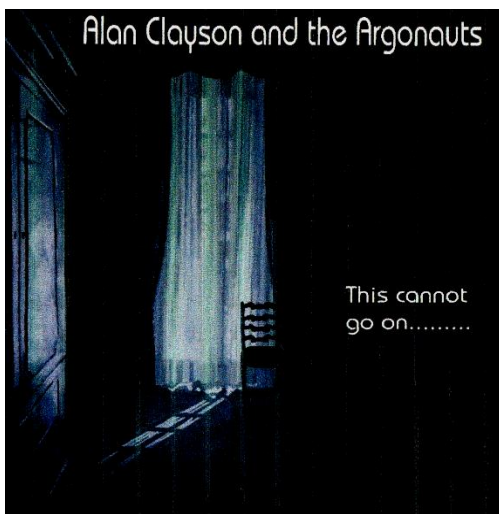


ARGOSY 2017

Even if I'm to be inducted, I've decided already to boycott the annual Rock & Roll Hall of Fame ceremony...

If it starts to grate on your nerves, maybe that's almost the point...

As far as I'm concerned, the event at the central height of 2017 was the October unleashing by Rush Music Records of *THIS CANNOT GO ON...*, the first non-compilation studio album by Alan Clayson and the Argonauts in over three decades. Its title is a line from a selection named 'Looking For A Monday' – which seemed apposite as it relates to careers founded on short-lived novelty and descent into a netherworld.



From a technical perspective, none of my earlier releases, both solo and with the group, has ever achieved such a profound depth of sound. Perhaps that was connected with a deliberate decision to minimise acoustic separation in Paul Critchfield, our bass guitarist's Blue Rocket recording complex – apart from lead vocals sung in the hallway and the sax honked in the living room: all very Joe Meek. Other than backing chorale and necessary overdubs, certain selections were completely 'live', capturing a spontaneity and thrilling margin of error that could only have happened then and there. We were really tearing it up, the most

wailing combo on the planet!

While *THIS CANNOT GO ON...* embraces road-tested songs dating back to our 'imperial' period in the late 1970s, most tracks are relatively fresh off the assembly line – but there's nothing we won't dare to try on the boards – although 'This Time Tomorrow' is often extrapolated into curious realms – and 'The Local Mister Strange' is even more 'approximated', not least because the version on the disc features John Otway's *obligato* on theremin (which is the instrument heard most famously in various horror movies and on 'Good Vibrations' by The Beach Boys). In the lyrics, the secondary character is a television repair man, but the first person singular lends this opus its title. Musically, it hinges on a repeated six-note riff. If it starts to grate on your nerves, maybe that's almost the point.

'I Hear Voices' is about someone similar, namely one of these quiet-shy-blokes-who-keeps-himself-to-himself. They're the ones you have to watch – who go berserk without warning and machine-gun a bus queue or leave a packet of wine gums outside Buckingham Palace. In a more passive way, 'Teenage Runaway' borders a similar area, centred as it is on a surf-tormented shore where stands a boy whose parents valued him for what they thought he *ought* to be. Moreover, 'Lone Cloud' is based very much on the suicide of someone closer to me in her particular way than anyone else.

'Derrydown Lane' however, is about another female – and is traceable to the first Saturday after I started at college in nineteen-seventy-forget-about-it – when I went to the Freshers Ball, where I was astounded to finish the evening in the bedsit of someone I'd judged to be way out of my league. It turned out that she was – because she made it clear that, if I wanted

our antics in her room to continue, I was, under no circumstances, ever to address her in public.



By contrast, despite the ‘power ballad’ tempo, ‘Angelette’ finishes quite optimistically. It’s also an example of a common song-writer’s ploy of using a girl’s name as a title – except I couldn’t get the name of the girl I had in mind to scan. Nevertheless, she knows who she is. Another composition she inspired is ‘If I Lost You’ – which also concerns a yearning to dwell on an island in the same geographical and local television news region where I live at present, i.e. in the proverbial ‘nearest faraway place’. Moreover, a remake of ‘The Refugees’ (from *One Dover Soul*) is an articulation of her Latvian parents’ separate flights from an intolerable native land torn apart by Hitler-versus-Stalin. When it became obvious that there’d be no welcome back to the Baltic States, they’d held painful homesickness at bay, and become naturalised British citizens, far removed from another life of Imperial-bearded burghers, *milchcow madchens*, *lederhosen*-clad boys, Hanseatic cities, thriving tillage, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, *bratwurst*, black bread, *slivovitz* and inky forests where, once upon a time, Hansel and Gretel had come across the witch’s gingerbread-and-candy cottage.

