

## PATTO - the JOHN HALSEY INTERVIEW

*Patto, apart from being one of the finest (purely subjective, of course) bands this country ever produced, were not blessed with good fortune. Forever on the verge of making it really big, they broke up after six years of knocking on the door and finding no-one home. Subsequently, two of their number died while the other two were involved in a terrible car smash which left one with severe physical injuries and the other with severe mental problems. Drummer John Halsey is now the only Patto member who could possibly give us an interview. Mike Patto and Ollie Halsall are both gone, while bassist Clive Griffiths apparently doesn't even recall being in a band! Despite bearing the scars of the accident (Halsey walks with a pronounced limp), John was only too pleased to submit to a Terrascopic grilling - an interview which took place in the wonderful Suffolk pub he runs with his wife Elaine. Bancroft and I spent a lovely afternoon and evening with the Halseys, B & B'd in the shadow of a 12th Century church cupboard and returned to London the next morning with one of the most enjoyable interviews either of us has ever done.*

John Halsey: I started playing drums because two mates who lived in my road in North Finchley (N. London), where I'm from, wanted to form a group. This was years and years ago, 1958, 1959. Want to see the photo?

PT: Oh, look at that!

1959! Me, with a microphone inside me guitar that used to go out through me Mum's tape recorder, and if you put 'Record' and 'Play' on together, it'd act like an amplifier. That's Ray Weedon, Ray Collins, Ray McDonald - they're all Rays - Brian Dixon and John Porter.

You were a skiffle band, a real tea-chest bass!

Well, soft of. I was 14 then. I was supposed to be the bassist, but I didn't have the jumper! Or a bass guitar! I had all the catalogues though, Hofner, Futurama, you know. Anyway, my Mum said if she saw a bass advertised on the boards outside the newsagents, she'd get it for me. Well, one day she came in saying 'There's a drum kit for sale on the boards outside The Regent. Do you want a drum kit?' Well, at that time my very best mate at school was a guy called Peter Rettig, and he played drums in a group called The Black Diamonds, with his elder brother Roger, who's still playing now. Roger's in a band with Albert Lee called Hogan's Heroes. So... I got the drum kit, fell out with the Rays, and Pete started showing me a few things on the drums. Then I spent a couple of years playing along to records by my heroes, Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent and also things like Jimmy Guiffre's Trio. I used to go to all the package tour concerts. Gene Vincent, I saw him, he was the best thing I'd ever seen. I remember it was The Laurie Jay Combo, Screaming Lord Such and The Savages, Mike & Bernie Winters compering, and Gene Vincent topping the bill. Good days. Oh, and Johnny Duncan & The Blue Grass Boys, they were there as well.



The first record I ever bought was by Johnny Duncan! 'More & More'.

Mine was 'Tutti Frutti' by Little Richard on 78, and I've still got it! Later, Laurie Jay became Timebox's manager. He now manages Billy Ocean... and George Best. And last year he produced an album by Mike Patto's son, Michael Patto. Michael comes up here with Boz (Burrell) and a sax player called Nick Pantelow and we have a little play downstairs, and clear the place usually. All the old locals waiting for a bit

of Country & Western, and we're playing Thelonius Monk tunes!

### **Was that the first group you joined?**

Well, I saw this ad in Melody Maker, 'Drummer Wanted', so I went down to a pub in Holloway with what I could carry on the bus to the audition. They were called Barry Reed & The Avengers. I was working as a design draughtsman then. Well, I got the gig, and we used to play around, mostly rock and roll.

