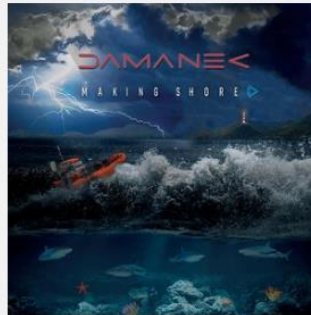


Interview with Guy Manning Feb 2023

Lazland

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DamaneK have recently released their third album, Making Shore. It is a wonderful work, and you can read my review by clicking <https://lazland.org/album-reviews-2023/damaneK-making-shore>. Shortly after publishing my review, I contacted Guy Manning and he very kindly agreed to do an in-depth interview with this website discussing all things DamaneK and the solo Manning project. Enjoy!

Thanks very much for agreeing to this interview, Guy. We will start off with some questions about the new DamaneK release, and then go into a bit of a potted history.

Making Shore is the third DamaneK release and it is fair to say that it has attracted several extremely positive reviews. You must be very pleased and proud.

Yes, and a little overwhelmed too. I have been very lucky to have received a fair amount of positive critical appraisal on all the albums that I have worked on...but with this new one, it seems to have gone up a notch and appears to be special to many people...thankfully.

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Well, to be honest, it was never approached with any real pre-determined game plan in mind...the tracks themselves seem to indicate the best running order for the albums, once done. Admittedly, some always seem to me to be openers or closers from early on

On "Making Shore", though, we wanted to present the material in two distinct parts because the nature of each part was, in my opinion, different in terms of subject matter and tone/atmospheres and so it seemed the best way to present it to the listener

You are responsible for the music and lyrics, whilst Sean shares the arrangements and is responsible for the knob twiddling duties. I am interested in how an album such as this is created, from the initial ideas to final production. So, a Brief History of Making Shore if you will, please!

Ok, it's a process we seem to follow each time. I sit in my home studio and compose the songs and lyrics and put them into a WIP demo format to discuss with Sean & Marek. These first cut pieces are placed into a working 'dropbox' that we all share. I get initial feedback on them and will update the demo as is necessary following debate/discussion.

These are in fact fully formed demos with keyboards, guitars, lead & BV vocals, programmed drums, bass, and even embryonic midi sax parts! Marek then starts to work on his additions...the sax arrangements and any bits of extra keys he'd like to suggest above my own. He sends them back to me and I set them into the working project for that piece and I edit, remove things etc. until I am happy with the new instrumental balance.

Once we reach this point and Sean is ready to accept the work, we transfer all the parts over to him and on his hard drive - these become the Master copies for any future updates from myself or Marek. Sean and I pass the arrangements back and forth in an incremental way until we are both happy and Marek (who has been receiving the dropbox updates) has no issues. Sean then starts to arrange the sessions needed from our lovely guest supporting cast until these are completed. Again, the demos pass back and forth until we are all ready for Sean to start into mixing it all. The mixes are reviewed systematically until all needed changes, updates, arrangement/instrument/vocal levels are addressed, and the album pieces are all deemed to be complete and ready to be mastered for CD.

Sounds busy...! It is!! and that's when it all runs smoothly without pandemics, studio moves, illnesses, clashes of day job availability!! Hence the delays since the "In Flight" album.

All I must do then is look into the artwork, samples, website updates, promotional videos etc & etc.

Phew!



(Note from website owner – I sometimes think that we as fans or reviewers forget, or do not even realise to begin with, the huge amount of work which goes into making an album. It is not just the expense, although that is a factor for me and is the reason I prefer to buy rather than stream, but the dedication involved. The incredible way that technology is utilised, and this is a wonderful example of how tech enhances our lives, and the inevitable compromises which are necessary in making a piece of musical art as a collective, something which is in the news now following Roger Waters' comments about his erstwhile bandmates. All of this before you even get to promoting the album, doing interviews, playing it live, and everything else associated with the business).

