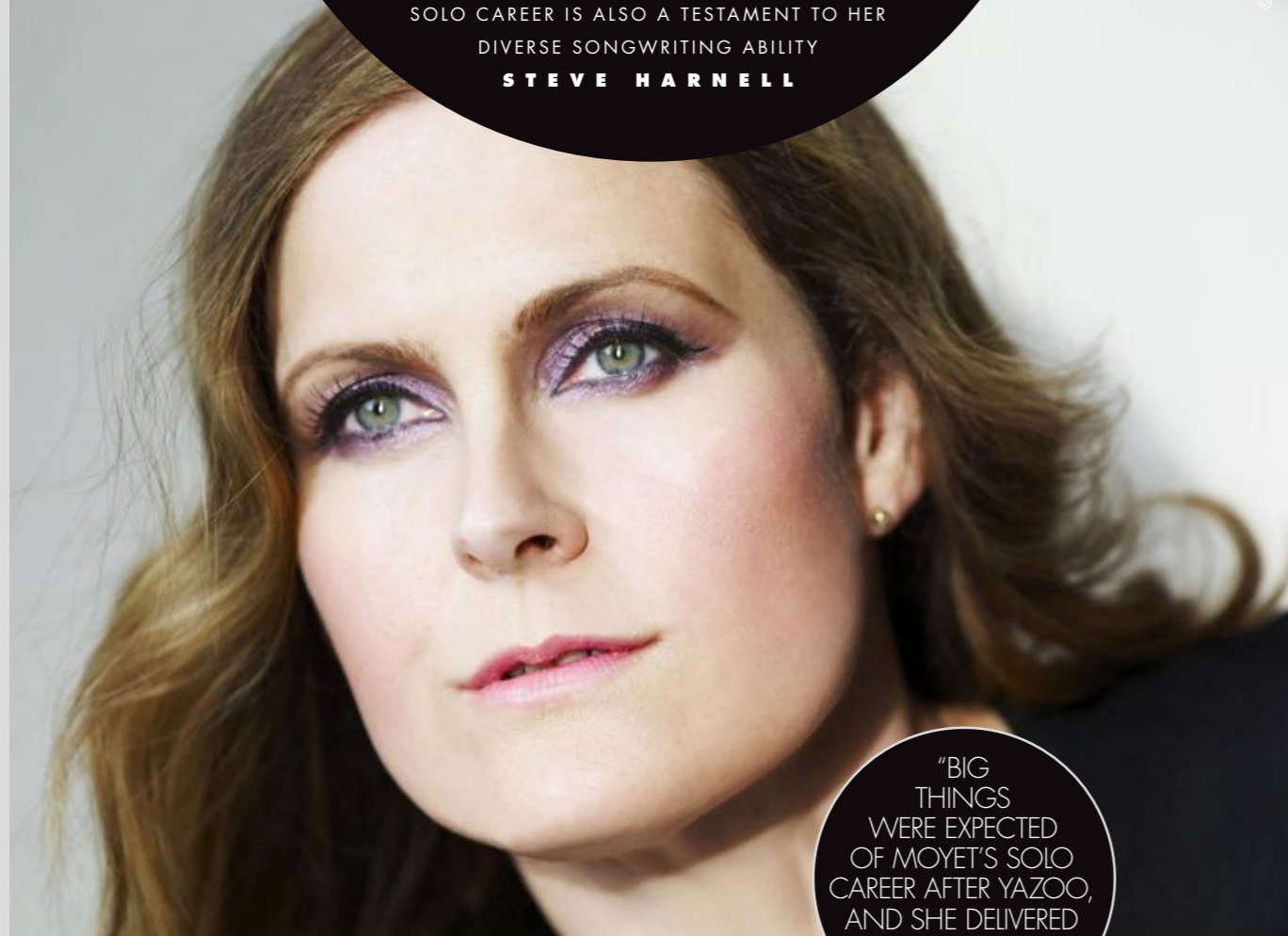


ALBUM BY ALBUM

ALISON MOYET

ONE OF THE FINEST VOCALISTS OF HER GENERATION, THE EX-YAZOO FRONTWOMAN'S SOLO CAREER IS ALSO A TESTAMENT TO HER DIVERSE SONGWRITING ABILITY

