

ISSUE #44

# American Music

## The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

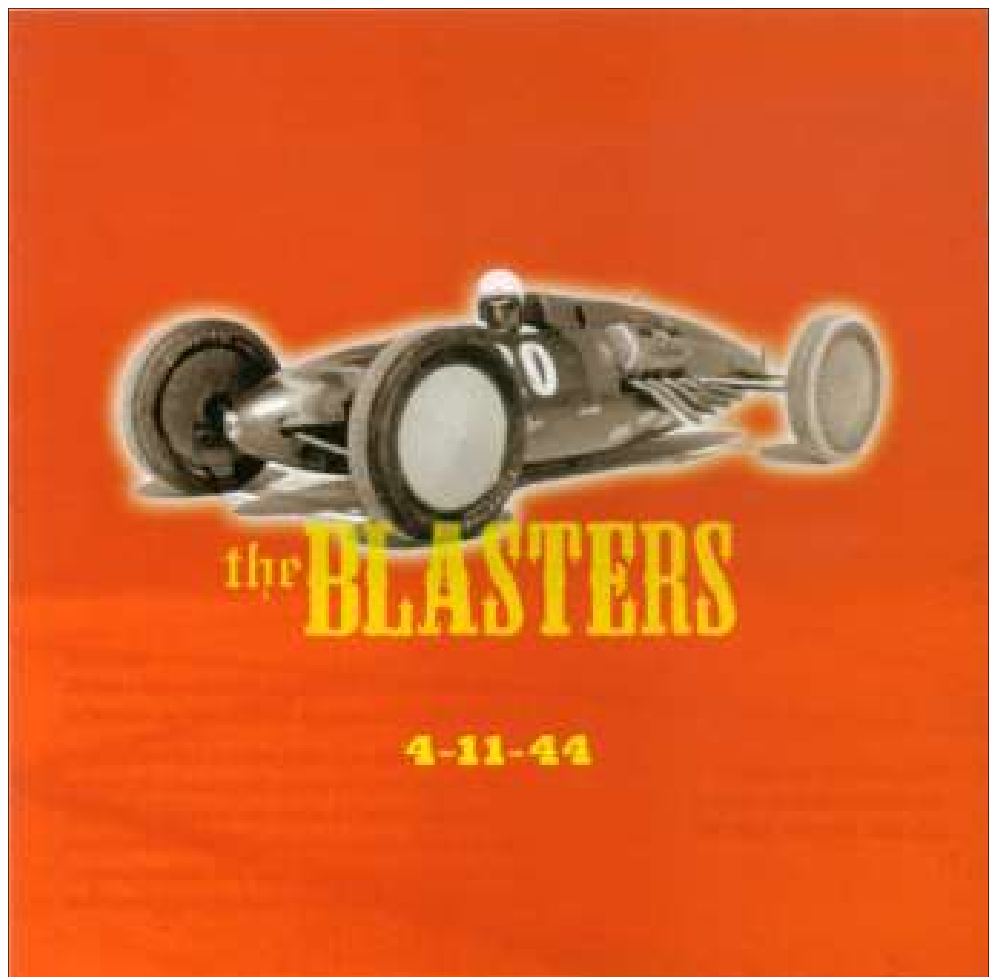
Nov. 2004

### Dave Alvin Tour Dates

- 12/4 San Juan Capis. CA at Coach House (Dave sits in with the Beat Farmers A.D.)
- 12/10 San Francisco CA at Fillmore
- 12/31 Milwaukee WI at Pabst Theatre
- 2005
- 1/15 Pasadena CA Neighborhood Church
- 1/22-23 Seattle WA at Tractor Tavern
- 1/28 Petaluma CA at Mystic Theatre
- 1/29 San Fran CA at Great Amer Music Hall
- 2/4 Santa Ana CA at Galaxy Theatre
- 2/5 Solana Beach CA at Belly up Tavern
- 2/25 Lake Worth FL at Bamboo Room
- 2/26 Tampa FL at Skippers

## The Blasters 4-11-44 CD Interview Issue

**Latest News** – The Blasters new studio album, 4-11-44 (pictured right) was released by Evangeline Records in the UK on November 4, 2004. If you live in the USA, the best way to mail order the CD is through [www.Amazon.co.uk](http://www.Amazon.co.uk). The Blasters are still in negotiations to release the CD in the USA. – Fitzgerald's night club in Berwyn, IL (near Chicago) is celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They have published a sharp looking photo book with a companion CD of tracks recorded at the club over the years. Dave Alvin's NEW HIGHWAY leads off the CD. Price is \$30 and is available through their web site at [www.fitzgeraldsnightclub.com](http://www.fitzgeraldsnightclub.com). -- The Knitters new album called The Modern Sounds of the Knitters is complete and will be released in the summer of 2005. – Dave Alvin says no progress has been made on releasing a second book of poetry. He says he would like to reprint the first book at the same time as the new book. The first book has become a rare collectible. -- Tom Russell announced on his Web site that Tough Company, his book of poems and letters centered on Charles Bukowski will be released in February by Black Shark Press. Dave Alvin wrote the introduction for the book. -- Tom is also releasing Hearts on the Line, a DVD of a musical train trip that he organized across Canada in 2004. The DVD will feature comments by Dave.~~ *AM*



***This Issue: The Blasters talk about their new 4-11-44 CD, an overview of the Dave Alvin 2004 Ashgrove Tour, also Joe Terry's Ashgrove tour diary.***

# The Blasters on their new album 4-11-44

*The Blasters have released their first studio album in 19 years. The CD is currently only available in the UK and Europe on Evangeline Records. A US distribution deal is currently in the works for early 2005. The membership has changed quite a bit since 1985's Hardline LP was released. The quartet is led by founding members Phil Alvin on vocals and John Bazz on Bass. Jerry Angel on drums and Keith Wyatt on lead guitar have been in the band for ten years and 8 years respectively. The new album titled 4-11-44 has been in the making for 5 years.*

*This interview was done in two separate sessions, on the eve of the release of 4-11-44 by Evangeline records on October 4, 2004. John Bazz, Jerry Angel, and Keith Wyatt sat down together in their tour bus while riding cross-country on tour in Sweden to discuss the making of the new album. Phil Alvin was interviewed in London, England on the final date of the Blasters 2004 European tour.*

**John:** Let's see: What year were the MIT sessions? Do you remember?

**Keith:** No. (laughs)

**Jerry:** I think 1999.

**Keith:** Was it that recent? (sarcastic laugh)

**John:** Keith had an offer come to him through the school (Musicians Institute) that he teaches at in Los Angeles, to have the Blasters participate in a recording class.

**Keith:** The 'Recording School,' RIT is the name of the program. The guy in charge of the program named TJ Helmrich is a real good guitar player, singer, musician, and engineer. He had been recording fusion bands and hadn't done a rock band with vocals for his class. So he had this session engineering class where students could participate in a real recording session with real musicians.

