

ISSUE #100

**American Music**  
**The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter**  
Celebrating 32 Years 1994 — 2026

FEB. 2026

# The 100<sup>th</sup> Issue

## Inside The Blasters Hard Line Album

**LATEST NEWS:** Dave Alvin will be working on his next solo album all throughout 2026 between tour dates II III Dave plays guitar on HOPE I DON'T BLEED on Everything We Thought We Wanted, the new album by The Far West. The song "is simply about being afraid of pain at the point of death," lead singer Lee Briant told The Bluegrass Situation site. "Having Dave Alvin tear a white-hot guitar solo through the song made it complete." II III Marcia Ball, who played piano on Dave's album with the Guilty Women in 2009, has been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease and announced her retirement from touring in October. She also played on Carolyn Wonderland's Truth Is album, which Dave produced. II III Bassist Sarah Brown, who recorded and toured with the Guilty Women in 2009-10, returned to the stage at Antone's in Austin, Texas, last year. She had been sidelined by a liver disease and underwent a liver transplant in January, 2024. II III Guitarist Laura Chavez has released an instrumental version of SO LONG BABY, GOODBYE as the first single from her album My Voice. "This song is my tribute to my home state of California and its one-of-a-kind roots/rock 'n' roll scene that has influenced me in almost everything I've done. The Blasters epitomized this melting pot and even hired one of my all-time favorite guitarists, Hollywood Fats, to add to their highly charged, R&B infused rock 'n' roll sound." II III The Palomino, a documentary on the legendary Los Angeles music club, will be screened on April 25 in Nashville and on June 17 in Los Angeles. Directed by Adrienne Isom, the movie features interviews with Dave Alvin, James Intveld (((Cont. Page 2 )))

***In This Issue: The Blasters' Hard Line with Jeff Eyrich, Dave Alvin, John Bazz and John Doe. Remembering Joe Ely.***

((Latest News Continued from Page 1 ))) and Rosie Flores. Other musicians interviewed include Emmylou Harris and Lucinda Williams. For more info - [mulekickproductions.com](http://mulekickproductions.com)

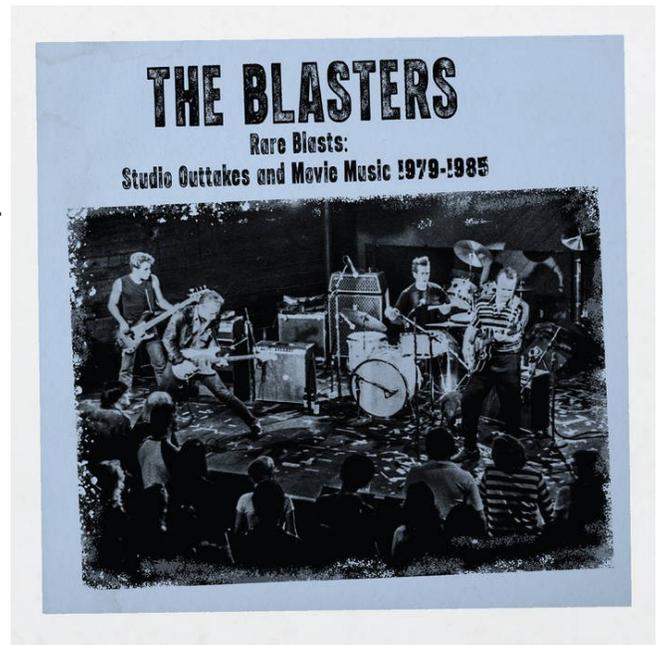
II III Los Lobos Native Sons, a documentary about the Los Angeles-based band, will have its world premiere in March at the South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas. Dave Alvin was interviewed for the film. II III A Kickstarter campaign raised more than \$57,000 to finish a documentary on the Ash Grove club in Los Angeles. Dave Alvin will be in the film. Google 'Ashgrove Kickstarter' to make a contribution. II III Pigus Drunkus Maximus, the lone album by Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs, was reissued on vinyl and CD on Jan. 16 by Blind Owl Records and East of Lincoln Productions. First released in 1987, the album features former Blasters saxophonist Steve Berlin, who produced the LP, and bassist Gil T, who later joined Dave Alvin's All-Nighters. Music journalist Chris Morris wrote comprehensive liner notes for the reissue. II III Dave Alvin has left his long time booking agency Mongrel Music and is now booked by Mint Talent. -AM

## **THE BLASTERS – Rare Blasts: Studio Outtakes and Movie Music 1979-1985**

### PRESS RELEASE

(LP: LIB-2112; CD & download: LIB-2120)

A crown jewel in last year's Record Store Day roster, An American Music Story: The Complete Studio Recordings 1979-1985, was a comprehensive 5-LP overview from Los Angeles roots-rock legends the Blasters. This deluxe box set was an immediate sellout, and over the past six months Liberation Hall has kept busy reissuing the five titles as standalone releases. The final entry from that box set, Rare Blasts: Studio Outtakes and Movie Music 1979-1985, arrives on April 18, 2026. It will be available on translucent cobalt blue vinyl with an inner sleeve showcasing rare photos, memorabilia, and liner notes essay by co-producer Chris Morris. Digital single **CAN'T STOP TIME** is available now.



**TRACKLIST:** 1. **21 Days in Jail** (W. Dixon, L.P. Weaver), 2. **Love 24 Hours a Day** (T. Jarrett), 3. **I Fell in Love** (K. Cook), 4. **So Glad** (C.A. Burnett), 5. **Ashamed of Myself** (R. McCoy/C. Singleton), 6. **Lone Wolf** (R. Harris), 7. **One Bad Stud** (J. Lieber/M. Stoller), 8. **Blue Shadows** (D. Alvin), 9. **Justine** (D. Harris/D. Terry), 10. **Leave My Money Alone** (C. Green/J. West), 11. **Flat Top Joint** (D. Alvin), 12. **Can't Stop Time** (D. Alvin), 13. **Cry for Me** (M. London), 14. **Kathleen** (D. Alvin) All tracks are previously released.

# The Third Mind Announce **Spellbinder!** Out March 13

Companion To Right Now! Marks A Return to the Band's Original Improvisational Vision

Psychedelic rock collective The Third Mind return with Spellbinder!, a companion album to last year's critically praised Right Now! that reconnects the supergroup with the founding concept that first brought its members together: spontaneous musical conversation.

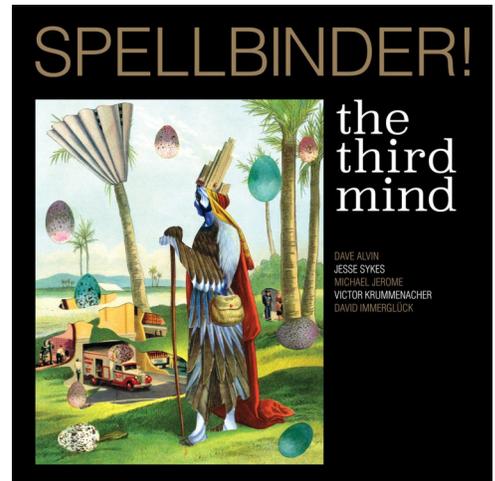
A companion piece to The Third Mind's latest album, Right Now!, this collection contains a bold instrumental interpretation of the Gabor Szabo classic, "Spellbinder," mixed by renowned mixing engineer Tchad Blake, and reimagined versions of songs from Right Now!.

This also marks the first vinyl appearance of "Reap What You Sow". The psychedelic improv supergroup featuring Grammy Award winning songwriter/guitarist Dave Alvin, Victor Krummenacher (Camper Van Beethoven, Cracker, Monks of Doom, Eyelids), David Immerglück (Counting Crows, John Hiatt, Monks of Doom, Camper Van Beethoven), Michael Jerome (Richard Thompson, Better Than Ezra, John Cale), and Jesse Sykes (Jesse Sykes & The Sweeter Hereafter) continues to defy expectations and genre on Spellbinder!

**Highlights:** Contains a new recording of the Gabor Szabo classic, "Spellbinder," mixed by Tchad Blake — The first vinyl appearance of "Reap What You Sow"

Also includes "Before We Said Goodbye" (alternate version - With Strings) and a Tchad Blake remix of "Darkness, Darkness/The Creator Has A Master Plan"

**Spellbinder! Tracklisting:** 1. **Spellbinder** (Tchad Blake Mix) - 8:39, 2. **Reap What You Sow** - 6:43, 3. **Before We Said Goodbye** (with strings) - 5:44, 4. **Darkness, Darkness / The Creator Has A Master Plan** (Tchad Blake Remix) - 14:50



## Rick Shea's new album **SMOKE TREE ROAD**

**Tres Pescadores Records - February 20, 2026**

*Los Angeles, CA* — California country singer-songwriter Rick Shea will release his new album, Smoke Tree Road, on Feb. 20 via Tres Pescadores Records. The announcement arrives alongside the album's first single, EL DIABLO MANDA ("The Devil Commands"), a stark, clear-eyed meditation on the current state of the nation and one of Shea's most direct and resonant statements to date.

A master craftsman bridging classic country tradition with a contemporary sensibility, Shea has spent five decades refining a style defined by stoic Western restraint and deep emotional clarity. His delivery—measured, understated, and quietly smoldering—allows the songs on Smoke Tree Road to unfold with uncommon power and grace.

Shea's musical roots trace back to the hard-edged honky-tonks and truck stops of early 1970s San Bernardino, where legends like Lefty Frizzell and Wynn Stewart still worked the circuit. That formative education continues to inform his work across more than a dozen critically praised albums and collaborations with artists including Dave Alvin, the late Chris Gaffney, Wanda Jackson, and Mary McCaslin.

Recorded with longtime collaborators including guitarist Tony Gilkyson, bassist/saxophonist Jeff Turmes, drummer Dale Daniel, and pianists Skip Edwards and

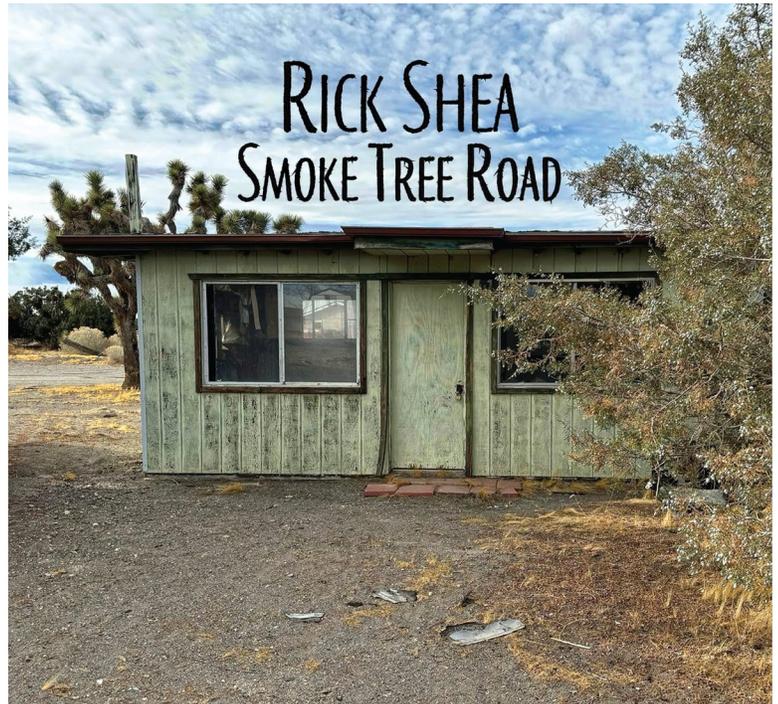
Danny McGough, Smoke Tree Road is an organic, ensemble-driven album rooted in feel, space, and narrative. Highlights include the road-worn A WEEK IN WINNEMUCCA, the tender MARIA featuring Celia Chavez, a reimagined ONE MORE NIGHT from Shea's earliest recordings, and the searing lead single, EL DIABLO MANDA .

A tireless live performer, Shea has toured nationally and internationally, from Belfast to the American Southwest, maintains multiple honky-tonk residencies in Los Angeles, and continues to participate in Dave Alvin's Roots on the Rails series alongside artists such as Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Butch Hancock.

With Smoke Tree Road, Rick Shea delivers a work of elegant simplicity and hard-earned insight, reaffirming his place among the most quietly authoritative voices in American roots music.

**A note from Rick Shea:** After the horrific shooting and killing of a woman by ICE agents in Minneapolis we're both heartbroken and horrified. We wish to send all of our sympathy out to the woman's family, neighbors and all the people of Minneapolis. This should not be happening. In light of these events, we considered postponing the release of this song EL DIABLO MANDA and video, which had been scheduled for several weeks, but as this is exactly what the song and video are about, we decided we should go ahead. Again our deepest sympathy and condolences to everyone who has been affected by this, which at this point is all of us.

Look for the YouTube video for EL DIABLO MANDA - The title is a Spanish idiom for telling someone to "go to hell."