Among less subjective excerpts are, ‘Looking for a Monday’ – inspired by an expression I overheard Dave Berry use during a telephoned conversation with his agent over filling a vacant evening in a string of one-nighters – and an overhaul of ‘Landwaster’, which, as a 1978 B-side, penetrated briefly a couple of Top Forties *sur le continent* after a radio presenter in the the Netherlands started spinning it by mistake. Dwelling specifically on historical figures too, Geronimo’ concerns the blood-stained legend of the landlocked Wild West, who spent his last days as a tourist attraction - while ‘Fame And Fortune’ was penned late in 1977, ten years after flower-power was supplanted by Al Capone chic from the jazz age and Prohibition-fuelled carnage by slouch-hatted, wide-lapelled hitmen riding on the tail-boards of Buicks.

Though the lyrics of ‘Young England’ might read ‘historical’ too, they – like those of ‘The Refugees’ - are germane to these present distracted times. Furthermore, the original title of ‘Aetheria’ was ‘Beer Cans On The Moon’, and was intended to combine an interest in astronomy with a Searing Indictment Of Society. Then imagination was captured by the name of a nondescript region on Mars and an awareness that other territories on the planet - e.g. the Styx, Olympus - were named after places in Greek mythology. The recurring Latin chant (*‘de ira dei’*) means ‘from the wrath of God’.

One pundit, however, has confessed to having ‘no idea what the song is about’ – and I’m pondering now the wisdom of just having helped to pick the bones of meaning from librettos like

'Aetheria' that may resemble the narrative of some wild dream that makes perfect sense until the sleeper wakes. Indeed, there are occasions when I'm only half aware of what an opus I've composed is about. An example is 'We share this scented light-bulb in the house of Johnny Various/Assured, our street survival, with his boys taking real good care of us', a couplet that surfaced as the last verse of 'Esmeralda Changing Partners', a selection on my 1996 LP, *Soirée*. This was the consequence of my habit of having a note-pad, biro and cassette recorder by the bed for the purpose of logging shards of inspiration. However, what may seem a most profound insight into the human condition during that interval between wakefulness and sleep is frequently not so half-a-day later.

I bothered with no explanations whatsoever in *TOO GONE TO EVEN KNOW THE WORDS*, an *oeuvre integrale* in print this summer, enclosing original lyrics committed to paper by me between 1972 and 2017. Here come three of the reviews:-

TOO GONE TO EVEN KNOW THE WORDS - LYRICS 1972-2017
 Alan Clayton
 (AETHERIA PUBLISHING) www.alanclayson.com
 ISBN 978-1-4240-537-6. Softcover. 108 pp.

On a personal basis, bringing out a retrospective book of lyrics is probably a necessary act for one so notable for his engagement with words, and how they can be used effectively with or without music. Publicly, it hints that there may be a sense that a temporary halt has been made: "Look, I have done all this - what's to come is yet unsure."

Alan Clayton - best known for taking The Argonauts on a tortuous road through contemporary music-making [and as a contributor in this parish: Ed] - draws also on his solo work here, and pieces recorded by a whole rake of household names stretching back to the eccentric Dave Berry. He has been a notorious performer, not just for his delivery of fantasies and recollections but also for his more complex persona, as 'a man possessed', primarily with 'a doomed romanticism that was Brel's trademark'.

Pieces written down, therefore, legitimately question whether what he composes may be called poetry or not. They are hugely variable in tone, quality and effect. Some bear a deeply resonant weight; others seem little more than doggerel. Through the book, as might be expected, it is the man's huge charisma which predominates. In Clayton's case, that's no bad thing.

Nick Burbridge

Rock 'N' Reel [RNR]
 Volume 2 Issue 63,
 May/June 2017

TOO GONE TO EVEN KNOW THE WORDS: LYRICS 1972-2017 by Alan Clayton (Aetheria Publishing, UK; 2016; 108 pages)

Alan Clayton is a writer, a historian, a musician, a performer and a recording artist. He's written books on the Yardbirds, the Troggs, Jacques Brel, Edgard Varese, and the British beat scene, to name just a few, and his writing has appeared in publications from the *Daily Telegraph* to *Ugly Things*. As a musician he's worked with Jim McCarty, Jane Relf, Dave Berry, Twinkle, Wreckless Eric, Dick Taylor, and Screaming Lord Sutch (again, to name a few), as well as his own Clayton & the Argonauts, in the '70s and '80s, and as a solo artist since then.

Too Gone to Even Know the Words is a collection of his song lyrics from the past 45 years, and they read like fine poetry: humorous, poignant, erudite, and unfailingly original. The subject matter is all over the map, from Cressida to the Dave Clark Five, from John Wilkes to Ug the Caveman, from the streets of old Rotterdam to the battlefield at Hastings. My personal favorite is his touching elegy to his friend David Sutch, "The Last Show on Earth."

