

'Frankly, I think Alan's teetering upon genius here....'



Andy Lavery (keyboards) and I delivering Roxy Music's 'A Song For Europe'

The most famous Clayson locally during this continuation of the world-wide pestilence has been Inese making unprecedented headway as a nature photographer - after over a dozen photographs taken by her while applying herself to gardening, were published from December 2020 in the *Henley Standard* (see examples below). The second of these also bestowed a more

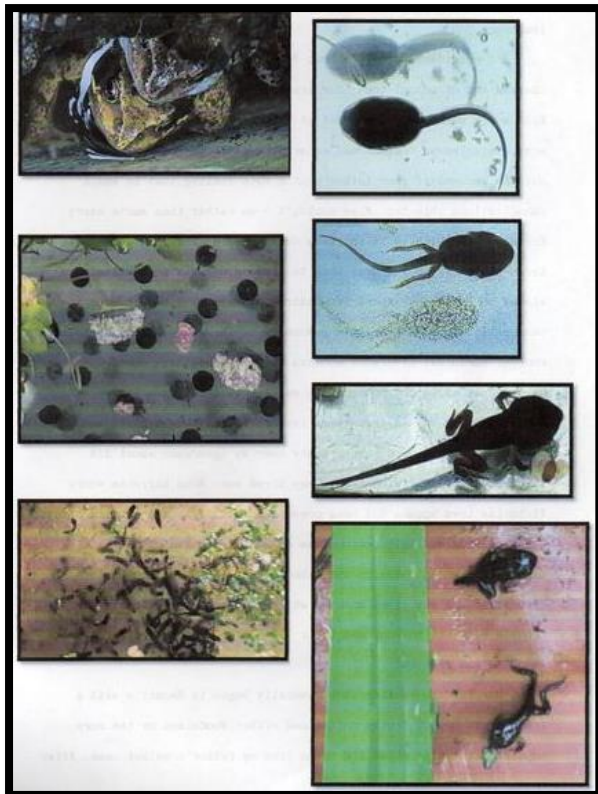


Henley Standard, 21st January 2021



Henley Standard, 14th December 2020

anonymous immortality upon Jack. Furthermore, on her very birthday - 19th August 2021 - Inese's documentation of froggy events - from spawn to exit - within a repurposed baby-bath filled an entire half-page.



Me? Although 2021 has been a year of postponed gigs, enough *Clayson Sings Chanson* spectaculars have been confirmed to turn those for next February into a 'tourette' which I am attempting to expand into a tour. Moreover, while on holiday on the Isle of Wight during early autumn, I managed my first stage performance in two years. This came about when I accompanied Dick Taylor, former Rolling Stone and founder of The Pretty Things, to a engagement at a pub in Brading to the east of the island, with a 'covers' group led by a seated rhythm guitar-strumming lead singer deeply reliant on a prompt book containing lyrics and chords.

Dick waved me in to liven things up - so I gave 'em a party-piece I use often whenever I find myself

microphone in hand in an 'impromptu' musical situation. Thus I advanced with the grace of a fencing master on 'Shakin' All Over, bleeding it into Them's 'Gloria' (with references *en route* to the spoken interlude in 'The End' by The Doors), elongating the talking bit by beginning with 'She takes a time machine to my century...she flies a flying saucer to my galaxy...she boards a rocket to my solar system...', you get the drift - so piling up the tension and creating uproar that, when I was done, the usual front man announced an interval.

I'm also in the midst of a creative surge - to the degree that in as many weeks, I've composed and demo-ed four items either in the Argonauts' bass player's studio or via my own primitive set-up you, i.e. linked-up cassette recorders in the attic. These include not so much a song as a 'thing' lasting around ten minutes, and, with greater commercial possibilities, 'KX54 WV', a requiem for my old car.

On the literary front, I'm awaiting developments with regard to the publication of the official life of Frank Zappa - and there've been matters to do with The Rolling Stones (in a discussion about their box-set of out-takes with Howard Hughes late on a Saturday night in March on Talk Radio) - and their late Charlie Watts, chiefly interviews as far away as Australia and South America plus mention of my 2004 biography in the *Daily Telegraph's* obituary ('As biographer Alan Clayson observed, had he stuck with the jazz and blues bands he played with in his early years, "it's likely that he'd have recouped little more than memories - not all of them golden"'). Moreover, a feature I wrote for one Saturday's *Daily Mirror* may be investigated via <https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/how-charlie-watts-became-unlikely-24857015>) - as can an interview with me on a Rolling Stones web-site (<https://rollingstonesdata.com/2021/09/02/an-interview-with-alan-clayson-author-of-the-first-charlie-watts->

biography/?fbclid=IwAR2XZU9trFmAs1s189jhlqkgI8WqdVMbl-C5kZH2SjGlq8Cs-92A8jqMUWs).

