Issue #102

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

Celebrating 32 Years 1994 — 2026

November 2026

Dave Alvin solo album coming in 2027

LATEST NEWS: Dave Alvin will play 3 shows at McCabe's in Santa Monica, CA in January. He will be previewing live most of his forthcoming solo album. **II III** Liberation Hall will release The Blasters' Mandatory The Best of the Blasters on vinyl on Nov. 20. The album will include 15 songs plus a download card to access six digital tracks. Chris Morris wrote the liner notes. The CD version had been released in 2023 as the first Blasters release on Liberation Hall Records. – (*more Latest News on Page 2*))



In This Issue: Dave's new solo, Blackjack David re-release, Grey DeLisle, The Abilene Cafe, and The Bad Day film.

II III Blues Caravan 2026 Live, a combination CD/DVD, features an instrumental version of the Blasters' SO LONG BABY GOODBYE. The track can be heard on YouTube. Performers on the Ruf Records release include Laura Chavez, Matthew Curry, and Elise Frank. **II III** Innerscapes, 10 Portraits of Los Angeles Poets, a documentary, is now available to watch on YouTube. The DVD was initially released as part of A Higher Form of Politics, The Rise of a Poetry Scene, Los Angeles: 1950 to 1990 by Sophie Rachmuhl, a book published in 2015. Dave Alvin is featured in a seven-minute segment filmed around 1986 and 1987 that includes him reading the poems MY MOTHER FELL, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, and NOVEMBER 1981 as well as discussing poetry and songwriting. Dave's segment begins around the 54-minute mark of the film. **II III** Dave and Phil Alvin's version of WORLD'S IN A BAD CONDITION was featured in "Karambits and Pieces," an episode of the television series Reacher that aired Aug. 14 on Amazon Prime Video. **II III** At the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in San Francisco on Oct. 4, Dave Alvin payed tribute to Joe Ely, who died at 78 in December 2025, Dave sang HARD LIVIN', a song written by David Halley that Ely recorded for his Musta Notta Gotta Lotta album in 1981. Dave's performance can be seen on YouTube. **II III** Dave Alvin recorded a song for a tribute to the Balfa Brothers who are a traditional Cajun family band in Louisiana. Dave did a song with the Lost Bayou Ramblers called THE FLAMES OF HELL. It should be out in 2027. **II III** Dave Alvin said that his next collaboration with Jimmie Dale Gilmore may be in the role of producer. **II III** -AM



Dave Alvin received the Best of the West Lifetime Achievement Award at the Folk Alliance Far West convention held in Portland, Ore., on Oct. 15-18. "Receiving an award like this never fails to stun me," he wrote on Facebook. "I've always considered myself a denizen of the outskirts of the music business, so it's always inspiring to know that someone is out there listening. It's a nice kick in the pants to keep on doing what I've been doing."

Dave Alvin's new Solo album for 2027

By Billy Davis

Dave Alvin has spent most of 2026 recording a new solo album. As early as June 2026, Dave Alvin starting letting out details on Facebook: "I'm really not supposed to say anything yet, but that's never stopped me from blabbing my mouth off before. I've been putting the final fixes and mixes on my first solo album of all-original songs in quite some time."

It will be 16 years since Dave's Eleven Eleven album was released in 2011. Since then, Dave has released 7 studio albums with Phil Alvin, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and the Third Mind. Dave seemed to enjoy those collaborations, but what his songwriting career has been known for is deeply personal and meaningful stories based on his own life experiences. Most of his songs in recent years are fictional accounts, tributes to musical heroes or friends, and places he's traveled.

In conversation with Dave Alvin, I sense this collection of original songs comes from a more personal place. He says it is themed around "People I love." His writing has gone in a more serious direction probably due to his ongoing cancer watch and the passing of so many musician friends over recent years. Dave elaborates on other factors of songwriting themes, "People have criticized me for not writing songs that are topical. But nowadays it takes a year to get an album out. How will I know what's relevant in a year?"

It's important to point out that every song on the new album is a Dave Alvin original. No cover songs, no songwriting collaborations.

In summer 2026, Dave Alvin talked about the album's progress: "Stylistically and sonically, the new album dwells on the electric blues and R&B side of folk music – sort of a sweet mix of the Guilty Ones, the Third Mind

and the Blasters with some tips of the hat to musical inspirations like Magic Sam, Jerry Butler, Lee Allen, Mongo Santamaria, Johnny Guitar Watson and Michael Bloomfield with a pinch of Merle Haggard's Bakersfield twang thrown in for good measure. A lot of dear friends/musicians lent their unique talents to the album. These songs were cut with everybody playing together in the same room at the same time and that special, hard-to-duplicate live magic is firmly in the album's grooves. I also think the songs ain't too bad for a goofy kid from Downey. To be honest, I think they're some of my best."

