

'Fire & Dust' by Reg Meuross

Reviewed by Carl Filby (March 2025)

Reg Meuross is a singer songwriter hailing originally from Teesside and before he was commissioned by Pete Townshend to produce *Fire & Dust* he had 15 solo albums to his name plus another 3 collaborations.



Despite the fact that I am also from Teesside; we are almost the same age and I have been attending folk clubs for more than

50 years our paths have never crossed by which I also mean that I have never listened to any of his music either.

My loss I think judging by this latest album, commissioned by Pete Townshend, which is a brilliant tribute to Woody Guthrie the legendary American folk singer whom I also have to admit to not knowing much about, though that was before I listened to this wonderful album.

For those of a similar disposition, i.e. ignorance of Woody Guthrie, I recommend that you read the several pages of biography which can be found in the front of the excellently informative booklet which accompanies the album and contains all the lyrics for the songs. Credits for all the supporting musicians including Pete Townshend himself and Phil Beer can be found on the album sleeve.

Of the sixteen tracks on the album 12 are written by Meuross and the other four by Guthrie, one, *Deportees*, jointly with Martin Hoffman. Meuross has previously been inspired to write songs about many historical characters and that was undoubtedly a big influence on Pete Townshend's choosing him for the album and if my reaction to the album is anything to go by then that choice will surely be vindicated.

I have now played the album several times, much more than I normally would to write a review and can honestly say that I have been playing it for pleasure in a style of music that I haven't much appreciated until now. I'm not even a big Dylan fan but I am now intending to explore the music of Woody Guthrie and that of Dylan who in some ways could perhaps be called Guthrie's greatest disciple.

It's such a pleasure to immerse oneself in the whole album that it seems unfair to pick out a few songs for special attention but that is what I am going to do starting with the opening

title track ***Fire & Dust*** which sets the scene touching on the background and influences on Guthrie's music. The Fire references the personal tragedies that occurred to family members. Dust refers to the dust bowl environment of the American Prairies in the 1930s and earlier in which Woody grew up, and which were also portrayed in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and influenced Guthrie's music throughout his career.

Deportees is a stark reminder of how badly immigrants can be treated when they are no longer wanted often because economic priorities have changed. It tells of a plane crash in 1948 and resulted in the deaths of 32 people, 4 Americans and 28 migrant farm workers who were being deported from California back to Mexico, though only the names of the Americans were given in the New York Times report of the crash. Does any of this sound at all familiar? Although this is Woody Guthrie singing about the situation in the United States I think it has a current relevance in Europe as well. I also think that I have a good idea what Woody might have made of the current U.S. Administration and the situation certainly needs someone to speak up in his place.

The third song I will pick out is the beautifully sung and terribly poignant ***Red Shoes*** written by Meuross, which I think is meant to accompany and amplify the message in *Deportees* by imagining and personalising the tragedy of one of those aboard the crashed plane. It succeeded in moving me to tears and I don't think I will be the only person on which it will have that effect.

As a consequence of this album alone Reg Meuross now moves onto my priority list of performers that I hope to catch soon and I also intend to explore his back catalogue.

For more information about Reg Meuross go to his website [HERE](#) where you will also find details of the upcoming tour and album launch and there is also a link to be found in the 'Gigs & Tours' Listing [HERE](#) on the **Unicorn Folk** website. For more information on Woody Guthrie I suggest that you start with Wikipedia [HERE](#).