

ISSUE #31

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

MAY 2001

Dave Alvin Wins Best Traditional Folk Album Grammy

DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES

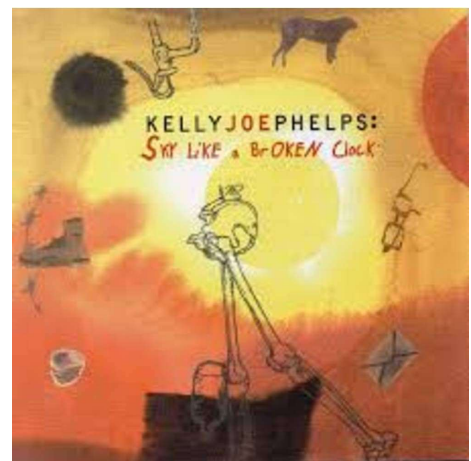
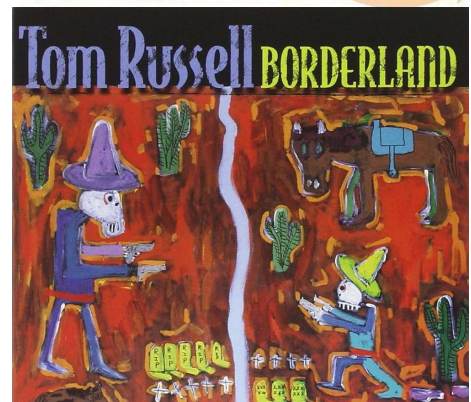
with The Guilty Men

5/18 Birmingham, AL at City Stages
5/19 Tampa, FL at Tropical Heatwave
5/20 Pensacola, FL at Spring Fest
5/31 Solana Beach, CA at Belly Up
6/1 West Hollywood, CA at Roxy
6/2 San Fran., CA at B & W Ball
6/3 Davis, CA at Palms
6/4 & 5 Reno, NV at Big Ed's
6/7 Arcadia, CA at Café Tomo
6/8 San Francisco, CA at Slim's
6/9 San Juan Cap., CA at Coach House
7/14 Denver, CO at LoDo Music Fest
8/03 Hillsdale, NY at Winterhawk Fest
8/10 Duluth, MN at Bayfront fest
8/17 Santa Barbara, CA at Lobero Thtr.
8/31 Seattle, WA at Bumbershoot Fest
9/05 Saratoga, CA at Carriage House
BLASTERS DATES
7/7 Irvine CA at Hootenany

*In This Issue:
Dave's Grammy,
James Intveld's
Big band, and
Dave's
spoken word
recordings.*



Latest News -- Rhino Records to release Blasters Anthology CD. The Blasters and Rhino records have agreed to a deal to release a 2 CD Anthology package which will contain all of the Blasters Slash/Warner Bros recordings. The set will include all recordings from the self titled "The Face" album (1981), Live At The Venue EP (1982), Non Fiction (1983), songs ONE BAD STUD and BLUE SHADOWS from The Streets Of Fire movie soundtrack (1984), and the Hard Line album (1985). Bonus live tracks are also expected to be included. Rhino does beautiful packaging and artwork for their anthologies, so we can expect the Blasters set to be a good one. -- Dave and Greg Leisz will appear on the Prairie Home Companion syndicated radio show on 5/26/01. It should air that day and the weekend following. Check your local stations to see who carries the program. -- The Blasters continue to work in the studio on their new album. They are re-recording tracks that they weren't happy with in the initial sessions and are working on some new arrangements. -- The Mississippi John Hurt tribute CD from Vanguard Records is due out this summer. Dave and Peter Case sing a song called MONDAY MORNING BLUES. -- Sony reissued Dave's Romeo Escape CD in March. -- Tom Russell new album Borderland, has a version of CALIFORNIA SNOW in addition to another Dave co-write, the song RIO GRANDE. Borderland is being released on April 17. -- Kelly Joe Phelps has a new album out on July 10, 2001 called Sky Like Broken Clock. Kelly Joe known for his virtuoso slide playing has boldly left the slide guitar off the new album, instead focusing on his acoustic guitar and folk songwriting. The album also features backing musicians, a first for the normally completely solo playing Phelps. -- Dave Alvin can be seen on the cover of the Spring 2001 issue of Blue Suede News. The photo is from the 1982 London Venue show. -- The May issue of Uncut magazine has two great Dave Alvin stories. One is an interview about his favorite movies, and another is a top review of his UK show at Borderline. -- The Blue Shadows have released a few live tracks on a compilation CD called Bowl-A-Rama on Rock-it records. Twelve bands recorded live include the Blue Shadows doing 2 original songs : COTTON and LITTLE PONY. Send \$17 postpaid to High Octane, 3311 Rowena Ave # 7, Los Angeles CA 90027. -- James Intveld continues acting in small movie parts. Recently he was seen in HBO's Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris movie called "61*" James played Sal Durante, a baseball fan who caught the record breaking Roger Maris homerun. -- Remember for the official news on the web about The Blasters and Dave Alvin, tune into Scot Kleinman's web site at <http://bullwinkle.as.utexas.edu/scot/blasters.html> —Am



