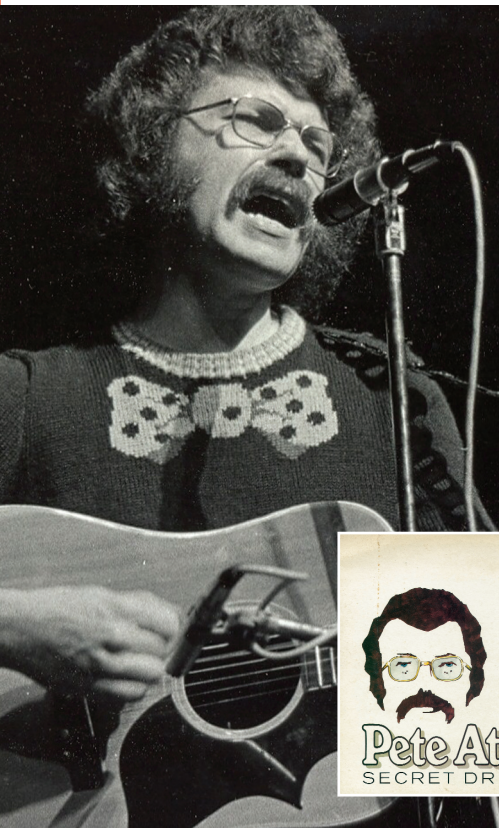


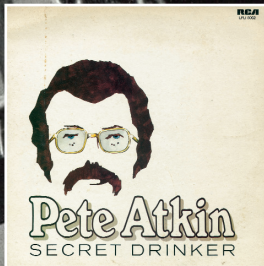


# The Songs Of PETE ATKIN & CLIVE JAMES



# Pete Atkin

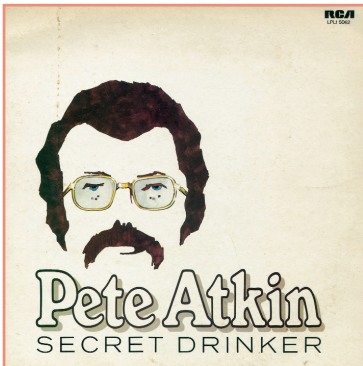
**SECRET DRINKER  
& LIVE LIBEL**



DISC ONE

## *Secret Drinker*

RCA LPLI 5062, 1974



Lyrics – **Clive James**

Music – **Pete Atkin**

Produced and arranged by **Pete Atkin**

Engineered by **Roger Quested**

Recorded at Morgan Studios, Willesden, London  
NW10, June – July 1974

Art direction – **Pat Doyle**

Design – **Sutton Paddock Associates**

Photography – **Fay Godwin**

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

**Paul Keogh** – electric guitar

**Daryl Runswick** – bass guitar, double bass

**Barry Desouza** – drums

**Frank Ricotti** – percussion, vibraphone

**Ronnie Ross** – baritone saxophone

**PA:** By the time I came to make this album in the summer of 1974, Clive was becoming much more famous for things other than his lyric-writing, mainly for presenting Granada TV's *Cinema* programme, and then for writing his revolutionary TV column in the *Observer* newspaper. We were back on the friendly, familiar ground of Morgan Studios in beautiful downtown Willesden, London NW10, in the ultrasafe hands of Roger Quested, for whom the experience of engineering my albums would cause him to give up hands-on studio work in order to develop what's generally acknowledged to be just about the best monitoring system anyone's ever come across.

**CJ:** Pete and I had an ambition to write songs that would break loose and live by themselves, and I suppose *Secret Drinker* shows that ambition reaching its apex, or its first apex anyway. Some of the songs on this album were, I think, among the most assured things we did, but it was steadily becoming harder to ignore the likelihood that life was going to get tougher the more we were confirmed in our role of appealing to a minority audience. The music business in those days was about the majority audience. It still is, but the minority now has a better chance of finding the product. Even for the time, Pete's record companies did an unusually thorough job of fumbling or forgetting every promise they made, but they might not have had the answer even had they been competent. What we needed was the web, but it hadn't yet been invented.

**Pete Atkin** and **Clive James**, January 2009



1. *Rain-Wheels* 3.23

*Recorded on 15th June 1974, plus later overdubs*

**CJ:** Nowadays the narrator would be trying to get into Notting Hill, not out of it, and the girl would be driving a Beamer runabout rather than a 4.2 Jag. It was a lot of car, the 4.2, so almost certainly it belonged to a rich boyfriend. The way neon looked when reflected in a wet street was something I first noticed in Sydney when I was a kid. There is less neon today: digital lighting has taken over, and it doesn't have the same glow. Those wire wheels would have strobed only to a camera lens, not to the unaided human eye, but I was taking liberties. Pete was taking them too.

The lyric is full of desolate envy but he turned it into a rabble-rouser, which was only proper. The song had revolution in its veins.

The storm has dumped a mirror in the street  
A Jaguar goes by like the fastest MTB in all the  
fleet

The girl at the wheel is food for heroes  
Her hubs full of haloes are strobing like a finger  
dialling zeroes

She has to get home to the Vale of Health  
She has to get out of Notting Hill

Would she care for us cripples if she could?  
Does her throbbing four-point-two shyly beat for  
me and you beneath the hood?

**morgan** *GPM* **stereo master O**  
**mono master O**

Client *P.P.A.* .....  
Artist *PEE-MIN* .....  
Producer *PETE-MIN* .....

Studio *30.3.74* .....  
Date *30.3.74* .....  
Tape No. *8041* .....

	Title	Time
	SIDE 1: <i>1116</i>	
(1)	<i>RAINWHEELS</i>	<i>8.5</i>
(2)	<i>SESSIONMAN'S BLUES</i>	
(3)	<i>I SEE THE JOKE</i>	
(4)	<i>NATIONAL STEEL</i>	
(5)	<i>NOTHING LEFT TO SAY</i>	
		<i>21.40</i>

Engineer *ROGER SWEET* .....  
Speed *15* .....  
Reply *E.O.* .....  
Morgan Recording Studios Limited  
169-171 High Road, Willesden, London NW10.  
Telephone 01-459 7244  
Cables Morganmus Lond. NW10.

And back to her nest in amongst the  
wealth

Where the rain falls warm and the  
winds don't chill

Her Firestones go trailing spray  
They spin, they grip, they whip away  
Through trembling reflections of the  
lights of intersections

And the brightly flourished crayon of  
the neon ...

## 2. *Sessionman's Blues* 4.25 Recorded on 21st June 1974, plus later overdubs

**PA:** When I was making these  
albums at Morgan Studios in the  
early 1970s, the lounge area was a  
rendezvous point at any time of the  
day for musicians coming and going  
between sessions, and it was the  
same at studios all over London. The  
muso in the song is no exaggeration.  
These guys would work at least  
three sessions a day, every day,  
turning up with little or no idea of

what they'd be asked to play, playing it brilliantly,  
hardly ever getting a credit, never getting to play  
their own music. That kind – and quantity – of  
session work has now pretty much dried up  
completely, making this song another historical  
curiosity.

Ironically, it wasn't at an album session that  
Clive wrote this lyric. Capital Radio, the  
commercial music radio station in London at that  
time, had a Saturday late-night show with live  
music. Clive was there talking to the host, Sara  
Ward, and to phoners-in, and in between I was  
singing and playing with the guys in the band I'd  
been touring with, each of them confined in his  
own acoustic box of screens. Clive wrote the lyric

The Jag is shedding tears along the airflow  
And its plum-coloured lustre is sobbing like the  
deep end of the rainbow

She has to get home to the Vale of Health  
She has to get out of Notting Hill  
And back to her nest in amongst the wealth

Why pretend our fortunes touch her heart?  
The supermarket windows have shivered in the  
street and come apart  
The girl in the E-type cares for no-one  
Her Firestones go trailing spray through trembling  
reflections of the neon

She has to get home to the Vale of Health  
She has to get out of Notting Hill



during the course of the show, and read it out at the end, as I remember.