STEVE HARNELL



© Steve Gullik

"BIG THINGS WERE EXPECTED OF MOYET'S SOLO CAREER AFTER YAZOO, AND SHE DELIVERED ON THAT PROMISE"



In little more than 18 months, Yazoo made a huge impact on the early-80s music scene. After the duo imploded in acrimonious fashion, big things were duly expected of frontwoman Alison Moyet's subsequent solo career. While some of the more experimental facets of Yazoo's dual musical personality were initially excised for traditionalist pop songwriting, Moyet's extraordinary voice remained – and her debut album lived up to all the expectations. Despite containing a clutch of hits that would become signature

songs for her, Moyet's 1984 debut LP *Alf* wasn't without the odd record company-related hitch. After signing a £1 million deal with CBS, Yazoo's US label Warner Records promptly slapped an injunction on Moyet that prevented her from getting a solo career off the ground. It took a year to iron out the legal difficulties before *Alf* could see the light of day. CBS had a battle plan, though, enlisting producers Steve Jolley and Tony Swain to recreate the kind of success they'd recently had with the likes of Bananarama and Spandau Ballet. Speed was of the essence. As an in-demand production duo, Jolley & Swain already had a packed diary – writing sessions were whipped through around the piano in just a fortnight with Moyet concentrating on writing lyrics while her collaborators provided the arrangements. Ostensibly manufactured by the record label, the

collaboration was a breeze. The resulting album is packed with polished, precision-tooled adult pop. Such was the soulfulness of Moyet's performance on lead single *Love Resurrection*, the censors missed the outrageous *double entendres* contained within. It's a couple discussing their flagging love life – a stirring anthem about someone who just can't get it up any more. Moyet is longing for a "warm injection" and pleads with her partner "I want you to grow in my hand." Even "If we pull together, we'll never fall apart again" has a certain sexualised element to it. Elsewhere, there's the upbeat synth-dance of *Honey For The Bees*, where Moyet's vocals elevate this above mere melodic fluff, buoyed by Tony Swain's keyboard pads. The outstanding Lamont Dozier-penned ballad *Invisible* features a *tour de force* vocal performance; Moyet is terrific as she growls "I'm boiling

mad" while the song careers into its instantly hooky chorus. Meanwhile, the sophisticated pop of *Steal Me Blind* is some distance away from her Yazoo days but *Money Mile* is a little quirkier. The funky soul of *Twisting The Knife* is lifted by another stunning vocal but it's the superb synth-pop of *All Cried Out* where Moyet truly builds on the feistiness of her Yazoo days. Despite Alison's reservations over the years about it, *Alf* was a consistently fine way for her solo career to get out of the starting blocks and proved that the former Yazoo frontwoman was a star on an international level, not just a British one.

ALF
Released 1984
Label Columbia
Chart Position UK No.1 and US No.45



Moyet's debut album *Alf* topped the charts in the UK and made waves on a global scale. Persuaded by her manager to relocate to Los Angeles for a year, her debut's follow-up was a concerted effort to break the United States and seal the deal. Meanwhile, Swain and Jolley stepped aside for the swaggering Jimmy Iovine. On paper, Iovine would seem like an odd fit for Moyet's style; the producer was more used to the straight-ahead rock likes of Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty and U2, but it's to Moyet's credit that she feels like the dominant presence here. Iovine's mate Dave Stewart co-writes *Is This Love?* under the

pseudonym Jean Guiot and Moyet pulls this off with aplomb. Second single, the Floy Joy cover *Weak In The Presence Of Beauty*, is equally strong and rises above its 80s production tics; you could certainly imagine Belinda Carlisle also wading into this power ballad. Where you might expect Iovine to introduce stadium bluster into proceedings, Moyet manages to coax him into allowing a few curveballs. *Ordinary Girl* is a first foray into jangly indie pop and *Blow Wind Blow* is a dramatic Gothic ballad. *Glorious Love* boasts a distinctly Duran Duran funk bounce with an upbeat chorus. The galloping *Without You* feels a little like Kirsty MacColl and the fizzy pop of *When I Say (No Giveaway)* details a brief romantic liaison with Alison competing for space in the mix with a superb, wriggling

