

'The booking is definite! Flyers are being printed already'



How have you been managing during this plague? Although Inese and I went on a long, hot walk over the weekend, the main outdoor occurrence is shopping. Overall, we're coping OK - but an element of cabin fever might yet insinuate itself.

Inese has had a photograph (see above) published in the *Henley Standard*, taken while she was applying herself to gardening. Also, after 'thinking about' decluttering', she's actually put action over debate - which is what I endeavour to do too whenever some mountainous project rears up. However, after the advance on signature for a book, for example, has fluttered onto the doormat, I often surprise everyone by undertaking long overdue household repairs or getting on with the most non-time-sensitive tasks: anything to put off what I'm supposed to be doing.

The most recent of these has been the authorised Frank Zappa biography - which is now all over apart from the shouting - and I was afflicted with both light-headedness and a feeling that the bottom had dropped out of my life until I settled down to some composition until becoming self-conscious about anyone else confined indoors too listening to the same riff and chord sequences over and over again for hours on end like Japanese water-torture. I suppose I could invest in headphones for use until I'm ready to record a demo on a primitive set-up of linked-up cassette recorders.

Instead, I decided to resume my autobiography - which still bears the working title 'Nut Rocker' - as I'm past caring whether a market for an Alan Clayson life story exists in the same way as the Kindle edition of my *Led Zeppelin: The Origin of the Species - How, Why and Where It All Began* - which was Number One in the Amazon rock chart in May and teetered on the edge of the Top 100 in the general subject list. Of more personal import were a Facebook post by a sound engineer for one of my solo contributions to a Frome Festival recalling 'Alan Clayson the mad man of music, who's a nightmare to tech, but a brilliant musician' - and Willie Brian Jones, a US expatriate country-and-western entertainer now resident in Germany, lauding *Too Gone To Even Know The Words* ('Your lyrics are magnificent sir. "Oh sovereign insensible come into the light..." that is gold. The way you gracefully tell your stories is magical much akin to the way you illuminate the 1960s British rock scene. It touches me')

Yeah, well... Yet I too have been enchanted by some literary offerings received for review over the past year. Four were by people with whom I'm either in touch - or used to be in the past in the case of Malcolm Noble, who was, like me, a daft teenager at Farnborough Tech, but has since become known as an author of crime thrillers and hosting a Sunday evening show devoted to blues and jazz on Harborough FM in the East Midlands. He ventured into fiction last summer via the publication of *A Life Of Blind Willie McTell* - and, prior to reading it, this Deep South bluesman was not the genius I now perceive him to be. Incidentally, after I interviewed him about this for *Rock 'N' Reel*, Malcolm implied that he'd spin a track of mine that might fall within the jazz-and-blues remit of his show.

Coverage was also procured for Chris Kirtley, an Argonaut in the late 1970s prior to providing action-packed entertainment as a singing keyboard-player in the Top Rank leisure corporation's dedicated saloon bars and, for the last two decades, within its Scandinavian equivalent. Now deep into his sixties, he's also brought out a novel, *The Duelling Pianist*, laced with romance, heartbreak, laugh-out-loud wit, and enviably instinctive command of realistic dialogue.

The Duelling Pianist is not without autobiographical elements - and these constitute the whole of Amy Rigby's *Girl To City*, concerning her pre-millennium decades, beginning in Pittsburgh, which, if hardly a realm of nice aunties and boys-next-door, was Dullsville compared to her immersion in that part of Manhattan artistic society with a common currency of narcotics and social disease where she interacted with denizens of downtown clubs like CBGB - at which her first husband drummed with The dB's. She was also obliged to buttress her musical earnings with office jobs (as a 'traitor to bohemia'). Nonetheless, Amy shook off the fetters of the correlated marriage and suburban motherhood after she 'finally worked up the nerve to make a solo album', namely 1996's *Diary Of A Mod Housewife*, which shifted a 'disappointing' 20,000 copies - which is where an enthralling (and sometimes mildly shocking) account concludes.