The thing about 'doublin' on baritone' at the end, is a reference to the fact that if, as a musician, you're asked to bring and play a second instrument on the session you're entitled to 25% extra on your fee, so doubling sessions are always specially welcome. In practice, tenor sax doubling on baritone is a slightly unusual combination, but never mind, it gave me an excuse to book the great Ronnie Ross, who'd long been a hero.

**CJ:** I always did love the saxophones, although I still get them mixed up. I have the excuse that most of the session-men sax players will double up to cut down the bills, so when you look through the window from the control-booth you might suddenly notice that your hero's instrument has suddenly doubled in size, if you'll pardon the phrase. When Pete performs this song on stage, he often gets a laugh on the last stanza. That laugh pleases me exceedingly, because it means that the audience, despite itself, is enjoying the neatness with which the Grim Reaper has joined the picture.

I've got the sessionman's blues  
I played on three albums today  
I paid a sessionman's dues  
I played what they told me to play  
Then I climbed in my Rover 3-Litre and motored away

I've got the sessionman's blues  
The squattin' in a booth alone blues

I've got the sessionman's blues  
But I get the dots right from the start  
I drink a sessionman's booze  
But my tenor blows what's on the chart

A single run through and I've got the whole solo by heart

I've got the sessionman's blues  
The squattin' in a booth alone  
Isolated microphone blues

I've got the sessionman's blues  
I'm booked up a lifetime ahead  
I get a sessionman's news  
The voice on the blower just said  
They want me to work on the afternoon after I'm dead

I've got the sessionman's blues  
The squattin' in a booth alone  
Isolated microphone  
Doublin' on baritone blues

morgan		COPI	stereo master O	mono master O
Client	RCR			
Artist	PEE ATKIN	8117	Studio Date	29.7.74
Producer			Take No.	8042
Title		Time		
SIDE 2				
1	TENDERPOOT	-6 1/2 -6 1/2		
2	TIME & TIME AGAIN			
3	LITTLE SAMMY SPEEDBALL			
4	SECRET DRINKER			
5	TENOR TIED	20-07		
Engineer ROGER QUENGO		Speed	15	NOV 15
Morgan Recording Studios Limited 169-171 High Road, Willesden, London NW10		Replay E.G.		
		Telephone 01-459 7244		
		Cables Morganmus Lond NW10		



### 3. *I See The Joker* 5.07

Recorded on 4th July 1974, plus later overdubs

**PA:** Clive was becoming bolder in sometimes handing me lyrics where the verses didn't always have exactly the same shape or length. What that meant here was that when I get to 'I cut the pack and see the Joker' at the end of each verse, I get there each time by a slightly different musical route.

The reversed guitar echo was Roger Quested's idea. In those dear pre-digital days of yore, the 16-track tape had to be physically reversed, the guitar track copied backwards with its echo, and the new track then re-copied

forwards on to the master multitrack. Got that? Simple really.

**CJ:** When *The Godfather* became a hit, gangsters became heroes, but I never thought that way. With typical solipsism I always put myself in the leading role as the top guy whose button-men, instructed to eliminate everybody, might have missed one out. I made a mistake in the wording: "cross-wires" should have been "cross-hairs". But otherwise I think the vocabulary checks out, and there can be no doubt about how Pete's driving melody – power turning to paranoia – multiplies the atmospherics.

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

#### 4. *National Steel* 5.14

*Recorded on 19th June 1974, plus later overdubs*

**PA:** Clive's lyric only slightly romanticises the true story of how I acquired the guitar. The music shop used to be in Camden Passage in Islington, not far from where Clive and I shared a big old house with a bunch of mates, in the days just before every house in Islington found itself smartly done up and out of reach for the likes of us. My National is an authentic early 1930s model. They were made for volume in the days before guitars were electrified, and it still sure is loud.

The usual way to play this kind of guitar is with an open tuning, i.e. tuning the strings so that they make a chord without you having to place your fingers on the frets at all, which makes it much more suitable for playing with a metal or glass slide (a bottleneck). But on this song I stayed with standard guitar tuning and played mostly standard guitar chords, except that I use the slide on the little finger of my left hand, exploiting the three-note chords that are available naturally on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th, or on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings.

I remember Roger recorded this with five microphones: one for the guitar, one for my vocal, one on each side for larger stereo ambiance, and one for my foot tapping.

**CJ:** When Pete brought the National home I took one look at it and sat down to write before he even started playing it. I had never heard the snap of broken bracken in the frost: only imagined it. Years later, filming in Kentucky, I heard it, and it filled my mind with the cold music of this song, of which I am very fond. It was the last time I ever wrote about a specific instrument, and once again, as with the first time, it was a guitar. But the National is a guitar like no other. For one thing, if any performer tried to smash it at the end of a concert, he would get about the same results as if he had swung a refrigerator.

Shining in the window a guitar that wasn't wood  
It was looking like a silver coin from when they still  
were good

The man who kept the music shop was pleased to  
let me play

Although the price was twenty times what I could  
ever pay

Pick it up and feel the weight and weigh the feel  
That thing is an authentic National Steel

A lacy grille across the front and etchings on the  
back

But the welding sealed a box not even Bukka  
White could crack

I tuned it to an open chord, picked up the nickel  
slide

And bottlenecked a blues that sounded cold yet  
seemed to glide

The National Steel weaves a singing shroud  
Just as sure as men in winter breathe a cloud

Scrapper Blackwell, Blind Boy Fuller and Blind  
Blake

Son House or any name you care to take

And from many a sad railroad, mine or mill  
Lonnie Johnson's bitter tears are in there still

Be certain, said the man, of who you are  
There are dead men still alive in that guitar

Back there the next morning half demented by  
desire

For that storybook assemblage of heavy plate and  
wire

I sold half the things I valued but I'll never count  
the cost

While I can pick a note like broken bracken in the  
frost

And I hear those fabled names becoming real  
Every time I feel the weight or weigh the feel  
Of the vanished years inside my National Steel

## 5. *Nothing Left To Say* 3.29

*Recorded on 2nd July 1974, plus later overdubs*

**PA:** This is one I now wish I'd perhaps given a bit more instrumental space, a bit more production. On the other hand, I still quite like the empty spaces in it.

**CJ:** I should hasten to say that if I have ever felt like this, it was only for a moment. For most of us, despair is an indulgence, and should be reserved for those who have good reason to think that giving up might be an option. Perhaps I was going through a bad patch. Anyway, even with my heart in my boots, I enjoyed the paradox of waxing eloquent about the inability to speak; and Pete got some beauty into it, which it sorely needed. This was my one and only mermaid, a species to be avoided, unless, like Daryl Hannah in *Splash*, she has the pulchritude to offset her manifest drawbacks.

The breakers from the sea that kept me sane  
Were clean and lucid, all along the line  
Like shavings tumbled upward from the plane

That leave with ease the surface of the pine  
 When the carpenter is planing with the grain  
 It's nothing  
 Nothing but a dream of mine

And I have come to nothing in a way  
 That leaves me with nothing left to say

Half a lifetime bending with the breeze  
 To buy the stuff I don't know how to use  
 A deck of credit cards, a bunch of keys  
 A station I achieved but didn't choose  
 The screws are on and no-one beats the squeeze  
 It's nothing  
 Nothing I can't bear to lose

The sea I dreamed of closes like a vice  
 Parading waves are frozen into place  
 Their veils of vapour scattering like rice  
 And far below, the ultimate disgrace  
 A mermaid crushed to death inside the ice  
 It's nothing  
 Nothing but a frightened face

## 6. *Tenderfoot* 6.19

*Recorded on 15th June 1974, plus later overdubs*

**PA:** I have always loved the epic movie-like quality of this lyric. It's not a song I've ever performed much live, but it's one of the ones I play and sing for myself often. With hindsight, I think perhaps I'd organise the verses and the choruses a bit differently now, and include an instrumental section to vary it a bit, but, hey, that was then and this is now.

