



Alstonefield Village Hall Events NEWS RELEASE

"The Internet may have led much that is of little worth to become overvalued. This time it may help the true worth of something undervalued to be seen more clearly."

Daniel Finkelstein, The Times, 11 February 2002

When: Saturday 23 March

8pm

What: PETE ATKIN

Alstonefield's concert series offers 'something completely different' with a show featuring Pete Atkin, for a unique evening of what has become a defining example of 'English Chanson'.

Atkin is best known for his collaborations with Australian author, critic and TV personality, **Clive James**.



The pair first met in 1966 as members of the Cambridge Footlights Revue that spawned so much British comedy talent, from the satire of Beyond the Fringe to the surrealism of Monty Python. It was this connection that would later result in Atkin and James being invited in 1977 to perform alongside the likes of John Cleese and Peter Cook at various Amnesty International benefits, subsequently released on DVD under The Secret Policeman's Ball titles.

What is less well known is that in the early 1970s, the pair made eight highly collectable albums of quirky, original, and entertaining songs, told with ironic humour and acute observation. Atkin wrote the music, and Clive James wrote the words.



Thanks to the internet, after a gap of more than 20 years, it became clear that Atkin and James' early songs were far from forgotten. As a result, the old albums were reissued on CD, and the pair revived their partnership with live performances including the Edinburgh Fringe and a tour of Australia. Getting back on the road led to new material being written, producing new albums every bit as good as those from the early days.

For a 'day-job', Atkin is a writer and freelance radio producer, having worked mostly for the BBC, on programmes such as *Just a Minute*, *Week Ending* and the epic series, *This Sceptred Isle*.

This is an rare opportunity to catch Pete Atkin solo, with just guitar and piano.

Licensed bar

See over - The Peak District connection

Pete Atkin & Clive James - The Peak District connection

2018 (August 16th, to be precise) was the 21st anniversary of a rather special event that took place in Monyash, just up the road from Alstonefield. It was a one-off festival billed as a 'comeback' for Pete Atkin.

Why Monyash?

At the time, Atkin was a highly respected radio producer, working on much-loved BBC programmes like *Just a Minute*, *Week Ending* and *This Sceptred Isle*, the station's 46-hour, 216-part history of Britain. The music had become a sideline and he was only playing a couple of gigs a year. One evening, at a tiny venue in Eastbourne, Atkin got talking to Steven Birkill, who had travelled all the way from Monyash (a 500-mile round trip) just to see him perform.



Steve Birkill was a top BBC engineer who later went on to invent a new type of tuner now used in Freeview TV boxes and most of the digital radios sold in the UK and Europe. He was also a huge fan of the Atkin/James songs, but he'd only seen Pete play a couple of times in the 1970s and had almost worn out his copies of the albums. With a large farmhouse and land in Monyash, Birkill had the idea of getting all the old Atkin/James fans to come to a one-off 'garden festival', with the help of the internet (which was still in its early days).

It was so successful that in August 1997, 250 people turned up for the festival, which also featured Julie Covington (who'd been appearing in 'Godspell' in London).

The following year, Birkill hired Buxton Opera House and staged a concert with Atkin joined by Clive James, who told anecdotes of how the songs were written as well as reading poems and extracts from his just-published book, *Unreliable Memoirs*. It was the first time they had shared a stage for over two decades.

The concerts (and subsequent live appearances by Atkin solo) resulted in new fans and Birkill set up a fan website (nicknamed Smash Flops) and a web forum, called Midnight Voices.

In 1999, there was another festival gig at Monyash, and Atkin/James were so encouraged that they went on to write new material and produced several new albums, containing songs just as good as those on the early albums.

Atkin has since said:

"Without Steve, our catalogue of recorded works would have ended in the mid-Seventies. There are more than fifty songs that would never have seen the light of day, including some songs on Winter Spring and The Colours of the Night that are certainly among the best things we've ever done. The internet made it possible, but Steve made it happen. Knowing the Midnight Voices fans were out there guaranteed us a core audience - and that was what we needed to get the juices flowing again."

Website: www.peteatkin.com

www.alstonefield.org



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