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# Al Stewart Turns Seventy



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By Alexander Baron



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Earlier this year, veteran rock guitarist Ritchie Blackmore **turned 70**; today it is the turn of another guitarist, Al Stewart. He has occasionally played electric guitar, but Al's preference has always been for the acoustic instrument; he alludes to his electric days in his epic song *Love Chronicles* which was released way back in 1970.

Although he is a superb guitarist and occasional keyboard player – the latter for writing on rather than performing – and has an excellent voice, Al’s overwhelming strength is as a songwriter. His semi-autobiographical song *Manuscript* – which like *Love Chronicles* dates to 1970 – is acknowledged as the first one in the new genre of historical folk-rock.

The Al Stewart story is well documented, including in the dedicated biography by Neville Judd; in addition to his official website you can find the stories behind over eighty of his songs on [SongFacts](#), and some excellent live footage on the video hub of the world, YouTube.

If you are one of those people who is vaguely familiar with him and thinks *Year Of The Cat* is the pinnacle of his achievements, think again. For starters, check out the earlier and intensely personal *Elvaston Place*, the epic *Roads To Moscow*, the moving *Laughing Into 1939*, or *Shah Of Shahs* from 2008.

Although he hasn’t produced an enormous amount of new material in the past few years, he is continuing to tour. His two latest albums of said new material are *A Beach Full Of Shells* (2005) and *Sparks Of Ancient Light* (2008). Later this month he will be playing a couple of dates in Minnesota, and next month a couple in Toronto.

Last month, as well as playing in Nebraska for the first time in three decades, he spoke to a local newspaper, the *Hastings Tribune*, which claimed he was enjoying “an inexplicable resurgence in popularity”. Since when has the popularity of great music been inexplicable? Perhaps even more surprising, Al himself said he considered anything over the age of 64 to be “bonus time”, which begs the question, whatever happened to the Biblical three score years and ten?

Now that Al has reached that milestone, we can only hope that he will not only make eighty and then ninety, but produce some new material in the meantime, in spite of little things like family commitments. Al married relatively late in life and has two daughters, the youngest of whom plays cello, making her stage debut with Dad four years ago.

In later years, Al has worked with Dave Nachmanoff, who might just be his second coming. In spite of the dearth of new material, you can currently find a couple of live CDs/DVDs on his [official website](#), including one of the two performing together.

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