

The Alan AtKisson Songbook

Lyrics 1978 - 2015



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The Alan AtKisson Songbook

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Preface

Why publish my song lyrics? Because people ask for them.

As an American-born songwriter who composes and sings (mostly) in English, but living a very Swedish and European life in my adopted home of Stockholm, people often ask me for my song lyrics. They want to learn one or more of the songs, but they have difficulty catching all the words on the recorded versions. For many, English is a second (or third or fourth) language. And sometimes I pack a lot of words into a musical phrase.

So here is a collection of (almost) every song lyric I have ever written. I left out some real stinkers, as well as my very first tender attempts as a teenage songwriter. Nobody else really needs to see those.

But I did include a number of songs that have never been recorded and released publicly. These include some that are very personal (e.g. “Anna-Kristina-Kicki-Du,” written for my wife and recorded as a surprise for our wedding), and some that were written and performed once at a conference but never recorded (e.g. the “Late-Nite Litter Song,” written for an Australian national conference on litter). Some were recorded and released privately on cassette albums, long before the days of CDs and instant digital sharing (though some of those old cassette recordings were released digitally on the album *Ancient History* in 2014. And few of these songs are scheduled to be recorded and released in the future.

In short, this is a compendium, and it was put together as much as a record for myself and my family as it was for my friends and those who like my songs and request the lyrics. To be honest, I even have to open up and use this songbook myself sometimes, to remember old lyrics I have not sung for a long time.

This book is also, for me, a reference that I am using to write another book — a kind of “musical memoir” with stories from my experience linked to the songs that emerged from those experiences. That book is called *50 Songs, 50 Stories*. I am posting essays from that book occasionally on my website.

You will find the song titles listed in alphabetical order, with the year noted. And on each page you will see which album the song comes from, or whether it was unreleased.

Thanks for your interest. This collection will be periodically updated, too. I expect that I will write more songs in the coming years. It seems I just can’t stop.

Alan AtKisson
Saltsjö-Boo, Sweden
Website: <http://AlanAtKisson.com>

AMERICAN TROUBADOUR (2011)

Words and Music © 2011 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

These are times of trouble
 These are times of toil and tears
 You were once a beacon
 Now you're torn by doubts and fears

I believe you believe that the world has used you
 And abused you
 And left you feeling unsure
 I believe you're in danger of losin' direction
 I believe you have an infection
 That only you can cure

My country 'tis of thee I sing
 What's happened to you?
 Sweet land of liberty, I think
 You know what to do
 Rise for freedom
 Stand for justice
 Hold the lantern of truth up high
 From the mountains
 To the prairies
 To the ocean of people of every kind
 Let freedom ring!
 Let freedom ring!
 Oh, let freedom ring!
 All over this world ...

I am just a singer
 An American troubadour
 And I have left your borders
 But I love you all the more

There are things I've been longing for the chance to tell you
 Just want to get through
 To the depths of your soul
 Certain truths I hold to be self-evident about you
 I don't want to doubt you
 I need your truths to hold

My country 'tis of thee I sing ...

*We hold these truths to be self-evident,
 that all men — and women — are created equal,*

*that they are endowed by their Creator
with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these fundamental, universal rights
are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of True Happiness*

There are those among you
Sewing seeds of hate and fear
We must all resist them
We must make our purpose clear

Shout it out, there's vision that we all will stand for
And make demands for
We'll sing and clap our hands
Human rights, equal chance, rule of law, and freedom
Blessed freedom
In every land

My country 'tis of thee I sing
What's happened to you?
Sweet land of liberty, I think
You know what to do
Rise for freedom
Stand for justice
Hold the lantern of truth up high
From the mountains
To the prairies
To the ocean of people of every kind
Let freedom ring!
Let freedom ring!
Oh, let freedom ring!
Oh - all over this world ...

AND WE RISE (1992)

Words and Music © 1992 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Fire in the Night*

In a time when the whole world trembles and moans
In a time when we face a dark unknown
In a time of confusion
When so many seem hypnotized
By a restless illusion
And when the truth has been disguised
By walls of delusion —
But it's breaking out ...

CHORUS:

And we rise
In the sight of our children's eyes
To preserve each sacred place
To sustain the human race
As the shadows start to fall
And we hear the planet's call
We will stand and bear the light
We will shine with all our might
Oh! We pledge our lives ...

As the walls of the old world crumble down
We are called to turn our very lives around
A complete transformation
A kind of total rebirth
And the full retoration
Of the damage done to the Earth
The whole of Creation
Is crying out ...

CHORUS

At the dawn of a new and a brighter day
We are drawn to the Truth that lights the way
And we don't have to fear it
It's the light of love that calls
It's the sign of the spirit
Of the live that moves in us all
And as we get near it
It's reaching out ...

CHORUS

ANNA-KRISTINA-KICKI-DU (2000)

Words and Music © 2000 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

She waits for me, just in side the Customs gate
I long to see her smiling face again
She takes me out and shows me 'round the town
 where she was born
It's almost just as beautiful as she

Anna-Kristina-Kicki-Du
Hur säger man att I love you?

We ride the bus, find a place to sit and talk
It seems just like we've been friends for years
She takes me in and shows me how the world
 was meant to be
She's every dream I've ever dreamed and more

Anna-Kristina-Kicki-Du
Someday I'm going to marry you

She takes me in and shows me how the world
 was meant to be
She's every dream I've ever dreamed and more

Anna-Kristina-Kicki-Du
This is the day I marry you

BALATON (1994)

Words and Music © 1994 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

The ancient engines turn their gears
The sound of fire swiftly nears
And when we look at what's been lost
There's no counting of the cost

We've got to find a better way
We've got to find the words to say
And the knowledge to pass on
And the strength to carry on

Hey Balaton
When the fire is at it's peak, we'll carry on
Hey Balaton
When the final ember flickers and is gone
We will sing a healing song
We will raise another dawn
We'll remember Balaton

To see such beauty torn apart
It's hard to hold it in your heart
It's hard to witness to the pain
To see it coming round again

And so we gather one by one
Our heartbeats powered by the sun
And all our voices raised
In passion, and in praise

Hey Balaton ...

When I'm lying awake
I go down to the lake
And I strip to my skin
And I'm runnin' in — splashing and diving
There's a storm faraway
And it's coming this way
And I'm dancing with lightning
Wrestling with thunder
Raising my arms up to pray ...

I ask the wind to lift our souls

I ask the rain to make us whole
I ask the spirit of the Earth
To attend us at our birth

Hey Balaton ...

Written beside Lake Balaton, Hungary, September 1994

BEAUFORT AIR (1983)

Words and Music © 1983 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Whitewing*

Summer breezes blew a feather from her hair
It rose towards heaven like a solitary prayer
See it dancin' there
In the Beaufort air
Until it falls again somewhere

We were children who convention couldn't tame
We played for hours at imagination games
We'd be leopards or
Sailors far from shore
Until our mothers called our names

And she took me to her hideaway
Where no one's ever been
And I have never found again

In the churchyard of her village by the sea
I saw a vision of the woman she would be
Moved to touch her there
In the Beaufort air
But she was just a distant dream

And she showed me where a child is buried
Underneath a stone
She died a hundred years ago

Turn the pages in a town I used to know
Walk the waterfront with memories in tow
See the lights out there
In the Beaufort air
Bright the night, and guide me home

BENGAL TIGER (1993)

Words and Music © 1993 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Fire in the Night*

In the histories of nations, in the galleries of art
I was searching for time's arrow when it pierced me through the heart
And the ghost of old Prometheus rose up before my face
And haunted me with visions of the holy human race

CHORUS:

We are weapons, we are soldiers, we are mothers wracked with tears
We are cannons and cathedrals and messiahs who don't appear
We are songs and saints and stories, we are rocket-ships in flight
Like a Bengal tiger burning in the moonlight,
We are fire in the night

On the plains of central Asia, the army of Genghis Khan
Sweeps the earth on horseback in the hours before the dawn
Driving wild beasts before them with arrows and with spears
I can hear the cries of fear and terror echo through the years

CHORUS

Poured out into history
Our origins a mystery
We're swept along like swimmers in a stream
We dive beneath it breathlessly
The current raging restlessly
And find that at the bottom it's a dream

Beyond the planet's borders, in a shining silver dove,
Our telescopes and astronauts look down from high above
They see cities lit like diamonds, they see forests all in flame
They see the whole of our humanity that none of us can name

CHORUS

[Then repeat to fade:]

We are fire in the night
We are fire in the night
We are fire

BLACK AND GRAY (1983)

Words and Music © 1983 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whitewing*

When I knew that I was blind
 I climbed a mountain in my mind
 Till I could see
 To eternity
 But the light was so divine
 I feared that it would leave me blinder than before —
 Forevermore
 So I turned away
 And woke up in a world of black and gray

If I'd known what I know now —
 It doesn't matter anyhow
 The deed is done
 It's not the only one
 For if regrets could chain me down
 Then I'd be permanently bound
 Inside of me —
 But I'm still free
 Because I choose to be —
 To live with who I am, and what I see

If I had the chance again
 No matter how or when
 To see that light, I'd do it differently

I would leave this world behind
 Abandon space and time
 The empty shell of what I've wanted most to find

When I knew that I was blind
 I climbed a mountain in my mind
 Till I could see
 To eternity
 But the light was so divine
 I feared that it would leave me blinder than before —
 Forevermore
 So I turned away
 And woke up in a world of black and gray

BUDAPEST (1996)

Words and Music © 1996 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

You could watch me go — watch me fly away
To a distant country — where I won't know what to say
Watch the door slam shut — watch the captain wave goodbye
The seven-forty-seven streak across the sky

Or you could wake up Budapest
And watch the sun go down
Cross the River Danube
To the Roman side of town
You could be walkin' in Budapest
You could be holdin' my hand
And I could say "*Szeretlek*,"
And you would understand

You could take this chance — I could take you there
We could fly together to a place where no one cares
Who you were before — Who you're tryin' to be today
It's already tomorrow there anyway

You could wake up in Budapest ...

Walkin' through the old town, walkin' through the city
Walk a little faster when the girls are pretty
Wishin' you were and walkin' with me tonight

Listen to the sound of the wind of the river
Listen to the music of Presser Gábor singin',
"*A szerelem jó, A szerelem fáj*"

Walkin' in Budapest ...

Written in Budapest across two summers, 29 Aug 1995 - 2 Sept 1996

CASSANDRA'S LYRE (1999)

Words and Music © 1999 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

She's the king's youngest daughter — fairest in Troy
Caught the eye of Apollo — refused him all joy
He blessed her and cursed her — it's no wonder she grieves
For Cassandra's a prophet that no one believes

She sings like a siren — her voice is a choir
Composes her songs on a magical lyre
She sings of the future — she predicted this war
Now she sings of Greek soldiers in a horse at our door

She stands like a statue — so cold and aloof
She sings what will happen and it happens forsooth
The king and his generals say they must have more proof
But Cassandra's lyre tells only the truth

I'm just a poor tinker — I mend pots and pans
Not much of a thinker — just do what I can
But there's something about her — maybe I should do more —
Though no one believes her, she's been right before ...

