

**THE PETE ATKIN & CLIVE JAMES
2001 TOUR
SONG LYRICS**

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Girl On The Train

What did I do yesterday? Well I'll tell you in brief
Ten quid from the bank and I got out of town with relief
And slowly but surely my life came to flower again
Falling head over heels for a beautiful girl on the train

She was reading a book, taking in every word the man wrote
And there in the margin she made the occasional note
And I couldn't deduce why she didn't once blink with surprise
As fathom by fathom I gradually drowned in her eyes

But she kept on the job of improving her single-track brain
Ploughing steadily onward through obsolete Monsieur Verlaine
While no further than seven-foot-six from her fabulous mouth
Sat the leading young poetic hope of the whole planet earth

Well apart from the chance of the driver accepting a cheque
For crashing his loco so I could be brave in the wreck
To boldly encounter this creature was not in my power
And so my heart mended and broke in the course of an hour

Well at last we pulled in and as straight as a three-sided knife
She got up and walked like a princess away from my life
And unless she remembers the day she was reading Verlaine
In a second-class coach on her way through the fields in the rain
She won't know it's her that I sing to again and again
Again and again

Thirty Year Man

Nobody here yet
From the spotlight that will ring her not a glimmer
Not a finger on its squeaky dimmer
I play piano in a jazz quartet
That works here late with a young girl singer

And along from the darkened and empty tables
By the covered-up drums and the microphone cables
At the end of the room the piano glistens
Like the rail at the end of the nave

Thirty years in the racket
A brindled crew-cut and a silk-lined jacket
And it isn't my hands that fill this place
It's a kid's voice still reaching into space
It's her they're driving down to hear
And it's my bent-over back she's standing near

Nobody talks yet
From the glasses that will touch soon not a tinkle
Not a paper napkin shows a wrinkle
I play piano in a jazz quartet
That backs a winner while the big notes crinkle

And along from the darkened and empty tables
By the covered-up drums and the microphone cables
At the end of the room the piano glistens
Like the rail at the end of the nave
And I play a few things while no-one listens

Thirty years in the racket
A brindled crew-cut and a silk-lined jacket
And it isn't my name that brings them in
It's a little girl just starting to begin
It's her they're piling in to see
And I'd kill that kid if she wasn't killing me

Nobody moves yet
From the tables near the bandstand not a rustle
Not a loudmouth even moves a muscle
I play piano in a jazz quartet
That backs a giver while the takers hustle

And along from the darkened and empty tables
By the covered-up drums and the microphone cables

At the end of the room the piano glistens
Like bones at the end of a cave
And I play a few things while no-one listens
For an hour alone spells freedom to the slave

Perfect Moments

Perfect moments have a clean design
Scoring edges that arrest the flow
Skis cut diamonds in the plump of snow
Times my life feels like a friend of mine

Perfect moments wear a single face
Variations on each other's theme
Renoir's mistresses in peach and cream
Rembrandt's mother in a ruff of lace

Perfect moments bear a single name
They're placed together though they never meet
Charlie Chaplin policing Easy Street
Charlie Parker playing My Old Flame

Perfect moments should redeem the day
Their teeming richness ought to be enough
To take the sting out of the other stuff
A perfect bitch it doesn't work that way

History And Geography

The History and Geography of feeling less than wonderful is known to me
The dates of broken bubbles and the whereabouts of every lost belief
And from the Point of Tears I see how far away across the Sea of Troubles
The Pinnacles of Happiness are halfway hidden in the Clouds of Grief

My common sense can tell me all it likes to count myself among the lucky
For pity's sake to draw a breath and take a look around me and compare
But all I seem to see and hear is something I'm unable to remember
The flowing speech that stuttered out, the pretty song that faded on the air

When the jet returns me half awake and half asleep to what I call my homeland
I look down into the midnight city through the empty inkwell of the sky
And in that kit of instruments laid out across a velvet-covered table
I know that nothing lives which doesn't hold its place more worthily than I

Without a home, without a name, a girl of whom to say 'this is my sister'
For I am all the daughters of my father's house and all the brothers too
I comb the rubble of a shattered world to find the bright face of an angel
And say again and say again that I have written this - this is for you

The History and Geography of feeling less than wonderful is known to me
When sunsets are unlovely and the dawns are coldly calculated light
And from the Heights of Arrogance across the steps that later I regretted
I see those angel faces flame their last and flicker out into the night

I See The Joker

Mornings now I breakfast in the tower
Then travel thirty floors to the garage
My sons are with me even underground
With nothing but our gun-cars all around
From anything but nuclear attack
That place is safe, but when I cut the pack I see the Joker
I cut the pack and see the Joker