The thrust of it was how privately ordinary, the icon once worshipped from afar seemed when Watts and his wife became an everyday sight, unmolested by autograph-hunters and worse, at sheep dog trials and like events parochial to their home in North Devon where nothing much else was calculated to happen, year in, year out. However, when motoring through Barnstaple late one afternoon in summer 1989, I noticed an act called Jamming With Edward - named, presumably, after 1971's budget-priced LP of that title, cobbled together from a jam session by Charlie, Bill Wyman, Mick Jagger and two auxiliary players - was billed to perform in a town centre bar. As I was late for one of my own engagements further west, I didn't have time to investigate whether this had anything to do with Charlie.

On the Internet too, you can now investigate me emoting an in-concert arrangement (with the muttering bit in Latvian rather than Latin) of Roxy Music's 'A Song For Europe' (which a correspondent for the BRYAN FERRY ROXY MUSIC ULTIMATE FAN PAGE (THE IN CROWD) Facebook site described as 'fabulous' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk8LQ_6hlyQ).

A composition of my own, however, is presented as a Dadaist concept by Dave 'Diggy' Dawson The Human Jukebox via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSBNGif629M>. As Dave himself adds, 'I first saw Alan Clayson solo supporting It's A Beautiful Day in Sidcup (I think) about ten years ago and had no idea what to make of him. I told Lucy Dawson and the next day we flipped a coin and headed out to Sutton to see (just) him again on the same tour. The song that floored me especially, 'Sol Nova', concerns a story from a fictional pulp sci-fi paperback about a scientist on the government payroll who discovers that Earth is on a collision course with the sun and tries escape to Pluto on the sly. I'd recommend you listen to that first on his *Sunset On A Legend* album before subjecting yourself to what I've done to it... Frankly, I think Alan's teetering upon genius here. I tried to work out the chords which was impossible, so I had to admit defeat and sheepishly ask him directly for them, whereupon he sent me the original handwritten lyric and chord sheet. Anyway, luckily they all rather like this, as reflected on the comment on the video'.

While I'm in the mood for gratuitous *braggadocio*, ebullient with praise too was belated five-star coverage of *Sunset On A Legend* on <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sunset-Legend-Alan-Clayson-Argonauts/dp/B01G47FHL4> by an M Fairman, writing about my 'mad weird and wonderful songs', confessing 'Clayson actually does have a voice and is clearly very intelligent. This was what the seventies was about musically, serious and send-up at the same time, handled extremely well by someone who totally should have reached a bigger audience'.

Aw...shucks... Certainly, it's at odds with this review of the *Aetheria: Alan Clayson and the Argonauts In Concert* DVD by an outlet named *Classic Rock Society*.

Aetheria

Alan Clayson and the Argonauts In Concert

Kissing Spell

Definitely favourite contender for oddest DVD of the month from a band that was born in 70's, so I understand, and were reborn, for some reason in 2005. To be fair Clayson (also better known as an author of around thirty books) can't sing but has this odd sort of stage presence that draws you in. While my finger was being told to press the eject button something would not let me do it. Was it some special power that Clayson and his very, very smart middle aged band had over me? No, as much as this would never win a music prize there was something very curious here. I found myself wanting to see the audience as much as the band! What sort of person would attend such a show. Not as zany as Gong and not as 'normal' as Otway, but certainly, well.....! Martin Hudson

Yet, if you derive deep and enduring pleasure from studying raw data about me, may I recommend <https://punkmusiccatalogue.wordpress.com/clayson-the-argonauts/> - which, as well as listing those musicians at nearly every recording session up to mid-1978, contains a not entirely accurate 'gigography' from 1975 to an engagement I can't recall at Sheffield's Limit Club on the 20th of July 1978.

More specifically,

<http://www.wycombegigs.co.uk/23-june-1977-clayson-and-the-argonauts-nags-head/> concerns Clayson and The Argonauts headlining at the auditorium above High Wycombe's Nag's Head - a show that was a blast from start for finish after a fire-regulation-breaking crowd had been drawn to the place like iron filings to a magnet through fulsome coverage of the group in the music press.

That I've mentioned something that happened the best part of half-a-century ago is symptomatic, I suppose, of nearly every day being similar to the one before and the one yet to come throughout 2021. Assorted and only vaguely connected trivialities include paying a £14.15p customs charge for a 'parcel' from Los Angeles - which contained nothing but a review copy of some singing songwriter's CD. So infuriating was this that I informed his publicist that I didn't intend to even give it a spin.

