

# Sing Out!

Vol. 52 #2  
Summer 2008

Alastair Moock never fails to delight me. With each of his five albums, this Boston-based singer-songwriter has honed his signature ability to write songs that sound joyfully homespun and irreverent while also being painstakingly poetic and intricate. He's settled nicely into the role of a folkie raconteur, exploring the American vernacular from swing to blues to Appalachian mountain music and fitting each genre to the timeless themes of his lyrics. Those styles also fit perfectly with Alastair's voice, which is pitched somewhere between a rasp and growl: this is a voice made for vintage-sounding Americana.

There are no simple songs on *Fortune Street*; each grapples with hard times, deep feelings, or dramatic moments in history. The songs are also filled with internal rhymes, sly wordplay, and daredevil alliteration. In the hard times area, the bluesy title song paints a bleak picture of loneliness, and how even friends and lovers are simultaneously together and alone. "Roll On," about a woman having the courage to leave a marriage, juxtaposes the age old idea that there are plenty of fish left in the sea with the lack of the necessary energy to start anew and seek out new lovers. "Swing That Axe," a playful swing tune that could have been written by Jelly Roll Morton, crows that when times are hard and all your luck is bad, all you can do is "swing that axe."

The album is leavened with a mischievous honky-tonk blues about conflicted love, "Yin Yang Blues." In a growl reminiscent of vintage David Bromberg,, Alastair croons, "Misery loves company, and baby, you're the one for me / I thought I wanted happiness – I want you even more, I guess." Delightful. "Fishing Tales," a song for the son Alastair and his wife Jane were expecting (in fact, they underexpected – or is it overexpected? – and had twins last December) takes a similar tongue-in-cheek perspective on the journey towards the miracle of life. At the heart of the album are two historical ballads: "Woody's Lament," exploring Woody Guthrie's internal conflict between his family and the pull of the road, and "Cloudsplitter," a modal mountain dirge based on Russell Banks' novel about the life of abolitionist John Brown.

The entire effort is smoothed out by the sure hand of producer David "Goody" Goodrich, who also plays restrained and atmospheric lead guitar on most of the songs. The recording session, which was compressed into five 16-hour days at the Signature Sounds Studio in Connecticut, served this music well, as it left no room for overproduction and allowed the spontaneous spirit of the music to come through.

SS