"David, oh David, hang on to that daydream,
 Hang on to that daydream
 if it means so much.
 Though centuries fade,
 there'll be some who remember
 That tears fell for Screaming Lord Sutch."
 More info: www.alanclayson.com (MS)

Ugly Things, No.45,
 summer/fall 2017

His maverick thoughts set out

Book: *Too Gone To Even Know The Words: Lyrics 1972-2017*
 By Alan Clayton
 Aetheria Publishing,
 £8 108 pages

THE B-SIDE of a 70s single by writer and musician Alan Clayton became a hit in Belgium after a radio DJ played it by mistake.

Now the words of that song and many others have been committed to print in an anthology of lyrics by the colourful performer who's also an eminent rock biographer, music historian and trusty scribe for publications including *The Beat*.

It's the latest in a string of books he's produced - except that, this time, he's the focus of his own work via a paperback compendium of pieces drawn from across the past 45 years.

Many of the songs collated have featured in the repertoire of his renowned ensemble 'Clayton and the Argonauts', and a number have been recorded by luminaries.

Arranged alphabetically by title, it's all highly individual in approach - with a diverse range of ideas filtered through decidedly maverick thought processes, and with Clayton's evident erudition and flair for vocabulary deployed to sterling effect.

The collection - delivering a wide sweep in terms of geography and history, and incorporating myth and legend, narrative intrigue, black humour, the barbed twist, clever imagery and themes of love and loss - is thick with literary devices like allegory and metaphor, pathos and bathos, bitter irony, and tragic-comedy.

On occasion, interpretation is left to the reader's own imagination, but there's also a poignant tribute that was written on the death of Screaming Lord Sutch (and elsewhere, fleeting references to The Beatles, Elvis Presley, the Dave Clark Five, The Yardbirds, Manfred Mann, The Swinging Blue Jeans, Nashville Teens - and even Sonja Kristina of Curved Air).

The Beat Volume 15 Issue
 180 April 2017

Critical acclaim, however, has not translated into sales beyond around a dozen bought from the merchandising stand at gigs and an internet order from a bloke in Italy. Nonetheless, if not yet in a profit position, *THIS CANNOT GO ON...* has shifted quite a few already, principally on the strength of word-of-mouth, social media and glowing press coverage which thus far extends only to *Just Listen To This* (see <http://justlistentothis.co.uk/reviews/alan-clayson-argonauts-cannot-go/>) and *The Beat* - which, as well as a critique, embraced an interview containing unusual questions (e.g. 'Where do you keep your moral compass?') from Jane Quinn, former newshound for US teen periodical *Tiger Beat*, to which I gave commensurate replies:-



Share a Cuppa Tea with Jane

Sharing a cuppa tea with...

Alan Clayson of The Argonauts as he discusses Elvis, monkeys, and new projects talks about fear, Beatles, and tattoos.

Well, as I grew up in the American corn fields, I never suspected one day I would share a cuppa tea with a genuine Argonaut. But here we are, chatting about Elvis and monkeys and whatnot. All things are indeed possible.

There are people around today who'll tell you the legendary ALAN CLAYSON AND THE ARGONAUTS were the greatest group ever formed. Were they? Answers on a postcard please. Whether they were, or were not, they were certainly fabulous and even described by *Melody Maker* as being on the "Lunatic Fringe" in the 1970s.

In addition to contributing to publications such as *Record Collector*, *Mojo*, and *Folk Roots*. Alan Clayson also established himself as a prolific writer of music biographies. Among his more than 30 books are *Backbeat*, which details The Beatles' early career in Germany, Ringo Starr: Straight Man or Joker, and biographies of Mick Jagger, Keith Moon, Roy Orbison, Yoko Ono, The Troggs, and many others.

Let us stroll into the garden and share a cuppa with our favourite member of the Lunatic Fringe, for there is much to talk about.

So... Mr Clayson... All aboard! Tell me, do you sing in the shower?
That depends.

Elvis Presley or Elvis Costello?

To ask my opinion of the King is like asking me about railway lines or donkeys' false teeth - because I can't say anything objective about him. He's just there. As for Costello, I always preferred Wreckless Eric.

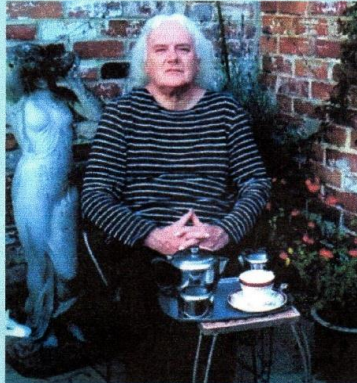
What is your first/earliest memory?

