

ISSUE #61

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

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The Dave Alvin/Blasters 2009 Tour Issue

Photo by: Billy Davis



Photo by: Janne Kurunsaari



Blasters shows

(Phil, John, Bill, Keith)

- 2/5 Seattle WA at Tractor Tavern
- 2/6 Portland OR at Dante's
- 2/19 Redondo Beach CA at Brixton
- 2/20 San Juan Cap CA at Coach House

Dave Alvin, McWilson, Cashdollar

- 2/16 New York City at City Winery
- 2/17 Sellersville PA at Sellersville Theatre
- 2/18 Alexandria VA at the Birchmere
- 2/19 Easton MD at Historic Avalon Theatre
- 2/20 Ashland VA at Ashland Coffee
- 2/21 Carrboro NC at Arts Center
- 2/23 Roanoke VA at Kirk Avenue
- 2/24 Greenville SC at The Handlebar
- 2/25 Decatur GA at Eddie's Attic
- 2/26 Charlotte NC at Stage Door Theatre
- 2/27 Tampa FL at Skippers Smokehouse
- 3/1 Birmingham AL at Workplay Theater

Dave Alvin acoustic shows w/??

- 3/19 Edmonton AB at St. Basil's Center
- 3/20 Calgary AB at Bow Valley club
- 3/21 Calgary AB at Garry Theater
- 3/22 Lethbridge AB at Geomatic Attic

Dave Alvin & The Guilty Women

- 4/24 Houston TX at Houston Intl. Fest
- 4/26 New Orleans LA at Rock 'n Bowl
- 6/12 Palisade CA at Bluegrass & Roots

Latest news: -- Dave Alvin has contributed a song called IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE (YOU CAN'T MAKE PEACE) to Freight Train Boogie 2: A Collection of Americana Music on Jackalope Records. This is the Willie Dixon song that Dave offered as a download on his web site a few years ago. Other artists on the CD include Laurie Lewis, Bruce Robison, Slaid Cleaves, Terri Hendrix, Wayne Hancock, and Audrey Auld. The CD is available at freighttrainboogie.com and villagerecords.com. -- Bill Hearne, a New Mexico singer, has included a version of Dave Alvin's BORDER RADIO on his CD A Good Ride (available at billhearne.com) -- Dave Alvin and the Guilty Women will be getting together in Austin in January to rehearse a bit. Dave says: "We're still recovering from Amy, so we want to reconnect. In April after some Texas dates, we may do some recording. The long term plan is to put out another Guilty Women album, but I don't expect we'll get it out in 2010." -- Dave Alvin and Tom Russell are doing another train trip in April 2010 called Kings of California. -- Dave Alvin and the Guilty Men reunited at a private Christmas party bringing together Gregory Boaz, Rick Shea, Steve Mugallian, Jack Rudy, and even Phil Alvin dropped by. -- Last issue a rumor was reported that Phil and Dave Alvin were involved in an audio project with Stephen King and John Mellencamp entitled The Ghost Brothers of Darkland County. Pollstar ran a story on December 28 that leaked some information about the project, but the managements of all artists rumored to be involved have 'No comment' at this time. (continued)

This Issue: The Blasters in Europe & Dave Alvin & The Guilty Women in the USA

(Latest News Continued) – In issue #49 it was reported that ‘The Mystery of Everett Ruess’ was solved when his body was found. In October, the Ruess family got a second opinion from the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory in Rockville, Md. They concluded a recovered lower jawbone was characteristic of an American Indian's, not a man of European descent. It's not known whose remains were actually found. University of Colorado biologist Kenneth Krauter, who handled the initial DNA tests, said he did a second round of tests that disproved his original results, but wasn't able to determine how he made a mistake in the first place. He called the Armed Forces results definitive. Dave Alvin has resumed performing his song EVERETT RUESS and says: “He is still out there somewhere.” --*AM*

Blasters Holland & Belgium tour—June 2009

By Janne ‘Drac’ Kurunsaari

I live on a street called Travelmanstreet in Helsinki, Finland - so when I heard that the Blasters would be touring Europe, I knew I would have some traveling to do. The tour started in late May through June 2009. They played Germany, Spain, Holland, and Belgium. Because former Blaster Gene Taylor is living in Belgium, it was easy to convince him to perform with his old band mates on the last two gigs of the tour. His presence made it “a must” for me to be there.