The students were considered the second engineers and followed his instructions. They were going to get credit on our album when it was released - because at that time we had a standing deal with HighTone to release whatever we came up with.

We had three days of sessions booked. We were all there the first day. The next two days Phil was late, so we cut mostly everything as a three-piece.

**John:** There was a fourth day when Phil recorded all the vocals.

**Keith:** Yeah, later on. Then the mixing went on for some time.

**John:** We kind of stalled at that point and then went on to Bruce Witkin's studio. We sent the tapes to him and had him transfer the tapes to a format we could work with. Then we re-cut a lot of stuff.

**Keith:** A lot of overdubs were done at Witkin's - all the mixes were done there. I think it was about 50 / 50 in both studios.

**AM:** Was there an official producer?

**Keith:** TJ Helmrich engineered the sessions at MI and Bruce Witkin at Witkin's Garage Studios. Bruce also engineered all of the final mixes. The 'producer' role was spread around between Phil, John, and me. On a number of occasions, I started tracking parts with Bruce before Phil or John showed up, which we would play back for them to listen and comment. Phil had lots of ideas on arrangements. John made valuable suggestions



### Unused title ideas for the new Blasters album

— Eight Cylinder Love — Mommy Rollin Stone — Daddy Rollin' Stone — Real Rock Drive —  
— Hullabaloo — Boneyard — Built For Speed — In Living Stereo — Chicken Run — Gung Ho —  
— -One Minute To Zero - — Citizen's Arrest — Tailwind — Cheater Slick — Black Ice — Drive —  
— Sonic Boom — Land Speed Record — Moonshine — Thunder Road —  
— Uncle Daddy Rollin' Stone and Other Songs About Prison, Cars and Women —

and comments all along the way. Jerry didn't make it to most of the dubbing sessions, so his input was limited to rehearsals and basic tracking sessions. We cut everything live as a band and then I went back and replaced most of the guitar parts to get better sounds, but we used some of the live stuff because it just felt better. Phil sang and played live and then went back and overdubbed all of his vocals, guitar and harp.

**AM:** What happened with the song OKEE DOKEE STOMP that was supposed to have all the Blasters guitar players on it?

**Keith:** That was Johnny's idea. The plan was to have all of the Blasters guitar players play on that one in sequence - we took (Hollywood) Fats' intro off of his record and paisted it onto me, John, and Jerry playing the first couple of choruses. Next Smokey, Dave, James, and Billy Zoom each take a chorus before I come back in and wrap it up.

**John:** We recorded it 5 years ago, got the basics down, and then finished it at Bruce Witkin's. Keith got his guitar on there. The next guy to put his stuff on there was to be Smokey Hormel. We sent the tapes to him and it got stalled. He called, apologized, and said he just couldn't get it done. He is so hard to get a hold of and his schedule is always so busy. Because we were so close to getting the record out, there just wasn't time to finish it. That's still something we can do in the future.

**AM:** How did the racecar artwork on the front cover come about?

**Phil:** Did you know that the longest word that can be spelled backwards the same as forwards is 'Racecar'?

**John:** Howie Idelson came up with ideas. We looked at them and tweaked them. I thought the CD itself should be something cool like a hubcap or tire.

**Jerry:** Yeah, the CD is a tire. Instead of saying 'Goodyear' or 'Firestone', it says 'Blasters.'

**AM:** What is the significance of the salt flats on the inside of the CD?

**Jerry:** The salt flats are in Bonneville, Utah. Pre-World War II guys used to race hot rods out there until the war broke out and the government made that area off-limits because of an Air Force base out there. They started racing again after the war but it dissipated with time. In recent years they've had a few revivals out there with some of the original racers showing up.

**AM:** In the last Blasters newsletter we saw a cover for the album that is white and says Sonic Boom. What was that?

**John:** That was a prototype. When we couldn't decide on the title, I made a bunch of album covers on my computer to show at a band meeting. 4-11-44 was our first choice - it's a song title and it's kind of mysterious. That was the one we all liked best. Other titles considered were Speed of Sound, Sound of Speed, Chop Suey, Blasters Gone Wild, and many others (laughs). I accumulated loads of names.

**Keith:** There were a lot of good names in there like 'Osama, Why I Outta.' (Laughs)

## *The songs* ♦♦♦♦♦ **DADDY ROLLIN STONE** ♦♦♦♦♦

**AM:** How did the groove change on that from the old versions the Blasters did live from 1996 - 99?

**Keith:** We were just jamming on it and you (John) came up with that bass line.

**John:** Yeah. It was 5 years ago and we were only three Blasters strong trying to lay down tracks without Phil. We ran through everything we knew really well that we didn't need him on. We just played around with this song. When Phil came in subsequently to put the vocals on, it was a completely different song for him. It was fun to check out the expression on his face.

**Keith:** I can't even remember the old version now. I originally learned it off a live tape of James Intveld with the band.

**John:** When we originally recorded that at MI, it came time to record the solo section and I remember Jerry made a comment to Keith. He said ‘Play menacingly.’

**Jerry:** Right! Right!

**John:** He said ‘It’s a menacing song. Play a menacing solo!’

**Jerry:** Keith came back and nailed it! It changed in that theme. It became a totally different flavor after I said that.

**John:** At one point we took a little piece of Keith’s solo off because we thought it was too long. I complained bitterly to the guys that I thought Keith’s solo should have been left intact. So the last thing we did on this record, was we found the missing section of Keith’s solo to complete the song. All this was all over a five-year process.

**Phil:** I don’t see this version as very different from the one on my solo record Unsung Stories (Slash records, 1986). There is a bass line difference and there is the attitudinal difference of the Blasters that are playing it. On the solo record it was Dave Carroll, Gary Masi, and Mike Roach.

**AM:** What is the origin of this song?

**Phil:** I bought the Otis Blackwell record on the JD label. It’s a very early record like ‘51 or ‘52. When I heard that thing, I said: ‘Damn!’ I never heard anybody else doing it, but now my friend Drac from Finland gave me a copy of Jimmy Ricks doing it. Damn! In fact that’s the one I wanted to put on my top ten list – the father of doo wop. Cie la vie (Laughs). (Ed note. – Phil just got off the phone with a major UK music magazine writer telling his ‘10 essential important records.’)

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ 4-11-44 ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Keith:** We heavy-ed that up.

**John:** We had been playing that for 10 years.

**Keith:** I learned that off the live tape starting with James’s guitar parts. I played it like him. Phil listened one day and said, ‘How come you’re playing it like that?’ I said, ‘I thought that was how it went.’ Phil said, ‘No.’ so, we changed it some.

**AM:** What influenced you to write this song?

**Phil:** When the lottery got accepted in California, I knew that was bad. That was a regressive tax on poor people and I thought that someone sometime must have tried to wise people up to this. I didn’t see any songs like that so I wrote one.