**CJ:** The lone horseman had been done to death in all media long before I wrote this lyric. But that was part of its point: my guy is dead already. I was pleased with the sierras and the landscapes generally, and some of the detail is as good as I can do. (In one case, it's as good as Dante could do: those eyes locked up with

ice belong to him.) The slow but steady movement Pete gave the horseman – he's riding carefully, picking his way – is exactly right, I think, and he's right again to say that the order of the non-events could do with some rearrangement. It pleases me that he's still thinking about how to make this one perfect, because I count it high, among my lyrics, as an attempt to bring a whole range of imagery to the task of defining a single emotion: regret, which is not the same thing as despair.

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

He knows he made pretence 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

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

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

### 7. *Time And Time Again* 4.03

*Recorded on 10th June 1974, plus later overdubs*

**PA:** I really thought this one might have commercial possibilities. But then I tend to think that, however improbably, about almost every song, at least at the start. But even allowing myself to think that way is itself a sign that the song was still – and remains – the primary thing for us. If it's a good idea you write it anyway, and only afterwards try to work out what you're going to do with it.

**CJ:** I also thought that this song had a chance to earn coin, although I didn't make it easy for Pete when I chose a word like "time" to feature so heavily. The long "i" is the beast of all diphthongs, and the Americans have an unfair advantage in being able to sing it unblushingly as "ah". Still, Cole Porter put the word "sky" on a long note smack in the middle of the chorus of "So In Love",

and as a gentleman of the East Coast social elite he presumably spoke just the same as you and ah.

Time and time again within my solitude  
She's there as if it were that very night  
Her cotton gingham gown floats frail and free  
And fabulous as petrol on the sea  
The sheer destruction of a beam of light

Time and time again, time and time again  
And time again within my solitude  
Time and time and time and time again  
Time and time again

There and then again I learn my loneliness  
Has linked me with a life I'll never share  
The ways that she was lovely must remain  
Unnumbered as the spaces in the rain  
They fill my thoughts as sunrise floods the air

Now and now alone I search my memory  
I lacked the time to think about her then  
But now she leaves me time and time again

### 8. *Little Sammy Speedball* 3.59

*Recorded on 10th June 1974, plus later overdubs*

**PA:** I think I'm right in saying that this was triggered when Clive got hold of a dictionary of drug slang and was taken by the poetry of it all. To that extent we may not be able to guarantee the regional consistency of every single term, but then Little Sammy was exceptional in many ways. Do not try this at home.

**CJ:** Except for the dreaded weed I knew nothing about drugs so I needed that dictionary badly. Unfortunately I transferred nearly its whole contents into the lyric, which has more vocabulary than story. But Pete made the mish-mash bounce along, which I suppose is what Sammy did. When I think of what I can do to a packet of Extra Strong peppermints, however, it's

lucky that I never popped even one pill, or I would have been dead in a week.

At the age of seven years he could already boost  
a short

To score himself a bluebird or a pearl  
He could smoke and chase the dragon, he could  
shoot and he could snort

And build a cocktail out of boy and girl

From any dealer's bundle he could sniff a single bag  
And spot the blank, the ca-ca or the flea  
The greatest living expert on the ways to mainline  
scag

He could tie up in the dark and not OD

So they called him Little Sammy Speedball  
Because Little Sammy Speedball took it all

He ate cartwheels to go up and dropped sleepers  
to come down

A red and rose and pink and rainbow stash  
He dynamited white stuff just to balance out the  
brown

And flashed on hash but never crashed on splash

Ripped on chalk and peaches he found time to  
load the Chief

And kissing big attained a state of grace  
His panaddicted system was tuned high beyond  
belief

A miracle of forces poised in space

But the day he turned eleven put the pin in the  
balloon

An aching tooth had nagged him half the night  
He took a junior aspirin crushed with honey in a  
spoon

And exploded in a blaze of heat and light

In the ruins of his bathroom lay the candy-  
coloured pills

The universal user's bag of sweets

But nothing else remained except an echo in the  
hills

And the sound of tablets bouncing in the streets



*PA with the National Steel*

### 9. *Secret Drinker* 3:47

Recorded on 21st June 1974, plus later overdubs

**PA:** For once I started this one by kind of improvising a tune over the woozy repeated C minor 7th/F major chords until the melody started to try to pull it in a different harmonic direction round about 'enchanted lands', and then finally succeeded on 'sure that he is real', from where it wanders off to some completely different places before it pulls itself back to the subject I'd first thought of. The whole thing ends on a different major chord, which might be a hint that there's at least the merest hint of the possibility some kind of future for the drinker.

**CJ:** Drinking was something I knew quite a lot about in my early days, so this lyric was a distillation – if that's the word I'm looking for – of solid experience, or at any rate liquid experience. The idea of the man at the bar being reflected in the bottles came to me, not from the movies, but from the poetry of Hart Crane, who was himself a sucker for the grape. I'm still proud of the way I got the word "vomit" to sound neatly placed. There's no such thing as a word you can't use, really, as long as it's properly prepared for, but it helps to

have a musician on the case to suggest that you might save words like "catachresis" or "ectoplasm" until next time.

## Secret Drinker

Perching high like an old-time man of law  
He travels on a barstool to enchanted lands  
And as the world before him swims and glows  
The secret drinker's only sure that he is real  
By the feel of his elbows and the steadily increasing  
Weight of his forehead in his hands

And behind the bar  
Like turreted and battlemented towns of long ago  
The lines of coloured bottles swim and glow  
Brilliantly as at the day of wrath  
Or the year of the comet  
But the secret drinker is far from it  
Gway from it all

He can ease the present back into the past  
Staring at the pastels and the prisms on the shelf  
With the magic words that make the evening last  
The same again and have one for yourself

He's a connoisseur  
He can space it out with chasers, he can lot it burn  
It's a trick it takes a little while to learn  
You might see the youngsters of today  
Sniff a cork and they vomit  
But the secret drinker is far from it  
Gway from it all

He can make the looming future lose its sting  
Staving off the pressure is a bargain at the price  
Of the magic words that make the angels sing  
The same again, go easy on the ice

Perching high like an old-time man of law  
He travels on a barstool to enchanted lands  
And as the world before him swims and glows  
The secret drinker's only sure that he is real  
By the feel of his elbows and the steadily increasing  
Weight of his forehead in his hands that should be ceasing  
To tremble by now and beginning to resemble  
The hands of a man he used to know

## 10. *Tongue-Tied* 2.01

Recorded on 2nd July 1974, plus later overdubs

**PA:** We sometimes overdo the line 'This is one of the first songs we ever wrote,' perhaps in an attempt to excuse ourselves for something, but this one really is. I first recorded it (with a different title) on the first of our privately-pressed LPs when we were still students. I can't remember why out of all the unrecorded songs in our stack this one was privileged to come to the top of the pile – perhaps just because it seemed like a suitable end-of-album song, or perhaps because the presence of the brilliant Daryl Runswick on the sessions reminded us that he had played the bass on that original clockwork recording.

**CJ:** This early lyric was an exercise in sustaining two-syllable rhymes, which, if you get it right, is a harder trick than it looks, and if you get it wrong it sounds lousy. I like to think that I got away with it, and that the falling two syllables gave Pete an opportunity for some very pretty cadences; but what strikes me now is the emotion. It was a true one. I really did feel tongue-tied in the presence of beauty, and I still do. But I suppose if I hadn't felt that way I would never have become a writer, and would certainly have never have been able to participate in this adventure with my gifted friend.

I need new things to tell her  
That won't seem so awkwardly shy  
I'm pretending to be strong and silent  
So hard that it's violent  
And plainly a lie

I need new words to fight with  
That win me far more than a smile  
A sentence that glitters and dances  
For my steely glances  
Miss out by a mile

I hear the wits' winning ways all around me  
Sweet nothings that ring the right bell  
But their ease with a phrase is beyond me  
Nipped in the bud, dried in the well

I need a gift to give her  
That talks for me when I'm not there  
And explains how the poems that start out  
By eating my heart out  
Are lost on the air

### *Bonus tracks:*

Recorded on 12th December 1974,  
strings overdubbed on 17th December 1974

**Pete Atkin** – vocal, piano

**Neil Campbell** – electric guitar

**Dick Levens** – bass guitar

**Jeff Seopardie** – drums

Strings led by **Wilf Gibson**

Issued as 7" single RCA 2517

## 11. *I See The Joker* [Single Version] 3.11

**PA:** To promote the finished album I once again put together a backing band and toured what seemed like most of the universities in the country. Unfortunately, despite getting great audiences and responses everywhere, once again I suffered from being quite low on RCA's priority list for pressing the actual albums. It meant that yet again we were touring like gangbusters and going down pretty well, but there were no records in the shops.