The first gig I attended took place in Goes, Holland on Friday, June 5th. It was a small town in the southwest of Holland at a club called Het Beest. It was a treat to see Bill Bateman back in business on the drums in the Blasters. It has been a while since he last visited Europe with the Blasters. The last time was in 2003 on the reunion tour, but before that it was 1991. The opening band for this show was a local band called The Ditch Divers who performed their bluesy set. But what I really was waiting for was to get “Blastered.”

The crowd in ‘Beest’ was pleased to see ‘em and they played lots of crowd favorites and new songs that hadn’t been heard in Europe before, including PLEASE PLEASE ME, ROCK BOPPIN BABY, and some older ones such as HELP YOU DREAM, and BLUE SHADOWS. Phil dedicated ONE BAD STUD to to Barack Obama.



Phil and Bill having fun backstage



Keith and John onstage



Gene and Phil lay out the plan for the show

They played the whole gig with such enthusiasm that the crowd knew they got their money's worth of pure American Music at its best in Het Beest.

We crossed the Belgian border for the next show in a peaceful Belgium city called Turnhout. At least that's how it appeared. The all-day festival was just outside the city in the suburbs in a cozy neighborhood. The Blasters headlined the festival that night with a special lineup addition to the tour: Gene Taylor.

This was the best Blasters show

I've seen them do in a long time, and I've seen a bunch of 'em. They rocked the outdoor show like never before.

Unfortunately, there was a curfew in that cozy neighborhood, so there was no time left for encores. But they rocked and rolled through the songs quickly, even letting Gene sing the old Jerry Byrne number LIGHTS OUT.

Phil had a special song for the darkening night and called for the band to play DARK NIGHT. Phil dedicated it to David Carridine, who died earlier that week in Thailand.

I had trouble getting back to my hotel in that 'Darkened Night' but thanks to Paul Kat and his wife, I made it safe and sound.

The last show of the European tour was back in Tillburg, Holland. I arrived there early and was surprised and shocked that there was this big Schlager (dance music?) festival going on in the city. I found myself wandering through the crowd with no indication that the Blasters were to be the headliners.

Later I found out The Blasters had nothing to do with the Schlager fest, but were playing the 012 Club in Tillburg. It was big building with a few smaller clubs inside. The Blasters played after a fellow Los Angelinos band and the crowd went wild as always.

A special treat was hearing Phil sing the lyrics to MARIE MARIE in Spanish. He later told me they have plans to do a whole album of Blasters songs in Spanish. It was also cool to hear Sonny Burgess's SADIE BROWN performed by this lineup of the Blasters. (The Blasters normally play it only when Dave Alvin is in the band.)

After the show, the Blasters headed back home and so did I . . . eventually. Thank you to all the nice folks I met on this tour. Special thanks to the Blasters for rocking and for making me feel welcome.

— All Blasters photos by Janne "Drac" Kurunsaari —





Gene is smokin' on the piano



Three guys and sixteen strings



John and Bill onstage

Dave Alvin and the Guilty Women tour 2009

Month by Month Tour Diary by Billy Davis

Dave Alvin's new band is called The Guilty Women. It's an all-girl band consisting of names we are all familiar with on the Americana Roots Music scene: Christy McWilson on vocals, Laurie Lewis on fiddle, Amy Farris on fiddle, Cindy Cashdollar on lap slide and dobro, Nina Gerber on electric guitar, Sarah Brown on bass, and Lisa Pankratz on drums.

The question many have asked is: 'What happened to Dave's band "The Guilty Men" that he had played with from 1994-2008?'

The formation of the Guilty Women came after a sad event in 2008: Dave's best friend, singer Chris Gaffney passed away in April 2008. He was an important



Photo by: Billy Davis

part of the Guilty Men's sound and live show. He was responsible for the Guilty Men's band's close-knit brotherhood and camaraderie.

Without Gaffney, the Guilty Men continued to tour out their commitments in 2008, but it was apparent to everyone in and outside the band that their 'Guilty Men world' had a massive hole in it.

I knew that Dave couldn't go on with the band and be reminded every minute how much Gaffney was missed – That goes for the other Guilty Men as well, who were all close friends with Gaff.

It's a shame the band couldn't continue in some form because the Guilty Men are the only band I've ever seen who could play Rock 'n Roll, Country, Folk, or Blues equally well – and blow the roof off a club.

When I heard Dave was assembling a new band in October of 2008, I already knew the reason was that he couldn't go on with the Guilty Men without Gaffney – but I wouldn't have dared say it to Dave or anyone else because I didn't know if Dave would want to talk about it. I write this in Jan. 2010 only after hearing Dave talk about those reasons publicly in some of his recent press and radio interviews.

