

2025 re-print and expanded edition

AMERICAN MUSIC

The Blaster Newsletter

Issue #5 Nov. '94

LEE ALLEN MEMORIAL SPECIAL ISSUE

LATEST NEWS: : Sad news to report. Legendary Saxophone player Lee Allen lost his bout with cancer and passed away on October 18, 1994. He will be remembered as the greatest Rock 'n Roll saxophone player who played on all of Little Richard's and Fats Domino's hits and a mentor and member of the Blasters for many years. Aside from that he was one of the nicest guys you ever could meet. He will be missed by friends and fans alike.

-- Phil Alvin's solo album is finished and will possibly be released by the end of November on HighTone Records. -- The Blasters drumming position has changed again. Jerry Angel has replaced Dave Carroll on drums. Carrol had some difficulty being available for the Blasters sporadic touring and recording schedule. Jerry Angel is a seasoned veteran in the business and is familiar to us as a member of Dave Alvin's 1987 band 'The All-nighters.' He has recorded and toured with artists such as Carole King, The Divinyls, Brian Setzer, Dwight Yoakam and The Dickies. He has been a well known session drummer for many years. We welcome aboard a fine drummer to the Blaster fold. -- Dave Alvin did a live concert broadcast on DRS 111 radio in Zurich Switzerland on August 13. Did anybody hear it? -- Dave Alvin is producing a tribute album to Merle Hag-



DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES

Nov. 13 Tucson Az. at Club Congress

Nov. 16 San Luis Obispo Ca.

at Sloe Brewery

Nov. 17 Fresno Ca. at Club Fred

Nov. 18-19 San Francisco Ca.

at The Paradise

Dec. 19 L.A. Ca. Benefit at The Palace
or The Palladium

BLASTERS TOUR DATES

Nov. 23 Long Beach Ca. at Blue Cafe

Nov. 27 Solana Beach Ca. at Belly Up

Dec. 17 Long Beach Ca. at Blue Cafe

gard for HighTone called 'Tulare Dust' which will feature a Dave Alvin track, a Dwight Yoakam tune, and many other artists. -- Guitar Player magazine's November issue has erroneously reported in its 'Fretwire' column that both Phil and Dave Alvin have regrouped as the Blasters for the eventual Sony/CBS Ep. Just a rumor as Dave has a very successful solo career. -- James Intveld continues his regular Thursday night gig at the Derby in L.A. with his swing act 'Jimmy & the Gigolos.'

THE DAVE ALVIN INTERVIEW

Dave Alvin is currently out on tour in support of his HighTone Records 'King Of California' CD and I was able to sit down with him for an interview after a gig in Philadelphia on Oct. 20th 1994. It wasn't easy for him with a sore back from a rocking performance that night and the fact that only 2 days ago Lee Allen had passed away. Well here goes

AM: Tell us about the idea of the King of California album being an acoustic and how did the duets with Syd Straw and Rosie Flores come about?

Dave: Syd's song (What am I worth) is there because I thought the album was getting a little too dark and Syd and I have done that song for years. It's an old George Jones song, so I thought, well we'd put that on just to liven things up. Rosie's song (Good-bye Again) was a song that Rosie and I had written that I always liked and that's why I decided to put it on there. The whole idea was to do an acoustic record as a live record. So in that respect, recording it, because everything's live, if I screw up the vocals or I screw up the guitar, we all do it again. If I do everything right and the bass player screws up, we do it again. In that respect the whole recording session reminded me a lot of the Rollin Rock thing. With the Blasters' Rollin Rock record, we did 24 songs in 2 days. For King of California the rehearsing was nine days and the recording was about a week.

AM: Why was Greg Leisz chosen for this album as producer?

Dave: Greg has been one of my closest friends for years and has always played on my records ever since I've gone solo and I knew he'd be the right guy. It's an instinctual thing.

AM: His production on your vocals is exceptional. With the acoustic songs your voice really seems to get low down there.

Dave: That's the nice thing about playing acoustic. My voice is way down here and when I play with a band that gets lost a lot of the time. Playing acoustic opens it up and the low end of my voice can come out. The next record is gonna be maybe not as acoustic.

AM: Did you do a video shoot to promote this album?

Dave: We did 'King of California' and 'Barn Burning.' It was just Greg and I playing them live. I really don't like videos. When I did the videos for the Blasters, I was real pissed off. Video directors make you promises. You say, "I don't want this, I don't want that, I don't want this." And they say, "Oh of course not, well we would never do that to you." And then you wind up with some model who would never kick you in the ass let alone date you, staring romantically and it's just a lot of jive.

