

Alison Cotton



Since her first solo work manifested in 2018, Alison Cotton has quietly become one of the UK's most extraordinarily evocative aural explorers, building eerily arcane tapestries of supernatural beauty from her multi-layered viola, incantatory vocals and harmonium. If Alison's chosen main instruments have predictably drawn comparisons with The Marble Index-era Nico and Cale, these ultimately prove superfluous as the cathedral vault soundscapes Alison crafts with producer Mark Nicholas soar into a magical realm entirely of her own making, haunted by folk's dark ancient spirit at the same time as providing a much needed time suspending antidote to tumultuous modern times.

Based in London, Alison made her first records with Mark as The Left Outsides, 2016's untitled collaborative album with Michael Tanner ('Plinth') pointing at her future path with its quietly levitating drones. Alison's startling debut album 'All Is Quiet at the Ancient Theatre' arrived like a vividly bottled medieval ghost visitation in 2018, its mesmerizing autumnal drone reveries including the ten minute title track, 'The Last Sense to Leave Us', 'The Bells of St Agnes' and 'A Tragedy in the Tithe Barn'.

Alison says many of her pieces are created for and named after spaces, real or fictional, usually of another time. As she plays, she focusses on the image of these places and becomes part of the scene. It should be added that she also plays percussion, recorder, omnichord, shruti box and piano.

Alison was then commissioned by the BBC to compose and record music to accompany Muriel Spark's ghost story, 'The Girl I Left Behind Me', broadcast on Gideon Coe's BBC 6 Music show that Christmas and released as a ten-inch EP by Clay Pipe Music in October 2019, doing full justice to her shimmering violas and spectral overdubbed chorale. It was joined by her music for another Muriel Spark story, 'The House of the Famous Poet', set against London in the Blitz as "an abstract funeral march."

Then came 2020's riveting 'Only Darkness Now' on Bloxham Tapes / Cardinal Fuzz / Feeding Tube Records taking her basic template to yet more uncharted vistas, starting with subtly shifting twenty minute drone-scape 'Behind The Spiderweb Gate'. With brief interludes provided by ethereal vocal confessional 'In Solitude I Will Fade Away' and solo viola 'The Hill Was Hollow', harmonium-violas gem 'How My Heart Bled In Bleeding Heart Yard' conjures centuries back sea voyage momentum tempered with that Nico-like omnipotence, the set closing with her luminescent stained glass reinterpretation of multi-instrumentalist Dorothy Carter's 'Shirt Of Lace' from 1976's Troubadour album (The track also became a lathe cut single-sided ten-inch, limited to 33 copies).

Five star reviews were joined by the set reaching number eleven in The Quietus Albums of the Year and number one in its New Weird Britain chart (along with getting cited in Stewart Lee's Cultural Year and hammered on BBC Radio 3 and 6 Music). In 2021, after The Quietus commissioned Alison to compose the first piece in their Singularity series, she came up with the twenty minute 'What You Told Me On That Journey in the Horse and Carriage' (released as a one-sided 12-inch lathe cut by State 51 in 2022).

*"Cotton may expand folk's raw emotions into more avant garde territories, but they still feel possessed by a blood-red muscle memory that goes back centuries" – Folk Album of the Month. **The Guardian***

*"Alison Cotton's solo work.... speaks of places, people and stories not quite of this world, while orchestrating folk and drone elements meticulously as if following an arcane ritual." **The Wire***

*"Folorn, hypnotic drone hymns for an ancient haunted England." **Mojo***

*"The power of this music is simply awe-inspiring. When Alison Cotton plays, the world stands still." **The Quietus***

*"Her exquisite voice calls to mind both the chill of the best British folk and the psychedelic detail of Occitanian traditional song." **Uncut Magazine***

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In 2022, she was invited by BBC Radio 3's Late Junction to take part in a live improvised collaborative session with Hinako Omori and, in March, performed a live set for BBC Radio 3's New Music Show at Sunderland Fire Station.

2022 also saw Alison headlining tours of the UK and Europe, along with festivals including Madeiradig, Supernormal, Krankenhaus, Raw Power and Berlin's Kiezsalon. Alison also attracted enthusiastic reviews for several of the many live shows she played in Europe, including The Quietus remarking of her appearance at Utrecht's Le Guess Who, "For more consistently overwhelming beauty, there is the Hertz theatre where Alison Cotton's set of sparsely looped violin is deeply affecting in its intensity and directness", and Louder Than War declaring of her Leeds gig, "If he'd had access to a Walkman, I'm pretty sure this is the music that Heathcliff would have been listening to while traipsing about the moody rural landscape of 19th century Yorkshire."