### **Was this pre-Beatles?**

Yeah, about 1962. I did that for a couple of years. Then me and a mate from Finchley, a guitarist called Paul Hodson, we started going down The Flamingo to see bands. And I really got into those bands like Chris Farlowe & The Thunderbirds, Zoot Money, Georgie Fame. That line-up, Hammond organ, two horns, guitar, bass and drums, I thought it was the best thing I'd ever heard. So good! Doing James Brown numbers and all that, and we thought, 'THAT is the kind of band we want to be in...'. Well, I had a mate, Eddie McHenry, he was drumming in a band like that, and Paul joined on guitar. Eddie knew I really wanted to join too, so he left. There was a guy called Pete Newman on sax, he'd been in The Tornados, Sutch's Savages and Johnny Kidd & The Pirates. Barry Huband was on organ, he demonstrates keyboards for Yamaha now, a guy called Mick O'Brien who was a builder's mate, probably still is, now he had the very first Burns Black Bison bass! He was a mate of that bloke Burns who made them. And that was Felder's Orioles. We were together for about three years. Just semi-pro, but we had 4 singles out on the Piccadilly label with John Schroeder. They were quite good actually. Then we thought we'd turn pro, and we all jacked in our jobs except Pete Newman, cos he had a mortgage, broke his heart, but there you go. So we got in this amazing African horn player, Mark, and Rodney Hinkstone on baritone, and we went pro. It lasted three weeks! We'd been going three years, and it was all over in three weeks! We'd been doing really well. We used to play all the clubs we'd wanted to, The Flamingo, Klooks Kleek, The Ram Jam, supporting all the bands we'd emulated. For example on a Tuesday we'd do the opening spot for Long John Baldry & The Hoochie Coochie Man featuring Rod Stewart. Anyway, when Felder's Orioles broke up, only Paul and me decided to stay pro, and he landed a great gig with Lulu. I advertised in Melody Maker, and I got a phone call from Laurie Jay saying that a band he was managing were playing at Scotch of St. James that night, and would I come down and sit in cos their drummer had been taken ill. He's caught TB and gone back home to Southport. They'd just come back from France and Laurie Jay had ended up playing drums for them, which as manager, he really didn't want to do. So I went along and sat in. The next day they came and picked me up to go and play the USAF base and Lakenheath, and that was that. We worked every night of the week from then on. It was incredible.



### **And that was Timebox?**

Yeah, that was Timebox. I'd only been in the band a few weeks when the guitarist, Kevin Fogerty, left. This would have been 1967, and Ollie (Halsall) got his first guitar. He used to play vibes and do a bit of singing. Well, once the band was like that, we decided to stop doing covers and work out some of our own stuff. They'd done a single 'Walking Through The Streets Of My Mind' (much laughter...) with Laurie Jay on drums, and now we were in the studio with Michael Aldred producing. We recorded a Four

Seasons song called 'Beggin', with an arrangement by Mike Vickers, who'd been Manfred Mann's guitarist, and Deram wanted it out as a single. Actually, it was quite successful. It didn't get too high in the charts, but it got a fantastic amount of radio play. At that time Radio One was broadcasting a lot of sessions. We'd do 5 numbers on The Jimmy Young Show, that sort of thing... all pre-recorded. We were in the BBC studios all the time, we did loads of sessions.

**I've read that Timebox were planning to do a live album at Club Noreik. Did that ever happen?**

No. Laurie Jay employed the services of a publicist, and he sued to make things up to get us press coverage.

[Elaine:] I remember your Dad phoning up saying, "I didn't know Johnny was going to Russia!"

Yeah, and we'd been caught up in the French student riots. Then he had us doing a live album. The Club Noreik was owned by Laurie Jay's partner, Laurie Boost. It was a bingo hall. We used to rehearse there when it was closed. It was just crap to get us in the papers. Anyway, starting around then was the thing that became known as 'progressive music', and we got into tune with that. Timebox used to wear band outfits and we could play real dance stuff. So one day they came to pick me up for rehearsal and they said "Let's learn that Arthur Brown thing, 'Fire'". I said hang on, why don't we write some songs of our own? And Mike Patto agreed, so we wrote two songs that day. One was called 'Froogly Boogly', and the other, now this is incredible, was called 'Ob La Di Ob La Da!' There was this African conga player Jimmy Scott, who was a mate of ours, and he had this saying 'Ob la di ob la da, life goes on'. Six months later The Beatles brought out a song called exactly the same thing! By the way, I was offered a gig with Arthur Brown before I joined Timebox, but I turned him down. Not long after he was Number 1 all over the world. He had this European tour lined up that was due to return the day before I got married. Elaine said 'go', but I thought I'd better not. So... we started writing, Chris Holmes (keyboards) left the band. I don't think he felt comfortable doing this new stuff, a lot of it was a bit odd and he couldn't really get it together, so I guess he got wheedled out. And we really celebrated our new-found freedom. It was great, Ollie could do whatever was wanted, Clive Griffiths on bass, me on drums, Patto prancing around singing.