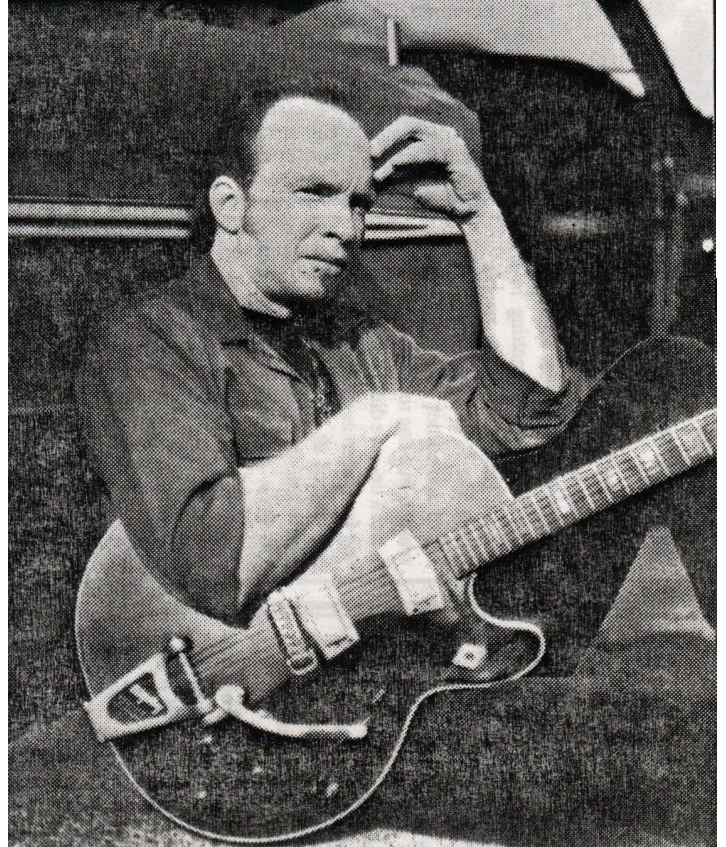


Photo: Adam Olszewski

AM: *There were only three videos you did for the Blasters right?*

Dave: There was 'Colored Lights,' 'Barefoot Rock' and 'Red Rose.' But I did one for the Blue Blvd. album for 'Why did she stay with him.' That was the ultimate (sarcastically), there was this guy going 'I said, I don't want to have a blond, I don't want to be in the desert. I don't want any of that stuff. I want to be in the desert with a blond.' That's just the way videos are.

AM: *Have the King of California videos gotten good air play?*

Dave: Yeah actually on Power plays (video show). I did 'em that way because they're not gonna get played on VH-1 and they're not gonna get played on MTV, so it's like the main theme of the video is, here is what the act is like.

AM: *I heard you did some studio work scheduled in Switzerland this year?*

Dave: Yeah. I produced a Swiss band last year, a band called Midnight to Six. It's kind of like

Swiss punk rock cajun country rockabilly band. They are really good people and I produced them last year and they came out to L.A. and it was a lot of fun. They wanted Greg and I to produce them this year in Switzerland and it just didn't work out. But Big Sandy's new album I produced and I'm really proud of that. They are great guys and he's a great singer. We did that live too, I took them into Capitol studio B where Merle Haggard did his records and Gene Vincent. We did a few rehearsals and rearranged stuff and all that. Then we got in there and it was just, 'Take 1, Take 2, Take 3.'

AM: *Any other production projects with older rockabilly legends like you did with Sonny Burgess planned for the future?*

Dave: No nothing like that. We have this Merle Haggard tribute album I'm producing with Tom Russell. Then I think Greg Leisz and I are going to do Tom Russell's next one in January. I'm gonna do Chris Gaffney. I wanted to do Lee Allen, but he passed away. He had been sick for a while anyway. For some of the older guys, I'm not a big enough star. If I was Tom Petty I could go to Little Richard and say, 'I know how to make a record for you!'

AM: *I heard you always wanted to do Jerry Lee and*

he has a new album out called 'Young Blood.'

Dave: Yeah, they ghosted it. They had musicians come in and play and Jerry Lee just came in and sang. The engineer Mark Linett engineered a lot of it and Mark co-produced my first solo record and engineered the 'Cry Baby' stuff as well as the Big Sandy record. He's a friend of mine and he was telling me about it, so unfortunately it's all ghosted. The tracks were already cut.

AM: *It really came as a shock to hear Lee Allen had passed away.*

Dave: I heard about it two nights ago right before we were leaving for a gig and I was just

Photo: Adam Olszewski



kinda in a bad one.

AM: *He was a great one and will be remembered for a long time.*

Dave: Lee played on everybody's records down in New Orleans in those days, everybody from Little Richard, Fats Domino's hits, Professor Long Hair records, Earl King, Roy Brown, Joe Turner, Shirley and Lee, he had his hit 'Walkin with Mr. Lee.' He played on so many damn records, Huey piano Smith and the Clowns, he did all the Sax work on that. You always know it's Lee Allen when you hear him. Once you know what Lee plays like you can always identify Lee Allen. Oh, I've known him since I was 13 years old, he was my hero, he was my mentor. I learned all my bad habits from Lee! (laughs) And I've learned all my good attributes from Lee too. His romantic story is a marriage to a woman he knew from a few years ago in New Orleans. They had been hanging around for the last five years and last year he married her and he promised her he would live, he would make it through the first anniversary and that was the day he died, so he made it. So that's Lee.

AM: *How is the Merle Haggard tribute album going?*

Dave: It's coming out pretty soon and I'm real proud of it. I do 'Kern River.' It's really like new age country. But the record is real good, we got Dwight Yoakam, Iris DeMent, Cindy Williams, Debbie Lee, Billy Joe Shaver, Marshall Crenshaw, John Doe, Peter Case, Rosie Flores, and Katy Moffatt. We wanted to get away from the stereotypes and the myths of Merle Haggard. Just here's a bunch of songs that a great songwriter wrote. Who is he? I don't know. It doesn't matter.

AM: *What other projects do you have planned?*

Dave: I have to write songs for my next record. I want to get a record out by this time next year or the early part of 1996.

AM: *What direction do you think that new record will go in?*

Dave: Well, it's the same old stuff. On King of California, I only play Stratocaster on one or two songs. But it's all the same, it's blues. The new record probably will be a little more rock n roll.

AM: *Moving back to the older days, tell me about 1988 and why you moved to Nashville after you had done your first solo record (Epic's 'Romeo's Escape') the year before?*

Dave: I didn't want to make records after the solo record. Because I just got fed up with record companies telling me what to do and all that kind of stuff. So, I thought I could be a Nashville writer and write songs for a living. That's a special skill and talent that I don't have. I write songs that are Dave Alvin songs and I found out Nashville is not gonna record them.