The line: ‘Baby needs a new pair of shoes’ came up immediately – that’s the reality. People gamble because they are deficient of brain adrenaline and there are people who gamble because it is the only chance they have of getting to their dreams. 4-11-44 was a lucky number in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century– the washerwoman’s number. I heard Blind Willie Mctell sing: “You got my number baby, 4-11-44.” This was a live recording by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress in 1942. Blind Willie said: ‘This is an old, down in the alley, blues. Back from when the blues got original.’

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ REBOUND ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Phil:** I had the Charlie Rich record on Phillips. I always thought the song was too short so I added the bridge twice. Charlie Rich also put out LONELY WEEKENDS at about the same time, and I thought that was Charlie Rich’s biggest contribution to his body of music. He was great the way he held melodies. The songs he recorded for Sam Phillips were meant as demos so Elvis or Jerry Lee could hear them to record as hits. Charlie Rich was a piano player. I heard the song done more with a guitar flail instead of piano rapid fire.

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ IT’S ALL YOUR FAULT ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Phil:** The first time I heard that record was in Memphis, TN when Dave Carroll was the Blasters roadie on the very first Blasters US tour in a white van. Richard Hite, brother of Bob Hite from Canned Heat, had moved to Memphis. He handed me two tapes, which wound up being listened to on the ‘Blasters road’ all the time. Richard put some 45s on there. One was Bobby Lee Trammel. He was as they said: ‘A white guy playing a

little more old timey.’ It was a record from 1959 called ALL YOUR FAULT on Shelby Singleton’s Sun Records label. (Ed – Singleton purchased Sam Phillips Sun masters in the 60’s and began flooding the market with re-releases.)

When I heard that recording I thought Bobby Lee Trammel was pulling a ‘Jimmy Reed’ so heavy on it. Jimmy Reed was extremely influential to country music. Jimmy Reed had more number one hits from 1953 through 1964 than even Chuck Berry. Marcus Johnson told me that more money fell out of Jimmy Reed’s pocket at night at the bar than Howlin’ Wolf and Muddy Waters had made all year long. He was vulnerable and brought images to music.

Jimmy Reed did not go unnoticed to the white guys who played country music. Billy Lee Riley was very influenced by Jimmy Reed. Even the song MEMPHIS is based off of a Jimmy Reed song.

**AM:** Did you do any thing different than the original version?

**Phil:** There were a few things, anachronisms that I brought up to date in the lyrics of my version.

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ JULIE ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Keith:** That arrangement came from scratch. Phil describes it as a prisoner's letter to his girlfriend.

**John:** We were rehearsing at the school. And Keith and Phil started working out an arrangement on that.

**Keith:** Phil had given us a CD of him playing it by himself – sort of a demo of it. I still have that. It should be a bonus track. Some of Phil's early demos were pretty wild.

**John:** The song really is nothing like that demo. It really evolved at the school. This is the problem when you take five years to make a record; you start something, then shelve it, then you come back to it and you forget some of the subtle things that were figured out at the last rehearsal of it.

We started working on that with a Bo Diddley vibe at a rehearsal place in Long Beach called Little Rock Studios.

**Keith:** Oh yeah.

**John:** It was a solid year before we went back to MI and finished it up.

**Keith:** Then I made a demo of it on my 4-track (recorder) just to try out different parts and choruses. The guitar solo is inspired by Albert Collins. - I did a combination of riffs inspired by Bo Diddley's guitar on ROLLER COASTER by Little Walter, and then I added the second finger picked part over that. We added more chords, but then later threw all the chords out and went back to the three-chord version. Phil had to write another verse. The song wound up cooler and tighter than anyone had anticipated.

**Phil:** I wrote this with a guy who is dead now. He was a murderous killing jail hound who had very good musical sensibilities. Named Tony Gerkoupolis, we called him Drac (not the Drac from Finland). He was a 6 foot 7 monster. He spent most of his life in jail, but had played slide for Leon Redbone. I was over at my friend White Boy James’ house and this guy Tony was there. He had just gotten out of Pelican Bay (Penitentiary). So that’s how I met him. Two weeks later, I was over at his house and he was playing Beatles songs. I complained and was ready to leave. He started playing this song that sounded familiar. I slapped down my hand and said: ‘Now that’s a song!’ It was called MONEY SLIPS THROUGH MY FINGERS; it was a local hit in LA when I was in high school. When I found out he was the writer of the song, then I completely changed my opinion of his taste in music. We became friends. I was recording County Fair 2000 about the time we sat down and wrote that song. He had some parts of the song and I added to it. So that’s how we wrote JULIE. Drac asked me who I thought Julie was. I thought hard and said: ‘I don’t know.’ He said: ‘Ah, I made her up.’

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ DRY RIVER ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Keith:** That one went through an evolution of a couple of arrangements before we settled on the recorded version.

**AM:** Did this come from the Dave Alvin version or ‘The Blasters with Smokey Hormel’ live version?

**John:** This has very little similarity to the Smokey Hormel version. We pretty much started from scratch.

**Keith:** We listened to Dave’s version once to rough out the structure. I remember because Phil was questioning Greg Leisz’s placing of the slide guitar. To this day, I have never heard the Smokey Hormel version. Essentially, Phil said that he wanted a Stax Records type feel, showed me his idea for the intro, and we all pieced

it together from there. In rehearsals we tried out some different chord arrangements before finalizing it. The middle break was originally Phil doing a horn-section type lick on the harp, but we felt that it was too out of keeping with the rest of the song and I came up with the guitar lick in its place, which is also pretty different. It sounds like an Otis Redding song - The sort of arrangement where the guitar plays the fills creating the illusion of horn parts. We kept playing with the middle part and changing the beat. A different guitar even comes in there. We cut that when Phil wasn't there. When he heard that, he thought we were kidding him. He thought it was a joke.

**John:** It's a strong departure from Dave's version. It was sparse – a lot of air - so we added something to it. That delayed the song a month or two.

**Keith:** The ending /outro was tough too. We had to piece that together – a real pro tools construction project. The outro vamp was pieced together in the studio with Phil trying out different lines, listening back, and then re-cutting it until we were all satisfied. It was a challenge to play live because it's in a high key, but Phil figured out how to phrase it and nailed it after the first few times.

Phil spent more time on that vocal than anything else to get the phrasing.

**Phil:** I'll never diss my brother. I always make sure to listen to every record that David makes, even though I don't listen to my own records. I listen to check in and see where my brother is at. When I heard DRY RIVER I thought he was doing a Blind Willie McTell sound. He had the guy on steel guitar. The riverbed in our neighborhood runs from Telegraph Ave to Firestone Blvd. To this day that section is not paved. They tried to pave it and they finally gave up. There are trees, and a pond. You can even catch fish there. That was David's riverbed too.

A more beautiful song can't be written and a more meaningful song can't be written because most of the people's riverbeds in Los Angeles are paved. One of David's skills is to see the important images in a set of images that aren't linked yet. He gathers a perception into a delineation of words - but then you're left with a single perception. That's why the words are easy to remember. David writes good chorus parts too, that are anthemic – like an anthem.

