

# Gene Clark

From the early 1960s until his untimely death in 1991, Gene Clark, a founding member of The Byrds, distinguished himself as an uncommonly poetic, deeply sensitive singer-songwriter. Although often cast as a doomed cult artist, his oeuvre has undergone a radical reassessment by new generations of musicians and fans over the last 25 years. It is a sad truth that his solo albums did not meet with commercial success during his lifetime. But now, here in 2018, one may say unashamedly, with utmost conviction, that Gene Clark's body of work - be it with the Byrds, Dillard and Clark or as a solo artist - sits comfortably alongside the best compositions by Bob Dylan and Lennon-McCartney. There exists a formidable arsenal of critical hosannas and praise from peers to support this statement.

## The Byrds

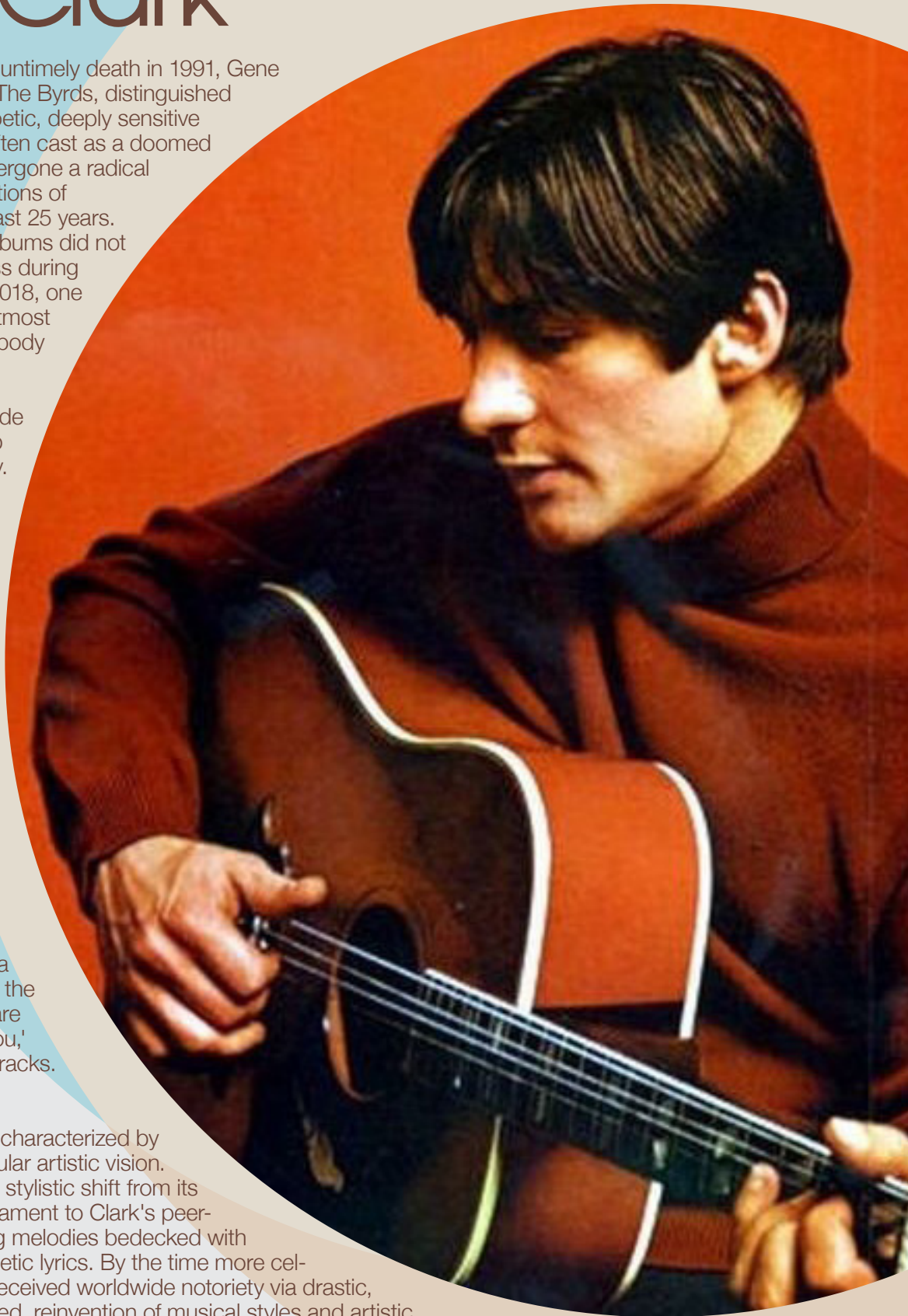
Always an innovator, Clark was at ground zero for the births of some of the most fertile genres of the rock era, including folk-rock, psychedelic rock, country-rock, alt-country and the singer-songwriter era of the 1970s. As a member of The Byrds, he was the principal songwriter of the era-defining, yet utterly timeless 'Eight Miles High,' as well as sole author of 'I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better' (covered by the late Tom Petty), 'She Don't Care About Time,' 'Here Without You,' and a host of other top-shelf tracks.