The forecourt is crawling with our boys
A heavy weapon rides in every car
My Cadillac's a safe-deposit box
With plastic armour in the top and sides
Solid like a strongroom in Fort Knox
And all along the parkway into town
We're covered for a mile front and back
By Family cars, but when I cut the pack I see the Joker
I cut the pack and see the Joker

Who is this guy and why does he want me?
This city has been ours since Christ knows when
At first from booze and girls and junk, and then
Legitimate, from rents and industry
The Chief of Police is ours to buy and sell

The DA and the Mayor are ours as well
There's no-one left to fight, the enemy
Are dead and gone, or just some juicehead black
Loose with a knife, but when I cut the pack I see the Joker
I cut the pack and see the Joker

The cops are checking each incoming flight
For solo hitmen with an urge to die
No-one gets in here by day or night
Without I don't know who they are and why
I'm in the clear, at barely fifty-five
One of the most respected men alive
Some blubber here and there, but nothing slack
I'm right on top, but when I cut the pack I see the Joker
I cut the pack and see the Joker

We do the journey different every day
Today we hit the garment district first
Then double back and take the boulevard
And as we drive I don't know which is worst
To know he'll come but not to know the way
To know he'll make a play but not know how
Is he somewhere out there setting up the gun?
Is this headache from his crosswires on my brow?
There's no way, not a crevice, not a crack
That he can reach me, but when I cut the pack I see the Joker
I cut the pack and see the Joker

Dreamboat

The night that you and I first were lovers
The schooner made ready for the sea
With nobody on board except the thought of you and me

And as we used our stock of borrowed time
The schooner navigated by the light
Of just the way your eyes lit up the night
And by the dawn was out of sight

And as the world closed in to separate us
The schooner's sails were curved like caves
Hollowed in the mountain of the sun
The leeward gunwale running in the waves

The day the sky fell in and we were through
The schooner was already long gone
On the green water sailing straight and true
She still goes on

Alone as me and even lovelier than you

Ice-Cream Man

This afternoon the ice-cream man
Has driven his magnetic van
From Angkor Wat or Isfahan
To park down by the meadows
The captain of a pirate ship
He struggles hard to keep his grip
With cannonades of strawb'ry whip
Delivered through the windows

A British Bedford Dormobile
Done over pink for eye appeal
With rainbow discs on every wheel
It makes a magic wagon
A mass of metal glorified
Sesame thrown open wide
And this amazing man inside
Fantastic as a dragon

It must be standing on tiptoe
And reaching up to trade your dough
For scoops of Technicolor snow
That makes the man look royal
To me he looks a normal bloke
With a second line in lukewarm Coke
Busting for a decent smoke
To break the round of toil

I guess I've got a jaundiced eye
The children never spot the lie
They're queueing up and reaching high
For something that tastes lovely
Neapolitan wafers make the day
The king is in his castle gay
And they're behind him all the way
Below me they're above me

Who'd guess from how they make a meal
With darting tongue and teeth of steel
From a mess of frigid cochineal
That they were born to sorrow
Gone to dust the age of kings
Lost the taste for simple things
If only time would give me wings
I'd double back tomorrow

Beware Of The Beautiful Stranger

On the midsummer fairground alive with the sound
And the lights of the Wurlitzer merry-go-round
The midway was crowded and I was the man
Who coughed up a quid in the dark caravan
To the gypsy who warned him of danger
"Beware of the beautiful stranger"

"You got that for nothing" I said with a sigh
As the queen's head went up to her critical eye
"The lady in question is known to me now
And I'd like to beware but the problem is how
Do you think I was born in a manger?
I'm in love with the beautiful stranger"

The gypsy (called Lee as all soothsayers are)
Bent low to her globular fragment of star
"This woman will utterly screw up your life
She will tempt you from home, from your children and wife
She's a devil and nothing will change her
Get away from the beautiful stranger"

"That ball needs a re-gun" I said, shelling out
"The future you see there has all come about
Does it show you the girl as she happens to be
A Venus made flesh in a shell full of sea?
Does it show you the shape of my danger?
Can you show me the beautiful stranger?"