I don't BS when I say that I have nothing but respect for my brother and what makes him, him. I can tell you what he's doing and he knows what I'm doing. When I heard David sing the end of the first line, I imagined that David must have considered it as an R&B song. The first line is like the Sam Cooke song IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME COMING. Dave did a country version of his own experience.

I rearranged the song when Greg 'Smokey' Hormel was still in the band. I had a harmonica solo on it for a while, but then Keith put a great guitar part on there. The stuff that Keith is doing on the guitar is phenomenal - in fact on every song he does on this record. He is such a good guitar player and musician. The school he works at hasn't tainted his soul. He focuses so well. When we talk music, I don't have any trouble with him at all, and I don't think him with me either. I talk in generalities and he knows exactly what I mean. His capability is just the highest – I have nothing but the greatest respect for him as a man, too – he is a remarkable character.

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ YOUR KIND OF LOVE ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Phil:** That's a very early Duke record by Earl Forrest. The guitar player may be Pat Hare. BAREFOOT ROCK was a Duke record also. The style of Duke records has always been prevalent in the Blasters repertoire. We did a lot of those songs over the years like YOU GOT ME WHERE YOU WANT ME by Bobby Blue Bland - which is related stylistically to this one.

**AM:** Didn't Lee Allen play on the Blasters early 90's live versions of this song?

**Phil:** That's right. Keith and I play that sax lick on the new record. You may not hear my guitar on the record, or any record (laughs), but it's there. The important thing is to have a full chord on that.

The Jimmy Reed theory of the wall of guitars says that the musician doesn't want you to know what is played - the guitars should blend and one leads into the other. That's not by studio tricks, but by arrangement. It has to happen live too. It's a blending of rhythm.



# LOVE IS MY BUSINESS

**Keith:** I fooled a lot around with the solos. I originally cut it with a real rockabilly thing in there. When Phil heard it and said: ‘When I get to that part of the solo I feel like I gotta to help the band – like I’m trying to mentally push that solo because it doesn’t go where it needs to go.’ So I re-cut it with different stuff and it helped a lot.

**Phil:** That song was from a time when David (Alvin) was in the Blasters. It was a sun record, but we heard it on a Charly records compilation. It was sung by Cliff Gleaves. It sounded exactly like Gene Taylor to me - a very prevalent piano - rockabilly song. He sings it just like Gene Taylor. I played it for Gene, but he didn't hear himself in it. It's essentially a very light-hearted song, but the juxtaposition of love and business is strong enough to be a little saltier than bland. Music, love, and business was an issue with me at the time. And now it's just music, love, and business (laughs).

# SLIP OF THE TONGUE

**Phil:** James Intveld wrote that when we were talking about making a new Blasters record. We got together to write songs for my solo County Fair record (HighTone 1995). The image of a slip of your tongue . . . (laughs)

**Keith:** I had played it live, but never felt it had the personality of what the song was supposed to be – like a lounge vibe or a tiki lounge vibe. What? I don't know. So, it took a long time of playing it over and over again, until I found what direction to go.

I even recorded all the guitars acoustic, because I thought that would be the right balance, but in the end we went back to electric.

**John:** What is different on that song from the prior versions we played live with James Intveld was that Keith added a bunch of different chords on the chorus to help differentiate the verse from the chorus music.

**Keith:** That bass line is on a million songs. For instance; WALK DON'T RUN. I just added a chord above it. On James version, he basically plays the bass line. James came up to jam with us at the House of Blues and we played that song. He asked me: 'What are those chords?' I said: 'Sorry James. I cant tell you.'

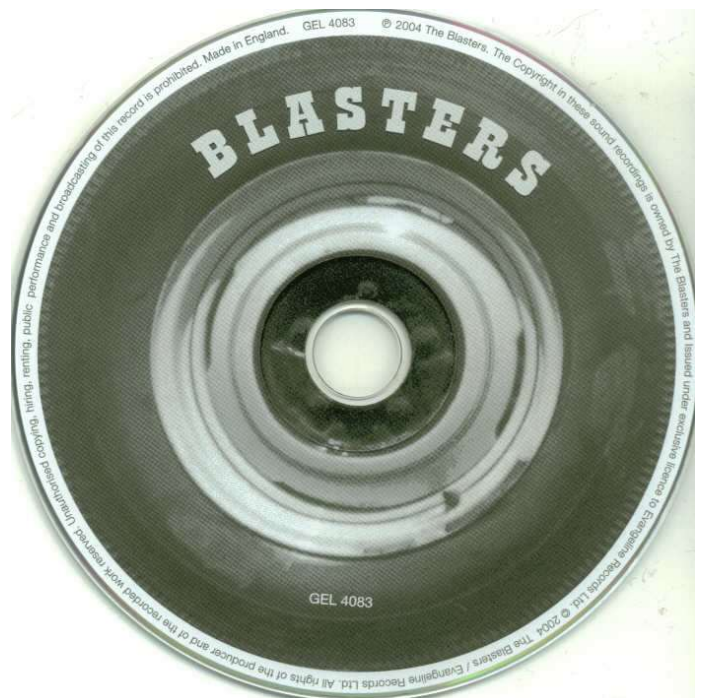
**John, Jerry:** (Laughs)

**Keith:** He thought I was serious and had this weird look like: ‘Wow.’

# PRECIOUS MEMORIES

**Phil:** That's a killer song. It's phenomenal because Johnny Paycheck was actually arrested. That chorus is a mixed metaphor a double entendre to 'raise hell.' There are two songs on this album that Dave Carroll showed me by singing them by himself – PRECIOUS MEMORIES and WINDOW UP ABOVE. Later I heard the originals and they weren't as good. Dave Carroll is one of the greatest musicians I ever knew. He was like my competitor. Every incarnation of the Blasters owes Dave Carroll a great deal in terms of stylistic elements he has contributed to arrangements of songs in every Blaster band and in me. Dave Carroll's version was much smoother than the original.

**Keith:** That one gave me the most trouble. I just couldn't come up with a part to play. I cut 5 or 6 tracks at Witkin's and it became jumbled, so I combined everything into a part that worked. I didn't want to do something that would only work in the studio, where it would sound empty live. We played it many different ways in the studio and now it feels very comfortable.



## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ **BONEYARD** ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Jerry:** I brought that in. I had a compilation of TV Themes from the 60's and 70's by the Ventures. On that album, they had the theme to the cartoon series of Dick Tracy. It was an instrumental tune that the Ventures wrote. I knew the Blasters never had an instrumental novelty tune, so suggested we do it.

**Keith:** We learned it right on the spot.

**John:** Jerry taught it to us. He had been playing it and knew the arrangement. Later we heard the CD to fine-tune it. This was when we had a lot of down time, so we were looking for new ideas.

