

Manfred Mann

With over 50 years in music Manfred Mann has lived through all of the major changes the industry has experienced: the 60s pop boom, prog rock, punk, the new romantics and boy band mania. He has successfully re-invented his career on a number of occasions, riding the 60s pop wave, experimenting with heavy jazz rock and launched his own prog band (as a way of being able to escape the restrictions of the three minute pop song) whilst still managing to score a number of hits with his new band, including a No 1 in the States. From the outset Manfred has been best known as an interpreter of other performers' material, often selecting obscure or undiscovered tracks and adding his own interpretation, resulting in a very different take on the source material. Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Mike Heron, Sting, Paul Weller, Del Amitri, Super Furry Animals, Abba plus many more have all been given the Manfred treatment resulting in many memorable singles, album tracks and live songs.

Manfred Mann (born Manfred Lubowitz) was born in Johannesburg, South Africa on 21 October 1940. A mainly self-taught jazz pianist, he had private lessons with John Mehegan of Juillard School (New York) who passed through South Africa, and Professor Hartmann of the University of the Witwatersrand. In late 1961 he moved to the UK, primarily to get away from South Africa and to develop his talents outside of his home country. Manfred played jazz piano and taught music and harmony theory and it was during this time that he adopted the name Manfred Manne for his writing for Jazz News. The name was derived from another jazz performer, the drummer Shelley Manne. The 'e' would eventually be removed to become Manfred Mann.

During the 1960s, Manfred was a founder member of the hugely successful group Manfred Mann (using his name at the suggestion of their producer). A string of chart hits followed in both the UK and the US. It was during this time that Manfred first showed his talent at interpreting other people's material with hits obtained from songs such as 'Do Wah Diddy Diddy' (The Exciters), 'Just Like A Woman' and 'Mighty Quinn' (Bob Dylan) and 'Pretty Flamingo' (Mark Barkan).

Frustrated with the limitations and image of being seen purely as a hit singles band the group split in 1969. Manfred and Mike Hugg formed their next band, Manfred Mann Chapter III in 1969 and over the next 2 years or so played a brand of jazz rock that was far ahead of its time. The costs and constraints of Chapter III led to its eventual demise and Manfred parted ways with his long time collaborator Mike Hugg.

The British prog rock movement came into being during the late 60s; generally featuring keyboards and guitar virtuosity, the approach always consisted of longer songs, expressive playing styles and heavy musical statements with meaningful lyrics. Manfred's new band was formed with no guidelines or ideas but mainly to play whatever they felt like playing; it was coincidence that the band was seen as part of the prog rock movement as Manfred had been an improvising musician long before this style of music was recorded. In 1971 he formed his new band, a four-piece called Manfred Mann's Earth Band, and immediately took them out on tour. The group rapidly developed a reputation as a fine live band and released a string of albums over the next few years. 1973 saw their first chart success with 'Joybringer', which was based on an arrangement of Gustav Holst's 'Jupiter, Bringer of Jollity'. Classical references in his music would also become a recurring theme over the following years.

1975 saw the first line-up change in the band that was followed by the hugely successful

album 'The Roaring Silence' released in 1976. Bruce Springsteen's 'Blinded By The Light' was given the full treatment and to this day is hailed as a superb interpretation, very different to the source version. The track reached No 1 in the US and No 6 in the UK. The follow up album 'Watch' included the band's other major hit, 'Davy's On The Road Again', a Manfred interpretation of a Robbie Robertson/ John Simon song, again showing his ability to spot a song and enhance it. 'Watch' established Earth Band as a major act in continental Europe.

Further albums followed, and in 1987 Manfred took time out to experiment with new songs. Encountering a book on North American Indians he recorded his first solo album 'Plains Music' (his personal favourite), scoring a No 1 hit in his native South Africa with the single 'Sikelele'.

For over 40 years there were regular tours of Europe and Manfred has continued to find new songs to interpret, revisiting old friends including Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen as well as new artists such as The Super Furry Animals; he is continually experimenting with music whilst at home or on the road. During this period other artists were (re)discovering Manfred's catalogue and a large number of samples from early recordings were finding their way on to new releases, including Massive Attack, The Prodigy, Disco Boys, Michael Mind, GLC, Peedi Krakk, Kanye West and recently Sharam.

2014 sees the release of his second solo album, 'Lone Arranger', which employs two approaches. The first uses other people's samples of Manfred's earlier tracks. Kanye West sampled 'You Are – I Am' on his track 'So Appalled' and in return Manfred has completely rearranged and changed the track which now appears as 'Hands In The Air'. He has also improvised and played over the tracks by The Prodigy and Disco Boys, adding to them. The second approach is using his talents to provide different takes on very well known 'anthems' of modern pop and rock. By his own admission, Manfred has recorded hugely familiar songs such as 'Light My Fire', 'We Will Rock You' and 'Nothing Compares To You' as a challenge. He says "I chose the songs deliberately as a challenge to alter these tunes and to change elements freely, leaving sections out because the listener's mind fills in the missing bits. On some of them I did not use the lyrics because people in a sense provide this as they listen to the tunes."

When will he hang up his keyboards? In his own words, he will carry on playing as long as the phone keeps ringing and people want to listen to his music.