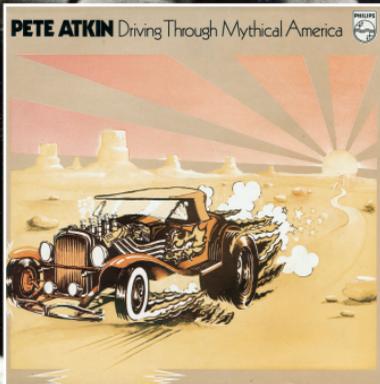




The Songs Of PETE ATKIN & CLIVE JAMES

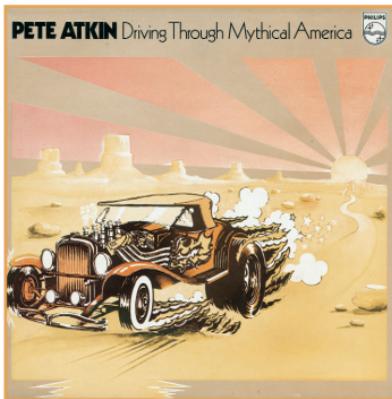
# Pete Atkin

DRIVING THROUGH  
MYTHICAL AMERICA



## *Driving Through Mythical America*

Philips 6308 070, 1971. Re-issued on RCA SF 8386 in 1973 in a re-designed sleeve.



Lyrics – **Clive James**

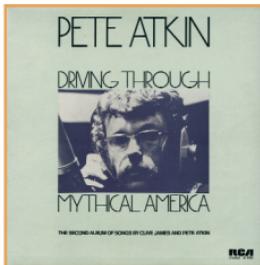
Music and arrangements – **Pete Atkin**

Conducted by  
Don Fraser

Produced by Don Paul  
Engineered by  
Roger Quested

Recorded at Studio 1,  
Morgan Studios,  
Willesden, London  
NW10, in March 1971

Original album design  
by Pat Doyle



**PA:** What turned out to be my first LP on Fontana, *Beware Of The Beautiful Stranger*, was recorded originally as demos for the publishers Essex Music. Its commercial release had a lot to do with the enthusiasm of Kenny Everett, and it received enough positive attention for Essex to be interested in having me make another one.

By now (1970) I was sharing a flat in Swiss Cottage with a bunch of other newcomers to London including Clive, who rented a room as his weekday London writing base, so he and I had plenty of regular contact for the to-and-fro of writing songs. We already had more than enough songs ready and waiting for a new album, with more always on the go.

For the new LP there was a big enough budget to allow me to use a bigger studio and more musicians, not big enough to go mad – or even mildly eccentric in an endearing rock-and-roll kind of a way – but big enough to make a difference to the sound and feel of the recording, enough, with luck, to make it sound more like a 'proper' record and less like a set of demos. That first album had been, accidentally and necessarily, all acoustic, and I'd since begun to build up a bit of a following playing acoustically mainly in folk clubs, so I did wonder idly if this might be my Bob-Dylan-goes-electric moment, but the truth is I don't think anyone was that bothered, what with me not actually being Bob Dylan and all.

Most of this album was recorded 'as live', i.e. with me singing and playing and all the musicians, including the brass, etc., playing in the studio at the same time, instead of overdubbing some of them later. I think the idea appealed to me (probably something about 'feel'), but I seem to remember that doing it had quite a bit to do with cost: it was a way of avoiding those extra sessions of expensive studio time.

It did mean I had to be well prepared, with full arrangements worked out beforehand, parts written out and everything. There wasn't time to teach the musicians the songs and spend studio time working out what to do. It wasn't a huge orchestra, but the line-up was big enough, especially with the horns, to need some kind of a conductor in the studio, which couldn't be me if I was also going to be singing and playing, so Don Fraser came in to bring a bit of experience to that role.

Although as far as I know the finished LP sold least well of all my



1970s albums, it's always been the one I've had the most enquiries about in all the years of its unavailability. Maybe it's something to do with these particular songs, or maybe it's something to do with the terrific playing from a brilliant set of session musicians.

**CJ:** Despite the title, I don't think that any of my lyrics for the songs on this album were aimed at an American audience. They were aimed at what people elsewhere *thought* of America. Partly because of the continuing Vietnam disaster, America was in the news every day. Although Pete had briefly toured the US with the Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeare Company, I myself still hadn't been there. But the imagery, far from feeling second-hand,

seemed to be to be happening all around me. Later on I realised that we were living through the opening stages of what we now know as the global media hegemony and the 24-hour news cycle.

**Pete Atkin and Clive James,**  
*November/  
December 2008*



## 1. *Sunlight Gate* 3.47

Recorded on 11th March 1971

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitar

**Chris Spedding** – electric guitar

**Herbie Flowers** – bass guitar

**Kenny Clare** – drums

**Dennis Cliff** – trumpet

**Leon Calvert** – flugelhorn

**Dai Davies** – trombone

**Jim Wortley** – bass trombone

**Richard Ihnatowicz** – clarinet

**PA:** Since my student days I'd been a huge fan of Duke Ellington's music – still am – not least for the way his and Billy Strayhorn's arrangements were written for a collection of distinct, individual instrumental voices rather than simply for, say, a trumpet section, a trombone section, and a sax section. And then there were Gil Evans's arrangements for Miles Davis and on his own records, which extended that idea, adding in the sound of some supposedly non-jazz instruments like bass trombone, flute, cor anglais, etc. A bit later I added the great New Zealand composer and arranger Michael Gibbs to this pantheon. I never aspired to writing jazz myself, but this arrangement was an (extremely modest) attempt to recreate something like that kind of instrumental atmosphere.

I had written out a complete part for Chris Spedding, intended more as an indication of the kind of thing I would like from him than as a strict set of instructions, but what he plays here is note-for-note precisely what I wrote for him.

Having played a classical guitar exclusively on *Beware Of The Beautiful Stranger*, I'd now acquired a steel-string jumbo, a Gibson SJN, to be my workhorse guitar, which it remained for the next 25 years or so. But early in this first session I broke a string, and – I can hardly believe this now – I had brought no spares with me, so what you hear me play here, if it matters, is Chris Spedding's acoustic, which he'd brought along just in case.