# Hard Line Producer Jeff Eyrich

## A 2026 Interview

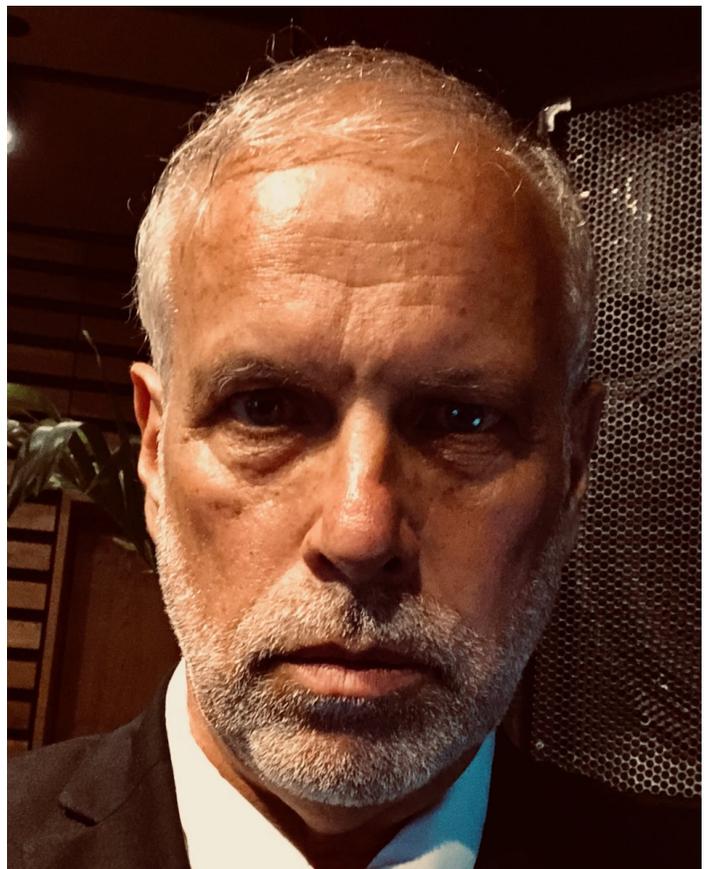
By Billy Davis

*In 1985 The Blasters released the last album, called Hard Line, before Dave Alvin left the band. Jeff Eyrich was the producer of that album. In an phone interview from January 2026, Jeff recalls the making of the album.*

**American Music:** Tell me about your earliest days of playing music.

**Jeff Eyrich:** From the time I was 15, I was playing guitar in local bands. I grew up in Long Beach, CA, but went to the same Catholic high school in Downey with Phil and Dave, called St. Pius X, with my younger brother. Phil reminded me that one time those guys came to my house to hang out with my brother. Phil was walking by my room and he saw Muddy Waters' The Real Folk Blues album laying on my bed and he said, "Wow that guy must be cool." I was into that kind of music in those days. This could have been something that Phil made up [laughs].

I played bass with James Harman in his Icehouse Blues Band for two or three years. What a great experience that was. Often we would back the old blues guys at the Ash Grove or Rick's Blues Bar. James insisted on authenticity. He would have me come over and listen to the original records and he would say cop this bass line exactly. We backed up John Lee Hooker, Big Mama Thornton, Jimmie Rogers, and Big Joe Turner at The Ash Grove and at the Topanga Corral. We also played Rick's Blues



Bar in Venice Beach. We had good times playing with James. We played a place in Watts called Small's Paradise. It was a four-hour gig in a low-lit bar with no white people [laughs] except us in the band. Then we'd go across the street to an after-hours joint where a guy named Ironing Board Sam was playing. He had the guts of a Hammond organ set up on an ironing board. He'd play by himself and they'd serve barbecue.

After that band, I moved to Hollywood. I had a friend named Pat DeVuono, a piano player who had connections with the Bihari brothers (Modern Records) – their operation was in Watts, where they had a studio. Pat would call me up to play on sessions with people like Big Joe and Lowell Fulson, Smokey Wilson and Charles Brown. We got paid like \$25 a side and the albums were released on Big Town Records in the '70s.

**AM:** What was it like playing with Big Joe Turner?

**JE:** Joe Turner would come up on stage -- he was huge -- and would sit in a chair. He would count off to us with his cane and we'd play his greatest hits. His voice was just in full command. I also played with Chuck Berry for a week of gigs at the Disneyland Hotel. I knew all his songs from his Chess records, so I was ready with those parts. He came in with his guitar case and a woman and said to us, "Everything is in C. I want the bass to be Da da da. Da da da." I was so disappointed [laughs]. I told him, "I know all your stuff." He said, "Just play it like that." I thought, "Oh My God [laughs] it's going to be an embarrassment." Once we backed up Freddie King at the Topanga Corral with no rehearsal. We just did it like a jazz gig, but they were songs we all knew from the Ice House Blues Band repertoire.

**AM:** Who did you produce before the Blasters?

Photo: Billy Davis



Jeff on upright bass at a recent gig

**JE:** I produced a James Harman EP for Enigma Records called Thank You Baby. Hollywood Fats was the guitar player. It's never been released on CD. I wish it would be, it's really good. I produced T Bone Burnett, Proof Through the Night for Warner Bros., the Plimsouls' Everywhere at Once for Geffen, including the single A MILLION MILES AWAY, and Rank and File, Long Gone Dead, for Slash/Warners -- a lot of the L.A. bands that were on the scene with the Blasters. I was kind of known as the roots-rock producer guy. Also, my style was that I liked to put bands in the studio live doing what they were used to doing on stage.

**AM:** How did the Blasters job happen?

**JE:** It came from Bob Biggs [Slash Records] and Steven Baker who was Lenny Waronker's [Warner Bros. president] assistant. I don't recall much pre-production on Hard Line, maybe just a discussion and a couple of pre-production rehearsals. Phil was cautious about handing over production to



Jeff, The Surf Punks and Rodney Binghamer

someone else. I wasn't given any directives by the label. Of course, Warners was interested in selling records and taking the band to the next level.

**AM:** Where did the recording sessions take place?

**JE:** We were recording at Ocean Way Studios, a classic old-school Hollywood studio. It had big open rooms. We were in Studio A. We set the band up live so they could all see each other. There is a beautiful natural ambiance in that room. Mark Ettel was the engineer and we had worked together often there. He was my assistant when we did T Bone Burnett. His rough mixes were always great and he was the engineer that I always wanted to work with. Mark and I did the final mixing.

**AM:** Was there an approach to getting the sounds from the Blasters?

**JE:** I might have helped tweak the guitar for Dave a little, but

they pretty much sound like that without a lot of help. Mark is a real guitar-sound guy, so he got their sound easily. In those days I was working with the Drum Doctor, Ross Garfield. He's a drummer with an amazing collection of drums. He would bring 10 different snare drums to the studio. He worked on Bill Bateman's drums tuning them up to get them to their maximum potential. It reduced hours of banging on drums trying to get the right sound. I think Bateman dug what was happening because it takes a lot of pressure off the drummer.

**AM:** What kind of technique recording did you start with?

**JE:** We jumped right into playing. We would just go for takes with the full band with Phil singing a pilot vocal and then we might look at it after. After, if necessary, I'd ask Phil to do a few more takes. If the first take was great, which it usually was, we'd keep it. With Phil Alvin it was easy, because he is such a good fucking singer – intense. He reminded me of the Plimsouls when I was working with Peter Case. He would go to the right place, the right energy level, the right delivery. He was inside the song from the beginning. That makes it easy for a producer to not have to coax a singer up to a certain energy level. He was the leader of the band and the rest of them dialed into his thing and played at that level.

**AM:** The Blasters are known for arguing in the studio. Did you see any of that?

**JE:** I have a younger brother two years younger than me and we always had big fights. So that dynamic was just a brother thing. I could see arguments coming and I would get out there and help work it out. But that was one of the positive functions of me producing. I can't imagine how they got through past records without someone there to mediate [laughs]. Because it got so heated they almost had fist fights.



Jeff Eyrich with Tim Buckley

The biggest disagreement was on a song Dave brought in called LITTLE HONEY. Dave sang on the demo and I loved the way he did it. I said to Dave, Phil is singing all the rest of the songs, how 'bout you sing lead on this one? He said: "I don't think Phil is gonna go for that." That was a huge fight and it never happened. Phil did a great job, but Dave did it differently.

**AM:** Do you remember Lee Allen and Steve Berlin recording?

**JE:** Yes, I think we moved over to Amigo Studios in North Hollywood to record the horns. It was a Warner Bros. studio. Ocean Way was good for recording tracks, but those big rooms are overkill to just overdub. And Amigo had better sound for that kind of stuff. We recorded SAMSON AND DELILAH over at Amigo also with background singers Bobby King and Herman Johnson.

**AM:** Dave Alvin told Chris Morris for the liner notes to the Blasters box set that Phil went into the studio with the backup singers and locked the doors to the rest of the band, so he could do it all his way.

**JE:** I definitely remember being there. We recorded SAMSON AND DELILAH over at Amigo with background singers Bobby King and Herman Johnson. I remember Phil working things out with them and Phil giving them the direction that he wanted the full gospel thing. That was a peak experience on that record for me. It was amazing.

**AM:** Bobby King and Herman Johnson also sang backup on the unreleased songs CAN'T STOP TIME and JUNGLE SOLDIER.

**JE:** Yes, their background vocals were done at Amigo. I played bass on CAN'T STOP TIME. It was more of a Motown song with a lot of chord changes. I probably had a chord chart and I think I used my own bass a '68 Telecaster bass. It wasn't really John Bazz's thing really. At that time I was doing a lot of recording sessions for different people playing a lot of styles. And I can't remember if that was Bill Bateman or Stan Lynch playing drums. On a lot of songs, I would have Stan next to Bateman adding percussion. Very much like they say that Paul McCartney would sit and bang a tambourine next to Ringo to keep the pocket. Bill and Stan worked together on a lot of songs.

**AM:** Tell us more about Bobby King and Herman Johnson, who were credited on the album as the Jubilee Singers?

**JE:** Their harmonies were automatic with those guys. They were used to singing. Both had a gospel background and seemed already familiar with the song. Phil directed what was natural to

them because one sang high and the other low. They totally got it. And the energy came from Phil.

**AM:** What do you remember about Gene Taylor?

**JE:** Gene used to sit in with us when I was in the James Harman band. I always sat at Gene's left when we were playing and he would kick the piano with his left foot to keep time like you'd tap your foot [laughs]. I always thought he was gonna kick a hole in the piano. He was the most amazing piano player I've ever seen. James would always break down a song to let Gene go on the piano, much like what happened on the Blasters' KATHLEEN at the Hard Line sessions. An amazing player and what a loss.

**AM:** LITTLE HONEY had Richard Greene on fiddle, David Hidalgo on mandolin, and Larry Taylor on standup bass.

**JE:** We wanted a country-ish feel on that song. We wanted a very different, more acoustic approach to that song and that meant different players than the normal Blasters thing. I played a lot in the '70s with a guy named Peter Ivers and that's where I met Richard Greene. Richard produced some stuff that I played bass on. I knew how great he was as a violin and fiddle player. Stan Lynch played some percussion on a wood block or something like that. Stan and I were friends, so we hung out a lot. I can't remember Larry Taylor playing bass, but it makes sense because he played with Peter Ivers and Richard in other configurations. I do remember cutting it live.

**AM:** Dave Alvin said it was cut with all the musicians in a circle like an old hillbilly recording session.

**JE:** That's right. I remember that because I would be out in the studio while the recording was goin' on and I remember that one.

**AM:** Did Bill Bateman accept the idea of another percussionist?



Jeff on upright bass at a recent gig

**JE:** Stan was really good about navigating a difficult situation where he was gonna fill in for somebody else. I think Bill and Stan became friends. I don't remember any difficulty with that. I think we really all worked together.

**AM:** What's your opinion of the longer version of DARK NIGHT?

**JE:** I think the final version was a tape edit of the longer one.

**AM:** When recording HELP YOU DREAM, Dave said when it was suggested as a joke to have the Jordanares on there. He said you knew how to get a hold of them.

**JE:** The Jordanares? You just call them up [laughs]. They did so many sessions around that time. There were a few versions of the Jordanares, but we had the most original version [with Gordon Stoker]. Phil, Dave and I flew down to Nashville to House of David Studios. Phil showed up in a suit and tie showing total respect for who he was going to be working with.

Phil Alvin definitely wanted to sing his vocals live with the Jordanares backing him up. So, we recorded them all together on TROUBLE BOUND, HELP YOU DREAM, HEY GIRL and ROCK 'N ROLL WILL STAND. Phil directed them on exactly what he wanted. It was easy for them to do. They were very cordial and fun, but they had other sessions to get to. Phil was in seventh heaven. That was another peak experience for me.

**AM:** COMMON MAN may have been one of the last songs recorded at your sessions.

**JE:** I just listened to it. It has a really different sound. Great guitars, but the drums don't sound like a Mark Ettel set up – I almost wonder if someone else went in and mixed it. It's the one song on the record that doesn't sound right. I don't know if someone used a snare drum sample or what, but it's a weird sound. Good groove though and great lyrics.

**AM:** These recordings sat for a year before being released with the record company requiring changes. What do you remember about this period?

