

When I was about twenty and my hormones were raging still, I had a fleeting 'thing' about Sonja Kristina, the prog-rock diva who fronted Curved Air in her thigh-high boots. While never owning any of the albums, I studied at length photos of her on their sleeves and in the music press. The fascination was such that all I wanted was just to *kiss* Sonja - with no unbuttoning, fumbling at her bra-strap or manoeuvring her into, say, the romantic seclusion of a backstage broom cupboard. I wouldn't have wanted to desecrate the purity of that once-in-a-lifetime moment with any undignified gropings as, ideally, every lingering split-second held us tighter in the same flow of feeling.

Well, last May, I was opening for with the present-day Curved Air, led by Sonja, at the same South London auditorium where I'd likewise served *It's A Beautiful Day* the previous summer. In the dusty half-light beyond footlights still being tested, I watched the group soundcheck, noting that all the essential elements of Sonja remained intact - not least of which were the industrial-strength stage presence, the stirring soprano and everything that captured my late adolescent heart. Indeed, the unquiet decades since 'Back Street Luv', Curved Air's only Top Forty entry, fell away as I glimpsed briefly a profile once defined by a *Top Of The Pops* arc-lamp.

Afterwards, amid the empty bottles, half-eaten food and further debris of dressing room hospitality, I achieved my ancient ambition via a chaste farewell embrace with Sonja Kristina. However, the now and the here did not disappear, and the overall effect wasn't the same as it might have been back in 1971.

Sonja is of pensionable age, and I'm not far behind - though further behind than John Roberts, *It's A Beautiful Day's* European tour manager, who I've known and liked since we were first introduced some seven years ago. I was, therefore, pleased to accede to his request for me to perform at his unexpectedly public birthday celebration on the 4th of July

atr Southsea's RMA Tavern - though I was as chalk to cheese to the other act booked, Stompin' Dave Allen, a thoroughly diverting Dorset gentleman of *yee-hah* hillbilly persuasion.

It was also through my entry into the same orbit that Clayson and the Argonauts' undertook an exhilarating show at the Beehive ('a cultural Oasis in the desert of the Swindon scene', it says here) the week after the Sonja Kristina encounter, at the recommendation to promoter Andy Marcer of Rob Beckinsale, who I'd met when he was a guitar-picking hireling of David and Linda LaFlamme, mainstays of It's A Beautiful Day. As a result, we found ourselves the toast of Swindon. Rebooked immediately, a return in November prompted a rave review in a local media outlet - see <http://greenmanbsp.wordpress.com/2012/11/27/alan-clayson-and-the-argonauts-at-the-beehive-23rd-november/> - despite the beginning of a heavy cold that caused problems with pitching and waking the next day with a voice like Howlin' Wolf - specifically, a Howlin' Wolf that couldn't sing in tune. This explained my non-appearance the next evening at a recital to honour the seventy years on this planet of Mike Cooper, who left the runway as a cult celebrity during the second wave of British blues in the later 1960s, and has since penetrated musical realms far removed from this while remaining as synonymous with his home town of Reading as The Troggs to Andover.

In parenthesis, an unrelated Cooper - Alice - reared up when I managed to procure press accreditation for Harry and I for his *Halloween Night Of Fear* at London's O2 Arena where, along a single staircase, you'd pass a ghoul, a demon, a vampire, a phantom and a strait-jacketed headcase. Some wound up on stage in a fancy-dress competition - judged by volume of applause - that prefaced a main event that brushed aside all their efforts like matchsticks as it would have done when we two plus Jack saw it in Hammersmith in 2004. Visually, while there were none of the funny activities of yore involving whips, dolls, chickens and a boa constrictor, Alice was initial central figure of a recreation of the birth of Frankenstein's monster - mutating via smoke and fireworks into a huge, havoc-wreaking behemoth. Yet the repellent fascination of this and further effects tended to distract attention from the quality of the music - a melodic, controlled strand of heavy metal underpinning an often witty and insightful lyricism throughout a presentation that's as riveting as it ever was.

Alice's career was set in motion via the pragmatic championship of Frank Zappa - and so in more absolute terms was that of Dweezil, the Mother Superior's elder son, whose *Zappa Plays Zappa* revue Jack and I experienced at the Roundhouse in November.