**CJ:** The Vietnam war was in the air like smoke at the time, but really all the wars are in the lyric. When I was very young, during the Korean war, there was a famous photo in *Life* magazine of a flight of F-80s heading out of Japan for the short flight to the battle. Included in the picture was the free-standing gate of a Shinto shrine. The photo stayed in my mind. Even today I find that images seen in childhood come back to trigger an idea.

The heroes ride out through the Sunlight  
Gate

And out of the sunset return  
I have no idea how they spend their day  
With a selfless act, or a grandstand play  
But high behind them the sky will burn  
In the glittering hour of return

The heroes ride out in unbroken ranks  
But with gaps in their number come back  
I have no idea how they lose their men  
To some new threat, or the same again  
But they talk a long while near the weapon  
stack  
In the clattering hour they come back

The heroes return through the Sunset Gate  
But their faces are never the same  
I have no idea why their eyes go cold  
And the young among them already look old  
But high behind them the sky's aflame  
In the flickering hour of their fame

## 2. *The Pearl-Driller* 2.24

Recorded on 18th March 1971

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitar, piano

**Alan Parker** – electric guitar

**Herbie Flowers** – bass guitar

**Barry Morgan** – drums

**PA:** This is the first of the tracks where I got to play with 75% of what was in effect the Morgan Studios house band, who also constituted the instrumental line-up of Blue Mink (the missing 25% was Alan Hawkshaw who later consoled himself at missing out on my session by composing the *Countdown* music for the Channel 4

game show). Right from the start it was obvious to me how much I was benefiting from their familiarity with each other. They seemed to me to play with the fluency of a real band, rather than as a pick-up group of musicians, however good they might have been individually.

I remember watching TV in the Swiss Cottage flat one evening with Clive when a short documentary about the pearl business came on BBC2. The programme emphasised the precise manual skill required in order to drill the pearls for necklaces, and that this work was always done by women. I forget why, not that it matters. I don't think any of the women in the film was wearing a gold silk jacket. But then our TV was black and white.

**CJ:** For the suitably retarded male mentality, pretty female faces spark songs. Just for the record, however, the girl in

question had a silver silk jacket, not a gold one, and only a madman would have gone with her anywhere. The consequence was a lyric which now seems to me as arch as the Admiralty. I try to block it out by sticking my finger in one ear while listening to the music with the other. But I still love, for all the wrong reasons, my idea of the grip containing "the few good books that really count." The grip would have had to be bigger than a military kit-bag



and would certainly have slowed down the getaway.

If you find me gone one day  
And the sad songs left half-done  
It won't be alone that I've gone away  
But a long way that I've run

I'll be gone with the girl in the gold silk jacket  
The girl with the pearl-driller's hands

If I fly the coop some time  
And take nothing but a grip  
With the few good books that really count  
It's a necessary trip

I'll be gone with the girl in the gold silk jacket  
The girl with the pearl-driller's hands

If one day you think me lost  
I'll be thinking with each kiss  
That the wrecked man has been found at last  
I waited too long for this

I'll be gone with the girl in the gold silk jacket  
The girl with the pearl-driller's hands

### 3. *No Dice* 6.02

*Recorded on 18th March 1971*

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, piano  
**Alan Parker** – electric guitar  
**Herbie Flowers** – bass guitar  
**Barry Morgan** – drums

**PA:** With hindsight, this song probably marks the point at which we put aside the idea that we were or should be trying to write songs for other singers to sing. By now I seemed to have at least some kind of recording future, so that our songs now had an outlet, and we could therefore feel free to try something other than what might

be saleable – even if our saleability had only ever been in our own imaginations anyway. I was stunned by the ambition of this one when Clive handed me the lyric: four dreadful deaths and a confession of failure to make sense of them. Not your everyday chart material.

It was a challenge to set, that's for sure. It certainly couldn't afford to be elegiac. It had to drive. And each story had to have a strong shape, so the tune for each verse is a kind of continuous composition, with no repetitions until it gets to the tagline chorus – a repetition which I confess I manufactured.

I probably shouldn't draw attention to it, but there's a fluff in the vocal. The reason I've had to live with it all these years is that the track is 100% as we performed it, me singing and playing the piano along with the other guys, and it is indeed the only take. Once again I'd written out detailed parts for everyone. We ran through the intro and the first verse to get a balance, the right tempo, the feel of it, and someone – I think it was Herbie – said "Let's go straight for one, shall we?" So we did. They played the intro as I'd written it and then we were off, the remainder of my written fiddly bits triumphantly ignored. It was one of the most exciting musical experiences I've ever had. It's some kind of miracle that I made it through to the end of the take with only that one stumble. But because I was singing live at the piano, and the piano mikes had inevitably picked up too much of the vocal and the band, it wasn't possible to 'drop in'

a retake of the fluffed line, and I decided to live with it, for better or worse. If only I'd screwed up more badly, we'd have had to go again.

**CJ:** Pete is quite right to say that this song marks the point at which we started to go for broke. I had already done lyrics with a multiple time-frame but in this one I cut the time-frames together without any linking material at all. so that the discontinuity became part of the subject. I could explain each scene if I was held at gunpoint, but the drama is meant to depend, in each episode, on the listener's being forced to guess, and not having enough time to figure it out because the music will not let up. One thing, however, I should make clear: the linguistic trigger was those two magnificent lines by Louis MacNeice about the ancient world: "It was all so unimaginably different/ And all so long ago."