Embracing his entire life thus far, however, is *The Great White Hope* by Alan Hope, successor to Screaming Lord Sutch as leader of the UK's Official Monster Raving Loony Party, an elevation equal to Admiral Dönitz becoming Fuehrer in the wake of Hitler's suicide. Yet I recall Alan when he was 'Kerry Rapid', a quiffed and hip-shakin' vocalist - and much the darling of the ladies in his native north Hampshire as Cliff Richard nationally. He writes in a long chapter - arguably, the memoir's main selling point - that when The Beatles undertook their ill-conceived 1961 booking in Aldershot, his appearance with his Blue Stars at the more central Central Ballroom 'successfully sabotaged The Beatles' first ever appearance in the South of England'.

Living in the district too as a child, I have fantasised in later years about just happening to be passing as John, Paul, George and Pete arrived, and watchfulness turning into chat and a ten-year-old's advice to brush their hair forward and work 'yeah-yeah-yeah' into something? 'What great ideas, young Al,' smiles Lennon, 'Tell you what: why don't you sing with us tonight?'

Instead, Hope-Rapid has me round-eyed as I watched him and the Blue Stars unloading their equipment. During the same five paragraphs devoted to me, he writes of being my 'mentor who inspired him to follow his music dreams'. Actually, I didn't meet the bloke until the late 1980s when he was landlord of the pub in Devon where David Sutch introduced us. As Alan himself asserts in the epilogue (albeit in connection with erroneous hearsay about his demise), 'people just make stuff up'.

With regard to my 'musical dreams' of late, all stage engagements from March were cancelled or postponed. By Sod's Law, there'd been a lot on over summer, including a *Clayson Sings Chanson* in-concert recording for a purpose that was non-specific - and one with the group at an optimum moment during an outdoor extravaganza near Tunbridge Wells over an August weekend. Yet, without being self-denigrating, I have to question what sort of event like that would have Clayson and the Argonauts as one of the headlining acts.

There are, nevertheless, what amounts to promises (e.g. 'The booking is definite'... 'We'll have you back when all this is over'... 'Flyers are being printed already', 'You can depend on me'...) for shows beginning next May - which, incidentally, is when Eric Clapton is to perform at the Royal Albert Hall where tickets start at around £200. You'll be paying, fundamentally, to breathe the self-absorbed air round that rock millionaire elite that includes a faintly unpleasant 'survivor' who caught the lightning with a knack for a fashionable style of fretboard picking. Crucially, if Eric appeared in disguise at your local venue, how would you rate his playing? OK but nothing brilliant? I know you'll think I'm terrible but my opinion after skiving off from my Saturday job to see him with Blind Faith at Hyde Park in 1969 is unaltered. I felt it then and I'll say it now: not only as a guitarist but as a singer and songwriter, he's all right, I suppose.

With regard to sustaining my own momentum, there was a 'streaming' of that *Brel By Alfredo* concert - with me as narrator - at the theatre in Sag Harbor four years ago - and I put a film short of a special 'lockdown' arrangement of 4'33", John Cage's famous 'silent' piece (played in the same key as the original) on Facebook. Directed by Inese too is a clip on the Open Air Live Stream section of Wild Willy Barrett's web-site (www.wildwillybarrett.com) of me performing a relatively new composition entitled 'Underpass'. I surfaced too in the closing credits on the Yesterday TV channel's *How The Beatles Changed The World* - and on the wireless via a slot in July on a Talk Radio programme named *Unexplained*, hosted by Howard Hugues (not the reclusive US multi-millionaire), discussing the myth of Elvis Presley faking his death. Was he was likely to re-emerge from a perversely unremarkable second life as, say, a counter assistant at an Essex video shop, a car mechanic in Detroit or even a Canberra night club's resident Elvis Presley impersonator, and return to recover his domain?

