

Kev Rowland – Progressive Archives (Sept 2013)

In late 2012, Guy started formulating the idea about writing a concept album about a faded village that has become lost beneath the march of progress, and started creating pieces based around these themes. However, he soon found that if he kept tightly to the theme then he was too restricted, so instead moved away from the original idea, although many of the songs are still about the nature of change in one way or another.

When I played this for the very first time I was surprised how 'warm' the album is, almost like a wonderful comfort blanket, and all I wanted to do was to wrap the music around me. Guy will always find himself compared to Tull, due both to his vocal and musical style, and if I was to think of this as something from Ian Anderson then this would fit right in the middle of the Seventies, although there is much more saxophone used and not nearly as much flute.

On this his 14th album, Guy provides Acoustic 6, 12 & Classical Guitars, Bass, Diddlybow, Drums, Incantation Bell, Keyboards, Mandolin, Percussion, Samples, Lead & Backing Vocals and as well as his band of David Million (Electric & Acoustic Guitars, Banjo), Julie King (Vocals), Kris Hudson-Lee (Basses) and Rick Henry (Percussion) he has plenty of guests to further assist him in filling out the sound.

It took me a while to get used to the keyboard sound, which is often like that of the old electric pianos, and in turn this gives the album quite a dated feel. But, the more I played this the more I found that instead of being a detraction it instead became an integral part of the whole sound. Each of the nine songs has a real story to tell, but the one that really hits home for me is "The Forge" which muses romantically about the loss of craftsmanship in favour of mass production. Lyrically the song is wonderfully evocative, "The bellows & the furnace dance in furious harmony, Wind & flame on a bed of earth in elemental symmetry, Born out of sweat in a battle to commence, Grappling with the raw flow with just his implements". Musically the rhythm and cadence of the song also makes one feel that they are in the presence of the blacksmith, hard at work with his iron and fire. In many ways this reminds me of Show of Hands, although more proggy and less folkly.

Over the years I have been lucky enough to hear all of Guy's solo albums, plus of course those he has recorded with groups like The Tangent, and this stands up as one of his finest releases. He brings together classic song writing and great lyrics, with emotion and drive, creating music that takes plenty of influences from the Seventies but making them relevant for today. Although the songs contain many different styles and instrumentation, they are tied together with Guy's soft vocals as he brings the listener in closer and creates an intimate experience.

Superb. ★★★★★