Gas rather than electricity lighting a kitchen with a rickety copper geyser hanging above a sink where my maternal grandmother would both bathe infants and wash up dishes from a dinner on a newspaper tablecloth

What is an Argonaut and why did you want to become one?

Haven't you ever seen the 1963 film *Jason And The Argonauts*? I was christened

Alan Robert Gordon, partly because my father was a keen cricketer, who treasured the sound of 'A.R.G. Clayson' being announced as I strode from the pavilion to bat for the school XI or, better still, the county. As it transpired, I developed an aversion to organised games, but it also turned out that, in the light of my leadership of Clayson and the



Argonauts in a then unimaginable future, I couldn't have been given more suitable initials.

Have you ever had a broken heart?

I refuse this question.

Where do you keep your moral compass?

Is there a dafter aphorism than 'you can't get into trouble for telling the truth'?

Singer-songwriter, author, or music journalist?

The first of these. However, my income depends more on doing what I want to do second-best.

What is the meaning of life?

What of the egomaniac whose self-adoration is entirely justified?

Who have you asked for an autograph?

Denny Laine was the first pop star I ever met. He signed the back of a boutique card after my 14-year-old self spotted him emerging from a Carnaby Street tobacco-

Alan Clayson and the Argonauts

This cannot go on.....



nist in spring half-term 1965, just as his Moody Blues' 'Go Now' was slipping from the charts. I came up to his shoulders then, but he came up to mine three decades later when he and I undertook a series of one-nighters in the north-east.

Do you like monkeys?

I feel the same way about them as I do Elvis Presley.

If you could have invited anyone, living or dead, to this wee tea party, who would it have been?

She knows who she is.

Tell us a secret.

This and other revelations must wait for my autobiography, *Nut Rocker*.

Did your dreams come true?

One I had only last week certainly hasn't. I was at a kind of party in the assembly hall of my old infant school. Outside, instead of the asphalt playground, there was a thick lake of blancmange into which Dave Berry, Twinkle, and someone I didn't recognise, were digging with great earnestness.

What's new?

'This Cannot Go On...' the first non-compilation CD by Alan Clayson actually with The Argonauts - which will cast adrift on the discographical oceans on October. 15

Alan Clayson and the Argonauts launch 'THIS CANNOT GO ON.....': with a special concert on Friday, October 20, at The Dublin Castle, 94 Parkway, London NW1 7AN - see www.bugbearbookings.com

His record company is at www.rushmusic.co.uk

© JANE QUINN
www.mightyquinnmanagement.com

More run-of-the-mill was a heavily edited cross-examination by *Record Collector*. However, you can read the unexpurgated version right now:-

ALAN CLAYSON AND THE ARGONAUTS
This Cannot Go On..., the first non-compilation CD by Alan Clayson actually with the Argonauts was cast adrift on

discographical oceans this autumn, and RC asked the eloquent Mr. Clayson about it.

The fifteen tracks embrace compositions both fresh off the assembly line - and from as far

back as our 'imperial' era in the late 1970s. If the tour bus had drawn up outside a ballroom on Pluto then, it mightn't have seemed all that odd – particularly after one of our B-sides, 'Landwaster', penetrated a couple of Top Forties sur le continent after a radio presenter in the Netherlands started spinning it by mistake.

Our first decade climaxed in 1985 with, well, What A Difference A Decade Made, a cause célèbre of an album that earned rave reviews in Folk Roots (!) and The Observer. That was presumed to be that until Sunset On A Legend, a two-CD retrospective, was unleashed by Damaged Goods twenty years later – and we reformed as a 'tribute band' to ourselves, namely me and three of the original members – Pete Cox (guitar), Alan Barwise (drums) and John Harries (woodwinds) – plus Andy Lavery (keyboards) and Paul Critchfield (bass). They're the finest edition of the Argonauts that's ever been; certainly the most versatile.

Though onlookers might gaze between cracks in their fingers sometimes, we deliver very much a 'show' that still defies succinct description. So does This Cannot Go On..., which resulted from us being pregnant with ideas for immortalising road-tested items evolved over hundreds of hours on stage - as well as not so much songs as 'things' (like 'The Local Mister Strange' with John Otway on theremin) that can't go beyond intriguing approximations on the boards during a present run of engagements centred on This Cannot Go On..., and, hopefully, the beginning of another 'golden age'!

Is there anyone in your family history who was a musician?

Not of any significance. Indeed, my mother told me, 'Alan, if you ever walk on a stage

with a pop group, I shall die of shame!' She's now deep into her eighties.

Of all the people you've worked with, who taught you the most, and in what way?