**JE:** After I left, I remembered hearing they were gonna cut a John Cougar song, which surprised me. But I knew the record company was obviously looking for a single. Don [Gehman] was a friend of mine, though I haven't talked to him in a long time. But that's not abnormal for this to happen with a big record company involved.

**AM:** Did you think the Blasters' music on the album was different than what they planned?

**JE:** The band had a huge fan base. We stretched the envelope a bit, but within what the band could live with, and they were happy with it. It didn't hurt their credibility. The last two songs could have appeared as if they were selling out, but I still don't think they did. The Blasters naturally evolved. Dave was really blossoming as a writer. My philosophy with every band is that you build a record, so just like buying a suit that's a little too big, you're gonna grow into it. I want the band to be happy and proud of what we accomplish in the studio. I want 'em to love it.

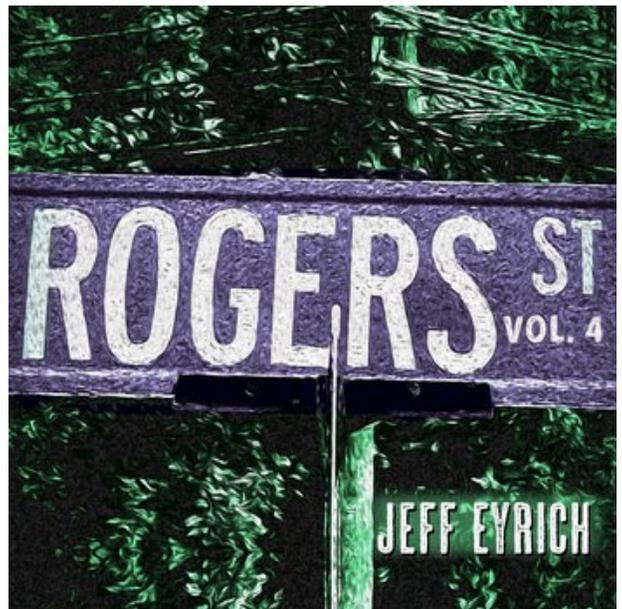
**AM:** How does Hard Line look to you now, 41 years later?

**JE:** The Blasters came out of the '80s as part of the scene, but they were always different -- a roots band. When I think of the Gun Club and Plimsouls, who were more pop, the Blasters were not that and they were so good live. They didn't do the typical '80s stuff. They stuck to their own style.

I'm super proud of Hard Line. It sounds great and fresh. Not dated. To use the Rhino Records term, it's a "testament" to a natural recording of the band in a good studio, but not getting too fancy. I think we captured them at their best. The band had matured and all of them rose to the occasion. I don't want to take too much credit, because it was all them. They were kind enough to let me join the band for the time we worked together.

**AM:** What are you up to now?

**JE:** I'm very active as a musician playing live gigs and recording -- sometimes guitar, sometimes bass. My Rogers Street Studio is my home studio in Tuckahoe, NY, which is just my laptop, software, and some vintage gadgets I've collected over the years. I've been doing this a long time and can turn out a good product. Since 2022, I've done six solo records -- primarily instrumentals. I write the music that I like and some I sing. I do a lot of remote recording, bass tracks, guitar tracks, mixing. People send me stuff and I add what I think makes it better.



**Go to [JeffEyrich.com](http://JeffEyrich.com) and select "The Work" to see all of Jeff's past and current music projects.**

# The making of **Hard Line**

## December 1983 – February 1985

by **Billy Davis**

The Blasters released their third major label album, called Hard Line, in February, 1985, but the origins of the album started over a year earlier. Phil Alvin would later tell Howard DeMuir of Sounds Magazine, “It was a struggle. But not just the album, but life situations in general, management and business situations. There were fights on how to organize things and our mother was sick. There was a lot of chaos. We always thought two months was too long to make a record and then this one took a year.”



The Blasters started preparing songs for the new album in between tour dates in late 1983. “Dave was always writing,” John Bazz said, “We would rehearse at my father’s factory. In the Hard Line era, Dave and Bill had lived together in a big apartment in Hollywood on Mansfield, so Phil and I would drive there to rehearse. The way we would learn a song was; Dave had the song sketched out, often complete, and would play it for us. We would listen and learn and have another rehearsal. We learned them to record, not necessarily for live. So, when we left rehearsal they were ready to go.”

The Blasters played a New Year’s Eve show at the end of 1983 with Los Lobos at



**The Blasters at the Music Machine in Los Angeles, December 31, 1983**

the Music Machine in Los Angeles debuting five new songs intended for the new album. It was the only indication to the public of what was going on behind the scenes of the new album. They did a longer version of DARK NIGHT with an extra verse that would not make it on Hard Line. David Hidalgo from Los Lobos played accordion on HEY GIRL. Dave remembers, "We had already cut that song with David, because I remember in the studio, was the first time he played it." So that tells us that the Blasters started in the studio in December of 1983. John Bazz remembers recording with him: "David Hidalgo is a musical master who picks up on things very fast." ROCK AND ROCK ROLL WILL STAND was also played that night with an extra verse: "He put out a record that nobody bought / Before he knew what happened everybody forgot / He called up the station who put him on hold / Styles have changed you're a little too old / He's playing by himself 'cuz he can't afford a band / Everybody knows rock 'n roll will stand." That verse would be cut out for the recording.

The set of new songs included CAN'T STOP TIME and KATHLEEN with Lee Allen

and Steve Berlin on saxophones. The studio recordings of those songs also would not make the final album, but were released years later on compilation albums.

Warner Bros. Records put pressure on the Blasters as if this, their third major label album, might be their last. The previous Non Fiction, did not outsell their first one. Some criticism was aimed at the quality of the production, of which the Blasters handled themselves. And the record company really wanted a successful hit single for radio. Warner Bros. said an outside producer was necessary.

The first idea the Blasters had was using Booker T. Jones of Booker T. and the MGs. He had produced Willie Nelson's Stardust album, which has sold more than five million copies since 1978. He had the qualifications, was asked by the Blasters and said "Yes," but Warner Bros. rejected the choice, preferring someone who was "young and hip," according to Dave. "It's a frustrating, sad memory that still keeps me awake some nights, wondering what could have been," he remembers, "And I had to be the one to call Mr. Jones and tell him he wasn't wanted."

"Phil was doing this record under protest," Dave told The Blasters Newsletter in 2021, "We had self-produced the last record, Non Fiction, and that was a terrible experience for the band. Me, Bateman, and Bazz demanded that for this one we had to have a real record producer. The label insisted also. Phil would say, 'What does a record producer do?' I'd try to explain Sam Phillips and Phil Spector to him, but he just didn't get it. But Hard Line went better than it did later with Nick Lowe trying to produce us [laughs]. So, Jeff Eyrich was picked to produce. Jeff went to high school with us, so he was one of us and a great musician. I remember even putting together a band for a high school dance with him back then with an organ player named Greg Courey. So, I've known Jeff a long time. He also produced the Plimsouls' MILLION MILES AWAY, which was an amazing record. There were fights between me and Phil that Jeff witnessed. I was trying to push the band in directions they were not comfortable with."

"I was fighting very hard against the idea of getting any producers on the album," Phil Alvin revealed to Harold DeMuir of Sounds Magazine in 1984, "I didn't see that it would make any difference in the recording quality. But I was wrong. Having producers was very helpful on most of the record – certainly in the case of Jeff Eyrich, who went to the same high school as we did and who could understand us."

Jeff Eyrich was suggested by Warner Bros. as the "young and hip" producer

who already produced The Plimsouls, Rank & File and T Bone Burnett. The Blasters often argued in the studio over little details for hours on end. A producer now could be a mediator and give them an unbiased opinion and be a deciding factor when they couldn't resolve issues. But more importantly Jeff Eyrich knew how to produce a successful 1980s record.

Dave Alvin explained to Gene Santoro for Guitar World that the band welcomed a modernizing of their sound, "It's our first album in stereo. With the other albums we produced ourselves, we were trying to make things sound like a Chess record or a Sun record or a Specialty record. We would bring in a Joe Turner record and play it while we were mixing because we wanted that kind of sound. But now in 1984, as far as radio is concerned, it's got to sound real stereo [laughs]. We thought that kind of high separation would lessen the impact, but we found it heightened it. It actually sounds now like the Blasters do live."

Recording sessions were in full swing in early January 1984. CAN'T STOP TIME was a song that established the idea that this album was going to be different and that not only the Blasters would play on the songs. If someone else could serve the song, it was agreed to allow them to play. Producer Jeff Eyrich played bass on this one. John Bazz admitted, "Jeff was an accomplished bass player. He if he saw me struggling, he would politely show me the part. I don't have any ego in these matters. We all agreed to let Jeff play, it if it gets the job done. I get the real bluesy feel of things, but outside that style, a guy like Jeff could really bring it home."

In an interview on Jan. 24, 1984 for Blitz magazine, Dave Alvin told Frank Beeson about the 12 songs they were currently recording: "DARK NIGHT is the heaviest thing on the album. It's the longest we've ever put on record – about 5 or 6 minutes." Dave added "I'm working on the last song right now [COMMON MAN]. It might be a little heavy too. The band is in an entirely different mood than when we cut Non Fiction. We are very optimistic. Warner Bros. is now claiming to be behind the band." Dave is referring to the return of manager

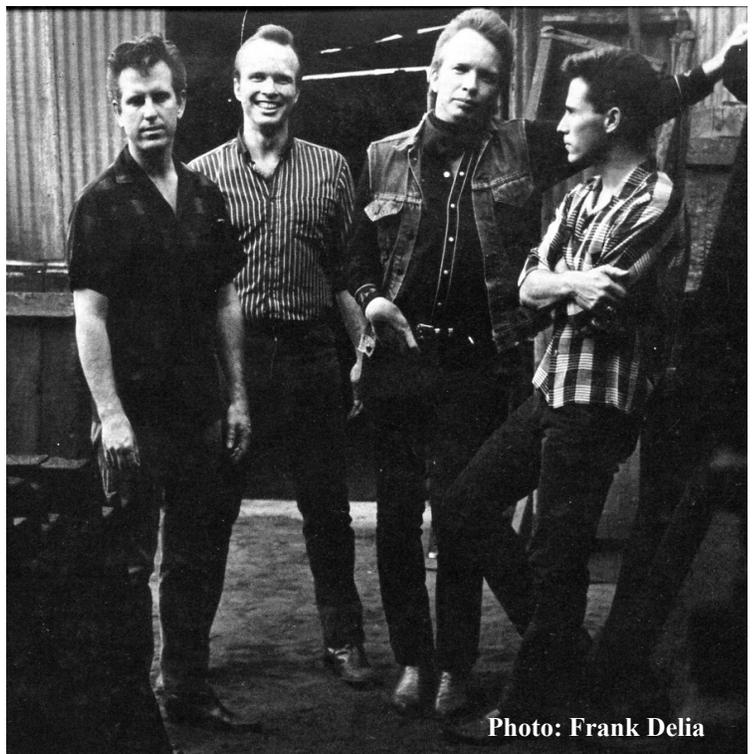


Photo: Frank Delia

Shelley Heber. She hadn't been representing the band for the last two years. Her replacements in that time, didn't have the good rapport with Warner Bros. that she had. Dave continues, "So hopefully everything will be good."

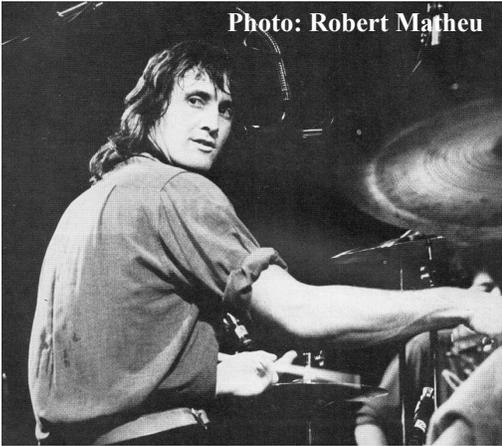
"We've got a song called HELP YOU DREAM which I wrote with the Jordanaires [to sing backup on] in mind," Dave said, "It's really pretty. We included an Elmore James song called CRY FOR ME. The way we did it in the studio was great - It just rocks. It's a real rock 'n roll song, not bluesy at all. The other cover is SAMSON AND DELILAH, originally recorded by Blind Willie Johnson. It's still being worked on. It's Phil and acoustic guitar and some gospel singers. It will be the last song on Side 2. Phil is such a good finger picker -- you can only really appreciate fingerpicking when played on an acoustic guitar. John Doe of X and I wrote a song together called LITTLE HONEY. When X was on the road John would send me postcards and cassettes of the song and I would rewrite it. The melody and groove he had was sort of a Marty Robbins honky-tonk piece. We turned it into a Rolling Stones-ish blues rocker but it wasn't holding up to those arrangements, so I rearranged it into an Appalachian type of song. It's really quiet with acoustic bass, fiddle and mandolin."