She stands like a statue — so cold and aloof
She sings what will happen and it happens forsooth
The king and his generals say they must have more proof
But Cassandra's lyre tells only the truth

The Greeks promised peace with a great wooden horse
I repeated her warnings — they scoffed at the source
So I hid in the storehouse with some young girls and boys
Then I led them away from the ashes of Troy

She stands in the starlight — so cold and aloof
She sings what will happen and it happens forsooth
The king and his generals say they must have more proof
But Cassandra's lyre tells only the truth

CHILDREN'S WRITER, THE (1993)

Words and Music © 1993 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*

I am a children's writer — I love to tell them tales
 Of princesses and princes out seeking holy grails
 And though I've never married, or had children of my own
 Heretofore, heretofore
 I preferred to live alone

A writer needs the freedom to keep his sails unfurled
 A writer needs the solitude to sail to other worlds
 A writer needs a thousand things to make children's dreams come true
 But heretofore, heretofore
 I didn't know I needed you

A prince stands at your door
 Come from a distant shore
 His magic ship can soar
 And carry you away

I know we've hardly spoken — we've spoken more with looks
 We seem to read each other like a pair of open books
 It's not that I'm too private, it's not that you're too proud
 But heretofore, heretofore
 it's been hard to say out loud
 Outside the castle walls
 The prince stands strong and tall
 The princess hears his call
 And turns her face away

I hope you will forgive me for the trouble that I've brought
 You know how writers tend to be high-strung and overwrought
 Of course I should have understood that the heart can make you blind
 But heretofore, heretofore
 It just never crossed my mind

I think I'll take a journey — go visit foreign lands
 Someplace where people live in ways that I can't understand
 But please, you needn't worry, because no matter where we roam
 I believe, I believe
 That we're never far from home

CHRISTMAS NIGHT (1983)

Words and Music © 1983 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Whitewing*

The snow fell on the world on a winter's day
The cold fell on our world and was there to stay
Well you walked out and left your pain
And left me feelin' so insane
And all your presents bore my name
But I pretended not to grieve
Christmas Eve

The dove in wintertime is a hungry bird
And love in wintertime is a lonely word
Well see me standin' at your door
I won't be knockin' anymore
I just wanted to say more
But I'd said all that I could say
Christmas Day

Upon the holly tree grows a berry red
It feeds these hungry birds while the world lies dead
Well you walked back through winter storms
I find you crying in my arms
What was cold has turned to warm
And I knew everything would be alright
Christmas Night

And now our hearts begin to pour
Our love is stronger than before
And I just want to love you more
And everything will be alright
Christmas Night

COCKROACH CULTURE WILL SURVIVE, THE (2000)

Words and Music © 2000 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

When you think about the future — the next 50 million years —
 It's not hard to give in to your darkest fears
 But if the human race is heading for a great big dive,
 The cockroach culture will survive!

CHORUS

The cockroach culture will survive
 They'll build cities on the ruins of London and Shanghai
 They'll play cockroach country music, cockroach jazz and cockroach jive
 The cockroach culture will survive

When you look at human history, and you take the long-term view
 It's hard to believe that we will make it through
 But if some kind of global catastrophe arrives
 The cockroach culture will survive!

CHORUS

So if we're realistic about the long-term for our race
 We've got no choice but to take off for outer space
 But even if we ruin the next world, and there's no one left alive
 The cockroach culture will survive!

CHORUS

Say goodbye to the planet — it's a very lovely place
 Too bad it's just too complicated for the human race
 But at least there's one fine species that we know will always thrive
 The cockroach culture will survive!

CHORUS

*(Inspired by the presentation of Aromar Revi at the 19th
 Balaton Group Meeting, Sept. 2000, with thanks to Bob
 Wilkinson for nudging me on this one ...)*

COLD WORLD (1986)

Words and Music © 1986 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Enter the party
See what's inside
It's nowhere that you've been before
It's time out of mind
Oh-oh ohh-oh

Crystal and china
Strawberry ice
Why don't you try the champagne
It's all very nice
Oh-oh ohh-oh

Don't even start if you have to think twice

Beautiful women
In beautiful clothes
Thrusting you deeper inside
To the thorn in the rose
Oh-oh ohh-oh

Purchase your pleasure
In nickels and dimes
Wear the white mask for your pain
It's a sign of the times
Oh-oh ohh-oh

Don't read the faces between the white lines

It's a cold cold cold world
Cold world, cold world
It's colder than stone

Everything's easy
Everything's fine
Nothing can give you away
You've got nothing to hide

You've been surrounded
By friends on all sides
Talkin' and laughin' and waitin'
For you to decide

You tell me your secrets I'll tell you mine

[spoken:]

It's a cold world out there

Feels like it's gettin' colder all the time

And what can we do, the many against the powerful few

C'mon — let me cut you another line

Can't you see that there's somethin' goin' out there

But you're pretty vision fades

You see that you're awake

You're thrust into a nightmare

Ten thousand warheads

Four billion lives

Locked in a deadly embrace

Like flesh with a knife

Engines of darkness

Beacons of light

Poised on brink of a dance

Of mortal design

Oh-oh ohh-oh

And when they kiss it's the end of all life

DAMN THE DISCOUNT RATE (2008)

Words and Music © 2008 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

It's a funny little number that you maybe don't know
 But it's vitally important, as my song will show
 It shows up in equations that economists use
 And that sounds abstract — but it might kill you!

We're writing down the future
 Pretending we don't have to share
 Selling it off so cheaply
 Pretending there's no one there

I'm an economic model and I'm really very nice
 When I think about the future, I think about the price
 And the farther ahead that I try to see
 The value of things looks smaller to me
 Doesn't matter what it is, or how much is still left
 If I can't use it now, then it's worth a little less
 And farther in the future that it is from me
 It looks cheaper and cheaper till it's all just free!

We're writing down the future ...

Now I am a person who isn't yet born
 I live in a future that's just worn and torn
 That discount rate that your generation used
 Was like a nuclear bomb with a very long fuse
 Now the bomb's gone off, and everything's been sold
 There's nothing much left and I'm hungry and cold
 Now species no soil no trees no land
 It's time to grow flippers cause there's no place to stand

We're writing down the future ...

So hey all you modelers, and economic brains
 I know you face your pressures and political strains
 But when you put a price on the rising of the sea
 Please adjust your parameters, and think about me
 I know you think I'm rich and can afford to drown
 It still doesn't feel right when you're on the way down
 So if it's still possible, if it's not too late
 Please get rid of that discount rate

We're writing down the future ...

DANCER (1978)

Words © 1978 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Whitewing*

Music © 1978 by Mark Beatty

She opens the theater door
Stands there alone in the aisle
She walks down the red carpet floor
Her face brightens up with a smile
 And her eyes start to gleam
 Remembering her dream
 Gracefully twirling
 And flawless swirling
 A dancer she wanted to be

As she walks up the stairs to the stage
The old empty seats disappear
Fantasy takes her ... the orchestra plays ...
The audience greets her with cheers
 And her eyes start to gleam
 Reliving her dream
 Gracefully twirling
 And flawless swirling
 A dancer she knew she would be

The crowd becomes still as she starts to perform
The dancer has captured them all
She steps, and she glides ... but she
suddenly stumbles and falls ...
Yes she falls ...

She picks herself up with a sigh
And walk down the aisle to the door
A tear starts to fall from her eye
The theater's empty once more
 And her eyes lose their gleam
 Forgetting her dream
 Gracefully twirling
 And flawless swirling
 A dancer she'd never be

DEAD PLANET BLUES (1990)

Words and Music © 1990 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whole Lotta Shoppin' Goin' On*

[Spoken:] Well hey there! Haven't seen you in a while! Let me buy you a drink. Uh, what did you say your name was again? Oh, right. My name? Well, my friends used to call me ... God.

Pull up a star and hear my tale of woe
I built a planet just a few billion years ago
It was a lovely little blue-green ball ...
One of my life-forms became self-aware
They started messing with my recipe for air
And now that planet's got no life at all! Yeah, it's a ...

Dead Planet

Yeah, I'm just gettin' back from the funeral

Dead Planet

Don'tcha hate it when they leave the casket open?

I got them old Dead Planet Blues

Yeah it's a sad story, this one

Lemme tell you about them creatures ...

Them little life-forms were a hungry bunch
They'd eat top-soil for breakfast, they'd eat r-r-rain forests for lunch
And they drank up all my fossil fuels

Let out one heck of a burp ...

You've never seen a more destructive race
Yeah, they rigged up these nuclear suicide buttons all over the place
And they kept pourin' out that CO₂

Well, it wasn't in my recipe ...

Now it's a ...

Dead Planet

Hey, anybody seen Jupiter lately?

Dead Planet

Tell 'im I got a great deal on a used moon ...

I got them old Dead Planet Blues

Here comes the sad part ...

All their refrigerators
Ate up the ozone layer
And flushed my food chain down the tubes!

I tried to warn them of the risks they took
I sent droughts, plagues, famines — did the whole thing straight by the book
But they just kept watchin' re-runs on TV

What did they leave to "the Beaver," anyway?
When things got bad they asked for mercy and grace
Said I'd made them in My image ... They insulted Me to My face!
So I revoked the lifetime guarantee
Now what do I do with a ...

Dead Planet

Use it as a cosmic doorstep?

Dead Planet

Hey, we can go bowling in the Pleiades!

I got them old Dead Planet

It ain't nothin' but a lifeless hunk o' granite

I got them old Dead Planet Blues

DEBRIS (1998)

Words and Music © 1998 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

I was talkin' to a friend the other night
 She said, "I don't like what you're sayin'
 "Your ethical affairs are just not right
 "I can't believe the games you're playin'
 "Yeah, you're havin' all your transcendental fun
 "But soon enough, you're gonna hurt someone
 "And it's so easy just to turn and run
 "When someone else is payin' ..."

So I've come here just to bare my soul to you
 'Bout these lies that I've been livin'
 I thought everything I said before was true
 Not just some lines that I was givin'
 So it came as a great shock to realize
 That truth is sometimes shot through with lies
 And the kindest and most innocent of eyes
 Can be the most deceiving

Now I'm washed up on the shore of Time
 Like a piece of debris
 With the evidence of all my petty crimes
 Washin' up around me
 And out on the horizon line
 The shipwreck of a dream
 Got to build a new one quick
 And get back out to sea

No one ever told me 'bout the fact
 That the price of gettin' older
 Is to carry all your secrets on your back
 Filed in confidential folders
 But no one wants to look inside
 'Cause everyone's got something to hide
 So I just take another forward stride
 Try to look a little bolder

When I'm washed up on the shore of Time ...

Sometimes I wish the muses and the fates
 Had refused to wine and dine me
 But I came to this conclusion far too late
 Now there's this shadow right behind me
 And I wish that I could promise you
 That everything I'm saying now is true

But if someday, I disappear from view
I hope to God you'll find me

When I'm washed up on the shore of Time ...

DEEPER INTO THE GROUND

Words and Music © 1995 by Kara Palmer, Alan AtKisson, and Robert Greenway - unreleased

Ten times the earth did turn, ten times
One hundred hearts and souls and minds
One great big tent against the sky
One hundred voices asking why

This planet's pulse is dimly heard
She's losing cultures, ways and words
We need to see the system whole
All the connections to our soul

Chorus:

Trusting our hearts to know
Where the truth can be found
Taking our souls deep down below
Deeper into the ground

We map the edges of the night
And ride the moon into the light
We raise these prayers around the fire
Our human circle lifts us higher

Chorus

Go to the suffering
You won't be confused
Go to the suffering
You'll know what to do

Dear friends we do not stand alone
The spirit of nature's in our bones
We've gained love's power in our hearts
We've seen the transformation start

Chorus

DIAMONDS & RUBIES (1995)

Words and Music © 1995 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

They left on a beautiful day
 it was nineteen eighty-five and the sky was a great bell ringin'
 They took the convertible down
 put the radio on real loud, and they both were singin'
 They drove through state after state
 they would sleep in the car, make love at the side of the road
 They were drivin' too fast
 They were drinkin' too hard
 They were drunk on each other
 They were frightened of nothing

They had such a beautiful plan
 go to San Francisco and the life that they'd both been dreamin'
 Get away from this tight little town
 get away from these tiny minds and the preachers' screamin'
 They were tired of secrets and shame
 seein' their reflection in all the hypocritical eyes
 Couldn't take any more
 Took the one chance they had
 Took somebody's car
 Took off to find heaven

That's life at the movies
 That's love according to the radio
 A bag of diamonds and rubies
 Pick it up — don't know when to let it go

They hit town on a Sunday mornin'
 crossed the Golden Gate and the air was so sweet they could taste it
 Didn't ride on the cable cars
 they went straight to the Haight and the Castro and they both got wasted
 Pumped up, full of strange light
 Seekin' salvation at the back of some dark little bar
 They forgot who they were
 They forgot why they came
 They forgot about each other
 They forgot about lovin'

That's life at the movies ...