AM: *Well, Dave Alvin fans are glad that you are singing and performing the songs instead of just writing them, even though we can understand that the publishing is where the money is.*

Dave: Yeah, well when Dwight does a song or when Shakin' Stevens did 'Marie Marie,' that's where the bread is. The big bread. But the thing is, I write Dave Alvin songs and I have to make them personal to make me interested in writing them. There are some great writers in Nashville, but it's not what I do. I'm a western kind of guy and the images I use are very western. Sometimes they translate to other places like Philadelphia or Zurich Switzerland and other times they don't, so it was a nice vacation.

AM: *Was it at this point that you sought out the HighTone deal?*

Dave: No. After the Epic Records thing, I took like 3 or 4 years off. I played with Syd Straw

and did some other things like that. I just didn't want to be Dave Alvin. One night I went to see Curtis Mayfield playing at the Palomino Club in N. Hollywood to about a hundred people. That was about one of the best shows I've ever seen and that was it. I went home that night and thought "I wanna play! That's the reason why you play music. Shows like that and that's what I wanna do."

AM: *You were also doing some soundtrack projects like 'Honeymoon in Vegas' at this time.*

Dave: Well, we recorded a bunch of Elvis imitators doing Elvis songs. They just said, 'Put together a band. We need horns, girl singers and Vegas arrangements.' And it was literally after I finished 'Blue Blvd.' and I said, 'OK how much? Yeah, I'll do it.' Then we were in Vegas four days filming all these bad Elvis imitators, we had the band and everything, and they used about 40 seconds of it in the movie - kind of a shame. I wrote songs for 'Crybaby' and I did some weird stuff with David Lynch, like weird instrumental music for a movie that was never made.

AM: *You did the soundtrack for the Movie 'Border Radio.' I hear there was a track left off the first 10,000 pressings of the album.*

Dave: Yeah. There was like a little instrumental thing. Supposedly it was put on the later pressings, but I don't trust them. It was 'La Frentary #2' and it was a ballad with a six string bass solo by me. You know, very mellow. It's on the cassette but not the Lp. (ed. note-This track did make it on a later pressing of the Lp.)

AM: *What do you remember about the now legendary Rollin Rock Blasters' sessions?*

Dave: It was great! It was two days, twenty four songs. James Harman was there being our spiritual advisor, we drank a lot, there is a dog barking on 'Crazy Baby' if you listen closely - Crystal the German shepherd. And it was a lot of fun.

AM: *What were some of the songs that didn't make it to the album?*

Dave: A Hank Ballard song called 'Its Love Baby 24 Hours a Day', a Sonny Burgess song called 'Sadie's Back in Town', a song by I think Ken Cook called 'I fell in Love', a Howlin' Wolf song called 'So Glad', and Ray Harris' 'Lone Wolf.' Things like that. Fairly obscure kind of covers.

AM: *Do you think it will ever see re-release?*

Dave: Well, I've always been the guy to say no. Rhino was going to do it a couple of times and I always said no because I always dug the idea of having a rare record. One of these days I might wanna put it out.

AM: *Speaking of unreleased songs, back before 'Hard Line' came out, you were pretty high on your original song 'Jungle Soldier.' What happened to that? I'm surprised it didn't appear with the other outtakes on the Blaster Collection CD.*

Dave: Well, they wanted to do that. Bill Bentley who put the Blasters CD together wanted it on there and I put my foot down. It's the worst song I ever wrote. It's got a great groove and it was sort of a comment. I wanted to write something about the Reagan involvement in Central America and this guy watching TV wanted to go kill communists and it was basically a Huey Piano Smith kind of groove. Lee does a great Saxophone solo! The lyrics though were the worst lyrics I ever wrote, the worst song I ever wrote, but it's funny. I had a friend of mine, Reuben Gabarr come and do this like Spanish rap at the end of the song as its fading out. It's goofy. The groove is great, the band is great, solo is great, Phil sings great, but the worst lyrics.

AM: *Other than finishing the tour what will you be doing before recording your next album?*

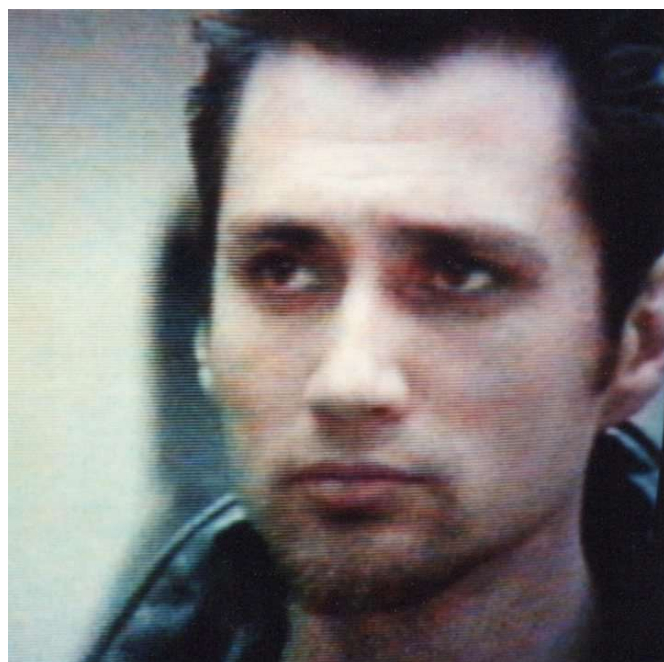
Dave: I'm gonna be in L.A. for a long time. I'm producing a couple of albums starting in January and going back to Europe in March for a little while. Then I gotta write songs. Greg Leisz and I are gonna produce Tom Russell. Then this guy Chris Gaffney who is one of my closest friends, he's crazy. Then I'm gonna maybe do this real challenge of this guy named Evan Johns who is also crazy, but listening to him is like seeing like a folk-art painting. If I can get him, I'd like that.