I'll always treasure those years of the Guilty Men; they are still great musicians who made great music and they are great people.

The first era of Dave and the Guilty Men is over for now – but don't rule out a new era of the Guilty Men someday. A band this good cannot stay away forever.

It was a surprise when news got around about Dave's new band: The Guilty Women. In a short time, he had assembled an all-star team of female musicians with great credentials and plenty of promise. The fans started to clamor for a tour so they could hear and see this new band in action.

The band first came together for a one-off gig in San Francisco in October 2008 at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass festival. The entire band arrived at the venue without a rehearsal and planned to 'just wing it' on stage.

The band was so impressive that Dave recorded an album with them, and they launched a year-long tour that June.



June 18, 2009 Santa Cruz, CA -- First shows of a tour are never musically the best because they are experimental. However, these fans can be treated to some unusual song choices and stage routines that often won't make it in the set list for the rest of the tour.

In this show, Dave announced: "This is our first real gig of the tour. We don't have our stage

banter down yet. So you're getting the good stuff, the free-form jazz right here." The set list formula for the tour featured 6 or 7 songs from the new album and Dave Alvin standards such as ABILENE, DRY RIVER, FOURTH OF JULY, and ASHGROVE. Later in the tour, the crowd pleaser HALEY'S COMET was added.

MARIE MARIE would become the regular opening song in the eastern US part of the tour, but tonight and throughout the western part of the tour, Dave opened with KING OF CALIFORNIA. Saving MARIE MARIE for last gave him the opportunity to extend the song with something extra. In the first few shows of the tour, he would segue into DYNAMITE WOMAN – a song he recorded for the Doug Sahm Tribute CD.

Another way of starting the show was to have Laurie Lewis do one of her own songs: I'LL TAKE BACK MY HEART.

Before every show, a song was played over the PA to carry the 'Guilty Women theme' as the band walked on stage - such as: The O'Kaysions GIRL WATCHER, Tom Jones SHE'S A LADY, and Charlie Rich's THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL IN THE WORLD.

In this first show, the band played a version of NANA AND JIMI which sounded as good as the album version, but it was dropped from the set list for the rest of the year.

A highlight of the show for me was Dave's mention of his dear departed compadre Chris Gaffney: "He should be standing right here on this stage. . ." Dave then played Gaffney's greatest ballad, MAN OF SOMEBODY'S DREAMS. This is the name of the new Chris Gaffney

Tribute album (www.hungryformusic.com). Dave does a beautiful version of this song – very touching. Chris would be very proud. On a few occasions BORDER RADIO was requested from the audience, but Dave responded: "Sorry I don't do that song anymore. It's private. Gaffney and I had 'A Thing' on that song and it'll never happen again."



July 2009 -- By the time they reached the East Coast, the band had 14 shows under their belts. The core of the set list was executed every night: CALIFORNIA'S BURNING was always the second song – it's a good up-tempo original song from the new album, and the soloists could show off a little. Next was DOWNEY GIRL, the soft-voiced heartfelt ballad about Karen Carpenter. This was my favorite of the new songs. There was a beautiful refrain performed by Amy and Laurie on twin fiddles after every chorus. Amy, Laurie, and Christy sang harmony vocals very well together on



this song. Another stellar example of the trio's harmonies was on the Christy McWilson song POTTERS FIELD. Although Dave did not normally explore harmony vocals with the Guilty Men, harmony is one of the strongest elements of the Guilty Women. Because of that, Dave brought back WHAT DID THE DEEP SEE SAY to play on the tour occasionally. It's a song from the Public Domain album that featured the Guilty Men singing harmony vocals.

Dave worked in some standard stage banter by now where he spoke for the women in the band, but his remarks would always be followed by a turn of Dave's head for reassurance from the women or a nod of disapproval. Then Dave would say: "Uh-oh, have I crossed the line here?" But there was one comment from Dave that always got laughs: "For the first time, I am be the best looking guy in the band."

Throughout a Guilty Women show, Dave chose certain songs to feature each of the women: BOSS OF THE BLUES gave Sarah Brown a chance to play a bass solo with her catchy walking bass line.

In this song, Dave even takes a solo but interestingly enough, it's on the acoustic guitar. In fact, the solo that Dave plays is the same solo he played in AMERICAN MUSIC in the old Guilty Men sets.

In DRY RIVER, the band walks off stage in the middle while Lisa on drums and Cindy on lap slide battle it out in a guitar/drum duel for a few minutes in the spot lights. It works really well as the song climactically rises with the whole band joining back in – it's a perfect finish to the show.