## Solo Years

Gene Clark's solo years were characterized by a relentless pursuit of his singular artistic vision. Each album marked a distinct stylistic shift from its predecessor; each was a testament to Clark's peerless ability to craft spellbinding melodies bedecked with deeply complex, uncannily poetic lyrics. By the time more celebrated chameleons of rock received worldwide notoriety via drastic, shocking, sometimes calculated, reinvention of musical styles and artistic personae, Gene Clark had already undergone a half dozen such transformations.

And the world is finally coming to understand the breadth and scope of his influence.

The brilliant Gene Clark deserves recognition for his songwriting and unique artistry. It is time to acknowledge the genius of a giant of Americana: **Harold Eugene Clark.**





Gene Clark (born Harold Eugene Clark, Tipton, MO, November 17, 1944) first attained notoriety as a member of the New Christy Minstrels, the popular folk music ensemble, who retained his services as vocalist after seeing him performing onstage in Kansas City in August, 1963. Within a year and a half, Clark achieved worldwide stardom as a founding member of Los Angeles folk-rock/country-rock/psychedelic pioneers, The Byrds. During his tenure as the band's principal songwriter, Clark appeared on their biggest hits ("Mr. Tambourine Man," "Turn! Turn! Turn!", both #1 on Billboard), penned many of their most beloved, influential works (including "I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better," "Set You Free This Time," "Here Without You," "She Don't Care About Time") and was the main composer of "Eight Miles High," considered by many to be among the greatest singles of the 1960s.



After leaving the Byrds at the height of their fame, Clark embarked upon a fearless solo career that embraced everything from chamber pop (*Gene Clark with the Gosdin Brothers*, 1967) and progressive bluegrass (*The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard and Clark*, 1968) to acoustic ballads (*White Light*, 1971) and sweeping cosmic prog (*No Other*, 1974). His final album, 1987's *So Rebellious a Lover*, recorded with ex-Textones leader Carla Olson, has been hailed as a progenitor of the alt-country movement.

What set Clark apart from most pop/rock writers of his generation was a truly exceptional ability to take typically adolescent subject matter (such as love and loss) and recast it within richly worded narratives that exhibited both strength and vulnerability, amid keening existential angst. The formidable combination of Clark's stirring, vibrato-laden tenor with his uncommonly poetic lyrics and penchant for minor-key melodies enabled him to carve out a distinguished career as songwriter and performer.