**Jerry:** We followed the original arrangement but it was so cartoony.

**John:** We definitely gave it the Blasters touch.

**Jerry:** Actually, we had learned it in the studio and on the last verse we were supposed to play the end once but we did it twice.

**John:** That was my mistake. After the bridge it supposed to go for a certain length. I gave Keith a nod and he just followed me. It's an inside joke with us. We talked about fixing it, but who cares.

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ **WINDOW UP ABOVE** ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**John:** This has two great guitar solos. Keith might not want to say this, but he spent a long time on the solos. Every song has the most time of overdubs put into the solos. Some have evolved over time. We had the luxury of time. We left no stone unturned – we didn't make any mistakes or have any regrets because we had plenty of time. We are all happy with the record.

**Phil:** The original by George Jones was a standard Nashville arrangement - which took the balls out of the song. Ours is the Fats Domino version. When Dave Carroll came into the band, I added the song to our set after he taught it to me.





## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ JUST TO BE WITH YOU ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Keith:** That was taken right off the original Muddy Waters record.

**John:** We did that completely at Bruce Witkin's studio. We didn't have any harmonica songs on the record and we all knew the song already. It's the only harp song on the record.

**Phil:** I like the version we had on the live radio show (KPFK's Folkscene 10/10/93). Marcus Johnson suggested the song to me, he was Muddy Water's Sax player, a friend of Lee Allen, and was the guy who really turned us into a band. Marcus said if there was ever a live powerful song that Muddy missed; it was JUST TO BE WITH YOU. There is a line that I don't sing, that Muddy sings about: "Call your mother in law honey." I left that out. I'm not dissing Muddy, but I thought it was a corny line. Marcus said: 'When they played it live, it was like I'M A MAN' – powerful. But, he said Muddy didn't get it right on record. Based on that I started doing the song.

## ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ FIRE OF LOVE ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆

**Phil:** Shorty Bacon and the Rhythm Masters did that. It's on a crazy little label called Ozark, the only time I've ever seen that label. It was between '55 and '62. I sung the song to myself and it was very immediate to me when I decided to make a record that this was an important song. It wasn't propagated much and I like that. -AM



### The Blasters 4-11-44 official T-Shirt

This limited edition T-Shirt is only available either at Blasters shows or from the following address via mailorder: Price: \$20 per T-shirt.

Color: White      Sizes available: Large, X-Large, 2 X-Large

Shipping and handling in the US is \$3, to Canada is \$5, to Europe is \$6. Allow 3 to 4 weeks for delivery.

Payment must be in US funds. Make checks or money orders payable to: Jerry Angel

Send to: Jerry Angel, PO Box 7591, Santa Monica, CA. 90406-7591

*Direct all inquiries concerning T-shirt sales to the Blasters at the above address. The BlastersNewsletter is not involved in the sale or distribution of this merchandise.*

### — Blasters Newsletter Contest — Win a Dave Alvin autographed Poster from his Ashrove Tour —

Question: Name 3 record labels that have released Dave Alvin albums. Correct answerers will be entered into a random drawing. Deadline 2/1/05. Mail answers to: Contest, Po Box 210071, Woodhaven, NY, 11421 or email at Davistb@aol.com

# Dave Alvin—The Ashgrove tour

By Billy Davis

Dave Alvin spent the summer of 2004 out on the road with the Guilty Men supporting his new Ashgrove album. The tour criss-crossed the US from June to November with the band playing nearly every night. Each month they would take a week off to regain their sanity.

The tour started in mid-June in Springfield, MO. Dave, Chris Gaffney, and Gregory Boaz flew in from California. Chris Miller, the new steel player (replacing Rick Shea) came in from Austin, TX. Bobby Lloyd Hicks and Joe Terry live in Springfield.

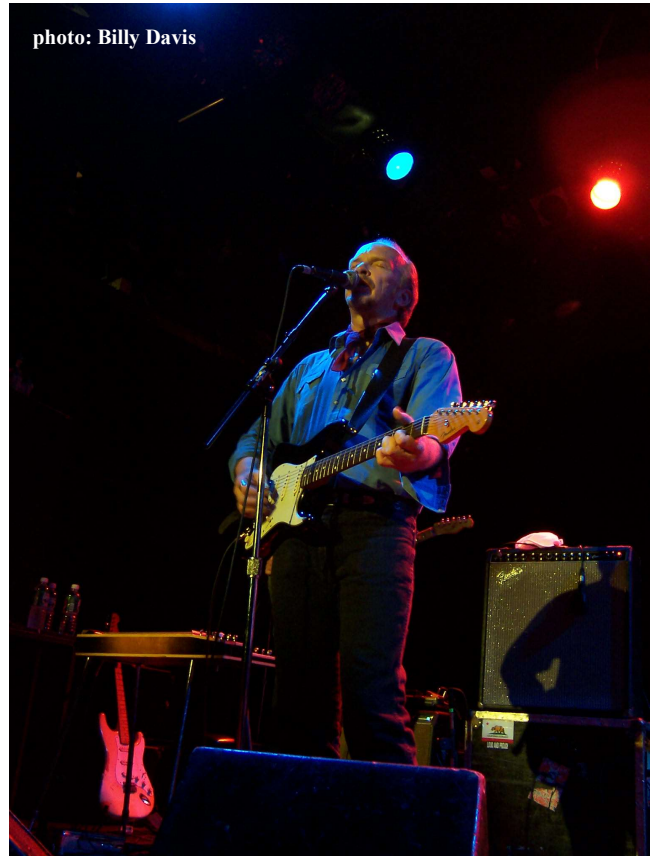
Three days of rehearsals started and it became clear that this was a different version of the Guilty Men. They had a new steel player and Chris Gaffney was now a full-fledged member of the Guilty Men. On past tours, Gaffney would join the band only in the encores. Now Chris plays acoustic guitar and accordion and sings backing vocals for the whole show. The band had a slew of new songs to work on. And with new players, they could play new arrangements of older songs. DRY RIVER underwent some major changes. The song always had a climactic ending to it, but now with some intense steel playing by Chris Miller, the band took it to another level with a different beat and groove. Dave: "The new ending came about when we were rehearsing it. We were goofin' off and Miller started playing that 'Gospel Steel' thing. I said, 'Hey, why don't we let Miller have some fun.' So that's become a big crowd pleaser."

Another older song that received a new treatment was KING OF CALIFORNIA. Rick Shea always played mandolin on that song, but Miller doesn't play mandolin. Dave: "The electric guitar has replaced the mandolin. So instead of sounding bluegrassy, it's now more like a TV western theme song - more muscle to it."

The band played their first show at the Outland Ballroom in Springfield. Dave remembers: "It was obvious instantly that our whole sound had changed. I wasn't worried about Chris Miller being new, but instead

about how the new songs would work live. We did a lot of the new songs that night to try them out. After a few shows, I thought all these songs sound like they have been in the repertoire for along time."