Christy McWilson sings lead and harmony vocals throughout the show. When Dave formed the Guilty Women, the first position he filled was Christy. Dave: "The first thing I decided was that I wanted Christy to be the voice of the band." Dave enjoys singing duets with her, such as George Jones WHAT AM I WORTH. For a spoken word intro to this song, Dave jokes about the first time he met Christy when they were in their teens. Dave playfully builds up the drama so that he embarrasses Christy into answering Dave's questions through the song lyrics. It's a clever and funny part of the show.

On rare occasions Dave sings a Moby Grape song called 805 with Christy. The song appeared on a Dave produced Christy McWilson album called Bed of Roses (2002), and was their first recorded duet.

Another Alvin / McWilson duet is HERE IN CALIFORNIA from the West of the West album. Dave diverted attention on this song away from the duet vocals instead to the lead guitar playing of Nina Gerber. Nina played on the original Kate Wolf version. This song would appear in

the set list only when Nina was in the line up.

Nina Gerber and Laurie Lewis weren't full-time Guilty Women on the tour because of solo commitments and schedule conflicts.

In a show on Long Island, Dave did something completely different to open the show. He and Cindy Cashdollar (playing dobro) came out and played BLACKJACK DAVID – a treat for sure because Dave doesn't play the song much anymore and it's a chance to for Cindy to play the dobro with no other instruments behind her.

Dave usually reads the crowd and knows how

to pace a set list. For instance, in Troy, NY, at Revolution Hall, the standing audience was drinking and getting a bit rowdy, so Dave rewarded them by stacking the end of the show with his harder rocking songs like HALEY'S COMET, ASHGROVE and DRY RIVER.

New Haven, CT -- The band arrived at the very small venue, Café Nine, and realized they were not going to be able to fit a 7-piece band on the stage. Lisa scaled down to just a snare drum and the two other girls with the biggest equipment (Sarah on bass and Cindy on guitars), gladly took a day off to rest. This meant rearranging all the songs for less instrumentation. So instead of doing the standard Guilty Women set list, Dave threw in some songs from the new album, added some surprises and played mostly rarities. It was a challenge for some of the girls who had never played some of these songs before.

It was a very loose gig. The girls played on stage, then left and hung out in the crowd, then came back up at different times. I think they enjoyed letting down their hair – so to speak.

Dave opened solo with TROUBLEBOUND and EVERY NIGHT ABOUT THIS TIME. The band came up for a total surprise song - JUBILEE TRAIN as Dave announced: "I'd like to do a song they have never played before." You would never know it - they did the song complete with solos and played it perfectly.

Then came a great song that makes one wonder: 'How is it not in the regular Guilty Women

Photo by: Billy Davis



During every show Dave would make mention of merchandise seller Will Skinner (above) who was set up at a table with a plethora (That was one of Dave's words) of merchandise for "your Guilty Needs." Dave wouldn't succumb to the typical serious shameless self-promotion plug, but instead put a humorous slant on it.

First he would say: "Go see honest Will Skinner over there." And after mentioning all the types of merch for sale, he would save the best for last: "And we have tote bags. . .now I'm an NPR station (laughs)."

set?’ It’s the Dave and Christy duet 805.

Dave joked about the risk of his next selection: “We’re gonna take an acoustic guitar, one snare drum, and two fiddles and make them sound like a jump blues band.” They played BOSS OF THE BLUES and pulled it off nicely.

This show was exciting for the fans following the tour, because it was so different from the rest of the tour. But there were still a few fans who were disappointed they weren’t seeing the full-on Guilty Women show – but that’s a credit to how good the new album is, and how good the band is. It was a fun show.

The closing song of the show was always QUE SERA SERA from the new album. Dave would introduce it this way: “This is our new age philosophy song. All you need to know about the world and life is right here in the lyrics of a song by that great existential blues philosopher . . .Doris Day.” The name always got a laugh from the crowd, but Dave really believes that the lyrics explain it all.

One of my favorite things about seeing this band live was to observe band interactions on stage. Dave loves to play his guitar and walk close to watch a band member like Amy or Cindy take a solo. Dave genuinely smiles at each soloist during her solo, and as she plays and she reciprocates. When Dave and Christy sing together, there is a similar nonverbal chemistry on stage. They look at each other and crack a smirk, remembering some joke or conversation from the long rides on the road. It’s obvious they are having fun.

I really enjoyed seeing Amy and Laurie face each other when playing fiddle passages. They would look directly into each other's eyes, feeling the music and playing perfectly harmonized lines. There is something special about the connection that all musicians make on stage when playing together, sharing the music they love, and creating it on the spot.