The folks – I use the word in the George W. Bush sense (anyone remember him?) – at RCA went through the motions of contrition, but by the time we found out what had happened it was all too late. Their response to our frustration was to suggest that we put out a single to try to recapture some momentum. Since there seemed to be no obvious candidate from the album itself, and since *I See The Joker* had undergone a bit of

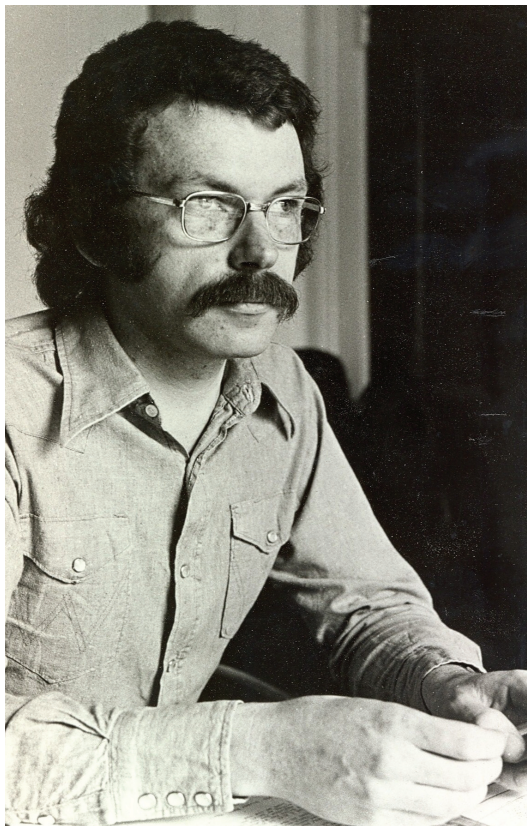
a performance evolution in the course of playing it nightly on tour, we decided to record it again.

I tried to add to its chances of some airplay by cutting it to three (instead of five) verses and giving it some choppy, bass-heavy strings. In the end the single didn't make a lot of difference, but it did get into John Peel's list of his favourite records of the year, so it wasn't a complete waste of time. And it was fun to do.

## 12. *Sessionman's Blues*

[Single Version] 4.40

**PA:** Recorded quickly as the B side for the single. We could have simply used the album version, I suppose, which would have had the mighty benefit of Ronnie Ross's baritone, but this was at least a small gesture of added value. The last time these tracks were reissued, the album version was included on the CD by mistake, so this is the first time this particular version has been heard on an album of any kind.





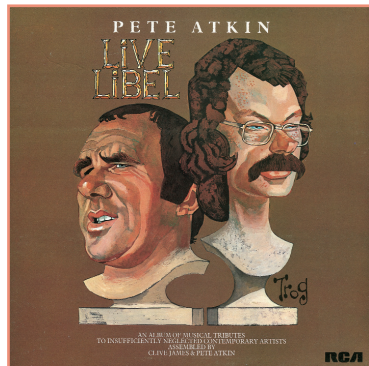
DISC TWO

*Live Libel*

**AN ALBUM OF MUSICAL TRIBUTES TO  
INSUFFICIENTLY NEGLECTED  
CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS ASSEMBLED**

**BY CLIVE JAMES AND PETE ATKIN**

RCA RS 1013, 1975



Lyrics – **Clive James**

Music – **Pete Atkin**

(except "I'm Crazy Over You" by Al Sherman and Al Lewis, and "Ballad Of An Upstairs Window" words and music by Pete Atkin)

Produced and arranged by **Pete Atkin**

Recorded at Rockfield Studios, Monmouth in March 1975, engineer – **Dave Charles**, and at Morgan Studios, Willesden in May 1975, engineer – **Roger Quested**

Remixed at Morgan Studios, engineer – **Roger Quested**

Historical Research Consultant –

**Dr. Hugh Brogan**

Co-ordination and critical path analyst –

**Simon Crocker**

Feasibility Research Consultant –

**Rudolph Regulus**

Front cover illustration – Trog

Design – John Cross

Art direction – Pat Doyle

**Pete Atkin** – vocals, pianos, acoustic guitars

**Neil Campbell** – electric guitars, Spanish guitars

**Dick Levens** – bass guitar

**Jeff Seopardie** – drums, percussion

**Daryl Runswick** – double bass

**Rock Bottom (Gaye Brown, Diane Langton and Annabel Leventon)** – backing vocals

Strings led by **John Mayer**

**PA:** If this album seems like a bit of a divergence from what had become our expected path, that's because it was. That might have been a good thing if we'd been testing ourselves and our audience in a creative way, but I have to be honest and say that wasn't it. It's not that I'm ashamed of it, mind, even though there may be those who think I should be, but it's not really the album I most wanted to be making.

Most of these songs were quick gags, of the moment, never meant to be lingered over. I found it handy to slip the odd one into a set to vary the mood, to keep the audience never quite sure of what to expect next. They were often requested by people who'd been at previous gigs, perhaps not least because they weren't on any of the records.

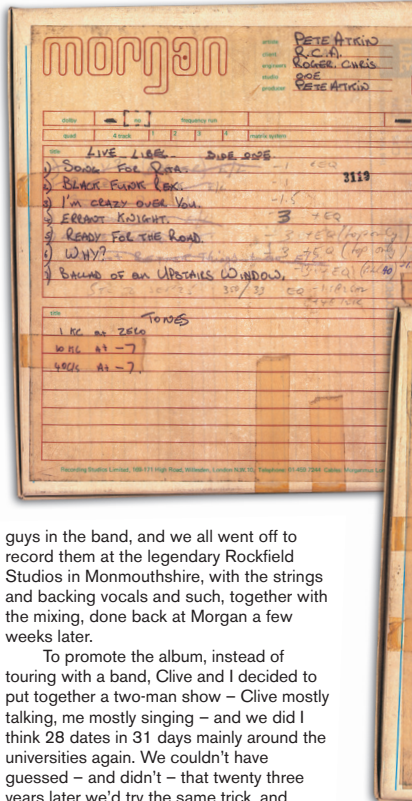
When *The Road Of Silk* came out I played a promotional tour with a backing band, only to discover afterwards that there had been no albums in the shops. The initial pressing had sold out in the first week, and because the LP

pressing plant in County Durham had received a large and urgent order to records by artists understandably much higher on RCA's priority list than I was, it took a month or so before my album could be re-pressed, by which time the tour was over. The record company undertook most seriously to make sure this didn't happen next time, and I duly went off on tour with my new band to promote *Secret Drinker* only to discover afterwards that they had pressed barely half the number they said they would, all of which had been sold in the first couple of weeks, and once again we were touring with nothing in the shops.

I was contracted to deliver one more album to RCA, but this was all seriously discouraging. We had a whole stack of new songs waiting for the next album, but I didn't want to risk another repetition of the whole sad story, and I decided to give them what was frankly a contractual fulfilment album, and to save the new songs for what I hoped – expected, even – would be a new contract with a new record company.

As it turned out, those songs had to wait another twenty years or so before they got a proper airing, because I blithely assumed that we'd built enough of a reputation to mean I'd have little trouble in moving labels. But by then it was 1976, and although we had never sounded very much like the rest of what was going on around us, we now sounded so little like the rest of what was going on around us that I might as well have been singing Rudy Vallee's greatest hits to the accompaniment of Manuel and his Music of the Mountains for all the interest I could drum up from record companies who without exception had only one thing on their collective mind: punk. But I'm getting way ahead of myself here.

So what became *Live Libel* seemed like a reasonable idea at the time. I had been playing several of the songs already on tour with the



guys in the band, and we all went off to record them at the legendary Rockfield Studios in Monmouthshire, with the strings and backing vocals and such, together with the mixing, done back at Morgan a few weeks later.