I tried hard to be useful, but no dice  
With no spit left I couldn't soften leather  
With these old hands I couldn't even sew  
So yesterday they left me on the ice  
I could barely lift my head to watch them go  
The sky was white, my eyes grew full of snow  
What thing reached me first, bears or the  
weather

I just don't know  
Yesterday was oh so long ago – so very long ago

I saw across our path through the lagoon  
Thick shrubberies of hail collide and quarrel  
Sudden trees of shellburst hump and blow  
Our LVT turned through the reef too soon

The front went down, we all got set to go  
But the whole routine was just too bloody slow

What kind of splinters hit me, steel or coral  
I just don't know  
Yesterday was oh so long ago – so very long ago

We hit the secret trails towards thin air  
Aware we'd never live to tell the story  
And at the last deep lake before the snow  
We rigged the slings, chipped out the water-stair

Swung out the holy gold and let it go  
It sank so far it didn't even glow  
And if the priest died too to share our glory  
I just don't know  
Yesterday was oh so long ago – so very long ago

Yesterday we finished with the ditch  
We stacked our spades and knelt in groups of seven

Our hands were wired by an NCO  
With a fluent-from-long-practice loop and hitch

No dice – there was nothing left to throw  
A bump against your neck and down you go  
And if I kept my peace or cried to heaven  
I just don't know  
Yesterday was oh so long ago – so very long ago

Yesterday from midnight until dawn  
I lay remembering my lost endeavour  
The love song that would capture how things flow

The one song that refuses to be born  
For I have tried a thousand times or so  
To link the ways men die with how they grow

But no dice, and if I'll do it ever  
I just don't know  
Yesterday was oh so long ago

#### 4. *The Flowers And The Wine* 2.07

Recorded on 23rd March 1971

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitars

**Dave Bell** – bass guitar

**Kenny Clare** – drums

**PA:** This sad little scenario has turned out to be one of our most successful songs – successful in the attention it has drawn from other singers, at any rate. For me it's that image of the streetlights across the river that keeps bringing me back to it.

**CJ:** Val Doonican sounded winningly smooth when he covered this one, but you can imagine my delight when I discovered that his writers had rewritten the lyrics of the bridge section in order to accommodate Val's own ideas of what might be poignant. In my own mind, however, the ringing of the cash register drowned out any yelps of pain.

Another night I've been to visit you and him  
Comes to an end  
Switch on the hallway light  
Farewell a friend

Another night I bring the flowers and the wine  
Has slipped away  
There were only three to dine  
And two to stay

When you fix the dates for tête-à-têtes like these

What tells you that I count the days between  
Except my nothing-caring air of ease?

When clouds black out the moon that moves  
the tide

What tells you there's a river in the dark  
Except the streetlights on the other side?

Another night I book a taxi door to door  
Has been and gone

I have never loved you more

See you anon

#### 5. *Where Have They All Gone?* 2.33

Recorded on 16th March 1971

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitar, piano

**Chris Spedding** – electric guitar

**Dave Bell** – bass guitar

**Kenny Clare** – drums

**Alan Wakeman** – tenor sax

**Don Fay** – tenor sax

**Richard Ihnatowicz** – baritone sax

**PA:** If you ever wondered what happened to *The Master Of The Revels*, then here's your answer. If you didn't, then it's in the nature of the character to tell you anyway. Actually, it's another one of those stories where you get the set-up and the aftermath but you have to work out the middle bit for yourself.

**CJ:** I still love the way Pete made the music move along with the pulse of a party that never ends, but this is a lyric that demonstrates all too clearly why it is wise never to revisit a theme except from a different angle. The narrator is the Master of the Revels all over again, only this time in

hippy apparel, which never looked good on anyone. I placed the word “shindig” in just the right spot, though. Sometimes a little satisfaction like that is the most you get to take away. I should add, for purposes of defence against self-libel, that nobody at any party organized by me was ever in danger from anything except the lemonade running out.

I used to be a permanent MC  
The spinning central figure of the fun  
The heavy action took its cue from me  
Who else could make things run?

For I threw parties once upon a time  
That started out with everybody tight  
And ended only just this side of crime  
So wasn't that my right?

I had the leisure problem taped  
With my huge capacity for absorbing pleasure  
Time wasn't killed so much as raped  
I had its measure

And the shindig kept a rhythm night to night  
With people turning up and turning on  
They used to call it strictly out of sight  
So where have they all gone?

## 6. *The Prince Of Aquitaine* 4.18

Recorded on 18th March 1971

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitar

**Alan Parker** – electric guitar

**Herbie Flowers** – bass guitar

**Barry Morgan** – drums

**PA:** The refrain about the Prince and the ruined tower gave rise to a good deal of

speculation and literary sleuthery on the Midnight Voices Forum at [www.peteatkin.com](http://www.peteatkin.com). Its origin was tracked down to the French poet Gérard de Nerval, but it was a question I had never bothered to ask myself. As an other-worldly image to contrast with the harsh realities in each verse, it seemed to me to work just fine wherever the idea may have come from.

It did occur to me much, much later that the verses are perhaps in the wrong order in story-telling terms, that the second and third verses should be switched around. That's how I do it these days, as well as quite a bit slower – but it doesn't matter much.

**CJ:** I'd like to be able to say that I was reading Nerval at the time, but actually I picked up the reference from *The Waste Land*. I figured that if Eliot had pinched it once, I could pinch it again. In those days I could recite almost all of Eliot's poetry by heart and his phrases were crawling around in my brains like radioactive bugs.

Pete was right about the necessity to switch the order of the narrative. His future expertise as a radio producer was already coming in to play. He was born with a sure instinct for narrative, as I noticed when I first heard him sing one of his early Footlights numbers “Ballad of an Upstairs Window” and resolved to barge in on his act.

I flew home into the city after dark and in the clear

With a seat beside the window and the usual  
thrill of fear

PETE ATKIN - 'DRIVING THROUGH MYTHICAL AMERICA' (Phillips).

A folk singer who uses a full complement of backing instruments, with, among others, Chris Spedding on guitar and Kenny Clare on drums. His vocals have a rather peculiar naked quality but little vocal embellishment is necessary since the lyrics alone could be Nobel prize winners! Writer Clive James has gone to town on his literary, historical and all other allusions and a medal to whoever can place everyone of them. (I could only manage Gatsby, so I'm well down!)

An excellent and unusual album.

COLLEGE EVENT

Thursday, 27th April

PETE ATKIN

Driving Through Mythical America

Phillips 6308070

I HAVE a number of reservations about the current tidal wave of singer-song-writers. I'm not hostile in principle, you understand, merely fatigued with songs whose harmonies consist of 30 per cent tonic/dominant triads and whose words are often arbitrary gestures in the general direction of verse.