'People make a fuss about my kids having supposedly strange names,' smiled the late Frank, 'but no matter what first names I might have given them, it's the *last* name that's going to get them into trouble.' Certainly, it provided Dweezil with a capacity crowd that *wanted* to like his six-piece group's presentation of his sire's music - to the degree that it brought forth an exclamation of 'They're the greatest band I've ever heard!' from some entranced youth as he headed home afterwards, lost in wonder.

It was almost the sound at any given moment that counted rather than individual pieces, chiefly via displays of eclecticism and unpredictability in compatible amounts in passagework and endlessly inventive soloing, most conspicuously when multi-instrumentalist Scheila Gonzalez took a sax break during the first half; virtuoso drummer Joe 'Vaultmeister' Travers commanded the stage under his own voodoo spell in the second, and Kurt Morgan on bass. ministered more obtrusively to overall effect - as on the same instrument did special guest Scott Thunes - who rose through the ranks to be second-in-command during Frank's final tour in 1988. Crucially, there was Dweezil who, as capable of serene resolution as severe dissonance, has carved a niche of true individuality as a guitarist *per se* that, at the most fundamental level, needs no affinity to a famous father to enhance it.

As we'd missed our intended train, Jack and I went to the bar where the group was holding court - and a most friendly and amusing bunch they were. Needless to say, Dweezil was the cynosure of most eyes as he reserved a little of his unspoilt-by-fame charm for everyone making a fuss of him - and Jack was most impressed with Scott and I bearhugging, and the 'Hi, Alan. Great to see you, man! How you doin'?'-type greetings from Kurt, who I'd known hitherto only as a telephone voice from the Zappa Family Trust's nerve

centre in California - and Joe, who I didn't realise immediately was the drummer I'd been watching for the previous two hours on the boards. The root cause of this was probably seeing him out of context - and not understanding that he had an existence beyond the dark and lonely corners of the Family Trust's archives where he pores over thousands of taped hours, dating back up to half a century, of out-takes, demos, alternative versions, in-concert performances *et al* in order to cater for a vast international fan base for whom no item connected with Frank Zappa is too insignificant to be less than totally fascinating. In passing, this bodes well for the Zappa biography, which is cranking into motion at last.

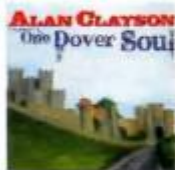
However Jack felt about my splendid familiarity with the boys in Dweezil's band, I flushed with pride when Kurt told me how much he liked *One Dover Soul* - for the long awaited release in August of this, the first Clayson disc since Clayson and the Argonauts double-CD retrospective, *Sunset On A Legend*, in 2005, and the first solo album since 1995, has been without question the biggest vocational event of consequence this year. As you will gather from those that punctuate this present exercise in namedropping and self-aggrandisement, all critiques so far have been favourable. There have also been a few scattered airings on the wireless, whether in the graveyard hours on BBC Radio Three or as far afield as a FM

ALAN CLAYSON



One Dover Soul

(SOUTHERN DOMESTIC) www.alanclayson.com



He may be a prolific author – thirty-plus books on music, including authorised biographies of The Yardbirds and The Troggs (and lately appointed by the Zappa Family Trust to write Frank Zappa's story) – but *One Dover Soul* is Alan Clayson's first album of new material in fifteen years. Makes you wish he'd venture into the studio more often.

Producer Wreckless Eric has done a mighty job of interpreting a collection of Clayson demos multitracked by the great English eccentric on various dodgy car-boot cassette players. His objective was to render the recordings more accessible while maintaining the ramshackle grandeur of the originals. Mission accomplished, and then some.

There's melodrama aplenty yet no little poignancy as Clayson's engaging voice navigates its way over uneven rhythms and ambitious arrangements, among which 'Celestial City', 'Heedless Child' and the truly memorable 'Ug The Caveman' work best. Here's hoping we don't have to wait so long for the next Clayson opus.

