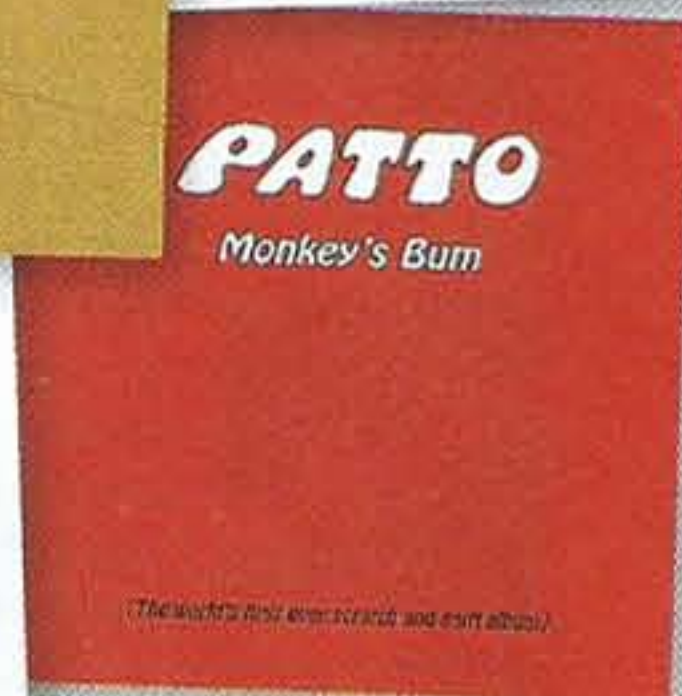




Definitely not Sergio Mendes: Patto (from left) Clive Griffiths, Mike Patto, John Halsey, Ollie Halsall.



Roll 'em Smoke 'em Put Another Line Out



Salty dogs

They sailed their own course and went down with the ship. Your navigator, Jim Irvin.

Patto

Patto ★★

Hold Your Fire ★★★★★

Roll 'Em Smoke 'Em Put Another Line Out

★★★★★

Monkey's Bum ★★★★★

CHERRY RED. CD

THE STORY IN brief: Midlands boys who, as Timebox, cut a great version of The 4 Seasons' classic *Beggin'*, renamed themselves after rasping lead singer Mike Patto when psych-pop ran out of steam and, on 1970's self-titled debut, worked up a unique sound, a four-way freak-out, with an amorphous songcraft similar to contemporaries Family, conjuring illogical collisions of grit, groove and surrealism, sometimes with unusual time signatures and abrupt left turns off the genre map, like the squalling 10-minute *Money Bag*. Multi-instrumentalist Ollie Halsall grappled scorching guitar, pounding piano and, of course, vibraphones.

On record they assayed everything from free jazz to cod sea shanties. On stage they threw bizarre evenings of deep soul and low tomfoolery with drummer John Halsey, later of The Rutles, leading the "looning".

1971's *Hold Your Fire* was a schizoid thing, dividing roughly into one side of searing blues and one of jazzy reveries. But making sense of Patto wasn't the point, it was how they made you feel; and if the creepy incest skit *Mummy*, from the thoroughly non-PC *Roll 'Em Smoke 'Em Put Another Line Out* (1972), only makes you feel

nauseous, rest assured that the album's highlights – Flat

Footed Woman, Turn Turtle and the frenetic Loud Green Song ("Whatever you do don't make it sound like Sergio Mendes!") – have an antic intensity that'll stimulate the kicking in of windows. I Got Rhythm's strange Sly-like funk is sung by white man Patto from a black man's POV: "I got rhythm/Why'd you call me names?" It wouldn't happen now. The album closes with Cap'n 'P' And The Atto's, six minutes of marine-themed filler. Rolling Stone called this unhinged album "the missing link between *Abbey Road* and The Mahavishnu Orchestra". Radio 1 featured them, music writers dug 'em, but their reluctance to stay in lane kept success at bay. You don't get rich playing free jazz in 11/9 when people want metal, nor by offering the James Brown-styled *Singing The Blues On Reds* if they've come to hear prog.

Lack of appreciation and cash started to bite. Ollie Halsall lost the plot, making unreleased fourth album, *Monkey's Bum*, then quitting midway, leaving behind I Need You, featuring delightful Les Paul-style speeded-up solos, and *Sausages*, illustrating rockers going insane on the road in its blistering playing. Adding brass (King Crimson's Mel Collins) brought a fresh dimension to the sound. Ironically, it's arguable that this unissued set, now released officially for the first time, was their strongest statement.

These reissues gather almost everything Patto recorded, with sharp remasters and informative notes. One can only hope they'll help the cult of Cap'n P and his crew reach new horizons.