AM: *Well good luck with everything and we'll look forward next to the Merle Haggard tribute.*

Dave: Thanks end...

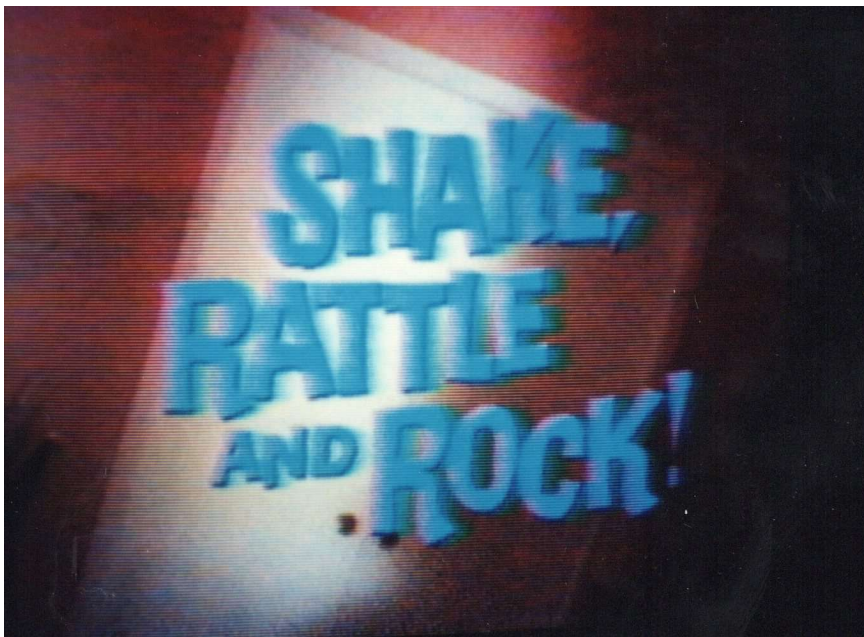
"SHAKE RATTLE and ROCK"

Blaster lead guitar player James Intveld has a minor role in the movie 'Shake Rattle and Rock' which can be seen on the Showtime cable channel. The movie is one in a series called 'Rebel Highway' which presents movies based on teenage rebellion. The 1994 made for cable movie is about two teenage girls (Renee Zellweger, Lattanya Baldwin) rebelling against their parents by opening a rock-and-roll nightclub. John Doe singer of 'X' plays 'Lucky' a leather jacketed biker in hot pursuit of the heart of the leading girl. James Intveld plays his partner 'Bubber' who goes nowhere without his motorcycle and a book to read. In one scene the two bikers completely trash a police car. Howie Mandell portrays Danny



Klay, the host of a teenage dance show called 'The 3 O'clock Hop' which becomes the inspiration for a group of teenagers to stand up for Rock 'n Roll when their parents try to ban the show. The parents against Rock 'n Roll put the music on trial on Klay's show through testimony and performance. Other stars include Paul Anka, and Ruth Brown.

The movie's soundtrack includes some original 50's songs like Little Richard's 'The Girl Can't Help it' and Eddie Cochran's 'C'mon Eve-



rybody.' New sessions were recorded and can be heard in the movie with Julianna Raye doing the female lead vocal, James Intveld on Drums & Guitar, Rosie Flores also on guitar, and piano from both Bobby Mizzell and Rick Solem (from Dave Alvin's current band.) Unfortunately, the soundtrack on A & M Records called 'Fast Track to Nowhere' doesn't have any of these original songs written just for the movie. Its actually a select number of songs from the different movies in

the Rebel Highway series. A & M chose an Iggy Pop version of 'C'mon Everybody' to represent the movie. The soundtrack is a disappointment, so if you want to see the movie and hear these songs check your listings for the Showtime channel through November and December.

—Am



COLLECTING BLASTERS: Dave Alvin has a live track on a new various artists CD called 'In Their Own Words' on the Razor & Tie label. Dave performs an acoustic version of 'Andersonville' and explains its meaning. Recorded live at 'The Bottom Line' in N.Y.C. - Look for the November issue of the U.K. magazine 'Vox,' which includes a free various artists audio tape which has Dave doing an acoustic live version of 'Barn Burning.' It was taped from a live Radio One broadcast in England and is an excellent version. - Another sheet music book is out with Blasters songs in it. The book is called 'Rockabilly!' and is published by Hal Leonard Co. Blaster songs are 'American Music,' 'This is it,' 'Marie Marie,' and 'Rock 'n Roll Will Stand.' It has 64 rockabilly songs by other groups. It sells for \$17.95 and can be ordered from H.L. Co., 7777 W. Bluemound Road, P.O. box 13819, Milwaukee Wi. 53213

PHIL ALVIN- THE FOOTHILL CLUB -L. A. CA. 9/15/94 Billy Davis

Phil Alvin opened up a show for the Dirty Dozen Brass Band at the Foothill club in Long Beach, California. His set of songs on this night would dig deeper into the roots of blues than normally conveyed through his lead in the Blasters. The agenda tonight would be Country Blues. The band consisted of Phil on vocals and guitar with a beat provided by, as Phil introduced him, “Jerry Angel from the Blasters.” In explaining the absence of the rest of the Blasters he joked, “And the other two are unemployed!”