**ETE ATKINS: DRIVING THROUGH MYTHICAL AMERICA** (Phillips 6308070; £2.05). Very interesting sounds against Pete Atkin's soft vocalising, from Herbie Alan Parker, bass guitarist Flowers, Kenny Clare's or with Barry Morgan's drums, etc. Lyrics by Clive James are good and Pete lets you hear them. He wrote the music. And The Faded Mansion on The Hill is quite enchanting.

**NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS**

December 11, 1971

clear, sparse and well voiced.

...to the words with  
...to the dramatic  
and falls in story or  
here.

James' lyrics are the which get me, though. I making a large claim (defend it) when I say is the first example and where the serious, side of modern has been tempered pened by the wit of away lyricists. There ty of examples to om, but I would cite Man', about a manager making a bid for a young

poet:

*I fixed one chap a show on telly*

*Who limped like Byron and talked like Shelly...*

Apart from the wisecrack -- worthy of Lorenz Hart -- the rhyme of 'telly/Shelly' is in itself hilarious. Or take 'Thief In The Night', a song in praise of the guitar:

*It reminds you of Memphis or maybe Majorca,*

*Big Bill Broonzy or Garcia Lorca,*

*A truck going north or a cab to the Festival Hall.*

There are funny songs, love songs, dramatic monologues and the title track, which manages to cram just about every American myth into its five and a half minutes.

With their accustomed display of sparkling efficiency, the record companies are issuing too many records of this type (if not this quality) and don't promote them properly. This one must be on the secret list, because I've only seen it mentioned in one other place. It's maddening

**E CLAIMS** to be the first from his country who isn't a "professional" Australian. "In fact, I don't think people notice my art," said Clive James. "I'm just there talking head." James was brought up at a time and place when the local cinema programmes were changed twice a week. Why did he miss a film. "I saw them and have been in love with films ever since. I even went to see the children's special shows on Saturday evenings." Like most youngsters from his home near Botany Bay, New South Wales, his favourites were westerns. In spite of his continuous love of them, they by no means dominate his taste. He rates his prime interest as book reviewing. He also has a Sunday television column... which means I spend a lot of time in front of the box as well as doing cinema on it."

He likes Morecombe and Wise and cartoons. What he cannot stand are competition programmes. He also dislikes imported American detective programmes, such as *Simon*. No matter who plays the central figure, they all come out looking the same, he says.

It isn't easy sorting out precisely what profession James is in. *Cinema* editor, he reviews TV in *The Observer* every Sunday, reviews books for the *Times Literary Supplement*, writes about Rock in a new pop magazine. He is also putting together book or two from his reviews and features, writing songs, and is looking toward to the issue of a new LP of songs he has written. In general, he accepts a neat balance between the very different worlds of TV, films and pop on the one hand, and high-low reviews of poetry on the other. To make life a shade more complicated, for a man whose various cupcations take place in London and Manchester, he lives in Cambridge. After going to Sydney University here, not surprisingly, he worked for the film society) James spent a year on a magazine before going to embroke College, Cambridge, to search English poetry.

After a while, I decided that wasn't really my scene, but I liked it here anyway."

His wife Prue is also Australian. They met in Italy, and then again in

# CINEMA MAN

-doing his bit to make

by KEN RO

Clive James is that straight-from-Australian who knows precisely what to *Cinema*. As its presenter, he has sensitive, terse criticism - laced with



# MA'S N

...the life complicated  
...OCHE

...-the-shoulder, no-nonsense  
...what he likes when it comes  
...has built up a reputation for  
...with a strong sense of humour



Cambridge. Apart from Clive and a two-time Claeuwen, Prue Bedford College, "It means we both but I rather like James." "We have London, just a re-typewriter, so I c and down every s. How did he be the remote creeds ship to the man television and jo up via speaking in London, articles, magazines, and a break on *Up Star*. At various sta- James told re-views were d thing to him; i were; and then d by James, mus were the big th Whatever he is discussing, plan at any moment i thing to him. Part of his sche apart from turn for publication a week than most is his journal. "I started it a years ago," he I'm very disorg and it tells me and who I saw, record of ideas. At any rate, glimpsed, it is more of a lite average desk diem in the am James. He considers Manchester s episodes of *Cinema* dedicated: "I watch d everything—none of these critics reviews. Once you sta that you also start writing al special programmes, the s spots nobody watches exc reviewers."

Page 24—MELODY MAKER, April 11, 1970

# FOLK FORUM

## THURSDAY

AT FOX ISLINGTON GREEN, NI

**PETE ATKIN**  
HALF PRICE BEFORE 8.15  
Thanks to Vin Garbutt for last

AT STATION OF WALES, West  
London Prince, Brian Hooper  
DIPLOMA DIPLOMA

## THURSDAY

TROUBADOUR, 9.30 p.m. Resident

**AMBER**

**DAVID CAMPBELL**  
Singers welcome

## SATURDAY

PEANUTS, Kings Arms, 213 Bishopsgate, E.C.2

**MUDGE AND CLUTTERBUCK NICK HARRISON**

PEELERS CLUB, Kingsfords, Widgeate Street, off Middlesex Street, near Liverpool Street Station.

**ROBIN & BARRY DRANSFIELD**

SATURDAY, May 2 FISHMONGERS ARMS, N.22

**THE STRAWBS**

THE LCS PRESENTS THE TIGERS CLUB, Ewan & Peggy, Lion Tavern, 22 Lloyd Baker London, W.C1.

AT A HEAD Metropolitan Club, Clerkenwell Road, Farnfield Road, Sam Sat. Guest

**BOB DAVENPORT**  
Bobby Campbell, Roger Finch, Tim Lyons. Floor welcome.

TROUBADOUR, 10.30, 265 Oldpton Rd.

**TERRY GOULD**

## SUNDAY

FOLK CLUBS, BOUNDARIES  
HOUNSLOW PARK TAVERN, BOUNDARIES ROAD, N11

**ARC SULLIVAN**

GROUP 64 THEATRE CLUB, 100A Rd, Putney

**IN CONCERT ANNA SEGER**

**TUG BAILEY**

READ, 265 York Road.