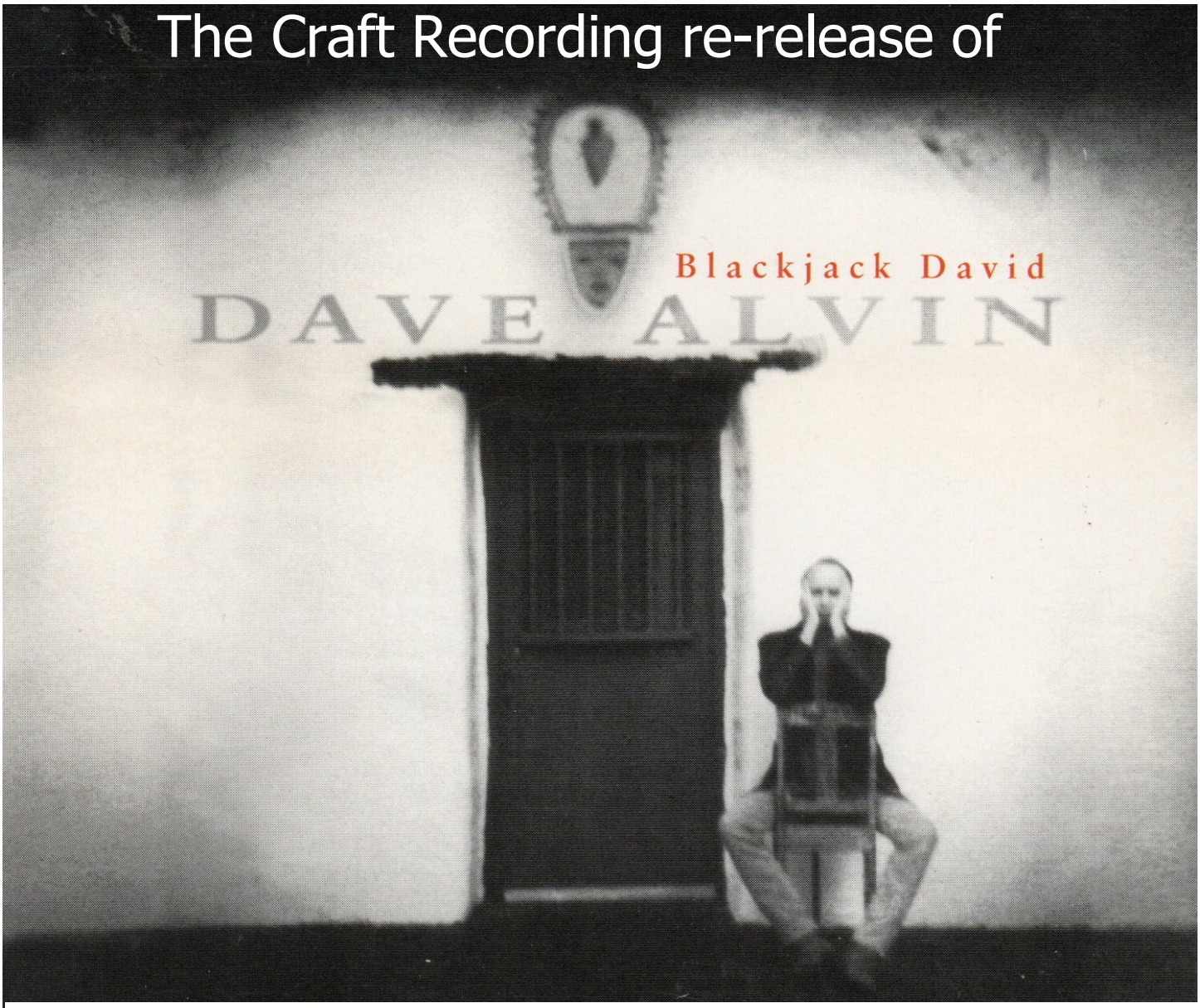
Final details on the new album will be announced in January 2027 by Dave's management and Yep Roc Records. The album will be released in the spring on vinyl and CD. The CD will have a bonus track.

Dave Alvin has been talking plenty to the audiences at his shows about the album. He can't help holding the info back. Dave is playing 4 of the new songs currently in his shows – TOM AND I, BLACK STOCKINGS, THE ONE I LOVE, and IMMORTAL 1975. TOM AND I is one he wrote about his co-writing partnership with Tom Russell. In January 2027, Dave will preview the album live on stage: "I will be doing a few shows at McCabe's in January where I'm playing the whole album or most of it."

Once the album is released the plan is to tour all through the year with the Guilty Ones. Dave adds: "The Guilty Ones played on the album as well as Rick Holmstrom and my old Guilty Men, Greg Boaz, and Steve Mugalian, on 3 songs. I'd like to add Willie Aron [the Third Mind keyboardist] on some live dates because keyboards are a big part of the album, but we'll see." Other musicians who played on the album are percussionist Michael Jerome [from the Third Mind], Steve Berlin on baritone sax and Jeff Turmes on tenor sax.

Dave Alvin concludes: "I think the album sounds like the Blasters, the Third Mind and the Guilty Ones combined [laughs]"-AM

The Craft Recording re-release of



By Tom Wilk and Billy Davis

More than a quarter century after its initial release, Blackjack David has been reissued as a remastered CD and two-LP set with a pair of bonus tracks, including the previously unreleased ANGEL ON YOUR SHOULDER on the Craft Recordings/HighTone label.

Released on June 16, 1998, Blackjack David was Dave Alvin's fifth solo album under his own name in the '90s, a decade that raised his profile as a songwriter and solo artist.

The roots of Blackjack David go back to the fall of 1996, when Dave began performing ABILENE and MARY BROWN on tour with the Guilty Men to promote the Interstate City album.