The song LITTLE HONEY is a perfect example of the maturation of the Blasters' sound and recording approach in 1984. Dave: "John and I wrote it as an up-tempo

song. When I took it to the Blasters, we were doing it as a rock 'n roll song. We cut a few versions that way and everyone decided it wasn't working. I knew it was a good song, so me and Gene Taylor played it as a ballad with me singing it. Jeff turned the recorder on, so there is a version with me singing it. I had it on a cassette for years, but lost all that in a mudslide on my garage. Now, it wasn't my voice that was on Romeo's Escape, it was more my King of California voice. I sounded like Keith Richards [laughs] on a really good day. It really worked. Jeff was all for it and said we should cut this. But I knew there was no way on earth Phil would go for me singing it. So, we talked about doing it that way



Photo: Frank Delia



Stan Lynch on Percussion

with Phil singing it.”

Dave Alvin: “We wanted to augment the song, so we figured let’s get David Hidalgo in here to play that instrument he created that sounds like a mandolin, but it’s not a mandolin.” Dave remembers that the song called for an upright bass sound, “At that point Johnny Bazz was not a standup bass player like he is now. Larry Taylor was always a friend of ours.” Jeff Eyrich brought in Richard Greene to play violin/fiddle. Jeff had

worked with him often before. Dave: “Richard was just great – Goodnight [laughs]. And Stan Lynch was added on percussion. Stan is a great guy, a real rock ‘n roller, and was friends with Jeff.”

John Bazz remembers the session, “I was there for that and a rehearsal that proceeded it, which was in the same room as the recording. I knew the song already, but the decision was made to use upright bass. I wasn’t playing upright at that time. The decision to use Larry was because he was hanging around us at the time and I love Larry. He and Phil were buddies too. It was easy for Larry. I didn’t want to miss this, especially with Richard Greene being there, I’m happy it went that way. It’s a beautiful arrangement. The talent in that room was incredible.”

LITTLE HONEY had more life after the Blasters’ version was recorded. X recorded it for the Ain’t Love Grand album and singer Kelly Willis performed the song in the Oscar-winning film Thelma and Louise. Later in Dave Alvin’s solo career he often played it in his acoustic shows.

Over the many years since Hard Line was completed, it was known that there was a bonus track called JUNGLE SOLDIER that Dave Alvin hated and didn’t want to be released in any form. To this day he hesitates to talk about its origins or re-

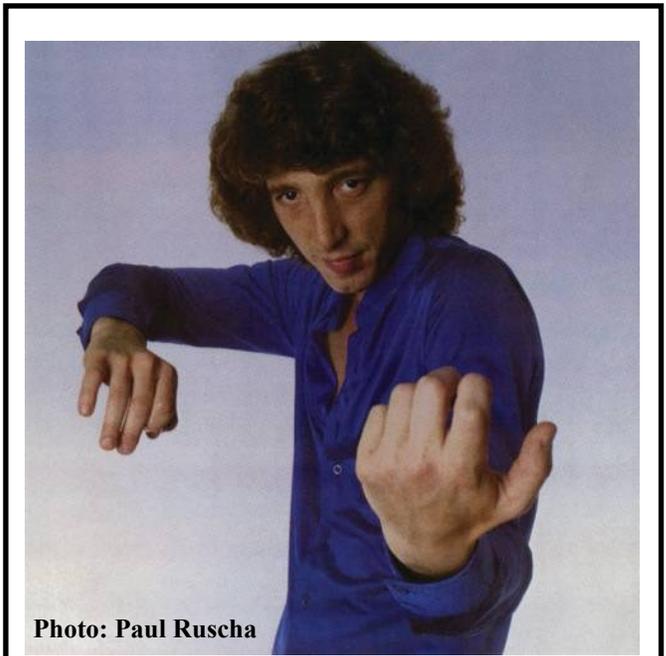


Photo: Paul Ruscha

“I love this song, sounds fantastic! This recording process was very similar to the way I recorded with Bill Monroe, all live, all at once.”  
--Richard Greene, 2026

ording. But here in this interview in January, 1984 in between sessions for the album, he had a completely different feeling toward the song. “I think the single may be JUNGLE SOLDIER,” as Dave continues sharing the story of the song, “It’s about a guy who works a day job, has a kid and wishes he could be a mercenary soldier in El Salvador. If this song had been on Non Fiction, it would have been a bloody depiction of life down there. People tend to listen to something if it’s more humorous. JUNGLE SOLDIER is fun. We’ve got marimbas on it. I’m giving Huey Smith co-writer credit because it’s similar to one of his numbers.” Musicologists have pointed out that it was a blatant cop of Huey “Piano” Smith’s DON’T YOU JUST KNOW IT. “The production makes it sound half-reggae, half New Orleans. We got Bobby King and Herman Johnson, who sings with Ry Cooder, to do the backing vocals.”

In 2025, Dave talked about JUNGLE SOLDIER when it was considered for the bonus track disc in the Liberation Hall Records Blasters box set, “It has a great Lee Allen solo on it, but I don’t like the way it came out. I especially don’t like all the ‘80s effects and instruments. If you listen to HOLLYWOOD BED, it’s all traditional instruments. JUNGLE SOLDIER is the worst song I ever wrote, so I don’t want to see a release of it.”

In 2026 Dave shared a little more, “There was talk about having Huey “Piano” Smith play on it ‘cause Lee knew him real well. We did track down a phone number for him, but then we were told he had gone religious and didn’t play secular music anymore. Lee played on all his hits. One of Lee’s best solos are on one of Huey’s songs called LITTLE LIZA JANE. My problems with JUNGLE SOLDIER are that there are a lot of ‘80s smush on there – cuz we were trying to get it to where it was a possible hit. We don’t have the two-inch masters for that to mix it better. And I don’t like my lyrics on there, even though Phil sings the hell out of it.”

John Bazz adds that, “It’s a protest song. It might have been too blatantly political or a little too left field for the Blasters at the time. You have to respect Dave Alvin’s judgment in these matters. It is his art ultimately.”

The Blasters were in Ocean Way Studios in Hollywood, CA, from January through April of 1984 recording 12 songs with Jeff Eyrich. As the Blasters’ familiar formula repeated, the album would have a few songs that featured the saxophones of Lee Allen and Steve Berlin. They had the aforementioned JUNGLE SOLDIER, CAN’T STOP TIME and a song Dave Alvin was very high on called TONIGHT KATHLEEN. And another song with the working title of DON’T STAY GONE LONG, later to be retitled, HEY GIRL.

In the studio the band were getting along well with producer Jeff Eyrich. Dave:

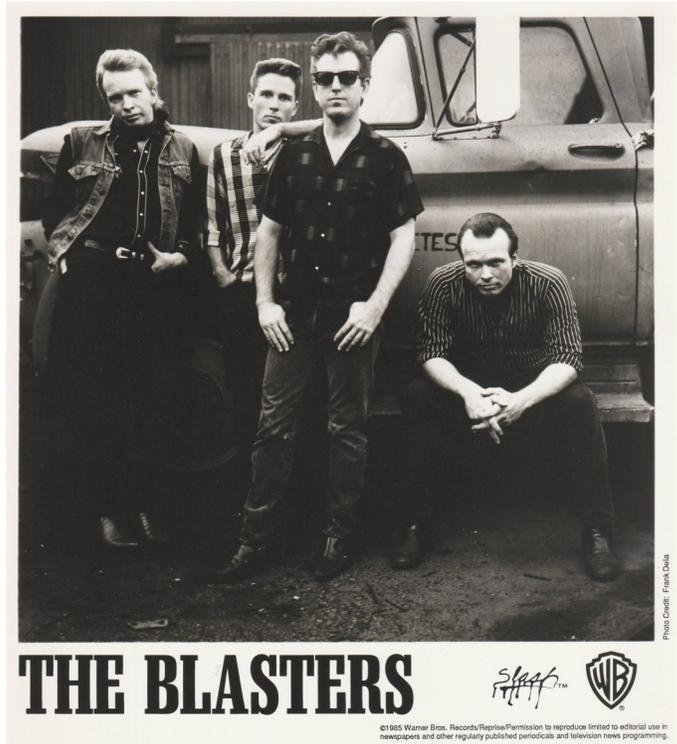
“Jeff really got our drums and guitars loud this time. Jeff said, ‘You’ve got to have a professional sound.’ He brought out a lot of things that we didn’t think we had in us.”

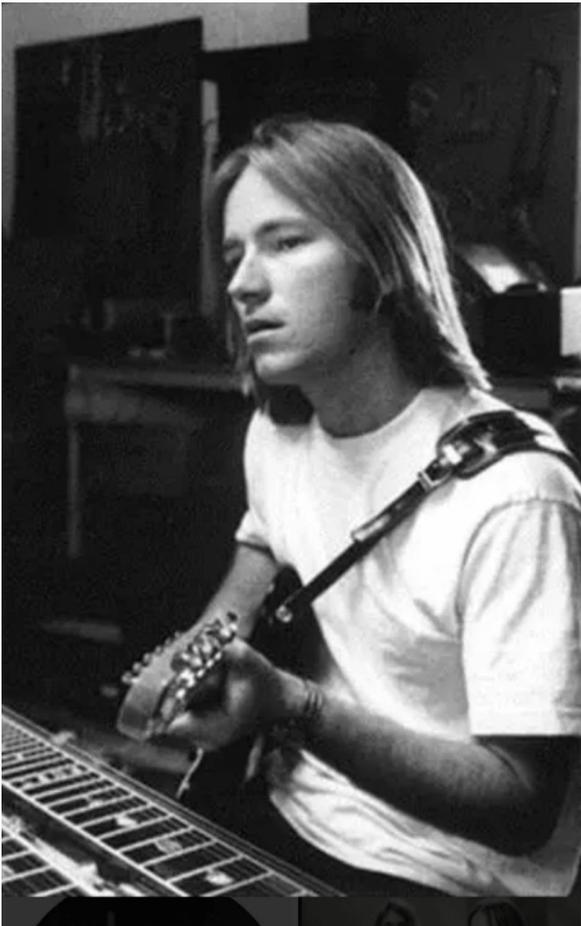
John Bazz described Jeff Eyrich as a “musical scientist” in Chris Morris’ *Blasters* box set liner notes, “He impressed me because he could recall a certain part of a song and talk about it. It’s hard for me to recall the details of a song when I’m playing it. But Jeff had a road map in his head and could pull things out at will. That’s why I referred to him as musical scientist. He knew music and was already a very accomplished musician.”

*DARK NIGHT* was a song that the *Blasters* were playing live and brought in with an extra verse and extended outro from what we would hear in the final release. The longer version adds 1 minute 52 seconds with a break hearing only Phil’s arpeggiated guitar notes. The rest of the band comes back in ramping up the sound to hear Phil’s final verse: “The family gathers round the coffin / The mother dries her tears / An old man kicking dirt saying nothing has changed in years / I thought these things didn’t happen anymore / I thought all that blood had been shed long ago.” The end repeats the mid-song crescendo to its sudden end.

In 2025 Dave reflected on the shortening of *DARK NIGHT* for the final release, “That was a big argument. I’m the songwriter and I wanted to yank the last verse out. I thought it didn’t add much. After I wrote it, I didn’t like it. But Phil was dead set against removing any verses. You wouldn’t expect a songwriter to argue in favor of editing his song [laughs]. Those were weird times. We also removed a verse in *TROUBLE BOUND*, but Phil insisted on still singing it live.”

Dave Alvin’s favorite song on the album was called *HELP YOU DREAM*. It went through many experiments and brought about the idea of adding Elvis Presley’s famous backing singers, the Jordanaires. Dave Alvin: “That started as a country ballad. I brought in a great pedal steel player named Ed Black, who played for years with Linda Ronstadt, to play on *HELP YOU DREAM*. I remember it very well. It was an overdub and I was thrilled to death -- he played his ass off. He also tried playing





Ed Black on pedal steel

a lap steel part on DARK NIGHT, but neither of them was used. Once pedal steel was on HELP YOU DREAM, it became a real country song [laughs]. At that point Phil was not into the songs coming off like that, though I was. As soon as Phil heard it, it was wiped. He said, “We ain’t having none of that on a record of mine.” But Ed Black piqued my interest and that’s why a few years later that kind of instrumentation showed up on my solo albums with Greg Leisz. I just loved that sound. I remember Ed Black very well because one thing he would do for fun is leather work. I asked him to make a guitar strap and he did. But it was so over the top, I could never use it [laughs]. It was a little too ‘Hey, look at me!’”

Dave Alvin revealed to Jeff Silverman of BAM Magazine in 1985 that the HELP YOU DREAM ballad changed to a shuffle, “We got to

a part where we needed a guitar, piano, or harmonica fill, and we couldn’t decide on what to use. Phil kept doing this vocal ‘bop shoo waa’ during the break, which led us to consider some gospel backup harmonies. Phil jokingly suggested we get the Jordanaires, but we thought, ‘Naah, they wouldn’t be interested.’ But Jeff knew how to reach them and they agreed to do it. We flew to Nashville and got them on four songs. They were so quick. They’d hear each song twice, write out their patterns in a weird geometric design and in three takes they were done.”

