



He likes orchids...” squawked the costermonger at the florists in the sunny Sussex village of Selsey. She proved to be just nosy (rather than clairvoyant) as her eyes meandered from the copy of *Patrick Moore on Mars* in my hand, up my plus-sixes and to rest incredulously upon my moustache. As I strode towards Sir Patrick’s sunken medieval house (with matching garden) the lolloping white orchid looked confident.

Upon arrival, I was directed down a wood-panelled hall by a no-nonsense nurse in uniform. She had already warned me by phone that Patrick’s tuxedo would not be back from the dry cleaners and that I must not mention the war, his late girlfriend or ask to be shown his telescope.

Stepping into Sir Patrick’s office, a psychedelic

shirt-clad Patrick sternly penetrated me with his monocle. “Hello, I’m Patrick”. Sir Patrick’s voice was characterful as ever; yet now had that dangerous rattling quality of a man beyond his allotted years. “Sir Patrick, this is exceptionally decent of you!”

He gestured me to a chair “Just Patrick.” Thankfully my sycophantic fawning soon calmed down as “Just Patrick” (with a mischievous smile) beadily scanned his one billionth guest. He and Ptolemy – his beloved cat – paid particular attention to making me feel welcome.

Throughout the interview, Patrick proved to be a jamboree of incredible anecdotes. Gleefully I extracted tales of a 1963 encounter with the Beatles and countless Dr Whos: “Tom Baker is fun... interesting Chap... likes his drink.” Patrick’s

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everyday speech pattern was that of a scientist reciting facts – his formula being to choose key words only. A recurring theme was his unconditional love for his dear late mother. It struck me that for a confirmed xylophonist he was an exceptionally sensitive and gentle man, despite his (almost whimsically old-fashioned) psychotic hatred of Germans.

Seemingly engaged in a continual battle of wits with his nurses, at one point Patrick requested his own book on the subject of UFOs, apparently housed “second from top shelf, five books from the right”. His nurse, however dismissed his request as if he were a child demanding a lollipop. “I’ve never heard of the book, Patrick.” Hunched and muttering to himself, Patrick ran an arthritic fist over a ream of titles within his opulent library index. “It’s here somewhere... Oh *where* is it? Here we are: page 28!” He rattled off what sounded like a Polaris missile launch code. Seemingly deflated, the nurse reached over to the allotted shelf and handed him the book. To a cacophony of antique clock chimes he beamed back at her victoriously. This man was as far from being senile as he was from being a Soho pole-dancer.

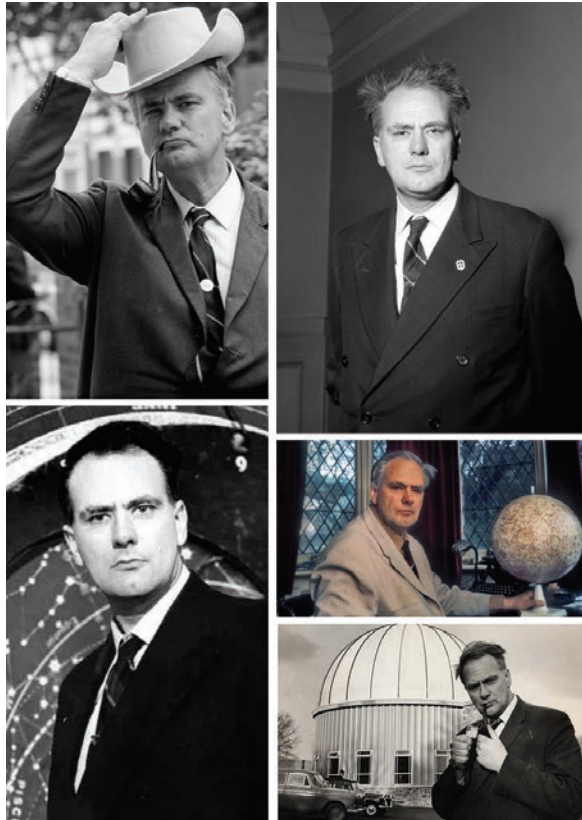
My chosen refreshment of a dry sherry arrived on a tray (courtesy of the beleaguered nurse). Patrick surprised me by claiming to be a hardened drinker, “Yet I’ve never been drunk in my life. Can’t seem to get drunk! I like to be in control of everything.” We chatted about British hellraisers (Burton and Reed) and savoured our tippie. “It’s Chilean. The Chileans make the best wine.” I naturally asked if he’d met the notorious ex-despot. “I have, yes. I have a great admiration for General Pinochet...”

“Can you admit that?”

“Yes I can!”

(My sycophantic laugh piped in) “Of course... You can say what you like! And you do!”

Despite his pro-sherry tendencies, Patrick was fervently against all blood sports. “I don’t enjoy killing. If you had seen inside a working German concentration camp, as I did...” Asked if he was there to liberate it, he looked up (with a knowing smirk) and muttered, “I was just pottering around.” I wondered whether this supposedly idle comment meant something highly top secret, brave and probably controversial. “They didn’t catch me... can’t talk



about the war... still bound by secrecy." After the interview I learned that, since his death, rumours have been rife about Sir Patrick being a high ranking British Intelligence agent during the Second World War.

I noted Patrick's sunken silhouette against the cranky angled architecture and watched what appeared to be a carnivorous garden plant tapping at the leaded window. Patrick, his mind, his wonky house, his alien plant and his powerfully charged memorabilia were of course all a vital extension of each other. As a privileged witness, I felt rather melancholic knowing that one day – probably very soon – both Patrick and his world would have to be dismantled.