**OPEN BROTHERS**

JOHN TIMPANY & SMITH, Thanks last

**ANDY ANDREWS, TERRY** for a good evening.

HOTEL DARTFORD  
**RED JORDAN CRAWFOLK.**

CRIS, Tower Hotel, Whitamston Central

**'S-IN-THE-FIELDS.**  
8.30 pm.  
**LX CLUB**  
Club by  
**TESSON**

## MONDAY

AT THE BRIDGE HOUSE, Borough Rd., S.E.1.

**CITY RAMBLERS**  
Russell Quayle, Bobbie Taylor, Moe Abraham, Jeff Beaumont, Rita Foreman.

**CLANFOLK**, Marquis of Clarendon, Southwick Street, Paddington. **COME ALL YE** plus George Harrison.

**ENFIELD FOLK CLUB**  
Hop Pains, Baker Street, Enfield. Back from the States

**FINBAR & EDDIE FUREY**

HAMPSTEAD RFC Folk Club, Redhill St., off Albany St., NW1

**BOB HAMILTON**

**PUTNEY "HALF MOON,"**

**URBAN CLEARWAY**

**LOCKRAN, AUGIER.**

**RON HARRIS, Herga, Royal Oak, Weststone.**

## TUESDAY

**BRIXTON BERT** and George Greenaway host a

**COME ALL YE** AT The Nelson, Merton High Street, South Wimbledon Tube.

**HOUNSLOW ARTS LAB STRAWBS**

**SALLY BROWN**  
White Bear, Kingsley Road, Hounslow.

**ROBIN & BARRY DRANSFIELD**

Barking Folk Club, Barking College, Langridge Road.

**STUDENTS' GALLERY**, opposite Herts. Hill Station, Windfall, Brian and Jean Moss and Guests.

**THE MITRE**, Greenwich High Road, SE10. **PACIE BYRNE.**

**THREE HORSESHOES FOLK CLUB**, Heath St, Nr. Hampstead Tube, presents

**PETE ATKIN** and your hosts, THE EXILES

**TROUBADOUR** 9.30. Allan Francis & Dave Lipson introduce.

**JOHN ROSS AND JERRY SHORE**

**WEDNESDAY**

Page 32—MELODY MAKER, June 27, 1970

# FOLK ALL GE

**PETE ATKIN: THROUGH MY AMERICA" (M. 630870).**

PETE ATKIN a James are one of the formidable songwriters in Britain that I am certain missed Pete's firsts. "Beware Of The Stranger" or alternat

Julie Covington album sure not to miss this. eleven songs he sings here all gems in lyrical and construction. The title track Dylan's insane dream of America — a sort of interpretation of "Desolated matter-of-fact manner, with backing provided by Chris Spedding, Herbie Flowers, Kenny Clarke, Barry Bell, Dave Bell, J.G.

## THURSDAY

AT FOX ISLINGTON GREEN N.1.

**PETE ATKIN**  
Half price before 8.15

AT STATION OF WALES, Inner N.W.1.

**DAVID CAMPBELL**

## SOUNDS

December 11, 1971

When the spoilers send you sliding down the  
drain  
The sky was full of London all around the  
tilting wing  
I could have hooked a street out like a pearl  
and diamond string  
But I think my fingers couldn't stand the strain  
And to the ruined tower came the Prince of  
Aquitaine  
In the continental terminal the maxi-coats  
look rich  
It'd take a better eye than mine to even fault a  
stitch  
The simple hair is golden as the grain  
While in Piccadilly Circus hunkered down and  
neon-lit  
There are kids with ancient faces who are  
praying for a hit  
But tonight the only free one is the rain  
And to the ruined tower came the Prince of  
Aquitaine  
The highway lights of sodium are cut and set  
like gems  
They run like this in whisperlines until they  
reach the Thames  
Their afterimage wealthy in the brain  
Beneath the bridge's footway in the shelter of  
the stair  
A cripple plays harmonica for pennies from  
the air  
While the river proffers answers to his pain  
And to the ruined tower came the Prince of  
Aquitaine  
In idle docks they're due now to be running  
out of meths  
Their eyes inside the darkness like a latterday  
Macbeth's

As Birnam wood comes close to Dunsinane  
I have brought them all the plunder of the  
international jets  
An envelope of sugar and two hundred  
cigarettes  
So I know now that my quest was not in vain  
And to the ruined tower came the Prince of  
Aquitaine

### *7. Thief In The Night* 2.39

*Recorded on 25th March 1971*

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitar

**Dave Bell** – bass guitar

**Barry Morgan** – drums

**PA:** A few metaphorical eyebrows were raised recently when I re-recorded this song without a guitar on the track at all, but it's a song about the guitar, from the point of view of the guy on the other side of the wall, who is not altogether necessarily in love with the sound, not while he's trying to get to sleep anyway.

The small mystery of the 'ribbon with a little silver hook' is a strong clue to the fact that when Clive wrote this I was playing a classical guitar. In order to play it standing up, instead of a conventional guitar strap I used to use the said ribbon, which hung down behind and under the guitar with the hook thingie latched on to the soundhole at the front. It didn't do too much good to the varnish, as I recall.

**CJ:** Back in Sydney in the 1950s I had a Big Bill Broonzy album and spent a lot of time wondering what it would be like to play the guitar while singing. The guitar,

which I couldn't play, got into my mind as the ideal accompaniment for singing, which I couldn't do either. On the Benny Goodman small group tracks, Charlie Christian's guitar sang all by itself. I was fascinated, although it had not yet occurred to me that Les Paul's guitar on "How High the Moon" would one day take over from Charlie Christian's as my personal ideal of how the instrument should sound. Not even Ry Cooder could beat that. It was the flamenco guitar that led me to Lorca's poetry, rather than the other way around. In Carlos Saura's *Carmen*, one of my favourite movies, Paco Peña's flamenco guitar knocked me out along with the dancing. A thousand years later, I hosted a fund-raising concert at the Festival Hall. Paco was one of the guest artists, and as he worked his magic I realised that I had forecast the moment in a lyric I had written long ago.