One of them was Dave Berry who served as careers advisor, father confessor and a major catalyst in the recovery of my artistic confidence when, after Clayson and the Argonauts sundered in 1985, I became keyboard player with his backing Cruisers.

If you could have anyone cover one of your songs, which one, and who would you want doing it?

Maybe it's happened already – because Dave has covered several, most conspicuously on his 1987 album Hostage To The Beat.

What's the oddest place or circumstance that's inspired a song?

In 1996 on a series of one-nighters in the north-east with Denny Laine – during which, incidentally, we were 'personalities' at a record fayre at the University of Northumbria – I pulled up outside a minimart around midnight. Without a by-your-leave, I plugged my cassette recorder into a power-point behind the counter to sing wordless bars of a melody that was bursting the river bank of my imagination. A half-awake check-out girl peered indifferently. This flash of inspiration would develop into 'Forest De Winter Kitkat' on my 2012 album, One Dover Soul.

Do you plan an autobiography?

I'm in the throes of Nut Rocker, my perspective on what one Sunset On A Legend reviewer described as 'one of rock's most glorious and enjoyable follies'. He mentioned too that 'Alan's sleeve notes are an entertainment in themselves' before concluding that 'somewhere there is a parallel universe where Clayson and the Argonauts are bigger than The Beatles'.

One of the actual appraisals of THIS CANNOT GO ON... that I wish could reach a broader readership too is that contained in a private e-mail from of Billy Ritchie, who post-Clouds, 'went off in a great sulk that has continued to the present day'. So runs a quote from a section concerning the trio in Rocking Chair, his entrancing compendium of 'what happens with a leftover life left to kill' after optimum commercial moments have passed. Of more direct interest is

another passage:-

CLAYSON & THE ARGONAUTS



Alan Clayson has proved himself to be that rare diamond in the music business – someone who can transcend lack of true success yet gain a respect and credibility almost unparalleled in our story of growing old in the Rocking Chair.

Clayson and the Argonauts were a seventies outfit whose individuality was obvious, but perhaps too idiosyncratic for mass appeal. Like many bands of their ilk, they seemed to come and go, disbanding in 1986, another act consigned to the dustbin of history. But watch this space.

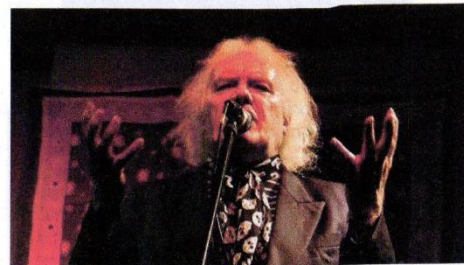
Retaining a sense of irony as well as an amusement of the ridiculous nature of fame, Alan simply changed tack and became a prolific writer, contributing to publications such as *Record Collector*, *Mojo* and *R2*, *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Times*. He subsequently established himself as a prolific writer of music biographies. Among his many books are *Backbeat*, which

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details the Beatles' early career in Germany, Ringo Starr: *Straight Man or Joker?*, and distinguished biographies of *Jacques Breil*, *the Yardbirds*, *Serge Gainsbourg* and *Edgard Varèse*.

Cleverly using all this as a platform, and undaunted by obstacles that would crush a mere mortal at first base, Alan re-established his musical career and even re-formed The Argonauts, at the time of writing, performing both solo gigs, as well as in his role as lead singer of The Argonauts, showcasing the many myriad aspects of his talent, and becoming in the process, nothing less than a National treasure.

Alan is one of the few included in this book whose credibility and status at the end is in an even better position than it was in the beginning. If only it was ever thus....



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By the merest chance, this pressing of *Rockin' Chair* was published in April –when in the dead of night on the 17th of that month, a not entirely unrepresentative thirty-minute bash (which was issued on a 2001 bootleg CD, *Ghostly Talking Heads*) by the 1977 line-up of Clayson and the Argonauts at the Paris Theatre, London was dredged up for transmission on BBC Radio Six (and can still be heard via <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08mkdz0>. Also, I have since discovered that this hasn't been the only time the same station has aired it since the turn of the century). The set-list was chosen by one of our then-co-managers as a demonstration of versatility as much as our individuality as a group. Thus we gave 'em 'Dear Lori', 'Only The Outcasts', 'Earthworms', 'On The Street Where You Live', 'The Rake's Progress', 'Für Elise' and 'You Really Got Me', complete with the idiosyncrasies then shoehorned into the act. The programme's producer Jeff Griffin liked what he heard – and I found a friend for as long as he lived in console boffin Mike Robinson, who was to be renowned in a wider world as the producer in 1980 of a domestic Number One for *Splodgenessabounds*.