As if to remind himself of his pre-disabled versatility, Patrick began playing me recordings of his personally composed music. His joyous expression was periodically interspersed with waves from his arthritic fists and angered cries of "I can't do it now!" Then in slightly calmer tones: "Can we have track 3 please?" And, "Play the first track on here..." (A Royal Command Performance on the xylophone). "If we could have track 4..." (his xylophone ballet). By now I had lost him. "Track

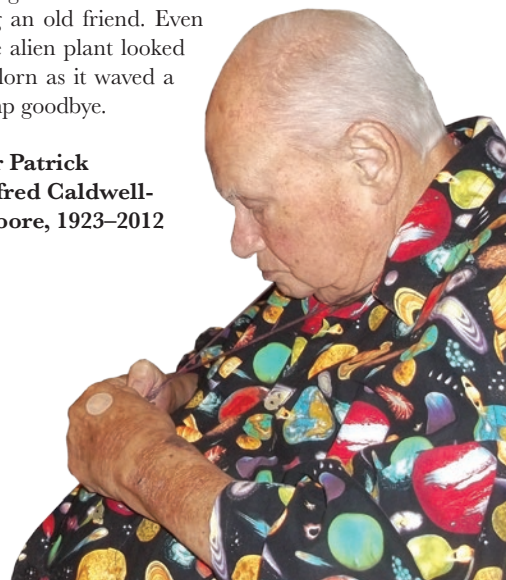
1! Track 2!" On and on went the patriotic musical pomp; I was truly impressed, yet I sensed our flustered button-punching DJ (the nurse) had heard it all before. A loud mechanical "Cuckoo!" heralded a blissful period of silence.

Our musings switched to the likelihood of intelligent alien life forms. "I don't think I'll live to see it, but I'd like to," he wistfully sighed. Stating that we could hear such news tomorrow, the topic switched to his mortality: "I've lived the life I wanted and done the things I wanted to do". Thankfully Ptolemy walked in to save us from a morbid tailspin. Patrick's eyes glistened with liquid love as he tummy tickled Ptolemy and rustled a bag of cat treats.

Time was ticking on (rather noisily) so I began arranging props around Patrick for some photographs. He made numerous attempts to re-attach his monocle, tutting at its failing glued rim. We quietly busied ourselves, pleasantly conscious of each other like two resident old pets. Looking at me curiously, Patrick launched into a sudden barrage of personal questions: "Do you have children? Are you married? Where do you live? Do you live alone? What do you do on New Year's Eve?" Having concluded that I was a confirmed bachelor, he then invited me to his New Year's Eve house party.

With the photographs done, a new blonde nurse entered, having taken over the shift. Cooing "Hello, handsome man!" she kissed Patrick on his expectant cheek. "I want to be Patrick Moore!" I cried. Smacking his lips, he chimed to me, "I think it's time for our sandwiches now, don't you?" Judging by the nurse's general "Are you still here?" glare, I deemed it time to go. Half way down the sunken drive I paused. I felt that strange pang one feels when leaving an old friend. Even the alien plant looked forlorn as it waved a limp goodbye.

**Sir Patrick
Alfred Caldwell-
Moore, 1923–2012**



THE CHAP
QUESTIONNAIRE

Ed Harcourt

Age: 35
Occupation: Singer/Songwriter
Birthplace: Wimbledon, London
Education: Fencing School
Early Career: Soux-Chef, Stuntman, Gigolo
Other Interests: Drinking, Taxidermy, Frowning.

What is your idea of absolute heaven?

A roaring fire, a never-ending supply of strong, peaty scotch, some decadent company and a game of strip charades.

And your idea of a hell on earth?

Waking up extremely hungover and accepting that the world is just one gargantuan shopping mall rammed to the rafters with clowns, wasps, mosquitoes and Simon Cowell.

What three items of clothing would you never consider lending to anyone else, under any circumstances?

My black tailcoat, a three-piece grey suit that belonged to my father and my grandfather's Royal Engineers military jacket.

Do you have any of your clothes made by a tailor?

Yes. One is my father's tailor who works on Savile Row and tailored my wedding suit. My wedding waistcoat however was made in Fulham by the people at Old Hat and was tailored Edwardian style at my request.

Who do you think is or was the greatest dandy?

For me the great David Niven comes to mind. It wasn't just about the way he dressed, which was exquisite, more his talent for hilarious anecdotes and that equal balance of mischief and charm.



Can you name any men living today whose dress sense you admire?

My eccentric chum Mr. Darren Berry, who plays in the Penguin Cafe Orchestra, never fails to tickle me pink with his outlandish attire. Bill Nighy's ongoing obsession with navy blue suits invokes a slight thrill and I think the esteemed 'Sapeur' gentlemen from the Republic of Congo are extreme sartorial trailblazers.

Is there any item of clothing you desperately seek but have not yet managed to find?

A nice white suit that rejects all stains, especially red wine. I have ruined too many to remember.

What item of clothing are you determined never to wear?

'Croc' shoes.

What type of facial hair do you think is suitable for a gentleman?

I would say the top lip should always be covered; do not sport the 'Abe Lincoln' unless you are actually dead or Amish.

How many different varieties of hat do you own, and which is your favourite?

I have a couple of flat caps, including a Christy's newsboy; a white fedora, a Guatemalan plantation hat I lifted from my brother and a large Russian rabbit fur hat. But I think my favourite has to be the menacing 'Amran' Fez that resides in my dungeon. I only wear that on very 'special' occasions. 🐎