ABILENE received nationwide exposure in October on a broadcast of the "Mountain Stage" radio program. In February 1997, Dave played FROM A KITCHEN TABLE and the album's title track in an acoustic performance with Kelly Joe Phelps at the Tin Angel in Philadelphia.

Of KITCHEN TABLE, Dave described it in a 1998 interview as "one of those songs that's totally uncommercial. It's about rehashing your life and wondering where people end up."

In the fall of 1997 and early 1998, Dave played a series of shows at Jack's Sugar Shack in Los Angeles and tried out the songs before going into the studio to record Blackjack David. In a 1998 interview, he recalled how one song led him to attempt it in a variety of styles. "For EVENING BLUES, I tried it as an R&B ballad, country ballad, and rocker before coming up with the version on the record," he recalled. "You could put out all the different versions and call it 'Dave's Mistakes,'" he said, with a laugh.

In new liner notes written for the reissued album, Dave told writer Peter Blackstock how the songs reflected his life at the time. "I started feeling kind of dislocated from family and friends. The songs were about leaving your old life behind, and that's kind of how I felt at the time. At that point, the only thing I belonged to was the road."

The new songs showed his depth as a songwriter. CALIFORNIA SNOW co-written with Tom Russell, captures the personal and professional ambivalence of a border patrolman dealing with the deaths of Mexicans trying to enter the United States. On 1968, Dave shows how the impact of a casualty of war lasts long after a peace treaty has been signed.

In presenting the songs on record, Dave and producer Greg Leisz utilized the largely acoustic approach of the King of California album. They also incorporated new instrumentation, such as a harmonium on the title track and clarinet on FROM A KITCHEN TABLE.

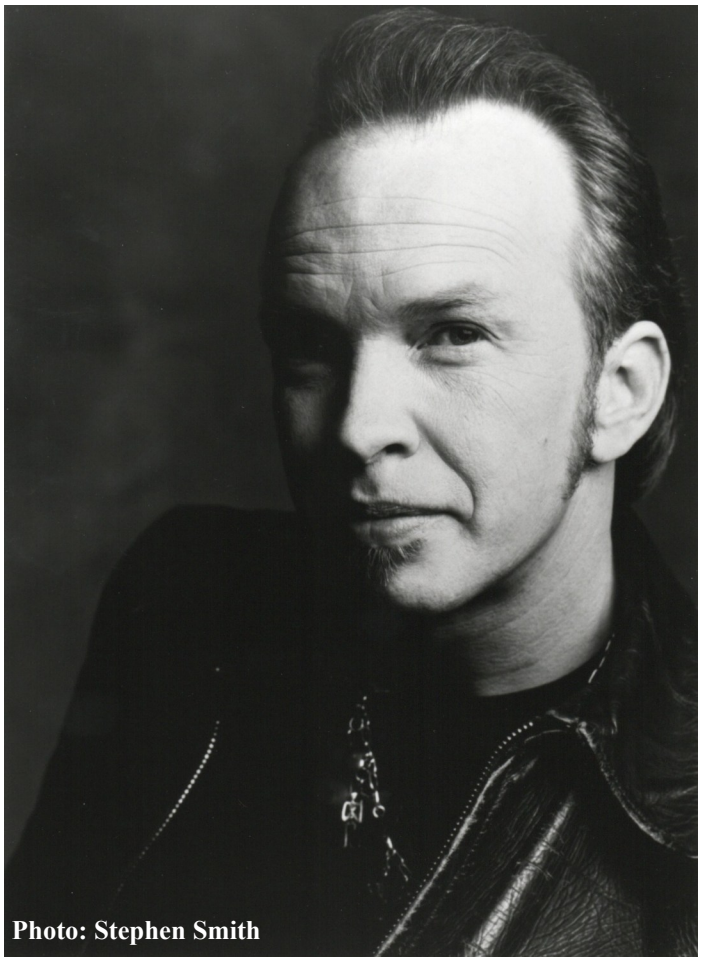


Photo: Stephen Smith

The bonus tracks feature DIXIE HIGHWAY BLUES (previously available on the Best of the HighTone Years CD) and ANGEL ON YOUR SHOULDER.

"It's a great song that Paul du Gre' found when going through the tapes," Dave noted, "Greg Leisz and I said, 'Why didn't we put this on the record?'

[laughs]. So, I'm really happy about that finally coming out."

Dave, who included the lyrics to the song in his New Highway book in 2022, elaborated on why ANGEL ON YOUR SHOULDER was left off the original release. He described the track as "late-night country revelations."

"The reason the song didn't make the album is from a conversation I recall with Greg Leisz. Greg thought that 45 minutes is the maximum an album should be. Even though that album was recorded at the height of CD popularity, when you could go up to 80 minutes, a lot of artists would pad the CDs with extra songs that maybe shouldn't have been on albums. But Greg was very firm about this point." He continues, "Also, those HighTone albums were done on a very limited budget, that's probably the other reason the song was never finished."

In March 2026, Dave went into the studio with Paul du Gre' and put some finishing touches on the song for this release.

In American Music #19, June 1998, Dave Alvin commented about Blackjack David's unreleased songs. He said: "I had a few other folky ballads, but Greg thought the record would be too long. One was called ANGEL ON YOUR SHOULDER that we were doing at some of the Jack's Sugar Shack unannounced shows. It was really along the lines of EVERY NIGHT ABOUT THIS TIME. Greg didn't want to have anything that was overtly country on the record, so we rearranged it to be R&B/folk and we cut it with a scratch vocal."

