

# arts

## Fearing and Loving

by Roy Thorpe

Stephen Fearing says "I can't write songs about things that don't mean anything to me." If you were one of the 250 who saw him live at the Flamingo last week you believe him. Fearing plays with a passion that can only come from such commitment.

He appeared on stage in black jeans, a black shirt and black boots. The stage was also completely black. The only thing not lost in the darkness was his face and his guitar. The simplicity of his show put the emphasis right where it should be, on the songs and his guitar playing.

Fearing is a master of the guitar. His style cannot be described as simply folk, although he has gained a reputation as a folk singer-songwriter. In his playing you can hear jazz, blues, Celtic, rock and country overtones. He spins a unique hybrid of these different styles.

He is as effective in songs that require wild, thrashing, aggressive playing, as he is in slow, melodic passages that are deceptive in their simplicity. In *Trying Times* Fearing combines an old Roberta Flack tune with a riff lifted from the Clash's *London Calling*. In the gentle ballad *Little Child Eyes* Fearing sings of a friend's battle with alcoholism. "And it comes down to you, you and your courage/It comes down to you, you and your pride." Fearing makes the change effortlessly and the audience goes with him.

Fearing is an engaging performer because he is believable. He comes across like a modern day minstrel with nothing but his songs to sell. He sings "creativity and ambition will keep you hungry," and you get a sense this is what has kept him going.

Fearing combines poetic images with a good sense of story. In *Blind Horses* Fearing tells the story of Frank

and Jesse James and their stolen blind getaway horses. He turns this into an allegorical tale of politicians and their inability to see the truth.

Many of his songs deal with themes of self awareness. In *Race of Fractions* he sings "We have studied this equation but we still don't understand." In another song he sings "We are mirrors to each other and blind to what we see." Fearing says he has been accused of using song writing as therapy, and admits it's probably true.

It has been well over a year since Fearing's last recording, *Blue Line*, was released in Canada on the True North label. Fearing hopes to have a new release out in the spring and his new songs were well received by the Flamingo audience. Songs like "I've got a railway station where my heart should be," showed that Fearing hasn't lost his ability to turn a phrase.

This was Fearing's fourth appear-



St. Stephen-A-Fearing

ance in Nova Scotia since the release of *Blue Line*. He appeared most notably at the Lunenburg Folk Festival and opened for Sarah McLachlan at the Rebecca Cohn. Fearing played solo at the Flamingo but he hopes to have a band when he tours in support of his next release.

## Is Alannah too good to be true?

by Dak Jiordani

For artists whose first album turns out to be a major league, grand slam home run, coming up with a comparable second record is a daunting, if not nearly impossible task. I'm no psychic, so I won't even try to predict how *Rockinghorse* will do on the charts, but I would guess that the record will have a hard time coming even close to the diamond status her self-titled debut album achieved.

Alannah Myles  
*Rockinghorse*  
Warner/ Atlantic

I'm not saying that it's a bad record, far from it. Alannah sounds better than ever; her raunchy, bluesy vocals have been tempered by David Tyson's production to a point that balances power with control, strength with range, and enthusiasm with endurance. The song-writing is nearly perfect - every song on the album features a well-balanced mix of storytelling, intelligence, and entertainment value. Also, the selection of songs is widely varied; from the powerful lead off track "Our World, Our Times," a song about the urban jun-

gle and the social degeneration of the kids who live there, to the country-blues tinged "The Last Time I Saw William," to the straight ahead, non-nonsense rock & roll of "Lies and Rumors," this album combines elements from a broad repertory of mu-



sical genres and somehow makes them flow together. Even the first single, "A Song Instead Of A Kiss," a moving ballad that sounds like it came from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom of the Opera*, seems perfectly natural coming from the lips of one of Canada's best female rock singers.

This is a great album... maybe too great. In terms of style and sound,

*Rockinghorse* strays so far from the Alannah's first album, such that the two records could have been made by two entirely different people. No disrespect to other performers intended, but *Rockinghorse* contains a level of recording quality that most artists don't achieve until the completion of their fifth or even sixth album. Unless her first single gets a lot of airplay she may find herself in the unenviable position of being "too good, too soon." For Myles to be a leader in the music industry, she must forge ahead and find her own path. But, she may have made a tragic mistake in being so far ahead of the times - her followers, her audience, may have become lost. If that occurs, it will be a sad day when her *Rockinghorse* is put out to pasture prematurely. **RATING: 9**

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