Dark days and dreamless nights
 they needed cash for the man and the fancy new medication
 Fixed a crude little firebomb
 but the store clerk panicked pulled a trigger in desperation

One shot — blood on the floor —
Cops outside, gasoline all over the ground
There was nowhere to run
There was nowhere to hide
They went down on their knees
They went down in the fire

That's life at the movies ...

DUNGENESS (1995)

Words and Music © 1995 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

Half a day's journey and more
 I took the trail that comes down from the peaks
 and meanders its way to the shore —
 Lonely and weary, I heard myself speak,
 I said "Lord, can you take me to my final rest"
 And I laid myself down in the sand
 At Dungeness

She came to me like a dream
 Moon in her eyes, and her hair all in curls
 And the colors were peaches and cream
 The lights on the sound were like diamonds and pearls
 And I danced with a girl in a white cotton dress
 And I thought I must surely have died
 At Dungeness

Lai-da-dai-dai ...

The morning crept in like the tide
 I looked to the North, but I saw not a trace
 of the woman who'd lain at my side
 I looked to the South trying to picture the face
 Of the girl who had shown me such brief happiness
 Who for one blessed night was my bride
 At Dungeness

Lai-da-dai-dai ...

Now time is a river of sand
 Time is a door with a lock you can't pick
 or the salt in the palm of your hand
 Time is a wall that we build brick by brick
 And there's nowhere to hide from your own emptiness
 And I swore I would never return
 At Dungeness

EARTHENWARE WALTZ, THE (1993)

Words and Music © 1993 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*

Grandfather clock strikes the hour of romance
Upstairs the Master is deep in a trance
Down in the kitchen the dancers prepare for the dance
And they dance

Saucers and pitchers and casserole pots
Tea cups and trivets with white
 polka dots
Leaping and gliding like leopards all changing their spots
And why not?

Twirling and turning in full somersaults
With their chips and their cracks and their second-hand faults
Dancing this magical dance called the Earthenware Waltz

Small butter dishes, big dinner plates
Glasses and goblets all paired with
 their mates
Look to the counter and pause as the tempo abates
And they wait

A fancy salt-shaker, a sleek pepper mill
Are poised in the moonlight, perfectly still
Then they whirl into life at a tempo so fast it could kill
And it will

Twirling and turning in full somersaults
With their chips and their cracks and their second-hand faults
Dancing this magical dance called the Earthenware Waltz
The salt strikes two dancers
Who topple and crash
And bring two more down with a shatter and smash
Everything stops,
Everything suddenly halts
In the Earthenware Waltz

Pieces of vases of flowers and fluff
Are mixed up with china and fancier stuff
And up on the stairs, the Master declares "That's enough!
Quite enough."

Chastened and chastised by what they've just seen
Salad bowls, candle sticks, big soup tureens
Go back to their cabinets, back to their Earthenware dreams

And they dream ...

Of twirling and turning in full somersaults
With their chips and their cracks and their second-hand faults
Dancing this magical dance called the Earthenware Waltz

ENTEBBE BLUES (2013)

Words and Music © 2013 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

Broken down at a petrol stand
African night makes it feel like a no man's land
Poor driver's down on his luck
With no car how the hell's he gonna make a buck ...
And I'm wonderin' where all the money flows ...
God only knows

CHORUS:

High crimes in the light of day
Bad people tryin' to frighten the better ones away
Bad feelin' 'bout the world today
I got them Entebbe Blues and they're not goin' not goin' away

I ask the man about the petrol line
Why's everybody buyin' gas one liter at a time?
Man tells me it's the local curse
A full tank makes you target for thieves or worse ...
And I'm wonderin' just where this story goes
God only knows

CHORUS

Three thousand people are superwealthy
A couple billion spend their lives in abject misery
Twenty cars in this petrol line
The three thousand just say, "what's mine is mine"
And I'm wonderin' what all these numbers show ...
God only knows

CHORUS

EPIPHANY DREAM (1985)

Words and Music © 1985 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*
(Originally appeared in the Fast Folk Musical Magazine)

It was the time of the change
 When the angels came down
 And built a place to receive us
 At the edge of the sea
 I was frightened, and I was joyful
 And then I took my turn inside
 When they gave me their blessing
 I believed ... and there was

Water flowing from my hands
 Like a water wheel
 Water flowing from my hands
 It felt so real
 Water flowing from my hands
 And it could heal, heal, heal

Well I was totally changed
 From my head to my heels
 I surrendered up my fear
 I lay my burdens down
 And I was helping the sick and the aged
 To take their turns inside
 When I saw someone injured
 I believed ... and there was

Water flowing from my hands
 Like a water wheel
 Water flowing from my hands
 It felt so real
 Water flowing from my hands
 And it could heal, heal, heal

It was the time of the change
 When the angels came down
 It was a time of great rejoicing
 A new hope filled the air
 And every man and woman came
 To take their turns inside
 When I awoke from my dream
 I could almost believe ... that there was

Water flowing from my hands ...

EVERYTHING IS NEW (1996)

Words and Music © 1996 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

I'm a simple man
but I'm living a complicated life
out in no man's land
somewhere between my lover and my wife
I'm a lonely mountaineer
climbin' up into your atmosphere

And I know
you say
that I'll go back to my old life some day
but you know
me well
enough to know that I am simply telling the truth
I am so in love with you
everything is new

I was married young
I've seen a lot of laughter and some tears
but all my songs were sung
and my sails had been stowed away for years
but then your storm came over me
and blew my ship back out to sea

And I know ...

I had to think it over
I had to work it through
Could I stay under cover
When all I want is to be with you

There's nothin' up my sleeve
but I feel like I found my lucky charm
'cause I just can't believe
the way I feel when I hold you in my arms
it's no trick, or sleight of hand
it's just that I'm a happy man

And I know ...

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH (1999)

Words and Music © 1999 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

Here's a story meant to warn you or enlighten you or both
 It's a little complicated but you really need to knowth
 About this dangerous phenomenon — I swear to you an oath
 That there's trouble in this world from all the Exponential Growth

Exponential Growth — Oh! — Exponential Growth
 Yes there's trouble in this world from all the Exponential Growth
 Exponential Growth — Look out for! — Exponential Growth
 You can run but you can't hide from all the Exponential Growth

A rate of 2% per year may sound like things are going slowth
 But that's really very fast as my example soon will showth
 There's six people now, there will be twelve if on it goeth
 in just 35 more years because of Exponential Growth

Exponential Growth — Oh! — Exponential Growth
 You can run but you can't hide from all the Exponential Growth
 Exponential Growth — Look out for! — Exponential Growth
 What's that creeping up behind you? — yes, it's Exponential Growth

If I sing along on one note and I slowly raise the pitch
 I can demonstrate the process — note just *when I make a switch
 Seems like nothing much is happening, it's *just a little rise
 But the *changes come much *faster and you're
 *sud-*den-*ly-*up-*to-*your-*eyes!

in all the ...

Exponential Growth — Oh! — Exponential Growth
 You can run but you can't hide from all the Exponential Growth
 Exponential Growth — Look out for! — Exponential Growth
 What's that creeping up behind you? — yes, it's Exponential Growth

To reinforce the message of this song I have compothed
 Here's another demonstration of just why this is the motht
 subtle danger that we face if we just let society coatht
 (*speeding up*) We'll go faster-faster-faster thanks to exponential growth

(*faster and faster*)

Exponential Growth — Oh! — Exponential Growth
 You can run but you can't hide from all the Exponential Growth
 Exponential Growth — Look out ...
 (*unintelligible blur of speeding syllables, coming to a sudden stop*)

(*slowly*)

Exponential Growth!

** When performing this song live, pantomime the path of an exponential growth curve. The "*" indicates both where the melody changes, and where the singer pantomimes slight rises in the curve, until the curve rockets straight up.*

EXTINCTION BLUES (1991)

Words and music © 1991 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whole Lotta Shoppin' Goin' On*

The dodo bird's gone bye-bye
 The great auk's squawked his last
 The chimpanzee's endangered and
 The whales are goin' fast

I got the extinction blues
 Lord, where have your species gone
 We'll get more from evolution
 But it takes so goddam long

There's a single ashy dogwood
 Growin' on a Texas trace
 And when that lone tree dies
 There'll be none to take its place

I got the extinction blues
 Lord, I don't know what to do
 Cause the way that things are goin'
 We'll kill 'em all before we're through

The giant Stellar's manatee has quit the Bering Sea
 The Carolina parakeet checked out, and took the key
 The tiny Toolach's wallaby left his payments in arrears
 And we'll never see another in a hundred million years

[kazoo solo]

[Repeat bridge]

We must do something quickly
 'Bout this terrifying trend
 Or the next endangered species
 Will be *homo sapiens*

I got the extinction blues
 Lord, where have your species gone
 We'll get more from evolution
 But it takes so goddam long

EYES OF THE HUNTER (1986)

Music and lyrics © 1986 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Lonely hart in the eyes of the hunter
I follow where you roam –
If he fires and you perish in thunder,
how will I find my way home?

Lonely hart in a veil of winter
prancing in the snow,
you've put your life in the sights of a hunter –
How could you ever know?

Flashing eyes
under stormy skies –
danger is fast on your heels

Running wild
for a hundred miles,
chased by the longings you feel

Run away ...
Run away ...

Lonely hart on the crest of a mountain
crying out in pain,
shoulder scarred by the shot of a gunman
who hangs down his head in shame ...

Streak of light
on a moonless night
burning straight into my heart

A bullet hole
makes my blood run cold –
it's tearin' my whole world apart

Run away ...
Run away ...

[instrumental]

Lonely hart in a vision of wonder
standing in the light,
your life is spared, for I am the hunter –
Where will you lead me tonight?

Run away ...
Run away ...

GALLIPOLI (1991)

Words and Music © 1991 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*

It was the summer of my twentieth year — there was a hint of autumn
 When the recruiters came to town
 They told us of the reasons for war, the evil Kaiser Wilhelm
 And the Turks of the Ottoman

We wanted to be heroes and men
 We swore to be soldiers and friends
 But we couldn't know how it would end
 On the beaches of Gallipoli

In a year we were down in the boats, we had our ammunition
 We were ready, to a man
 But the landing was a little bit rough — there were some complications
 With the Allied battle plan

We dug trenches in the hot Turkish sun
 Calmed our fears with a ration of rum
 Cleaned the sand and salt from our guns
 On the beaches of Gallipoli

Sunset, all on alert,
 Air still as death, I was fightin' off a fever when a
 Shot rang out, couldn't tell who fired first, someone
 Pumped off a round, the machine guns started roaring then the
 Shells came in, Johnny Turk was gettin' mad, but he
 Didn't have the range — the explosions came closer then
 Blast hit the trench, knocked me on my ass, there were
 Seven men dead right before my very eyes, then my
 Buddy went down, shrapnel in the chest,
 Blood like a river, I called for the stretcher, told him
 "Try to hang on!" — he took my hand like a vise, said
 "Billy, I'm not gonna make it out of here alive"

There was a hill called Teke Tepe, it was a Turk position
 We had to win at any price
 We were two hundred fifty men strong, we were the best of Norfolk —
 We would make the sacrifice

The Colonel gave the order to run
 We charged into the blaze of the guns
 And they cut us down, every last one
 On the beaches of Gallipoli

Oh - ohhhhh ...