Let's have a chat about the individual tracks on the album. It opens with A Mountain of Sky. Why the Himalayas? What was the inspiration behind this, please?

Good question! The honest answer is that the title popped into my head first and I liked it...then I started to formulate what it might be about. So, Everest; why not? 29 thousand feet removed from all the nonsense that Man is creating below...War, famine etc. The Mountain cares not, it is timeless...and yet we try to reduce that majesty by claiming that it has been "conquered"! This made me laugh...in what way is it conquered? It is unaware and is uninterested...it is only the fragile egos of men that seek to bolster self-worth with thoughts of domination. Futile really...

In my review, I referred to this track being a gorgeous eclectic mix of styles, and I meant eclectic in the true meaning of the word as opposed to the somewhat generic "eclectic prog" category used by some websites and commentators. This has been a feature of your career, but at the core of what you do is a vital sense of melody. I would be really interested in hearing from you your main musical influences and how they impact upon your work.

There was never a lot of music in the house growing up. The home LP box consisted of a few Frank Sinatra albums and classic movie soundtracks. So, I guess subliminally, the sense of the big screen grandiosity of memorable show tunes was probably ingrained there. My mum insisted that I take piano lessons which I hated and rebelled against...until she gave in, and these stopped. Only later, finding an old classical guitar in my parents wardrobe (still wrapped in plastic), did I seek to train myself, learn things, and to return to the dusty upright piano we still owned.

After that, it was meeting other people and their sharing of music with me that had the influential effect. My earliest loves were Jefferson Airplane, Wishbone Ash, Lindisfame, Alice Cooper...

Things shot up a level once I met my (still) best friend Simon...he had gotten into music well before me and had a big LP collection...through him I first heard Jethro Tull, Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart, Deep Purple, Colosseum, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, Free and many more and then, together, we went on to discover the Canterbury bands like Hatfield & the North, Caravan plus singer songwriters such as Joni Mitchell, John Martyn, Roy Harper, Genesis, Yes, ELP, Gentle Giant, the fusion bands Weather Report, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return to Forever...and the journey still continues to this very day!

I blame Andy Tillison for my love of Van Der Graaf Generator and Peter Hammill

Back2Back is a serious commentary. As we do this interview, the so-called Doomsday Clock has moved a wee step closer to midnight. Concerns about the damage to our beautiful world has been a feature of your words and music for a long time, but I took from this track a sense that you are a glass half full type of chap, as opposed to doom mongering, that we can still get our act together to make positive choices. Please do share your thoughts with my readers.

This is a song about the threat of over population. Limited resources and climate change are a growing threat. Not sure what answers we have to address this other than laws limiting numbers of children, which would be awful...

Most of my songs (hopefully) tell us that we can still do something about all these things, we still have a little time and urges us to band together and address them...or at least it puts the central characters, that the listener can empathise with, into the very heart of the narrative (be it Elephants, US and Chinese Farmers, Sailors, Dementia sufferers - whatever)

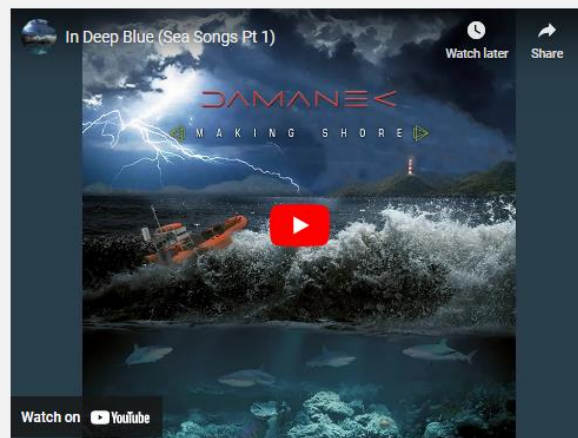
Noon Day Candles. You and I are of the generation which was hit between the eyes by that terrible report by Michael Buerk on the Ethiopian famine, but subsequently inspired by the efforts of Geldof & Ure and a host of stars to send relief – basically, humanity at its best. Yet, as your lyrics state, we still cannot put food on the table of every child born – humanity at its worst. This website is not a political one, but cultural, but I was struck by the single words from Argument to Void, exemplifying the frustrations every reasonable human feels at the weakness of our leaders to deal with these issues. Please provide my readers with your thoughts behind the track. I am especially interested in hearing your feelings on the fact that your obvious anger is understated on the music – I feel this puts across the raw emotion and empathy far better than a shouting, grungy rant.