Along the tour, they performed on a few in-studio radio shows. Dave handled the interviews and he brought Christy and Cindy to perform scaled-down arrangements of some of the new songs. Dave used the full band for the nationally syndicated NPR show ‘Mountain Stage’ out of Charleston, WV.



August 2009 California – Returning to California, Cindy Cashdollar missed a few shows while sick. Dave and the Guilty Women played Dave’s hometown (Los Angeles) gig in Santa Monica at the Pier. Greg Leisz filled in for Cindy on lap steel and various guitars with quite different arrangements. They replaced Cindy’s parts with solos by Leisz, Nina Gerber, and fiddle players Amy and Laurie. DRY RIVER got the biggest overhaul because Cindy’s playing normally dominates this with

Lisa's drumming. Greg Leisz has played the song on many Dave Alvin tours over the years, so he knew the song. But the 'drum verses lap slide duel' section lacked the energy that it had with Cindy. Another unusual addition to DRY RIVER was that Christy sang the second verse instead of Dave singing all the verses. Greg did a great job filling in – especially with no rehearsals. Dave joked: "I think we're gonna make Greg Leisz an honorary Guilty Woman (laughs)." The next two shows in Bakersfield and Sparks, NV, featured only Nina and Dave as the guitar players.

In late August, the band did a run of shows in Missouri. Bobby Lloyd Hicks, Lou Whitney, and D. Clinton Thompson of The Skeletons traveled with the band and were in the audience for the Missouri shows. Bobby Lloyd got to play drums on the Don and Dewey song JUSTINE with Dave and Christy singing the vocal parts.

September 2009 – The band played Texas and a few Festivals – The Strawberry fest and Bumbershoot and some shows in the Pacific Northwest. In Portland, Chris Miller joined the band for a jam. The last week of September was a time for the band to rest before they would play the last 4 shows of their cross-country tour. Those last four dates were in Arizona and California.

Only three days before they were to resume the tour, fiddler Amy Farris committed suicide. Her band mates were devastated. But they decided the show must go on.

October 2009 -- The first show without Amy was at the Mystic Theater in Petaluma, CA.

Amy's friend Exene Cervenka set up a memorial display in Amy's spot on the stage: A stool with a black bow and a can of Red Bull with a straw - her favorite drink. The band started the show, but after the first song, Dave had to speak about their loss. Dave said: "This is an interesting night for us - a sad night. We're a weird tribe, us, you, all of us. We mourn and celebrate. . ." Dave paused to hold back tears and found the distraction by grabbing for a beer at his feet. Christy stood behind Dave consoling him to 'hang in there.' The audience lightly applauded in support as Dave strengthened his voice to continue: "We mourn and celebrate in our own way and tonight we're playing for Amy."

Amy and her violin playing were immediately missed by everyone on so many levels. KING OF CALIFORNIA was a song that Amy would carry the main melody on her fiddle behind Dave's vocal. Without her, the version in this show sounded bare. No one else knew her part on that song. Maybe the absence of her melody was a kind of tribute to her gift. DOWNEY GIRL is another song that was driven by the refrain of the double fiddles led by Amy. In this show, Laurie and Suzy Thompson took the parts but appeared lost at the beginning of the



Photo by: Billy Davis

song. ABILENE was Amy's favorite song in the Dave Alvin set. She was always given the extended length crescendo solo near the end, but now she was gone and so was the spark of the song. Her harmony vocals were a major part of the sound as well. POTTERS FIELD featured Christy, Amy, and Laurie harmonizing on a beautiful chorus. Occasionally, when Laurie wasn't performing with the Guilty Women, Dave would sing the third part, putting the harmony vocal in a completely different range. Dave couldn't really sing Amy's part – she sang in such a high register while Dave sings extremely low. So the harmony became very different without Amy.

Dave also dedicated 4TH OF JULY to Amy. She often told people one of her first rock concerts was in 1987 seeing 'X' perform 4TH OF JULY with Dave in the band.

Before the last song, Dave reflected on the past year with the Guilty Women: "I just had this realization that a year ago to the day tomorrow is the first anniversary of this band. Because (everyone lives all over the country), there was no time to rehearse for our first show, but it was great. We walked off stage and decided we should make a record. Then I decided, 'Let's not rehearse for the record. We'll just go in and wing it - like they used to do (in the old days). We said: 'We liked the result, so let's tour the USA and Canada' and we did. We're now nearing the end of four months on the road. We've been a band for a year, put out an album, and have only rehearsed once. That's how good they are!"