The Jordanaires also sang on TROUBLE BOUND, HEY GIRL and ROCK AND ROLL WILL STAND. It was quite an experience for Dave, Phil and Jeff Eyrich to record with the legendary singers at House of David Studios in Nashville. Phil remembers, “I sang with the Jordanaires in the same room together! I was charged. I am not a big Elvis fanatic, but the Jordanaires were like the guys around town, like cousins. I always thought they were my friends.”

In 2026 Dave Alvin recalls: “We carried the two-inch tapes on the airplane to Nashville. That was the old days before file sharing. We each had a tape because those things weigh a ton [laughs]. We were there only for a few days. During the sessions, we took a break, so I walked down to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Photo: Paul Natkin



### **The Jordanaires in the '80s — Gordon Stoker, Neil Matthews, Duane West, Ray Walker**

When I came back, Gordon Stoker one of the Jordanaires said, 'Did you see our suits in there?' [laughs] I said, 'Yes I did.' We had the Jordanaires in the studio mainly for HELP YOU DREAM and TROUBLE BOUND, but we thought, let's add them on more - HEY GIRL and ROCK 'N ROLL WILL STAND. I kind of wished we took more time on their arrangements."

Dave Alvin said there was a specific way that Phil Alvin worked up the arrangements with the singers, "It was a matter of coming up with a similar language." Dave said, "There was a gospel singing group from the '30s and '40s called the Golden Gate Quartet. They sang a style called Jubilee singing. They were a huge influence on the Jordanaires. So, Phil would say, 'Sing this like the Golden Gate Quartet,' and they understood. They were tickled that these young guys knew who the Golden Gate Quartet was. For TROUBLE BOUND Phil said, 'Hey you know what you did with Elvis?' They said 'Yes.' 'Well, do that!'" [laughs]

SAMSON AND DELILAH was in essence a Phil Alvin solo song that none of the other Blasters played on. Phil Alvin talked about the song to Jimi Lalumia for an April 1985 article for Island Ear Magazine: "Blind Willie Johnson's beautiful powerful version from 1928 was a little too wordy and rural to catch the ear of your average music fan. There's a version by Pop Staples that was very sweet and had taken the wordiness out and I put a musical delay between each line, so the song doesn't come at you like a speeding train. It leaves you enough time to deal with the strong lyrical images."

The usual tension still existed among the Blasters during the making of this album. On this song, it was said that Phil Alvin locked everyone out of the studio

while he, and backup vocalists, Bobby King and Herman Johnson recorded the song. Only engineer Mark Ettel was allowed in to run the board. Producer Jeff Eyrich remembers being there as well because he considers it a peak memorable moment for him in the making of the album. Dave remembers, “None of the band were there. Jeff might have been there. That was Phil’s way of flipping us the finger. But it was a great track and we said it has to be on the record.”

In 2026, Dave Alvin talked in more detail about this session and how it was indicative of the band members’ relationship at the time, “Phil and I had to make a deal to get this album done because Phil was an unwilling participant in some ways. On the past albums I would bring in a song. I’d have the lyrics written out. I would sing it six, seven or eight times and Phil would then get up and sing it and have it memorized by the end of the rehearsal. On Hard Line, nope. I would say have you learned it yet? ‘Nope. I haven’t had time.’ [laughs] It got to a point where Phil didn’t want to learn the songs or he wouldn’t show up at rehearsal at all.” Dave Alvin reasons, “The band never recovered from when Phil, Art [Fein], and Alex Oakley were managing the band. Phil was still mad about being fired as the band’s manager. Phil was good for us in the early days at looking out for us. We all were trained by Lee Allen and those guys who got screwed by the music industry. So, we got a good deal on our publishing by going with Bug Music. Michael Jackson was the biggest artist in the world, but he couldn’t change the way the music industry was structured. The Blasters’ success had went to Phil’s head in a weird way. He thought he had the ability to change that structure. When we let Phil go as manager, we had meetings with real managers like the guy from the Cars and others from the Ramones and the Eurythmics. Phil’s one demand of them was that their commission would be off the net instead of the gross, but that brought a reply of ‘You’re crazy. Goodbye.’

The recorded version of KATHLEEN was a song that showed growth but retained the essence of the Blasters style. The band was very high on it when they recorded it. Dave said in 1984, “There’s a song called TONIGHT KATHLEEN, which has guitar, horns, and piano. We actually jammed in the studio, which is something we’ve never done before.” That song title would later be shortened to KATHLEEN.

John Bazz remembers the special moment in the song: “We were planning a fade-out and then Gene doesn’t stop [laughs], he just keeps going. Gene was in his own world. Then everyone else came back in. It wasn’t rehearsed, not discussed in advance. It was so organic, it just happened. It’s my favorite ending to a

song.”

The band felt very positive about their 12-song collection of recordings and now just needed to present it to Warner Bros. for their approval. Phil Alvin was confident enough that he told his live audiences the album would be out in June, 1984. Dave Alvin told Sounds Magazine's Harold DeMuir, “Warner Bros. doesn't bother me about song content or anything. We're kind of a weird act over there. When we were first working on Hard Line we played some of the tapes for label president Lenny Waronker. There was no COMMON MAN or DARK NIGHT yet and he was going, “Where's all the dark political songs?” They seem to have faith in us, and they let us get away with a lot.”

But that alliance wasn't as smooth behind closed doors. In 2019, Dave Alvin published an essay in John Doe's book More Fun in the New World looking back 35 years at the real story. Dave's 13-page writing was titled It Sounds Too Much Like the Blasters. Dave Alvin reveals that he was fuming mad after visiting Warner Bros. offices to play for them the initial 12-song rough mixes. Warner Bros. president Lenny Waronker had a team of junior A&R men speaking for the company that said the Blasters' new songs, specifically KATHLEEN, “sounded too much like the Blasters” to be released. Dave Alvin detailed in that essay how this meeting said everything about the tumultuous times the band were in. Dave wrote, “Out of everything the Blasters ever recorded before or since, KATHLEEN was – and remains – my absolute favorite performance we ever did. It was often difficult for us to replicate the raw energy of our live shows in the cold and clinical environment of the recording

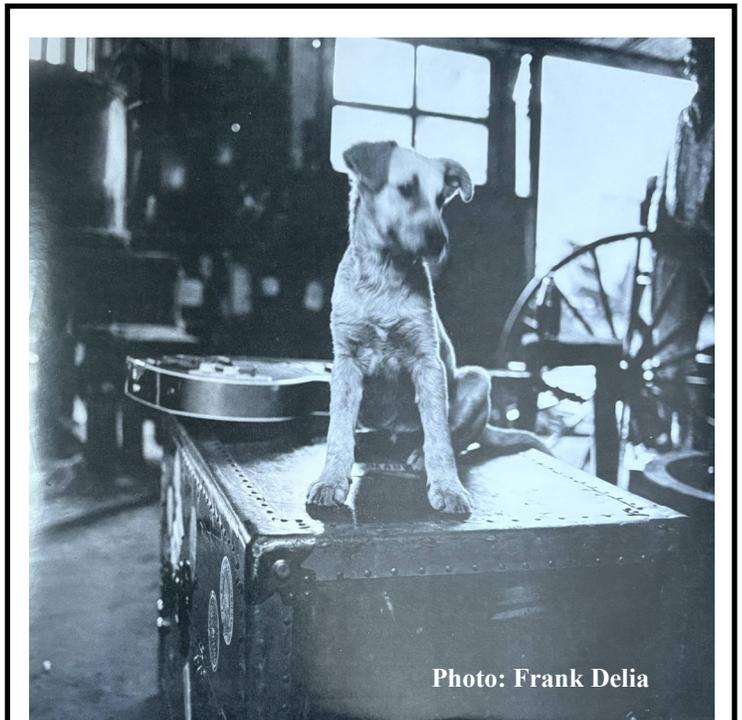


Photo: Frank Delia

On American Bandstand, Dick Clark asked, “Who is the dog on the inner sleeve of the Hard Line record?” Phil replied, “That's Princess - she's David's and my dog. She died just before Christmas [1984]. She was a great dog and was there the whole time while we were growing up. I still expect her to be my partner when I come home at night, but she's not there.”

studio, but when we cut KATHLEEN we captured the sweaty abandon of a live gig perfectly.”

Other songs that were rejected were CAN'T STOP TIME and eventually JUNGLE SOLDIER. Coincidentally, all the songs had the horn section of Lee Allen and Steve Berlin on them. So, was it that Warner Bros. was targeting the horns as persona non grata?

Dave Alvin softened the rejection when talking to the press at that time. Chris Morris interviewed Dave for an article in Record magazine in April 1985: Dave: “When we handed Warner Bros. the album as it originally stood, they said you’ve got some great shit on here, you’ve got some stuff you’ve never done before and then there is stuff you have done before. At first, we were pissed at them. We said, ‘You guys are crazy. We’re great. Anything we do is great.’ But we grew up in the past two years. Finally, you realize you have to listen to other people and others’ input is good.”

Dave reflected in 2024: “KATHLEEN is our greatest studio recording with everybody on it -- Lee Allen and Gene Taylor and Steve Berlin. I’m still pissed at Warners for leaving that song off the album. Jeff Eyrich was wise enough to let the tape roll to catch Gene going crazy on a jam at the end. I learned a lot from Jeff about producing. I wished he could have been involved with JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY and COLORED LIGHTS.”

After that meeting, the Blasters’ Trouble Bound album, as they were calling it, had a working sequence of *Side A, 1. Trouble Bound, 2. Rock ‘n Roll Will Stand, 3. Help You Dream, 4. Hey Girl, 5. Jungle Soldier. Side B, 1. Samson and Delilah, 2. Dark Night, 3. Common Man, 4. Cry For Me, 5. Little Honey*

In the spring of 1984, the Blasters announced that the Trouble Bound album was planned for a summer ‘84 release to coincide with the release of the Streets of Fire movie which the Blasters appeared in and contributed two songs to the soundtrack. Manager Shelley Heber remembers, “They wanted to name the album Trouble Bound. I said that’s a terrible name. I could just see critics and press making fun of the title. I thought Hard Line was a strong positive statement. Phil was Phil. You had to pick your fights to get through to him. My assessment of the situation was to predict how long he could last in a discussion and then think how long I could last. Then place your bets where it makes the most sense. You very rarely would win with him, but I won that one.”

John Bazz, “I remember the meeting where she said we should drop that title. I loved the title, but she was right. That was her business. She was very smart and

After Hard Line, a promotional 12-inch single for the song TROUBLE BOUND was released which had an alternative extended mix of the song. Dave Alvin told the Blasters Newsletter, "Well, the idea of doing the mix wasn't our idea, it was London's [record company] who was distributing Slash product in England. I don't write songs that apply themselves to dance remixes. The cover came from an old cartoon from the '20s or '30s called something like 'Bringing up father.' The woman's name was Maggs and the guys name was Jiggs. Somebody in England came up with using those images."



she knew her promotion. She was a great manager but the fringe benefit was her promoting skills."

The Blasters were eventually able to use the Trouble Bound title for a live album in 2002 on HighTone Records when the original band reunited.

Through the summer the Blasters lost their first band member when Steve Berlin decided to join Los Lobos. Steve told The Blasters Newsletter, "I was still in the Blasters when I produced the Lobos album And a Time To Dance in 1983. I was around for the beginning of the recording of the Hard Line album in 1984. I was actively trying to get producer gigs, meanwhile still playing in the Blasters, but starting to grow unfulfilled in many regards. The fighting was one issue and the inability to say anything became another, because I was the lowest guy on the band totem pole. I didn't know then, but I could sort of see Dave moving away from the band. I thought Dave's songs were being aimed more at his

development as a songwriter and the horns were being phased out. I loved Dave's songs, he was growing into what is without a doubt one of America's best songwriters. I will always love the Blasters and they made me who I am. I'm not sure if I made a definite decision to join Los Lobos, but as I got to know them and be in their world, I noticed they didn't fight about the weather. They treated each other with civility and were gentlemanly in a way that quite frankly, the Blasters never were from the beginning. It opened my eyes to a certain extent. The Los Lobos guys treated me with an enormous amount of respect even though I can't say

that I deserved any of it [laughs]. Then soon after, the Blasters and Lobos were both leaving on tour the same day. I just made a last-minute decision and called Dave and told him I was going to Lobos. He said: 'Okay, cool!' He didn't even try to talk me out of it. That was the end of my Blasters days and the start of my Lobos days in October, 1984."

Further delays releasing the Hard Line album ensued as Phil Alvin told Jimi LaLumia in 1985 for the Island Ear magazine: "From February to April 1984, we recorded 12 songs and then the situation came up with my Mother's illness. During that time we also realigned our management. We then decided to record more tunes that might give us some better leverage in the area of radio airplay. That's what brought Don Gehman into the picture."