To promote the album, instead of touring with a band, Clive and I decided to put together a two-man show – Clive mostly talking, me mostly singing – and we did I think 28 dates in 31 days mainly around the universities again. We couldn't have guessed – and didn't – that twenty three years later we'd try the same trick, and indeed to go on and do it three times

around the UK and once all around Australia and in Hong Kong.

So here it is, a curiosity. There are one or two of these songs that I still sing sometimes even now, so I'd better not be too snootily dismissive. Besides, there's some terrifically resourceful and enjoyable playing, particularly from Neil Campbell, a truly outstanding guitarist who came to London from Skye to try his hand at the music business thing. But I guess it was a case you you-can-take-the-boy-out-of-Skye, etc., because the last I heard he'd decided to head back.

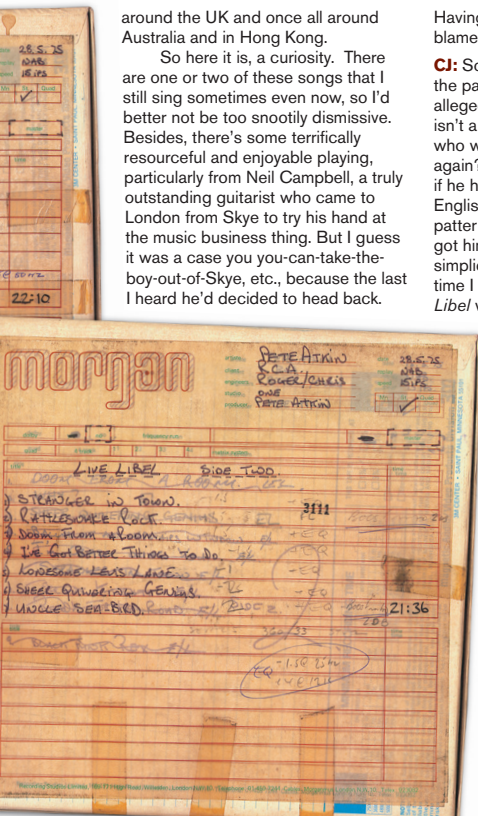
Having now been there myself, I honestly can't blame him.

**CJ:** Sometimes I think that if I had a gateway to the past I would go back and consign all my allegedly "funny" lyrics to the scrapheap. A song isn't a song unless you want to hear it twice, and who wants to hear even the most successful joke again? Noel Coward wouldn't have been himself if he hadn't written things like "Mad Dogs and Englishmen", but I still think the chief value of his patter songs was that their demanding intricacies got him into shape for writing the graceful simplicities of "Mad About the Boy". For a long time I thought the only redeeming feature of *Live Libel* was the fabulous caricature that Trog kindly

produced for the cover, but now, when I go back to it, I can see that there are some decent numbers. Invariably they are the ones that Pete has used in concert ever since, when he wants to break up a sequence of the heavy stuff. When we toured the album you could tell, from the kind of applause, which songs were being rewarded for their craft. The tour, incidentally, was the first time I went on stage unencumbered by a script, and when I work solo in the theatre today, I am still using what I found out then.

**Pete Atkin and Clive James,**  
*January 2009*

NB: The original gatefold sleeve of "Live Libel" included a liner note for each song. In order to include in this booklet all of Pete and Clive's 2009 annotations as well as the lyrics and photos and ephemera that they have kindly supplied, it has proved impossible to reprint the 1975 notes. However they can be found at <http://www.peteatkin.com/libel.htm>





1. *Song For Rita* 3.50  
(featuring **Griff Gostuff** yourself)

Recorded on 5th March 1975 at Rockfield Studio

**PA:** The 'Rita' bit of the title is the bit that has aged least well. (I mean the reference rather than the actual person – I haven't knowingly seen the actual person in thirty years or more and I wouldn't presume.) Kris Kristofferson was in the process of revolutionising the writing of country songs and making them in many cases much more philosophically intricate, and it was his duetting with Rita Coolidge one evening on The Old Grey Whistle Test that inspired, if that's the right word, this song.

I still sing this one from time to time and I am always rather moved by the extent to which I find myself moved by its, um, movement.

**CJ:** Parody is a dangerous form for the songwriter, because it can so easily sound like envy. But I really think that Kris Kristofferson spent a lot of time on the verge of the ludicrous. I loved "Me and Bobby McGee", especially when Janis Joplin sang it, but some of KK's more philosophical meanderings struck me as the maxims of a *Kung Fu* martial arts master learning to play the guitar. In live performances, however, the audience always went for this one, and I suppose it was because they respected the victim enough to know his lyrics well. I would have welcomed the same fate for myself, no question.

The way my arms around you touch the centre of  
 my being  
 As I step inside the marshland of your mind  
 Makes me weak inside my senses like a dog hit  
 by a diesel  
 And more alone than Milton goin' blind  
 And I know I need to lose you if I ever want to find  
 you  
 'Cause the poet's way is finished from the start  
 And I feel a palpitation kinda flutter in my  
 forehead  
 As I think the problem over in my heart  
 Yes I guess I'll always never know the question to  
 your answer  
 If I can't be doin' wrong by feelin' right  
 But I'm really lookin' forward to how you'll be  
 lookin' backward  
 When I'm walkin' with you sideways through the  
 night  
 I can keep this kind of writin' goin' more or less  
 forever  
 But I can't undo destruction when it's gone  
 I can only think of you and what you cost me in  
 hotel bills  
 As I settle down to dream of movin' on  
 If I've never longed to love you less than now you'll  
 know the reason  
 Is because my whole desire is to sing  
 And everything I'm sayin' is the mirror of your  
 beauty  
 As it hovers like a vulture on the wing

## 2. *Black Funk Rex* 3.25 (featuring Marc Boloc)

Recorded on 5th March 1975 at Rockfield  
 Studio

**PA:** It's a little unfortunate and unfair that my own  
 musical laziness meant that this has tended to be  
 tagged as a T. Rex parody when it was always

intended to constitute a much wider insult. These  
 days, thanks to the post-music activities of the  
 now all but sainted Ozzy Osbourne, everyone  
 knows Black Sabbath. But it's the second  
 component of the title who perhaps truly deserve  
 the oblivion that seems to be their fate (pending,  
 sod's law, an imminent revival of interest) – yes,  
 hands up all fans of Grand Funk Railroad. They  
 were huge. Honestly, kids, they were huge.

**CJ:** The permanent living death of popular music  
 arrived in the form of the full-throttle noisemakers,  
 and they have never gone away: they just keep  
 on being reborn in different bodies. I hated the  
 stuff and still do. In fact I hate all musicians who  
 feel the urge to move around on stage for any  
 reason except to snatch a quick toilet break. If  
 Roy Orbison just stood there, why does anyone  
 else have to run about? Why do they even have  
 to make faces? Why doesn't that Gallagher  
 person just sing into the microphone instead of  
 crouching under it and snarling up into it, as if it  
 were the bottom of a mounted policeman's  
 horse? Why?

I wanna talk about some guys with glitter on their  
 eyes and cute lips  
 It's an all-purpose noise that's already put the  
 boys in the chips  
 If you're talkin' about pre-teen sex your talkin'  
 'bout Black Funk Rex

Black Funk Rex are cuddly as rabbits  
 They drone about elves and they drool about  
 hobbits  
 But their warmed-over whimsicality hardly inhibits  
 Their wide repertoire of nauseating habits

And when the amplifiers roar  
 They sound like fairies waging atomic war

They got one riff to their name  
 Which isn't to their shame  
 'Cause the secret of their fame



And the basis of the game  
 Is that every song's the same  
 And when the bass booms down there  
 Like a constipated bear  
 Breaking wind inside its lair  
 Perspiration fills your hair  
 And the lead shrieks up here  
 Till it fills your mind with fear  
 That an electronic spear  
 Being hammered up your rear  
 Is coming out your ear  
 But the rhythm's got one lick  
 So flatulently slick  
 It's guaranteed to make you sick  
 And the drummer's got one stick  
 But he hits you like a kick  
 In the stomach from a hick  
 Serving ten years in the nick  
 And the singer is a prick  
 With a breath-bereaving trick  
 Of twitching like a chick  
 Who gives her bum a flick  
 Like a giant facial tick  
 And you couldn't call 'em quick  
 In fact they're thicker than a brick  
 But when they all turn up the wick  
 It brings the tots  
 Screaming up out of their prams and cots  
 Black Funk Rex is the music of tomorrow  
 Say it with pride though you hear it with sorrow  
 They're the Middle Earth between L.A. and EC4  
 And your middle ear has never suffered like this  
 before

### 3. *I'm Crazy Over You* 2.09

*Recorded on 12th May 1975 at Morgan Studios*

**PA:** The eminent historian Hugh Brogan was a member of my college, and it was from his 1930s 78rpm record by the Trix Sisters that I learned this one, and I used to do it as a sort of party

piece. It doesn't really belong here at all, to be honest. It's an album-filler on a filler album, and its silly sweetness is in danger of giving the lie to the rest of the enterprise.