As DRY RIVER ended, Dave announced all the members' names -- including Amy Farris -- and walked off.

After the encore song, Dave thanked the crowd, announcing all the Guilty Women on the stage again: "From the bottom of our hearts, Thank you for coming to share this night. Thank you to Amy Farris. We miss the hell out of you. That ain't the right words, but to Amy Farris: Rest in peace my darling. We'll see you soon." Was that last sentence for Amy? Or for the audience? Or both?

Dave lists this show as his favorite of the year because of the emotional level they were riding on after Amy's death: "It was an amazing show. It was sold out. I just didn't want to get off the stage. I even did ARTESIA after someone requested it. It was a total surprise." ARTESIA is a Chris Gaffney song that Dave recorded for the Gaffney Tribute CD. It's a special song for Dave. It was the first song he heard Gaffney play at a club, and it encouraged Dave to approach Gaffney – thus starting their life-long friendship.

The next day they played their one-year anniversary show back at the place where the Guilty Women band started: San Francisco's Golden Gate Park for the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival. Dave announced: "Were missing a member. Our dear friend, our compatriot, and our soul mate who played fiddle and sang – we have a couple of candles down there for her, and we'd like to dedicate

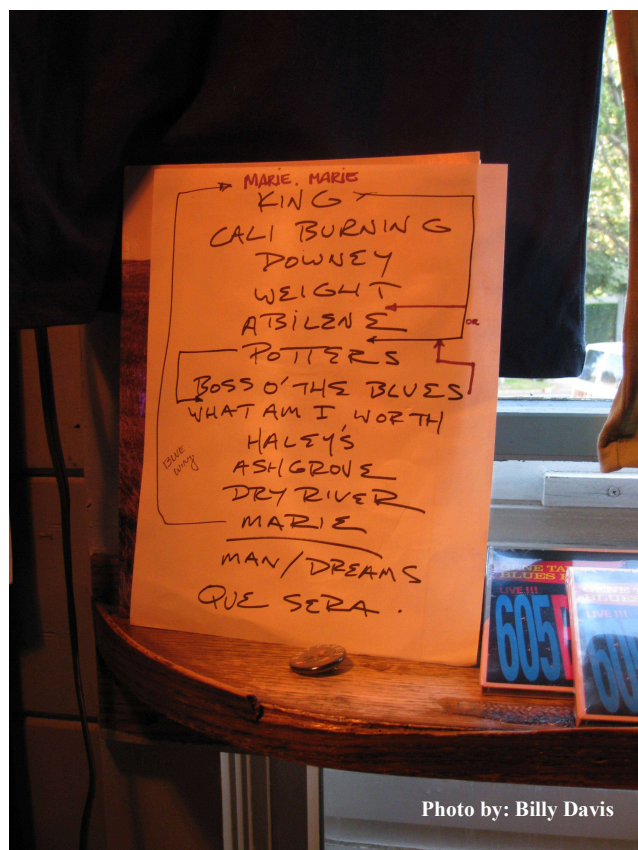


Photo by: Billy Davis

this to our compadre Amy Farris.” The band played a very short but inspired set different from the Mystic Theater – this was a festival crowd – not like the hard core Dave fans of the previous night.

When the tour was over, Dave reflected not only on the loss of Amy as a friend but as a band leader losing a member to suicide: “I’ve never had to deal with something like this inside of a band. This is sad but I did this (band project) to try and get over Chris. And it was working. And then this happens.”

With Amy's memory close to everyone's heart, Dave assures us the Guilty Women will continue. They plan to get together in Texas in early 2010 to regroup for some rehearsals. Next, Dave will plan more touring and another album to follow in late 2010 or 2011. --~~AM~~

Donations can be made in Amy Farris' name to her favorite charity Hungryformusic.com. Check out Amy Farris' only solo album entitled Anyway on Yep Roc records produced by Dave Alvin.

From The Editor: The Blasters newsletter is in its 17th year, and is still going strong. As I mentioned in the last issue, I have discontinued the print edition /snail mail version of the BlastersNewsletter. The web version on Blastersnewsletter.com will continue and now you can print it out off the web site for free.

Printing, stapling, folding, sealing, and mailing is a lot of work – harder than the actual writing of the newsletter - and less fun. It has come to my attention that most people who receive the snail mail version also read it on-line anyway. So those reasons brought me to this decision.