It's a long long way to Tipperary

(Based on soldiers' diaries from World War I)

GDP SONG, THE (1996)

Words and Music © 1996 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whole Lotta Shoppin' Goin' On*

(Sung to the tune of an old Latvian tavern melody,
courtesy of Valdis Bisters)

Margaretta went out shopping
Bought a pair of nylon stockings
Ripped them on her finger nail
And threw them in the garbage pail — and

GDP's rising
GDP's rising
Buy buy buy
Dollars in the sky
Dol-la-la-la-la-la — HEY!

Johann bought a brand new car
Celebrated at the bar
And drove his car into a tree
That's good for the economy, 'cause

GDP's rising ...

The Exxon captain went below
And told the mate to take 'er slow
But no one saw the reef ahead —
And now a million birds are dead, and

GDP's rising ...

Yuki's a sarariman
With a corporation called Japan
Sings karaoke, that's a perk —
His cause of death was overwork, and

GDP's rising ...

Sheikh Abdullah took some dough
Flew his jet to Mexico
And bought an Aztec pyramid —
Oil makes the highest bid, and

GDP's rising ...

Yakov made a small mistake
Began to tremble and to shake

And then he made six errors more
And melted the reactor core — and

GDP's rising ...

Send the army out on marches
Cover them with golden arches
Blow them up and sell around a
Hundred million quarter-pounders

GDP's rising ...

One-point-two billion Chinese
A giant market for TVs
Cars and colas — make it snappy!
Who care if it makes them happy!

GDP's rising ...

Shoot a rocket out to space
Paint the moon with Mickey's face
We'll name our planet "Disney" then
Sell tickets to the aliens — and

GDP's rising
GDP's rising
Buy buy buy
Dollars in the sky
Dol-la-la-la-la-la — HEY!

GHOST STORY (1995)

Words and Music © 1995 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

I went home to Beaufort by the sea
to take refuge in friends and family
but I was haunted by an apparition
like shade made of light
shade made of light

I stood still, and listened with my heart
I heard a voice there, like an echo in the dark
"Can you help me — can you tell my story ..."
Then it faded it away
Faded away

No one spoke of the man who'd come around
He was a white boy from the other side of town
She took the baby in her Daddy's rowboat
And she washed it away
Washed her away ...

"Can't you see
how lonely she'd be ...
I couldn't bear
to watch her grow up lonely
when I'm so lonely here ...
Forgive me
Forgive me
Forgive me ..."

I bowed my head and spoke prayer out loud
Then I raised my voice up to the laughter and the clouds
"Please believe me — we are all forgiven
You can go on your way
Go on your heavenly way ...
Can you hear me
Can you hear me
Can you hear me ..."

Written in Beaufort, North Carolina, Summer 1995

GOIN' TO THE TOP (2001)

Words and music © 2001 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

The sky is bright
Streaks of light
And we know this isn't any ordinary night
You know it's true
'Cause me and you
And everybody here can see

CHORUS

We're goin' to the top
We've got know that we're goin'
Nothing can stand in your way
When you make your own road

We're goin' to the top
We've got to feel that it's comin'
I believe it's our time to stand
In the promised land

Don't look down
We're off the ground
And we're never ever going to stop or turn around
Gaining speed
Guess we'll need
To get ready for a very fast climb

CHORUS

We used to think we'd never be here
We used to think we'd couldn't fly
But now we know that we belong here
And all we had to do was try

Can you see
What I see
We're coming closer to a new reality
So take my hand
'Cause when we land
We'll be standin' on the top of the world

CHORUS

HÄR KOMMER DE NYA

Words and Music © 2002 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased
Written for Saga AtKisson & Max Henningson

Här kommer de nya
De som ska leva kvar
När vi har vår vinter
De ska sommar da:r

Vi här lovar att lära
Er som inte kan så mycket än
Vi vill ge Er
Ett härligt liv

Ni kom med våren
Med ljuset och fågelsång
Har inte gått ett steg
Och vägen är väldigt lång

Vi här lovar att visa
Er som inte sett så mycket än
Vi vill ge Er
Ett härligt liv

Och namnen som
Ni får idag
Är bara ord som
Ni ska ha ett tag
Men vem ni är
Bara ni kan säga
Och det längtar vi att se ...

För ni är de nya
Ni som ska leva kvar
När vi här har lämnat
Vår glädje och vårt besvär

Vi här lovar att lyssna på
Er som inte säger mycket än
Vi vill ge er
Ett härligt liv

Vi här lovar att lyssna på
Er som inte säger mycket än
Vi önskar er
Ett härligt liv

HELLO, DEATH

Words and Music © 2013 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Hello, Death
I hope you hear me calling
Yes, I know, Death
There's no time for stalling

I don't know if you are just around the corner or
far away
Could it be the words I'm saying are the last ones that
I'll ever say

Listen up, Death
That's your phone that's ringing
With my last breath
I will go down singing

I suspect that when you come I will object that I have
never felt stronger
You can only kill me once so I suggest you wait a
little bit longer

Don't go, Death
I'm not finished talking
Me and you, Death
We're both dead men walking

I guess you know that the whole Universe eventually will
fade away
Is it comforting to think you will also have a
dying day?

You'll have a dying day ...

HORMONE HAVOC (1996)

Words and Music © by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whole Lotta Shoppin' Goin' On*

So let me in ... troduce myself
 You think I'm some kind of chemical elf
 Who increases your economic wealth, well
 I got some news for you

So listen up — better get this straight
 I'm closing in on your sexual mate
 I'm in that snack that your kid just ate, and
 I'm comin' for you

So say hello
 Say how-de-do
 To this little evil inside of you
 I ain't your normal hormone
 I'm a chemical corruptor
 A mean molecule
 Called an endocrine disruptor

I'm goin' out — on the town tonight
 I'll hit all your receptor sites
 You may think they're locked up tight, but
 I've got a skeleton key

I'll go in — and just hang around
 Blockin' out those hormonal clowns
 And sending phony messages that mess around
 With your gender identity

So say hello ...

Mother's milk — caviar
 You'll find that I'm in every ounce
 PCBs — DDT
 And a host of other chemicals you can't pronounce

I'll make it hard — to procreate
 You won't make past the second date
 If your penis size is second rate —
 How does three inches sound to you?

And here's the point — I want to emphasize
 You'll never stare into your baby's eyes
 If I cut your sperm count down to size

And that's just what I'm gonna do

So say hello
Say how-de-do
To this little evil inside of you
I ain't your normal hormone
I'm a chemical corruptor
A mean molecule — mad molecule — evil molecule
Called an endocrine disruptor

[I'd like to thank all the chemical companies of the world for making our show possible this evening ... Good night folks ... and good luck.]

Written in Csopak, Hungary, 2 September 1996

*with thanks to the authors of Our Stolen Future, Theo Colburn,
Dianne Dumanoski, and Pete Myers*

I LOVE, THEREFORE I AM (1992)

Words and Music © 1992 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

Something's come over me
 Something's got hold of my heart
 Something's trying to break me open
 And it's tearing me apart
 Standing in the pouring rain
 Trying to let these tears of joy wash away the pain

I used to be a rational man
 Who said "I think, and therefore I am"
 But all of my philosophizing
 Was just a zephyr in the sand
 I listen to the church bells toll
 And suddenly I understand the logic of my soul

I love, therefore I am
I love, therefore I am

I wish that I could right every wrong
 I wish I could embrace every child
 I wish that I could tear these walls down
 And let the love go running wild
 I don't know just where to start
 But I've got to listen to the message of my breaking heart

I love, therefore I am
I love, therefore I am

Something's come over me
 Something's got hold of my heart
 Something's trying to break me open
 Oh I can feel the healing start
 Standing in the pouring rain
 Letting all these tears of joy just wash away the pain

I love, therefore I am
I love, therefore I am

We love, therefore we are
We love, therefore we are

I MET A MAN (1984)

Words and Music © 1984 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

I met a man whose heart was full of wine
like the summertime
And his love was twisted up inside his veins
like a candy cane
He said, "I live my life in bottles and in bars
I spend my nights in old abandoned cars
And I drink myself half blind to see the stars"

I met a man whose heart was full of gold
He was very cold
And his love was buried deep inside his mind
Like an ancient rhyme
He said, "I keep what's mine and take what others give
And that's okay 'cause it's all relative
For if I were poor I'd rather die than live"

I met a man whose heart was full of light
Like an angel's flight
And love shone in his hands and in his eyes
He came from Paradise
He said, "My love for you is deeper than the sea
And I've come to show you how to love like me
For love is the truth that makes you free"

I VOLUNTEER (1997)

Words and Music © 1997 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

How much is enough?
How much does anyone require?
Can I be both kind and tough?
Can I put faith before desire?
Right now, for all time,
I vow to try ...

I volunteer to be simple
I volunteer to love
Every living thing
Like a mountain stream
That flows out o'er the land
I volunteer for the journey
From here to heaven's gate
I will do my part
I place my heart
In Your gracious hands ...

How then shall we live?
Let us live lightly as a feather
How much shall we give?
Let us give everything, together
One heart, one mind
All humankind ...

I volunteer ...

In Memory of Joe Dominguez

I'LL BE (1998)

Words and Music © 1998 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

When grandpa came to visit
 For the first and only time
 We were waiting for him at the airport
 And I was the first in line
 And when he'd landed in Orlando
 He hugged me to his chest
 And I could smell that Ozark farmland on his Sunday best

Grandpa'd never left the heartland
 He'd spend his whole life growing hay
 So we drove straight to the Atlantic
 To see the ocean and the waves
 And as the girls in their bikinis
 Lay there giggling on the beach
 He muttered over and over, like an incantation
 He was trying to teach

Well I'll be
 I'll be
 There's just water for as far as you can see
 Well I'll be
 I'll be
 Won't you take me down and let me taste the sea

My grandpa was a sweet man
 He had a great big chucklin' laugh
 He was a genius with machinery
 He could be tender with a newborn calf
 But I'd heard my father's stories
 He hadn't always been that way
 He hadn't always been this gentle man
 Who could only say

Well I'll be ...

Seven years and summers later
 In the hot Missouri shade
 I was sittin' with my Grandpa
 We were sippin' lemonade
 And I heard him say distinctly
 "I was too hard on them kids
 "And I wish to God there was some way
 "I could undo the things I did ..."

At my father's funeral supper
I held my grandpa to my chest
And I could smell that Ozard farmland
On his Sunday best
He was so old he was like a baby
And he'd been crying half the day
But in my mind he was still the man
Who taught me how to say

Well I'll be ...