I remember listening to the broadcast at my mate Kevin's parents' house – where he taped it on his top-of-the-range cassette-recorder - while Inese caught it at my parents' home a mile away. My Dad was out, but tuned in his car radio. If his attitude was an appalled 'He can't be doing that, but, by God, he is!'. Mum's attitude was veering from resignation to puzzlement. After she

volunteered to motor Inese and I back to our semi-derelict home in Reading's Cemetery Junction suburb (where I was still living at the zenith of my fame as a pop star), she couldn't leave without toasting my latest achievement up the Dove, a local pub where televisionless bohemians tended to gravitate in the evening, could she? If she was expecting me to be giving it some showbiz there to enthralled fans on the rebound from *In Concert*, with her proprietary arm draped round my shoulders, all she got was me sauntering over to one of a parochial outfit called Motley Crew with 'Hello, Dave, how's the group?' 'Great, Alan,' began his riposte, 'How's yours?' No-one else took a blind bit of notice of me.

As well as foreseeable plugs for *THIS CANNOT GO ON...*, contemporaneous slots on the electric media have included discussing the late songwriter Geoff Goddard ('Johnny Remember Me', 'Tribute To Buddy Holly' 'Just Like Eddie') on BBC Radio Berkshire, and on screen for a Spotify documentary about the location and circumstances in which Roy Orbison and Bill Dees created 'Oh! Pretty Woman'. This was filmed in a complex within the shadow of the decommissioned Battersea Power Station – and trivia freaks may be intrigued by the information that, along a corridor there, I passed the actress who plays 'Gail' in *Coronation Street*.

Travel was not necessary, however, after I was approached to participate in *Prog Story*, a visual show to be presented in Quebec, featuring footage of seven prominent British acts of that genre who left the runway in the late 1960s, interspersed with commentary from *dramatis personae* and the likes of me. So it was that, on a May afternoon of hazy sunshine, the director – who happened to be my friend Daniel Moisan of Mosquito B, assisted by Nathalie, his betrothed - set up the camera on the patio in my back garden - where the previous week I'd eaten lunch with David Scott, Kathryn Williams' sometime guitarist, and now very much an artiste in his own right - when he was breaking a journey from Brighton to his native Tyneside.

I hadn't spoken to David for quite a while, but the most poignant reunion of the year – possibly the decade – was that with the other members of Turnpike, the folk-rock quintet getting-it-together-in-the-country, who I joined as singing mouth-organist in 1972, and who acquired only the merest renown in flashback when their recording of one of my compositions. 'The Rake's



Progress' –though attributed erroneously to Clayson and the Argonauts – was, in 1976, placed at Number 28 in a chart devised by rock periodical *Zigzag*. As a rank-and-file member, I was introduced to the joys of village life as well as the intrigues and discords which make pop groups what they are. Indeed, for most of my tenure with Turnpike, I was ignorant of the high command's hidden agenda to be rid of me as soon as someone more suitable came to light – because what they truly wanted was a biological duplicate of Jacqui McShee or Maddy Prior, doubling on flute if possible.

Nevertheless, two of them were to throw in their lot with my Argonauts; we all stayed in the picture about each other's activities (albeit often by circuitous enquiry) - and none of the old

wounds were re-opened when - as captured in the photograph below - we spent a companionable summer evening in a Berkshire pub.



THE NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD: (left to right) Ross Fergusson, Mic Dover, Alan Clayson, Clive Chandler and Alan Barwise, all once of Turnpike, pause for the camera on an occasion of coded hilarity and selective nostalgia.

During a period in the mid-1990s when I 'wasn't speaking' to Ross Fergusson, Turnpike's ex-lead guitarist, I saw no reason to call on him when hurtling past the turn-off to his house near Milton Keynes when on my way to interview Clem Curtis, singer with The Foundations, best remembered for 1967's pop-soul crossover, 'Baby Now That I've Found You', the first of six UK chart entries, but then thriving as a popular mainstay of Sounds Of The Sixties revues - and as an antiques dealer in his home town of Olney, Buckinghamshire. In the course of our discussion, Clem alluded to his manifold sexual conquests and two stretches in Borstal as a young man. He also showed me his collection of erotic timepieces. On reading this, you might perceive Clem as an appalling fellow - but I liked him, and, six years later, we were to roister on the same table when watching Lonnie Donegan's appearance at a showcase for Sequel Records in some basement club down Drury Lane. In the wake of Clem's death aged 76 this March, it was my duty to pen his obituary for the *Daily Telegraph*.