"I don't run a cinema here, little man
But lean over close and tune in if you can
You breathe on the glass, give a rub with your sleeve
Slip me your wallet, sit tight and believe
And the powers-that-be will arrange a
Pre-release of the beautiful stranger"

In the heart of the glass I saw galaxies born
The eye of the storm and the light of the dawn
And then with a click came a form and a face
That stunned me not only through candour and grace
But because she was really a stranger
A total and beautiful stranger

"Hello there" she said with her hand to her brow
I'm the one you'll meet after the one you know now
There's no room inside here to show you us all
But behind me the queue stretches right down the hall
For the damned there is always a stranger
There is always a beautiful stranger

"That's your lot" said Miss Lee as she turned on the light
"These earrings are hell and I'm through for the night
If they'd put up a booster not far from this pitch
I could screen you your life to the very last twitch
But I can't even get the Lone Ranger
One last word from the beautiful stranger"

"You live in a dream and the dream is a cage"
Said the girl "And the bars nestle closer with age
Your shadow burned white by invisible fire

You will learn how it rankles to die of desire
As you long for the beautiful stranger"
Said the vanishing beautiful stranger

"Here's a wallet for you and five nicker for me"
Said the gypsy "And also here's something for free
Watch your step on my foldaway stairs getting down
And go slow on the flyover back into town
There's a slight but considerable danger
Give my love to the beautiful stranger"

Thief In The Night

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

The Faded Mansion On The Hill

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

The Flowers And The Wine

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

Canoe

The perfect moon was huge above the sea
The surf was easy even on the reef
We were the lucky three
Who slid in our canoe
Through the flowers on the water
And tried to read the signals in the sky

We travelled with our necklaces of shell
The moon was waning through the nights and days
And how we dreamed of home!
But we couldn't find the island
Where you trade the shells for feathers
We fainted in the sun's reflected blaze

With cracking lips I turned to tell my friends
The time had come for all of us to die
"She's out a whole degree"
I told them as I floated
Checking readouts at my shoulder
"Re-enter at this angle and we'll fry"

The go for override came up from earth
We took control and we flew her with our hands
And how we dreamed of home!
We saw the south Pacific
As we fought to get her zeroed
Before the heat shield started hitting air

We came home in a roaring purple flame
And gave the mission back to the machines
We were the lucky three
The parachutes deployed
We were rocking like a cradle
As we drifted down in silence to the sea

Stranger In Town

I never will remember how that stranger came to town
He walked in without a swagger, got a job and settled down
The place would have seemed the same without him
And now I can't recall a thing about him

He didn't wear a poncho or a gun with a filed sight
And he wasn't passing through like a freight-train in the night
He rarely wore a stetson with a shadowy big brim
And I still can't be sure if he was him

From Kansas to Wyoming, from Contention to Cheyenne
His name meant less than nothing and it didn't scare a man
So folks didn't worship him or fear him
And I can't remember ever going near him

He didn't tote a shotgun with the barrels both sawn off
So people didn't hit the deck or dive behind a trough
He walked the street in silence ignored on every side
And it's doubtful if he could even ride

I never could remember how that stranger met his death
He was absolutely senile, and with his dying breath
He forgot to ask his womenfolk to kiss him
And afterwards they didn't even miss him

Star Of Tomorrow

A slow train to just another gig
Eat like a hummingbird and sleep like a pig
Can you keep a level head, now you're gettin' big?
Star of Tomorrow

Are you speaking from the station? I'm speaking from the club
Of all this town's activities this venue is the hub
Just a seven mile walk, be certain not to miss the fork
And there you'll find the pub

It's called The Dead Man's Hand
Afraid it's nothing grand, ha ha
We're in the annexe out the back Ho ho
I'm sure you know how things are
Star of Tomorrow

A slow train to just another gig
Eat like a hummingbird and sleep like a pig
Can you keep a level head, now you're gettin' big?
Star of Tomorrow

I must admit the turnout isn't quite what we had hoped
The girl in charge of advertising hasn't really coped
In fact she and Mr Sloane who should have brought the microphone
Appear to have eloped

So there aren't many people here
Three men and a dog, I fear, ha ha
But the dog's got all your albums
Ho Ho
I'm sure you know how things are

Star of Tomorrow

The whole thing was a triumph! You handled it so well
You reminded us of Rod McKuen, or even of Jacques Brel
No-one could have faulted you when that drunk assaulted you
We loved the way you fell

I s'pose that was Kung Fu
You say that guitar was new, ha ha
You broke your glasses too
Ho ho
I'm sure you know how things are
Star of Tomorrow

The milk train in the morning leaves not long after four
I could ask a million questions and my girlfriend even more
But if you'd rather not, in that case we've always got
Our trusty kitchen floor

A good spot for a nap
If I ever mend that tap, ha ha
Would you like some luke-warm beer?
Ho ho
I'm sure you know how things are
Star of Tomorrow

A slow train to just another gig
Eat like a hummingbird and sleep like a pig
Can you keep a level head, now you're gettin' big?
Star of Tomorrow
Star of Tomorrow
Tomorrow

Tenderfoot

Beyond the border town they call Contrition
The badlands are just boulders and mesquite
A school of Spanish friars built the mission
But left because they couldn't take the heat
And further on the road to Absolution
The mesas turn to mountains capped with snow
And the way becomes a form of execution
That only hardened travellers can go