IF THE TREES WERE THE PEOPLE (1995)

Words and Music © 1995 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

If the trees were the people
And the people were the trees
We'd stand like a forest
At the edge of the sea
And the forests would wander
Just as far as they pleased
If the trees were the people
And the people were the trees

If the sky were the ocean
And the ocean were the sky
We'd look up in wonder
At the whales swimming by
And the children would frolic
In the clouds off Shanghai
If the sky were the ocean
And the ocean were the sky

If the heart were the spirit
And the spirit were the heart
We'd laugh at life's ending
And grieve at it's start
And we'd raise mighty anthems
To the souls who depart
If the heart were the spirit
And the spirit were the heart

If a song had the power
And the power had a song
I'd sing every moment
I'd sing all night long
And I'd sing revelations
In a voice loud and strong
If my song had the power
And the power had a song

INDICATOR (2010)

Words and Music © 2010 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

I come home from a hard day
And I find a note with my name
Stuck to our refrigerator
It's a little indicator
Of her love

I lay down on my pillow
And I catch the scent of her hair
Like a hint of what comes later
It's another indicator
Of her love

There's that sweet little rhythm that I feel when we're walkin'
And all those hours that she listens to me talkin'
And the way she smiles and says "Hey, I understand"
All the stupid things I do that she just dismisses
And a million goodbye and hello little kisses
And there's two growin' kids and two rings on her hand ...

I wake up to a brand new morning
And the sun lifts my soul to the sky
Like some cosmic elevator
It's a damn fine indicator
Of her love

INVISIBLE MAN (1983)

Words and Music © 1983 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*

Cold winter, heavy snow
I'm out walkin' but I don't know where I'm goin'
Unnoticed and unseen
Am I living in the world or in a dream?

High mountains, foreign lands
No matter where I go, seems that I'm stranded
In shadow, endless night
Somewhere between the darkness and the light

The people all around me
They're piled into a heap
I stare into their faces
Everyone's asleep

No matter what I do
I can't get through
I'm somewhere out of view
I'm the invisible man

Love loses, love regains
We're spun round and given nothing for our pains
And our passions — what we feel
We can't tell what is false from what is real

My heart is bursting open
My mind has sprung a leak
My soul has been forgotten
My body's getting weak

No matter what I do
I can't get through
I'm somewhere out of view
I'm the invisible man

I'm still waiting for the chance
To make you become my partner in this dance
Of desire — what's your name?
We're jumpin' from the fire into the flame

We hold each other tightly
You stare into my eyes
You tell me that you want me
I'm lost in my disguise

No matter what I do
I can't get through
I'm somewhere out of view

I'm the invisible man

IONA (1998)

Words and Music © 1998 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

If your soul has grown weary
 If your well of dreams has run dry
 If your heart of gold has gotten rusty
 If your soaring laughter cannot fly
 There's a place you can go to
 It's really not hard to find
 Close your eyes and say, "Iona!"
 You can be there anytime ...

Take me back to old Iona's shores
 Let me dance with the ocean and the rain
 Feel the wind blow open all the doors
 I won't rest till I see that shining isle of light again

Take your fears and your worries
 And throw them right out to sea
 But keep passions and your inspirations
 They'll lead you home eventually
 Take your vain invocations
 And toss them up to the wind
 But keep your curses and your imprecations
 They come in handy now and then

Take me back to old Iona's shores ...

Now every life has its summer
 And every love an autumn brings
 Every poem is full of winter
 Every song is full of spring
 Every heart is an island
 And every soul is the sea
 Everyone is living on Iona
 So it ever was and ever more shall be

Take me back to old Iona's shores ...

*(Iona is a tiny island off the west coast of Scotland,
 the burial site of kings, and a place of pilgrimage for
 those enchanted by its spiritual history and wild
 beauty. This song was written on its southern-most
 promontory, in the wind and rain ...)*

ISN'T THERE SOMEONE HERE (2004)

Words and Music © 2004 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

We drove out to the Dales on the equinox
 Brendan and Karen and Sophie and me
 And Brendan liked to tell us dirty limericks
 "There once was a man named Horatio," said he
 And when we joined up with our friends
 Brendan said, "Let the fun begin ..."

We would talk every night of the books we read
 Shakespeare and Plato and Stevens and Jung
 And Brendan said "The soul is like an empty bed"
 Quotations fell trippingly off of his tongue
 When we came at last to Freud
 Brendan seemed so overjoyed ... (He said)

Isn't there someone here you might like to sleep with
 Isn't there someone here
 Isn't there someone here you might like to sleep with
 Isn't there someone here

The room filled with signs of our nervousness
 Quick furtive glances and intakes of breath
 And Brendan winked and smiled, and just looked at us
 The gleam in his eye nearly scared us to death
 And we each wrote down some names
 And Brendan said "Now let's play a Game ..."

Isn't there someone here you might like to sleep with ...

The sun broke the spell with a summer dawn
 We stood up abruptly and trudged off to sleep
 And Karen came to my bed like a nervous fawn
 I kissed her sweet hair as she started to weep
 And now the years have come and gone
 And now the memory's just a song

Isn't there someone here you might like to sleep with ...

JERRY'S GUITAR (1997)

Words and Music © 1997 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Dear Michael, I've got bad news
The guitar's okay, don't worry
It's just looking a bit more used
I had it repaired in a hurry

I'd just changed the strings on this beauty
I'd just changed the strings on this beauty

I stacked up some books too high
They fell on its face, with a clatter
I was so mad, I started to cry
But I knew you'd be madder

Cuz it's Jerry's guitar
I'd just changed the strings on this beauty
Jerry's guitar
I'd just changed the strings on this beauty

If you don't look too close you won't notice there's a crack
just above the pick guard
You can make it good as new with some glue and some laquer
it's really not so bad
I kind of think Jerry'd like it better this way

Berkeley, Spring 1997

Written for Michael Klein, on the occasion of returning to him a guitar that he had loaned me, which had once been played by Jerry Garcia, and which I had allowed to be damaged in the way described

LAND HOLD ME (1983)

Words and Music © 1983 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Whitewing*

Land hold me
The sky is calling me away
Into the crystal blue glow of a dream
Telling me life never is what it seems to be

Rain wash me
The land has soiled my dreams
I'm laying face to the ground and I'm bruised
I never knew that the Earth was so hard to move

Sun warm me
The rain has melted my heart away
Give me the strength to endure what I feel
Seems like you have to get hurt just to heal your wounds

Sky breathe for me
The sun has taken my breath away
Shinin' so beautiful bright like an eagle's eye
Tellin' me never to quit till the day my soul
decides to fly

THE LAST DICE (2010)

Words and Music © 2010 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

Head hangin' low
Eyes bleary
I shuffle round
in Istanbul

Never been so
world weary
Empty head
And a heart too full

Oh - ohhh - ohhh
Oh - ohhh - ohhh

The scent of spice
and salt water
draw me down
to the Bosphorus

In the fading light
On the black water
I look for signs
That there's hope for us

Oh ...

Longing for a future that is past
Like Ulysses lash me to the mast
Sailing on the sea of here and now

Sharp minarets
In the first starlight
Draw my gaze
To an empty sky

I place my bet
On the long shot
Take the last dice
And let them fly

LATE-NITE LITTER SONG, THE (2004)

Words and Music © 2004 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

You're walkin' down the beach, soakin' in the sunshine
You see an old tire soakin' in the salt brine

You're trippin' down the street and oh! the city spangles!
A fast-food wrapper wraps around your ankles

You want to find the guy who ruined your day
You want to tweak him on the nose and say ...

CHORUS:

Pick it up!
Pack it out!
When you see somebody throw it on the ground,
Give a shout!

Pick it up!
Pack it out!
Yeah, your dirty, nasty litter's somethin'
Planet Earth can do without!

A groovy dude is shootin' hoops at the dustbin
But when he misses he just tunes out your fussin'

You're in the garden stickin' seeds in the soil
A cigarette butt starts your blood to boil

You want to find the one who did this thing
You want to tweak them on the ear and sing ...

CHORUS

A mountain of garbage is growin' in the world
It's enough to make you lose your cool — yeah!
So go ahead and lose it — let your voice be heard
Express yourself to those littering fools! Say ...

REPEAT CHORUS ... for as long as you have the audience with you ...

Written in Melbourne, Australia, May 2004

LET ME NEVER (SIXTEEN MILES) (1986)

Music and lyrics © 1986 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Sixteen months on the road
 sixteen miles left to go
 till I see you again —
 just a little longer
 Almost too tired to move
 till I think about how you
 said "Come see me again" —
 I start feeling stronger

Tryin' to figure out some special thing to say
 To let you know that I'm finally here to stay ...

CHORUS:
 Let me lay down beside you
 Let me always be with you
 Let me never stray from you arms again

I been on the road so long
 I forgot where I belong
 and that's right here with you —
 I just kept on drivin'
 Puttin' miles on the van
 puttin' miles on the man
 though my heart was here with you —
 and your light was shinin'

All them smoky bars and Paradise Motels
 I love my music, but sometimes the road's just hell
 CHORUS

Sixteen months on the road
fifteen miles left to go
 till I see you again —
 just a little longer
 Almost too tired to move
 till I think about how you
 said "Come see me again" —
 I start feeling stronger

Tryin' to figure out some special thing to say
 To let you know that I'm finally here to stay ...

LICHEN SONG, THE (1991)

Words and Music © 1991 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whole Lotta Shoppin' Goin' On*

Once there was a fungus — Freddy was his name
Said "There's no love for me among us, all these fungi look the same."
So he took himself a courtin' down to where the green things grow
Met some algae name of Alice, and she set his heart aglow

CHORUS:

Freddy Fungus and Alice Algae took a LICHEN to each other
They grew so very close that now you cain't tell one from t'other
Now those lichens lead a simple life, they never are alone —
Alice does the cookin', and Freddy builds the home

Freddy said "Oh Alice, you've made my life complete,"
But Alice said, "Now Freddy, there's something else we need.
Got to have some lichen children — little ones like you and me,"
So they broke themselves in pieces, and that's how lichens came to be

CHORUS

So if you're a lonesome fungus, and you're hungry too besides,
Better hook up with somebody who can photosynthesize
And if you love each other, as all good couples do,
And take vows of symbiosis, you can be a lichen too!

CHORUS

LIFE HAS TOLD ME (1983)

Words and Music © 1983 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*

Bone tired and bleary-eyed
 I went home to find the reason for my fears
 in childhood tears
 And in some familiar place
 I was hypnotized by the hungry face of time
 It froze my mind
 A night colder
 One day older
 It's a sign of what's in store
 Come hold me
 Life has told me
 You're all I'm lookin' for

Well do you know the price of hate
 It's a sinister and bitter fate, and friend
 It never ends
 You can damage your immortal soul
 You can put yourself on that devil's roll of names
 You're washed in shame
 Storm's breakin'
 The earth is shakin'
 With the signs of what's in store
 Come hold me
 Life has told me
 You're all I'm lookin' for

Please release me from the fire in my brain
 I never want that gate to fall
 Can you help set my soul free from his chains
 I can still hear the demon call

Deep in the coal-black night
 There's a terrifying but loving light that shines
 Clean through your mind
 I pack up, I turn my head
 I leave those anxious fears for dead
 'Cause I know
 It's time to go
 The world's waitin'
 I been hesitatin'
 At the signs of what's in store
 Come hold me

Life has told me
You're all I'm lookin' for

LIKE A GIANT TREE (2006)

Words and Music © 2006 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Outside your door
There's a world that's hurtin'
You've heard this before
But one thing is certain
We've got to make it better
We've got to work together
It's got to show
And this much I know ...

Like a giant tree, we'll stand strong
Like the wind in the trees, we'll sing songs
Like the deepest roots, we'll keep diggin' down
And like the branches we'll keep reachin' ...