With a back catalogue as rich and eclectic as Clark's, it is not surprising that his works have been interpreted by a vast array of artists – from virtually every genre of music. Clark's work has been covered by, among others, Robert Plant and Allison Krauss, Tom Petty, Linda Ronstadt, Richard Thompson, Death in Vegas (with Paul Weller), Hüsker Dü, Iain Matthews, Yo La Tengo, This Mortal Coil, and Soulsavers (with Mark Lanegan). Additionally, two separate tribute albums have been released, *The World Turns All Around Him* and *Full Circle*; and Scottish rock band Teenage Fanclub penned a moving elegy to Clark on their 1993 album, *Thirteen*.

Gene Clark passed away on May 24, 1991, at his home in Sherman Oaks, California, at the age of 46. While he was never to regain the same level of superstardom he saw as a member of the Byrds, his work continues to inspire and excite new generations of fans. In 2014, a veritable who's-who of indie musicians (including members of Beach House, the Walkmen, Fleet Foxes and Grizzly Bear) banded together for the unprecedented purpose of touring Clark's 1974 magnum opus, *No Other* (regularly featured in top-album lists). It was an extraordinarily selfless gesture that conferred upon Clark the widespread, well-deserved acclaim and respect that eluded him in life.

Since 2014, the rediscovery of Gene Clark's oeuvre has continued apace. Last year saw the release of an archival set of unreleased recordings, *The Lost Studio Sessions, 1964-1982*, which received universal acclaim. Additionally, the Clark-penned 'Because of You,' from 1971's *White Light*, was featured in NBC's hit series *This Is Us*, and subsequently released on the program's official soundtrack album.

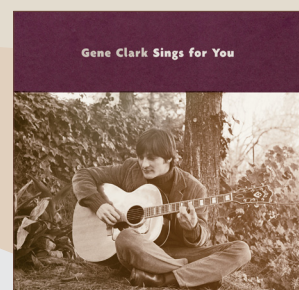
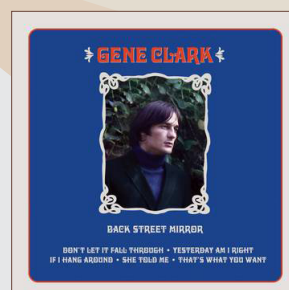
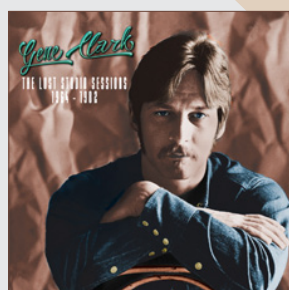
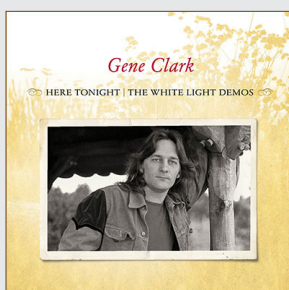
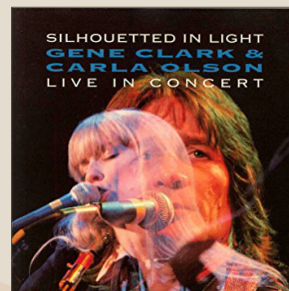
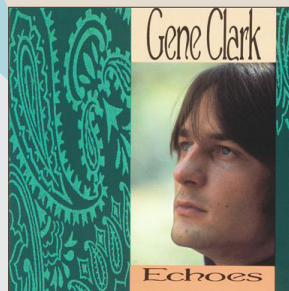
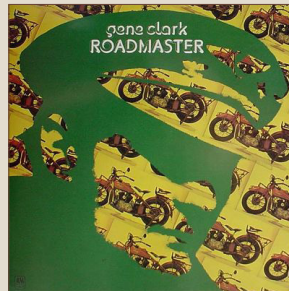
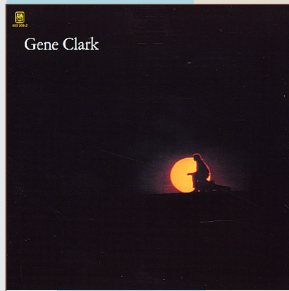
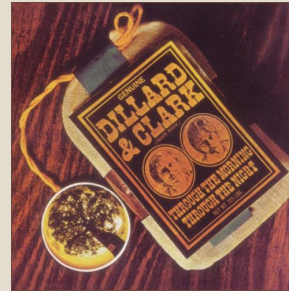
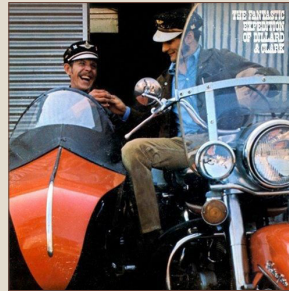
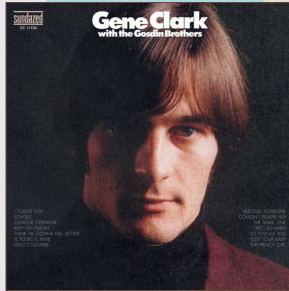
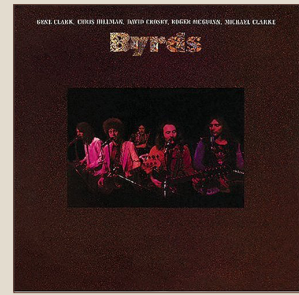
And 2018 will see the release of no fewer than two more collections previously unreleased material—a testament to his prolific songwriting skills—along with multiple re-releases of his back catalogue (including *No Other* and *White Light*), proving that a true artist's worth is not gauged in dollars, but in the ability to captivate the imaginations of successive generations.