"Warner Bros. Records always respected artistic integrity." Shelly Heber remembers in a 2023 Interview with the Blasters Newsletter. "The Blasters were in a comfortable niche at the time in 1984. But then when Hard Line was being recorded, Warner Bros. really wanted a hit, which was very difficult. They didn't feel the Blasters had anything strong enough to get on the radio. Warner Bros. approved me spending more money on a credible producer to get a few more songs, so I called John Mellencamp, who loved the Blasters. I wanted his producer, Don Gehman. John said: 'I'll fly out on my own to produce the Blasters.' I said 'You'll what??!!' [laughs] 'John, I don't have the money to pay you what you deserve.' He said: 'I'll do it for free.' Again, I said, 'You'll do what??!!' [laughs]

Dave Alvin remembers his first reaction to working with Mellencamp and Gehman in his comments to Gary Burch of Record magazine, "When COLORED LIGHTS was offered to us, our whole thing was, If we don't like the song we're not gonna do it." Mellencamp agreed wholeheartedly, according to Dave, and that Mellencamp just wanted to help a fledgling band in a



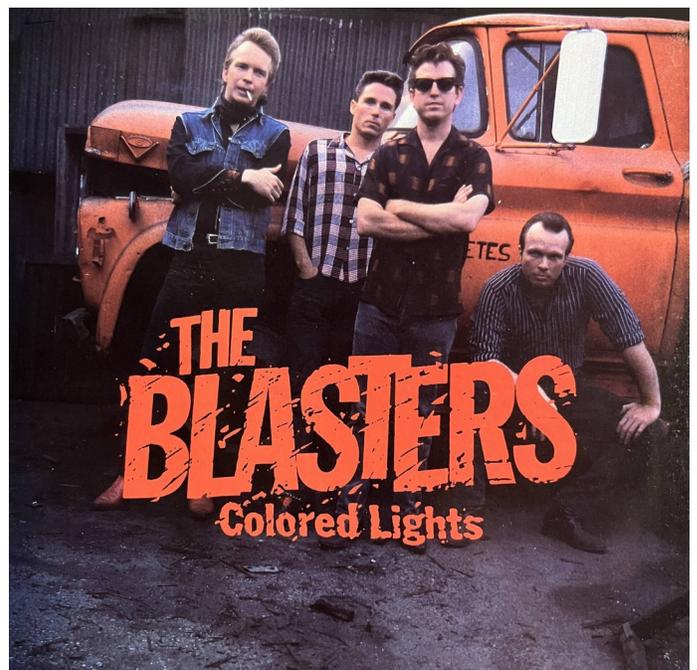
**The Blasters with John Cougar Mellencamp**

way that no one ever did for him.

So, Dave and Mellencamp got together with a few acoustic guitars to write a song. Dave remembers: “Every line I came up with, he’d come up with a better one. So, basically John wrote it.” Dave later told Music Connection magazine that, “His approach to writing is opposite from mine. My outlook is more literary and his is musical. We sat down for a few days trying to co-write, but we really needed a week. I know I learned a lot from it.” Phil Alvin didn’t have much to do with the song as he told Harold DeMuir of Sounds Magazine in 1985, “I’ve still got a disagreement in that I think that COLORED LIGHTS should sound like 96 TEARS. Cougar thought so too, but it didn’t happen.”

John Bazz remembers the COLORED LIGHTS recording sessions, “That was at the Captain and Tennille’s studio, Rumbo Recorders in Canoga Park. Gehman and Cougar had a philosophy about recording. Each song would take one day. The first half before you break for lunch is the basic tracking of all the instruments live. Then the second half is overdubs and mixing. By end of the day, a song is done. That was during the [August] 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics – I remember the traffic. I came up with the beat at the beginning of COLORED LIGHTS. I think I sat behind the drums and did the boom chik, . . . boom chik, boom boom chik. It’s kind of goofy, but they liked it.”

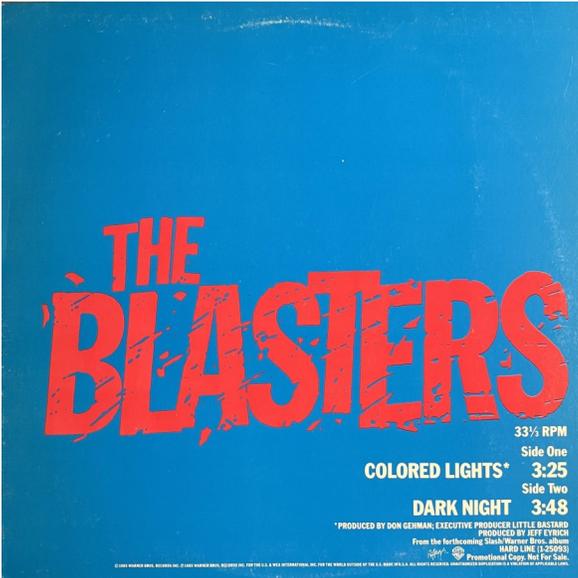
Dave Alvin was interviewed in 1985 by Kent Zimmerman and talked about Don Gehman and how he approaches guitar solos, “Gehman really knows his stuff. He’s one of those producers that is eight steps ahead of himself. He likes to lay down the guitar, bass and drums live, so it doesn’t sound layered and then everything else is overdubbed.” He continued, “One of Gehman’s tricks with both COLORED LIGHTS was to do the guitar solo last. I’m standing out there and you get the sound [slaps his hand on the table like the engineer cuing him], and he says, ‘You’re on Dave. If you don’t get it in two tries, then see you in 20 minutes.’ COLORED LIGHTS was a first-take solo and I hadn’t figured out anything in advance. On the older albums I would rehearse solos to not waste studio



time. It's one of my favorite solos I've ever done."

John Bazz still recalls in 2026 how exceptional Dave Alvin's solo was in the song, "David's guitar work is brilliant. His solo changes key, that was David's idea and it makes it memorable. It was so musical. I thought, where did Dave come up with this? It's not a Warren Smith Sun Record solo [laughs]."

The band started playing COLORED LIGHTS live in September of 1984 and Phil



was announcing the new album for January 1985. Warner Bros. liked the COLORED LIGHTS song and asked the band to go back in the studio and do one more song for single potential. Dave Alvin had one last song that he had written with John Doe called JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY.

The band returned to Amigo studios to record the song with producer Don Gehman. John Cougar Mellencamp wasn't available. Dave: "So the way Mellencamp and Gehman worked was that before they did the basic tracks, we

decided on the tempo and they liked to cut a percussion track – because it was more human than playing to a click. Top 40 radio was all about click tracks in those days [laughs]." Stan Lynch, the drummer of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, was brought in to assisted on that. He had previously played on LITTLE HONEY and DARK NIGHT. On COLORED LIGHTS and JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY, Stan Lynch played percussion with Bill Bateman.

John Bazz reiterates, "Bands did that back then and we had the budget to afford to bring guys in like Stan Lynch. None of us liked click tracks, we couldn't stand it. There was one situation on an earlier Blasters recording session recorded at United Western Recorders that the engineer insisted on it, so I wore the headphones with a click in it, and I clapped my hands next to Bateman. I was a human metronome."

Dave Alvin sang backup vocals on JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY. In the Blasters Newsletter, writer Tom Wilk asked Dave about it: "There's not too much of a story to my background vocals on that song. Don Gehman, had heard my vocal demo of the song and thought that my voice had some quality that might sound cool buried in the mix. Buried waaaaaayyy back in the mix [laughs]. It wasn't my first vocal on a record. My first was as a background singer [along with Loudon Wain-

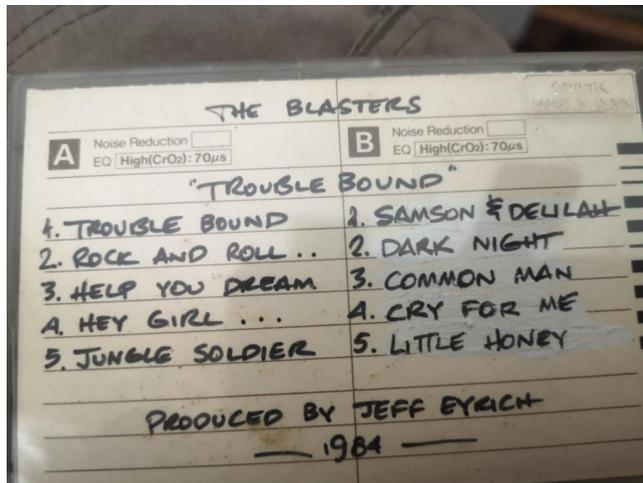
wright III] on The Beat Farmers' version of BEAT GENERATION.”

Dave and Phil compared the two producers when talking to the press. Phil told Harold DeMuir of Sounds Magazine in 1985, “In the case of Don Gehman, it was just really great to watch him work and hear his sounds. I had never worked with anyone like that, just letting them take the thing. Even with Jeff Eyrich I edited a lot of stuff, but with Gehman I just let him do it. It was a big thing for me, having my control usurped completely is something that is very hard for me.”

Dave told Jeff Silverman of BAM Magazine that, “Eyrich is pretty eclectic. His strength is getting the band to sound big loud and loose. Don Gehman is more of a pop producer. He gets more into the actual structure of the songs. He saw something in the rough form of JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY and he did a lot of little things to finish it off. He added some percussion effects, some background vocals, brought the Hammond organ in the song and he got Phil to relax a little bit on the vocal to build more character. And he works fast. I hope to work with him again. Together were a good combination of rock traditionalists and pop instincts.” The Hammond organ isn't credited in the album liner notes but Dave Alvin thinks it may have been Benmont Tench, the keyboard player in Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

In November, 1984, Phil Alvin told the Houston Chronicle's Marty Racine, “There are two songs made almost specifically for radio. I'm not sure which they will release but one is called JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY, which to my ear is a really good radio song. And with Cougar's name on COLORED LIGHTS, it should get the response.” COLORED LIGHTS eventually did get released by Warner Bros. and they financed a video for MTV airing. The song didn't take off and the idea for a second single was scrapped.

There were many rough mix tapes of the Hard Line album throughout 1984. The last 10-song lineup was finally complete. The two Gehman-produced songs pushed JUNGLE SOLDIER and CRY FOR ME off the list. Dave Alvin had a strong feeling that COLORED LIGHTS and JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY could be hits, so they didn't need JUNGLE SOLDIER, which was the lone holdout “horns song” in the collection. The record company probably pushed for its deletion based on that.

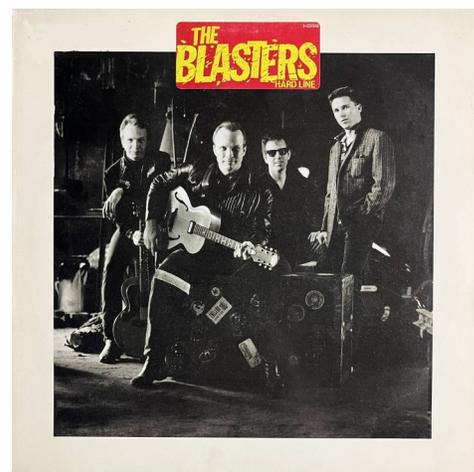
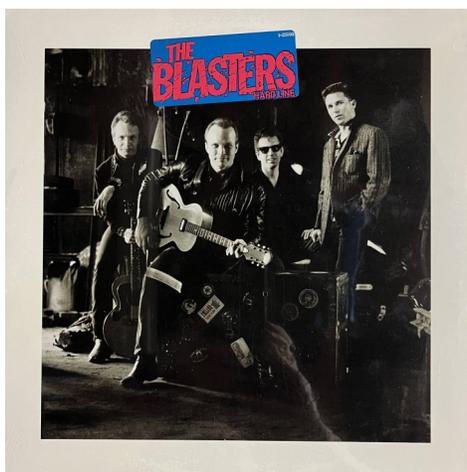
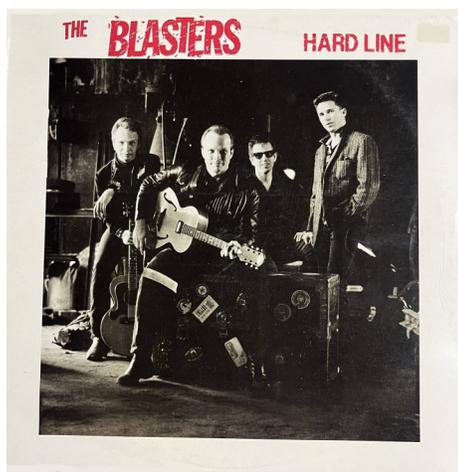


One more song had to make way as Dave Alvin explained to Ronald Coleman of Music Connection magazine in 1984, “To be honest, I didn’t think it was a full album either. With stuff like LITTLE HONEY and DARK NIGHT and TROUBLE BOUND, I thought, yeah that’s incredible. The Elmore James song CRY FOR ME rocks, but it’s really a B-side.”

John Bazz says the whole band attended the mixing sessions: “We were all there, but Phil was very heavy-handed about it and was really particular about his vocal parts. Everybody had their hands on the board. This is before the days of automated boards. Jeff and Phil told us what to do so we’d each be assigned to ride faders for certain parts like if the guitar solo had to come up or a drum part was too loud. We’d note the times, but because we played the songs we knew them well. Jeff told us where to go.”