David Burke



Alan Clayson



One Dover Sole

WWW.ALANCLAYSON.COM. CD

The singer pays tribute to his hometown, wherein madcap but pop-worthy vignettes of supernatural events in mundane locales illuminate the human condition. Beware its affecting jabs of Ray Davies-esque nostalgia. *IH*

station in Quebec, thus giving false impressions of *One Dover Soul's* standing in market terms. Already, sales via the web-site are fizzling out - which is why Wreckless Eric has awarded me an *asbestos* disc, and why I'd be pathetically grateful if you'd encourage people to look at http://www.alanclayson.com/pages_single/One_Dover_Soul/One_Dover_Soul.htm, and perhaps trigger a fresh burst of commercial activity.

Yet copies are shifting steadily if unremarkably on the merchandising stand at concerts, notably at the respective launches at the Twelve Bar Club (see heading illustration) - along Denmark Street, once London's Tin Pan Alley - and the Rising Sun Arts Centre in Reading where as well as focussing unashamedly on not so much arrangements as *approximations* of items from *One Dover Soul*, I attempted to address other musical trackways of a professional career which is, I suppose, traceable to my first paid engagement (when, incidentally, I was rhythm guitarist for one night only with The Senators Of Sound during their monthly residency in 1968 at Aldershot Abattoirs Social Club. Please don't tell anyone about this very well-concealed ledger in my artistic accounts.)

The Rising Sun show was fraught with grave technical problems instanced by a cassette player chewing up a pre-recorded backing tape and hence putting the kybosh on the world premiere of not so much a song as a 'entity' entitled 'The Local Mister Strange'. Nevertheless, the 'surprise' appearance of the Argonauts for the second half lent credence to the homily 'All's well that ends well' - to the degree that we were engaged for dates in spring and for next summer's Rising Sun Festival.

As it was both there and in Swindon, we had the same effect on the audience when warming up for The Steve Gibbons Band at Bristol's Thunderbolt in October where a fellow

Alan Clayson

One Dover Soul

☆☆☆☆

Southern Domestic SD 004 CD

A Clayson certainly
intermittent Argonaut and
inexhaustible scrivener Alan
Clayson was recently appointed
Frank Zappa's official
biographer. A safe and
appropriate pair of hands,
given both men's veneration
of composer Edgard Varèse –
not forgetting that, besides the
artistically fecund Zappa,

Clayson is one of the few
Trojans who can be said to
have been comparably prolific.

Quite apart from his
30-and-counting music books
and the "argosies" collected
on AlanClayson.com, Clayson
is an underappreciated
sovereign of songcraft in the
Martin Newell and Robyn
Hitchcock vein: literate, witty
and as English as muffins and
chilblains. *One Dover Soul*,
produced by Wreckless Eric, is
a bracingly wayward beast:
uncategorisable and
uncontainable in equal
measure. Its opening salvo,
the livid and stormy *Cressida*,
appears to be blown
unsteadily along by Mellotron-
operated bellows. This gives
way to the ruined chamber
music of *Forest De Winter Kit-
Kat*, which drapes a courtly
Christmas cloak over a lyric of
nostalgic longing; never has
the word "eschatological"
sounded so apposite.

Thereafter, the programme
veers compellingly from the
bereft rumination of
Headless Child – a bleak
bulletin from an empty nest
– to the lurching dramedy of
Ug The Caveman, a lurid
litany of death discs.
A Varèse melody even gets
a look-in, accompanying the

86 Record Collector

November 2012

Paul Verlaine poem Un
Grand Sommeil Noir.
Oregano Rathbone

Living on the edge

CD: Alan Clayson -
One Dover Soul
Southern Domestic

Writer-performer Alan Clayson is justifiably proud of a maverick musical reputation established in part by way of comments suggesting that he "holds a premier position on rock's lunatic fringe" and that he presents "a stage act that defies succinct description", which "often teeters towards catastrophe".

But behind the unorthodox persona is a very solid and impressive background in recording and performing. Having led the superbly named Clayson and The Argonauts - a cult ensemble with a strong following on the live circuit from the mid-70s into the 80s - Alan is also versatile enough to have worked with such disparate pop figures as Dave Berry, The Yardbirds, Twinkle, The Pretty Things, and Screaming Lord Sutch.