A song which contrasts the stark cold voices of disagreement with more a heartfelt plea to consider life balance when dividing the spoils of increased technologies. The message is one that seeks to say that each and every ONE voice calling out about inequality has value even if it feels sometimes that there is no point in being that single voice...you are NOT alone....one candle may be dwarfed by the midday sun, but it still burns bright and powerful and in the same way a single voice still helps the message to become a choir.

There is frustration for sure in the track, more than anger I feel.

In my review, I stated that Americana must be inspired by Steinbeck. Was it, please?

No, not directly, though I have read Steinbeck of course and even used a sampled quote from 'The Grapes of Wrath' (Henry Fonda) on my "The Cure" album. Americana is about climate change again and the everyday plight of mid-western US farms to survive against the changing forces of nature. The farm in the story has been passed down through generations and the current family are struggling but held together through family love and belief.



The wonderful Marek Arnold

I love In Deep Blue. You talk of your youngest son, who has Asperger's Syndrome, having a pop at scuba diving. My son has the same condition, and I think that much of the modern cultural narrative around it tends towards the negative, whereas I think we would agree that there are so many positives, and it is the love and positivity which shines through which is so telling.

Yes, the only personal 'lived through' tale on the album. His choice to do this thing and to tackle it on his own really surprised us, we saw that he had grown up and could cope now and we were proud.

On this, Marek's sax is simply beautiful, and the backing vocals combine to create a wall of sound. This is probably a good point to ask about the creative input into DamaneK by this supremely talented musician. Please, wax lyrically about Marek Arnold!

Marek brings a unique musicality to my songs and arrangements. He also has the annoying habit of being able to hear a clashing note on some instrument buried several layers down in a mix when the rest of us are oblivious to it! I always am slightly worried about 'over egging' the album with too many sax solos...so we have this way now of making the sax arrangements more ensemble like...his use of layered or duetting sax parts is fabulous and these are an extremely important part of the DamaneK sound...

In Deep Blue is one of two "sea songs" – why the sea?

To make things appear to be a continuation and not just random, harking back to the earlier albums as well, I will sometime group pieces together...Heaven Songs, Sea Songs etc. like a growing canon of works based on similar backgrounds/themes.

Reflections on Copper is stunning. It is quite easily the finest song dealing with the tragedy of dementia I have heard. At the risk of potentially opening wounds, I cannot imagine that this piece is anything other than one based upon personal experience. Your commentary on it would therefore be very interesting.

My mother is now mid-90s and her memory is getting worse weekly...I have not had to deal with full on dementia myself yet, thankfully, but I can empathise with those that have and can place myself into the character of someone struggling to retain their past. Normally our memories shine clear and bright reflecting back at us like a polished mirror, but in this case, the mirror is made of copper, so the image is distorted, duller, unclear.

Crown of Thorns is interesting in that it talks of devastation on the coral reefs not by mankind, but of a natural force in the shape of a starfish when that population grows out of control. Where did the inspiration for this track come from, please?

My reading about world issues in nature, I guess. I do lots of research when I am writing lyrics so that I am more confident about the content and accuracy of what I am singing about. This problem was something that I found when looking into the Great Barrier Reef and seemed both worrying and interesting. So, I am singing from the POV of the coral/undersea creatures here.

