

... being to factions within pop what Fellini and Antonioni were to those within pseudo-intellectual movie-goers...



Before the continuing saga of the Frank Zappa biography entered the realm of tragedy, I was required to register with the US tax office as one of the side-actions of the wavering and springing between the corporate organisations involved – with me and my newly-acquired literary agent as mere bystanders. Then, on the first Wednesday of October, I left a message on Gail Zappa's telephone answering device, asking for a progress report, unaware that she was on her death bed, surrounded by her children.

As well as our professional link, Gail had become a friend, and it's still a bit raw at present. Furthermore, it's not entirely out of the question that, at Diva's invitation, I may attend a celebration in Los Angeles of what would have been her seventy-first birthday on New Year's Day.

Closer to home, however, was the passing of Twinkle on the 21st of May and the consequent service at All Saints in Godshill near her home on the Isle of Wight. Nearly a quarter of a century earlier, there'd been immediate empathy with Twinkle on the afternoon I arrived at her previous house in Cobham, Surrey, to interview her for *Record Collector*, and, before I left, was asked to form a backing combo for her intended comeback on the *Sounds Of The Sixties* circuit. The group – that she named 'The Wild Ones' - never got beyond rehearsals, but concord between Twinkle and I endured, and I was so proud to know one who my thirteen-year-old self had first encountered when watching her miming to 'Terry' on ITV's *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. Indeed, when her casket was carried out to the strains of 'You're My World' by Cilla

Black (soon to die too), it signified in an intangible way the absolute end of the so-called Swinging Sixties, the decade that defined me (and Twinkle).

It was both a difficult and poignant day, freighted with memories and emotions from representatives of so many aspects of Twinkle's life, including three of The Four Pennies – with whom she was 'featured vocalist' after The Wild Ones fizzled out – the now-elderly president of her fan club, the local RSPCA, niece Faye Ripley (famous actress) - and John Bloomfield (whose son, incidentally, co-manages Alison Moyet, Little Mix and One Direction among others).

You wouldn't think so to look at him now, but John had been leader of The Trekkers, a two guitars-bass-drums outfit in the Merseybeat image. As The Beatles had been to the Cavern, so The Trekkers were to London's unlicensed Esmeralda's Barn, part-owned, purportedly, by the Krays. Since finding herself microphone in hand one frolicsome 1963 evening at the place, fifteen-year-old Twinkle was allowed a weekly two-song spot with the group, thus setting off a chain of events that led to pop renown. If her period in the limelight was shorter than those of the Sandie Shaws and Marianne Faithfulls, Twinkle was less of a marionette as most other female singers of the era seemed to be, composing the A-sides of her hits herself - thus pre-empting the Woodstock Nation likes of Joni Mitchell and Melanie.

Of other absolute departures this year, the first was that of Trevor Ward-Davies ('Dozy' of Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich). During his farewell at the parish church in Pewsey, Wiltshire, rather than hymns, the congregation – which included personnel from The Troggs, The Tremeloes and Marmalade as well as Beaky, Mick and Tich - had to blast up 'Okay' and 'Always Look On The Bright Side Of Life' - neither of which lent themselves especially easily to community singing - and DDDDBM's 'Zabadak' soundtracked the coffin's procession to the altar. Moreover, both before and after the ceremony, the sound system effused a correlated selection of discs compiled by Ron Cooper, editor of *Zabadak* fanzine (see <http://davedeedozybeakymickandtich.nl/zabadak-the-magazine>).

Next up was John Renbourn, taken by a heart attack. This will probably seem an unlikely affinity, but I was quite friendly with him in a shallow, showbiz sort of way, and, indeed, spoke to him only a fortnight before his demise. As well as being a virtuoso guitarist, he was a most likeable bloke too.

If less star-studded than John's funeral – which I was unable to attend - in a remote village on the Scottish border, the ceremony at a crematorium near Henley-on-Thames for 'Legs' Larry Smith's wife Sarah was remarkable for a moving prose-poem written by the widower. It closed with the line 'Enough – I must stop' – and so I will too in dwelling on fatalities.

Instead, I will recommence by focusing on the possible breathing of fresh commercial life into 1987's *Hostage To The Beat*, the *cause célèbre* of a Dave Berry album in which I was involved inescapably as producer and composer of the lion's share of its content. This has come about via the interest of US musician and journalist Robert S. Silverstein who, having flipped his lid over *Hostage To The Beat* when it was first unleashed, is prodding the nerves of record label supremos he knows about its reissue. He also lays it – and *One Dover Soul* ('a most welcome sonic treat') – on with an acclamatory trowel, God bless him, via his associated web-site (see <http://www.mwe3.com/archive/pastfeature/featureMusicRevWinter2013.htm>).