I was more cheerful about writing a feature for *Rock 'N' Reel (RNR)* about my old compeer John Otway as *quid pro quo* for his contribution to 'The Local Mister Strange'. He did this on the very day in March that his own *Montserrat* reached the shops, and I can't recall when I last heard a more meticulously engineered and cleanly mastered album. Crucially, in the midst of the technical exactitudes, there's not a solitary dull moment *per se* within the eleven tracks in which the emotional piquancy of John's sixty-five-year-old baritone is as affecting in its way as it was when I

first knew him in the late 1970s. This was evident too when, after his *THIS CANNOT GO ON...* session, I drove him to a show with his Big Band (plus harmonica-blower [and road manager] David 'Deadly' Crabtree) at Newbury's Arlington Arts Centre – where I was to perform myself in November. In parenthesis, two cheap acoustic guitars exhumed in a dark and lonely corner of my attic are waiting to be collected by Otway's sometime cohort Wild Willy Barrett for employment in a stage routine where he'll saw them in half.

The only other concert by another artist that I witnessed in 2017 was when Shakin' Stevens put Inese and me on the guest list for a stop on his *Echoes Of Our Times* tour, an exemplary visual production in which renditions of items from the titular album hit as hard as those of his daring overhauls of 'Marie Marie', 'This Ole House' and so forth.

Of records by others that have come my way recently, my *fave raves* have been *Montserrat* and – though it's also necessary to declare an interest - *Alfredo Sings Brel* by Alfredo Merat, who, if you remember, brought me back to North America last year. Its content subverts how no less an authority than Charles Aznavour describes *chanson*, i.e. songs to which you can't dance. In this, Alfredo was aided by skilled, even dazzling musicians local to the studio in Cuba where he conceived a work that can be recommended unconditionally.

My own efforts with Andy Lavery in the field of *chanson* performance continue to be surprisingly successful (even if a short residency at Le Quecumbar, a Parisian-style *brasserie* in south-west London, was called off). The most distant took place on Bastille Day at a community-owned institute in Brighton, very much a city of neighbourhoods – and the one where we played seemed to be a tribe apart from the others. It resembled a sort of bohemian and middle class *Albert Square* in that, rather than watch television, everyone prefers to either congregate in the pub or get along to the hall where they could sample French cuisine and, said the venue's web-site (<http://www.exeterstreethall.org>), 'a well-chosen selection of ballads and chansons by *chansonnier* Alan Clayson, whose performance was greeted with rapturous applause by the assembled *sans-culottes*'.



Among the audience at this extravaganza was Alice, who I've known since she was seven. She's now forty and a mother of two – just as a fellow called Richard had been the same age when first we met, and had his pregnant wife in tow when up at a *Clayson Sings Chanson* came to Reading's South Street Arts Centre in November. That the place was relatively packed was gratifying in the light of another such recital in the same town only six months earlier (with the same local opening act, Izziee Jewell).

The jewel on the crown of this aspect of my cultural activities, however, occurred at the vaster Arlington Arts Centre on the outskirts of Newbury where *SOIRÉE: AN EVENING OF CHANSON* on the final Saturday in November was deemed to be 'jazz' on a brochure in which it was sandwiched between such as The Thinking Drinkers comedy duo, *Simon Yates: My Mountain Life* and the Kennet Opera Society production of *The Marriage Of Figaro*.

In case you missed the edition on the 30th of November, here's what the *Newbury Weekly News* entertainment correspondent made of us:-

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Alan Clayton at Arlington on Saturday
Picture: Brian Harrington

La soirée formidable

Double bill by local masters of chanson

TRUE chanson is about love, death, pain and passion and often sprang from poverty and deprivation. It has frequently been sanitised and watered-down for English sensibilities (witness the awful Terry Jacks hit *Seasons In The Sun* - which started life as the Jacques Brel song *Le Moribond* and robbed the original of so much of its true power and meaning).

This show featured a full set by Alan Clayton and another by Gail Hendrickx, both of whom I have known for 45 years. They are local musicians who have achieved considerable critical acclaim, so seeing them on the same bill was a real treat.

Alan is the author of a definitive biography on Brel, who influenced so much great music by artists as diverse as Scott Walker, Mark Almond and even David Bowie. He also regularly tours his chanson show in parallel with his Clayton And The Argonauts material.

After a brief spoken introduction, the evening opened with Gail's great renditions of the Edith Piaf classics *La Vie En Rose* and *L'Accordeoniste*, both sung in French, as indeed were many of the songs in Gail's repertoire. She also included Michel Legrand's *What Are You*

Music

Soirée: An Evening of Chanson, Alan Clayton and Gail Hendrickx, at Arlington Arts, Snelsmore, on Saturday, November 25

Doing The Rest Of Your Life and a superbly-emotional version of *Ne Me Quitte Pas* (famous in English as *If You Go Away*) in her first set, before Alan took to the stage with his highly-theatrical, passionate delivery and an eclectic variety of songs, including Jacques Brel's *Mathilde* and the brilliant *Next* (covered here by the Sensational Alex Harvey Band) and several of his own compositions - *The Old Dover Road* and *Days in Old Rotterdam* were highlights for me - while Charles Aznavour's *The Ham* and *Sweeney Todd the Barber* (recorded in the 50s by Stanley Holloway) were simply incredible.