There was one other song Dave talked about in 1998 that he worked on during the Blackjack David sessions that he would eventually use on the 2004 Ashgrove album. Dave: "The other song was called RIO GRANDE that me and Tom [Russell] wrote. I think there is a version of RIO GRANDE with me and the guitar that we cut. It was 5 minutes long and it has a lot of words. For a while, it was going to be an end-of-record song, but then we realized we only had so much time. Now I'm two songs down for my next record [laughs]."

DIXIE HIGHWAY BLUES was written for the Blackjack David album, but Dave now recalls: "It was suggested that it sounded too much like EAST TEXAS BLUES off the King of California album, so we didn't record it. But I did record it years later and it appeared on the 2008 Best of the HighTone Years compilation."

Blackjack David was remastered off the 2007 Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab version. Dave said, "It sounds sonically amazing." Dave said his favorite moment was on the newly discovered song. "Bobby Lloyd [Hicks] counts off into the song ANGEL ON YOUR SHOULDER. It was great to hear his voice again." -AM

Voiceover artist Grey DeLisle takes center stage on new album

By Tom Wilk

As a voiceover artist, Grey DeLisle has brought characters to life in television, movies, and video games for more than a quarter century. Her work has been featured in The Simpsons, American Dad! and The SpongeBob Movie: Search for SquarePants.

Paralleling that career, DeLisle has found an outlet as a singer/songwriter and she has picked up the pace in recent years. DON'T TURN AROUND, released on Oct. 23, is her fourth album since 2024, and features a country-styled duet with Dave Alvin on YOU'RE DRVING ME AWAY.

In a September phone interview, she described the 11-song album of original compositions as "Tammy Wynette meets the Beach Boys," adding, "I wanted it to sound like a good record collection."

She drew inspiration from the events of her life. "I was going through a divorce and some songs reflect that." DeLisle found new ways to describe the effect of a marital split.

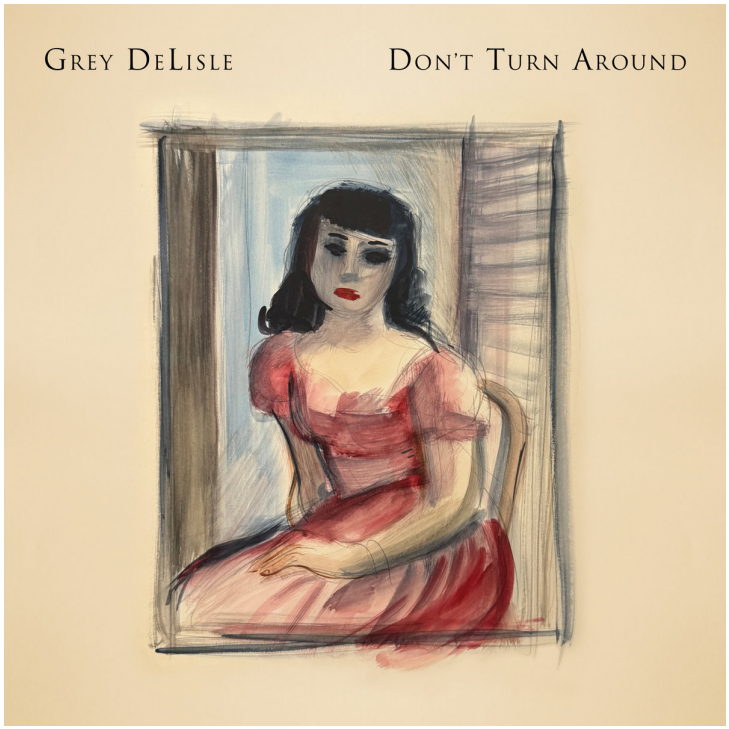
"Your Mama Doesn't Love Me Anymore" examines the post-divorce change in her relationship with her former mother-in-law. "Losing her friendship hurt almost as much as the end of my marriage," she admitted.

Still, there's a glimmer of hope. "I sent her a copy of the song and she told me, 'I still love you.'"

Other songs display her gift for wordplay and the turn of a phrase. EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK ENDS IN WHY opens the



Photo: Spike Marble



album with a romantic lament that would sound at home on a Patsy Cline album.

THE LIGHTS ARE OFF BUT SOMEBODY'S HOME was inspired by DeLisle's desire to write a trucking song and gave her a chance to deliver part of the vocal as a CB radio transmission.

The making of Don't Turn Around had its share of sadness. Andy Paley, the original producer, died of cancer at 73 in November 2024. DeLisle turned to Marvin Etzioni, a solo artist and onetime bassist for Lone Justice, to help her complete the album.

DeLisle credits Etzioni with realizing that YOU'RE DRIVING ME AWAY, should be a duet as it deals with a couple hashing out their future while traveling and offered this analysis.

"Car arguments are the worst. There's no place to go to 'cool off' so you inevitably say something you regret," DeLisle points out in the track notes for her album. "I also never tire of the car wreck/bad relationship metaphors."

Etizoni suggested Dave as her vocal partner on YOU'RE DRIVING ME AWAY, and she agreed. "Marvin thought Dave would be perfect with his masculine voice. The session



Photo: Spike Marble

went quickly. We did it in three takes."