### 4. *Errant Knight* 5.11

*(by arrangement with Strongbow Spam)*

*Recorded on 6th March 1975 at Rockfield Studio, Monmouth*

**PA:** A flight of fancy more than a parody of anything at all, especially musically. I probably identified too strongly with Sir Sagramour to give him anything other than a slightly yearning kind of a tune, and one which has little or no connection with anything remotely folksy.

**CJ:** I was always fond of the Fairport Convention / Steeleye Span / Fotheringay legacy, but I couldn't help feeling that even the divine Sandy Denny sometimes overdid the faerie feyness of the knightly narrative. Hence this tribute, which Pete sensibly set in a less winsome mode, thereby creating a sure-fire crowd-pleaser for concert purposes.

My Lady Anne your champion's depressed  
 I'm not in shape to carry on the quest  
 I have to keep my speed down to a trot  
 Or lose what little armour plate I've got

My screws are loose, my clamps are hanging off  
 My helmet topples every time I cough  
 I topple with it every time I charge  
 I've gotta get this suit to a garage

Oh do you wonder I feel so uptight  
 Times were never tougher for an errant knight

My faithful steed is the joke of Joyous Gard  
 And sensitive withal he takes it hard  
 His forward gears are shot, and what is worse  
 He's too slow for my safety in reverse

So there we go, my faithful steed and me

No third party, tax or M.O.T.  
And there beside me rides my faithful  
squire  
His card's unstamped, his trumpet  
fixed with wire

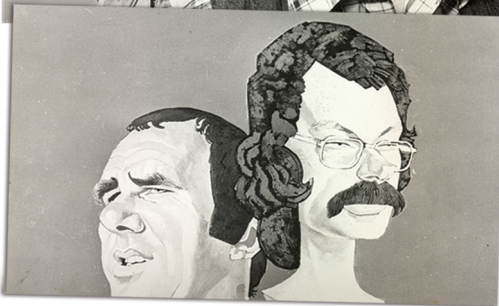
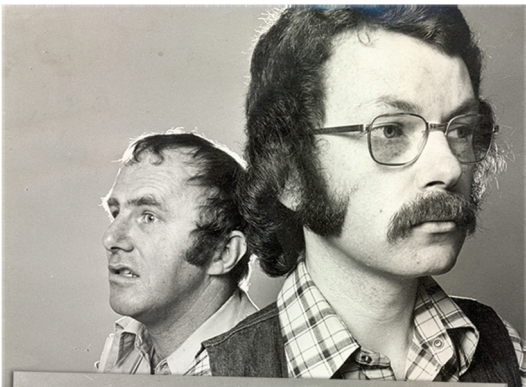
For tomorrow I must fight Sir Valentine  
Thy hateful ravisher, the prancing  
swine  
The time has come for him to meet  
his fate  
From me, Sir Sagramore the  
second-rate

The joust is in the morning,  
Lady Anne  
And you not there? My one and  
only fan  
This time I pray that I may stay the  
course  
And not fall from the crane and miss  
my horse

But Justice, God and Truth watch  
over me  
At half a sovereign ringside,  
children free  
Sir Valentine the Violent is through  
Providing God comes up with  
something new

'Cause his drop-forged armour and his  
tungsten axe  
His horse that runs on caterpillar  
tracks  
That showy stuff is strictly for parades  
Like his rocket launcher, radar  
and grenades

Sir Valentine the Violent, supersword  
Tilts with me tomorrow on the sward  
Thy just revenge lies in my hand and eye  
My faithful squire has bade me do or die  
And put all his money on the other guy



So dost thou wonder I feel so uptight?  
Times were never tougher for an errant  
knight

Oh do you wonder I feel so uptight  
Times were never tougher  
Like rugged, man, and rougher  
Times were never tougher for an errant knight

## 5. *Ready For The Road* 2.23

(featuring Tesco Tex)

*Recorded on 6th March 1975 at Rockfield Studio*

**PA:** Rather as with *Apparition in Las Vegas* on the album *A King At Nightfall*, it was the audience that was the fascination here rather than the show. Back then, before Gram Parsons and the like, and before country music even began to be taken seriously by audiences who considered themselves 'serious' music fans, country music nevertheless played to huge crowds in huge venues, and sometimes these events were televised as if they were Wimbledon or the World Darts Championship. But the specially shipped-in American stars, besequinned and behatted and befringed as they were, could not hold a candle to the spectacularly accoutred British country music audience.

**CJ:** This one blows them away in concert, and for a good reason: Pete's melody is at least as good as any song in the genre it pillories. And I'm bound to say that the verbal jokes fulfil their function. "A signet ring the size of Samson's knuckle", in fact, is a bit better than a joke, although perhaps a bit less than an immortal image. For rhyming "Tucson" and "shoes on", I must apologize, because it isn't a true rhyme, and I persist in my quixotic conviction that all rhymes should be pure, even in a song.

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

## 6. *Why?* 2.35

(featuring special guest artist Telly Savarso!)

*Recorded on 12th May 1975 at Morgan Studios*

**PA:** OK, yes, we'll come clean – yes, it is Clive. He's probably more embarrassed about this than he needs to be. Actually, casting Clive as Telly Savalas is not all that far-fetched: both expatriates, of course, one from Australia and one from Karpathos, and both... yes, well, and both...

**CJ:** And they both sang like dying dogs. Only God, Christ and Holy Mary know how very much I wish that I had never done this. I blame Pete for allowing it to happen. We might have been out to kill a contract, but that was no excuse for murder.

If I could love you when I'm dead  
Then let me share your grave  
I wouldn't have to shave  
No band-aids on my head

And if you want a lollipop  
I'll have one you can lick  
I suck them till I'm sick  
And then I eat the stick

Why can't I stop  
Because I'm a sucker, baby?  
No, because I'm a cop

And when the greatest police chief sends  
For Crocker, me and you  
Then Stavros can come too  
Because these guys are my friends  
When our last series ends, pussycat  
When our last series ends

### 7. *Ballad Of An Upstairs Window* 2.35

*Recorded on 12th May 1975 at Morgan Studios*

**PA:** This was a song I'd written some time before I even met Clive. In fact, I had used it as my Footlights audition song, and joined the club on the strength of it. It was not long afterwards that Clive suggested to me that I might like to have someone else write some words for me. And so there were are.

'Goldie the budgie' was a topical reference back in 1966. In March 1965 a golden eagle called, um, Goldie escaped from Regent's Park Zoo in London and evaded recapture until he got hungry twelve days later. In December he got out again but this time they caught him after only four days. And so there were we are.

**CJ:** When I first heard Pete sing this one in the Footlights I thought, aha! This guy knows how to set a narrative to music. Instantly I formed a plan to ensure that he would never again find the time to do such a thing on his own.