**And you changed your name from Timebox to Patto.**

Yeah, Timebox were known as a band who played the Ed Stewart Show, did pop records, and we were getting the wrong sort of gigs. We were turning up at college dances and playing all this new stuff, and no-one could dance to it! We wanted to do gigs where people sat on the floor and watched and listened, which lots of other bands were doing. I mean, you didn't go see Blodwyn Pig with your best gal on your arm and expect to dance, did you? Actually, we did a great gig with Blodwyn Pig. It was them, Patto and



Free. I'd never seen Free before, and we just stood and watched. I thought; "Bloody hell, they're going to be huge". It was such a nice little set up.

**I believe Timebox did an album for Deram?**

That's right, 'Moose On The Loose', only came out in Germany. It was produced by Wayne Bickerton who's married to Clodagh Rogers. It was all our singles and B-sides plus a few other things. Well, by the time it was ready to come out, we'd changed. We thought it was awful. We said, "look, we're not like this any more. We write our own stuff, we don't wear blue frilly shirts, it just isn't us".

**You changed labels to Vertigo. Was it easy to get a deal with them?**

That was all done by our management. We had Muff Winwood producing us even though he worked for Island. And Island was THE label everyone wanted to be on. Rather like when I was in Felder's Orioles, we all wanted to be with the Rik Gunnell Agency, just to prove to yourself that you were in one of those bands. In the end Patto did get signed by Island.

**But Vertigo was quite respected, wasn't it?**

Yeah, I suppose it was. Laurie Boost, a good old Tottenham boy, used to say: "I got you sorted wiv that Ver-tie-jo label". Anyway, we were gigging around, doing some very good things. We built up quite a following.



Left to right: Clive Griffiths, Mike Patto, John Halsey, Ollie Halsall

**There was always a feeling that Patto were going to be really big, really soon, but it never quite happened.**

No, it didn't. I remember Patto and Ollie used to sit in the van saying "Why don't we write

some pop songs and see if we can sell them?" Once when they were going on about it, I said "listen, if you can write songs that good, why don't we fucking record them ourselves?" They both looked astonished that I'd even considered doing anything vaguely commercial! We were so intent on trying to make everything as weird as possible. Some of the things we did I look back on and wonder what it was all about. On stage, though, we'd do Chuck Berry songs and they'd sound great. And then there was all that stupid stuff.

**You mean the humour?**

Personally, I loved all that. Live, we used to tear the place up. We did a big Joe Cocker your, after Mad Dogs. It was us, Mark-Almond, and Joe. God, he was in a hell of a state. they used to have to try and sober him up every night just so he could walk on stage. we used to go on first, and we just tore 'em up. Some places we had to play while the audience were coming in, you know, with the lights on. And they said when the lights went out we'd have to stop, cos that's when the show began! well, once we found our feet, they were turning the lights out and we were getting standing ovations. People jumping on the seats. When we played the Hollywood Bowl, Mark-Almond added a brass section, Cocker had Delaney & Bonnie on, so we were told we had ten minutes! 'Both bands are playing longer sets, so you've got ten minutes'. Well, we used to do 'Walk Don't Run', the old Ventures number, for a laugh, and hold a Twist competition. I'd do that Ventures drum beat, Ollie and Clive would take their guitars off and twist. Ollie would tell the audience to cheer for whoever they thought was best. So patto used to do some twistin', the Clive would do a bit, then Ollie would start leaping in the air. The audience would be encouraged to clap after each twist. Then they'd do The Amoeba Twist where they'd roll round the stage, and from that we went straight into Elvis' 'Big Hunk O' Love'. We just did two numbers, and when we finished we had everyone on their seats calling for more. I'm not kidding, it was fantastic! Mark-Almond just couldn't follow us. People were calling out for us all through their set. Cocker was completely out of his brain. All the band were smacked or coked out, except the ones who were drunk, and by the time they'd finished the place was half empty. We felt pretty good. Then we went to Hawaii and Jon Mark (of Mark-Almond) tore his finger off.

