

Folksinger\Guitarist Alice Stuart

American blues and folksinger/guitarist Alice Stuart has toured with Van Morrison, Mississippi John Hurt, and many others. During the 1970s she first gained notice as one of the only women in rock n roll to write her own music, front a male band, and play lead guitar. She can currently be found performing alongside Marc Willett (*The Kingsmen*) and Steven Flynn (Chuck Berry, Jr. Cadillac) in the band *The Formerlys*.

By Tina Ayres

Tina Ayres: What was your childhood like? What are some of your most fond memories from those days?

Alice Stuart: My childhood was pretty miserable. My mom parked me at 2 years old with my aunt (her sister) and went off to work at Bechtel (of all places). She came home a couple times a year. Very sad for me. My aunt and I (although I learned a lot of practical things from her) were pretty much like oil and water trying to mix together. I was a nervous wreck, allergic to practically everything. All I cared about was music.

TA: Do you happen to remember what your very first favorite song was?

AS: Beethoven when I was playing piano, then Buddy Holly and Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis.

TA: What was it that first led you to discover your love of music?

AS: Always loved music. First piano, then drums, baritone ukulele, and then graduated to guitar.

TA: Why do you think music has always had such a strong appeal throughout time? Why do you think the Delta style has always struck such a chord in the hearts of listeners?

AS: People need a connection to their soul and the Delta style really connects you. It's the real deal. I still prefer it.

TA: Was it more challenging being a woman in the industry back then as opposed to now?

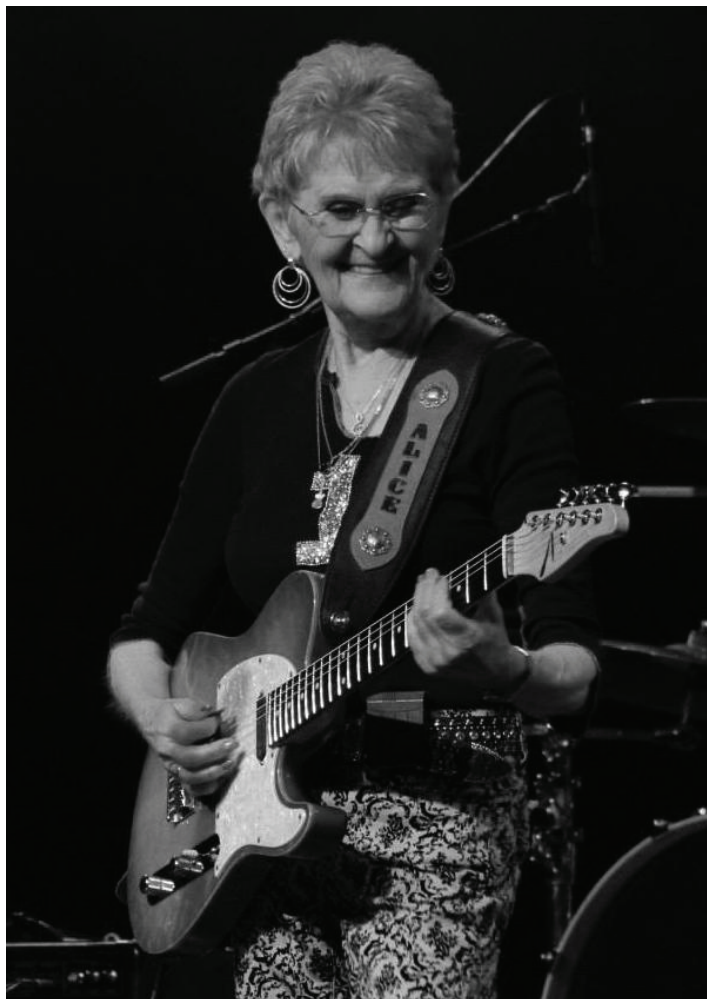
AS: Absolutely! I was told I would never play as well as a man...pretty challenging, I'll tell you. Guys didn't want to take you seriously when it came to playing. They wanted you to show up and just sing. Once I started on electric guitar, I just had to get up there and jam with the rest of them, whether they liked it or not.

TA: What advice would you offer to the women of today and of tomorrow?

AS: Just do it.

TA: How do you think the music industry has changed most since you first started your career in it?

AS: There is lots of help now, with *CD Baby* and just about everyone having a recording studio. You kind of have your pick. In Nashville, it's \$50 per tune per guy. Pretty darned cheap. Plus with the internet, we can send out



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mass mailings. Before, I had to send postcards to everyone!

TA: What was it like to play the *Berkeley Folk Festival* for the first time?

AS: Exhilarating, exciting but very scary. I went from for playing to 50 people to 5000 or more a little too quick.

TA: Are there any moments from your career that stand out most in your mind?

AS: *The Dick Cavett Show* was very important and my tour with Van Morrison to Canada, Eastern US and Europe.

TA: What would you say is the most important thing you have learned so far from life in general?

AS: Family plays a large part in my life. I gave up music for about 15 years to have another child and actually raise her right. I had my son before that and he suffered a lot. I was just working non-stop. I have 5 grandchildren and need to connect with them. They range from 7 to 30 years old.

TA: What would be the most important thing you have learned about being a musician?

AS: I have learned to be more confident in what I do...quit being so paranoid. Just say what comes into my mind at the time. I spent way too many years worrying what other people thought. And you must practice..warm up. Don't go into a gig and spend the first 30 minutes warming up.

TA: Do you still enjoy performing as much as you always did? What do you love most ?

AS: I need to write some more songs. Getting very sick of the same ones. But, yes, I love performing and I love not having to get up at 6 or 7 a.m. to go to work.

TA: What projects are you working on at the moment?

AS: Just trying to write some new material.

TA: Do you have a dream project you'd most like to bring into being before your time is over?

AS: Hmm. Yes, I want to record live....no overdubs, except instruments. My voice should always be live. Never have gotten to do that before and always wanted to.

TA: How do you hope to be remembered when you own time is up?

AS: My goodness, that sounds so ominous! But first and foremost, I was the best Grandma ever and second, that I made my mark as a musician in a good way. That if I hadn't stopped when I did to raise my kids, I would have made it. And my songs...I write good songs.

TA: Is there anything else you would like to say?

AS: Very easy these days to get overlooked because of the plethora of people out there. You really have to work to get noticed. Not sure I've got the energy for that.