And, so to Oculus. I would love to hear the inspiration and story behind this epic track. In doing so, I would quote from the words I placed in my review, namely that this fantasy is rooted in the real world, perhaps from a reflection on self, or from an event such as the pandemic and coming out the other side, vowing to do things differently in the future.

This set of songs tell a specific linear story (see www.damanek.com and look for the Oculus page for this). It is a real mash up of literary sources/influences: Lewis Carroll, HG Wells, Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allen Poe, the Wizard of Oz, Joni Mitchell etc.

The idea started with a thought about what would happen when looking in a mirror, if the reflection did not match with what was actually behind us and the ideas ran from there. It's a gothic escapist piece of fiction told in four acts with a motif driven overture to kick off the proceedings. The fanciful concept of being able to sample variations of your own life, based on different events and decisions that had splintered away from the one 'real' path was quite intriguing.

However, our 'hero' narrowly escapes a terrible fate and realises it is better to live out and make a one best life than to chase illusions.

Also shamelessly quoting from my own words, I expressed my opinion that this track is thoroughly modern. Yes, there are clear and loving nods to classic prog and rock of days gone by, but I get the impression that the three of you would rather be thought of as 2023, 21st century, musicians with stories to tell and music that is pushing boundaries forward, as opposed to living off past glories. As part of your answer to this question, please do tell us just how Guy Manning is in February 2023 and what you are looking forward to creatively, musically, and in life.

At the moment, I am ok, but my health has been better...I am having a little rest from music writing right now as we have only just released the new album...but no doubt I will get bored soon and get back into it.

What that will be is too early to say!

I am going to ask some questions now about the past. I could quite easily write another ten pages minimum of questions about your career because it has been long and extensive. I will, therefore, try to make it a potted one. Let's deal with Damanek first. The name comes from DAN Marsh, Guy MANning, and MarEK Arnold. I believe that the project started after your United Progressive Fraternity project could not continue. Please inform my readers of the genesis of Damanek, the reasons why you disbanded your own Manning band, and how Sean Timms came to be involved.

I think Manning had run its course really and I wanted a chance to work more collaboratively, rather than control every aspect of everything myself.

At the same time, fortuitously, Mark Trueack had contacted me asking if I'd like to be involved in his new 'United Progressive Fraternity' project...I had met "Truey" at Summers End Festival in 2010 when he was performing with Unitopia (and Sean of course).

So, I joined up and brought Marek (Arnold) and Dan (Marsh) into the initial line-up. We recorded the "Fall in love with the World" album and went in a short European promo tour. The tracks that had then written for a potential follow up UPF album were deemed not needed in the end as Truey had started close working with Steve Uhrh.

Marek, Dan & I decided to do our own thing with my tracks and so Damanek was born, but I wanted a much better keys player, so I contacted Sean and he enlisted! Sean is crucial to what we do, not only a great keys player but a fab producer too...we trust him implicitly.

The debut album was On Track in 2017. I want to concentrate on two pieces of music from that wonderful album. Firstly, Long Time, Shadow Falls. This track could almost be the dictionary definition of fusion - it has exceptional jazz, blues, classic rock, and prog and is deeply listenable and clever. A statement of intent?

Everything I write will be a blending of styles, I think. I write intuitively and instinctively. "Long Time, Shadow Falls" is a piece about the endangered animal life in Africa, through poaching and tribal migration/starvation. The promo video we did (please find it on our Damanek YouTube channel) really sets the scene for this one beautifully, and all told from the animals' point of view.

Madison Blue is delicate and quite beautiful. I take it as being a love song at heart. Your thoughts would be very welcome.

This is more about letting go of someone you love to enable them to go out into the world hoping they will live out their dreams but keep on touch!



Sean Timms

On the sophomore album, *In Flight*, I have *The Crawler* on as I write this question. I think the same thing tonight as I did the first time I heard it, and that is that damned with faint praise word, "catchy".