I was going to the pictures with my girl at 7.30,  
got there first and started queuing on my own  
By 9.15 she still had not arrived and so I walked  
around the block  
and then I thought I'd telephone  
I let the phone keep ringing for ten minutes

perhaps a quarter of an hour then concluded she's  
not home  
I thought I'd walk around the block again  
but soon got fed up wandering aimlessly around  
all on my own

It was then the thought occurred to me she might  
have been there  
all the time just let the phone keep ringing on its  
own

In order that I might be led to think that she'd  
gone out  
or for some other reason wasn't there at home  
Now if for any reason this should prove to be the  
case

I couldn't help but wonder what the cause might  
be  
Perhaps her budgie Goldie had escaped out of the  
window  
but in any case I thought I'd go and see

Well the truth is by the time I'd caught the bus  
down at the corner and arrived the time was  
nearly half-past ten  
So in order that I shouldn't seem a fool  
I went into the phone box just outside her house  
and phoned again

Just as I dialled the number I perceived an  
upstairs window  
in her house become illumined by a light  
Immediately I replaced the receiver on the bracket  
and once more I stepped outside into the night

Now I knew her mum and dad had gone to  
Scotland for the weekend  
and that she was in the house all on her own  
So I presumed it was her brother's motorbike what  
stood  
outside the gate although it's eighteen months  
since he left home

I felt compelled to cogitate on what was most  
appropriate

in circumstances previously unknown  
I reasoned that if she felt tired she wouldn't thank  
me  
if I woke her up and so I caught the bus back  
home

### 8. *Stranger In Town* 3.34 (featuring Ricky Fablon)

Recorded on 6th March 1975 at Rockfield  
Studio

**PA:** Always intended as a kind of tumbleweed-y  
movie song – the images are all from the movies,  
after all – I persist in believing that the movie  
could yet be made.

**CJ:** This is the one I like best, mainly because  
conscious banality is so tricky to write: one slip  
and it sounds like actual banality. The basic idea  
was pinched from Graeme Garden, who in his  
Footlights days used to knock them dead with a  
song about a dangerous gunslinger called Two-  
Gun Blackhat. ("They called him Two-Gun  
Blackhat for he always wore two guns / And had  
a big black hat upon his head.") After Sergio  
Leone made the monumentally dreadful *Once  
Upon A Time In The West*, alas, the man with the  
fast gun got beyond ridicule, but in those days he  
was still in range. Something has to have the piss  
in it before you can take the piss out of it.

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

### 9. *Rattlesnake Rock* 2.13 (featuring Gladys Graveyard)

Recorded on 5th March 1975 at Rockfield  
Studio

**PA:** Alice Cooper was always brilliantly funny  
anyway, so any kind of a parody was going to  
have to go quite a long way beyond, and Clive's  
joyful exuberance still gets a laugh from people  
too young to know Alice Cooper as anything but  
a golfer.

**CJ:** I thought the world of Alice Cooper, and  
years later I managed to get him into a TV studio  
as the star interviewee on my weekly show,  
where he tore the place up with his quiet wit. He  
was just so quick. On stage, his gift for language  
was sometime hidden behind the smoke-plumes,  
chicken feathers and flying snake-scales of *grand  
guignol* hoopla, but face to face he could wipe





you out just with his turn of phrase. Too cool for school.

I gotta file my teeth and glue fish-scales on my tongue  
I gotta grease my hair from a tub of orang-utan dung  
I gotta stay outrageous even if I can't stay young  
Rattlesnake Rock, let it roll  
Rattlesnake Rock, let it roll  
There's a hole in my sock, there's a slide-rule in my soul  
I pull open my shirt and climb into my sling-back heels  
And my aerosol eczema tingles before it congeals

On my chicken-bone chest in a blaze of pimples and weals  
Rattlesnake Rock, let it roll  
Rattlesnake Rock, let it roll  
There's a hole in my sock, there's a slide-rule in my soul

I foam at the mouth in spasms of sadistic rage  
When I'm burning a baby and eating the ashes on stage  
And screwing a skunk through a hole in the back of its cage  
Rattlesnake Rock, let it roll, kill your mother  
Rattlesnake Rock, let it roll, rape your brother  
There's a hole in my sock, there's a slide-rule in my soul

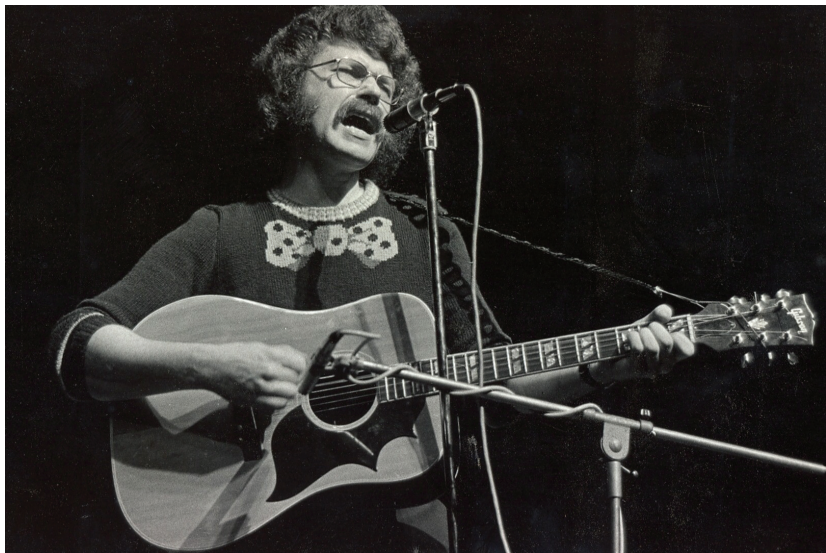
10. *Doom From A Room* 1.36  
(featuring Leonard Conman)

Recorded on 12th May 1975 at Morgan Studios

**PA:** I think that both Clive and I have come a long way around toward Uncle Len's side since we did this. He's also still at it, triumphantly, which continues to be a great comfort and an inspiration.

**CJ:** I resisted Leonard Cohen's droning charms for a long time (I still think "Bird On A Wire" is strictly for the bird in question) but I started to

wake up when I heard two perfect lines: "There's a funeral in the mirror/ And it's stopping at your face." Jesus, I thought: where did he get that? So, in about another twenty years, I was ready for the easy, loping majesty of "Everybody Knows". There isn't a lyricist alive who doesn't long to get hit by a line like "A thousand kisses deep." The old moaner's really got the secret, and it's good to know that the universal adulation in which he now basks, unlike the money he made on his long road, can't be stolen away from him by some bastard who will rot in hell.



Like a saint on the fire  
Like a guru's funeral pyre  
Just a blur  
Thoughts occur  
In a slur

Like a fog on the bay  
Like a hog washed away  
It's a mist  
But the gist  
Might exist

Like a cat on a rail  
Like the next note up the scale  
Count to ten  
Pause and then  
Down again

Like a poet in a loft  
Like a sherbet growing soft  
Easy now  
You've been a wow  
Take a bow

### 11. *I've Got Better Things To Do* 3.29

*Recorded on 6th March 1975 at Rockfield  
Studio*

**PA:** OK, I admit it: it was stretching things a bit to include this one – a very early effort, and not really a jokey song at all. In any case, listening to it again now after all this time, I think I got it seriously wrong musically. I was always perhaps too ready to take a lament and turn it into a howl, and this time I should probably have gone in the reverse direction. There's actually a sweet, sad song here trying to get out.

**CJ:** Actually there was hit song trying to get in, but I undercooked the development sections of the lyric. Saying you don't care when you obviously do is a standard strategy, but the minor tactics need to be unpredictable for that very

reason. I should have thought about it longer, and later on I would have.

