

Al Stewart – Bio

Al Stewart aka Alastair Ian Stewart was born in Glasgow, Scotland on 5th September 1945. His father, Alastair Stewart, a WWII RAF pilot was killed in action during March 1945, aged twenty-five. Following his birth, baby Al and his mother lived with his paternal grandfather, a bank manager, in Greenock, near Glasgow. When Al was three, Stewart's English born mother, Joan, decided to relocate south of the border and she settled in London, moved to Wilmcote [Stratford Upon Avon] and finally made Bournemouth her home. In his teens Al attended public school in Gloucestershire. During this period, he showed an interest in music, bought an electric guitar and began writing songs. After leaving school, through the second half of his teens, Al was, for a short time, a member of Tony Blackburn's band, The Sabres. Blackburn later enjoyed a successful career as a pirate radio and Radio 1 dj. In Bournemouth, Al was also a member of The Trappers and Dave LaKaz and the G Men.

On February 1st 1965, Al passed his driving test. The following day he moved to London with the intention of joining a pop band. Having gone to meet a friend at the folk music venue, Bunjies, he ended up playing one song – Dylan's "The Times They Are A-Changing" - scored a residency and, literally overnight, became a folk musician. It was only late February 1965. Armed with an Epiphone guitar, Al was soon performing in folk clubs across London and the south-east counties. During those early days in London, Stewart roomed with two visiting American musicians, Paul Simon and Jackson C. Frank. Frank's girlfriend at the time was Sandy Denny, then, still a part time singer and full time nurse. With one Stateside duo album under his belt, in England, Simon cut a solo album for CBS and produced Frank's self-titled solo debut aka "**Blue Run The Game.**" Al made his recording session debut when he contributed to Frank's "Yellow Walls." These were heady days for folk music, with the transition from traditional to contemporary sounds, enhanced by a rock beat, in full swing. In 1966 Stewart, now managed by Roy Guest, signed a recording deal with Decca Records but only one single "The Elf" b/w "Turn Into Earth" [+], released that August, resulted from the relationship. By the following year, like Simon & Garfunkel, Al was a CBS recording artist and his heavily orchestrated eleven-song debut "**Bedsitter Images,**" released on October 6th, garnered good reviews but sold poorly. The album featured the seven-minute long closing track "Beleeka Doodle Day." When CBS issued a remixed version as "**The First Album,**" three cuts were dropped, and replaced by "Lover Man" and "Clifton In The Rain."

Al's second album "**Love Chronicles**" further stretched the creative envelope, with the eighteen-minute long album title cut, occupying most of Side 2. Toward the end of the song, Al delivered the "f" word. The session players included Jimmy Page and Ashley Hutchings [Fairport Convention], and the now defunct weekly UK music publication Melody Maker voted this folk-rock collection Album of the Year. While album sales increased, the numbers were far from significant, and that situation prevailed through his other CBS releases up to the Alan Parsons produced "**Modern Times**" [1975]. "Manuscript" on "**Zero She Flies**" was a precursor of Al's [ongoing] lyrical fascination with historic events, while he wasn't to know while penning "Electric Los Angeles Sunset" that he would eventually find fame and fortune once the American West Coast became his base. "**Past, Present And Future**" [1974] was exclusively given over to historic songs. The Janus label issued "**Past, Present And Future**" and "**Modern Times**" in the States.

When CBS didn't renew his contract, Al moved to California and working with Alan Parson, recorded "**Year Of The Cat.**" The album, a Janus release in the States, proved to be a worldwide success. RCA Victor issued the title in Europe. "**Time Passages**" and "**24 PCarrots,**" issued Stateside by Arista, also proved to be commercial successes. Al's road band during this period, A Shot In The Dark, cut one self-titled album for RSO Records in 1981. The double vinyl album "**Live – Indian Summer,**" his final Arista release, contained one side of new studio recordings and three sides of already familiar songs cut at L.A. venue, The Roxy.

The synthesiser rich "**Russians and Americans**" [1984] was a RCA release in Europe, and appeared on the Passport label in the States. The El Sugundo, California based Enigma Records issued "**Last Days Of The Century**" [1989]. Sadly, the label closed soon afterwards, and with album sales going from lean to practically zero, during this period, Al and his band ended up performing in venues such as Nevada casinos. Early the following decade Stewart took the decision to tour as a solo act, or, at most, with an accompanist. On the live recording "**Rhymes In Rooms**" [1992] Al was accompanied by, long time associate, Peter White on piano, accordion and guitar. Mesa issued the disc in the States, while in

the UK the release witnessed the start of an ongoing relationship with EMI. **Famous Last Words** [1993] was meant, at the time, to be Stewart's final album. Tempted to continue, "**Between The Wars**," his third Mesa release, marked the beginning of a studio/live partnership with Laurence Juber [Wings]. When the Mesa label collapsed, Stewart signed with Mirimar Records and Juber produced "**Down In The Cellar**," but the label suffered a financial collapse just prior to release, and it was left to EMI in Europe to save the day. These days, Al's CBS, RCA and Enigma back catalogue is available through EMI.

Stewart now lives in Marin County, California with his wife Kristine and daughters Violet [born 1994] and Daisy [born 1998]. Stewart is one of the world's acknowledged experts on French wine. The independent label Appleseed Recordings released "**A Beach Full Of Shells**" in the States in late June 2005, while EMI released the disc in other markets. In the early fall of 2005 EMI in the UK issued a five disc retrospective of Stewart's career, all the way from "The Elf" to tracks taken from the recent "**A Beach Full Of Shells**." "**Sparks Of Ancient Light**" which surfaced in the late summer of 2008 was also an EMI/Appleseed release, and the fourth consecutive recording to be produced by Laurence Juber.

Note.

[+] - Penned by Paul Samwell Smith, bass player in The Yardbirds and later an album producer.

Discography : "**Bedsitter Images**" [1967] ; "**Love Chronicles**" [1969] ; "**Zero She Flies**" [1970] ; "**The First Album**" reissue of 1967 debut with two different tracks [1970] ; "**Orange**" [1972] ; "**Past, Present And Future**" [1974] ; "**Modern Times**" [1975] ; "**Year Of The Cat**" reissued on CD in 2001 with bonus cuts [1976] ; "**Early Years**" two album retrospective of Al's early CBS recordings [1977] ; "**Time Passages**" [1978] ; "**The Live Radio Concert Album**" U.S. only promotional release [1979] ; "**24 PCarrots**" reissued on CD in 1992 with studio cuts from "**Indian Summer**" [1980] ; "**Live - Indian Summer**" double vinyl album of live and studio recordings [1981] ; "**Russians And Americans**" [1984] ; "**Last Days Of The Century**" [1988] ; "**Rhymes In Rooms**" live recording [1992] ; "**Famous Last Words**" [1993] ; "**To Whom It May Concern**" 2CD compilation of 1967, 1969 and 1970 albums + rare 1966 Decca single [1993] ; "**Between The Wars**" [1995] ; "**Seemed Like A Good Idea At The Time**" official fan club release, now out of print [1996] ; "**Live [At The Roxy Los Angeles 1981]**" CD version of the live recordings from "**Live - Indian Summer**" [1997] ; "**Down In The Cellar**" [2000] ; "**Time Passages Live**" a CD reissue of 1979 U.S. only promotional release, enhanced by one track [2002] ; "**A Beach Full Of Shells**" [2005] ; "**Just Yesterday**" 5 disc retrospective box set issued in UK [2005] ; "**Sparks Of Ancient Light**" [2008] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 05/05, 10/05 & 08/08.

[1075 words]