A guitar is a thief in the night  
That robs you of sleep through the wall  
A guitar is a thin box of light  
Throwing reflections that rise and fall  
It reminds you of Memphis or maybe Majorca  
Big Bill Broonzy or Garcia Lorca  
A truck going north or a cab to the Festival Hall

And the man who plays the guitar for life  
Tests his thumbs on a slender knife  
Forever caresses a frigid wife  
His fingers travel on strings and frets  
Like a gambler's moving to cover bets  
Remembering what his brain forgets  
While his brain remembers the fears and debts

Long fingernails that tap a brittle rhythm on a glass  
Around his neck a ribbon with a little silver hook  
Like some military order second class  
You can read him like an open book  
From the hands that spend their lives creating tension  
From the wrists that have a lean and hungry  
Eyes that have a mean and angry look  
A guitar is a thief in the night  
That robs you of sleep through the wall  
A guitar is a thin box of light  
Throwing reflections that rise and fall  
A guitar reminds you of death and taxes  
Charlie Christian outplaying the saxes  
The beginners' call and the very last call of all

## 8. *Driving Through Mythical America* 5.33

*Recorded on 16th March 1971*

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitar  
**Chris Spedding** – electric guitar  
**Dave Bell** – bass guitar  
**Kenny Clare** – drums  
**Clive Baker** – trumpet, flugelhorn  
**Alan Wakeman** – tenor sax, flute  
**Don Fay** – tenor sax, bass clarinet  
**Richard Ihnatowicz** – baritone sax, clarinet

**PA:** On May 4th, 1970, at Kent State University in Ohio, there was a peaceful student protest at the recent Nixon-announced U.S. invasion of Cambodia. The Ohio National Guard were called out and in their unwarranted panic they ended up

shooting four students dead and injuring nine more. The impact of this was predictably enormous and not just on young people, amongst whom we still counted ourselves.

Clive's resulting lyric was one of the first of several through the years where he juxtaposes images and ideas from different times in history, rather as W.H. Auden had done in *The Fall Of Rome*. The song also represents a view or an idea of America gained from the outside; Clive had never been to America when he wrote this.

**CJ:** As Kafka and the young Brecht both proved, the imaginary America, the one you haven't been to, can be even more powerful in the mind than the reality. The Kent State disaster created, in my mind, a vortex of centripetal energy that pulled second-hand vignettes together with such force that they fused, as if a junk-pile had melted. I don't quite know how it happened and I certainly never did anything quite like it again, but I remain proud that younger people still see something definite in it when all I remember is sitting around in a trance. My daughter Claerwen used the title for one of the abstract paintings in her first exhibition, and when I asked her why, she said something along the lines of "Dad, you don't understand your own words." The names of the cars are all wrong but that was because my memory had played me tricks. Such details were far harder to check up on in at a time, now hard to imagine, before Google existed. The gangster Eddie Prue is a figure of evil in a

novel by Raymond Chandler. There is nothing Eddie Prue won't do. Pete's melody, I think, irresistibly evokes a long car-ride through many states to an appointment that would be better not kept.

Four students in the usual light of day  
Set out to speak their minds about the war  
Unaware that Eddie Prue was on the way  
Things had to snap before they knew the score

They were driving through mythical America

A Rooney-Garland show was in the barn  
Fields was at the Pussycat Cafe  
No-one had even heard of Herman Kahn  
And Jersey Joe was eager for the fray

Four students had to take it in their stride  
And couldn't feel the road beneath the wheels  
Of the car they didn't know they rode inside  
Across the set and through the cardboard hills

They were driving through mythical America

They sold their Studebaker Golden Hawk  
And bought a Nash Ambassador Saloon  
Bogart said "Even the dead can talk"  
And suddenly the coats were all raccoon

Four students never knew that this was it  
There isn't much a target needs to know  
Already Babyface had made the hit  
And Rosebud was upended in the snow

They were driving through mythical America

Gatsby floated broken in the pool  
The Kansas City Seven found a groove  
Barrymore and Lombard played the fool  
And Cheetah slowly taught John Wayne to move

Four students watched the soldiers load and  
aim

And never tumbled they were on the spot  
Moose Molloy pulled ten years on a frame  
The dough was phoney and the car was hot  
They were driving through mythical America

Henry Ford paid seven bucks a day  
Rockwell did the covers on the Post  
FDR set up the TVA  
And the stars rode silver trains from coast to  
coast

Four students blinked at ordinary skies  
But the sunlight came from thousands of  
motels  
A highway through the night was in their eyes  
And waiting at the roadblock Orson Welles

They were driving through mythical America  
Four students never guessed that they were  
through

Their history had them covered like a gun  
It hit them like a bolt out of the blue  
Too quick to grasp and far too late to run  
They crashed and died together in the sun  
They were driving through mythical America

## 9. *The Faded Mansion On The Hill* 4.33

Recorded on 25th March 1971

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, electric piano

**Dave Bell** – bass guitar

**Barry Morgan** – drums

**PA:** When we were writing this, my head  
just happened to have been full of images  
from Raymond Chandler, and it took me a

pathetically long time to realise that of  
course the main setting here is Sydney  
harbour. Not that it matters. The song is  
about home, the idea of home and the  
reality of home, and we can all put our own  
personal gloss on that.

It's the only song on this album with  
one of those Broadway-style introductory  
verses before the song itself breaks out,  
but in this case I treated the verse musically  
almost as a song in its own right, with a  
middle eight and everything.

There's another example here of the  
kind of problem I caused by mucking up a  
line on the take, the kind of problem even  
the genius of Roger Quedsted was unable  
to solve on *No Dice*. I messed up on the  
line "The cemetery of home could  
somehow soon be left for dead" too badly  
to even think of leaving it uncorrected. So I  
re-recorded just that line, but since once  
again I had been simultaneously singing  
and playing, the re-taken vocal includes  
none of the spilled-over sound of the piano,  
hence the markedly different sound quality  
on that line. We hoped that it might be  
taken as a deliberate and deucedly clever  
acoustic effect. Well, I've blown that now.

**CJ:** As I remember it, I was the one who  
said that the noticeably different quality of  
the dropped-in line would register as  
deliberate because it was too blatant to be  
taken any other way. I'm not here to  
embarrass Pete with flattery, but I wish  
there were more critics who would,  
because I think the way he set the long

verse proves that he could have composed the melodically appealing operas that so many famous modern opera composers patently couldn't. In my nightmares I still meet an angry fan who doesn't realise that the "cats" are catamarans, and I have to reassure him that no animals were endangered in the creation of this lyric.