Phil opened up the set solo accompanying himself on banjo playing old blues standards ‘The Whining boy’ and ‘Mobile Line.’ He dedicated the pair of songs to the famous New Orleans banjo player Danny Barker who had recently passed away. This was the first time in Blasters/Phil history that I would have heard Phil on Banjo and without doubt he did impress his own amicable style on the instrument.

When Jerry Angel entered the stage, Phil switched to guitar and more familiar to the audience’s ear, ran through his Country Blues repertoire - which included songs more familiar to a Phil Alvin solo set. Since 1981, Phil has gained notoriety playing these solo gigs in between Blaster tours, his unique arrangements of these songs has remained unchanged over the years, and to his credit - a true traditionalist.

Throughout the set, Phil’s voice really filled the room, from his first solo album ‘Unsung Stories’ he played ‘Gangster Blues’ and from his upcoming solo he performed ‘County Fair.’ Jerry Angel’s drums on tracks like ‘Big Road Blues’ and ‘Mean Ole Frisco’ really put a rockin’ edge on an already satisfactorily accompanied group of songs normally performed on just guitar and vocal. From the Blasters Hard Line album, Phil played ‘Sampson & Delilah,’ a track that can be heard in its original form on the Blasters collection CD.

The set was short and Phil was in fine form. The only shortcoming was not hearing any interaction between Phil and the Dirty Dozen Brass band. They played together on Phil’s ‘Unsung Stories’ album back in 1986 and the Brass also guested on Phil’s new ‘County Fair 2000’ album. A joining on stage would have seemed natural. One thing I can say about an experienced musician like Phil is when playing by himself in this setting, the music he performs is the true Phil Alvin. This is the music he carries around in his soul. This is as pure as American music comes.

The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Phil Alvin at the Foothill.

■ A lot of rock & roll fans get queasy at the very mention of a trumpet, let alone an entire troupe of horn-blowing musicians. Wake up, kiddies, the Dirty Dozen ain't no rootie-tootie Al Hirt/Herb Alpert thang, nor a mob of cowbell-and-sleeve-garter Dixieland mooks, nor Neville Bros. disco dross. This band makes with a swingingly singular deep New Orleans street sound, all warm, fat melodies and tough propulsive rhythms — a seductive sound so full and driving as to be utterly unstoppable. With the presence of Professor Phil Alvin, blues-keening, finger-picking monster behind the Blasters, this bill assumes even more adventurous and far-reaching proportions. Having recorded together on Alvin's 1987 *Unsung Stories*, Alvin and the Dirty ones long ago sniffed out each other's aesthetic territory, creating a situation charged with infinite blow-top musical potential. This'll be a sweet sonic vortex — plunge into it. (Jonny Whiteside)

MIKE SMITH



Dirty Dozen Brass Band

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PHIL
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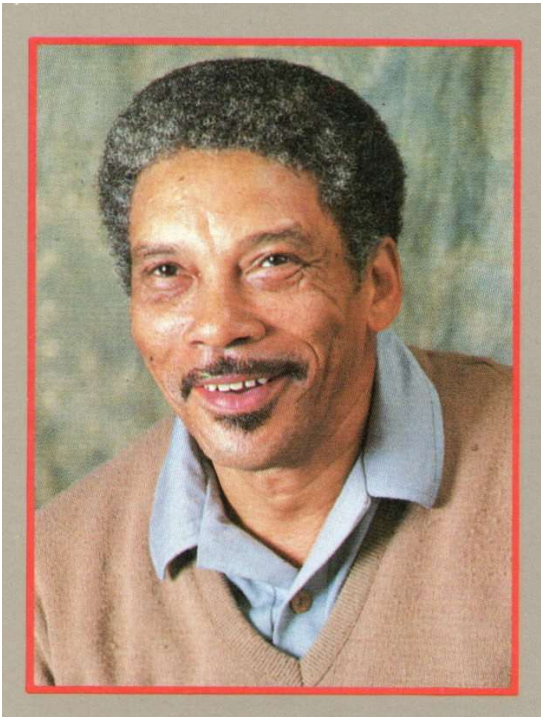
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HIGHTONE RECORDS

LEE ALLEN 1926-1994



Lee Allen was born on July 2, 1926 in Pittsburgh, Kansas, but spent most of his early years growing up in Denver Colorado. He moved to New Orleans in 1944 to attend Xavier college on an athletic scholarship where he lettered in Track, basketball and football. Lee was already a well-trained Sax player whose idols were the top Jazz Saxophone players of the era: Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Lester Young, Illinois Jacquet and Dexter Gordon. By hanging around the New Orleans Jazz club scene he was able to learn from these legends as well as playing with them. Later, when Lee was followed on the L.A. club scene by members of the Blasters, he took them under his wing much in the same manner that he had learned in New Orleans from his idols.

Lee got married in the mid 40's and never finished his schooling, he was more interested in breaking into the New Orleans R & B scene. He had success when working with Annie Laurie and Paul Gayten's band, doing his first recording with the latter but really gained notoriety when he became friends with trumpeter Dave Bartholomew. By 1950, Bartholomew had become the biggest bandleader and recorder in New Orleans. He directed the group that backed Fats Domino and later Little Richard, Smiley Lewis and many others on record. On many of these recordings, he counted on Lee for his exciting spotlight solos. As Lee played the New Orleans clubs and countless recording sessions he gained a name in the Crescent city's booming R & B scene and soon was the top renowned Sax session player. He remembers working very hard, "Back in those days, coming out of New Orleans, it was \$35 a session. It was supposed to be for 3 hours, but sometimes it was \$35 for the whole day. That's the way it worked out because they had black and white (musicians union) locals There were two separate locals then in New Orleans, so you just had to take it as it came along. There was nothing we could do about it and only so much fight we could put up. A dollar was a dollar then, so we took it for what it was worth. We were just trying to keep some good food in the pot."