**Aha. So that's where it happened.**

Yeah, there was this coconut tree on Waikiki Beach, and they;d built a bar around it. Well, Patto, being the extrovert, shins up the tree. Everyone's cheering him on. He gets right up near the top, and then swings down and lands on the sand. Then Johnny Mark who's also a bit of a lad says "I'll get higher than that...", shins up the tree, right to the very top. Then, like Patto, he swings down and lets go, but instead of dropping on the beach, he just hangs there. Then he drops down. Well, there was this nail in the tree, and it got caught in his wedding ring, and his tore his finger completely off. I mean, we all looked at his hand and there was just this bit of bone sticking up...

**[after appropriate vomiting noises] That happened to Chelsea's goalkeeper some time ago. Peter Borota, I think he was Polish. He caught his wedding ring on a hook in the crossbar, you know, there to keep the net up. Same thing.**

Really? Well, we went off to New Zealand and Australia without Mark-Almond. I ended up drumming for the Pattos, and then I used to go on with Cocker's band as well, because Jim Keltner quit. He wanted more money and Nigel Thomas, Cocker's manager, wouldn't pay. I got an extra £30 a week for that. Tight arsed bastards! But it was really exciting playing with Cocker. But then disaster! Everyone got busted and deported. The last few shows were all cancelled and we didn't get to Japan. We came home in disgrace - well, I thought it was quite a laugh really. But then after playing massive gigs like the Hollywood Bowl, we were back at

The Black Swan, Sheffield, and it was all a bit of an anti-climax. I thought; "Oh Gawd! Back to reality!" We did another album, Ollie got the real moodies in the studio.

**Was that 'Roll Em, Smoke Em'?** [Ed's note: let's get a bit of chronology here. Patto recorded 4 albums, 3 of which were released. These were 'Patto' on Vertigo 1970, 'Hold Your Fire' on Vertigo in 1971, 'Roll Em Smoke Em, Put Another Line Out' on Island in 1972, and...]

No, we did one called 'Monkey's Bum'. 'Roll Em Smoke Em' was meant to coincide with the American tour, but like all good record company fuck-ups, it was released the day we left America.



**PATTO**  
JOHN HALSEY (Drums)    OLIVE GRIFFITHS (Bass)    OLLIE HALSALL (Guitar & Keyboards)    MIKE PATTO (Vocals)    

### What about 'Monkey's Bum'?

It was the first album we'd done that I wasn't happy with. I liked some of it, but we were trying to write songs and for me, it wasn't happening. Ollie got in a real mood. We were listening back to some tracks and we were saying, "What are you playing like that for, Ollie?" And he'd just say "it's how I feel like playing". But he wasn't playing properly, you know, one note guitar solos. It was really strange. There were a few songs he obviously liked, and on those he played properly. But on all the things that Mike Patto wrote, he wouldn't play ball. Then he turned round and said "I've had enough, I'm leaving". And that was it, he was gone. So we got Mel Collins in, and we dubbed sax solos in on all the bits that Ollie had been messing around on, wiped those off, and the album was finished. But Island decided they weren't going to release it. Well, sometime earlier, when Ollie's Dad died and he'd gone up for the funeral, we'd had these gigs booked. So instead of cancelling them, we got a load of our mates together, Alan Spenner, Elton Dean, Tim Hinkley, Boz, Marc Charig, Bernie Holland, and did them as Dick & The Firemen. We got the name off a dressing room wall. So when Ollie left the band, we went to see Muff and suggested we do something with Dick & The Firemen. Well, Muff was really cold about it. He just said "Forget it. It's all over." We said, "What about our new album?" and he just kept repeating "Forget it, it's finished, the record industry's not like that any more. We're into Roxy Music, Sweet, glam rock. All that progressive stuff's finished. Move on." We didn't know what to do. We'd done 4 albums with Muff, and we'd never seen that side of him. He was really curt. "Don't wanna know. Just leave me alone. It's all finished." That was his attitude.. and he was right (laughs). Then Patto started singing for Spooky Tooth, Ollie joined Jon Hiseman's Tempest, Clive joined Alexis Korner's band CCS, and I started working with Grimms. I got that through George (Zoot) Money. Gerry Conway had left, and he suggested me. I met loads of people through that, Neil Innes, The Scaffold, Brian Patten, Andy Roberts. Neil lives down the road, Andy comes up for a pint now and then. I got quite a name for myself. You know how if anyone does a kind of folky record, they always get Dave Mattacks to do the drumming? Well, I became the drummer to use if you were doing something really stupid! I played on the Monty Python records, on the kids TV