"THE FOLLOW-UP TO ALF WAS A CONCERTED EFFORT TO BREAK THE UNITED STATES"

bassline. *Sleep Like Breathing* is a rare duet, featuring David Freeman of The Lover Speaks (who also provided "No More 'I Love You's'" for Annie Lennox); its twisted pop is a nice change of pace on a album that in the main plays the percentages. Despite the sleek Iovine production sheen, *Raindancing* didn't smash the US FM radio circuit but did very respectable business elsewhere around the world. Moyet has since distanced herself from what she described as its "American sound" but let's not forget there were two more classic singles to add to forthcoming setlists for many years to come.

RAINDANCING
Released 1987
Label Columbia
Chart Position UK No.2 and US No.94



The new decade brought a fresh sound for Moyet as the singer had been openly critical of the overtly commercial nature of her first two solo records. *Hoodoo* was an attempt to redress the balance where Alison would create purely on her own terms. Disenchanted after a world tour in support of *Raindancing* and feeling under pressure to produce pop hits, Moyet ran in the other direction, hooking up with tour guitarist Pete Glenister for a writing partnership that would last for several years. While her previous albums had their share of hit singles, the 7" releases from *Hoodoo* all tanked, unfairly tarnishing its attendant LP as an experiment

too far. Now almost 30 years down the line, the record stands up remarkably well. Moyet's instincts were proved correct. In 2007 she commented: "Making *Hoodoo*, we were left to our own devices and found some passion and aggression again. It is not a flawless record, but it [was] a road map that led to me understanding myself much better." The earthy soul of *Footsteps* makes for a fine opener, and there's rarely been a record that hasn't been improved by the contributions of the Kick Horns. Meanwhile, Ocean Colour Scene's Simon Fowler and Steve Cradock turn up on the proto-Britpop of *It Won't Be Long*. Moyet even supplies harmonica for the urban blues *Rise* that also features a tasty wah wah guitar solo. Kirsty MacColl is as empathetic as ever with a backing vocals turn on waltzing ballad *Wishing You Were Here*. On the sleeve notes she's

"MOYET WAS OPENLY CRITICAL ABOUT THE COMMERCIAL NATURE OF HER FIRST TWO SOLO ALBUMS"

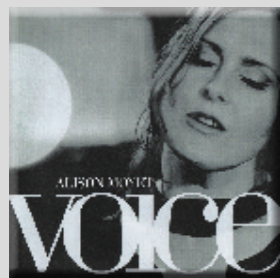
described as providing an "Elysian chorus". How apt. Fine Young Cannibals' Andy Cox and David Steele return Alison to her electro roots for the knowingly-titled *Back Where I Belong*, yet the track is given a 90s update. Intriguing electro pulses thread through the standout *My Right A.R.M.* (sample lyric: "In no way let God's Kingdom pass you by"). On an increasingly diverse yet coherent collection, *Hoodoo* leaves us with some old skool soul via the Gospel vibe and Hammond organ swells of *Find Me*. It's an anthem, a song of hope, on a decidedly defiant collection.