You can tell the horseman grieves for how he sinned
He rides a killing trail
Reminded of his hard heart by the hail
And of his folly by the chilling wind

By day the canyon ramparts blaze their strata
Like purple battlements he shall not pass
The sunlight sears the horseman like a martyr
The glacier's a magnifying glass
And by night the clouds black out the constellations
While veils of icicles lock up his eyes
He moves by echo through the cold formations
Walls of drift and ice-fall fall and rise

You can tell the horseman grieves for how he sinned
He rides a killing trail
Reminded of his hard heart by the hail
And of his folly by the chilling wind

He knows he made pretense of love too often
His deadly carelessness went on for years
At dawn the shields on his eyes will soften
And all of his regrets will be in tears
But far too late to go back and be gentle
Or say how clearly now it comes to mind
His pride at never being sentimental
Was just a clever way to be unkind

You can tell the horseman grieves for how he sinned
He rides a killing trail
Reminded of his hard heart by the hail
And of his folly by the chilling wind

Around him lie the stunning and the drastic
Where nothing but the utmost can be felt
The temperatures will always be fantastic
Noon will never cool nor midnight melt
A fitting climate for one so unfeeling
Who once was so indifferent to distress
He's goaded onward with his senses reeling
Without the prospect of forgetfulness

You can tell the horseman grieves for how he sinned
He rides a killing trail
Reminded of his hard heart by the hail
And of his folly by the chilling wind

The golden handshake and the lightning kisses
Were all his for the asking in the past
But the subtlety and softness that he misses
For them the horseman always moved too fast
And now at last to contemplate his error
Facing the dimensions of his loss

He journeys where the sky meets the Sierra
That every man alive must one day cross

You can tell the horseman grieves for how he sinned
He rides a killing trail
Reminded of his hard heart by the hail
And of his folly by the chilling wind

I Feel Like Midnight

I feel like midnight
And whether a new day
Will ever dawn
Is just a guess

I see by starlight
The long road from the day
That I was born
To this address

And I look at where you slept
And I taste the tears you wept
And you're here again except
I feel like midnight

I feel like midnight
And you are here again
To mock me with a smile
Each time I say

I feel like midnight
And the only chance I had
To rest a while
I threw away

Give me a break
Give me the break of day
I feel like midnight
I feel like midnight
I feel like midnight

Laughing Boy

In all the rooms I've hung my hat, in all the towns I've been
It stuns me I'm not dead already from the shambles that I've seen
I've seen a girl hold back her hair to light a cigarette
And things like that a man like me can't easily forget
I've got the only cure for life, and the cure for life is joy
I'm a crying man that everyone calls Laughing Boy

A kid once asked me in late September for a shilling for the guy
And I looked that little operator in her wheeling-dealing eye
And I tossed a bob with deep respect in her old man's trilby hat
It seems to me that a man like me could die of things like that
I've got the only cure for life, and the cure for life is joy
I'm a crying man that everyone calls Laughing Boy

I've seen landladies who lost their lovers at the time of Rupert Brooke
And they pressed the flowers from Sunday rambles and then forgot which book
And I paid the rent thinking 'Anyway, buddy, at least you won't get wet'
And I tried the bed and lay there thinking 'They haven't got you yet'
I've got the only cure for life, and the cure for life is joy
I'm a crying man that everyone calls Laughing Boy

I've read the labels on a hundred bottles for eyes and lips and hair
And I've seen girls breathe on their fingernails and wiggle them in the air
And I've often wondered who the hell remembers as far back as last night
It seems to me that a man like me is the only one who might
I've got the only cure for life, and the cure for life is joy
I'm a crying man that everyone calls Laughing Boy

Ready For The Road

A belt with a bull's head for a buckle
High boots that satisfy the western code
A signet ring the size of Samson's knuckle
And I'm gettin' ready for the road

I'm gettin' ready, I'll soon be good an' ready
Yes I'm gettin' ready for the road
I'm gettin' ready, yes I'll soon be good an' ready
For the road

Blue Jeans that clutch me tighter than a pipe wrench
Two guns it took a fork-lift truck to load
I feel like I'm standin' in a slip-trench
But I'm gettin' ready for the road

For the road is the home of a troubadour
And a troubadour is what I am
And I travel the trail of a troubadour
From the Empire Pool to Birmingham

But my heart belongs to Tulsa and to Tucson
For me the Alamo is à la mode
And just as soon as my 'orse can get its shoes on
I'll be ready for the road

I'm gettin' ready, I'll soon be good an' ready
Yes I'm gettin' ready for the road
I'm gettin' ready, yes I'll soon be good an' ready
For the road

I'm gettin' ready, yes I'll soon be good an' ready
For the road