Robert's efforts on our behalf were among topics discussed in Dave's dressing room before positioning myself in the wings of Reading's Hexagon complex to watch him being accompanied by an entity called 'Union Gap UK' – some blokes from Birmingham – on a bill that also featured Herman's Hermits minus Herman and an Ivy League containing no-one heard on their chart entries.

Among the more outstanding of my own public activities in 2015 were Clayson and the Argonauts' return to Swindon's Beehive – where we paid tribute to Twinkle with an arrangement of 'Terry' (and no lyrical changes whatsoever). The previous month, 'Dominique' by The Singing Nun was delivered likewise during a *Clayson Sings*

Chanson recital with Andy Lavery (and Gail Hendrickx in support) at the Half-Moon in Putney, which was dignified by the presence of John Farley - sometime conductor of the incomparable Portsmouth Sinfonia – and Netherlands radio presenter Eddy Bonte, whose conversation with me afterwards was broadcast on *Savage Tree*, his programme on Radio Sutch (www.radiosutch.net) in May.

Present too was Aurora Colson, who, as well as vocalising with Wild Willy Barrett's French Connection, is central figure of a presentation that borders the same area as *Clayson Sings Chanson* – so much so that she and Warren, her manager, enticed me to join her and her Chanson Trio for a cameo on the boards at Twickenham's Cabbage Patch during a December cabaret evening entitled *A Night In Paris*.

Following a somewhat hair-raising battle through rush-hour traffic, the evening at this citadel of quality entertainment was most enjoyable, nor least for an unexpected free meal offered by Warren from a menu of four starters, five main courses and four desserts. Into the bargain, I won a bottle of champagne in the raffle. Then there was Aurora, the genuine Gallic article, and possessor of a stirring and assured soprano, instanced most conspicuously when she dispensed items synonymous with Edith Piaf in a manner that I found more appealing – and less belligerently bombastic - than that little madam's recorded blueprints.

Her jazzy Chanson Trio – with whom I'd had no dealings until that night – framed me in unavoidably rough-and-ready fashion when, after being introduced by Warren as 'a singing author', I opened the second half with 'The Ham'. Afterwards, it was gratifying to receive praise for what was a particularly *bravura* rendition by not only those who'd hitherto never heard of me, but some who'd attended the event partly because they'd experienced *Clayson Sings Chanson* in Putney.



[A Night In Paris \(soundcheck with The Chanson Trio\)](#)

Clayson Sings Chanson reared up too at Club 85 in Hitchin – for the second time – lording it over Hazel Turnock and her Finger Choppers, a singing songwriter named Smige - and, most extraordinary of all, The Twirling Canes, a parochial duo whose demeanour and self-penned songs effused Hollywood's cynical *film noir* apotheosis.

A more recent – and subjective - past was evoked when John Otway and I appeared on the boards *at the same time* (see photograph at the top) as both compères and main attractions during a charity function at Reading's Purple Turtle one Sunday afternoon in September.

Beginning as a kind of jackass king of his native Aylesbury, John markets himself as 'Rock And Roll's Greatest Failure' - although his career has been, within its self-created parameters, a triumph, even if he'd invite professional suicide by attempting a reinvention as a 'musicianly' artiste with a self-deprecating image.

He and I go back a long way – to 1977 when we were clients of the same booking agent, and tended to work at the same venues, most conspicuously when he – with Wild Willy Barrett – was on the bill too at the Roundhouse that August night in 1977 when the 'in-concert' excerpt on *Sunset On A Legend: The Saga Of Alan Clayson And The Argonauts* was taped. We'd been first introduced, however, a few months earlier by John's then-girlfriend, during a slightly distracted evening at the Speakeasy, the social centre for the metropolitan music industry in the mid-1960s, but on its last legs when Otway's and my eyes met through the nicotine clouds.

At the time, we were being written about in the same sentences in the music press, and were regarded – by ourselves anyway – as rising stars. Yet I felt very much a slightly out-of-bounds *arriviste* who'd had to decide for myself, with the help of equally perplexed Argonauts, whether I was sufficiently in vogue to pass through the hallowed doors of the Speakeasy.

Both John and I might have been so, what with *Melody Maker's* Allan Jones assuring readers that 'Otway and Clayson presently occupy premier positions on rock's Lunatic Fringe (challenged only by Wreckless Eric)'. There was a tendency also to project us as being to factions within pop what Fellini and Antonioni were to those within pseudo-intellectual movie-goers. That's probably an overstatement, but there were at least cursory similarities. For example, '(Ghost) Riders In The Sky' was in both our repertoires – and an unfortunate onstage remark by me was inserted in gleeful coverage of a Clayson and the Argonauts bash in the now-defunct *SOUNDS* newspaper ('*Where's Otway tonight?*, says Clayson leeringly, '*he usually comes to pick up a few tips*'). The piece was penned, incidentally, by Tim Lott, a more highbrow wordsmith nowadays. Yet John and I became matey enough to exchange Christmas cards before losing touch – and we picked up, more or less, where we'd left off after we started being flung together again after the turn of the millennium.