Harold Eugene Clark lies buried in St. Andrew's Catholic Cemetery, Tipton, Moniteau County, Missouri.

– Tom Sandford is a Toronto-based writer/editor. Since 2008 he has maintained a blog called *The Clarkophile*, an appreciation of Gene Clark's songwriting. [Clarkophile.blogspot.com](http://Clarkophile.blogspot.com)

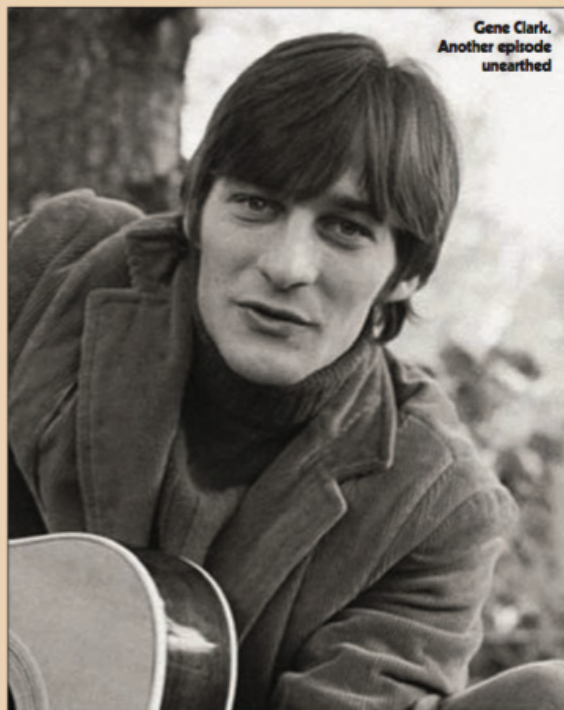
For more information on Gene Clark visit the Gene Clark website at [www.Gene-Clark.com](http://www.Gene-Clark.com)





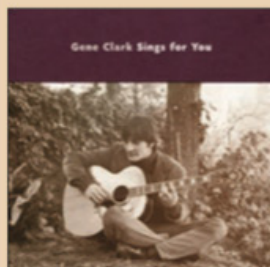


# reviews then



Gene Clark.  
Another episode  
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## Big City Country Guy



Gene Clark Sings for You

### GENE CLARK

#### Gene Clark Sings for You

★★★★

OMNIVORE CD/LP

If Gene Clark was still alive today, would he have ever run out of songs? So prolific was the troubled ex-Byrd that 27 years since his death, demos and rare versions of Clark songs are still steadily coming out of the woodwork.