I got better things to do  
Than hang around you the livelong day  
I got better things to do  
Than think about you the livelong day

There's all my seashells from everywhere I've been  
There must be hundreds that need another clean  
I've got better things to do, believe me  
Than hang around you

I got better things to do  
Than waiting for you to talk to me  
I got better things to do  
Than dying for you to talk to me

I could watch King Kong for the whole afternoon  
Or a late-night re-run of Destination Moon  
I got better things to do, believe me  
Than hang around you

Big deal, so you think you're in demand  
Well do you know what you really are?  
You're a baby piano pretending to be grand  
And all I want is a table near the band  
So you can hear me go "Nyaargh!"  
Have a cigar

I got better things to do  
Than waiting for you to notice me  
I got better things to do  
Than yelling at you to look at me

I got books of crosswords that are only half filled  
in  
I could fill in the rest and fill the first half in again  
I've got better things to do, believe me  
Than hang around you

OK, so you're heading for the top  
But with me it won't get you far  
They've put your features on toothpaste, powder  
soap and scent  
Your name in lights and your footprints in cement

But to me you're just Nyaargh, that's what you are  
I got better things to do than hang around you the  
livelong day  
I got better things to do than think about you the  
livelong day  
There are things at home that need attending to  
Like the alabaster statue I'm carving of you  
I've got better things to do, believe me  
Than hang around you

## 12. *Lonesome Levis Lane* 4.14

*Recorded on 5th March 1975 at Rockfield  
Studio*

**PA:** I'll never understand why Neil Campbell  
wasn't snapped up by Nashville producers after  
hearing this, regardless of the arguably less than  
sympathetic view of country musicians so  
exuberantly expressed in the lyric. But the truth is  
they probably never heard it. Besides, I feel sure  
that Neil, having been snapped up, would have  
snapped himself down again.

**CJ:** I myself continued to wear jeans well beyond  
the signal to cease, which is when the  
measurement of the waist exceeds the  
measurement of the leg.

Now down in Nashville lives a man who makes a  
million bucks a week  
Singin' country music like it should be sung  
He don't sound too impressive if you only hear him  
speak  
But when he sings his vocal chords are full of  
dung  
His hawkish eyes are hooded, not with sun but  
from the strain  
Of a slight myopia he won't admit  
His thighs are well-developed from a lifetime  
kickin' shit  
And his monicker is Lonesome Levis Lane

Lonesome Levis, Lonesome Levis, Lonesome  
Levis Lane

Now he's been called a ravin' fascist by the  
communists and blacks  
But the truth is he's an independent man  
And it kinda disappoints him he gets no relief on  
tax  
Buyin' guided missiles for the Ku Klux Klan  
His noble teeth are gritted into pretzels from the  
pain  
Of heels so high he's standin' on his toes  
But a tang of bovine ordure still comes twangin'  
through his nose  
And his monicker is Lonesome Levis Lane  
Now Hitler, Himmler, Göring and all them other  
reds  
They never understood the power of a song  
If you want to plant a crazy notion in a million  
screamin' heads  
Just spell it out and make 'em sing along  
No it wouldn't shift the needle if you tried to weigh  
his brain  
But he passes for a thinker in his art  
He can shoot a cornball slogan like a bullet up the  
chart  
And his monicker is Lonesome Levis Lane  
Now if you're drivin' down the turnpike tune to  
station KKK  
You'll hear that Nashville drone come slidin'  
through  
It's just as fresh as fallin' cowplop and as true as  
Old Dog Trey  
That sentimental splurge is all for you  
In the concrete fields of Nashville they've grown  
their own John Wayne  
And he's singin' while he's suckin' blades of grass  
The sphincter of a heifer don't exude more warmth  
and class  
And his monicker is Lonesome Levis Lane

Yes his monicker is Lonesome  
But he's never on his ownsome  
As he rides that strawberry roansome  
On the stage his baritonesome's  
Like Godzilla on the phonesome  
Lettin' out a happy groansome  
After eatin' blood and bonesome  
That's a million-dollar moansome  
And his monicker is Lonesome  
Lonesome Levis Lane

### 13. *Sheer Quivering Genius* 2.44 (featuring James Paler)

Recorded on 12th May 1975 at Morgan Studios

**PA:** The object of this bit of gratuitous derision is also, like Leonard Cohen, another worthy survivor, of course, so I guess we needn't feel too badly about the consequences of our mercilessness.

**CJ:** James Taylor deserved better than this and made the money to prove it, but I never forgave him for telling *Rolling Stone* magazine that he had been to bed with Joni Mitchell. I never did.

My sweet little sister has come up with another LP  
People might think she's more sensitive even than me

I suppose I'm gonna have to start workin' against the clock

Produce another heap of identity crisis rock

I-D with the emphasis on the I  
I-D-entity crisis rock

I need six more songs about starin' out into space  
With those alien stars burnin' holes on my sensitive face

Then another six cuts about starin' down into my soul

And the critics'll call it the future of rock 'n' roll

I-D with the emphasis on the I  
E and that means the spotlight falls on me  
I-D-entity crisis rock

A discreet little concert to push the album into the stores

I'll be so damned humble I can only just bear the applause

If it all pans out I'll hardly even have to sing  
Just stand looking delicate ten feet in front of Carole King

I-D with the emphasis on the I

E and that means the spotlight falls on me

I-D-entity crisis rock, I'm just so fragile

I-D-entity crisis rock, please call me Ishmael

I-D-entity crisis rock

Oh no – not the stigmata again!

### 14. *Uncle Sea-Bird* 3.59 (in memoriam Ralph J. Gleason)

Recorded on 6th March 1975 at Rockfield Studio

**PA:** Another America-from-the-outside song, America as seen through the pages of *Rolling Stone* magazine. *Uncle Sea-Bird* is a composite, of course, a kind of counter-cultural guru with elements of Ralph J. Gleason, Timothy Leary, Wavy Gravy, and just about everyone else on the Magic Bus.

Once these records began to be placed under the filter of websearching, all the references began to be pinned down, but Luria Cantrell managed to elude everybody; I think the best suggestion anyone came up with was that she was a misprint for Luria Castell who had been associated with the Family Dogg in San Francisco.

**CJ:** Luria Cantrell was indeed an inadvertent invention. I trusted my memory, which in those days was far less fallible than it is now. It wasn't strange, just depressing, that the hippy era produced so many gurus. Hippiedom was American democracy *in extremis*, and, as

Tocqueville had predicted, one of the consequences of a fully developed American democracy was that the instinct for credulous servility flourished along with every other instinct. If I were writing the lyric now I would put Al Gore into it. The lyric needs updating, which any genuinely felt lyric should never need. The chief strike against the lyrics on Live Libel is that too many of the references are tied to their time, but I suppose that if you can tell they are, then they really aren't. What always counts most, however, is the music, and it pleases me greatly to know that some of these tunes still set people humming along.

Uncle Seabird was an action man  
He knew the scene before the scene began  
The first cat to drop acid in the Haight  
He understood the lyrics of The Weight

When Fillmore West was still a carousel  
And the chick to know was Luria Cantrell  
Uncle Seabird tried hard to be nice  
When Berry Gordy asked him for advice

Uncle Seabird, Uncle Seabird had the word  
Uncle Seabird, Uncle Seabird had the word  
Uncle Seabird, Uncle Seabird led the herd

When Uncle Seabird wrote for Rolling Stone  
A generation felt much less alone  
His footloose odyssey went so far back  
He recalled not having heard of Kerouac

He represented youth in all its force  
For evolution has to take its course  
When the children queued to hear the Grateful  
Dead  
His wheelchair glittered somewhere up ahead

When a snot-nosed little kid called Zimmerman  
Was seeking a new surname that would scan  
Uncle Seabird filled his lungs with hash  
And "Weberman" he muttered in a flash

"There's a new group down a hole you ought to hear"

Said the telephone in Brian Epstein's ear  
"But let's not haggle now about my fee  
Tom Parker handles these affairs for me"

The last and greatest festival of all  
Was Uncle Seabird's acid test and ball  
They say one row of people passed a joint  
From Yasgur's Farm clear to Zabriskie Point

Crosby Stills and Clapton, Young and Nash  
Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Johnny Cash  
They all backed Yoko Ono while she ... sang  
And Elvis Presley read from R D Laing

When Uncle Seabird wheeled onto the stage  
He was crowding eighty-seven years of age  
"We are stardust, we are ... (croak)" he cried  
And the children yelled his name out as he died

**PA:** What we couldn't know at the time was that this track would be the last one on my last album for more than twenty years, until the ever-to-be-thanked Steve Birkill put me on the web and it all started up again, and so to end with a small unresolved ambiguity doesn't seem altogether inappropriate, and as if at Robert Graves's careless comma,

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