HOODOO
Released 1991
Label Columbia
Chart Position UK No.11 and US –



Record company travails continued for Moyet into the mid-90s – while the label execs wanted to pitch her as a middle-of-the-road balladeer, the singer had other ideas entirely. Continuing writing with Pete Glenister, Alison's first set of songs submitted as the follow-up to *Hoodoo* were rejected by her paymasters who deemed it as uncommercial as its predecessor. The Lightning Seeds' Ian Broudie was drafted in to re-record several tracks and give them a more chart-friendly sheen. In fairness, you'd be hard pushed to see the joins. Broudie does a fine job in retooling the bulk of this record. There's an exotic world music flourish to opener *Falling* – it's Kula Shaker two years early – but don't let that put you off. Broudie brings his influence to bear on the melodic, breezy power-pop of *And I Know*, with a gnarly guitar solo that gives the song a kick in the pants. You can also see his fingerprints all over *Another Living Day*, too. Jules Shear's *Whispering Your Name* feels like a standard and Moyet revisits a self-penned Yazoo track on the fine *Ode To Boy*; the urgent strummed acoustic guitars and Alison's rapid-fire delivery are an absolute delight. *Essex* is one of Moyet's most guitar-heavy collections, a nod to the dominance of Oasis, Blur et al, but it still stands alone as a consistent and timeless collection rather than merely an era curio.

ESSEX
Released 1994
Label Columbia
Chart Position UK No.24 and US No.194



The title says it all. After being declared one of the greatest vocalists of her generation, here was the one occasion where Moyet swapped onward artistic progression to capitalise purely on the quality of her pipes. Dreamed up after Alison performed with the BBC Concert Orchestra in 2003, the singer approached Anne Dudley to provide expansive arrangements. To their credit, Moyet and Dudley give most of the usual contenders a swerve, instead presenting a collection of off-beat covers that pay tribute to the singer's personal favourites rather than pandering to commercialism. The songs themselves are played pretty straight, from the wistful *Windmills Of Your Mind* to the gentle Gershwin standard *The Man I Love*.

Two Elvis Costello reboots stand out – the Chet Baker tribute *Almost Blue* and *God Give Me Strength*, a top-drawer collaboration between Costello and Burt Bacharach. Moyet rolls her r's wonderfully on *Je Crois Entendre Encore* of *The Wrangle-Taggle Gypsies-O!* and *Dido's Lament: When I Am Laid In Earth*, while both authentic enough, seem a bit of a stretch.

She'd be forgiven for giving it both barrels on *Cry Me A River* but it remains understated; Julian Jackson provides the Stevie Wonder-like harmonica. Meanwhile, bonus track *Alfie* should have made the first team. THIS is how you should have sung it, Cilla.

VOICE

Released 2004
Label Sanctuary
Chart Position UK No.7 and US –



Rightfully nominated for a BRIT Award and the Mercury Music Prize, *Hometown* was eight long years after *Essex* but well worth the wait. Exploring another fascinating musical direction, this was Moyet's brief flirtation with the Bristol Sound. Helmed by the South West city's production duo The Insects (aka the under-the-radar Tim Norfolk and Bob Locke), sessions attracted members and affiliates from Portishead, Lupine Howl and Massive Attack. More label politics upset Moyet's creative flow, hence the eight-year gap between albums four and five. Now it was Sony's turn to push Alison into more commercial territory only for the

singer to dig her heels in. When *Hometown* eventually turned up on Sanctuary Records it was one in the eye for Sony; within a few months of its release it had shifted more than a quarter of a million copies. A commercial and critical triumph, in fact.

Moyet reasoned that the recording was "an adult album but it's not mainstream. There's some blues on it, some chanson, some heavy strings. It's the best album I've ever made. A lot of people will love it but it's not Radio One." The Insects' arrangements provide the perfect cradle for Moyet's talents, from the heartstring-tugging model of restraint that is *Should I Feel That It's Over* to the sly groove of chilled electronica-tinged *More*. The stunning title track is a melting pot of Massive Attack and Portishead, a loping groove with jazzy inflections. And that latter band's Adrian Utley provides his trademark guitar

textures on *Say It*, which builds to a rich chorus. And despite Utley not playing on it, the spirit of Portishead also infuses dramatic break-up ballad *If You Don't Come Back To Me*.