Only last month, I held forth at greater length about my life, my aspirations and my paranoias on the Get Ready To Rock station, an hour interspersed with correlated Clayson-associated records that, if nothing else, emphasised how far removed my music was (and is) from mainstream pop. This may be investigated via <https://www.mixcloud.com/grtr/the-pete-feenstra-feature-alan-clayson-22-november-2020/>. Delving as far back as a delivery of just one number at distractedly breakneck speed, scarcely able to hear either my voice or guitar over a sea of restlessness at 1975's Watchfield Free Festival, this cross-examination was conducted by Pete Feenstra, a friend from way back who has presented all three of my manifestations - (Alan) Clayson and the Argonauts, *Clayson Sings Chanson* and Clayson solo - on the boards at London venues within his sphere of influence as a promoter.

Among the discs Pete span was 'Sol Nova' - and last year's ten-inch 45 on which it was contained resonated still with coverage by Gary 'Pig' Gold (see <https://bobsegarini.wordpress.com/2020/01/13/gary-pig-gold-with-ten-you-may-have-missed-in-2019/>) and Ron Cooper, editor of *Zabadak*, who also revisited 1984's *Last Respects* 33⅓rpm EP ('a

very precious & fascinating item in one's collection'). More recently, however, there was a harking back to a primal Clayson and the Argonauts recital (see below) in *When Reading Really Rocked: The Live Music Scene In Reading 1966-1976*, a chronicle by three local authors, among them Adrian Moulton of The Complaints, a combo that emerged when the Argonauts and I were escaping from the parochial orbit.

After successes the previous year, the British Legion in Tilehurst decided to set up a dedicated Country and Western Music Club, and the Merry Maidens continued the cabaret/showbiz format that had been so successful the previous year. The emphasis was firmly on dancing, as it was at the Thing-A-Me-Jig Club, soon to be known as Harvey Wallbangers, so what they thought of Clayson and the Argonauts' gig in May of that year is anyone's guess, because a dance band they certainly were not. Alan Clayson had a demanding stage presence, and with his excellent band giving shape to his unique material, he could, on a good night, sweep all before him. After all, who else was weaving tragic tales of the Dark Ages with songs like 'Pagan Mercia'?

Printed by Two Rivers Press (www.tworiverspress.com), *When Reading Really Rocked* could help the miles fly by on a longish train journey, even if, to paraphrase Rudyard Kipling, 'What should they know of Reading who only Reading know?'. It also emphasises that the saga of acts far beyond the main spotlight can be as interesting as those of any two-a-penny chart contenders. Yet the town produced a world class group in The Crazy World Of Arthur Brown - and Marianne Faithfull's two-year run of Top Forty strikes began when she was omnipresent at local folk clubs as were Mikes Cooper and Oldfield, the first a cult celebrity during the second wave of British blues, the other leaving the runway with *Tubular Bells* when 'works' were in vogue during the mid-1970s. Illustrious too would be Roxy Music's Andy Mackay, a student at the university, and, in more qualified fashion, GT Moore and his Reggae Guitars - and country-rock luminary Terry Clarke - who passed away in April during a seemingly routine operation on his abdomen, two years after the release of his *Atomic 10 And Other Sinatra Dreams magnum opus*, a breathtaking balance of the serene and the dramatic (and on which my most immediate fave rave was 'Drive Me Home').

I'd known and liked Terry since the two of us were buzzing round a studio owned by Rob Boughton and Martin Maynard, circa 1975 (though he'd first noticed me during a characteristically twisted performance by Average Joe and the Men In The Street). I was Martin's 'project', while Terry was the protégé of Rob - who wasn't convinced his colleague was barking up the right tree with me. I could tell by a look in his eyes that I'd seen at every artistic shipwreck of my existence - that expression that went beyond scepticism to sensing, I dunno, maybe the aura of mental abnormality, certainly one of a loser, effusing from me.

