

# DVD REVIEWS

## FOLK: A film by Sara Terry

Sara Terry, the producer/director of FOLK, is an award winning journalist—print, public radio, and subsequently photojournalism. It is her second documentary. The project web site describes FOLK as: ‘a verite character study, part music documentary, part road trip movie—a multi-layered examination of three artists faced with the challenge of how to be heard in the 21st-century version of this distinctly American art form.’ Is it distinctly American?

FOLK opens and closes at the annual—late February—International Folk Alliance Conference in Memphis, Tennessee, albeit separated by 12 months. There we meet the central characters—Dallas based solo artist Dirk Hamilton, Austin’s Flying A’s—30-something husband and wife duo—Hilary Claire and Stuart Adamson, and the trio of California based John Elliott, Texas immigrant Raina Rose and New York’s Anthony da Costa, supported by Californian Andrew Pressman (upright bass—and, episodically, track them over a period of 12 months. On FOLK you see...

Indiana born, raised in Northern California, currently aged 63, Hamilton began making music professionally aged 15. An ABC and Elektra/Asylum artist during the mid/late 1970s, thrown off a Warren Zevon tour—not his fault—Elektra dropped him. He ceased making music for a time. Shades of Detroit’s Rodriguez lie in Dirk’s early 1990s discovery of his rock star status in Italy. For two decades his income has mainly come from touring there.

Dirk collides, head on, with unfamiliar ‘networking’ avenues at IFA, and recalls frequenting The Roxy in the 1970s—a rock club. Lacking a picture postcard listing his private IFA showcases he groans: ‘I grew up with managers. I think I got spoiled.’ In California, Dirk performs *Thug Of Love* in McCabe’s Guitar Shop, a long established Santa Monica folk venue, and wanders the beach area where he once lived. Former Rolling Stone reviewer Steve Pond describes Dirk: ‘Cranky and weird. He hated the music business.’ A friend from 30 years ago, Patti Hartman, locates him and begins directing his career. There’s archive film of Dirk and electric band, circa 1979. In NYC for a gig, he witnesses a protest march by young people. ‘This is like the sixties, I never thought I’d see it again.’ Dirk is seen performing in Italy. A year later in Memphis,

postcards in hand, he reflects: ‘I love everybody. I’ve learned.’

Both married previously, Hilary and Stuart Adamson are first seen at a private showcase. Hilary met Stuart at a Kerrville Folk Festival song circle circa 2005. She attended Kerrville Song School to learn to play guitar and they began working together. ‘He needed a harmony chick on his second album.’ Stuart: ‘We came together when we really needed each other.’ At the legendary Ardent Studio, Hilary records a vocal. Producer John Jennings (Mary Chapin Carpenter) calls her: ‘A force of nature,’ adding: ‘In a fair world, half the songs on this record would be big hits.’ In a tearful scene Hilary confides: ‘This whole music thing saved my life.’ She energetically co-helms an IFA house concert seminar, and is seen teaching an Austin school choir. Stuart reflects: ‘I was teaching full-time. I’ve been substituting some. Trying to keep my head above water then life happened.’

On local TV station K-EYE the duo perform. Driving home, they dream of appearing on Austin City Limits, Letterman, Saturday Night Live and even the Grammy Awards. There’s scenes from the Flying A’s debut on Kerrville’s main-stage. Financial pressures dictate Stuart return to teaching, while Hilary tours supported by Austin musician Danny Britt. Stuart: ‘I don’t want it to end.’ They go for marriage counselling. Hilary: ‘There were times when I thought I was going crazy. He had a really tough year.’ As for their music: ‘It’s not about the dollars at all. This is my life and I love it. It’s such a gift to have a husband and a partner in life and in music that feels the same way.’

At an IFA showcase the trio are seen performing Elliott’s *Love Found Lost* and Rose’s *Let Me Down Easy*, and subsequently

criss-cross the country ‘on tour.’ Eventually the focus falls on Austin based Raina and boyfriend Andrew. Raina: ‘I love playing with other people, I love harmonies. I miss that being solo, there’s nobody to sing with.’ Life as a folk musician: ‘The major labels are dinosaurs. The independents are wonderful, but there’s too many. The internet created a middle class of musicians, but also created lots of white noise. Any way to get above that, I will take. It’s a great life, but it’s not a great living.’ Andrew: ‘I was working for Apple and I quit a \$45K job to play music full time. Folk music.’ A pregnant Raina explains: ‘He’s always wanted kids, so we’re having a little folk baby.’ Emmet Rose Pressman arrives before the final credits roll.

Aged 11, Raina began playing guitar. Her father played guitar and penned songs, her mother wrote poems. ‘It didn’t occur to me there were people who didn’t do that.’ Told to go to the Kerrville Folk Festival, she recalled: ‘Why in hell would I ever go to Texas for anything. I went and absolutely fell in love with everybody I met there.’ Raina on songs: ‘They used to be the way people remembered their histories. Now I feel it’s the way people are figuring out their futures. To foster and build community around that is important.’ Raina and the future: ‘If we don’t start to make a living, we need to figure something else out. I want to continue playing music. I know Andrew doesn’t want to go back to work.’ With perfect grace adds: ‘I have gotten to play music for six years, that is amazing and I am so lucky. If I become a pre-school teacher, I’ll still feel incredibly lucky that I got to do it.’ FOLK closes with an IFA performance of Da Costa’s *The Last Call*. Seems appropriate ... **Arthur Wood**

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