The yin and yang of *Do You Ever Wonder* – a light melodic touch contrasted with desolate lyrics – works beautifully and Massive Attack's Angelo Bruschini shines with a wriggling guitar part on a lilting *The Train I Ride*. The dramatic, swelling *You Don't Have To Go* closes proceedings where for the first time Moyet walked the tightrope between being completely true to her muse and achieving a more than respectable chart return.

HOMETIME

Released 2002
Label Sanctuary
Chart Position UK No.18 and US –

"EXPLORING A NEW DIRECTION, HOMETIME WAS A BRIEF FLIRTATION WITH THE BRISTOL SOUND"



While everything works well in isolation, as a coherent collection *The Turn* is a little disjointed. That's explained by the three-song run towards the tail end of the album taken from *Smaller*, a stage play Moyet starred in with comedian and friend Dawn French. Alison described the long-player as "an album of crafted song, [built] from a core of chansons and the shapes of Roy Orbison that

grow from a gentle place to an impassioned climax." You can hear exactly what she means with the slow-building classicist songwriting of opener *One More Time* and the equally swelling ballad *Anytime At All*. *The Man In The Wings* is a devastating torch song of (perhaps) imagined unrequited love ("We won't speak, he won't ask me to follow him on/ And his name, if I ever did know it, is gone.")

It's Not That Thing Henry is one of the hardest-rocking tracks Moyet has ever committed to tape before the breathy ballad *Fire* then takes the pace down several notches.

But it's that trio of songs culled from *Smaller* that skew the picture somewhat; a theatrical torch song (*World Without End*), the Gallic-

flavoured *Home*, piano accordion and all, as well as the elegiac title track of the play which features a downbeat brass band.

The sharp change of pace for album closer *A Guy Like You* – a twinkling pop tune about a lothario lover – only goes to underline the idea that *The Turn* often feels like two projects crammed into one place.

The album would mark the end of her songwriting partnership with Pete Glenister and you get the sense that was the correct call, there are plenty of steady songs on *The Turn* but nothing to get you particularly excited. The Moyet-Glenister songwriting partnership had possibly run its course.

Critics agreed that while Alison's vocals were as strong as ever the material itself seemed a little lacklustre. After all the twists and, no pun intended, turns across her seven solo albums it was time for Alison to bring it back home to where it all began.

THE TURN

Released 2007
Label W14 Music
Chart Position UK No.21 and US –

"WHILE EVERYTHING WORKS IN ISOLATION, AS A COHERENT COLLECTION, THIS IS A LITTLE DISJOINTED"



A hugely successful return to her electronica roots, *The Minutes* ushered in a new songwriting partnership with Moyet now co-penning material with Guy Sigsworth, who'd previously worked with an array of artists including Seal, Björk, Britney Spears and Madonna. A critical and commercial smash, the broadsheets labelled this her best album in decades while the record-buying public rewarded the LP with a UK Top Five placing, her best since *Raindancing*. With some of Moyet's typical arch wit, in a press release for the record, she described *The Minutes* as "Born of reconstructed improvisation. I like to think of it as prog-pop. But I also like to think of big dogs

as small horses, so don't hang on to that thought long."

Conceived while "mindless of industry mores that apply to middle-aged women," for the most part, Moyet makes good on the claim that the electro direction was completely without reference points, both retro or modern. While it may have been written and laid down in a musical vacuum, you can imagine her old sparring partner Vince Clarke could have been at the controls for the melodic *Love Reign Supreme* or Yazoo-like ballad *Filigree*.

Elsewhere, though, twitching electro meets chopping guitars on the superlative *Changeling*, a real banger that's become a live favourite and the equally dancefloor-centric *Right As Rain*, where Moyet once again sounds absolutely at home in this context.

Another live fave is *When I Was Your Girl*; powerful, emotive and a superb bravura vocal performance from Alison.

"A CRITICAL AND COMMERCIAL SMASH, THIS WAS LABELLED MOYET'S BEST RECORD IN DECADES"

THE MINUTES

Released 2013
Label Cooking Vinyl
Chart Position UK No.5 and US –

The ticking beats and stripped-back cyclical melody of *Remind Yourself* recall Massive Attack's *Teardrop*, but *The Minutes* is very much Moyet's album through and through, a wonderful reconnection with her earliest musical history that still manages to sound totally bang up-to-date.