A few of the standout new songs featuring Chris Miller were SINFUL DAUGHTER, a great country blues song that Miller could stretch out with some slide guitar licks. Dave outdid himself on OUT OF CONTROL, which he calls 'The new economic blues.'





Before Dave came out on stage, Chris Gaffney and the Guilty Men opened the show each night with familiar songs from the Gaffney song repertoire such as ALBUQUERQUE, LONELY NIGHTS, IS IT LOVE, and THERE STANDS THE GLASS. But a stand out new song is ALL NIGHT WORKER, a song originally by Little Joe and the Family. It was a great song for introducing Dave Alvin to the stage. Half way through the song, Gaffney shouted, "Dave Alvin." Dave plugged in his guitar in time to take a rockin' solo to finish out the song.

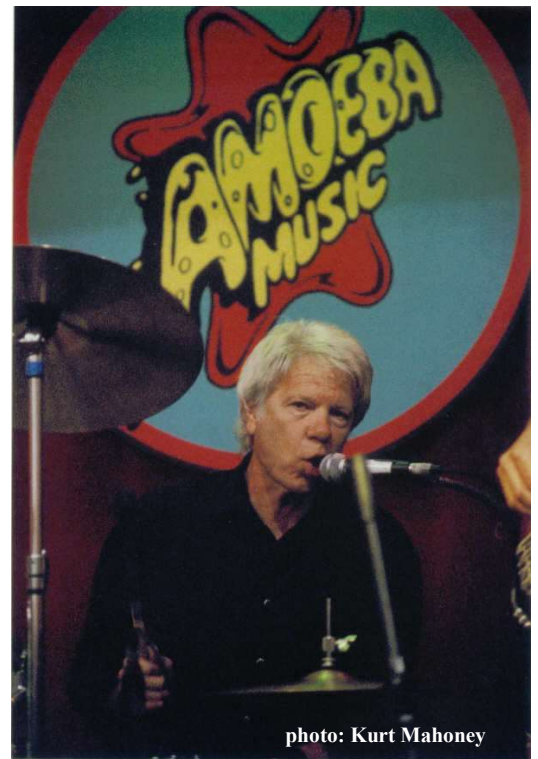
Dave's most often used opening song was SO LONG BABY GOODBYE. That song definitely signaled to the audience, 'This is a Rock & Roll show.' Sometimes OUT IN CALIFORNIA opened the set. Both work equally as well.

Dave recalls the first few shows when he felt Chris Miller was holding back on his guitar playing: "The first couple of gigs he was great, but timid. In Kansas City, I turned around and said to him, 'Feel free to kick my ass.' He said, 'Really?' I said, 'Go ahead and try it.'

Dave: "Chris plays more like I do. He plays country stuff, but he's really a blues / R & B player. He's very aggressive. When Rick Shea left the band, Chris Miller was the first guy I thought of. I knew he could play all the country and folk stuff, but unlike Rick and Greg Leisz, who are all great players, Chris can play like Johnny Guitar Watson. Songs like OUT OF CONTROL or SINFUL DAUGHTER or a blues number - he can do it. He can be a guitar-slinger when he wants to be. It changes the dynamics of the band. It makes it like a rock & roll blues band."

For most of the tour, the set list remained the same with minor changes. Older songs were thrown in only occasionally. Dave: "We did LONG WHITE CADILLAC a few times, but in general we were concentrating on a fairly regular set list. Next year we'll open it up more and work in some of the older songs." When Dave reached the west coast he did some extra promotion for Ashgrove by doing a few in-store performances, one at Amoeba Records and the other at Footprints. The first was full band; the second was Dave and Amy Farris. Amy is a fiddle player / singer who just put out an album on Yep Roc records called Anyway. Dave produced the album. Amy filled in at Chris Gaffney's spot on some west coast shows while Gaffney was out touring with his band the Hacienda Brothers. Dave: "She knew all the songs. She is such a great musician. We didn't have to teach her any songs. We played a song once and by the end of the song, she knew it. She's like Rick Solem (former Guilty Men piano player) in that way. Rick played songs like he had played them for years."

As for other special guests – Christy McWilson joined Dave in Seattle for a version of their duet 805. DJ Bonebrake from X played drums for the Guilty Men in Canada



in Vancouver and Ottawa. Dave: "Bobby can't get into Canada. They're not called the Guilty Men for nothing (laughs)." In Englewood, NJ, Chris Gaffney opened up the show with a set backed by the Guilty Men. It was great to see a Gaffney set so far from California where he normally exclusively plays.

At The Los Angeles Troubadour show, Rick Shea was in attendance. He didn't play, but Dave dedicated OUT OF CONTROL to him: "This is for Rick Shea who tries to hide it, but he will always be a Guilty Man."

Something new that fans noticed on the tour was the absence of Dave's signature blonde Fender 1964 Stratocaster. Dave: "That's turned out to be a big deal with the fans. That is a wonderful rare guitar. I've had it for almost 20 years. There are none like it." Dave had many reasons to leave the guitar at home for safe keeping: "On one flight I literally had to yell at a flight attendant who told me I couldn't bring the guitar on the plane and I had to check it in baggage. I finally convinced them I had to take the guitar on as carry-on baggage."

Dave continues: "By law they have to allow musicians to take their instruments on the plane. I have a document from the musicians' union that tells them that. But it still seems to be up to the discretion of the flight attendants. They can claim that it's against their airline's policy." For most of the tour Dave carried his old guitar with him, but played a new black Stratocaster on stage. Dave recalls having both guitars in the same bag in July: "I accidentally ran over the guitars in Cleveland. I leaned them against the van and then drove off and only realized they were left behind because I felt my wheel go over a bump – the guitars. I almost had a nervous breakdown."

Then the final straw was when Dave heard that Greg Leisz had two guitars stolen when they were checked baggage. Dave: "That was too much for me." So from now on, the old guitar will stay home.



Dave describes his new road guitar: "I now have a black 1961 reissue Fender Stratocaster. I took it to a guitar guy with my old '64 Strat and told him, 'Make this guitar as much like my old guitar as you can.' He shaved the neck down so it's exactly the same thin neck. We put a humbucker pickup in the neck position to give it a fatter sound on the lower end. It compensates because the new Strats never have the same sound as an old one. We routed out the body to make it the same weight as the '64."

Dave Alvin has always carefully aligned songs in his set lists. He did it for years with the Blasters and



always in his solo shows. For the Blasters, solo, and Guilty Men shows, Dave Alvin has always enjoyed overlapping songs together with interesting segues.

Over the years, here are some inseparable pairings: 30 DOLLAR ROOM and MUSEUM OF HEART; JUBILEE TRAIN and PROMISED LAND; LITTLE HONEY and WHO DO YOU LOVE. The latest pairing from the new album are SOMEWHERE IN TIME and ASHGROVE. On the studio album, ASHGROVE starts the album and SOME WHERE IN TIME ends the album. SOMEWHERE IN TIME's ending morphs into the groove of ASHGROVE. For the live situation, Dave reversed the order and segued the two. As the softer SOMEWHERE ends, the audience's excitement steps up a level as ASHGROVE starts. It's another good pairing because each song sheds light on the other.