The song features mariachi horns and accordion. "I just love mariachis. They're part of my upbringing as my grandmother sang Mexican music and used to sing with Tito Puente. Growing up in Southern California, Mexican culture is so intertwined with everything we do here. I usually sing a couple of songs in Spanish at my shows."

DeLisle recalled her initial encounter with Dave. "The first time we met was at a place called Jack's Sugar Shack where Ronnie Mack was doing his Barn Dance show and my little cowpunk band Side Saddle was playing there, but I don't think Dave remembers it at all. I was just a fan in the throngs of people wanting to get some attention from him."

After releasing her first solo album in 2000, she opened for Dave at a show on the Central California coast near Santa Maria in 2005. More recently they shared the stage at a New Year's Eve concert in 2025 in Long Beach, CA.

DeLisle continues to remain active as a voiceover artist and musician and points out the former helps finance the latter. "I've done over 2,000 characters, maybe 2,100," she says of her voiceover work. "It's helped me pay [to make] music and to tour Europe."

More music is in the pipeline. "I have six more albums that haven't come out," she says, including recordings produced by former Blasters guitarist James Intveld.

She also would like to work again with Dave. "I hope to sing another song with him and would love to write a song with him." —Am



Photo courtesy: Grey DeLisle

The Abilene Café

A bar named after a Dave Alvin song has a last call

story and photos by Gary Stern

Dave Alvin's song ABILENE is a tale of tough breaks, regrets and bad timing. He sings of a woman who's been through it all and just might be heading for a fateful encounter at a Texas bar. But the guy at the bar, "remembering every lie he's told," decides to leave.

The song, from Dave's 1998 album, Blackjack David, had such an impact on Danny Deutsch of Rochester, N.Y., that he decided to name his bar after it. The Abilene Bar and Lounge opened in downtown Rochester in 2008, becoming Rochester's roots-rock capital.

But Deutsch, turning 71, decided





to close the bar in November after 18 years, mostly so he would have time to attend shows outside Rochester. The Abilene's farewell, though, was much sweeter than the ending of the bar's namesake song. Patrons and musicians gathered through the fall to celebrate the cozy bar, which couldn't hold much more than 50 people.

"Danny has done so much for us," local singer-songwriter Meg Gehman said as she brought him up on stage for a hug after her Oct. 29 set. Several in the audience stood to applaud.

Deutsch told American Music

that he was happy to give roots music a home for as long as he did. “We have a great music scene in Western New York – Rochester and Buffalo and Syracuse,” he said. “Downtown Rochester, I mean, there’s no place I’d rather be. People here love good music and this little block downtown is special to me.”



Dave Alvin never played the Abilene because it was a bit too small, but he did stop by one day. “So we'd been open just a short while, and he knocked on the door one day and said, ‘Man, I heard about this place,’ “ Deutsch said. “I said, ‘Oh, that's awesome.’ “

But the Blasters did play there several times. “The times they played here, they were so great, right up till the end,” Deutsch said. “Phil was tremendous. Those shows are local lore now.”

Other acts from the Alvin universe also played the Abilene – like Big Sandy & His Fly-Rite Boys, who made an annual stop, and Carolyn Wonderland. Jon Dee Graham, J.D. McPherson and Dale Watson are among other Americana stars who played there.

Before opening the Abilene, Deutsch was a bartender at a popular downtown music club called Sorgie’s and then got into booking shows across Rochester. He played a hand in bringing Dave Alvin to a few Rochester venues, including several stops at a Jewish Community Center in Brighton, outside Rochester. Deutsch got Dave and Jimmy Dale Gilmore to play there a few years ago.

Told of the Abilene’s closing, Dave Alvin said this: “I’m sad about that. I never got to play there because it’s too small. But the owner helped promote my shows whenever I played Rochester. I hear he is gonna continue to be involved with music at other venues. Me and Danny Bland dropped in there once and I said at least I should

have a beer here. [laughs].”

Deutsch has marketed shows at other venues as “Abilene on the Road.” He plans to continue promoting those shows and hopes to bring Dave back to Rochester.

Deutsch said he named the bar after Alvin’s song because Blackjack David is a “top 10 album for me.” Coincidentally, Blackjack David was reissued in October by Craft Recordings.

Of seeing Dave perform live, Deutsch said: “When he plays with the Guilty Ones, for me, that’s the pinnacle of music. I love his songwriting and his playing. Chris Miller…what can you say? Lisa and Brad are so great. It’s the pinnacle.”

He plans to see more shows at the Sportsmen’s Tavern in Buffalo, some 70 miles away, a regular stop on Dave’s East Coast tours.

Deutsch calls the Sportsmen’s one of the nation’s two best bars for music, along with the Continental Club in Austin.

“The guy who owns the Sportsmen’s, Dwane Hall, is a musician, and they treat musicians and customers so well,” he said. “We



share a lot of the same acts, but their capacity is like 400.”

The Abilene was located in a building built in the mid-1800s that was a rooming house at one point, possibly a brothel, and later housed a gay nightclub. Deutsch owns the building and has hopes of a buyer possibly keeping the Abilene alive in some form, but there was no news of a sale at deadline.