programme, Tiswas, album. I played with The Scaffold, cos they were pretty stupid. It was quite handy really. I did some other things too. I toured the States with Chris Jagger - he brings a cricket team up here every year to play against the village team, and we have a little jam afterwards. Then I got a gig with Roy Harper along with Andy Roberts and Henry McCullough, Dave Cochrane on bass and Dave Lawson on keyboards. I've heard he's an arms dealer now, supplying massive amounts of weapons to third world countries. I don't know if that's true. The band was called Black Sheep, and lasted about two years. I didn't really know Roy before that, but as soon as I met him, heard him, I instantly became a big Roy Harper fan. I thought he was absolutely brilliant. Still do. At that time I was working with lots of different people. I did Lou Reed's 'Transformer' album. Viv Stanshall's 'Teddy Boys Don't Knit'. I worked with Neil Innes in a band called Fatso for a couple of years, and then, of course, there was The Rutles.

**You had a big starring role in that.**

Yeah, it was really exciting. First we did the album, then when it came to the filming it got really exciting. There was no script, it was all ad-libbed. We had to get into character, like real actors. You know, like when we did Rutles interviews, we were giving all the smart-arse answers just like Paul and John used to do, and I was really pleased with my witty comebacks. But when they edited it all together, they didn't use anything I'd said! I was really pissed off, but they couldn't sell the film as 'starring John Halsey' could they? It was Neil Innes and Eric Idle's thing. Great fun though, and a good pay day.

**Wasn't Ollie on that?**

Yes, he played on it, and he was hoping to play the Paul McCartney role. But the production company wanted Eric to do more than just narrate, so he did it instead. In the end Ollie was just in some still photos. All the songs that Eric Idle sings, well that's actually Ollie's voice speeded up a bit.

**Didn't you play with Joan Armatrading?**

Yeah, I was on her first album. I did some stuff with Frankie Miller, then Patto asked me to join Boxer when Tony Newman left. I did a few rehearsals with them, but I decided not to join. I didn't like it. I wasn't into drum risers with dry ice any more. I did join a band with Patto later on though, it was called Rocks, with Freddy Gandy, Bernie Holland and Chris Stainton, the only person to have played at both Woodstock and Live Aid! We got some really good things together. Stainton's brilliant.

**We must be getting close to the time of Mike Patto's death.**

I remember he came round to my house. He'd been in a lot of pain, and he'd been too scared to go to the doctors. Anyway, he finally went cos he had to find out what was wrong. So he called round and said, "I know what it is. It's the start of an ulcer, called an abrasion." He'd been put on this diet and was really relieved. Then only a few weeks later we heard that he'd had some tumors removed, so me and Clive drove down to Maidenhead, where he was living. He was sitting in the garden, and he looked really shocked, like people do when they'd had major operations. His skin was all waxy, and his eyes were a bit scary. It shook me up quite a bit. Well, after that he really got fit. He was playing golf all the time, by Christ he got fit. He was really kicking against it, but he was still smoking too much dope. He smoked so much, it was really incredible. In the Pattos we smoked all the time, took a lot of trips together, took whatever we could get our hands on. I'd stopped doing it, but Patto was still into it all. We did a Dick & The Firemen gig at Crystal Palace with Eric Clapton and Freddie King to raise