To me if the song is not memorable, we have failed and missed an opportunity. A 'catchy' melody or hook is essential to me for achieving that.

Skyboat is very similar in this regard. But they are – you have a definite pop sensibility in your music, and I am interested in what you feel is a commercial success for your music. I long ago despaired of intelligent music conquering the popular music charts, but this track, to these ears, exemplifies all that is good about your approach to song writing. Are "sales", radio play, and the rest considerations for you when you produce your music? In addition, how important are *Giant Electric Pea* to your operations?

I never think about sales per se when writing or releasing music...it's more to do with the 'will it be liked and appreciated?'. I will never be able to retire on the proceeds from my albums or the *Damanek* albums, so it is never going to be a real issue for me!

GEP were the only label interested in us at the time that we needed a home. We are very grateful that they had enough faith in us to put up some money to get the music released. It would be nice on occasion if they had more time and resources to help me promote the band, but we'll see where it all leads. GEP handle the pressing and distribution of all the albums...so my days of putting CDs into jiffy bags and going off to the Post Office are over (mostly)

The epic on that album is *Big Eastern*. It is superb, but in this interview, I want to concentrate, please, on one lyrical passage from the track. You talk of us lacking for nothing, but still craving more. I find this very apt and knowing. It summarises the modern consumer and corporate culture which causes so much environmental, physical, and mental damage so well. I would be grateful if you could expand on your thoughts here, please.

I think we can become preoccupied with material gratification above spiritual matters at the expense of all around us (these things can be close to us or/and out there in the wider world).

When we lose sight of what actually makes life worth living by surrounding ourselves with quick wins, easy fix distractions, it all comes at a cost.

So, to the musical journey of *Guy Manning*. Born in *God's Own County*? You started off playing at school and played in a few bands in *Leeds*. We spoke earlier about what music inspired you. In the 1980's, it is fair to say that a love of progressive rock was not a passport to success with the hottest ladies, but I would love to hear about your experiences in local clubs playing live and the audience reactions. What did you play?

I was always a fish out of water doing the wrong type of music at the wrong times! We had a theatrical outfit (like *Alice Cooper*) at the start of punk – good music but the wrong thing to promote...playing small pubs/clubs...lugging amps up fire escapes into small-staged rooms to play to 100 people. Our friends/family turned up out of loyalty and we got some good local press...but it was like walking up hill through mud all the time...so I started to just write whatever I felt like, in any old style and then looked to get it released...again I had no luck so I pressed it on CD myself and went mail order...

Luckily a proper label (*CYCLOPS*) then came along, and we officially released "*Tall Stories for Small Children*" and the rest is history as they say

So, let's concentrate for a little while on *Manning*, your band. Formed in 1999, between that year and the disbanding of the project in 2014, you only missed releasing annual new studio work once, in 2008. That really is an incredible work rate. Given the delicious music that you produced throughout that period, how on earth did you stay so creative for so long?

Well, boredom drove me. I really like writing songs and so I just kept doing it. Also, considering that I really was a very small fish in a very small pool, the only way I could continue to get even a little bit of attention was to keep releasing material. I wrote songs prior to 1999 and have continued to do so ever since to the present day.

If I were to ask questions about all your output, this interview would take up the digital equivalent of an encyclopaedia. I have this past week had a lot of fun revisiting some old favourites and sampling some new stuff as well. Let's start with *Songs from the Bilston House*. I love the longest track on the album, *Pillars of Salt*, in which I hear some loving nods to classic 60's pop/rock.

Your *Manning* material and now with *Damanek* does tend to the more melodic and accessible end of the progressive spectrum – is this a fair comment?

Pillars of Salt owes a debt of respect to *Al Stewart* and my favourite album of his "*Past, Present & Future*". An album that taught me the importance and power of doing some research into your subject matter. From that informed point of view, you can produce a better, more succinct, and focused lyric. "*Pillar of Salt*" follows that tradition comparing the changing times/events of the late 60s' especially *Woodstock* and *Altamont* (two sides of the same coin)

For me, melody and a good lyric and something to say or a story to tell make up the thing I want to do the most and best.