*Gene Clark Sings for You* is a welcome official outing for a fabled 1967 audition acetate made by Clark between his flop solo debut and his brief, ill-starred return to the Byrds fold. The eight-song acetate could be seen as rough sketches for a projected follow-up album. Remastered from the scratchy copy doing the rounds on bootleg, it's still a rough and ready affair.

Taped with an unknown pick-up band (bar pianist Alex Del Zoppo, who adds tasteful sprinkles of piano,

callopie, and chamberlin strings), it's an unrehearsed-sounding shakedown for some fascinating rare tunes from Clark. The rhythm section is hanging on for dear life, the drummer cheerfully thuds his way through proceedings like a man building a shed, and there's a weary crack in Clark's voice that suggests this was all done in a day. For all this raggedness, the songs are great – ranging from some fine bruised romance to Clark in full oblique, poetic lyrical mode. "Past My Door" is a sprawling stream of consciousness with three distinct sections while "Down On The Pier" with its talk of thieves, trees and "Heartbreak Hotel" sounds like the result of some acid-fuelled people-watching. It's fascinating listening, and poignant to hear a former king of The Sunset Strip temporarily on his uppers and looking for a new gig.

As if the original acetate wasn't enough, a previously unheard second five-song acetate of Clark songs of various vintage given to protégés The Rose Garden is included, as well as a home demo taped for the band. Ranging from solo demos to full-fledged studio recordings like the R&B lament "Big City Girl" and the groovy "Doctor Doctor", it's a welcome addition to a songbook that still throws up mysteries to this day.

Gene Clark never fully got his due as a solo artist, but history's loss is our gain.

**Martin Ruddock**

## GENE CLARK The Lost Studio Sessions 1964–1982

SIERRA RECORDS

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*Solo Gene: fractured journey through the enigmatic Byrd's rich backstory*



*Lost Studio Sessions*, remarkably – collecting 24 unheard studio tracks – is the first career-spanning effort to shed light on Clark's

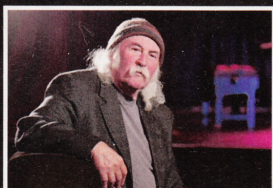
numerous undocumented sessions. Five crooner ballads from 1964 open it; Clark was surely seeking his musical identity in these pre-Byrds moments, but his capacity for lyrical self-reflection and brooding loneliness arrives crystal clear (highlight: "That Girl"), and his mannered baritone is a revelation. Arranger Leon Russell puts his expansive, orchestrated stamp, including strings and horns, on two 1967 cuts, highlighted by "Back Street Mirror," Clark's complex, wild-eyed observations and rhyming incantations echoing Dylan's *Highway 61*. In the later material, with unadorned acoustic guitar and truly spartan melodies, Clark ruminates on the big questions – purposefulness, the tangles of time, and deep romantic longing – as on the vulnerable "Awakening Within". *Roadmaster*-era cuts, and *Nyteflyte*, a partial Byrds reunion, retreat from the precipice, but yield many gems, too; a swelling, ethereal cover of "Roll In My Sweet Baby's Arms" from 1972 is as magnificent as anything Clark ever recorded.

**Extras:** Six extra songs on two bonus CDs.

**LUKE TORN**



# FILTER SCREEN



## Out on the side

Saluting the heart and soul of the man who invented country rock. "Gram who?" says Ross Bennett.

### The Byrd Who Flew Alone: The Triumphs And Tragedy Of Gene Clark

★★★★★

FOUR SUNS. DVD

At the beginning of this long overdue look back at the life and music of Gene Clark, his friend and fellow Byrd Chris Hillman sits back in his chair and ponders: "He sang from his heart and he had great songs... why didn't it work?" It's a question that this compelling documentary asks again and again, and one that lies at the very heart of Clark's journey from folkie to rock'n'roll star and beyond.

