the chime of an anvil. A view of the lost art of making in the modern times of automation and mass production.

The forge is constructed in a way that other songs on the album follow, it embraces the listener in the golden glow of nostalgia.

'Palace of Delights' is a prime example of this as Guy takes us into his past through the treats found in a packed village shop, a cornucopia of toys and collector's items from our youth, all packed into the tight space of an independent local shop. It serves to remind us that our past is easily traced through a series of objects we owned or desired through the years. A truism of the late 20th century is that our lives are mapped out through commercialism.

'Old School' is part nostalgia and part lesson (pardon the pun). Whilst it seems interesting to revisit the corridors and classrooms of the past we learn the ugly side of old school, of the overbearing authoritarian practice which bordered on abuse "Make a stand today against draconian violence." It's another Manning bit of storytelling, this time we see the pupils rise up in a Grange Hill style siege on the establishment.

'Mists of Morning Calling to the Day' is another outstanding song with its ghostly goings on, it's a story within a story. Guy's tale of haunting tales from the village's past. Its opening folkier riff is pure Manning and something the long-time fans will savour. This track grows on the listener and opens its beauty with repeated listens.

'The Huntsman and the Poacher' completes the set of songs that were part of the original village concept along with 'Mists...' which has found its way into this release. It's a good track but seems to cling to the edge of the theme rather than fit within it. However, it is clear that Guy never intended the listener to see this album as a concept piece and so its place provides an important reminder of this fact.

A final part of this album that needs to be mentioned is the important contribution from the large cast of gifted musicians that have contributed. Not least the regular members, Kris Hudson-Lee on Bass, Julie King's lovely vocals and Rick Henry on Percussion and David Albone on drums. Completing the main line-up is a return for David Million who is a returning member to the Manning fold. Steve Dundon's distinctive Flute playing, a feature of so many of Manning's albums and Marek Arnold on Sax are essential to the band as are so many others involved. The full cast is available on the Manning page under the new release section.

Sometimes overlooked, Manning have produced another gem of an album that is enjoyable from the first listen. After 14 releases it could be easy to assume that this is just another release but that isn't the case and there is much here for the fans as well as the newcomers.

Grab a copy from the Manning website and see what you're missing.

Maybe it's time for a change?



'The Root, the Leaf and the Bone'

Visit <http://www.guymanning.com/2009site/albums/14/index.html> for further details
'The Root, The Leaf and the Bone' is available from 07-10-2013 and can be pre-ordered now.