

Al's Answers to Fans' Questions, February 2011
Submitted By Carol Vermilyea

Al graciously answered all of our recently accumulated questions before the show at the City Winery in New York, February 27th 2011.

Interviewer's note: many of the answers are short, sometimes just one word. We had limited time and a long list of questions. After the last question, Al elaborated a bit on some of the previous questions.

Q. Does the song Bad Reputation refer to anyone in particular?

No.

Q. On your albums, who writes the music for parts that are played or sung by musicians other than yourself?

A. It varies. Sometimes I do it, other times the musicians create their own parts, and sometimes it is the producer. Examples: I wrote the parts for the backing female vocalists on Mona Lisa Talking. When there is a lead guitarist, that person often writes his/her own part. When Laurence Juber is producing the album, he often writes the parts for backing musicians.

Q. When you refer to hoop skirts in A Child's View of the Eisenhower Years, are you referring to skirts that were often made from a circular piece of fabric and had a poodle appliqué on them?

A. Well, I didn't know about a poodle or any other designs, or how the fabric was cut, but yes, I'm referring to skirts that flare way out in a circular shape. (Al demonstrated by reaching both arms out to the side with his hands at about hip level.)

Q. In the song Ear of the Night, is there a significance to the phrase "military hair," other than that it rhymes with solitary air? Bob in PA notes that some military women have long hair which they put up for duty and let down for more, uh, relaxed times. He finds this type of hairstyle very sexy and wonders if "military hair" might refer to it

A. That phrase was primarily included because it rhymed with solitary air. Secondly, it refers to the short haircuts that many military women wear. The narrator of this song, as I imagined him, found short hair sexy. This says nothing about whether I myself find short hair sexy, or not.

Q. Regarding the song Year of the Cat, can you tell us anything about the musical collaboration between the late Peter Wood and yourself on this song?

A. Yes, Peter wrote the riff for most of the song, as well as the chords. I wrote the riff for the middle section of the song. [Al then told me which lines he was referring to. I think it was the lines starting with: "She looks at you so coolly, and her eyes shine like the moon and the sea," but I'm not absolutely sure since Al was talking faster than I could write.]

Q. Regarding the song Year of the Cat, are the lyrics based upon a true-life story?

A. No

Q. Is there any connection between the Year of the Cat girl and the In Brooklyn girl who came to study astrology?

A. No.

Q. One of the fans has a hazy recollection that some sportscaster once used the Lord Grenville seven-note riff (the one that appears prominently at the end of the song) as bumper music. Do you recall anything about this?

A. No, I don't remember anything about this.

Q. Was Night Train to Munich based to some degree on a movie by the same title?

A. No.

Q. Was Night Train to Munich inspired by the movies The Third Man or 39 Steps, or both?

A. No.

Q. Have you read anything historical by Antony Beevor?

A. I'm not sure. I know the name. Probably, but I couldn't give an exact title.

Q. As a songwriter, which of your own songs do you consider to be your greatest?

A. My answer to this would vary from day to day. One day it might be Old Admirals. Another day it might be The Dark and the Rolling Sea. A third day it might be Somewhere in England 1915. And there are some others.

Q. Regarding Modern Times, is there any sense in which the old friend in this song is your earlier self?

A. No.

Q. Regarding Modern Times, is there any sense in which you are voicing your own thoughts about your earlier albums or lyrics?

A. No.

Q. Regarding Modern Times, is there any sense in which you are trying to reconcile your earlier songs with your songwriting during the Modern Times period?

A. No

Q. Regarding Beleeka Doodle Day, the opening lines of this song are:

"I could have gone to Cambridge with Lionel, I think I tried to raise a pound
Just to see the University and see the sights she hung around."

Is this actually the first AI song to mention Mandi? Is Mandi the "she" that hung around?

A. No, these lines actually refer to Jenny, the same woman as in Samuel Oh How You've Changed. Jenny and Lionel were at Cambridge together. This song was written after Jenny committed suicide at the age of 23. I was thinking about visiting Cambridge with Lionel, sort of as a way of visiting Jenny's spirit.

Q: You have said that Jenny was incredibly beautiful. Did she look like anyone we might know?

A. Jenny looked something like Marianne Faithfull, only she had ginger colored hair.

Q. Is there a chance you might work again with Alan Parsons? Would you consider asking Alan to produce one of your future albums?

A. I talk with Alan with somewhat regularly. My sense is that he is semi-retired, though I could be wrong about that. I also have the feeling that producing may be in the past for him, though again I could be wrong. I suppose anything is possible.

Q. You have done several concerts/initiatives for charity. Recently there came into my hands a record by Jonathan Elias "Requiem for the Americas-Songs from the Lost World" performed by various artists for charity in 1990. Among all the people involved, in the column of performers is mentioned Al Stewart. Is this you? And if so what was your role?

A. Yes, that Al Stewart is me. I was invited to sing on this recording, but somehow it never happened. I guess they forgot to take my name off the list of performers.

Q. Were you ever contacted to be involved in charity projects after Live Aid? I mean the British Band Aid (Do They Know it's Christmas?) or the American USA for Africa (We Are the World.)

A. No, I was never asked. If I had been asked, I would have done it.

Q. Do you know when you are next coming to the UK, or elsewhere in Europe?

A. No, I don't know, sorry. There's no date set at the moment.

Q. What happened to the proposed UK tour with all the other '60s folkies?

A. I'm not sure exactly, I think the promoters may have been unable to find a time when everyone was available. The scheduling didn't work out, in other words.

Q. How do you now look back on your days at Les Cousins and Bunjie's? Was it a golden period in your artistic life?

A. Well, sure, it was a lot of fun. Everyone there was just starting out in their careers, it was kind of like being in class together. [Al mentioned several names of those who performed at these venues, but he said them too fast for me to get them down.]

Q. Have you got any plans to write a book (your memoirs or anything else)?

A. Maybe. There will come a time when I will no longer be able to tour as extensively as I do now, and that might be a good time to do some writing.

Interviewer's note: later, after the show, when Al was signing my "Sergeant Al" poster, he commented that he thought this show at the City Winery had gone very well, and added: At least as well as could have been expected under the circumstances. I then asked:

Q. What do you mean by "under the circumstances"?

A. Well, doing seven shows in nine days.

Interviewer's note: I had thought about these seven shows in nine days as I looked at the schedule for this tour in the days before the City Winery show. Watching Al and Dave on stage, it looks as though they expend a lot of energy. It's amazing to me that they can maintain a schedule like that.