On a recent night, when Meg Gehman and Austin-based Teddy Long performed, a sign behind the bar said “Thank you for 18 great years!” A “No No Kings in America” banner covered most of one wall, and a poster behind the stage urged “Vote Kinky for Governor.” A crowd of maybe 30 people cheered hard for the performers,

and several people stopped to chat with and thank Deutsch.

Deutsch moved quickly around the bar, taking care of his nightly tasks while – like a true Western New Yorker – clutching a half-eaten chicken wing. —AM

Music publicist Mark Pucci dead at 79

His clients included Dave Alvin, the Blasters, Tom Russell

By Tom Wilk

Longtime music publicist and former record company executive Mark Pucci died at 79 in Georgia on Oct. 8. The cause of death was listed as complications from a stroke and a brief illness.

Pucci was known for his tireless efforts in promoting the artists he represented and served as an advocate for the blues. His career in the music business spanned more than half a century, including serving as publicist for HighTone Records. He publicized multiple albums by Dave Alvin, including Interstate City, Blackjack David, Public Domain and Out In California through his company Mark Pucci Media. In addition, he worked on the reissue of the Blasters' American Music album in 1997 and their 2002 live album, Trouble Bound, recorded on their reunion tour.

One of his highlights in promoting HighTone was his work on the Monsters of Folk tour in April 1998 that featured Dave, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Tom Russell, and Chris Smither performing together. He recalled the tour in a 2017 email: "My company handled all the publicity for HighTone Records back then, so we were onboard from the get-go to work this tour, having already done publicity for each of these individual artists for their HighTone albums," he wrote. "There was a lot of momentum and interest on this tour since each of the guys had received excellent reviews and publicity on their previous albums and tours."

Dave shared his memories of Pucci in an interview with American Music: "I last saw Mark when we played Decatur, Ga., just about five years ago," he recalled. "Mark was a great guy. When he started working for HighTone, he was already a solid publicist. He was always an artist friendly guy."

Pucci got his start as a music writer, contributing stories to such publications as Rolling Stone and Zoo World. He had separate stints as a publicist and executive for Capricorn Records, working with a wide range of artists, including the Allman Brothers Band, Gregg Allman, the Marshall Tucker Band, and Wet Willie.

In addition, Pucci did publicity for other performers, including Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Carl Perkins, Maria Muldaur, and the Fabulous Thunderbirds.

For his work in promoting and preserving the blues, he was a recipient in 2008 of the Keeping the Blues Alive Award from the Blues Foundation in Memphis. —Am



The Monsters of Folk 1998 - Dave Alvin, Mark Pucci, Rambin Jack Elliott, Chris Smither, and Tom Russell

FORTY YEARS LATER, REVISITING

'BAD DAY'

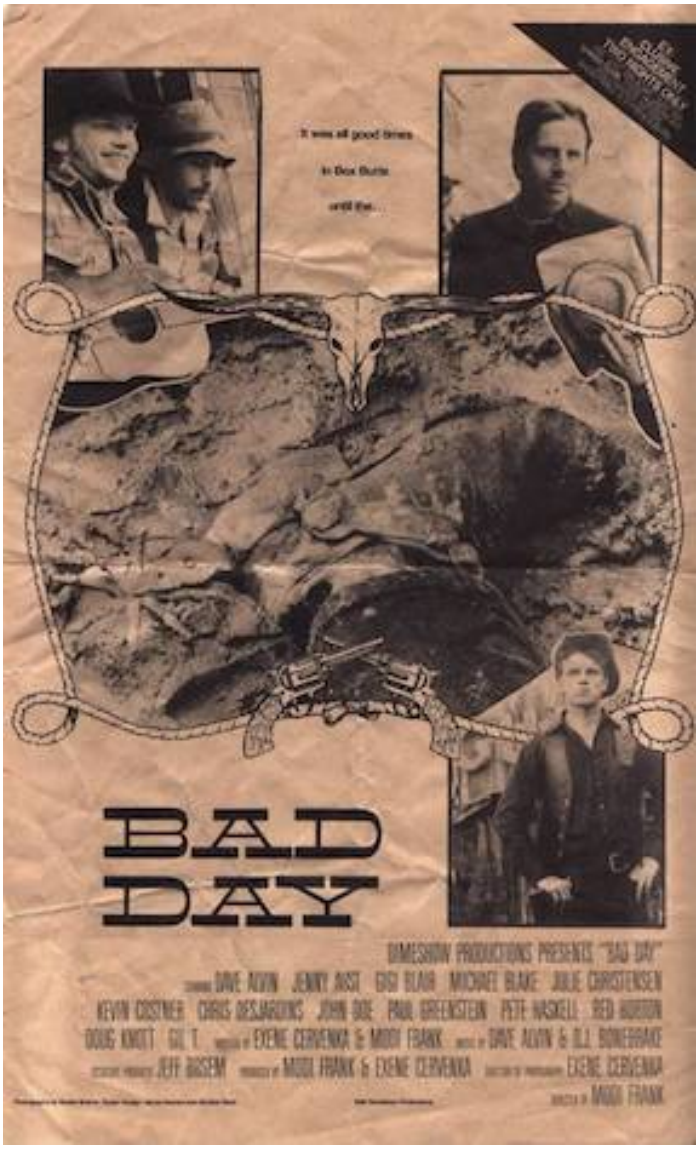
By Tom Wilk

As a musician, Dave Alvin has paid tribute on record to his influences (Big Bill Broonzy, Merle Haggard) and his contemporaries (Chris Gaffney, Don Heffington).