Whatever it was, Martin reckoned it could be harnessed, and might result in 'Claysonmania' extending beyond just Clayson. Yet it was plain fact that Terry, with his prominent cheekbones and restless eyes like James Dean, was better-looking and more obviously marketable musically, even if I was more driven by 'the hunger' - and Terry, who, at one with the Frome technician, described me, not unaffectionately, as 'the mad professor of rock', had been intrigued by Average Joe. So it was that Clarke with his accompanying Domino Effect - who I thought of secretly as 'The Terry Clarke Five' - would have a single released on Boughton's Stiletto label.

Yet our careers continued to intertwine - as instanced when we were both on *Airs And Places: The Sound Of People And Music In Berkshire*, a 'various artists' album associated with a book of similar name containing essays about the county's choirs, brass bands, bell ringers, orchestras, groups, singers, instrumentalists and the like. It was sent on its way by an informal Sunday afternoon concert on a suburban stage, ponging of polished comprehensive school floorboard - from which I fled without participating within minutes of arrival while Terry went the distance.

Then there were the occasions when, apart from a solitary late-arrival, a hall in Swansea stayed empty for the entire evening that we co-headlined - and when Terry and I (on, respectively, guitar and piano) backed a duo of brothers while they delivered a set rooted in the 1950s as the concluding turn of an end-of-term party for Reading's Wilson Road Primary upper juniors.

It was also farewell to two other Reading acquaintances - jazzier Pat Kelly - who, seven years earlier, lay opposite me in a hospital ward, but wasn't willing to have more than a cursory chat with a rock 'n' roll hooligan - and Terry Edmond, my general tutor at college - and a visual artist who exhibited widely within the kingdom. After graduating, I encountered him occasionally, usually at village fêtes and previews of the final exhibitions for Fine Art degrees at the university.

Gone too was Peter Green, who I'd come upon in 1968 at Earl's Court tube station. He was back from his Fleetwood Mac's tour of Scandinavia with The Fugs, and on his way to Notting Hill to collect his resprayed car. In between *Mr. Wonderful* and *Then Play On* then, he was at the height of his powers as a singer, composer - and guitarist whose talent lay in integrating with the melodic (and lyrical) intent of a given item, rather than reacting with grimacing, clenched teeth and high velocity flash to underlying chord patterns. It was difficult, therefore, to reconcile that svelte and *dans sa peau* star with the Judy Garland among old fretboard heroes I witnessed as a saddened concert reviewer thirty years later.

Following Peter along that bourne from which no traveller returns would be Spencer Davis. His last major interview was by me (for *Guitar & Bass* magazine), but decades earlier he'd been pleasant and, more to the point, informative in the dressing room of Swindon's Wyvern concert hall when I was commissioned to write my second book, *Back In The High Life: A Biography Of Steve Winwood*.

Sadder still from my perspective was the departure of Phil May with whom I'd had an affable telephone conversation only a fortnight before the cycling accident that had led to fatal surgical complications, not long after he'd finished an outstanding sonic epitaph - his Pretty Things' *Bare As Bone, Bright As Blood*, an album sung in an attractively rougher if more reposeful fashion than when, projected as wilder, fouler and more peculiar than The Rolling Stones, the group had been flashed into respectable homes via *Top Of The Pops* cameras in 1964. While the most liberal parents fought for control of their features on viewing Phil's cascading tresses - the longest male hair in the country - the effect was most keenly felt by their short-back-and-sides sons, guiltily transfixed by the Things' androgyny, offset only by lead guitarist Dick Taylor's beard. As mentioned in an earlier argosy, one of their flip-sides, 'I Can Never Say' was of particularly acute resonance as I outlined a guitar in a steamed-up kitchen window and wondered why my mother didn't get the picture.