Throughout the tour, Dave performed every song on the Ashgrove album often except BLACK HAired GIRL, MAN IN THE BED and EVERETT RUESS. Dave: "We played BLACK HAired GIRL a couple of times in the begining of the tour, but I felt it didn't work live as well as on the CD. Maybe now that people are more familiar with the Ashgrove songs, we'll pull it out and see how it goes. MAN IN THE BED and EVERETT RUESS probably work better at acoustic shows."

From the Public Domain album, Dave played EAST VIRGINIA BLUES every night but only occasionally played WALK RIGHT IN or DARK EYES.

In Englewood, NJ, we were treated to an acappella version of WHAT DID THE DEEP SEA SAY. It wasn't intentional. Ironically, the power went out on all the instruments during OUT OF CONTROL. Only Gaffney's acoustic guitar and Bobby's drums could be heard. Dave took control by grabbing Gaffney's acoustic and played a solo. Only the front rows could hear it. Gaffney picked up the accor-dion. The song finished and Dave boldly started DEEP SEA acap-pella. It sounded great with just vocals. The crew worked frantically to get the power back on. Slowly instruments started coming back. By song end the bass and drums were coming through the house PA and the crowd started to cheer. The band played on through the difficulties and came out of it rousing the crowd. At song end, some-one in the audience yelled: "Crank it up." Dave replied: "I think cranking it up got us in trouble."

The set closing songs were always ROMEO'S ESCAPE and MARIE MARIE and only occasionally AMERICAN MUSIC. Dave would leave the stage as the band played a reprise of SO LONG BABY GOODBYE.

On the east coast part of the tour, the openers were Yep Roc records label mates Los Straitjackets, a great surf instrumentals band that wears Mexican wrestling masks on stage. They are a theatrical band complete with choreographed moves on stage. In the last song of their set every night, they play a cover of the Tornados' 1962 hit TELSTAR; then two mysterious guys dressed in black and also wearing wrestling masks came out on stage with their arms







crossed and just stood there while the band played. For three quarters of the song, these two masked men stood motionless and finally added backing vocals to the end of the song. They then walked off uncredited. Unbeknownst to the audience, the masked vocalists were Guilty Men Joe Terry and Bobby Lloyd Hicks. That little touch was a lot of fun to see.

On a few occasions throughout the tour, Los Straitjackets came out on stage for Dave and The Guilty Men's encore to sing



## CALIFORNIA SUN.

There was some very cool merchandise for sale on the tour. On the Los Straitjacket portion of the tour, there was a large poster with the two bands on it and all the tour dates. It's a very attractive poster. Also there is a new Dave Alvin T-shirt available on this tour. The people at Yep Roc designed a red and black shirt that has the letters D and A that resembles the old RCA radio wave logo. Bobby Lloyd had a custom drum-head made with the new logo on it as well. Dave recorded the San Juan Capistrano show for a possible self-released live CD like Outtakes In California, but there were technical difficulties that made it an unsuccessful recording. He may record a Santa Ana, CA show in November 2004. The tour is continuing into the winter. Expect more Guilty Men shows in the early months of 2005.

## Guilty Man Keyboard Player Joe Terry's Ashgrove Tour memories

Well, it was the first date really for the Ashgrove mega-touring that lasted all summer and into some of the fall was in Springfield, MO. (home town to Bobby Lloyd and me). It was a Wednesday night that had most of my hometown friends out. It was also our new guitarist Chris Miller's first night with the band. We have come a long way since that first night. Arrangements have changed, songs have been added and dropped. Many miles have been put on the van, which sits in my driveway as I write (having just gotten back from getting some recall work done on the van which could have killed us I'm sure, had I not gotten it done). Chris Gaffney has kept us laughing all the way, and Bobby Lloyd is drummin' like a mad man. Somewhere along the way, Dave managed to take guitar lessons from the great Esteban, Gregory keeps layin' it down, and Chris Miller is now comfortably snaking his way through every song.

This first part of summer touring took us through KC, St. Louis, Nashville and Birmingham - then on east. On June 22nd we



played a gig in Raleigh, NC, at the Pour House. This was a li'l record release with the folks from Yep Roc in attendance. My pal PJ O'Connell from up east showed up with Terry Adams in tow. I think Terry is one of the greats, so it was a thrill having him there. June 25th and 26th had us two nights at The Iota in DC. Just love playing that place. Saw Billy Davis there along with Steve (formerly Big Steve) Buschell. After that month of touring, I got to go home for about 4 days and waited to start up again on July 2nd in Indy.

While on this leg of the tour, I got to see Tito Jackson and band play the blues at the American Music festival over the July 4th weekend at Fitzgerald's in Chicago. Who knew Tito could sing the blues? At one point he donned a large Afro and did a short medley of Jackson 5 hits. We then went straight to Green Bay to play a tiny little stage at the Oneida Bingo and Casino. Rockin' the house, man, just ask the little old lady lookin' over her shoulder at us like a cow lookin' at a new gate while pullin' on the slot machine. This tour took us through the Midwest and up east and north. Some really nice shows through the likes of Cleveland and then Ann Arbor -- where I discovered Chris

Miller to be a coffee addict. I like coffee and am somewhat a coffee snob (I've taken to bringing my own coffee and filters with me for the hotel rooms since so many now have coffee makers—what a find that was). But Chris Miller was outta my league. The man regularly orders a quad espresso. Seen him do it on countless occasions.

On to New Jersey, Rochester and such. In Englewood, NJ, Steve Buschel showed up and gave me a three CD set of 70's hits because we'd been talking



photo: Billy Davis



photo: Billy Davis



photo: Billy Davis

about Hurricane Smith's hit WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? Now my son is suddenly a Bread fan. Gotta speak to that boy. In Ottawa, Canada, we played at the Ottawa Blues festival with a substitute drummer. Some guy named DJ Bonebrake or somethin'. This guy oughta be in a band 'cause he was pretty good. Now...that night when returning to the Lord Elgin Hotel from the gig about a half mile away, I pulled into the hotel portico area around midnight. The band piled out. I handed the green valet stub to the man in attendance. Done. I sleep soundly. Next morning I sent for the van. The valet asked me how the show went before he went on his way, 'cause somehow I'd gotten



photo: Billy Davis



chummy with the guy or something. "Fine, fine the gig was good, oh, um, by the way I lost my half of the green valet ticket..." He says no problem - he knows the big van, and he'll be right back. By now the band is in the lobby and out the front doors. The big silver van pulls up, and he hands me the keys. Problem is, these aren't our van keys. "How did you do that?" I ask. We now think that it is one of those rare instances when a set of keys matches another car somewhere else in the world, or so that legend goes. Gregory (Boaz), our

