

Real music for tough times

Alastair Moock rocks his roots at the furniture store

By Noah Schaffer

"My wife told me to stop talking so much about death," admits Alastair Moock. The gravel-voiced singer/songwriter doesn't seem to be listening to his better half. His new recording, *Let it Go*, includes a powerful electric cover of Rev. Gary Davis's "Death Don't Have No Mercy."

The song fits in perfectly among the album's nine originals, which slyly deliver thoughtful lyrics over thick swamp-blues and honky-tonk grooves. The result is one of the best roots music records to come out of New England in recent memory.

"I find death so fascinating," says Moock. "It's the one thing you can count on, so it never goes out of fashion."

Despite his morbid obsession, Moock's songs are rarely bleak or depressing. There's "Red Ribbon Waltz," an old-fashioned county ballad about falling in love. Then there's the searing "Let It Go," which calls out the powers that be in the way you'd expect from Moock's hero Woody Guthrie. But the song also tells of Moses, Jesus and the afterlife.

"It must be something that happens when you hit your 30s. You get a real yen for the old bible stories and spiritual things," muses Moock. "When [producer and guitarist] Michael Dinallo and I were putting this CD together we modeled it after these recent records by Pop Staples, The Blind Boys of Alabama, and The Dixie Hummingbirds. They all have this deep, gritty sound with wide-open spaces. That's what we were going for."

The record has the same deep sound as some of Bob Dylan's recent recordings. It's a marked departure for an act that made his name in the Boston folk circuit. Moock still frequently performs solo, but will be playing Café Fantastique with his band of Dinallo, lap steel guitarist Steve Sadler, and bassist Paul Kochanski. The show is a double bill with Rod Picot, another earthy songwriter best known for his collaborations with Slaid Cleaves.

Another interesting tune of Moock's is "Unwelcome Guest," in which he sings about getting rid of an unwanted presence. "That's about fighting depression," he says. "I was cryptic about it. I wanted a broader meaning for the song. It could be a disease. Whatever you are fighting. We all face things that we can't have control over, things that come and are part of our lives. Depression is something I've written about over the years, it's an important issue in my own life, and part of overcoming it is talking about it."

Moock often gets asked about his scratchy voice, which perfectly complements the country blues that informs his music. "It's just how I sing," he says. "People are surprised when they see me. I'm younger-looking than I sound. The voice does get attention. It's the strangest thing about what I do, but every singer has to make do with what they've got. Dylan and Tom Waits have unusual voices, they are not pretty in the traditional sense, but they know how to use their voice for affect and that makes an impact."