Out in the storm
And inside the boardroom
Got to help this get born
Emerge from the Earth's womb
We've got to stand together
No matter what the weather
We're going to grow
Cause this much I know ...

Like a giant tree, we'll stand strong
Like the wind in the trees, we'll sing songs
Like the deepest roots, we'll keep diggin' down
And like the branches we'll keep reachin' out ...

LOVE-LOVIN' LOVER (1995)

Words and Music © 1995 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

She wakes me up when the sun comes up in the mornin'
She takes me down in the heat of the afternoon
She stands close when the stars come out in the evenin'
And holds me tight in the light of the summer moon
Doesn't matter what celestial body shines above her

She's my love-lovin' lover
Love-lovin' lover

She starts to purr when the temperature is risin'
I start to growl when the mercury runs high
And we howl when our hips start harmonizin'
And join a choir of coyotes on a summer night
And the tunes we do are all originals, not covers
Every time it's a brand new song
And we're singin' all night long
She's my love-lovin' lover

I go to church where her kisses preach the sermon
I take communion at the altar of her face
I thank the lord for the way she keeps returnin'
To show me revelations in her warm embrace
You can find her just below where all the angels hover
I'm a student at her Sunday School
I'm a holy-rollin' fool
For my love-lovin' lover

MAXIE (THE MANATEE) (1999)

Words & Music © 1999 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

She swims upstream in winter
 Comes back to the sea in June
 She's huge, and gray, and bulky
 But somehow kind of cute
 She lives in our marina
 Comes right up to our dock
 And if we had a door,
 I think she'd knock

CHORUS:

Maxie the Manatee
 visits every day
 She says, "Can you come out to play?"
 I'll push your boat from here to there
 Turn my belly in the air
 Will you scratch me, just like yesterday?"

Now a manatee is gentle
 It just swims, and feeds, and floats
 But mama says that they're in danger
 From people and their boats
 Mama says that Maxie's different
 'Cause she's sharp as a tack
 But I worry about those marks
 Across her back

CHORUS

She came back again last summer
 When I turned ten years old
 And she had a little baby
 Who cuddled, splashed and rolled
 We called the babe "Cecilia"
 That's the name my mama picked
 And Maxie taught Cecilia
 All her tricks

CHORUS (different the third time)

Maxie the Manatee
 brings Cecilia every day
 She says, "Can you come out to play?"

We'll push your boat from here to there
Turn our bellies in the air
Will you scratch us, just like yesterday?"

Yesterday ...

MOON'S BEST FRIEND (1994)

Words and Music © 1994 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

My first memories are of snow
 Sledding through white crystal, as fast as we could go
 You were my motorman, and I too young to know
 your name

My young mother pampered me
 My father was an older man who turned me cross his knee
 And you were the boy who my parents hired to be
 my friend

Would you read me that story 'bout the moon's best friend
 Pick me up — swing me round again
 My heart comes all undone
 Can I tell you how it feels to be two years old

When we went camping in the west
 At the edge of the Grand Canyon, you put a harness round my chest
 You were my bridleman, and I was always testing
 the rope

And when my baby sis was born
 My mom was always sleeping, and I was all forlorn
 You took me out in the street to see the morning star

Would you read me that story 'bout the moon's best friend
 Pick me up — swing me round again
 My heart comes all undone
 Can I tell you how it feels to be two years old

And when my family moved away
 We left behind my sandbox, and a dog who'd learned to stay
 And you became a ghost in my memory as you waved
 goodbye

Would you read me that story 'bout the moon's best friend
 Pick me up — swing me round again
 My heart comes all undone
 Can I tell you how it feels to be three years old

Written in Seattle, 1994

NOTHIN' AT ALL (1995)

Words and Music © 1995 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

Take my car so I can't go nowhere
Take my phone so I don't have to answer the call
Take the TV so I won't watch none
Keep takin' till I don't have nothin' at all

Nothin' at all
Nothin' at all

Take the lamp — I don't need no light here
Take the chair and I'll just sit facin' the wall
Take some money so I won't have too much
Keep takin' till I don't have nothin' at all

Nothin' at all
Nothin' at all

Late one night
you tell me a story —
You get to the part about
the power and the glory
and it all hits home
and I start cryin'
and it's hell's own river
'cause I know you been lyin' to me

Take my eyes so I won't see the answer
Take my ears so I won't hear my name bein' called
Take off, and I'll just stay here
I'll have more than enough with nothin' at all

Nothin' at all
Nothin' at all

MIDSUMMER ISLAND (SURROUNDED BY BEAUTY) (2008)

Words and Music © 2008 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

Look how the rain begins
to make a dance on the sea
See how the sun returns
to drive this chill out of me
And the morning lasts forever
and forever fills the day
and the island knows a secret
that the evening longs to say

I am surrounded by beauty

Look how this little girl
has found a flower that has no name
She puts it in a vase
because she loves it all the same
And the flower fills the kitchen
with a scent I've never known
It melts my melancholy
and it tells me that I'm home, and that

I am surrounded by beauty

Look now
See how
It's all around

Look now
See how
It's all around you ...

See how the stars all search
across the depths of outer space
Look - now their light has reached
my favorite features on your face
And the stars have found their purpose
and begin their lives anew
And there's something that they're singing
and they're singing just for you - They sing

I am surrounded by beauty ...

Utö, Sweden, 21 June 2008

PARACHUTING CATS, THE (1994)

Words and Music © 1994 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whole Lotta Shoppin' Goin' On*

Once upon a time down in Borneo
 There was a U.N. group called the W.H.O.
 They were doctors and bureaucrats from every nation
 Working for the World Health Organization ...
The key word there is "health"

Well they said, "We've come to take care of ya
 And cure this bad outbreak of malaria
 It's carried by mosquitos you can plainly see,"
 So they sprayed the whole countryside with D.D.T.

And the people slept sound in their beds
 Till their thatched roofs fell down on their heads
You see, it happened like this ...

There's a parasitic wasp whose eggs all hatch
 In a little caterpillar that feeds on thatch
 But the D.D.T. killed all the wasps at once
 And the caterpillars ate the roofs for lunch
That's what you call a rude awakening ...

Well the bureaucrats said, "We can fix this up,
 We'll put a new tin roof on every hut
 We know it's kind of ugly, and it's noisy too,
 But it's something that the caterpillars just can't chew"
Well, they had a point there ...

But the people were not happy still
 For they all became desperately ill
You see, it happened like this ...

The lizards ate the bugs, and got eaten by the cats,
 Who got a dose of D.D.T., and — *thptt* — that was that!
 So the rats went on this frenzied rat rampage
 And caused outbreaks of typhoid and sylvatic plague
*That's right, the plague, brought to you by the
 World HEALTH Organization ...*

Doesn't it just make you sick?

Well the bureaucrats knew things were out of hand
 So they gathered stray cats from every land
 They gave them little parachutes like G.I. Joe
 And they pushed them out of airplanes over Borneo

Remember, I did not make this up.

To make sure that you don't get me wrong
Here's the moral of my little song:

The Earth's a very complicated place
Like a living web of delicate lace
So if someone tries to tear it up, say "No!"
Or we'll be parachuting cats into Borneo

PICTURE OF YOU (1984)

Words and Music © 1984 by Alan AtKisson and Mark McColl - unreleased

Sometimes I see you here
Sometimes the picture's not so clear
Sometimes I get the fear that you never left at all

But when you say my name
It doesn't feel at all the same
Because we played that game and we never saw it through

I don't remember what you look like
When I try, I can't see through
All the years that cloud my mind —
I never had a picture of you

The passion made me high
I felt like we had wings to fly
But then you said goodbye, and you left without a trace

Now you say your life has changed
Well mine got rearranged
I feel so very strange when you say you're thinking of me

I don't remember what you look like
When I try, I can't see through
All the years that cloud my mind —
I never had a picture of you

We've been apart so long
The memory's not very strong
But when I wrote this song you came to see me in my dreams

I don't remember what you look like
When I try, I can't see through
All the years that cloud my mind —
I never had a picture of you

RAVEN, THE (1984)

Words and Music © 1984 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

[adapted from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"]

In the darkness of midnight, in the howling of a storm
I was hiding from my sorrow, reading books of ancient lore
Suddenly there came a tapping at my chamber door

I said "Who calls there?" to the darkness
There was darkness — only this and nothing more

So well I remember — I'll remember evermore —
How every dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor
And the darkness of December seemed to freeze my very core

When at the window came a tapping
Just a tapping, somewhat louder than before

Hoping she'd come back to me
I called her name out quietly
"Are you out there? Is your soul lost in the storm?"

Desperately I tried to see
Her face there looking back at me
But the face there
In the window
Was a raven
Quoth the raven, "Nevermore"

"By the heavens above us — by the God we both adore
"By all the unseen angels, O Raven, I implore,
"Tell me, is she waiting on some dark and distant shore?"

"Is she waiting?
"Will I find her?
"Can you tell me?"
Quoth the raven, "Nevermore."

Desperately I tried to see
Her face there looking back at me
But the face was not a face I'd seen before
Bird or prophet — thing of evil
Prophet still if bird or devil
Like an angel born of hell
"Nevermore"

Now the time has been passing, faster than before
And the raven still is sitting just above my chamber door
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor

And my soul from out that shadow,
From his shadow, shall be lifted ... Nevermore

RECYCLING GAME, THE (1992)

Words © 1992 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased
sung to the tune of "The Circle Game," by Joni Mitchell

Yesterday a mother ate a pickle
 went to throw the pickle jar away
 But her daughter said, "That jar is worth a nickel
 And there's a simple game that you can play."

She said "A pickle jar can go round and round
 "But the bad old garbage just hangs around
 "It sits there in the landfill for all time
 "So don't forget to REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE every day
 "Things go round and round and round in the Recycling Game."

The daughter tells her mom that it's just wasteful
 To use something once, and then throw it away
 She buys recycled things to show that she is tasteful
 And brings her own bags to the store on shopping day

Because recycled things go round and round
 But the bad old garbage just hangs around
 It sits there in the landfill for all time
 So don't forget to REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE every day
 Things go round and round and round in the Recycling Game.

The daughter says, "Don't buy things wrapped in plastic
 "Or packaged up with those white foam peanut shells
 "It's a simple change, it's really not so drastic
 "And it just might save us all from garbage hell."

Because recycled things go round and round
 But the bad old garbage just hangs around
 It sits there in the landfill for all time
 So don't forget to REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE every day
 Things go round and round and round in the Recycling Game.

(Repeat chorus)

REVEREND MOTHER (1989)

Words and Music © 1989 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*

I saw a sign
 It said the Reverend Mother will comfort you
 Distance and time
 Will not prevent her from discovering what troubles you
 She will banish the evil and beckon the good
 She lives in a nice refined neighbor
 Well that's understood ...

Flickering blue
 From a candle flame hung on a wicker rope
 She said "What can I do
 For a man with the face of abandoned hope?"
 And my palm lay in hers like a baby in bed
 She looked at me sadly just nodding her head
 And this is what she said

She said, "You're unlucky in love —
 You could one day be struck by a heart attack —
 You've got live for the moment and don't look back —
 And would you please pay in cash at the door."

If you've lost your job
 Or your loved one has left you, or you seek success
 The power of God
 Has been given to this woman of holiness
 She'll restore your lost manhood, and bring back your wife
 Without asking one question, she'll read your whole life
 And when she reads your life

She'll say, "You're unlucky in love —
 You could one day be struck by a heart attack —
 You've got leave her behind you, and don't look back —
 And would you please pay in cash at the door."