bass player, gets in and starts it, then looks around and discovers that it's not our van. Valet boy now says that that was the only big silver van back there (what were the chances of that too?). There is only one space they have available for a van that size. I get pretty nervous about then because a little earlier Chris Miller and I had been out gettin' quad espressos and walkin' the dangerous Sunday morning streets of Ottawa. I kept my cigarettes in my back pocket along with the green stub that I had seen that morning in my possession. Well, of course I'm now thinkin' it fell out while reaching back for one of the thirty or forty cigs I had on our 1/4 mile walk, and somebody has now come and claimed the van. This is REALLY going through my head while everyone, including some tourist couple who is drawn to this drama, is eyeing me. I throw open my suitcase right there on the sidewalk and tear through it for last night's clothes, and I produce the green ticket. Saved. Dave hugs me. But wait – not so fast - wrong ticket. It's for the second car we have on tour with us. I haven't cried for a very long time (except when Boston beat up on my Cardinals in the World Series -Johnny Damon..puleeze.... gimme a break). I came close. I was now back in the dog house. Valet dogboy (might I add right here that, Microsoft Word is having real trouble with "dogboy") – he says: "I'm sorry, sir. I don't know what to tell you." I stare in horror. Then he says that he might know one...other...place...it ...might...be... Ahh, whatd'ya know? It was there. But he still did not have the keys that I gave the night valet. I went back

photo: Kurt Mahoney



to the "valet key hanging board" (that's hotel speak) and found them under a Camry listing. The valet thought I should complain to the hotel but I just wanted to get outta there and we did. Out of Canada passing up all the Tim Horton's-Canada's Stuckeys.

The very next date on the tour after Ottawa was Lexington, KY. On July, 21 we started a series of dates with the great guys from Los Straitjackets. We co-billed a bunch of shows together and had great times in Pittsburgh, Columbus, DC, and Philly. The show in Boston was one night after the Democratic Convention ended. Los Straitjackets' last song of the night was usually TELSTAR by the Tornados. If you've seen Los Straitjackets, you know they perform in wrestling masks, black t-shirts, black jeans, and black Converse All Stars. Well, Lloyd and I have all these things already with us (what can I say? Over-used de rigueur rock clothes) sans the masks, which weren't hard to acquire. We ended up joining the boys for TELSTAR at the end of most shows just to sing the "ahhs" at the end. This tour ended with a great show at the Bowery Ballroom in NYC. Look for us doing some more shows together in January.

August had us out in the wilds of the American West with a kickoff date at The Troubador in Los Angeles. I had never played the storied club. In attendance was one of Gregory's good pals, director Gore Verbinski, who directed The Ring and Pirates of the Caribbean among others. My daughter Sally is gaga over Johnny Depp. She actually had a slumber party on his birthday in his honor with a cake and such...so I got Gore's autograph for Sally. It's the connection here that counts.

On to Reno. Reno. Reno. Picture a man with his shirt half tucked in-half out. Eyes blurry and bulging, hair tousled, mumbling to himself. That's me after a night in a Casino. 'nuff said. It's a good thing I don't live near one of these hell-holes. Chris Miller and Bobby Lloyd had to drag me out to the Sierra foothills west of Reno for a day of trail walking just to wash the gambling stink off of me. In Portland, OR they have a summer concert series at the Washington Park Zoo Amphitheatre. The elephants sway to the music in the background in some kind of two-ton elephant dance. With some time to kill after soundcheck, Gaffney and I strolled through some of the zoo. He confided that in his 50 something years, he had never been





to a zoo. I think he liked the monkeys.

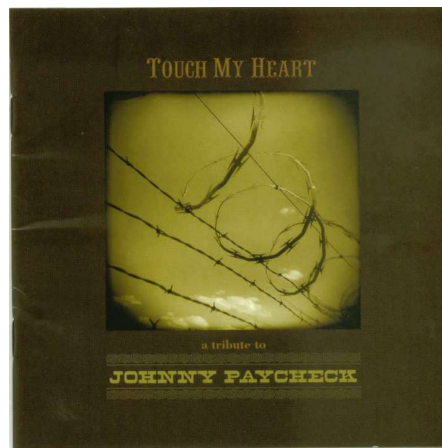
The tour took us to beautiful Vancouver. Opening the show was a Rockabilly trio (go figure) with a name like Johnny and the Rockin' 88's (again, go figure). But they had a twist. Burlesque. Trust me, if you're ever having trouble getting your frantic, poorly played rockabilly over to the audience, rest assured they won't think a thing about it if you just put a coupla girls up there in pasties. Good trick. I think somebody got a picture of me and a few band mates in full wolf leer. We headed back into California with a nice diversion to the Coastal Redwood forests. Played two nights at the new Palms Playhouse. Label-mate, Amy Farris joined up with us there for a few dates. Somewhere in there was Seattle, Portland, Santa Rosa, and Santa Cruz. We ended up at Slim's in San Francisco - One of my favorite clubs on earth. It was a great way to end the tour.

Most recently we've been through the mid-south, into New Orleans where we played the famous Mid-City Bowl. One of the great banes to bands is stairs. It seemed everywhere on this tour we were loading up 30 flights of stairs at a time. Played some great Texas dates and on through the southwest ending up in Los Angeles. A bunch of great shows all summer long with many more highlights I'm missing I'm sure. Like Dave backing over his guitars in Cleveland.....

We have a new arrangement of DRY RIVER that I and the band love with a rockin' back beat and some rockin' steel guitar. I think that all the new songs are received very well with a few standouts. OUT OF CONTROL seems to get a real rise outta the audience every night. It's got a sinewy back beat from Gregory on bass and Lloyd on drums. We've turned SOMEWHERE IN TIME into a kind of real musical emotion. All the songs get slightly different treatments on any given night. Fine tuning, takin' it apart, puttin' it back together, maybe sometimes as if by a monkey with a staple gun (which can be a great and luminous perspective). All in all, not too many cuts and bruises, no accidents, no arrests, (if you don't count....nevermind) a lot of fun...and Chris Miller plays just a wee bit different than he did that first night back in Springfield, MO.) - My home town. My wife just came in the room in a Coconut bra , I gotta go..... See ya - Joe

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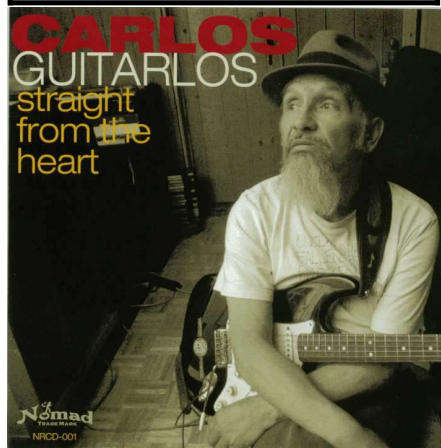
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