I have embedded for my readers *Inner Moment*. It is simply a beautiful song. From the abandoned house on the title track opener to this wonderful closing piece, with the mournful *Fairbairn* fiddle, could you please provide us with the lyrical and musical inspiration behind this work?

This piece was written for someone who had a period of being somewhat 'lost', and I think I helped him get through. The song was about putting one foot in front of the other and taking the first steps out into a new place.

You followed up this album with the critically acclaimed Number Ten. What hit me immediately about the album, and revisiting it today, were the lyrics on An Ordinary Day. The contrast between the album cover and the high power and political shenanigans of that famous door to this paean to working class, decent, people with their noses to the glass. I love my ordinary life, and I get the impression that this song pretty much exemplifies your approach to the true heroes of our society (with their ordinary problems)?

Yes, indeed. Sometimes as we move from the ordinary to the extraordinary, we lose sight of our values...a warning I would give any person in 'power'/influence.

Most of us have 'ordinary' (though not unimportant) lives and daily struggles and this lyric was almost an observational poem about all that. Looking at the people, their daily working lives/routines, the clock ticking away, nature outside being watched through office glass windows etc.

I am afraid to say that Charlestown was the last album of yours I purchased from the Manning project (more below), but that 35-minute epic is stunning.

A disgrace! 😞 there are a few good ones that you have missed! The follow up (to "Anser's Tree") 'Family tree' based concept album, "Margaret's Children" for a start!

I have embedded it below and ask my readers to sit back, take a break from work, and immerse themselves in your words whilst listening to this incredible achievement. It is the story of a sailor lost at sea - please tell us that story.

Well it is best to hear that track and try and work it out in my opinion! In essence, it follows the fate of a vessel leaving Charlestown bound for Bristol, the journey, and events (tragic in places) and what happened to all those aboard the 'Water Witch'.

An album I missed, and only caught up with this week, is The Root, The Leaf, and The Bone. I have rectified this gap in my collection by getting it from your Bandcamp page at <https://guymanning.bandcamp.com/>

This is pastoral rock wrought large. I love the mellotron at the end of the title track and I think that this album is a homage to folk rock of old, but also delightfully fresh, and about as warm an album as one is likely to hear. Your music talks a lot about the country, the climate, the sea, so how does your life and the nature around you influence your thinking?

Sadly, not a lot, especially of late under lockdown.

As I have said, most of my journeys are in my head supported by research and reading into things.

My Yorkshire heritage and the surrounding moors and hills has had an influence on me and will continue to do so. I am lucky to live where I do but I would never promote the thought that I am the primary promoter/inheritor of this place, using it as a back rest to give some gravitas to my own back story.

The Sea has always been a source of fascination too, be it on the East Coast of Yorkshire trips from my youth or on the sandy beaches of a Greek Island ("The Ragged Curtain" album was deeply inspired by my time on Rhodes, for example)

Why did you take the decision to halt your solo project and move again to a collective in Damanek?

As I said earlier, I grew tired of being the designated driver. I wanted someone else to share the wheel with me for a while.

So, what is next for your fans? I hope that Damanek continues to go from strength to strength, but is there anything else in the pipeline?

We will wait and see! It's too early to plan another Damanek album. Sean has a busy year ahead, so we are giving him the space he needs.

Meantime, as I wait, I have a batch of other new pieces which I am exploring with the help from some of my other musical pals. This outfit is called "The Patchwork Alliance" and we'll see how this matures. There is no rush for me to do anything, this is supposed to be a no pressure, as and when, let's see endeavour!

To conclude, I am exceptionally grateful to you for agreeing to this interview.

Great to be able to explore some of these things in detail, my thanks to you.