Alan, a prolific music historian, biographer and reviewer - he is, of course, a contributor to *The Beat* - will have delighted fans of his own repertoire by resuming his recording activities. This latest foray is certainly true to form - it's an engagingly eccentric and idiosyncratically avant-garde collection of songs that are steeped in a kind of delicious psychedelic maelstrom.

There are a dozen original and unconventional compositions - plus a piece by the poet Paul Verlaine that's been set to music written by the radical classical composer Edgard Varèse. The album is uniformly intriguing - and often you've enjoyed the "journey" so much that you want to know more about the tale that's been woven.

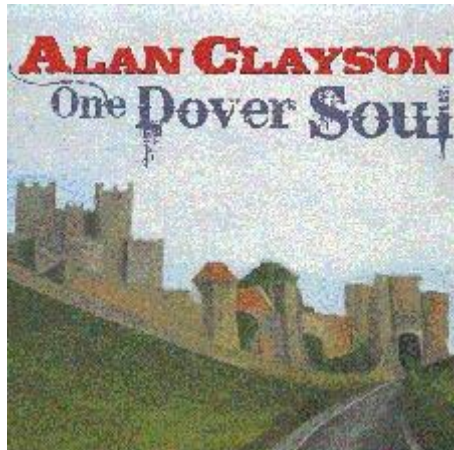
There's plenty in the way of unexpected phrasing and audacious rhymes - and surely the potential for a novelty hit in the case of the irresistibly catchy track 'Ug The Caveman'.

'One Dover Soul' has been produced by fellow musician Wreckless Eric, who immersed himself in a lengthy process transforming some very rough demo recordings into finished music able to accommodate new Clayson vocals - while preserving what's described as their "ramshackle grandeur".

The Beat, October 2012

named Chris, buoyant with enthusiasm, cornered me after we'd finished to sound me out about Clayson and the Argonauts playing a working men's club in Portishead next July. I named a price and was dismayed when he didn't haggle (which implied we might have been worth more) - and I also expressed uncertainty about how we'd be received, but he assured me that such establishments are no longer the sole preserve of vile comedians, ale-choked singalongs, dodgy variety acts and facetious introductions (e.g. 'Without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to bring on a *grrrrreat* entertainer I know you're all going to enjoy - well, my late grandmother was quite fond of him...'). Neither do the customers expect The Rolling Stones for their admission fee or say as much between numbers.

Chris was there in his capacity as an old friend of Steve Gibbons, a post-Woodstock chart contender who, even in the evening of his life, still has everything it takes: easy professionalism, instinctive crowd control, the physique of one of half his age, most of his hair still on his head and a gleaming onstage grin that just about slays me. By coincidence,



So who remembers **Clayson and the Argonauts**?

Probably not many - although a deluge of messages to the contrary would be further proof toward the age of miracles not being a complete and utter lost cause. Anyway, [Alan Clayson](#) has a new album out entitled "One Dover Soul". Not having sold his to the devil, he still has artistic licence on all aspects of his. Recorded over a period of time "in Norfolk and South West France" by the indefatigable **Eric Goulden** with the aid of various Wreckless alumni including Ms **Amy Rigby**, it's a peculiar beastie.

On the info sheet, the reference to being "heroic and blundering" pretty much hits the nail on the head. "Cressida" crashes in like **John Leyton** channelling **Syd Barrett**. Another person it reminds me of is Julian Cope and the more eccentric end of his dabbling with the garage disease. "Refugees" and it's "3, 2, 1... zero hour" refrain particularly but all the way out the end of a relatively long fade. ODS is a genuine anomaly. Eric assures me that his live outings are revelation but how do we translate that into a viable commodity. Clayson is almost as obscure as Rodriguez or this Bill Fay guy that has emerged again after forever although he has been hiding plain sight as an author all the while.

Perhaps a documentary film is the way to address it?

"Ug The Caveman" is a novelty that Joe Meek himself might have been proud of. Indeed it factors in an element of him in name-checking a number of death record titles across its duration.