ROAD LIFE (1996)

Music and lyrics © 1996 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

They sailed the Winnebago to Wyoming
 Anchored down in Jackson Hole
 Somewhere on the highway they'd found Jesus
 Somewhere else, they'd lost their soul
 Churches and western bars, they'd hit them all
 Crosses or elk heads hangin' on the wall
 Preachers and barkeepers both announcin' the last call
 They kept drivin' on

Ronnie was an adman out of Georgia
 Fillin' space in magazines
 Mabel had these eyes that looked Egyptian
 So Ronnie called her Mabeline
 They'd been married nearly fourteen years
 Ronnie liked his bourbon and his import beers
 She would have divorced him if it weren't for all those fears
 They kept drivin' on

Road life

Road life

*There's a yellow line between a husband and a wife
 Chasin' storms, waitin' for a lightning bolt to strike, goin'
 Where the thunder goes
 Where the thunder goes*

One night at a party in Atlanta
 They got drunk drinkin' wine
 Mabel screwed her courage up and told him
 And Ronnie, well he just said "Fine."
 "Let's take the 'bago out and tour the west
 "Do some real soul-searchin', get things off our chest
 "If it don't work out, we'll give this marriage thing a rest" —
 And they kept drivin' on

Chorus

Jackson Hole just wasn't like they pictured
 Boutique malls and tourist herds
 They finally found a bar that served the locals
 And they started to preach the word
 One cowboy listened for a real good spell
 Fished in his pocket for a shotgun shell
 Laid it on the bar, and he said, "Go to hell"
 They kept drivin' on

Chorus

Drivin' toward the Tetons that same evening
They broke down — threw a rod
Ronnie started cursin' at the heavens
When Mabeline said "Oh my God"
 Down the valley come a great big light
 Ronnie and Mabeline were froze with fright
 When they woke up, well the sun was shining bright
 And the Winnebago ran just fine

(No chorus)

They pulled into a campground in the valley
Neither one had much to say
Sat outside the 'bago sippin' coffee
Watched the deer and the antelope play
 Went back to Georgia by the shortest way
 Ronnie, he stopped drinkin' and he joined AA
 And as for Mabeline, she still loves him to this day
 They're still drivin' on

Chorus

ROMANCE (1986)

Words and Music © 1986 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Ancient History*

Red light from a neon sign
reflects in a polychrome shine
and I'm standin' at a payphone, puttin' in a dime
for Romance

She says, "I'm so glad you called"
I'm waitin' for evening to fall
I'm gonna spend a little money, spend a little time
with Romance

[instrumental]

I'm making four sixty-five
I set some extra money aside
I know just how I'm gonna spend it, gonna buy a little present
for Romance

I'll buy something she can use
new dress, and a pair of red shoes
she's gonna click her heels together, tell me in a whisper,
"There's no place like home"

"A surprise ...
baby, just close your eyes"
she says, "I'm gonna love you twice tonight"
and she holds me, oh so tight
Then she sighs
pulls the sheets up real high
she says, "Why are you so damn nice to me?"
and silently, she cries

[instrumental]

Sunlight fills the afternoon
meets up with the smell of perfume
and they twirl around together, get to know each other better
in a slow dance

She tells me it's time to go
like I'm someone she don't even know
but it's not so bad now is it
'cause I've had my little visit
with Romance

Yeah, the world ain't so bad is it
when I've had my little visit
with Romance

Gonna spend a little money
spend a little time ...

SECRETS OF THE HEART (1984)

Words and Music © 1984 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Behind the mask of an impassive face
We yearn for paradise
Fear we can't pay the price
We run the mazes of the human race
More lost at every turn
As the walls start to burn
We're running faster but we never will arrive
Afraid that something's going to skin us alive
Oh why must we live so far apart?
We have to look into our lives
And learn the secrets of the heart

In the shelter of our endless fear
We have the perfect alibi
Life just passes us by
We close the door when understanding nears
Don't want to see our selves in her eyes
Clinging to lies
We're keeping secrets that we never want to tell
We make our privacy our own private hell
Oh why must we live so far apart?
We have to push aside the veil
And learn the secrets of the heart

Groping blindly towards that distant light
Even when hope is gone
Something's pulling us on
Towards a destiny we dare to fight
Trying with all our might
To stay lost in the night
We raise our voices to that heaven in the skies
We call for help but no one answers our cries
Oh why must we live so far apart?
We have to find that heaven inside
And learn the secrets of the heart

SET THE WORLD RIGHT AGAIN (2009)

Words and Music © 2009 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *American Troubadour*

Like a fire that you can't put out
A bad dream that you can't stop thinking about
An experiment you shouldn't have run
This world is a child with a gun

You want to put the train on some new track
End the tragedy before they start the last act
Get the help of every woman and man
Stop the madness any way you can

And set the world right again
As if none of this had ever been
Let the story have a happy ending
Set the world right again

Your objective is to turn the tide
In a game of risk and danger - and you have to choose sides
It's a game you have no choice but to play
And you wonder if there's any way

To set the world right again
As if none of this had ever been
Let the story have a happy ending
Set the world right again

There are voices that say that it's already too late
There are voices that drown out each other in debate
There are voices that claim that there's no place to start
But the only voice to listen to
Is the voice in your heart

In the end it all comes down to love
What you care enough about to be the champion of
And believe no matter how hard it seems
That it's possible to live this dream

And set the world right again
As if none of this had ever been
Let the story have a happy ending
Set the world right again

Set the world right again ...

SHE COMES FROM THE STRONG PLACE (2004)

Words and Music © 2004 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

Written for Aila AtKisson. One of the meanings of the name "Aila", in old Scottish, is "she who comes from the strong place"

Two people meeting by chance
changing their lives with a glance
and soon a new life comes into
the world

Before the carriage gets worn
Another child is born
And they celebrate another
baby girl

CHORUS:

She comes from the strong place
Aila — Bearer of light
from the strong place
Bright little Aila, shine
for all to see

Her sister Saga thinks she
is just as cute as can be
and she kisses her and dances
round the room

Family and friends far and near
Gather to welcome her here
And start her on her journey
from the womb

CHORUS

Last chorus transitions to modified American traditional:

This little Aila mine — I'm going to let her shine (x3)
Let her shine, let her shine, let her shine

I got me a baby girl that outshines the sun ... (x3)
Let her shine, let her shine, let her shine

All the children of this world will outshine the sun ... (x3)
Let 'em shine, let 'em shine, let 'em shine

SUSTAINABILITY (1998)

Words and Music © 1998 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

Like a boat that sails us home
Like a star that leads us on
The compass we're steering by
A place that we someday hope to see

Sustainability
We can save the things we love before they're gone
Sustainability
Let the beauty of the Earth live on and on
For generations

It's a science and an art
It's a dream in every heart
A vision we can't let go
A hope that will someday set us free ...

Sustainability
We can save the things we love before they're gone
Sustainability
Let the beauty of the Earth live on and on
For generations
Generations ...

Written for Donella Meadows

SYSTEM ZOO (1998)

Words and Music ©1998 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

Your system's crashing and you don't know why
 You want to hang down your head and cry
 Pull yourself together ... there's no time to be blue
 I'm going to tell you just what to do ...

Go to the Zoo
 Take a walk around the Zoo
 Yeah the System Zoo will enlighten you
 You got to listen to the animals, they'll talk to you ...

You got your sources and sinks
You got to know how to think about it
Stocks and flows
That's where it stops, and where it goes
Oscillations, delays, and rates of change
You got nonlinear effects that are really strange
You these signals runnin' round in a feedback loop
That's the way it goes down in the Systems Zoo

Na-na-na-naaa-naa-na
Loop, loop
 Na-na-na-naaa-naa-na
Loop, loop

Yeah if your system's comin' down, and you don't know what to do
 You got to take a walk around in the System Zoo

Every system's idea of fun
 Is to maintain equilibrium
 If you push it to grow to fast
 Your going to reach overshoot and collapse ...

Now let me tell you a little story ...

A man learns to fish, he fishes better than the rest
 He buys a few boats with the rewards of his success
 Takes the money that he makes and buys a whole damn fleet
 Till the ocean's full of boats, but there's no fish in the sea ...

Now what didn't he do?

Go to the Zoo ...
 Get your butt down to the Zoo
 Yeah the System Zoo will enlighten you

You got to listen to the animals, they'll talk to you ...

You got your sources and sinks
 You got to know how to think about it
Stocks and flows
 That's where it stops, and where it goes
Oscillations, delays, and rates of change
 You got *nonlinear effects* that are really strange
 You these signals runnin' round in a *feedback loop*
 That's the way it goes down in the Systems Zoo

Na-na-na-naaa-naaa-na-na-na
Loop, loop
 Na-na-na-naaa-naaa-na-na-na
Loop, loop

Yeah if your system's comin' down, and you don't know what to do
 You got to take a walk around in the System Zoo — Yeah!

(Written and presented at the 1998 meeting of the Balaton Group, at the invitation of Donella Meadows. The author gratefully acknowledges the work of Professor Emeritus Hartmut Bossel of the University of Kassel, Germany, from whom he borrowed the phrase "system zoo" and proceeded to change it beyond all recognition. "Systems Zoo," in formal terms, refers to Prof. Bossel's collection of small, archetypal system structures that are the building blocks of more complex dynamic models. Thank you, Hartmut, and please accept my apologies for this piece of intellectual *leger-de-main*.)

TIME STANDS STILL (1996)

Words and Music © 1996 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

Time
we had so much together
each of us half of one
every day we said "I love you"
and I sang to you of all the time to come

You
there on the phone, weeping
hundreds of miles away
and you tell me that you need me
and you ask me if I'll ever change my mind

And time stands still
for nothing
but a moment
and I rush to fill
the silence
with another
word

I ...
try to forgive something
try to find something more
but there's nothing I can tell you
and the truth is just too hard to say once more

And time stands still
for nothing
but a moment
and I rush to fill
the silence
with another
word

TO SAIL (1982)

Words and Music © 1982 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Whitewing*

On the deck of a boat in the open sea
 With a spinnaker billowing over me
 To sail!
 To follow the ocean breeze
 To work hard, but live at ease
 Come away!

Do you think we can make it to Monterey
 There's a thunderhead building not far away
 We sail!
 We ride through the restless waves
 What we lose, the ocean saves
 Come away!

There are storms up ahead
 There are skies filled with dread
 But there's a voice in my soul
 Singing praise!
 O praise!

Now the ocean is calm and the weather fair
 And a rainbow is hovering in the air
 Come sail!
 Come follow a life that's free
 You can be who you want to be
 Come away!

Yes there are storms up ahead
 And sometimes the sky fills with dread
 But you know there's a voice in our soul
 Singing praise!
 O praise!

Now the ocean is calm and the weather fair
 And a rainbow is hovering in the air
 O come sail
 On a white-crested sea of love
 We can sail to the stars above
 Come away
 Come away
 Come away!

TRYING TO BE HAPPY IN A CRAZY WORLD (1991)

Words and Music © 1991 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

Open up the paper — turn on the news —
 Get a double dose of the daily blues
 And the man in the mirror, he's struggling free
 Like he's swimming up from the bottom of the sea, he's ...

Trying to be happy in a crazy world
 Trying to be happy in a crazy world
 Trying to be happy in a crazy world

Sometimes history seems like a practical joke
 That ends with a planet going up in smoke
 We're slippin' and slidin' — it's a banana peel dance
 Are we just the victims of global circumstance? Are we ...

Trying to be happy in a crazy world ...

