

KOID9 Interview with Guy Manning

Hello Guy, even if you're probably not the most well known (prog) musician, your career last for about 20 years, can you introduce yourself to the French audience and present your work since Parallel or 90 degrees and your first solo work ?

Ok...deep breathe...here goes...a potted history....

I worked in a few local bands in the 80s and at one session recorded for the BBC, I used a studio run by a man called Andy Tillison. We got on rather well and later AT asked me to be a part of Parallel or 90 Degrees, but shortly after, that Po90 line-up reduced to really just AT and me. We started to pool equipment and wanted to test it out on something so decide to do some reworkings of songs by mutually loved Van Der Graaf Generator / Peter Hammill. From these sessions, an album "No More Travelling Chess" was born and we at first sold it on Cassette mail order before CYCLOPS records took it up and so it was released (in an enhanced form) on CD.

Running up to 1999, I was working abroad a lot and so had to quit Po90, but once back from there, I got in touch with Andy to help out on making a debut album for me "Tall Stories for Small Children". This was eventually released on CYCLOPS in 1999. Since then, I have released 14 more "solo" albums under the name MANNING, plus I was asked by Andy to get involved on the debut TANGENT album, "The music that died alone" and I stayed helping out for a further 3 albums and a live album before moving on.

As the last MANNING / tour was being done, I felt I needed a change and so looked about for other musicians /projects to with/work on. It was at that exact moment fortuitously, that Mark 'Truey' Trueack got in touch to ask if I would be interested in working on the debut United Progressive Fraternity (UPF) album. I happily said "yes!" and an album and short tour followed in 2014. For that project, Mark also asked if I could find other musicians. I immediately approached Marek (Arnold) who had played saxes for me on the latter MANNING albums and also Dan (Mash) who I knew from Tangent days. Both came aboard for the album/tour. (Fall In Love With The World) - Phew!

Can you tell us about the birth of Damanek?

How did you team up with from the band and how did you connect with far away people like Sean?

Following the end of the UPF tour, I settled into a writing phase for what I thought would be the next UPF album. However, by the time Mark was ready to go to work he had already decided to get a more local UPF band up and running and also to work more closely with Steve Unruh. My proposed pieces were not really needed at that time.

I thought these were pretty good songs tbh and did not want to waste them, so I approached Marek & Dan to see if they would help me launch a brand new band to record these, they agreed. We picked 8 songs from the pile of new demos and I named us DAMANEK (after DA for Dan, MAN for Manning and EK for Marek)...but I also really wanted a keyboards maestro as I knew one was needed for these compositions. I approached my friend Sean (Timms) the 'other half' of Unitopia (with Truey) and he said he would love to help. DAMANEK was now a quartet.

We played the UK's Summers End X as an unknown band in 2016, released "on Track" the debut album in 2017 and now are releasing the follow up "In Flight" – ok up to date!!

Is Damanek only You, Marek and Dan or is it larger than that with all the people involved?

DAMANEK is primarily the quartet at its core, but we do use other great musicians as we need them.

These have included Luke Machin (Maschine, The Tangent, Francis Dunnery, Kiama), Brody Green (Southern Empire), Kev Currie & Julie King from the MANNING band, up and coming singer DavidB, Tim Irrgang (from UPF), Raf Azaria (from UPF), Antonio Vittozzi (Ex Soul Secret), Tzan Niko (up and coming fab guitar player), The Santucci Horn Section, a gospel choir and some special guest help from Nick Magnus and Phideaux!

What's your main priority now, Damanek or your solos albums? (how many btw, got 8 of them myself...)

DAMANEK is my main priority for now and as I said earlier, I have released 15 solo albums (plus lots of others in which I am featured)

On track was really well received, was it hard to write a follow-up? big challenge or easy one?

The hardest thing was for me to be patient! I had the pieces, I demoed these extensively but then it had to 'do the rounds' for the others to add/change/replace parts. Then it had to bounce back and forth between Sean and I as we got to grips with making the arrangements perfect and then Sean had to do the actual mix and supervise the Mastering. While I waited, I organised the artwork, updated the web site etc. in anticipation.