some money for him, and he turned up and sang. I mean, he had it licked. But then he started going downhill again, he'd got some more tumors or something. I used to go and visit him in hospital, and he was getting real worried - and I was too. He came out of hospital for a little while, then he was back in again, and he died a couple of days later in great pain. He had lymphatic leukaemia, which is cancer of the lymph glands. I remember asking him what that meant. He wasn't sure, but he'd seen this X-ray they'd done of him and he said, "you're completely covered in lymph glands, like a hundred in one finger, and that's what I've got cancer of". But even then he was getting stoned. He said that dope was the only thing that brought him any relief from the pain. He told the doctors about it and they turned a blind eye. He had this big nugget of dope and some masking tape, and he'd go to the toilets, tape up the cracks round the door, open the window and get stoned. He was an amazing bloke.

### **Moving into the 1980s, what were you up to?**

I was scratching around. I was really struggling. After the Rutles had its bit of success, the 'phone stopped ringing and I just stopped working. Everyone thought I was doing alright, but it had just dried up. It coincided with studios getting more technical machinery and me getting a bit old for joining groups and slapping up and down the M1 on WEM speakers. The people I worked with were getting into other things, and I had a wife and family, so I figured I'd better move on. So I set myself up in a business selling fish.

### **As you would, naturally.**

That's it, like so many other of my contemporaries. Ollie and I tried to get a band together, and we toured Europe with Kevin Ayers. Me, Ollie and Clive, the old Patto band with Ayers, but it was a bit weird. I didn't have a lot of time for him, I thought he was a bore.

### **Fish.**

Yeah, I borrowed £200 from one of my sisters and bought an old VW van, borrowed £200 from another sister and went up to Lowestoft and bought a load of fish. Then I went out and sold it for £300, just by knocking on doors. The next week I bought £300 worth and sold it for £450, the £400 worth and sold it for £600, and within 6 months I had a business like you wouldn't believe. Absolutely bloody fantastic. While all this was going on, Clive had become one of Joe Brown's Bruvvers. Their drummer left, so they asked me to join. So I was doing gigs with Joe Brown, getting to bed at about 3am and getting up two hours later to sell my fish. Which was okay until one night me and Clive were coming home from a gig and crash, bang, wallop - we had this accident. Put paid to another two of the Pattos. There's me disabled and Clive like a Dalek, paralysed down one side, brain damaged, never able to work again. He doesn't remember the Pattos, doesn't remember Joe Brown. He is seriously damaged, and all it was was a fucking bang on the head. Our wives got the dreaded phone call at 5am, saying we were in Chichester Hospital. I'd been asleep in the passenger seat, with my leg up on the dashboard, Clive was driving. Well, this other bloke went to sleep at the wheel, came right across the road and hit us head on. So there we were in hospital next to each other. I'm absolutely smashed to bits. The top of my head was smashed in, broke my skull, broke my top jaw off my skull and my bottom jaw was broken in five places. My hands were broken and my knee was shattered by the dashboard. Clive had a cut and a fractured cheekbone, that's all, but he was unconscious. Trouble was, six weeks later he was still unconscious. Poor old Clive...

### **Do you still see him?**

Yeah, now and again. I spoke to him when Ollie died. That was all a bit odd, 'cos Kevin Ayers'

lady friend, Kristin, Richard Branson's ex, 'phoned me up from Majorca to say that Ollie had died, and they didn't know what to do. Did he have any family? I just couldn't believe it. I was so shocked. It was kind of left to me to try and find his family. I didn't know where his Mum was. He had an ex-wife called Monica, and there were two daughters as well. I met them in 1991 at the Bloomsbury Theatre when I did this show with Viv Stanshall. It was the first time he'd done anything for ten years. Jack Bruce was on bass, there was Rodney Slater and Roger Ruskin-Spear, Pete Brown, Ollie came over from Spain for a week. It was brilliant, we had a wild time. That's the last time I ever saw him. Anyway, we eventually tracked his family down.

**Patto certainly don't seem to have been the world's luckiest band!**

Right. Patto's dead, Ollie's dead, Clive's one of Dr. Who's Daleks, there's me walking round with a parrot on me shoulder... even our roadie, Eric, great bloke, he got shot and killed in Pakistan.