One of the biggest obstacles to making a film about Gene Clark is, of course, the resounding lack of Gene Clark footage, but the film-makers do an excellent job of splicing together the

little there is (witness the magnificent Byrds clips and the film of *Silver Raven*) with warm-hearted reminiscences from all the main players in his life.

Clark's immersion in bluegrass and country began early and he cut his first record, *Blue Ribbon*, aged 14. Despite this, his family's hopes only ran to him becoming a country star in Nashville. Tellingly, his sister Bonnie reveals "he would have been comfortable with that life". As quickly becomes apparent, "comfort" would be a rare sensation in Gene Clark's life.

In 1963 the folk world came calling in the form of The New Christy Minstrels, but the heavy touring schedule (his chronic fear of flying started here) was enough to make him quit the group and head to Los Angeles where he met fellow folk aficionados David Crosby and Roger McGuinn.

The Byrds may have hit Number 1 with their cover of Mr Tambourine Man, but it was Clark and his prolific output of folk rock originals that would ensure the band could fill LPs. I Feel A Whole Lot Better, Set You Free This Time, Eight Miles High –

This Byrd has flown: (main image) an outtake from cover shoot for 1967's *The Gosdin Brothers LP*; (insets, from top) Clark circa '66; fellow Byrd David Crosby; Gene in 1985.

as Hillman admits, "Gene would write five or six songs a week". Footage of The Byrds in their 1965 prime also attests to Clark's commanding stage presence, those inner-looking tendencies manifesting themselves in moody beatnik flourishes and a "piercing countenance" that mined the melancholy beneath McGuinn's chiming Rickenbacker.

As the band's chief songwriter he also enjoyed material success, bought a Ferrari and later began dating Michelle Phillips, the sort of rock star ostentation that rankled with the rest of the group. Clark pushed the self-destruct button (again) in early 1966, kickstarting the most fascinating decade of his life, a period that would produce three magical albums, *The Fantastic Expedition Of Dillard & Clark* (1968), *White Light* (1971) and 1974's truly extraordinary *No Other*.

Recurring dependencies on drugs and alcohol would pockmark his final decade with almost-highs and nasty lows, but as we hear, those mystical songs of love and loss cut through the missed opportunities and thudding depressions to establish The Byrds' lost soul as one of America's great songwriters.

"HE SANG FROM HIS HEART AND HE HAD GREAT SONGS... WHY DIDN'T IT WORK?" CHRIS HILLMAN



### WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- On February 27, 1966, when Clark told The Byrds that he wouldn't be able to join them on a flight to New York, McGuinn told him: "You can't be a Byrd if you can't fly." His tenure in The Byrds ended then and there. He was 21.
- In 1968, Chris Hillman knew that "something was up" when he met Clark and Doug Dillard at 9:30am for breakfast and the pair proceeded to order margaritas.
- Clark's last gig was at the Cinegrill in LA in April 1991. He died just over a month later on May 24, 1991, aged 46.



## The Byrd Who Flew Alone: The Triumphs and Tragedy of Gene Clark

By John Rhett Thomas and Tom Sandford | August 20, 2014 | 9:55am

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MOVIES > REVIEWS

RATING

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Paste



Mention Gene Clark as one of your favorite musicians and almost invariably the response will be a raised eyebrow followed by the words “Gene who?” Namechecking alone won’t cut it. Mentioning that he was a founding member of the Byrds might trigger a vague memory, but many still won’t be able to actually place him, or any of his songs. And yet David Crosby’s post-Byrds mega-fame with CSN, and Roger McGuinn’s iconic 12-string Rickenbacker & granny glasses (vis-a-vis Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man” in particular) have pretty much guaranteed their admittedly rightful places in our collective cultural memory. Meanwhile, Gene Clark, a uniquely gifted songwriter who played a pivotal role in the rise of folk rock, psychedelia and country rock, but who could never seem to catch a break, has seemingly disappeared into the past.