Someone who did was Pete Sargeant. He first experienced a Clayson spectacular in 2001 - the one where I was backed by Brian Hinton, Dick Taylor and Fran Wood. Taking place in a Twickenham blues club, it was on a par with Bernard Manning's appearance the following year at the politically-correct Comedy Store, but Pete - active too on stage and in radio and TV comedy writing - not only took it upon himself to pen a glowing if mystified critique for *Blues Matters*, but continued supporting the Clayson cause, even dragging himself along to an Argonauts gig when he was very obviously fading away with the cancer that killed him as 2020 left its turbulent runway.

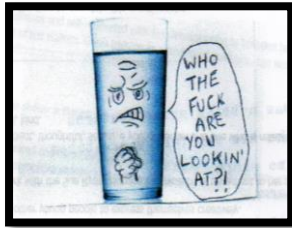
The same malady took Wayne Fontana in August - and prompted *Record Collector* to dredge up a feature about him it'd commissioned from me long ago and sat on ever since. Please forgive another bout of name-dropping, but, when I was keyboard player in Dave Berry and the Cruisers during the mid-1980s, I was thunderstruck to find Wayne as my roommate at Amsterdam's stately American Hotel in the very heart of the city. Despite an outward cheerfulness, there was something sad about the boy. Looking homeward to his girlfriend and cockatiels, he killed much time in the company of Messrs. Pimms and Johnny Walker. All the same, I liked Wayne Fontana - because, for some reason God alone knows, he liked me. After all, I'd been a bit waspish about him in *Call Up The Groups!*, but he was good-natured enough to forgive me, and between us, we raided the 'fridge and worked up a sizeable room service bill.

We remained in contact, and discussions with Wayne about a biography were frank and unashamed. For instance, an eye-stretching episode in 2007 resulted in a conviction for arson after

he appeared for trial dressed as a Lady of Justice (for which reason he was sectioned rather than jailed). However, he mastered his chaos, and became a fully-integrated constant of the Swinging Sixties nostalgia circuit - as delighted as the audiences that his hits were so fervently remembered – and that the often amusing continuity prompted almost as much approbation. Indeed, had he not been so fully occupied with pop, Wayne might have made a mark on cultural history as a truly great comedian.

Talking of laughter, I shall close this epistle by responding to popular demand for the complete collection of my 'hard' pictures. Can you think of any more?

HARD WATER



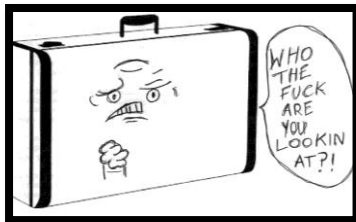
HARD HAT



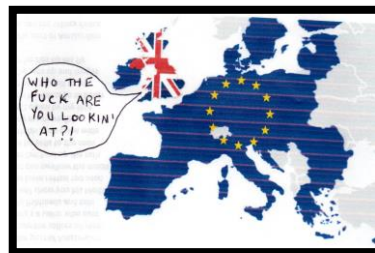
HARD CASH



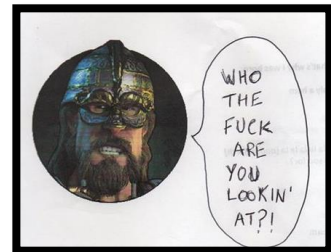
HARD CASE



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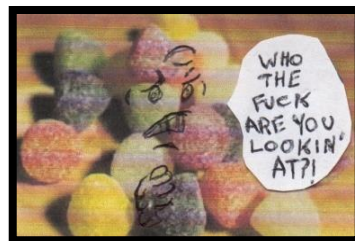
HARDRADA II



HARD FACTS (FAX)



HARD GUMS

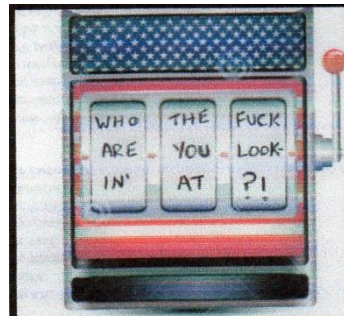


HARDRADA III

(entrance to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art)



HARD LUCK



HARD TIME