**You did a benefit for him at The Torrington, didn't you?**

Yeah, that's right. It was an amazing night.

**I know, I went to it.**

Did you really? You were one of the ones who got in.

**I was dead lucky. The queue was about 2 miles long, and right at the front was this guy who'd nicked my copy of 'Hold Your Fire'. I made him feel so guilty that he paid for us to get in and bought us drinks all night.**

I'll tell you about 'Hold Your Fire'. We got this shiny magazine paper that was really good for drawing on with felt tipped pens. Ollie had been to art school, and I've got a certain bent. Clive was good too, but Patto was the world's worst artist. Anyway, we had all this stuff in the van and we were playing that game where one of your draws a head, the next one draws a body and so-on...

**Consequences.**

Right. We really got into it. I mean, seriously into it. Like we'd go to Sheffield and do two consequences in all that time. We were even taking them home to finish them. So we had a whole collection of these things and they were amazing. We thought we'd use them on an album cover. We just wanted all these drawings on the sleeve. They really were incredible. So we took them to Roger Dean, and he went and lost them all! That's why his design was like consequences. But can you believe it, he lost them all! Our roadie, Barnabas, Eric's brother, he's still got a lot of stuff though. Loads of rehearsal tapes with us freaking out. We'd just flip and go avant-garde. He's got tons of that. Alvin Lee and Ten Years After did a tour of Scandinavia with us supporting. On the first night we played an absolute stormer and I don't think one person applauded. Not one! Then Ten Years After came on, they hadn't played for six months. Ric the drummer was so rusty t was unbelievable. It was like Sweep playing the drums with Sooty on the Magic Organ! And the audience went crazy. It made me wonder what it was all about.. certainly not about going on and playing well. Anyway, Alvin couldn't believe Ollie. He'd never heard him before, and he absolutely flipped. So he got a Revox and recorded every single Patto gig on the tour. Alvin even used to travel from gig to gig in our van., He just wanted to be with Ollie.

### **A lot of guitarists really rated Ollie, didn't they?**

Well, he was a one-off. Ollie learned vibes when he was 14. He told his parents he wanted a set of vibes, they didn't even know what vibes were. So they said, "You learn how to play them, and we'll buy them for you." So Ollie looked at a piano keyboard, and cut strips of paper to match, laid them on his bed. He'd bought some vibes beaters with his pocket money and he learned to play like that. Well, after a while he told his parents, "I can play them now." So they took him to a music shop in Liverpool, and he could. He turned pro when he was 16.

### **So he really picked up a guitar for the first time when the guitarist left Timebox?**

When we toured, Ollie and I always used to share rooms. He used to sit up half the night just running up and down the neck. I'd be trying to get to sleep, and he'd be doing his scales over and over. After about three months he was playing them like lightning. It was fucking amazing. Also, he was left handed. He played his guitar left handed, but if he got hold of someone else's guitar, strung right handed, it didn't make any difference, he could play it perfectly! I used to wonder how anyone could do that, it would be like me playing a left-handed drum kit. Early on Ollie used to play guitar and vibes live, and he got into doing a Keith Moon with his vibes, cos the fell apart very readily. They really looked like they were wrecked. We used to finish the set with The Beatles' 'Helter Skelter' and he used to kick the vibes over at the end, till one night he kicked them a bit too hard and they fell off the stage and smashed to smithereens. He never played vibes again after that.

### **And John Halsey, what's he up to at the moment?**

I still play a bit. I did some sessions with Viv Stanshall last year, with Ollie and Jack Bruce. Actually, about a week ago we put the pub on the market. We've been in the pub trade seven years and it's so exhausting if you do it properly. And we like to do it properly.

### **What are you going to do then?**

I haven't got a clue. No idea. I'd like to do a bit more playing, but at my own pace. I'd love to play some more. I mean, when do you lose the urge? When do you want to stop? I'm 50 now and I still want to do it. I was saying that to Tim Hinkley the other day. He reckons you just keep jogging along.

*Based on an interview by Nick Saloman/Cyke Bancroft in September 1992. Production by Phil McMullen, © Ptolemaic Terrascope 1992*