How did this happen? Well, that’s a long, sad story in itself. For Gene Clark’s small but fiercely loyal cult of fans, carrying his torch through the decades has largely amounted to a silent crusade. But thanks to a long overdue critical reevaluation, reinforcements are on the way. Robert Plant and Alison Krauss’ 2007 collection *Raising Sand* won a Grammy for Album of the Year, with two Clark compositions—“Through the Morning, Through the Night” and “Polly,” a devastating, heart-rending pair of songs—anchoring the proceedings. Earlier this year, a tour was launched by an ad hoc group of indie stars from bands Beach House, Grizzly Bear, the Walkmen and Fleet Foxes—plus British folk legend and early Clark advocate Iain Matthews—performing the lost masterpiece *No Other* in its entirety to sold-out crowds on America’s East Coast. But the best entry point for new fans to discover a treasure trove of some of the best music

nobody’s ever heard is a new documentary, *The Byrd Who Flew Alone: The Triumphs and Tragedy of Gene Clark*.

Gene Clark’s life is a tale of brief early stardom, followed by a painfully slow, inexorable fall. The ill-fated Missouri-born country boy hit the peak of his fame at age 20, contributing to the band’s one-two punch releases from 1965, *Mr. Tambourine Man* and *Turn! Turn! Turn!* Clark’s abrupt departure from the band in early 1966, however—precipitated by anxieties within and pressures without—saw him spend the remaining 26 years of his life toiling in relative obscurity, haunted by the shadow of that early success. He would go on to record great, even brilliant, records, but commercial success eluded him, and he fell headlong into a decades-long downward spiral of substance abuse that reached its grim conclusion on May 24, 1991.

For documentary creator Paul Kendall, a former music journalist (who himself interviewed Clark in 1977), this documentary has been a labor of love, albeit one with its share of obstacles. Practically speaking, Kendall, working alongside sons Dan and Jack, had to somehow work around the unfortunate—and astonishing—fact that there is no known extant footage of Gene Clark from the immediate post-Byrds period (i.e. 1966) up until his brief tenure with the quasi-Byrds reboot, McGuinn, Clark & Hillman, in 1979. This is a significant chunk of time to cover without aid of any visuals of the principal subject, apart from stills. To compound matters, this was arguably Gene Clark’s most productive period as an artist. This means that much would depend on the quality of the interviews conducted especially for the documentary. And so while each interviewee provides vital information about the enigmatic ex-Byrd, it becomes

distractingly apparent that the Kendalls were grappling with budgetary constraints—the most telling manifestations of which resulted in shaky camera work and some sloppy editing.

Because the Kendalls chose a subject whose post-Byrds video legacy is only slightly more substantial than someone like Nick Drake, we’re lucky that so many key individuals were available to speak about Gene, including the surviving original ex-Byrds, ex-wife Carlie, sister Bonnie, brother David, sons Kelly and Kai, Carla Olson—even David Jackson from Dillard and Clark. (A sad footnote: several of the interviewees have since passed away, including Carlie Clark and producer Larry Marks).

Of the surviving original Byrds, David Crosby, rock’s ever-ebullient enfant terrible, provides the most interesting commentary, but to be perfectly frank, he appears tired and slow in the film. More judicious editing might have helped move things along. Roger McGuinn, still looking remarkably chipper and alert, was predictably aloof; while Chris Hillman seemed genuinely eager to speak about Clark’s talent.

Elsewhere, Byrds biographer Johnny Rogan speaks to Gene’s songwriting. His comments are eloquent and astute, and go well beyond the usual “Hillbilly Shakespeare” explanations of Gene’s unusual gifts. One wishes there had been greater allowance for discussion of the music, but lacking the accompanying visuals would have doubtless proved difficult. A late-period video of Gene singing “Silver Raven” (from his 1974 masterpiece *No Other*) was a genuine heart-stopping surprise. In those few moments the film—on the wings of that tiny bit of footage—positively soared. But it also underscored the fact that more of Gene would have accomplished so much more than any number of talking heads. But, to be fair to the Kendalls, you can’t slag the doc for not including what does not exist.