At the Purple Turtle, we brought on some local singer-songwriters – of whom the most impressive was the Rev. John H, who traded in amusingly dirty ditties emoted to his own six-string picking and an I-Phone5, and was the 'constant companion' of Maija Tuomi-Nikula, the classical pianist who'd shared a lunchtime stage with Amy Gibb at the Rising Sun last November.

During the interludes between these slots, John and I delivered 'The House Of The Rising Sun', The Osmonds' 'Crazy Horses', my party-piece medley of 'Shakin' All Over' and 'Gloria' - and 'Johnny Remember Me' with me on guitar-and-vocals and him enticing appositely otherworldly oscillations from his *Theremin* (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mv4BD7ORGLc>). Before we'd even left the building, every number was on both *Facebook* and *You Tube*, courtesy of Eddie Armstrong ('Two legends on the same stage!', he enthused), husband of Jane Stevens-as-was, who, if a mother-of-two now, had once followed both Clayson and the Argonauts and John Otway to the ends of the Earth – well, London and the Home Counties.

By way of historical and cultural perspective, I ought to mention that 'Johnny Remember Me' is the most enduring work by Geoff Goddard, Reading's most

successful composer (and the subject of my very first *Guardian* obituary). Yet, weary of the discords and intrigues of the British music industry, he withdrew into anonymity by taking a run-of-the-mill job in the catering department at the University where workmates would deduce from the odd secret smile and what was left unsaid that Geoff had, indeed, Hit The Big Time long ago and far away.

There was to be, however, no 'Johnny Remember Me' or reprises of any other of the Purple Turtle duets at a more orthodox Clayson-and-Otway engagement in the auditorium attached to the Dublin Castle, a noted rock'n'roll haven in central London where Clayson and the Argonauts used to play decades ago – and will be again next spring on the strength of the impact of my hour (plus encore) that preceded Otway.

Response was much the same, albeit before a smaller audience – despite a publicity campaign crowned by a chat with Tony Blackburn on his BBC Radio Berkshire programme - when I was back at Reading's Rising Sun Arts Centre on the evening of some major rugby match on television. The opening turn was by Henry Padovani, original guitarist with The Police (and then Wayne County's Electric Chairs). He performed seated on his hand-made stool – which he left behind, and which awaits collection from the office-cum-study where, like a mediaeval scribe to his parchment, I type these argosies and further contributions to the world of dialectic gymnastics.

Much of such output this year has been reviews - plus obituaries, all of them for musical figures apart from that of Donna Douglas ('Elly May Clampett' in the 1960s US sitcom *The Beverley Hillbillies*) - and all for the *Daily Telegraph* (and, thankfully, uncredited). I've also reared up on television as a talking head on Heyday, 'the brand-new entertainment channel featuring nostalgia like it used to be!' – which I can't view on my set – and in an outside broadcast for BBC Radio Berkshire from Wellington College on the two hundredth anniversary of the Iron Duke's most celebrated victory. I'd been brought in as light relief amid the battle symposiums to chat about Abba gaining the day in 1974's Eurovision Song Contest with – you guessed it – 'Waterloo', but I also threw in a US country-and-western hit of the same title from 1959 by a certain Stonewall Jackson.

Not so routine was an assignment to cross-examine Roger Chapman, former *chanteur* with Family, for March's *Record Collector*. Few listeners were able to fault his outfit's musicianship or realization of quirky, even extraordinary, visions as songwriters and arrangers, but, way back when, most either liked Roger's tortured nanny-goat vibrato or they didn't. There were no half-measures. Me? I loathed it – but, aeons of vocal extremity later, I was surprised how much more palatable, even brusquely enchanting, he seemed on both his latest solo album, *Peaceology*, and *Once Upon A Time*, a sturdy and beautifully designed 14-CD anthology of Family's six year recording career, complete with a large-format hardback biography by Pete Feenstra with all the trimmings - personnel, composing credits, locations, artwork, rare picture sleeves, you name it - to keep the trivia freak as happy as a sandboy. The more marginal Family devotee, however, needs to be aware that this labour of love costs the equivalent of approximately two dozen takeaway *biryanis* – and you're advised, therefore, not to use it as a tray when eating a plateful off your armchaired knees.

Bill Wyman's similarly motivated *White Lightnin': The Solo Box* is nowhere as lavish or extensive, but it left me with the feeling that Bill's thwarted ambition as a composer - for the Stones anyway – deserves sympathy. I also derived empathetic enjoyment from his interpretation of 'This Strange Effect', written in 1965 by Ray Davies for Dave Berry.