When you see what can't be helped go by  
With bloody murder in its eye  
And the mouth of a man put on the rack  
The voice of a man about to crack

When you see the litter of their lives  
The stupid children, bitter wives  
Your self-esteem in disarray  
You do your best to climb away  
From the streaming traffic of decay

Believing if you will that all these sick hate  
days

Are just a kind of trick Fate plays  
But still behind your shaded eyes  
That mind-constricting thick weight stays

When on the outskirts of the town  
Comes bumping cavernously down  
Out of the brick gateways  
From the faded mansion on the hill  
The out-of-date black Cadillac  
With the old man crumpled in the back  
That Time has not yet found the time to kill

Between the headlands to the sea the fleeing  
yachts of summer go  
White as a sheet and faster than the driven  
snow

Like dolphins riding high and giant seabirds  
flying low

And square across the wind the cats and  
wingsails pull ahead  
Living their day as if it almost could be said  
The cemetery of home could somehow soon  
be left for dead

But the graveyard of tall ships is really here  
Where the grass breaks up the driveway more  
each year

And here is all these people have  
And everything they can't believe  
The beach the poor men never reach  
The shore the rich men never leave

Between the headlands from the sea the  
homing yachts of summer fill  
The night with shouts and falling sails and  
then are still  
The avenues wind up into the darkness of the  
hill

Where Time tonight might find the time to kill

## 10. *Practical Man* 3.08

*Recorded on 23rd March 1971*

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, acoustic guitars

**Dave Bell** – bass guitar

**Kenny Clare** – drums

**PA:** I like to think that we were being at least somewhat ironic even as early as when we wrote this. My guess is that if any practical man had made us an even vaguely similar offer we'd have jumped up, saluted smartly, caved in, and sold out sharpish. As things turned out, we've been able to hang on to a lofty but unconvincing disdain for the very idea.

**CJ:** Were I to be grilled by a pedant about the imagery of this lyric, I might find myself explaining that the car with a turtle's mind

was a late, last flowering of my surrealist phase, whereas the waiters on the flaming swords were just a stroke of phantasmagorical comedy. But I would hope to get the interrogation down to earth by pointing out that if the story line is simple and strong enough then it can bear any amount of rhetorical flash.

What Pete says about the central character is all too true, alas. We both dreamed of meeting the mogul who would try to corrupt us, but he never showed up.

Last night I drank with a practical man  
Who seemed to think he knew me well  
He had no debts and he had no troubles  
All night long he kept setting up doubles  
And he asked me 'What have you got to sell?'

'I'll see you right' said the practical man  
'A boy like you should be living high  
All you do is get up and be funny  
And I'll turn the laughs into folding money  
Can you name me anything that can't buy?'

'So you deal in dreams' said the practical man  
'So does that mean you should be so coy?  
I fixed one chap a show on telly  
Who limped like Byron and talked like Shelley  
Through a ten-part epic on the fall of Troy'

'I'll tell you what' said the practical man  
As he tapped the ash from a purple fag  
'Let's head uptown for a meal somewhere  
You can sing me something while we're  
driving there

There's a grand piano in the back of my Jag'  
So I sang my song to the practical man  
It sounded bad but she couldn't hear  
And the silent lights of town went streaming  
As if the car was a turtle dreaming  
The night was sad and she was nowhere near  
'It's a great idea' said the practical man  
As they brought in waiters on flaming swords  
'You love this chick and it's really magic  
But she won't play ball — that's kind of tragic  
Now how do we get this concept on the  
boards?'

'I see it like this' said the practical man  
As he chose a trout from the restaurant pool  
'We change it round so she's going frantic  
To win the love of the last romantic  
And you're the one, her wild creative fool'

So I thought it all over as the practical man  
Watched them slaughter the fatted calf  
I saw again her regretful smile  
Sweet to look at though it meant denial  
It was bound to hurt but I had to laugh

And that's when I told the practical man  
As he drank champagne from the Holy Grail  
There are some ideas you can't play round  
with  
Can't let go of and you can't give ground with  
'Cause when you die they're what you're  
found with  
There are just some songs that are not for  
sale

11. *Lady Of A Day* 2.34

Recorded on 11th March 1971

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, piano, acoustic guitar

**Chris Spedding** – electric guitar

**Herbie Flowers** – bass guitar

**Kenny Clare** – drums

**Dennis Cliff** – trumpet

**Leon Calvert** – trumpet

**Dai Davies** – trombone

**Jim Wortley** – bass trombone

**Richard Ihnatowicz** – clarinet

**PA:** This one's a bit unusual harmonically, at least in the accompanying chords. They're all based, for what little it's worth, on a whole-tone scale, i.e. F, G, A, B, D flat, and E flat. I was just messing about really and I liked the kind of uncertain, spacey, unjoined-up feeling which that gave. And the shiny, unsentimental brass seemed right too.

**CJ:** The word "gay" was still available to be used without gender-based overtones in those days. *Autres temps, autres moeurs*, as we used to say at the milk bar across from Kogarah railway station. Live long enough and your vocabulary will date you, but if you try to fix it up the repairs might look more conspicuous than the damage. "There's a bar in far Mumbai..."

And so goodbye, my lady of a day  
Now let your step be long and now your laugh  
be gay

It's only right that everything went wrong  
It couldn't happen any other way

A thousand miles east, the lovers say  
It's written in the sky with stars that lead away

It couldn't happen to a nicer guy  
A nicer girl, my lady of a day

Through screens of memory you leave me  
Smile on the screen behind  
And then the screen behind the screen  
behind the screen  
But nothing alters what has been  
Nor do my eyes deceive me

And so goodbye, my lady of a night  
Now let your head be clear and now your  
smile bright  
As hour by day by week by month by year  
You dim but never wholly disappear  
On the curving path away from my delight

*Bonus demo*

12. *Practical Man* 2.31

Recorded at City of London Recording Studio,  
Osborn Street, London EC1 on 3rd February  
1969

**Pete Atkin** – vocal, guitar

**Steve Cook** – bass

**PA:** In common with most of the demos appended to "Beware Of The Beautiful Stranger", this track comes from my second privately pressed LP "The Party's Moving On" from 1969. Again I should apologise for the sound quality because the original reel-to-reel tapes disappeared a long time ago and this copy has been taken from one of the very few vinyl copies I can still lay hands on.