Among items to which I've been listening hard, nonetheless, is *Walk Like A King: Songs For Dylan Thomas* by the late Terry Clarke, focused chiefly on the foremost Welsh poet's decline in the Big Apple - but I couldn't help but feel a far deeper sadness for Terry than Thomas. However, of everything in which I've ever been involved indirectly, I can't think of much that has depressed me more than the saga of six-year-old Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, even if, while the mind can absorb the media account of it, thankfully, the imagination less so.

In comparison, certain other public tragedies this year have been but gnats round a tent, among them the respective passings of Florian Pilkington-Miksa, drummer with Curved Air - who I encountered last when opening for them at the Boom-Boom Club in 2013 - Geoff Stevens, composer of 'The Crying Game' (for Dave Berry), 'Winchester Cathedral' and further hits - plus Gerry Marsden, who I met to discuss an organisation who'd approached me about helping to put together a tour of Russia starring him and others of the same vintage. In parenthesisisisisisis, when attending a 'Merseycats' charity concert at Liverpool's Grafton Rooms in 1989, two rapt teenage girls asked my mate Dave Humphreys and me if we'd been in the bleached-blond Blackwells, losers in a Battle of the Bands contest that constitutes the main thrust of Gerry and his Pacemakers' *Ferry Across The Mersey* period film.

More sudden was the death of Johnny Rogan, a unique individual, and one of the finest authors in his field, who wrote pop tomes on his terms, in his way and only when he felt like it, hiding away for months on end to complete them. Flatteringly, I was one of the few ever invited round to his flat in central London, an address otherwise kept secret, even from his very publisher. In February, police broke the door down to find Johnny slumped in front of his computer.

Staring at me from a shelf at the moment of writing is Johnny's *Byrds: Requiem For The Timeless – Volume 2*, placed there after he sent it four years ago - and, though it's the work of a world expert, I've done no more than dipped into its 1,264 pages. Conversely, I read *Ray Davies: A Complicated Life* from cover to cover. Through his expected scholarly *gravitas* and thoroughness of enquiry, Johnny viewed the story from a far more objective prism than any previous attempt - including his own *The Kinks: The Sound And The Fury* (1984) and the episode about Larry Page, the group's manager, from *Starmakers And Svengalis: The History Of British Pop Management* (1988), the most personally intriguing of all Rogan books.

Like anyone else, I can't help but quantify bereavements - which is why I was more affected by the cancer-goaded loss of Stuart Booth a closer friend. Indeed, without him lifting my career as an author off the runway by contracting *Call Up The Groups!* in 1984, my life might have taken a different course. So it was that, in a different guise, I began an emergence from the shadows that had lengthened since Clayson and the Argonauts' mostly downward spiral since the very late 1970s, leading to disbandment.

It was through Stuart, too, that Sidgwick & Jackson came to commission my next book. He'd advocated I go to the London Book Fair at Earl's Court Exhibition Centre to dare a careful walkabout, trying not to look as if I was making an effort, among promenading entrepreneurs and those manning trade stalls. Before the afternoon was out, I was in S&J's reception without an appointment on the first floor in premises in the old heart of literary London.

Finally, via Stuart persuading Cassell to publish it (and finance its official - and star-studded - launch at the Weavers in Newington Green), *Beat Merchants* - a more considered *Call Up The Groups!* - became one of my most enduring professional achievements. Certainly, it was the last word on the subject in the sense that it was *my* last word on the subject.

During the night after I'd heard the news about Stuart, there were long wakeful periods filled with shards of memory and disjointed thoughts - him wavering between anxiety and fraternal pride as I delivered my solo turn beneath the proscenium when opening for Mungo Jerry on a showery Friday at the Tivoli in Wimbourne Minster; unearthing his *The Aerofilms Book Of England* at a car boot sale; Stuart's serviceable way with blues



Stuart in his prime

harmonica when he and I gave an impromptu performance at the Helter Skelter bookshop along Denmark Street, and his mention of him and other lads at Pudsey Grammar School attempting to form a group - which got as far as emblazoning its name on a van's side panelling...



Judy Totton 1952-2021

among others, Ray Davies, Shakin' Stevens - and Bill Wyman. She was also a talented photographer whose subjects included me and Wreckless Eric at the Marquee.