Forty years ago, Dave took part in a tribute to a cinematic genre, the Western, as both a musician and actor. A one-reel silent film that runs for 20 minutes, Bad Day recalls the earliest days of movies. Filmed in black and white, the movie finds Dave sharing scenes with future Oscar winner Kevin Costner and collaborating with X drummer D.J. Bonebrake on the soundtrack.

Dave recalled his approach to the film's music in a 2026 interview. "The soundtrack was pretty much one take. It's me playing ragtime guitar," he said. "I sat down with a guitar with a mic in front of me and watched the visual and played along trying my best to sound like Phil," Dave added with a laugh.

In addition to Dave, the cast features John Doe, Chris D. and Julie Christensen. All four also appeared in Border Radio and performed on that film's soundtrack. Gil T., who went on to play bass with Dave in the All-Nighters, has a small role as a saloon owner in Bad Day.



Modi Frank, who later made videos with Jane's Addiction, the Rollins Band, and Fishbone, among others, served as director. Frank co-wrote the script with X singer Exene Cervenka, who was the cinematog-



rapher.

Doe discussed how Costner and Michael Blake, another future Oscar winner, became involved with Bad Day.

"Well, I had become friends with Michael Blake, who is a writer. Michael knew Kevin Costner and this guy, Jim Wilson, because they all hung out at Raleigh Studios on Melrose Avenue," Doe recalled in an interview published in Juice Magazine in 2020.

Costner played town drunk Luther Tucker and Blake played Sheriff Blake in Bad Day.

Dave offered details on what it was like on the set. "What I remember about the filming was that everyone, with the exception of John Doe and Kevin Costner, was drunk [laughs] – or at least hung over, because it was 8 a.m. It's funny that Costner is playing the drunk, but he was sober."

Made on a shoestring budget for an estimated $10,000, the equivalent of just over $30,600 in 2026, Bad Day was filmed in 1986 in Chatsworth, a suburban neighborhood of Los Angeles.

"We shot it out in Chatsworth on a Western set that a guy built in his backyard, a big piece of property," Dave said. "The scenes with the horses were shot at a place called the Garden of the Gods, where many movies have been made since the 1920s."

The plot is a basic one. The small town of Box Butte is threatened by a bad man.

Portraying Woodie Monroe, Dave is the first character shown on screen. He introduces the other characters with title cards and serves as a troubadour for the film. In all his scenes, he's either playing or holding a guitar. Wearing a cowboy hat and western gear, he calls to mind Dwight Yoakam.



Director Modi Frank and Exene Cervenka

"Bad Day" quickly builds to a showdown between Sheriff Blake



Dave Alvin and Kevin Costner

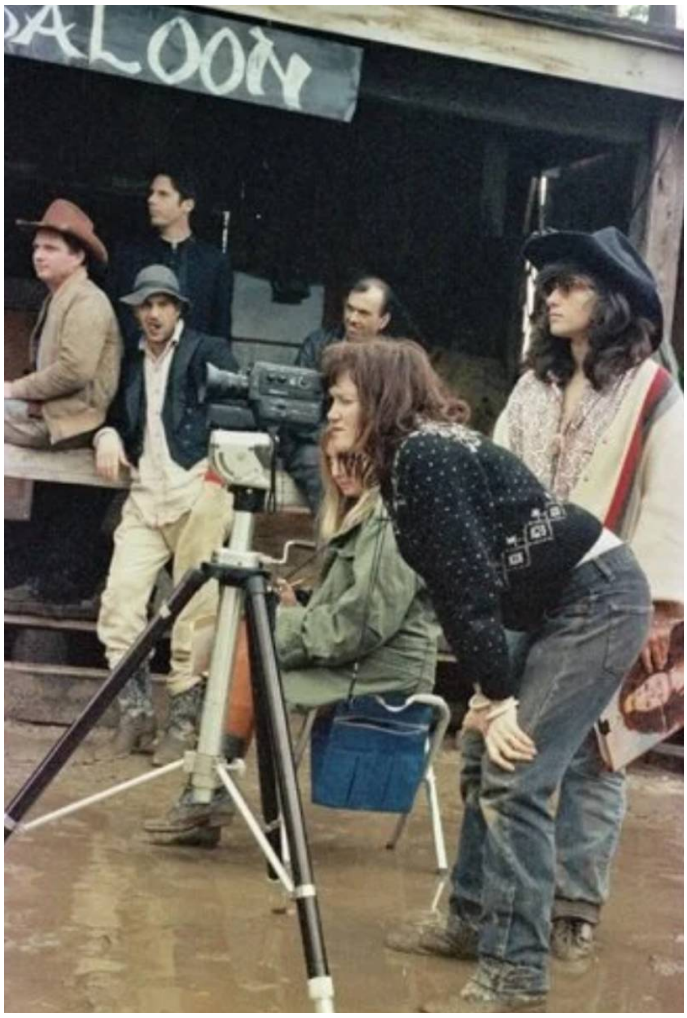
and the outlaw Johnny R. Walker, portrayed by Peter Haskell. Dave's acoustic guitar work adds a touch of tension in dramatic scenes. The soundtrack, which includes incidental percussion from Bonebrake, features traditional folk with a touch of blues.