Moyet claimed making the record was the most enjoyable of her career to date, and you can hear that joy filtering through to the confidence infusing every groove. Lyrics contained within may have touched on difficult subject matter including schizophrenia, but this was a dynamic, ebullient return to form. By going back to the source, she became reborn.



Arguably Moyet's finest solo album to date, if there was any sense whatsoever that her hook-up with Guy Sigsworth for *The Minutes* was a flash in the pan, then this put that to the sword in spectacular style. *Other* celebrates Moyet's outsider status, revelling in her own individuality. Opening track *I Germinate* rocks you back on your heels, and there's a joyousness in the poetic potential of language that features throughout the album. *April 10th* is spoken word set to a minimalist backing featuring a Dylan Thomas-like flair for symbolism ("Fog, Like boiled wool, felt-tight, rolled in as though a bale of hay

introduced"). *Lover, Go* returns us to the feel of previous album's *Remind Yourself* and its nod to Massive Attack's *Teardrop*.

The English U alludes to Moyet's dyslexia ("A criminal to grammar/ To apostrophe – the hammer") as well as her mother's love of prose and correct syntax, something Moyet Snr hung onto passionately as she was taken by Alzheimer's disease ("You kept beautiful words in soft carbon pages/ As beautiful worlds went missing in stages.")

The Rarest Birds, meanwhile, celebrates the inclusivity of her Brighton home town ("Find yourself bearing easy, Mercury aside a Lurex sea") and builds to a stunning, soaring chorus that's full of hope and elation.

There are allusions to the firearm obsessions of far-right Americans in *Beautiful Gun*, a hard-hitting synth-rock bruiser with a crunching central riff that

pomp-era Depeche Mode would have been proud of. There's also a throwback to Yazoo on *Happy Giddy* that pours scorn on Twitter haters and keyboard warriors ("It's mob entertainment/ Find your life online").

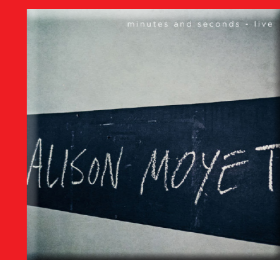
If fans longed for torch songs, they're handed the beatific title track. Moyet refers to her own musical shape-shifting tendencies and new-found sense of release in "I cut out whichever shape I need/ I'm as free as I have ever been". It's the sound of an artist striding into the future. We look forward to the next chapter with feverish anticipation.

"THE SOUND OF AN ARTIST STRIDING INTO THE FUTURE. WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE NEXT CHAPTER."

OTHER

Released 2017
Label Cooking Vinyl
Chart Position UK No.12 and US –

LIVE RELEASES



MINUTES AND SECONDS - LIVE 2014
The first live album of Moyet's career, the proliferation of material culled from *The Minutes* proves just how much confidence the singer had in her eighth studio LP. Prime solo cuts are also interspersed here, of course, as well as two Yazoo tracks, including a thumping version of *Situation*. A radical reboot of *All Cried Out* loses none of the drama of the original. Meanwhile, *Is This Love?* is reduced to a hushed crawl.

The stripped-back band keep arrangements to a minimum; it's Moyet's voice that is the focus here.



THE OTHER LIVE COLLECTION 2018
Equally stripped-back as *Minutes And Seconds - Live*, the transitions between eras of Moyet's career here is seamless, from the bracing *I Germinate* to a fantastic revamp of *All Cried Out*. John Garden's guitar packs a punch on *Beautiful Gun* and the electronic refit of understated torch song *The Man In The Wings* takes your breath away.

And it's unlikely there was a dry eye in any of the houses that Moyet played the touching tribute to her mother, *The English U*. Fittingly enough, *The Rarest Birds* soars beautifully. This is a masterclass in emotive vocals and sophisticated electronica.