Anyone who currently has a paid subscription, will still receive those issues until it is filled. If there is anyone who has a special situation, like not owning a computer, or special circumstances, etc. . . then write to me and I will try to accommodate you. — Have A Blast — Billy Davis

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American Music, PO BOX 210071, Woodhaven, NY 11421

Dave Alvin exclusive digital download tracks discography Part 2

In summer of 2007, Dave Alvin launched DaveAlvin.net. It opened up opportunities for Dave to further reach out to his fans. He began releasing exclusive bonus songs available only on the internet. It was Announced: “Throughout his career, Dave Alvin has periodically paid tribute to songwriters/performers that have inspired him by recording his favorite songs by these artists. Dave has many of these and other self penned gems hidden away in his personal archives. He is happy to now have the opportunity to make some of these tracks available to you exclusively through yeproc.com and davealvin.net. To accompany each song's release, Dave has a few words for us about why he felt compelled to record it..”

Starting in American Music #54 (August 2007) Part 1 of this discography appeared for the first group of songs he released: PEACE, and HIGHWAY 61. Here is part 2 of Dave's descriptions of the exclusive tracks available on his website:

Dave Alvin - "Mobile Blue"

Release: October 2007

Sometimes people argue over who is the greatest living songwriter or who is the greatest male or female songwriter or who is the greatest songwriter in Texas, Nashville, New York, California or wherever. Usually the songwriters that these people bestow the "greatest" title on is whomever is the current critical darling songwriter of the week. And they may very be right, I don't know. I always abstain from these kinds of discussions because songwriting ain't baseball or football. Songwriting can't be discussed in those black and white terms for many reasons. One of the reasons is that there are too many fantastic unknown or little appreciated songwriters throughout music history who I think are as good or even better than many of the names I often hear mentioned.

For example: Mickey Newbury. A case could easily be made that he was as responsible as anyone for the golden era of country songwriting in the 1960's and 70's. Some of his songs were quasi-autobiographical heart-breakers while others were beautifully sketched narrative ballads but almost all are as good as anything written by anyone anywhere anytime.

John Prine said that "Mickey Newbury is probably the best songwriter ever." Kris Kristofferson said, "God, I learned more about songwriting from Mickey than I did from any other single human being." You can't argue with those guys.

You may have never heard of Mickey Newbury but you certainly heard his songs. They've been covered by (a very short list): Elvis, Willie Nelson, B.B. King, Tom Jones, Dottie West, Jerry Garcia, Etta James, Jerry Lee Lewis, Ray Charles, Roy Orbison, Phish, Joan Baez, Buddy Rich, Keith Richards and, even, Engelbert Humperdinck. An extremely impressive list of admirers. I highly recommend any of his albums if you want to hear a master at work.

The Newbury song I recorded, "Mobile Blue," is from his classic concept album, Frisco Mabel Joy. It was cut as part of a tribute CD to Frisco Mabel Joy and Newbury that was put together by No Depression's Peter Blackstock a few years back that deserved more attention than it received. The track was recorded in 2000 at the sessions for my Public Domain CD and features Rick Shea on the biting electric guitar, Joe Terry on the pumping piano, Bobby Lloyd Hicks slapping the skins, Brantley Kearns on the swinging fiddle and former Rodger Miller/Hoyt Axton/Dillard and Clark/Jackson Browne bassist, David Jackson thumping the stand up bass. The backwards guitar intro is by jazz guitar innovator Bill Frizzell. - Dave Alvin

Dave Alvin and the Guilty Men - "Variations on Earl's Rumba"

Release: November 2007

"Variations on Earl's Rumba" is The Guilty Men's tribute to one of our favorite guitarists, Earl Hooker. He's a legend among blues musicians, for peerless technique, his clean slide guitar style as well as his fluid single string picking (his playing is also respected outside the blues community - master Celtic/Folk/Rock guitarist Richard Thompson told me that Earl Hooker was one of his favorite guitarists - Now, that's high praise!). From his earliest recordings at Sun Records, through the many tracks he cut for King, Chess, Argo, Checker, Chief, Arhoolie, Blue Thumb, both as a solo artist and as sideman (for Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Junior Wells, Charles Brown and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee to name a few), Earl Hooker displayed how he was, in writer Bill Dahl's words, "an endlessly inventive fountain of ideas that other guitarists drank from regularly." He could also bring his hard blues chops to jazz, country and, as his original version of the instrumental (guitar rumba) shows, latin music. Unfortunately, Earl Hooker died too young and never got the kind of "guitar God" acknowledgement he rightly deserved. - Dave Alvin

Dave Alvin and Chris Gaffney - "Two Lucky Bums"

Release: December 2007

Written by Dave Alvin Performed by Dave Alvin & Chris Gaffney

Out in the lonely, high desert plains of New Mexico is a tiny, semi abandoned town called Cuervo. Fifteen or twenty mostly dilapidated buildings made of rock, adobe and wood. My best guess is that they were built around one hundred years ago but they could be much older. In their current state the buildings appear not to have been constructed by human hands but to have risen out of the surrounding sand, rock and chaparral landscape under their own power. That's about all I know about Cuervo.