In the end, one must give kudos to Paul Kendall for not only undertaking this challenge in the first place, but for bringing it to fruition with such bravery, passion and grace. *The Byrd Who Flew Alone* is not only an extraordinary accomplishment, it is a soulful testament to Gene Clark’s enduring brilliance.

(*The Byrd Who Flew Alone* will receive limited screenings in September, including one in Mendocino, Calif., Clark’s beloved home in the 1970s, at which he wrote some of his most passionate work. Documentary creator Paul Kendall will be in attendance for the Medocino and Pasadena screenings.)

**Directors:** Jack & Paul Kendall

**Screenings:** Sept. 4, 2014 (Nevada City Film Festival, Nevada City, Calif.); Sept. 13, 2014 (Hill House, Mendocino, Calif.); Sept. 18, 2014 (South Pasadena Public Library, Pasadena, Calif.)

MUSIC

# Byrds founding member Gene Clark to be saluted Saturday in South Pasadena

By RANDY LEWIS  
FEB 24, 2017 | 11:55 AM



The Byrds circa 1965: David Crosby, left, Gene Clark, Michael Clarke, Chris Hillman and Roger McGuinn. (Don Hunstein / Sony BMG Music Entertainment)

Gene Clark — a founding member of the Byrds whose musical legacy is often overshadowed by those of his onetime bandmates Roger McGuinn, David Crosby, Chris Hillman, Clarence White and latter-day member Gram Parsons — will get a salute of his own on Saturday at the South Pasadena Library from several peers and collaborators.

Singer-songwriter Carla Olson, who recorded with Clark, will be joined by Moby Grape member Peter Lewis, ex-Byrd John York and Clark's son, Kai Clark, for "The Songs of Gene Clark: A 50th Anniversary Celebration."

Clark wrote the Byrds' hits "I'll Feel a Whole Lot Better" (on which he also sang lead vocal), "She Don't Care About Time" and "Eight Miles High," among

others he wrote during his two-year stint with the group when it shot to stardom.

"At one time, he was the power in the Byrds, not McGuinn, not Crosby — it was Gene who would burst through the stage curtain banging on a tambourine, coming on like a young Prince Valiant," Hillman said of his former bandmate. "Few in the audience could take their eyes off this presence. He was the songwriter. He had the 'gift' that none of the rest of us had developed yet. ... We learned a lot of songwriting from him and in the process learned a little bit about ourselves."

George Harrison credited the Byrds' recording of Clark's "She Don't Care About Time" for inspiring the signature

guitar riff in his 1965 Beatles song "If I Needed Someone."

Clark launched a solo career that included a number of well-respected albums and reunited for one album with McGuinn and Hillman in the short-lived band McGuinn, Clark & Hillman. His other collaborations included the 1987 duo album "So Rebellious a Lover" with Textones singer, songwriter and guitarist Olson. Clark struggled through the years with substance abuse and other health issues and died at 46 in 1991.

Proceeds from tickets for Saturday's tribute, which cost \$25, benefit the library. Information is available at the library's website.

The 50th anniversary designation recognizes the release in February 1967 of his first album after leaving the Byrds, "Gene Clark With the Gosdin Brothers."

Clark's influence on folk-rock and country-rock has been increasingly acknowledged in Americana and indie-rock circles and was further buoyed last year with the release of two dozen previously unreleased recordings on "Gene Clark: The Lost Studio Sessions 1964-1982."

And in 2013, a group of indie rockers including members of Fleet Foxes, Grizzly Bear, the Walkmen and Beach House briefly toured performing the songs from Clark's 1974 solo album, "No Other."

"It is so great to see my father finally getting the credit he so well deserved," Kai Clark said recently. "I think there is still a big, bright future for my father and his legacy. His music only seems to be growing, still on the cutting edge of anything out there in music."

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