So, in essence for me, not an exhaustive hard task really! But I wanted the new album to be darker than the debut, so I set about trying to create those more melancholy atmospheres.

On track, In flight, on what will be your third effort (laughs)

Another 2 word title??? Maybe "More Stuff" (lol)

How do you work within the band, being most probably very far from each other? You're the main composer, but after ?

Well as I said, I demo my ideas thoroughly, even providing very sketchy sax parts for Marek! The players then dive in and rip out the parts they are to be responsible for and replace with better played versions and dexterous solos!

The parts are assembled by me in my UK based studio with parts submitted via DROPBOX. I get a working version of it ready. Once I think we have enough, for Sean, the project moves to his Studio in Adelaide for him to get stuck in on keyboards, production etc. I work closely with him on arrangements until we are both happy

You, Marek and Sean are respectable keyboards players, who's the main man behind the keys ? OK, the keyboards in the vast majority on both albums is Sean and I, and after that, if it sounds like a "hard to play" bit or a brilliant solo it is very likely to be Sean!! But much of my Strings, Trons, Organs etc. are still in there thankfully! Sean may however have taken my original part and replayed it (better!!).

Generally speaking, you're all multi instrumentalists, so who's doing what?

So hard to break it down for you, except if it's a Bass its Dan 99% of time, if a Sax (100% Marek!) For drums (Brody), for acoustic guitars, mandolins etc. (me), for electric guitar (you should be able to recognize Luke's style probably) and after that it gets too messy to itemise!

On track had a lot of societal and ecology concerns, what is the new album about? Moving around earth?

Yes ON TRACK dealt with some big issues! IN FLIGHT has no real concept or theme behind it, but it deals with stories about the human condition. You, as listener are the observer to events played out. Mainly, these are about Journeys or one type or another. So in some cases, the location is VERY important 😊

What is inspiring you? Can you explain to our readers what's behind the different tracks from the album? I especially love Big Eastern with the addition of oriental instruments and music inside classic Damanek sound.

Let's start with "Big Eastern" then, it's a 3 chapters journey that take the auditor from the poorest parts of China, so metimes ruined by earthquakes or dreadful weather, to Chinatown in San Francisco, where many Chinese have emigrated. It tells how these migrants tried to keep their culture and their beliefs. There are still many Chinese provinces today where life is extremely difficult. It's a way to draw attention to it.

Another important place: "Ragusa" which speaks of the maritime republic of Ragusa, of which Dubrovnik was the capital. Here is a parable, an image where an old man remembers the wonderful city of his youth, disfigured by industrialization, urban development and the market economy ... That said, Dubrovnik remains a very beautiful city, that's why it is chosen as an example.

"Skyboat" is a dystopia. Humanity is now at peace, wars are gone. The man has returned to a lifestyle based on agriculture. It's a reflection on this way of life and its longevity.

"The Crawler" talks about monsters in the closet, things that scare when darkness falls.

"The Crossing" tells the story of a family escaping the dangers of their present life. The father tries to save them by crossing a border knowing that he may not see them again. This is the story of many migrants today.

Finally "Moon-Catcher" is the cousin piece of "Cosmic Score" on On Track. The moon controls the water on the earth (the tides). The man is mainly composed of water, so I imagined that the moon could control us and that someone who could manipulate the moon could control the population ... Yes I know, it's weird, it came to me watching a starry sky one night.

What's your next plan after the release? Touring?

Touring Yes! Damanek and Southern Empire (plus Seven Steps to the Green Door on the European Dates) embark on an 8 day tour (3 Europe, 5 UK) - Details again on the website under 'Live' section.

How do you plan to render live all the complexity of the arrangements of your music? Sometimes I feel like listening to a 10 member band.

Well we will have to compromise and create simpler arrangements of pieces for the live show. Sometimes songs will be just too hard to replicate live which is a shame, but there are plenty of songs to go around. We will use a backing track for pieces where major element is missing (multi percussion where needed, the choir etc.) but the vast majority is live on the night.

Thanks a lot for your time, and I wish you the best for the release of In flight, another fine album.

Thank you for letting me talk about the music and band – a pleasure