



Scott Alarik **"All That Is True"** no label

For almost quarter of a century, based out of Boston, Alarik has established a reputation as a second-to-none writer on the subject of American folk music [of all shades and derivations] via his column in the Boston Globe, as well as contributions to Sing Out! plus the now defunct New England Folk Almanac. In tandem, Alarik maintained a career as a performing musician and recording artist, and **"All That Is True"** is his latest outing in the latter field. Stylistically and vocally, Scott brings New England performer Bill Staines to mind, and this subjectively varied twelve-track collection is composed of traditional numbers and Alarik penned originals, plus one cover song.

Alarik opens this collection with the trad. arr. cowboy love song "Colorado Trail" wherein the narrator reflects on the time he spent in Abilene with the beautiful Laura, although these days she's a fond, yet fading memory. Subsequent traditional numbers include "Fair And Tender Ladies" a 'caution on the subject of courting and the aftermath of engaging a false love,' the ghostly Child ballad "The Unquiet Grave" and the closing tracks "Pretty Saro" and "Rose Of Allendale." The former is a tale of unrequited love and parting, while, regarding the subject of love, the latter is rather joyous – in fact, precisely the opposite of "Pretty Saro." Folk music is littered with songs that pay tribute to the magnificent equine, and the Steve Gillette/Linda Albertano collaboration and racetrack epic "Molly And Tenbrooks," though penned some four decades ago, remains one of the best of its kind.

Time now to look at the half dozen Scott penned songs. In each of the four verses of "All That Is True" the confused [and lovelorn?] narrator explores 'the seasons of a relationship' and then closes with the doom-laden contention *"Every day, it's the same old song, Everything I do is wrong."* "Carolyna Moon" opens with a reference to the traditional cowboy ballad "The Streets Of Laredo," and goes on to relate how, Carolyna, the narrator's mother, always dreamt of living on a ranch in Montana, while "Edith Day" is a sad tale of love won and lost. Alarik was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Curious to relate, a stage actress [Broadway and London's West End] by the name of Edith Day was born in Minneapolis circa 1896 and died in London, England seventy-five years later.

Alarik returns to the annals of history and the American Revolutionary War for the lyric to "General Johnny." A general in the British Army, John Burgoyne and his expeditionary force of some 6,000 men surrendered to General Horatio Gates at Saratoga, New York on October 17th 1777. Alarik's narrator is a farmer turned foot soldier in Gates' army, who is shot in the arm during an engagement with Burgoyne's troops. The farmer compares his sad plight *"Now I've got the chills and my arm won't set, but who gives a damn for me?"* with the privileges enjoyed by Burgoyne and his officers following the British general's surrender. The love song "If It Wasn't For Mary" is similarly set in the past – during the early 20th century, around the long redundant copper mining area in Northern Michigan - although the principal subjective focus is on a promise made and kept.

Alarik actively campaigned against the draft during the late nineteen-sixties, and in his based-on-fact "Finest Are The First To Go" he focuses upon three dark periods in world history. A woman doctor and vociferous opponent of Nazism perishes as *"Jackboots echo through the dark Munich streets,"* then Scott travels back to Biblical times, immediately post Jesus' crucifixion, and witnesses the death of a young [Christian] blacksmith who refused to serve in Rome's army and, finally, back in modern times Alarik recalls the murder of Medger Evers in Jackson, Mississippi during June 1963. Tyranny, intimidation and bigotry are ills that mankind has succumbed to throughout history, and in the fourth and closing verse Alarik reflects, "how soon we all forget."

It's appropriate that the sub-title of this first-rate collection is **“folks songs old and new,”** and **“All That Is True”** was produced by Berklee College of Music alumni Hanneke Cassel. Cassel contributes fiddle and piano to a number of the tracks, and the other support players include Rushad Eggleston [cello], Greg Liszt [banjo] and Aoife O'Donovan [vocals] from the bluegrass band Crooked Still, Compass Records recording artist Jake Armerding [mandolin, guitar, vocals] and Eric Merrill [viola, violin].

Folkwax Score 7 out of 10

Arthur Wood.

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