The kitchen sink melodrama suggests an element of theatre. The feeling that this is a disjointed recording of a some distance from the beaten track "production" is never too far away. Somehow it all hangs together, I'm not entirely sure how or why. There's no agenda other than to present what's rattling around the canyons of this particular mind. Vivian Stanshall is another guy that springs to mind, particularly during "Teenage Runaway".

Track 12 is entitled "I Hear Voices" and this comes as no real surprise. I can genuinely report that you won't have heard anything like this. It's not an instant "get" but it seems like a shame for the cast to have come this far and for you not to at least make an effort to hear where they ended up.

Flummoxed is a word that sprang to mind after the first time I heard this. After several more, I'd like to add confounded. "One Dover Soul" is a fish out of water and for that reason alone we should celebrate the fact that it can exist at all in these disposable times.

Comments:

Great live band Clayson and the Argonauts

posted by  Ian : 4:12 PM

-
The Next Big Thing, Sunday, September 02, 2012

Steve made a guest appearance as a prelude to a *Clayson Sings Chanson* show the previous week in the Kitchen Garden Cafe, an auditorium within a nursery in his home city of Birmingham - where a near-capacity (and most attentive) crowd included disparate parochial showbiz figures, among them Trevor Burton (once of The Move) and a woman who'd been in ITV's long-running *Crossroads* soap opera, set in a Midlands hotel.

Among further unleashing of Clayson Sings Chanson was a scintillating evening at the Cellars, the Southsea Tweedledum to the RMA Tavern's Tweedledee, where many attended on the strength of my 2011 support to John Cooper Clarke, and prompted an e-mail from a certain Martin Boorman ('your performance was brilliant...opening my eyes to a musical genre and an artist I knew nothing about'). Yeah, well... *Clayson Sings Chanson* also drew a crowd as rabid back at the Rising Sun and the Thunderbolt. At the latter venue, 'rabid' might have been an apposite adjective because someone brought along her barking dog.

The Rising Sun was the location too for a maiden Clayson art exhibition, centred on a morbid kind of calligraphy. Here's two examples (not to scale), followed by an advertisement:-



The current catalogue of Clayson's Calligraphy is available in 3 sizes. Bespoke orders are also taken. For further information please send an email to: aetheria6@yahoo.co.uk.

[Current Catalogue](#)

- **Where's it all going to end?**
- **You can't get into trouble for telling the truth.**
- **Every silver lining has a cloud.**
- **All life is bold adventure.**
- **Domesticity is the Enemy of Art.**
- **Alcohol is the refreshment of the Devil.**
- **Don't bring shame on the old folks!!!**
- **Rock-a-boogie hound dog.**
- **It's not the principle, it's the money.**
- **Every name is shaken in Death's Great Urn.**
- **What of the egomaniac whose self-adoration is entirely justified?**
- **Hew Agag in pieces before the Lord!**
- **It is sacred to be clean.**
- **We must die brother. We must die.**
- **En ma fin gît mon commencement. (translation - In my end is my beginning).**
- **See a pin and pick it up and all day long you'll have a pin.**
- **Total nuclear war now!!!**
- **Remember.**
- **Al Capone's guns don't argue.**
- **Why be happy when you could be normal?**
- **If a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing pedantically.**
- **Dark care sits behind the horseman.**

We sold three of these - and four during another such occasion on the 4th of December - but that's more than Van Gogh sold in his entire life. *A propos* nothing in particular, Gauguin was a friend - who wasn't really a friend at all, if you know what I mean - of Van Gogh. His cadaver moulders in the same remote Pacific island cemetery as that of Jacques Brel, and at a lunch party Inese and I attended at Argonauts drummer Alan Barwise's house, one of the other diners was Gauguin's great-granddaughter, Mette.

Finally, because one of the difficulties in writing it is that real life doesn't run as smoothly or as coherently as fiction, this next piece of information doesn't fit anywhere else. It relates to the start of the year when Joanna Szalkowska, a young film director, contacted me about participation as an interviewee in a documentary she was making called *Heroes Of The New Romantics* - about one of the cultural movements that came after punk. Before the cameras, I seized the opportunity to present a case for Clayson and the Argonauts being harbingers of this. If you're interested, this kicks off exactly five minutes into <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3955im5fxg>.