From deeper antiquity came Haydn Meddick, keyboard player during Clayson and the Argonauts' 'imperial' era, namely eighteen frenetic months of expecting to be on *Top Of The Pops* next week. Certain personnel still look back upon it as the greatest days of their lives, forgetting that their income from the group was, on aggregate, about a sixth that of a road sweeper,



The boys in the band outside the BBC's Paris Theatre in 1977: left to right) Mic Dover, me, Alan Barwise, Sandy Monteith, Alan Whetton - and Haydn Meddick,

While Stuart's transition was foreseeable, I was stunned to discover that of Judy Totton 'following a period of illness'. So it read on the final Thursday of November in an obituary in *The Times* of a public relations executive with a winning smile and a rarity in the business in that no-one had a bad word to say about her.

Through Judy, I'd interviewed

exemplified by a net payout of £11.46p apiece after a fortnight in Ireland.

I'd found out about Haydn's funeral in September via the Internet when working on my autobiography and seeking information about the post-Argonauts life of one with whom contact was lost decades ago.

Yet I was overcome by an involuntary melancholy about the passing of someone I first knew as not much more than a child - and I felt it all the more sincerely for knowing the rest of us are still around.

Very much alive too is Fran Wood, who released a CD retrospective, *Franthology*, that was on automatic replay for a journey to and from Cornwall in July. Some of the tracks were recalled from the early 1990s when Fran was in Poacher's Pocket, which I served for several months as guitarist and 'featured singer' - with a side-serving of vamping my electric piano (programmed to sound like a harpsichord). They traded in polkas, slip-jigs, hoedowns, hornpipes, reels and so forth with a dash of mostly folk-rock in between the cavortings - usually with Fran 'calling' - at the barn dances that

were their stock-in-trade - though 'barn' was rarely applicable as my engagements with them tended to take place in community institutes, fields, school assembly halls, parks, pubs, gardens and at private functions like that of a Parent Teacher Association at a school where Phil Collins' children studied (and for which he donated a signed Genesis LP to the raffle).

Thought was fuelled that perhaps Poacher's Pocket could be turned into a Steeleye Span infused with Claysonic authority - and directed at the concert arena rather than *cèilidhs* with their Roger de Coverleys, Strip the Willows and Dashing White Sergeants. There'd be no place for that sort of stuff anyway on a second Poacher's Pocket album - which had had reached the discussion stage - with room cleared for Clayson originals, 'The Landlocked Sailor' And a wordless scoring of 'Only The Outcasts'. Taking root too was the notion of me producing it.

By then, I'd become dexterous enough a guitarist to be able to play moderately complicated pieces whilst being able simultaneously to wonder whether I'd remembered to collect some curtains from the dry-cleaners - and not feel calling myself an 'instrumentalist' was as much of a contravention of the Trades Descriptions Act as it had been. Yet another bloke would be lined up to supersede me following what occurred after Jim McCarty rang me to ask if Poacher's Pocket could fill in for his indisposed Stairway in a kind of New Age shopping arcade - painted stones, dowsing rods, crystals, *while-u-wait* tarot readings, that sort of thing - in Tunbridge Wells for a fee that was huge by even the standards of a group that went out for money comparable to that made by Clayson and the Argonauts over an entire tour.

Although I might have been expecting to be some kind of hero for procuring this gig, the rest wouldn't do it because it was mid-week, and they had to be up the next morning for the well-paid day jobs they did. If it suddenly became clear to me then that they were in Poacher's Pocket for enjoyment rather than financial reward, I still reared up at them - and one thing led to another...

The danger of that vast amount involved trickling through my fingers made me damn sure the show was going ahead one way or another. Therefore, I drew together a trio that fastened together a set consisting of improvisations derived from sections of Argonauts numbers that didn't need much thinking about plus 'Interstellar Overdrive' by Syd's Pink Floyd. Mostly, these coasted into rambling and loud free-form, but matters terminated with an echo-chambered half-hour of classic rock and 1960s favourites. At one point, one of my colleagues muttered - unwittingly on-mike - 'Has the cheque been cleared?' before we loaded the gear and left hurriedly, but any profit for me had been nullified before I'd even reached the venue when the rear suspension of my car collapsed.



Two thirds of Poacher's Pocket rehearsing in 1991: (left to right) Fran Wood, Anne Stonehouse, me and Simon Weston

A little bird told the genuine article that we'd been billed as 'Poacher's Pocket', and this, on top of my 'otherness' as a musician, brought a telephone call from Fran that terminated my employment. This was less long-faced than might be envisaged, and I accepted the decision without rancour - and would even work with Fran again. Also, if nothing else, my sacking caused me to give up the smoking I'd resumed simply because Fran and Penny, the Pocketeers to whom I was closest, did.