Well it's hard to keep your hope when there's such trouble in the world
 The thorns among the roses, the swine who eat the pearls
 And it seems so very hard to love just one other being
 When it happens, the joy makes the angels sing

Maybe life's a riddle — or maybe it's school
 Maybe we're a family of hopeless fools
 Maybe we're just tired of livin' on a little blue ball
 We're playin' dangerous games that make no sense at all — Maybe we're

Trying to be crazy in a happy world
 Trying to be crazy in a happy world
 Trying to be crazy in a happy world

WATER IS LIFE (IN EVERY LANGUAGE) (1996)

Words and Music © 1996 by Alan AtKisson - unreleased

In every land, every living thing
 Water is life
 In every heart, every mother tongue
 Water is life

WAI — TAI — MAY
 AMANZI — PANÍ
 MAJI — MIZU — AGUA
 UDHÍK — JAL — VELLÁM

L'EAU — SHUI — SU
 AB — VÍZ — VAND
 WATER — WASSER — WODA
 AIR — NEERU — NAM

A víz élet — Tubig ay buhay
 Wasser es leben
 Pi en ngima — Maji ni afya
 Mayim chem chiam

CHORUS

Udens er dzibibá — Mizu-wa inochi
 Shui shi sheng meng
 Vodaya e zhivot — wada eto zhrizing
 Wai ora

CHORUS

[Repeat last line, "AIR — NEERU — NAM" to fade]

Words for water used in this song:

AB — Persian
 AGUA — Spanish
 AIR — Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Indonesia
 AMANZI — Xhosa
 JAL — Bengali
 L'EAU — French
 MAJI — Swahili
 MAY — Palestinian
 MAYIM — Hebrew
 MIZU — Japanese

NAM — Thai
NEERU — Kannada
PANÍ — Hindi
PI — Luo
SHUI — Mandarin Chinese
SU — Turkish
TAI — Maori (rough ocean water)
TUBIG — Tagalog
UDENS — Latvian
UDHÍK — Konkani
VAND — Danish
VELLÁM — Malayalam
VÍZ — Magyar
VODA — Czech, Macedonian
WADA — Russian
WAI — Maori (fresh water)
WASSER — German
WATER — English

*Written at Lake Balaton, Csopak, Hungary, 2 September 1996
For the Final Banquet of the Balaton Group Meeting*

WATER OF LIFE (1993)

Words and Music © 1993 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Fire in the Night*

Look at the light shining off the Sound
 There's nobody around
 But me, and this body of water
 Alone in a crowd
 Of stars and stones and trees and passing clouds
 Spirits high, I'm singing right out loud
 Sing up the beauty of this

Clean water, clear water, cool water
 Water of life
 Pure water, wild water
 It's the water of the life of the Spirit moving in the world

Look at these jewels of morning dew
 The eyes I'm looking through
 Are windows of water
 When it falls down
 I am water watching water hit the ground
 Every drop splashes up a crown
 The Queen of all the Earth is

Clean water, clear water, cool water
 Water of life
 Pure water, wild water
 It's the water of the life of the Spirit moving in the world

The water takes a complete control
 Like a river running through my soul
 Like a rainstorm roarin up my spine
 Like an ocean of love that rocks my mind

Look at the waves rolling up the beach
 They can almost reach
 The place where I'm standing
 Won't be too long
 The moon will pull that tidal rush up real strong
 Me and my footprints will be gone
 But evermore there will be

Clean water, clear water, cool water
 Water of life
 Pure water, wild water
 It's the water of the life of the Spirit moving in the world

WATERFALL, THE (1994)

Words and Music © 1994 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

When I open my eyes, and I see you sleeping
I feel my tears starting to rise
When you wake up, and you catch me weeping
It's only the water of love in my eyes

Water of love, water of love
Runs like a river through the heartland of my life
I'd give my soul to meet the maker of water
Water of love

We found a trail up into the mountains
We got naked and swam in the lake
You touched my mouth with cold mountain water
Took me down and kissed me awake

Water of love ...

The waves get rough, sky turns black
But the current's strong, and we can't turn back
And we're diving over the waterfall
And splashing up, splashing up ...

And your love showers me like a fountain
I bathe my soul in the scent of your hair
And we run together like two mighty rivers
And I pray to goddess you'll always be there

Water of love ...

WE ARE A RIVER (1984)

Words and Music © 1984 by Alan AtKisson - from the cassette album *Whitewing*

It's hard to explain
the joyful refrain
of this melody
inside of me
And it's hard to believe
the joy I receive
when I hear the song
and sing along
It's hard to imagine who the singer could be ...

CHORUS:

We are a river
God is the sea
We flow on forever
wherever it leads –
won't you go with me?

All that I need
to satisfy me
is this old guitar
and a guiding star
And enough time to spend
with my loved ones and friends
and the chance to do
what I love to do
And a sense of the spirit within all I see

CHORUS

This dream of our birth
of heaven and earth
will flow on a while
like the winding Nile
Till the darkness descends
the long journey ends
and we rest our eyes ...
Till a new sun rises in a glorious sky ...

WE LOVE THE SDG'S (2015)

Words and Music © 2015 by Alan AtKisson - single

There is a bright new star that's shining
 Can you see its light
 And its pointing in one direction
 I just know it's right
 There are seventeen goals to strive for
 And the road is long
 But maybe this is what we were meant for
 We're seven billion strong
 Can this finally be our time?
 Can these seventeen goals all rhyme?

CHORUS:

We love the SDGs - We love the SDGs
 Ending poverty and hunger
 living healthy lives
 education and equality
 go side by side

We love the SDGs - We love the SDGs
 Taking care of all the life
 That's in the ocean and land
 Clean energy and water
 They go hand in hand

We love the SDGs - We love the SDGs
 An economy that gives us
 What we all really need
 Greener cities, greener products
 And a lot less greed

We love the SDGs - We love the SDGs
 Now we have to come together
 Live in justice and peace
 Turn this dream into reality
 For you and me ...

And for everyone ...
 And the ones who come ...
 After us

Now the nations have met and spoken
 And the words ring true
 But whether words will turn into action
 Depends on what we do

Yes they're talking of transformation
A whole systems view
But whether we can hold the whole planet in our hearts and minds
Depends on me and you
So like birds who have stretched their wings
Take these seventeen goals and sing

CHORUS

Spoken text over final chorus: the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

WHAT KIND OF WORLD (1999)

Words and Music © 1999 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Believing Cassandra*

I know you've had some bitter blows
You've had your highs and lows
I know you need a little inspiration
There's something in the air tonight
I think the feelin's right
To dream up a better world
What if the world could be
Just what you want it to be?

CHORUS:

Shine up your vision — let it sparkle and gleam
The future is where you belong
So many dreamers are living their dreams — tell me
What kind of world do you want to pass on

I know you've had a lonely road
You've borne some heavy loads
I know there isn't any consolation
But if you just spread your wings
I can give you a song to sing
Maybe together we can fly
Someday the world could be
Just what you want it to be

Shine up your vision ...

Don't believe what the cynics tell you
Share your vision and your friends will help you
Keep your eyes on the day after tomorrow
Help will come in ways you don't expect at all
And even if you should fall
I'll pick you up every time

Given how far we've got to go
Given what we know know
It's hard to believe in transformation
But there's really nothing else to choose
Cause there's so much to lose
And if we win, we change the world
Someday the world will be
Just what we want it to be

Shine up your vision ...

WHITEWING (1983)

Words and Music © 1983 by Alan AtKisson - from the albums *Ancient History* and *Whitewing*

Father
I am almost grown to a man
and I can hear the wind
calling my name
So will you make for me
some wings of white to carry me high
up above the world —
Will you teach me to fly!

CHORUS

To be one with Apollo and Mars
Fly like Pegasus to the stars
Hear the songs the Goddesses sing
To be a Whitewing!

Son I give to you
These wings of wax to carry you high
Up above the world —
Now you can fly
But you must promise me
Never fly too near to the sun
Stay close the Earth!
Oh son, you could die

But you'll be ...

I'm flying —
I'm hovering alone in the sky
And I can feel the sun
Warming my face
It's so calm up here
I never want to come down at all
Oh wings, please take me high!
You can't let me fall!

For I am ... [CHORUS]

My wings are melting I am
Falling falling I am
Falling falling

A feather

came in on the crest of a wave
Icarus is dead
My foolish boy
Your rise and fall were one and the same
And I will let this land forever bear your name

For you were ... [CHORUS]

WHOLE LOTTA SHOPPIN' GOIN' ON (1991)

Words and Music © 1991 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Whole Lotta Shoppin' Goin' On*

Gotta listen to me honey, gotta count all your money, gotta know just where you stand
 If you're gonna be my date, well you better get it straight, I'm a big-time shoppin' man
 Yeah I shop real fast — I buy things that don't last — I pay for stuff that I could get for free
 And I'll do it till I die, 'cause I've figured out that life is just one big shopping spree

Oh baby come on
 There's a whole lotta shoppin' goin' on

I've shopped in Siam, and I've shopped in Samarkand, where the bargains are as thick as
 flies
 And I've shopped in Nepal at Mt. Everest Mall, but the prices were a little too high
 In Spain I shop with zesto — "Señor, cuanto cuesta?" — I bought my very own matador
 And I own a flock of sheep 'cause I got 'em real cheap at a Mongolian department store

Oh baby come on
 There's a whole lotta shoppin' goin' on

*Well, those East Coast Stores really knowck me out
 They leave the West behind
 And blue light specials make me scream and shout
 And shop till I drop out of my mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mi-mind*

Well I know those TV ads and those superficial fads are just tryin' to make me spend a buck
 And I know that they're tryin' to manipulate my mind, but I don't give a flyin' —

Got to keep on shoppin'!

Yes and some people claim that it's bad for your brain to hold shopping in such high regard
 But if it ever gets to me I'll just some therapy, and I'll put it on my Mastercard!

Oh baby come on
 There's a whole lotta shoppin' goin' on

*Well these cards are made for shoppin'
 And that's just what they'll do
 One of these days my credit cards are gonna
 Shop all over you ...*

So make up your mind, or I'm leaving you behind — you gotta put your money up now
 You know just where I stand — I shop, therefore I am! — and I'm off to buy a sacred cow
 Gonna buy the Pope's estate, gonna buy the Pearly Gates, gonna buy a few icebergs and
 thaw one
 And when I die they'll all laugh when they read my epitaph: "He knew a 'good bye' when he
 saw one."

Oh baby come on
There's a whole lotta shoppin' goin' on
Let's go to the mall ...
Come on
There's a whole lotta shoppin' goin' on
Get that money out of your savings account ...
Come on
There's a whole lotta shoppin' goin' on

ZEN BONES (1994)

Words and Music © 1994 by Alan AtKisson - from the album *Testing the Rope*

We lit the fire the first day of Spring
There is smoke and ashes in every living thing
And there's something nameless, like a great opening
In these old zen bones

Fire the ancient lady — smoke take her soul
Let the warm winds lift her to where the thunder rolls
Let the heat of burning burn out the cold
In her old zen bones

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust
There's a piece of fire in every one of us
Burns like coal to cinder, iron to rust
Burns our old zen bones

I walked to the lookout — looked out to sea
Felt the winds of heaven pouring over me
Like the breath of a lifetime, like an old memory
In my old zen bones

And I'm singin' now

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust
There's a piece of fire in every one of us
Burns like coal to cinder, iron to rust
Burns our old zen bones

Sing it now

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust
There's a piece of fire in every one of us
Burns like coal to cinder, iron to rust
Burns our old zen bones