



Left to his own devices

Introspective progger Alon forges a solo path paved by technology and rooted in acoustic soul

By ERIC HARABADIAN

He is a solo artist leading a life tinged with mystery and steeped in technical wizardry. He turned to music at a young age to cope with the death of his father and subsequent life in single-parent where frequent moves, due to his mother's career pursuits, made friendships elusive.

This Philadelphia-born-and-bred musician became introverted and turned to the arts as refuge. He started playing bass, then embraced electric guitar, and gradually evolved into the artist and recording project known as Alon: "I was basically alone a lot so I dropped the letter 'e' of 'alone' and I gave myself the artist name 'Alon'. I wasn't even gigging or anything. It was just me, in my bedroom, writing music."

In the late 1970s/early '80s, the young teenager was starting to blossom and interact with other musicians. At 17 he hooked up with a group called Pseudo Rebels and applied his affinity for art rock, something that ran in the family.

"My older brothers were heavily into Peter Dinklage-era Genesis, King Crimson, Gentle Giant and Emerson, Lake & Palmer," says Alon. "Those were the real giants back in the day and I was influenced by them too. By the time I was in my late teens I got into the industrial sound like Ministry and, later, Nine Inch Nails."

The mid-'80s found Alon co-fronting a zany eight-piece theatrical rock group called Bag. Cut from the same cloth as seminal "new wavers" Lene Lovich and the B-52s, Bag performed edgy over-the-top love shows that were precisely choreographed, musically sophisticated, and done with tongue firmly planted in cheek.

Bag carried on until the early '90s, whereupon Alon was moving from live club work to a more studio-based orientation. He realigned himself with the industrial sounds he cut his teeth on a decade before.

Having opened a personal recording facility called Great Egg studio as well as starting a record label and publishing company to handle his back catalog of Bag material, Alon initiated a new project called No1uno.

No1uno (pronounced “no one you know”) was a trailblazing studio/Internet concept that pushed the boundaries of pop songwriting, blending in white noise, sampling, incessant grooves and experimental electronica.

“I eventually abandoned No1uno to pursue a solo acoustic guitar-oriented live and recording project,” explains Alon. “What rekindled this whole prog-rock thing for me wasn’t any preconception. I started using this synthesizer software called M-Tron, and it helped me create all these classic mellotron sounds. I started working with other musicians and layering the music with the M-Tron. Everything just took on this prog-rock feel.”

Following his muse back to those progressive music roots and honing his skills as a solo artist, Alon has been prolific in the new millennium: He has three self-issued CD releases and a series of select East Coast club and festival performances under his belt, with more to come.

His first EP, *Persian Butterfly*, came out in May 2002 – a six-and 12-string acoustic guitar affair with atmospheric effects added to alter the mood. The second release, simply called *Alon*, came out in 2003 and furthered his singer-songwriter identity with a mix of original studio tracks, live club performances and a video clip,

Two years later, 2005 brought *The Artist Manifesto: Document 1*. This represents Alon’s most seamless blending of acoustic organic sounds with the enhancement of modern technology and to the avant-garde vibe permeating “Art’s end,” the enigmatic Philly troubadour demonstrates diversity and depth.

The album features some top east Coast session players and also marks the fruition of Alon’s digital and electronic guitar effects system, humorously dubbed the Alonomorphic Control Station (ACS).

“When I started it was just acoustic guitar with no effects,” says Alon. “Then I had a song on *Persian Butterfly* where I used an ultra-harmonizer and I wanted to bring that onstage with me. And it started from there. I added a delay unit, a pedal board and then I added another rig. It all was kind of evolutionary.

“When I started seeing all the sonic and performance possibilities I knew I would need help from a technical standpoint. Chris Gately, who has also assisted me in the studio, is a technical engineer and was very critical in helping me make my vision a reality. He is brilliant at drawing and reading schematic diagrams and things like that.”

Alon has taken this unique show to the stage at high profile venues including Philadelphia’s Tin Angel and Grape St. Pub, and New York City’s Kenny’s Castaways. He also has appeared on progressive Internet radio programs and played an auxiliary outdoor gig at the 2005 North East Art Rock Festival in Bethlehem, Pa.

“If you see my shows I don’t just do all these swirly, spacey, wild sounds, because there’s a limit to that,” Alon confides. “My shows are far more dynamic than that. I’ll open with a beautiful and intense film track score and then I’ll do this arpeggiated 12-string piece, and then I’ll go into a sparse folk thing. But even though I like to push the boundaries of acoustic guitar, I’m not losing touch with my roots. This ACS thing has evolved into something innovative and hip, but I’m still rooted in sitting down with an acoustic guitar and playing a song.”

Through a series of digital triggers, sequencers, samplers and foot controllers, the ACS has allowed Alon to become a totally self-sufficient artist and performer. That’s precisely what his album and his personal philosophy, “*The Artist Manifesto*,” are all about.

“At a young age I came to the realization that when you formally become involved in the marketplace of music it restricts your artistic vision,” he says. “So that’s when I took a detour in my life from pursuing music to, quote unquote, ‘make it’! I had shifted my focus whereas I put myself in a position where I had the resources – materially, financially and otherwise – to produce and publish my music. That’s what evolved into me buying my home, converting my garage into a recording studio and, separate from that, completely developing a wireless communications business where I made all my money.”

The saying goes that “no man is an island.” But when it comes to self-realized musicianship, Alon has turned “going it alone” into a high art form: “I felt a certain freedom and liberty to promote, publish and create projects without being a slave financially to them. I’ve got people promoting my material and I’ve got a website to sell my CD’s. I’ve got control of my art and I’ve got my freedom!”