The artwork of the album was pretty simple and only the original four Blasters appeared on the cover. Much has been made of the absence of the seven-man lineup over the years in the cover photo. Fairly unrepresented was Lee Allen and Steve Berlin, who were not on any of the released recordings on Hard Line. Steve Berlin had left to join Los Lobos while the album was being made, so by release time he wasn’t in the band any longer. Lee Allen was still a touring member of the Blasters. Gene Taylor played all over the album, but wasn’t on the cover. In 1996, Gene said in the Blasters Newsletter, “We were supposed to shoot the picture one time and then they changed it to earlier. I was up in Toronto and I didn’t want to come back to L.A. just for that, I was fishing. Dave even asked me, ‘Do you mind not being on the cover?’ and I said, ‘It don’t mean shit to me, it’s meaningless. It has nothing to do with the music.’” Gene did get his photo printed on the inner lyric sleeve—the only Blaster to have that distinction.

In February, 1985 the album was released. Reviews were positive and the al-



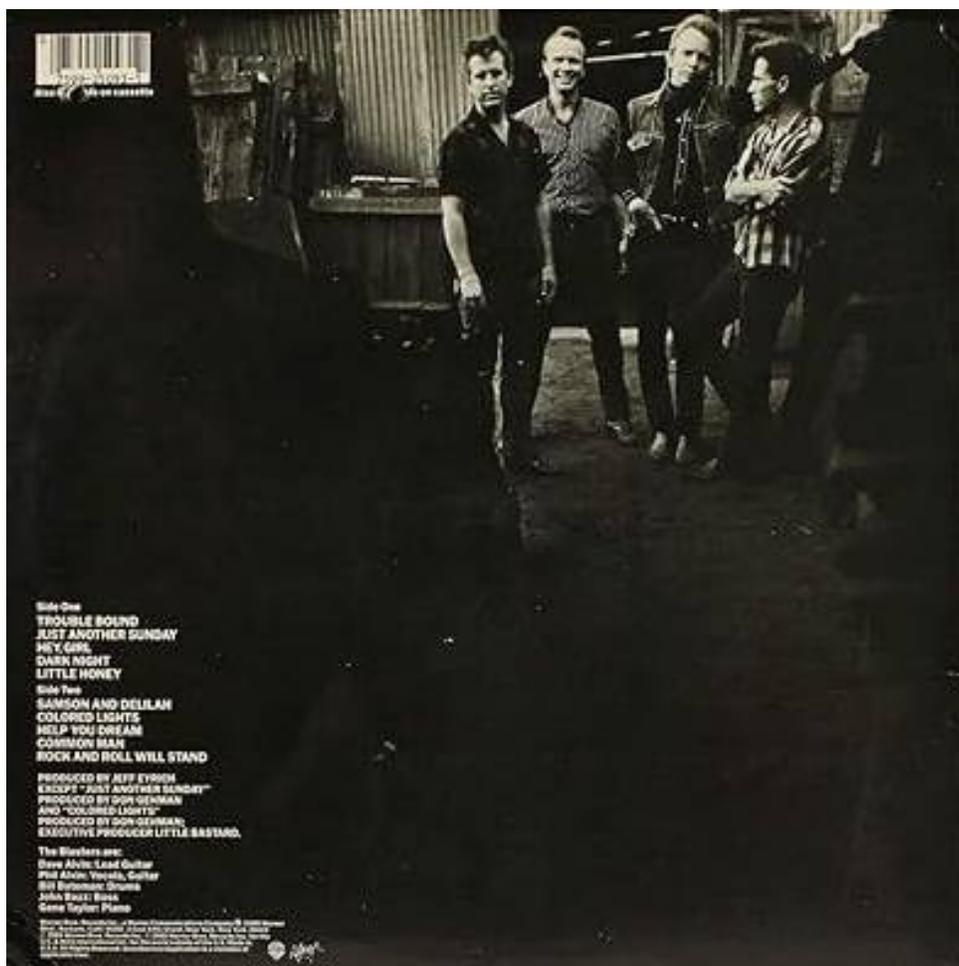
Hard Line alternate cover designs

bum sold more than the previous Blasters albums. It was enough that Warner Bros. kept the Blasters on the label and made plans for another album. Dave Alvin told Gary Burch of Record Magazine, “I don’t think we’ve compromised anything and I wouldn’t want success that way, It’s still us. It’s a little more commercial, but it’s the same old American Rock n Roll.”

In looking back now at the Hard Line album 40 years later Dave says, “I am very proud of it. But it was a difficult time and unlike when we did The Face album, there was no pressure from Slash Records. But by Hard Line they said you gotta have a hit. I always felt like I let the band down that I didn’t write a hit. I mean, I’M SHAKIN had ‘hit’ written all over it -- so catchy and a great vocal by Phil. But why wasn’t MARIE MARIE the second single? Radio didn’t want to play anything more than two and half minutes. As a songwriter it hurts that none of my songs were picked as a single. Though RED ROSE was, but it was an afterthought and Warners didn’t get behind it.” And about Jeff Eyrich as producer Dave said, “I learned a lot from Jeff about producing. I played guitar on a Gun Club record that he produced. I wished he could have been involved with JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY and COLORED LIGHTS.”

Hard Line would be the final album before Dave Alvin left the Blasters to start his solo career. It’s an accomplished piece of art that stands on its own as a diverse set of songs to listen to together. It’s a disservice to the album that the unsuccessful quest for a hit song is always attached to this album’s story.

**The Blasters’ Hard Line has been re-released in 2026 on Liberation Hall Records on vinyl, CD and digital. —AM**



# Hard Line Notes from Warner Bros. 1985

## Media Information

The Blasters, a band for all seasons if there ever was one, have reached down deep on Hard Line, their third Slash/Warner Bros. album, and come up with a ten-song collection of classic and contemporary rock & roll. The California quintet, long-known for its searing live shows and a treasure-chest of original tunes, has always specialized in capturing American music at its proudest, from heartfelt gospel to raw-boned rock. And on Hard Line, with the help of their first outside producers and several musical guests, the Blasters settle any bets on whether their mighty sound would ever be captured on record. The answer is a resounding yes, and for those who'll accept no substitutes for the real thing, the band delivers in aces.



A look at the Blasters' past explains why the five members are able to create such a seamlessly powerful take on all types of musical styles, what songwriter Dave Alvin calls "electric folk music." As Alvin explains, "We all grew up together; that's the glue that holds us in one piece. In fact, we may all – not just me and Phil – just as well be brothers. That closeness is found all through the band's sound, whether it's on the easeful, emotional lope of "Help You Dream" or the pushy dynamics of "Colored Lights." This is music that isn't so much learned, but rather lived, and listening to Hard Line, it's immediately clear the Blasters wouldn't have it any other way. From the earliest days in biker bars and blues clubs, on up to European tours and appearances on American Bandstand, the group has always stood their ground as prime purveyors of that timeless music heard all over the United States, playing indelible songs meant to make a difference in people's lives.

And at last, on Hard Line, the spark the Blasters are famous for is caught at full force. "This is the record where we wanted to get everything right," says Alvin. "We have to take chances, because in some ways our fans see us as being at the forefront of this type of music. We also didn't want to put out a record that didn't at least make people think a little bit more. Then it all fell together, and, finally everyone's happy, because it goes from the most roots thing we've ever done, "Samson and Delilah," right into the most modern rock, 'Colored Lights.'"

At a time when more and more people are paying avid attention to roots-soaked rock 'n' roll, the Blasters have upped the ante with an even more adventurous attack on the music. In many ways, Hard Line is an album that summarizes everything great about one of the country's prize possessions. And while much of the Blasters' music of the past may have escaped many listeners, songs like "Common Man," "Dark Night," "Just Another Sunday" and "Trouble Bound" have a strength that refuses to go away, and an authentic spirit which says this is a music that we shouldn't live without.

0285

## Dave Alvin on “Hard Line” song themes on the Jim Ladd 1985 radio show



**Trouble Bound** – “The Blasters tribute to Saturday night and getting in trouble with girls - all the normal stuff. It started out as a country song, like a nice George Jones ballad, but titled TROUBLE BOUND. Then it started telling me it needs to be rock ‘n roll. I kept working on it to be about a normal working Joe.”

**Just Another Sunday** – “My mother died and I did and didn’t want to write about it. I thought I’d write a romantic song, but try to get the desolate feeling in it that I was feeling. I wanted to put in heartbreak and loneliness. My friend John Doe had a melody and a few lyrics, so I gave it a bluesy swampy guitar figure. I made the lyrics more desolate [laughs]. There are times when everyone has felt that way.”

**Hey Girl** – “This is a swamp pop type of music -- a mixture of R&B country and Cajun. It’s different from straight Cajun because its poppier. The melodies are sad, but not down and with a driving beat. Some singers I really like are Johnny Allen and Rod Bernard. I just wanted to write a song you would have heard by them playing on a jukebox in Lafayette, Louisiana, or Lake Charles.”

**Dark Night** – “It’s a story about two lovers who fall in love, but the people in the neighborhood don’t approve and take matters into their own hands. I really wanted to create a mood full of tension. That swampy feel was it for that song. I got to meet Fogerty and we were talking. He got an advance of the album. He said this is the best one you’ve done yet. It’s got all the good feels and then there’s that song DARK NIGHT. It sounds like my GREEN RIVER slowed down. I said, “Well, GREEN RIVER sounds like Howlin Wolf speeded up [laughs]. He said, “Yeah. Well, I guess we listen to a lot of the same records.”

**Little Honey** – “This is a song about loving someone so much that you’ll give them anything they want even if it hurts you. Then your back is against the wall and you don’t know what to do. John Doe and I wrote it as a rock ‘n roll song. We were in the studio cutting it and we both thought this isn’t making it. The music was killing the song. We were about to pull the song off the album but I said I really liked the song. I went up to the studio with Gene Taylor and as a joke did it as a ballad. We demoed it and our producer went crazy and loved it. We added Richard Greene on fiddle, Larry Taylor on standup bass and David Hidalgo on mandolin. Everybody stood around in a circle like an old hillbilly recording session. We cut it like four times and the fourth take was it.”

**Samson and Delilah** – “This is a gospel blues song that Phil sings with the Jubilee Train singers. All done in one take at 3 am in the morning. It’s the rootsiest thing we’ve ever cut.”

**Colored Lights** – “We met John Cougar Mellencamp in Italy at the Isle of Capri a few years ago. We were all doing an Italian TV show. We were the only American acts, so backstage we were the only ones that could talk to each other [laughs]. We had done 12 or 13 songs already with Jeff Eyrich producing and we felt we reached our peak. We wanted to work with Don Gehman. Our manager was friends with John Cougar Mellencamp and called him to say we were working with his producer Don Gehman. She asked him how he thought that might work. He said it will be great, but let me try some-

thing. So, he came out to L.A. and we both sat in a room with two acoustic guitars. He had half a song he was working on and so did I. We tried to put them together. Then we started a new song. Eventually we had COLORED LIGHTS. He wanted to do something different than a John Cougar song.”

**Help You Dream** – “It’s about a run-down bar on the outskirts of town and two run-down people who meet there trying to rekindle the old flames they had as kids and trying to get their dreams back. It’s my favorite on the record.”

**Common Man** – “It’s a song not just for our president. Last year [1984] when I wrote it during the elections there was so much artificial flag waving, heart thumping and kissing babies. It just got to me finally and I had to write a song. I don’t know what the common man is anymore. Reagan had those commercials “It’s a new day America.” He does have showbiz pizzazz like a leader, but take away that Hollywood veneer and what do you have?”

**Rock ‘n Roll Will Stand** – “This was for a lot of our friends in the old neighborhood who never got out of playing the neighborhood bar playing cover songs. It’s a tribute to all the bands on the L.A. scene who got a record deal with a big advance, sold two records then had to break up. If you love the music, it doesn’t matter what kind of band you play in. Music comes first. That’s the Blasters attitude on things.”

## Dave Alvin & John Doe: Songwriting collaborators

HARD LINE marked a time of transition for the Blasters. The band brought in outside musicians (David Hidalgo, Richard Greene, among others), outside singers (the Jordanaires, Bobby King, Herman Johnson) and outside producers (Jeff Eyrich, Don Gehman) to make a record.

**By Tom Wilk**

For the first time, Dave Alvin also collaborated with a songwriter from outside the band. He and John Doe of X co-wrote LITTLE HONEY and JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY.

In a phone interview from his home, in Austin, Texas, Doe said their songwriting collaboration preceded Hard Line and began with the Knitters, the side project that also featured X bandmates Exene Cervenka and D.J. Bonebrake.

“THE CALL OF THE WRECKIN’ BALL was the first song we wrote together,” he recalled. “I found myself at Dave’s apartment with the Super Bowl on TV and the sound off. Neither one of us were football fans so we decided to write a song.” Doe related the origins of the song, which was included on Poor Little Critter in the Road, the debut album of the Knitters in 1985. “It’s based on a friend of my brother who woke from a dream with a



Photo: Modi Frank

wrecking ball coming toward him. It's a clever metaphor and Dave said, 'What if the guy was a wrecking ball?' With its quirkiness and humor, John compared WRECKIN' BALL to a Shel Silverstein song. "The song came together quickly and it's a crowd pleaser in concert," Doe added. A sequel, THE NEW CALL OF THE WRECKING BALL, was released in 2005 on The Modern Sounds of the Knitters album.