Lee played on all of Fats



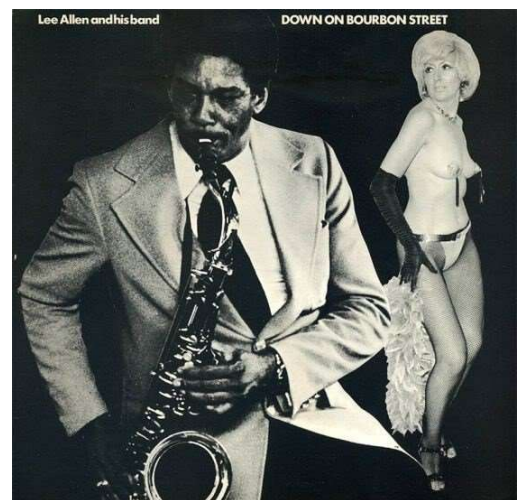
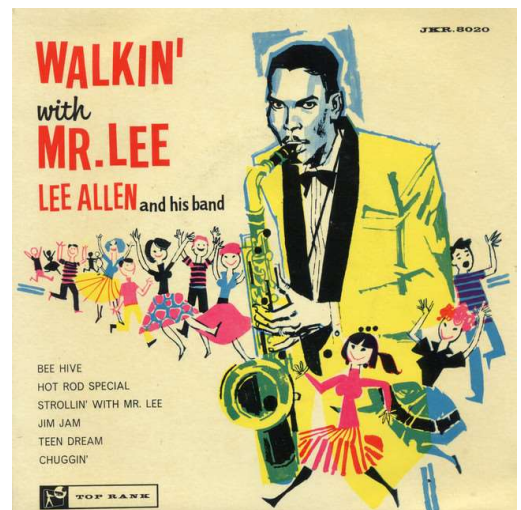
Photo: Gary Leonard

Domino's sessions, Little Richards too, and had a couple of instrumental hits of his own. His first solo records as a featured artist were for Alladin records in 1956 called 'Shimmy' and 'Rockin at Cosimos.' They weren't very successful. In 1957 Allen signed with Herald-Ember records, a New York based R & B label known for hits by vocal groups like the Nutmegs, Turbans, Five Satins and Silhouettes. Lee played and worked as producer on hits by Tommy Ridgely, Joe Jones and Ernie Kador for the label. Lee's biggest solo hit came in Early 1958 as Ember 1027 called 'Walkin with Mr. Lee.' It was a catchy instrumental that Lee had developed when on tour with Fats Domino. The song was featured regularly on American Bandstand and stayed on the national charts for Three months

Lee had some other minor hits including 'Tic Toc', 'Cat Walk', 'Jim Jam' and 'Creole Alley.' He recorded an album titled 'Walkin with Mr. Lee' which went gold and now sells for hundreds of dollars in collectors circles. With this success, Allen formed a touring band and spent 3 years on the road. Between '61 and '65 he returned to Fats Domino's band but in '65 the R & B scene in New Orleans seemed to have dried up, so he moved to Los Angeles. There he worked in an aircraft factory and played the clubs with other Blues legends like Big Joe Turner, T-Bone Walker and Eddie Cleanhead Vinson. In L.A. is where Lee started to notice a new breed of young roots oriented rockers.

Allen remembers the young Blasters growing up around the music scene, "I've seen 'em grow up a little bit which has been fun," Allen reflects, "I haven't stopped to think how many years it's been, but they were in school at the time. It was because of the interest in the music and at the time, they wanted someone to be interested in them because they wanted a little help. They stuck in there, which a lot of them don't and it's started to prove out for them."

Later when the Blasters got their first record deal, Lee who remained friends with the band, called and said he wanted to play on their album they were recording for Slash. The band was thrilled and set up a gig at L.A.'s Whiskey club to feel the collaboration out. The addition of Allen felt great. At the time he officially joined the Blasters he wasn't exactly looking for work. He had played on the Stray Cats second album, guested on a number of dates of the Rolling Stones 1982 tour but still chose to record with and extensively tour with the Blasters. Blaster leader Phil Alvin remembers Lee as a true road warrior, "Lee Allen is a battle horse on the road, there is nobody in history that's ever been like that guy. That cat since 1948 has been putting bands to



bed and waking them up for breakfast and he was doing the same with the Blasters.” Lee stayed with the Blasters through their sporadic touring in the late 80’s and early 90’s while guesting on numerous recordings. In 1993 he was traveling to a gig with the Blasters to San Francisco when he suffered a seizure. Soon after, he was diagnosed with cancer forcing him unwillingly off the road. On October 18, 1994, Lee Allen passed away at 68 years old. For those of us who did not know him personally, we are fortunate to have an endless number of legendary Rock ‘n Roll recordings to remember him by.



Lee’s solo work can be found in record stores on CD on the Collectibles label titled ‘Walkin with Mr. Lee.’ There is an Lp collection of hits available titled ‘Down on Bourbon St.’ that is no longer in print but can be found in collectors shops.

Lee Allen had friends all over the world. Here is a private photo collection that his friend Jimmy Taylor of Sydney Australia gathered over the years.



Photo from the Lee Allen Tribute record “Down on Bourbon Street” NOLA LP 16.