Now, what does Cuervo have to do with "Two Lucky Bums", a duet that I wrote for myself and my best pal, Chris Gaffney (from the Hacienda Brothers)? Well, for many years after Gaffney and I first stumbled on to

Cuervo late one night while on tour, he and I have fantasized about buying the quasi ghost town and moving there, dragging all our other friends along with us. Of course we don't have the cash to do it but it's a nice little dream for a couple of musician/bums. We've spent more than a few hours on various highways and continents making wildly improbable plans for our small desert paradise. Whenever we're driving near Cuervo, we always stop and say something wistful along the lines of, "Someday, Gaffney" or "Someday, Alvin." Eventually I figured if we ever did find ourselves in the unlikely position of possessing Cuervo, that the potentially ludicrous experience would probably be like an old Bing Crosby and Bob Hope "road" movie. The Road To Cuervo, I guess. And that movie would need some songs so I'd better write some. "Two Lucky Bums" might just be the theme song.

The song is a bit different for Gaffney and me. I've always been a fan of Crosby's laid back vocals and also a fan of the great 1930's and 40's pop songwriters but I have never attempted writing anything in that swing/pop style but I figured, "What the Hell?" I guess it's a tribute of sorts to Crosby, Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, etc. Beside singing with me, Chris plays some sweet, accordion licks while I strum some rudimentary 40's jazz guitar. Craig Parker Adams did his usual superb recording job at his Winslow Court Studio in Los Angeles and our buddy Kurt Mahoney took the photograph. Gaffney and I had a real gas recording "Two Lucky Bums" and I sincerely hope you get a kick out of it. Until we meet again, see you in Cuervo. - Dave Alvin

Chris Gaffney, Dave Alvin, and The Gene Taylor Blues band - "Those Lonely, Lonely Nights"

Release: March 2008

This month's song is very, very special for me. Last December, Chris Gaffney joined me on stage with The Gene Taylor Blues Band and sang Earl King's classic 1955 blues ballad, "Those Lonely, Lonely Nights." As great as Earl King's original recording is, Chris and I have always loved the version by Johnny "Guitar" Watson also cut in '55. Besides a typically passionate vocal, Watson's version features one of my favorite guitar solos of all time - as simple and effective as a Zen haiku or a punch in the face (I try to replicate Watson's furious, one note attack in the first chorus of my solo before heading off in my own direction). Needless to say, Chris sings the hell out of it. As some of you who are fans of his solo recordings and his CDs with The Hacienda Brothers already know, Chris is one of contemporary roots music's greatest singers. Whether the song is country, soul, blues, rock and roll, norteno or even Sinatra pop, Chris delivers the musical and emotional goods like few others can these days.

All this brings me to some very sad news. My best friend Chris Gaffney is seriously ill and requires some costly medical treatments. Unfortunately, most of us understand the tough financial reality of the health industry these days and know that every little bit helps in paying the various bills. To help Chris cover his medical expenses, his family has put together a website where all of his friends and fans around the world can donate to the Gaffney cause. The webpage will be up and running in the next week or so, as soon as the doctors give his family an estimate of what his treatments will cost. Please check back at my website, davealvin.net, in the next week or so in order to be directed to the family webpage. You'll be able to make a donation there through Pay Pal as well leave get well messages for Chris and get updates on his situation. I know times are tough for just about everyone right now, but any contribution you can make would be deeply and sincerely appreciated by Chris, his family and me.

Our version of "Those Lonely, Lonely Nights" with Gaffney is another outtake from the upcoming Gene Taylor Blues Band live CD, and whatever income is generated from the downloads of this recording will be going directly into the Gaffney medical fund. I'd like to thank the members of The Gene Taylor Blues Band (Gene the piano monster, bass specialist John Bazz and drum deity Bill Bateman), genius recording engineer Mark Linett, visionary executive producer Hudson Marquez and the good folks at Yep Roc for their generosity and help in making this possible. Get well brother Chris. I'll see you in Cuervo!

- Dave Alvin, March 17, 2008

These digital singles are available for download on Yeproc.com in the Yep Roc Web Shop for just \$0.99.