The Hard Line collaborations began with a case of writer's block. "I had written half a song and thought it was OK, but I couldn't figure out where it should go," he said of LITTLE HONEY. I contacted Dave and said, 'Fix this shit, you can make it better,'" he recalled. "Dave has talent and heart and experience and technique," he said, in explaining what he offers as a co-writer, be it lyrics, music, or arrangements. He knows what to use to complete a song, Doe adds.

(Rick Estrin, who co-wrote WHEN YOUR WOMAN IS GONE and NEVER TRUST A WOMAN with Dave in the 1990s, made a similar point in a 2013 interview with me. "Dave mentioned that as a co-writer, he was really good at helping finish songs when a writer gets stuck.")

The Blasters recorded LITTLE HONEY in a country vein, while X opted for an up-tempo version with a rockabilly tinge that John credits to guitarist Billy Zoom. "If he did one thing, he brought rockabilly playing to punk rock," Doe said of his bandmate.

The first recording of LITTLE HONEY was done for the soundtrack of the movie Border Radio that featured Doe on acoustic guitar and vocals, Dave on electric guitar, and Steve Berlin on piano. It was also included on the film soundtrack album. It's a stark version and Doe remembered the session went quickly. "We had 30 minutes to set up and record and said, 'Let's do it for Allison,'" he recounted, a reference to Allison Anders, the film's director. The Knitters never performed LITTLE HONEY in concert, according to Doe, because he felt the song wouldn't work as a duet between him and Exene.

JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY followed a similar pattern as LITTLE HONEY. "I had a verse and didn't know where it should go," he recalled. "I had hit a brick wall." He elaborated: "I was going through a low point in my life. Exene [Cervenka, his then-wife and song-writing collaborator] and I were having a hard time and separated romantically."

"With that song, I put what I had on the table," says John, who credits Dave's input with completing the song. "Dave is good at writing songs where a character backs himself into a corner," Doe said, referring to the narrator of the song. It's a pattern that Dave would follow with such songs in his solo career as GUILTY MAN, MARY BROWN, and BEAUTIFUL CITY 'CROSS THE RIVER. Neither X nor Doe ever recorded or played JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY in concert. "I'm so grateful somebody [the Blasters] got something out of it."

Looking ahead, Doe said it's unlikely that the Knitters, who last performed at a memorial concert for Mojo Nixon in March 2024, will release another album since the members are involved in other bands and endeavors. "Maybe in another lifetime," he joked.

His next big project will involve the printed word, instead of music. He is working on a memoir called The Unpretender, which will be published by Da Capo in 2028. "It won't be a straight chronological account," Doe said.

The site Publisher's Marketplace says the book will explore "the author's small-town childhood; coming of age in bohemian Baltimore; the exhilarating and destructive area of the L.A. punk scene, where he cofounded and fronted the seminal band X; and the excesses of Hollywood, where he appeared in such movies as Road House, Great Balls of Fire and Boogie Nights while trying to connect with some more solid, honest and real." —Am

# Hard Line Review March 7, 1985 by Tom Wilk

*I wrote a weekly music column for The Gloucester County Times in Woodbury, N.J., over a nine-month period in 1984 and 1985. My review of Hard Line was published on March 7, 1985. It appears here with some minor edits. Hard Line turned out to be the final studio album by the band's original lineup. By coincidence, this review was my final column as I left the paper eight weeks after its publication. -- TW*

## The Blasters Aim for Mass Appeal with 'Hard Line' By Tom Wilk

For the past few years, the Blasters have been one of the better kept secrets in popular music, highlighted by their strong, live performances and rich blend of blues, country and rock 'n' roll. The Blasters' secret may be out with the release of their new studio album "Hard Line" (Slash/Warner Bros. Records).

It deserves to be the breakthrough album for the group in terms of achieving national success. Led by brothers Dave and Phil Alvin, The Blasters have been compared favorably to Creedence Clearwater Revival for its straightforward, no-frills rock 'n' roll.

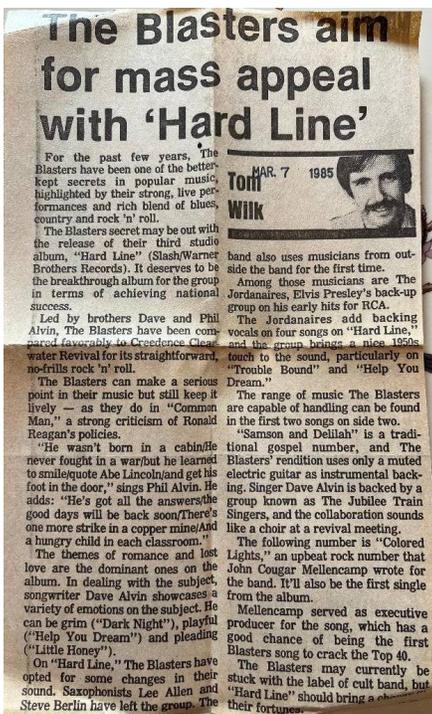
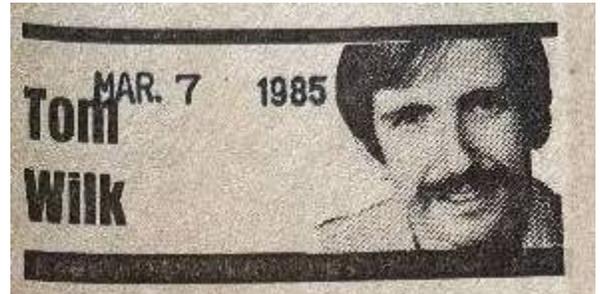
The Blasters can make a serious point in their music but still keep it lively — as they do in "Common Man," a strong criticism of Ronald Reagan's policies. "He wasn't born in a cabin/He never fought in a war/But he learned to smile / and quote Abe Lincoln/And get his foot in the door," Phil Alvin sings. He adds: "He's got all the answers/the good days will be back soon/There's one more strike in a copper mine/And a hungry child in each classroom."

The themes of romance and lost love are the dominant ones on the album. In dealing with the subject, songwriter Dave Alvin can be grim ("Dark Night"), playful ("Help You Dream") and playful ("Little Honey").

On "Hard Line," the Blasters have opted for some changes in their sound. Saxophonists Lee Allen and Steve Berlin have left the group. The band also uses some musicians from outside the group for the first time. Among those are The Jordanares, Elvis Presley's back-up vocal group on his early hits for RCA. The Jordanares add backing vocals on four songs on "Hard Line," and the group brings a nice 1950s touch to the sound on "Trouble Bound" and "Help You Dream."

The range of music the Blasters are capable of handling can be heard in the first two songs on side two. "Samson and Delilah" is a traditional gospel number and the Blasters' rendition uses only a muted electric guitar as instrumental backing. Singer Phil Alvin is backed by a group known as the Jubilee Train Singers, and the collaboration sounds like a choir at a revival meeting.

The following number is "Colored Lights," an upbeat number that John Cougar Mellencamp wrote for the band. It will also be the first single from the album. Mellencamp served as executive producer for the song, which has a good chance of being the first Blasters song to crack the Top 40. The Blasters may currently be stuck with the label of cult band, but "Hard Line" should bring a change in their fortunes.



# JOE ELY

**FEBRUARY 9, 1947 – DECEMBER 15, 2026**

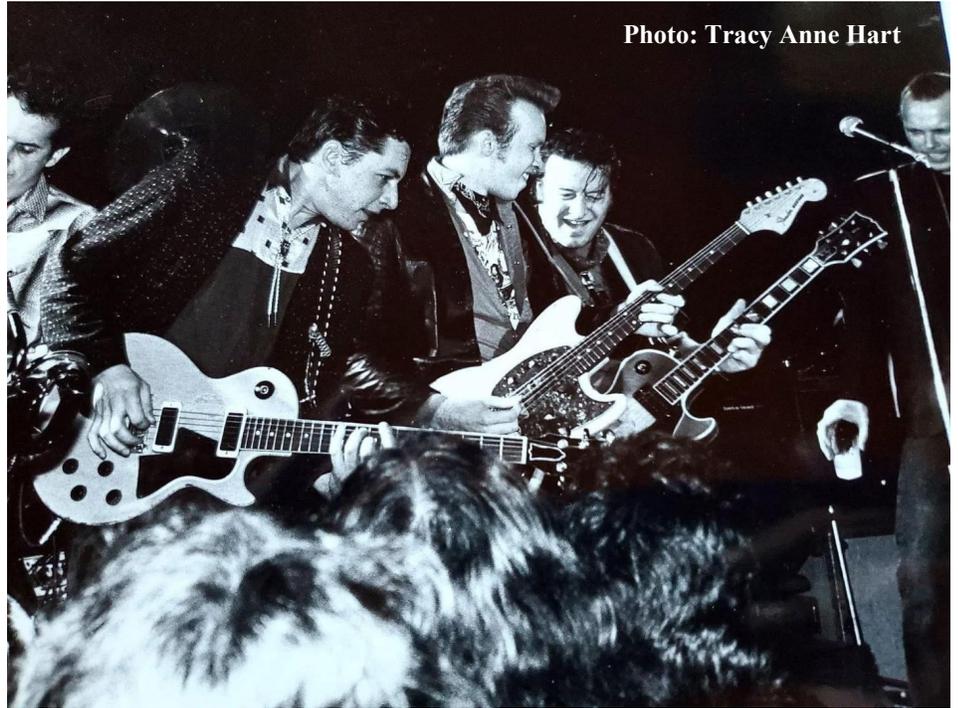
**BY TOM WILK**

Joe Ely, whose musical career spanned more than half a century and intersected with the Blasters and Dave Alvin on multiple occasions, died of pneumonia at 78 on Dec. 15, 2025. He also had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia.

In a Facebook post in December, Dave remembered "Joe as a musical force of nature, an extremely talented showman, evocative songwriter, a devilish heartbreaker, a pool hustler and a visionary honky-tonk rock and roller (way back before that wasn't a whole genre of music unto itself)."

As a solo act and member of the Flatlanders and Los Super Seven, Joe blended blues, rock, country and folk in his music, but also incorporated Mexican influences and flamenco sounds in his later years. "I like to jump back and forth [in musical styles]," Joe told me in a 2004 interview. "When worlds collide, it opens up new doors."

The road served as a common bond for both the Blasters and Joe. "We toured a lot with the Blasters in the early 1980s," Joe remembered in the same interview. Members of his band and the Blasters got to know each other well over their similar musical roots. "We had some great times together, staying up all night singing and playing." Occasionally, they would share a stage. Phil Alvin joined Joe's band for a rousing version of Jimmy Reed's BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY on April 3, 1982, in



**Joe Ely / Blasters April 10, 1982 Fitzgerald's Houston TX**

## The **JOE ELY** Band



## The **BLASTERS** APRIL 3 BOULDER THEATRE

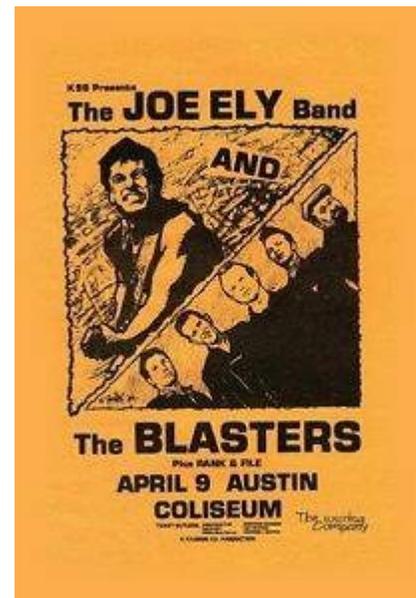
Boulder, Colo.

An admirer of Dave's songwriting, Joe recorded EVERY NIGHT ABOUT THIS TIME as the final track of Love and Danger, his 1992 album. "I loved the song the first time I heard it," he said, calling it, "a perfect country song." In 2004, Dave recalled: "Joe's version was great. Joe is a great singer and songwriter, so to have him do one of my songs was the ultimate compliment."

Joe also contributed a pair of songs to tribute albums that Dave helped to put together or did so himself. On Tulare Dust: A Songwriters' Tribute to Merle Haggard, Joe recorded WHITE LINE FEVER, a song Merle released in 1969. An ode to long-

distance truckers, the lyrics resonate with Joe, who frequently criss-crossed the country in a life as a touring musician. "I've been from coast to coast a hundred times or more/And I ain't seen one single place where I ain't been before," he observes.

For Man of Somebody's Dreams: A Tribute to Chris Gaffney," released in 2009, Joe opened the album with a spirited rendition of LIFT YOUR LEG. The pairing of singer and song was no accident as Dave recalled in Issue No. 60 of the American Music Newsletter. "This was a song that Chris wrote about Joe Ely. He got drunk with Joe one night – which was never advisable in the old days. Joe could drink -- and it kinda kicked Chris's ass. So, it made sense for Joe to do that song. Joe came in and knocked it out of the ballpark. Ponty Bone plays accordion and used to be in Joe's band back in the '80s. Ponty and Chris were longtime friends. I wanted to get as many of Chris's pals [on the album] as I could." —~~AM~~



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