**With Dave Bartholomew on
Trumpet - Sydney Opera House
Australia October 1975**



**New Orleans jazz fest 1988.
The singer is Jessie Hill, the ooh poo pah doo man**



**Lee Allen playing drums in the Fats Domino show.
Sydney Opera House October 1975. With Dave Bartholomew on trumpet**



Lee Allen and his band DOWN ON BOURBON STREET

Lee Allen is a master of the tenor saxophone, who first came to fame as a member of that select group of New Orleans' musicians that gave the world a new sound in the fifties. Mac Rebennack (Dr John) really said it all in *Walking To New Orleans*:

'Lee Allen was part of the Studio Band with Red Tyler. I think he played more solos on more records, with the exception perhaps of King Curtis. His sound was part of the New Orleans' Sound, him and Red Tyler played in intense harmony and also played that unison sound when backing up the singer. It was so strong, and the sound that Lee had when he played solo was so distinctive. Every artist he played behind he put a particular style to it, if it was a Little Richard solo he'd put a Little Richard signature in, if it was Fats Domino he'd do a Fats thing. But he'd always play something around the melody of the song or around the melody of changes. Every song was a different trip, and he could be very humorous or very funky or bluesy. He was king of the funky saxophone players in the style that was being played in the 1950s.'

He was born in Pittsburgh, Kansas on July 2, 1926 but completed his schooling in New Orleans, where he started taking up music — not only was he immersed in New Orleans' long musical tradition but he was also very aware of the exciting bebop sounds of the time. He left school when he got married and started working with bandleader Paul Gayten and singer Annie Laurie at the Robin Hood Club in the late forties. Paul Gayten invited him to join the recording sessions he was doing at Cosimo Matassa's J. & M. Studios, and before long Dave Bartholomew asked Lee to do the same thing for him. By the mid-fifties he was an ever-present in the studios, and the famous Studio Band gradually came together. Lee Allen describes how it happened:-

'The original Studio Band consisted of Earl Palmer (drums), Red Tyler and myself (saxophones), a bass player named Frank Fields and piano was just two or three different guys, there were just five of us. And these different record companies started coming here and using the band, flying from New York and the West Coast to be with us. And then comes Bumps Blackwell with Little Richard, that's when we recorded him and from then on everything else started. Recordings kept being hits and they kept on flying down to us. After the first couple of times we usually thought we had a hit, we had the foot stomping, hand-clapping

thing. Of course we usually had a lot of fun in the studio as well I guess, as you can hear on a lot of the stuff we do, this came straight from the heart. Sometimes we were in the studio all day and half the night on one or two tunes. Of course things are now a little more precise but they weren't strict as they are now. We never heard anything called overtime, after four tunes we had completed one session and then go on for another session. Those were the good old days, I guess.'

Lee Allen played behind almost every famous artist who recorded in New Orleans at the time, Fats Domino, Professor Longhair, Huey 'Piano' Smith, Lloyd Price, Smiley Lewis, Shirley & Lee, Clarence 'Frogman' Henry, Little Richard, Amos Milburn, Charles Brown, Etta James — everyone!

His first own record, 'Rockin' At Cosmo's'/'Shimmy' was issued by Aladdin in 1956 but these rocking instrumentals made little noise. However, his next release, 'Walking With Mr Lee' shot up the *Billboard* charts, making No. 54 spot early in 1958. Lee tells the story behind this record:-

'We were in a big show with Fats Domino and at the close of the show they had Paul 'Hucklebuck' Williams Big Band who were playing with us on that particular last tune. Meanwhile I'd come up with this little riff of mine and this guy from New York City (Al Silver of Herald/Ember Records) said why didn't I record that. I would play anything the man asked me, that's how it came up. This guy from New York called up and said, 'You got a hit! It was the time of Dick Clark's Bandstand and the tune had hit Dick Clark's Bandstand and was No. 1 for about six weeks. And then I got a little nervous, that was it. Then the record company had me come up there and I'd never made any travelling as an individual artist, I had worked for so many bands out of New Orleans. Everybody was looking at me!

'Walking With Mr Lee', a typically easy-going R & B instrumental of the time, was loosely based on Bill Doggett's influential hit, 'Honky Tonk' and headlines this album, which is drawn entirely from the three sessions he did for Ember. The selections range from funky instrumentals as on 'Walking With Mr. Lee', 'Cat Walk', 'Big Horn Special' and 'Strollin' With Mr Lee', through the bluesy atmospheric 'Creole Alley' with growling sax and lowdown guitar, to the smokey, after-hours jazz style of 'Promenade' and 'Teen Dream'. A real Rhythm and Blues pot-pourri!

When the excitement of the hit record died down, Lee went back to touring with Fats Domino but in 1965, tired of the road, he moved to the West Coast to take up a job in an aeronautics factory. He still kept in touch with music, doing the occasional record session. It was all pretty insignificant for a man of his stature, but happily he's been pushed into the public spotlight again after he took up his old position in Fats Domino's band in 1975.

Lee Allen is an incredibly warm and friendly person whose many musical achievements are greeted with almost disarming personal modesty. But whether he acknowledges it or not, he has helped to write a very full page in America's rich musical heritage, even if he has not received full credit monetary or otherwise. Mac Rebennack perhaps put it best:-

'Lee made so many hit records for so many people and got nothing for it except the session fee. He would be a millionaire now if he'd got a percentage out of all those records he'd been on. Instead he got a little bit of money which was chop-change compared with the work he put in. Considering records in those days were made on one track, everything had to be right for the take, Lee Allen would put in solos from the first to 110th take, and every one would be just as good.'