A review copy of *White Lightnin'* thumped onto my doormat a few weeks after an interview with Bill for *Guitar & Bass* and *Rock 'N' Reel [R2]*. This took place on an April afternoon in an alcove of his Sticky Fingers diner in Kensington where, as it has been at our encounter at the Barbican in 2013, he was revealed as a fit-looking, affable and *dans sa peau* cove, approaching his eighties. Moreover, *Back To Basics*, the new

LP he was plugging, has him in complete command of his artistic faculties – with certain of its selections, especially ‘I Got Time’, a blues transported by time machine from the 1930s, among the finest of his own creations, emoted in a voice that, ravaged by age and cigarettes, is alluring after a close-miked, sandpapery fashion. Certainly, the collection needs no association with renowned colleagues, past and present, to enhance its intrinsic worth.

Acquaintance was renewed too with Denny Laine, albeit across the Atlantic by e-mail, for *Guitar & Bass* – and Dave Clark for *Rhythm* in the wake of BBC2 devoting two hours of one Saturday evening to his self-directed *Glad All Over And Beyond*, a thoroughly diverting documentary centred on the career trajectory of his Five. There’s also been a chat with Frankie Valli (for a column in *Mojo* entitled ‘Rock ‘N; Roll Confidential’) during which I mentioned that he and I share the same birthday (3rd of May), information that wasn’t worth more than an ‘oh really?’ from him.

The inclusion of ‘The Moonlight Skater’ on *Pearls Of The Deep*, a ‘best of’ CD retrospective by Stairway, released by Angel Air this summer, hasn’t been greatly appreciated either – though I managed to procure a commission from *Mojo* to praise *Moonstone*, Stairway’s second non-compilation collection, in a 850-word essay for the periodical’s ‘Buried Treasure’ section in the Yuletide edition.

An element of self-aggrandisement also pervaded ‘It Started With A Disc’, a recurrent feature on the penultimate page of *Rock ‘N’ Reel [R2]*. Mine concerned ‘I Can Never Say’, a Pretty Things B-side that had been one particularly articulate speech of the heart when my adolescent self traced a guitar in the vapour of my bedroom window and wondered why my mother didn’t understand. During the course of the article, I slipped in the gigs I’d done with Dick Taylor, notably the one at Eel Pie R&B Club with Fran Wood and Brian Hinton (see ALAN CLAYSON’S ARGOSY 2001), which triggered an astonished appraisal in *Blues Matters* by Pete Sargeant. Such was the thrust of the final paragraph of my ‘It Started With A Disc’, and, upon publication in May, resulted in me addressing unexpected aspects of my life and art in ‘Twenty Questions’, a regular and most erudite item on Pete’s *Just Listen To This* web-site (see <http://justlistentothis.co.uk/20-questions/alan-clayson-20-questions/>).

Another ego-massage occurred on a Thursday lunch-time in September at the new location of the Twelve Bar Club – along the same *norf* London thoroughfare where Joe Meek’s RGM Sound studio had once stood above a handbag store. Joel Brewer, a protégé of Mark Chapman – who directed the *Aetheria: Alan Clayson And The Argonauts In Concert* DVD - required me to ruminate on the sunshine and showers of grinding up and down the motorways and *autobahns* of Britain and *sur le continent* with a 1970s pop group. This came about mainly because Belgium – Joel’s country of birth - was where Clayson and the Argonauts notched up their only legitimate chart entry – and even that happened by mistake through a radio presenter in the Netherlands spinning a B-side. Nevertheless, her efforts caused ‘Landwaster’ (rather than what I tend to think of as the Song That Dare Not Speak Its Name) to spend a fortnight in the lower reaches of the Belgium Top Twenty.

Since reforming in 2005, Clayson and the Argonauts have always closed each show with ‘Landwaster’, and have exhumed it as a remake on the album that muddles on in Paul Critchfield’s studio – though I can’t help thinking that if ever released, it will have - like the Clayson ‘Moonlight Skater’ single in 2002 - the public impact of a tract from the Flat Earth Society.

In parenthesis, I convened in licensed premises on separate occasions in 2015 with three ex-Argonauts, namely, Rob Boughton – who let loose his maiden solo album, *Time And Emotion* in April – Paul Tucker on his annual trip from Western Australia - and, most poignantly, Mic Dover, who’d also been *de facto* leader of Turnpike, on a rarer visit from New Zealand. Our furies and rivalries all spent, Mic and I were in danger of being quite overcome with rose-tinted sentiment when conversing about people, places and things that seem so distant now – as implied by these photographs of us over forty years apart:-



1972



2015