Alison released her third album, 'The Portrait You Painted of Me' on Rocket Recordings / Feeding Tube in May 2022. Displaying the continuing evolution of her sound, it was another astonishing masterpiece, setting the mood with the multi tiered vocal fanfare of 'Murmurations Over the Moor' before 'The Last Wooden Ship' unveiled the set's characteristic deeper, richer sound as her viola unfurls its oaken magic, complimented by her piano adding another voice. Blessed with a clear, sepulchral vocal, 'I Buried the Candlesticks' takes the subtle sonic expansion further with percussion such as rattlesnake fizzes and closing drum tattoo before side two opens with the heaving drone of 'That Tunnel Underground Seemed Neverending' creating an atmosphere of claustrophobic melancholy and mournful reverie. 'Violet May' shocks again with Alison singing her words of lost love and waiting with crystal acapella resonance. Finally, '17th November 1962' kicks up a massed viola drone processional, glazed by feedback-like sparks oddly recalling the Velvet Underground at the Exploding Plastic in the way it becomes all enveloping as the track unfolds.

Along with the barrage of great reviews it received, the album made The Guardian's Folk Album of the Month, The Quietus' Album of the Week and reached number 37 in its Albums of the Year along with Stewart Lee's year end list.

Alison is currently working on her fourth album and planning more live events in 2023, including curating 'Engelchen' at Sunderland's Holy Trinity Church with her music inspired by the sisters Ida and Louise Cook, two opera fans who saved 29 Jewish people from the Nazis.

Kris Needs – 2023

"Bathed in arcane allure, Alison Cotton's records loom like mesmerising apparitions. They bring folk music's dark, pagan origins into modern times with fearless sonic experimentation, haunted by flickering ghosts and shadows on medieval walls; genuinely different and all her own." 5/5

Record Collector

"Her ever expanding stained glass window continues to beam with unearthly light." 5/5

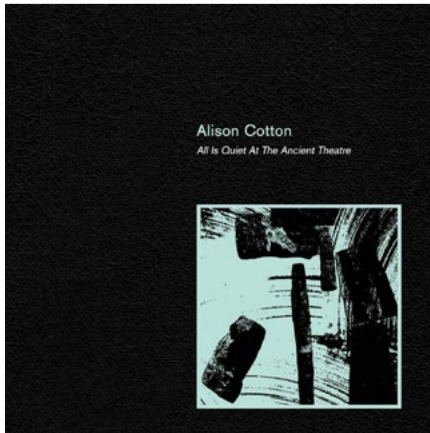
Shindig! Magazine

"An eerie, lost folk horror soundtrack glinting in the sunshine, Cotton's pure English voice rising mysteriously around the violas and recorders."

The Guardian

"I cannot recommend this record highly enough as astonishing as it is astounding and I sense I am not alone in this."

**Jonathan Donahue
(Mercury Rev)**



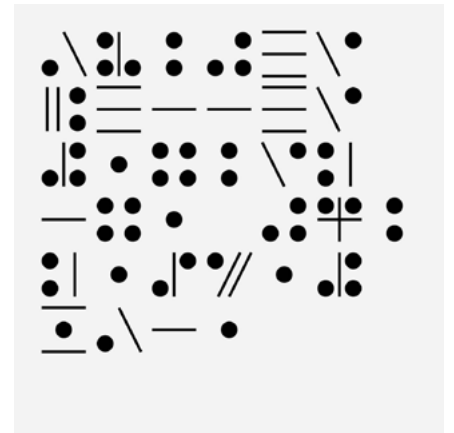
All Is Quiet At The Ancient Theatre

2018 Cardinal Fuzz / Feeding Tube Records / Bloxham Tapes



The Girl I Left Behind Me

2018 Clay Pipe Music



Behind the Spiderweb Gate

2019 Longform Editions



Shirts Of Lace

2018 Bloxham Tapes



Only Darkness Now

2020 Cardinal Fuzz / Feeding Tube Records / Bloxham Tapes



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2020 Sensory Leakage Records



What You Told Me On That Journey In The Horse & Carriage

2022 The state51 Conspiracy



The Portrait You Painted Of Me

2022 Rocket Recordings / Feeding Tube Records