Yes, Lee Allen was at his world-shattering best blowing those countless innovatory solos behind other artists, but this album of instrumentals is a glowing tribute to his all-round ability — a master of the tenor saxophone, indeed...

John Brøven
(Author of *Walking to New Orleans*)

LAST CALL

Lee Allen was the wailin' daddy of the tenor saxophone. He arrived early in rock & roll's history, and today nobody can follow him. His passing on October 18 of lung cancer is a tragic loss — both to those who knew him by name and those who only knew the sound of the man. "It was Lee Allen who introduced horns to rock & roll," says Phil Alvin, leader of the Blasters, with whom Allen played for years. "While many other more familiar names got the credit, he was the one who redefined the language," says Steve Berlin, who played alongside Allen in the Blasters.

Lee Allen was born on July 2, 1927, in Pittsburgh. Just one year later he moved to Denver, and soon became interested in music. After high school he was offered a music and athletic scholarship to Xavier University in New Orleans. It was not too long before music overshadowed his curricular activities and school got eased out of the picture.

During the late '40s, he became a mainstay of the Paul Gayten/Annie Laurie Band. He was discovered by bandleader Dave Bartholomew, who put together a crackerjack group consisting of Allen, Alvin "Red" Tyler on tenor sax and Earl Palmer on drums. They played on many — if not most — of the hits to come out of New Orleans, including sides by Fats Domino, Little Richard, Huey "Piano" Smith, Lloyd Price, Amos Milburn and Smiley Lewis. There were countless sessions, all bearing Allen's squawking genius. "He had a very schooled sound that was more melodic than the other players," says Earl Palmer. According to Little Richard, Allen played his solos as if he were singing the song.

Not even Allen could catalog all the sessions he played on; Phil Alvin believes him to be one of the most recorded musicians in history. In later years, Allen played on sessions with Tom Waits, Dr. John and the Blasters.

Little Richard, the self-proclaimed architect of rock & roll, says it was Allen who helped draw the blueprint. Richard had unsuccessfully tried to cut a hit record; it didn't happen until he hooked up with Allen and Earl Palmer. "If it wasn't for Lee Allen, there would be no Little Richard," he says.

In the mid-'60s Allen moved to Los Angeles. Dave and Phil Alvin, who later went on to form the Blasters, befriended Allen while they were in their early teens. "He was a father figure and a teacher to us," says Dave. He recalls sneaking out of his Downey bedroom to catch up with Allen at the Denny's on Lakewood Boulevard, where the musician held court after his gigs. "I can still remember him sitting there in a shark-skin suit with a pencil-thin moustache, looking like a cross between Clark Gable and Billy Eckstine." A decade later, Allen joined the Alvin boys in the Blasters. "I think it was a way for him to stay creative and young by playing with us," says Dave.

Allen lived life the same sweet-tart way he played his horn. "He always gave it his all," says Berlin. "Even on his drunkenest and stupidest nights he would play better than most people. It was a greatness one could aspire to."

In 1980 Allen was invited to go on tour with the Rolling Stones. After the first couple of gigs he was reprimanded for upstaging Mick Jagger, says Phil. Evidently, the Stones had Allen on a riser above Charlie Watts and behind Jagger. Allen was jumping up and down and clapping his hands too much; after the eighth show, Jagger booted him off the tour.



Wail On, Mr. Lee

Allen didn't record much under his own name, though he scored with the instrumental hit "Walkin' With Mr. Lee" in 1958. Shortly before he became ill, musician Smokey Hormel recorded Allen for a blues and jazz album he hopes to have out by next year. Tentatively titled *Blues for Tiny* — Tiny was Allen's second wife — it is a fitting final testimonial to the sound of a master.

"I think of him every time I take a solo," says Berlin. "There isn't a sax player who isn't influenced by Allen, whether they know it or not."

— Allen Larman

Lee Allen's Top 10 Greatest Recorded Moments

- 1) "I'm Walkin'," Fats Domino, 1957
- 2) "Long Tall Sally," Little Richard, 1956
- 3) "Little Liza Jane," Huey "Piano" Smith & the Clowns, 1956
- 4) "Walkin' With Mr. Lee," Lee Allen, 1958
- 5) "Hey Now Baby," Professor Longhair, 1949
- 6) "Feel So Good," Shirley & Lee, 1955
- 7) "Roll 'Em Pete," The Blasters, 1982
- 8) "Plastic Rose," Dave Alvin, 1991
- 9) "Chicken Shack Boogie," Amos Milburn, 1948
- 10) "Old Rockin' Chair," Lee Allen with Smokey Hormel, 1994

— A.L.

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THE BLASTERS WITH LEE ALLEN



Dave Alvin and Greg Leisz

At The Middle East Cambridge MA 7/15/94



Photos by Sara Josephson



FROM THE EDITOR: Thanks to all the American Music subscribers who constantly supply info from all parts of the world that keeps us informed on the Blasters happenings. If you would like to have your name listed in the newsletter for tape trading with other Blaster collectors, please write me with your address. If you would like to write an interesting story on the Blasters or have a good idea on something you would like to see in the newsletter, let me know because your input is very important. Anyone interested in reading the complete James Harman

interview, which was edited in issue #4 to his connection with the Blasters, can catch it in an upcoming issue of Blue Suede News. Anyone collecting Blaster radio shows may want to contact Jim McGoodwin for a copy of the 1985 Spin Radio Concert on vinyl. He only has the first of the two discs in the set and is asking \$25 for it. Write: 13409 N. Inverness Ave., Oklahoma City OK. 73120

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