

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

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Lyrics courtesy of Midnight Voices,  
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[www.peteatkin.com](http://www.peteatkin.com)

**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