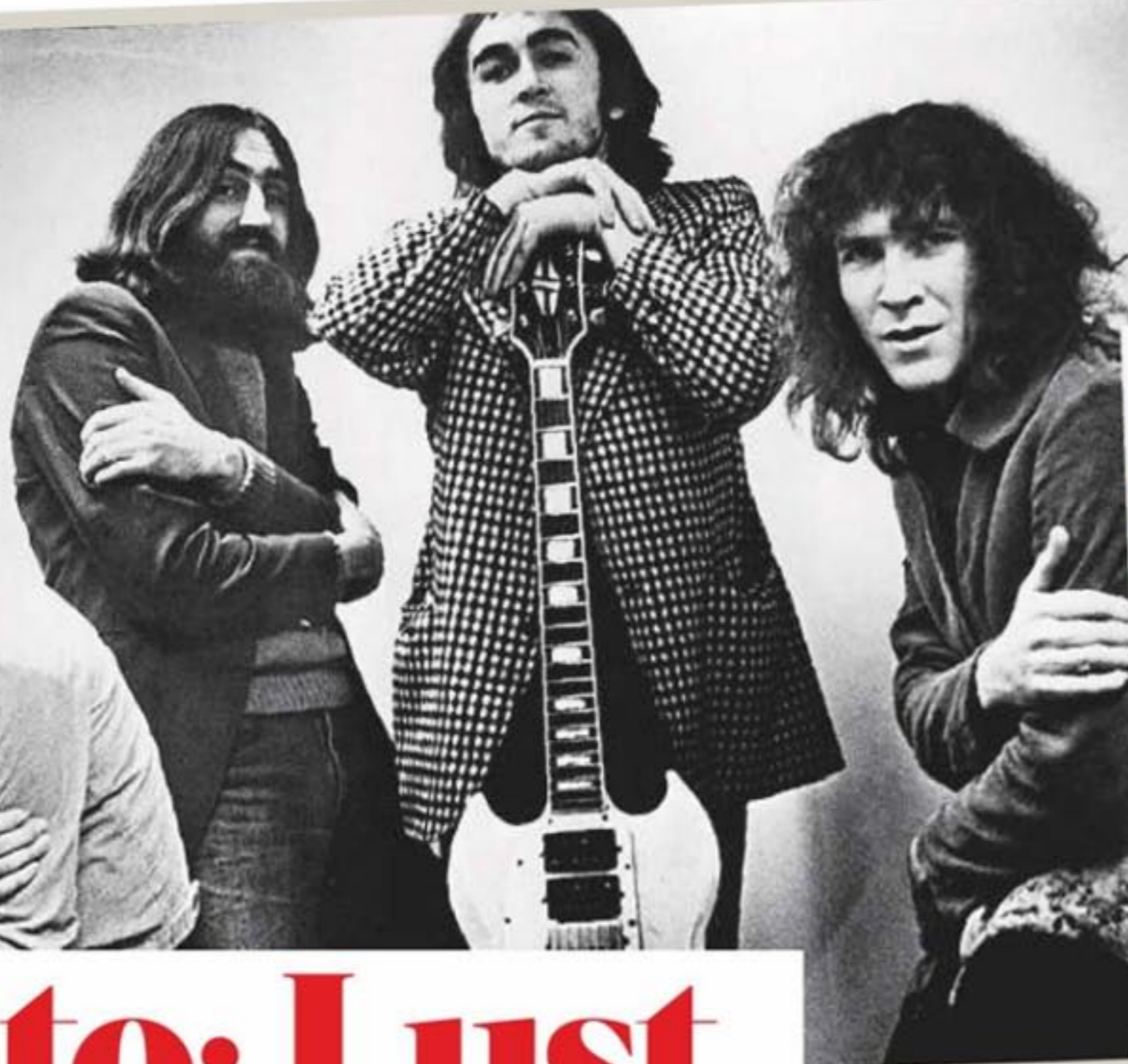


Patto: (l-r) John Halsey, Clive Griffiths, Ollie Halsall, Mike Patto



# Patto: Lust For Glory

**Roll 'em, smoke 'em, put another reissue out... Loony prog outliers Patto rediscovered**

**O**N Son Volt's current album, *Notes Of Blue*, there is a song titled "Lost Souls" which Jay Farrar dedicates "to the amazingly talented performers you meet along the way but never hear from again". Patto had been and gone long before Farrar picked up a guitar, but in the realm of great lost bands to which his song pays tribute, the outré early-'70s quartet deserve a place.

Formed from the ashes of Timebox – best remembered for their 1968 cover of The Four Seasons' "Beggin'" – Patto's combination of instrumental virtuosity, grittily soulful vocals and vaulting prog

ambition should have been all-conquering. In Mike Patto they boasted a singer who evoked comparison with Steve Marriott and Paul Rodgers. Left-handed guitarist Ollie Halsall was a brilliantly accomplished muso who also played uninhibited free-jazz keyboards. Drummer John Halsey was described by one critic as a cross between Jaki Liebezeit and John Bonham, and bassist Clive Griffiths was no slouch, either.

"Progressive music started coming in and instead of people in mod outfits waiting to dance, they were sitting on the floor waiting to be played to," recalls Halsey of the group's mutation from 1960s beat group into prog-rock adventurers, who embraced the spirit of the times with enthusiastic abandon. "We smoked all the time, took a lot of trips together, whatever we could get our hands on." Not for nothing

was their third LP titled *Roll 'Em Smoke 'Em Put Another Line Out*. The music took a dramatic left turn, too, emerging as a promiscuous hybrid of jazz, blues, funk and rock with plenty of freeform wiggling-out on the side. "Ollie was trying to write stuff that was more avant-garde, and we were getting into weird time signatures," Halsey recalls.

Between 1970 and 1973, Patto released three hard-to-categorise albums on Vertigo and Island, toured with Joe Cocker, Ten Years After and Rod Stewart & The Faces, and received substantial critical acclaim. But the albums failed to sell and when Halsall quit, the band broke up. Mike Patto went on to join Spooky Tooth and formed Boxer with Halsall, but died of leukaemia in 1979. Halsall charted with The Rutles (as did Halsey) and played with Kevin Ayers before succumbing to a drug-induced heart attack in 1992. Then, while playing in Joe Brown's Bruvvers, Griffiths and Halsey were involved in a car

accident, which robbed the bassist of his memory and left the drummer with a permanent limp.

Yet over the years interest in Patto has steadily revived, culminating in the 2017 reissue of the band's entire back catalogue, including the first official

release of *Monkey's Bum*, the group's "lost" fourth album, shelved by a disinterested label when they broke up in 1973.

Why Patto failed to make it remains a mystery. Some ugly and cartoonish

album covers didn't help. Arguably, nor did their sense of humour at a time when prog took itself too seriously: onstage they "looned about" with stunts that

included an a cappella version of "Strangers In The Night" in 5/4 time with added expletives, and a twisting competition conducted to The Ventures' "Walk Don't Run".

Ultimately, perhaps they were simply too leftfield. "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?'" recalls Halsey, who in later years retired to run a pub. "I said, 'If you can write songs that good, why don't we fucking record them?' They both looked astonished that I'd consider doing anything commercial. We were so intent on trying to make everything as weird as possible." **NIGEL WILLIAMSON**

*Patto, Hold Your Fire, Roll 'Em Smoke 'Em Put Another Line Out and Monkey's Bum are available now on Cherry Red*