All songs published by Onward Music Ltd,  
except tracks 1, 2, 3 and 9 published by  
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# THIS WEEK'S SOUNDS

Project co-ordination – **Val Jennings**  
 CD package – **Jools at Mac Concept**  
 CD mastering – **Alchemy**  
 Epiphora courtesy of the collections of  
**Pete Atkin and Clive James**  
 CD front cover main photo and strapline photo –  
**Sophie Baker**  
 Huge thanks – **Pete Atkin, Clive James,**  
**Simon Platz, Steve Birkill, Ronen Guha**  
 and **Caroline Cook**

For everything (and we mean everything) relating to  
 Pete Atkin's works, visit [www.peteatkin.com](http://www.peteatkin.com), but  
 make sure you've got plenty of time to spend!  
 Then of course, you'll want to visit  
[www.clivejames.com](http://www.clivejames.com)

*Pete Atkin's albums on the  
 Edsel label.*

**Beware Of The Beautiful Stranger...plus**

[EDSS 1029]

**Driving Through Mythical America**

[EDSS 1030]

**A King At Nightfall...plus + The Road**

**Of Silk [2 CD] [EDSD 2028]**

**Secret Drinker + Live Libel**

**[2 CD] [EDSD 2029]**

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by Richard Williams

SATURDAY

Bernstein: Mass (3.10 Radio 5).  
 Lennie the Cultural Lion wrote  
 his epic for the opening of St  
 John F. Kennedy Center for the  
 Performing Arts in Washington  
 last year, and what a monster  
 it is: choral, dancers, singer  
 orchestras, bands, all showed in  
 one of the most eclectic music  
 settings ever devised. Very much  
 a post-Jesus Christ – Superstar  
 work, it alternates the dazzling  
 and the downright inapt. (Oh,  
 'blues singers' are a bad joke.)  
 In 20 years it'll look like a real  
 white elephant. But hear it.

In Concert (6.30 Radio 1). Bad  
 in 63, a young, back-combed  
 singer named Rod Stewart made  
 his first appearances with Lon  
 John Baldry and the Hoochie  
 Coochie Men. Rod's now a world  
 star with and without the Faces  
 while Baldry is still fighting  
 (albeit in a typically languid  
 manner) for the recognition his  
 great voice demands. They're  
 both on this programme. Which  
 cat's the grandfather?

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

MONDAY

Sounding Out (11.20 BBC1 – not  
 Wales). Not only are Stone, The  
 Crows filmed at a gig in Hamp-  
 stead's funky Country Club, but  
 their singer, the pungent Maggie  
 Bell, goes back home to Glasgow's  
 Tiffany Ballroom to sing 'The  
 Lady is a Tramp' just like she  
 used to. Like all Glaswegians,  
 she also has a lot of good tales  
 to tell.

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

THURSDAY

Sounds of the 70s (10.0 Radio 1).  
 The Third Ear Band were recently  
 called in to provide suitably  
 evocative soundtrack music for  
 Polanski's *Macbeth*. An all-  
 improvisation group, they feature  
 the cello of Paul Buckmaster, a  
 gifted writer whose arrangements  
 have been among the highlights  
 of Elton John's recordings.

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

FRIDAY

Sounds of the 70s (10.0 Radio 1).  
 On no account miss this rare  
 appearance by Pete Atkin, an ex-  
 Cambridge Footlights man who  
 now writes melodies around the  
 accurate, incisive lyrics of Clive  
 James. They create music far  
 beyond the pretensions of most  
 current composers, and if Randy  
 Newman can make it, so can they.

Richard Williams is in The God  
 Grey Whistle Test (Tuesday 10.45  
 BBC2 Colour)

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

# THIS WEEK'S SOUNDS



by Richard Williams

SATURDAY

In Concert (6.30 Radio 1). The  
 Sutherland Brothers – Iain and  
 Gavin – were born in Aberdeen-  
 shire, and played music together  
 from a very early age. Influenced  
 most heavily by Bob Dylan and  
 the Byrds, they came down to  
 London in 1970 and formed their  
 own band last year. Their sound  
 is friendly and unpretentious.

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

SUNDAY

Francis Albert Sinatra (7.25  
 BBC1). Frankie puts the accent  
 on the music of the 60s, with  
 Diahann Carroll (who, besides be-  
 ing Copsay Dave's best friend, has  
 a smashing voice and once re-  
 corded with the MQJ) and the  
 Fifth Dimension.

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

Jazz Club (12.5 am Radio 1 and 2).  
 Musicians' opinions of their con-  
 temporaries are always enlighten-  
 ing – the pianist and composer  
 Michael Garrick has already writ-  
 ten that the John Taylor Sextet  
 reaches a new pinnacle in *Bamb*,  
 jazz. Taylor, a quiet pianist, has  
 a hand which perfectly combines  
 the attributes of spontaneity and  
 organisation.

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

TUESDAY

Sounds of the 70s (10.0 Radio 1).  
 Matching Mole may be hard up  
 for work, but their music doesn't  
 show it. Since Dave McRae (elec-  
 tric piano) joined drummer Robert  
 Wyatt and friends, they've  
 come on by leaps and bounds, as  
 tonight's 20-minute piece – largely  
 consisting of free improvisation –  
 will attest. McRae is actually as  
 heavy as anybody in the world on  
 his instruments. Plus Pete Atkin,  
 with songs from his next album  
 (which must make him rich and  
 famous) and Gary Wright's  
*Wonderwheel*.

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

THURSDAY

Jazz in Britain (11.0 Radio 3).  
 John Stevens leads his 20-piece  
 Spontaneous Music Ensemble  
 through an exposition of collec-  
 tive improvisation. For those un-  
 familiar with New Music, this  
 long work – titled 'Encompass' –  
 could be a valuable and intruc-  
 tive introduction. Some stellar  
 names are involved, and will only

