

Al Stewart At 75

In April this year, legendary guitarist [Ritchie Blackmore](#) celebrated his 75th birthday. This month, singer-songwriter Al Stewart reached the same landmark. If you haven't heard of Al, why not?

He was born in Scotland on September 5, 1945, the posthumous son of a Royal Air Force volunteer. Named after his father, his widowed mother lived for a while with Al's paternal grandfather before relocating to England.



The story of his formative years has been written into some of his earlier songs, albeit at times in a round about or even a mystical way. The epic title track of his second album, *Love Chronicles*, goes into great detail, some would say too much detail, about his adventures in Swinging London where the Swinging Sixties was really a thing. His third album, *Zero She Flies*, includes *Manuscript*, the first song in the genre of historical folk-rock; this

sees him reminiscing about his boyhood and looking back on the outbreak of the First World War through the eyes of his grandmother.

In 1970, *Love Chronicles* was named *Folk Album Of The Year* by the now long defunct *Melody Maker*, but although his following albums were all successful, his big breakthrough did not come until 1976. If you have heard only one Al Stewart song, it is probably *Year Of The Cat*. Co-written with Peter Wood, who died in New York in 1993 aged just 43, the song was a massive hit on both sides of the Atlantic, reaching number 8 in the US charts. Although it didn't quite make the top thirty in the UK, it received a lot of airplay, the album going gold in the UK and platinum in the US.

This saw Al relocating to California; the following *Time Passages* album contains an enigmatic song, [*Almost Lucy*](#), the true subject of which can be discerned from its initials.

Al married late in life, his youth being haunted by Mandi, who is mentioned *en passant* and sometimes directly in many of his early songs. As with so many marriages today, especially of people in the entertainment business, his didn't last, but he and his American wife had two daughters, one of whom has followed in her father's footsteps. Daisy Stewart made her debut on cello playing with her Dad on December 17, 2011.

Al didn't release much new material in the 1990s, but the turn of Millennium saw him revitalised, including collaborating with Dave Nachmanoff - pictured with Al at Houston, May 16, 2014. Listening to Dave's own songs, the Al Stewart influence is all too apparent, especially [*The Loyalist*](#).

Last year, Al made a somewhat surprising return to his youthful electric roots, touring with a young band of acolytes The Empty Pockets. He played London's Cadogan Hall on October 9, [*showcasing some new songs*](#). Not that he had totally abandoned rock; both *Time Passages* and *24 Carrots* (recorded with Shot In The Dark) have heavy rock influences.

Subject to the lockdown (and nationwide riots when Donald Trump is re-elected), Al will be playing at least a few US dates next year. In the meantime, check out his [*official website*](#).

This [*alphabetical list*](#) is purely subjective but includes his greatest songs:

Class Of '58 (epic)

Elvaston Place (intensely personal)

Fields Of France

Laughing Into 1939

Love Chronicles (epic)

Manuscript

One Stage Before

Roads To Moscow (epic)

Shah Of Shahs

The News From Spain (intensely personal)

Year Of The Cat (the most famous).

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