In retrospect, the film is not meant to be taken too seriously. It's an historical artifact pairing Los Angeles musicians from the punk era with Hollywood up-and-comers. It's a testament to the power of friendship and the do-it-yourself philosophy of creating art.

Costner won Oscars for best director and best picture in 1991 for "Dances With Wolves" and Blake won the Oscar for best adapted screenplay for the same film. It was Blake's lone appearance as an actor.

"I saw the final cut of the film when I saw a screening at a club called The Largo," Dave said. "That was while I was a member of X, so it was all part of the fun of being in that band."

Looking back, Dave has been critical of his acting abilities. He discussed his appearance in Bad Day in an online Q&A with a fan in March 2004 who asked if that was him in the movie.



Director of Photography Exene Cervenka

He replied: "Yeah, it was me. Fortunately, it was a silent movie, so no one could hear what a lousy actor I am. Unfortunately, there was film in the camera so everyone could see what a lousy actor I am. Oh, well, what can you do?" --Am

To watch Bad Day online, search "Bad Day Modi Frank" on Vimeo.com. On YouTube search "Bad Day Trailer Modivation Films."

Blackjack David press release

Los Angeles, CA (August 18, 2026)—Craft Recordings and HighTone Records proudly announce a new deluxe reissue of Blackjack David, the esteemed 1998 album from GRAMMY®-winning Americana icon Dave Alvin. Featuring highlights such as “Abilene,” “Evening Blues,” “California Snow,” and “Blackjack David,” the album will be available on October 16 on 2-LP, CD, and digital (including hi-res) and is available for pre-order/pre-save today.

This special reissue also includes two bonus tracks: “Dixie Highway Blues,” which was written for the album but originally released on 2008’s The Best of the HighTone Years, and the previously unreleased “Angel On Your Shoulder,” recorded during the same sessions, with finishing touches added recently by Alvin and his longtime producer, Greg Leisz. Alvin says of the track, “[It] got away and it shouldn’t have, so it’s great to have it be part of the canon now.” “Angel On Your Shoulder” is available to stream for the first time today.

Physical formats also feature new liner notes by music journalist and No Depression co-founder, Peter Blackstock.

GRAMMY-winning singer-songwriter, guitarist, and producer Dave Alvin (b. 1955) has long been counted among the pioneers of Americana music. A Southern California native, Alvin began his career in 1979 as a founding member of The Blasters, alongside his brother Phil. Their unique blend of punk, rockabilly, and classic American music soon made them a fixture in the early Los Angeles punk scene. By the middle of the decade—after stints with X and The Knitters—Alvin was eager to embark on a solo career, launching with his 1987 debut, Romeo’s Escape.

By the mid-’90s, Alvin was finding his groove in stripped-down settings—a departure from the high-voltage, electric stylings of his earlier work. 1998’s Blackjack David marked the pinnacle of this era, with primarily acoustic arrangements that let his storytelling and emotive vocals take center stage. Alvin, who shines on the acoustic six-string guitar, reunited with multi-instrumentalist Greg Leisz, who produced his 1994 studio album, King of California, and would go on to helm several of his future releases. Leisz, who also performed a variety of the instrumentation on the album—including lap steel and slide guitar, mandolin, banjo, dobro, and the pedal steel—lent the album a dynamic sound that blended elements of blues, rock, folk, and country.

"I’ve learned from a lot of musicians, but no one has taught me more than my dear friend Greg Leisz,” Alvin asserts. “Working with Greg was like studying for a PHD in guitar playing, singing and producing, particularly on the album Blackjack David, where I let Greg have free reign with his beautiful and sensitive interpretations of my songs. I will never be able to thank him enough for this.”

Setting the tone for Blackjack David is the eerie title track—a traditional tune about a charming outlaw, which Alvin first began playing with The Blasters. The song tells the tale of a woman leaving her husband, baby, and warm home for “Blackjack David”—only to sleep on the cold ground alongside the questionable title character.

The remainder of the tracks (all originals) focus on the human experience, as Alvin spins rich, world-weary narratives of everyday life—from the young woman in "Abilene" who travels from town to town, seeking a better life, to the man who never left his hometown and lives a life of monotony in "From a Kitchen Table." Other songs deliver stark social commentary, as Alvin writes from the point of view of a border agent in the heartbreaking "California Snow" and an aging Vietnam vet in "1968," who is forever haunted by the loss of his best friend in the war. Alvin also sings about love lost—from a relationship that's slowly dying in "Evening Blues" and an impending breakup in "The Way You Say Good-Bye," to the haunting album closer, "Tall Trees," in which a man imagines a former partner returning to him.

Long considered to be a highlight in Alvin's esteemed career, Blackjack David has received broad praise over the years, including from Americana UK, which called it "The album that elevates Dave Alvin out of the 'important' category of Americana artists and firmly into the 'vital' classification." Record Collector Magazine admired Alvin's "thoughtful, literate ruminations on the American condition," while No Depression called Blackjack David "A perfect album…an essential part of American music's rich history."

In his liner notes, Peter Blackstock remembers the 1998 album as a turning point in Alvin's career: "Looking back, Blackjack David stands tall as an album that significantly expanded Alvin's acoustic repertoire…. This record helped him find his voice, and be more confident as a singer. Now he doesn't need help doing that, because he knows how to do it. He just can do it on his own—and he has been for a long time."

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