The night ended with another fine set by Gail, which even included a choir on Leonard Cohen's *A Singer Must Die*.

Formidable!
BRIAN HARRINGTON

...several of his own compositions - *The Old Dover Road* and *Days in Old Rotterdam* were highlights for me - while Charles Aznavour's *The Ham* and *Sweeney Todd the Barber ...* were simply incredible



We shared the bill with Gail Hendrickx (*née* Richards), a leading lights of the folk club when I was at college. She was its compère the first time I performed there, giving 'em a self-penned and untitled morosity, dirged like a mumbling sleepwalker, that fizzled out during the aimless plucking of an instrumental interlude. Plunging then into Dave Berry-via-Chuck Berry's 'Memphis Tennessee' didn't save the day, and I stumbled off to a hollow and undeceiving

spatter of clapping. On thanking 'a most unusual performer', Gail delivered sounder musical goods – and it's feasible that Ross Fergusson *et al* had been rubbing his chin over her to supersede me in Turnpike. You could comprehend why – because Gail is blessed with a soprano as pure as Miles Davis's *Sketches Of Spain* trumpet – and had been a television and radio star in Wales prior to undertaking tours *sur le continent*, fronting The Prague Jazz Collective – with whom she delivered a memorable sell-out concert at Newbury's Corn Exchange in 2007.

At the Arlington, she was equally at ease singing to her lone guitar as to a seated backing combo and what amounted to a choir during an evening to which Andy and I added a streamlined adaptation of the South Street repertoire.

Such triumphs were not dampened by certain onstage experiences with the Argonauts that have been depressing for reasons connected with onstage sound - and the vicissitudes of provincial journalism affecting attendance. Particularly damaging was a an article in one local rag headlined *Album launch Christens new After Dark [sic]* - which was slap-dash, ill-conceived and insulting, not least for an accompanying photograph that had nothing to do with us and ham-fisted sub-editing that spawned the following sentence: 'On December 9 Alan Clayson and the Argonauts will drops "This Cannot go on..." at the London Road venue'. More extremely objectionable was my group being described as 'raucous' – which, according to my dictionary, means 'disagreeably harsh or strident'. Certainly, it's an adjective that could never be applied to us – as a spin of *THIS CANNOT GO ON...* will confirm.



Into the bargain, while it's likely that ALAN CLAYSON AND THE ARGONAUTS will endure as an entity unto death, we were more delighted with the cancellation of one London booking than we were when it was confirmed. This came about through three of the group refusing point-blank to perform unless the running order was rescheduled on the entirely acceptable grounds that if we played last, those three would have been obliged – on top of six hours of hanging about after the

soundcheck - to catch the modern equivalent of the 'milk train' from Paddington which, following costly journeys on arrival, would have meant getting to bed near dawn. What's more, we had a show the following night. Time was when that would have been water off a duck's back.

In the capital too, another presentation in the same district was marred by the person on the door disappearing at the end with all the money. *Plus ça change*. Though there have been no lasting *I-don't-want-to-do-this-anymore moments*, other Argonauts spectacles have been less about enjoyment than completing a job-of-work with entire passages of my continuity predictable by the Argonauts to the very diphthong. Yet there have still been moments when... and rebookings before we left the premises.

We were sufficiently relaxed after the soundcheck at Club 85 in Hitchin to amble over to a nearby recreation ground for photos – of which this one was chosen as the publicity shot for *THIS CANNOT GO ON...*, even if it's reflective of the plain fact that not a solitary Argonaut is below the age of sixty-four.



ALAN CLAYSON AND THE ARGONAUTS, 2017: (left to right) John Harries (saxophones and flute), Pete Cox (guitar), Alan Clayson, Andy Lavery (keyboards), Alan Barwise (drums) and Paul Critchfield (bass)

Perhaps the most agreeable gig of 2017 was the one least publicized – when I performed solo back at Dimbola Lodge in Freshwater Bay on the Isle of Wight in May. Dick Taylor augmented the 'Sol Nova' encore – which was followed by 'impromptu' renderings of two of his hits with The Pretty Things with Brian Hinton on piano and support outfit Dandelion Clock.



Inese and I had decided to make long weekend of it – which culminated with a drunken pub lunch with one of my ex-managers and his wife – during which I assured them that, even if I'm to be inducted, I've decided already to boycott the annual *Rock & Roll Hall of Fame* ceremony until Mr. Trump either resigns or mends his ways.