Dave Alvin Gets Off The Interstate Just Long Enough To Win A Grammy

by Billy Davis

Dave Alvin's **PUBLIC DOMAIN: SONGS FROM THE WILD LAND**, on HighTone Records, won a Grammy for Best Traditional Folk album. Go Dave!

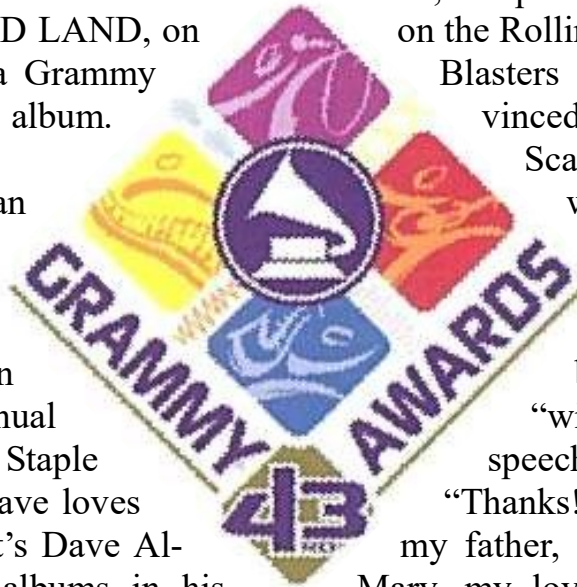
February 21, 2001 -- Can you picture Dave driving his van in traffic amongst all the limousines, trying to make it on time to the 43rd Annual Grammy Awards at the Staples Center in Los Angeles? Dave loves being in that van. But that's Dave Alvin. He has written ten albums in his twenty years of music, never compromising to music biz pressure and always making music the way he wants to hear it. No one is more deserving!

Back in January, Dave learned of the nomination. Dave: "I'm floating on cloud nine. As corny as it sounds, it's amazing to be nominated. You put a lot of time in a studio and band and this is how you get paid back."

The day of the awards presentation, Dave had a secret weapon good luck charm as he recalls: "I was walking out the door and thought, 'I need something for good luck, I have to have something for good luck! The scarf!!' I've kept it in a secret place all these years, so I got

it out, and put it on. That's the scarf I wore on the Rollin Rock album and on all the Blasters album covers. I was convinced it was 'The Magic Blasters Scarf' that did it. It's pretty worn and frail, but it felt good putting it back on."

When Dave won, he says he couldn't have been more surprised so he "winged it" on his acceptance speech. Here is what he said: "Thanks! This is for my mother and my father, my brother Phil, my sister Mary, my love Mary, all the musicians that played on the record, and all the musicians across the country, who are in vans pulling into truck-stops on the way to gigs and beer joints. Thanks."



Backstage there were a few artists Dave has played along side of over the years: Emmy Lou Harris, Taj Mahal, and Ray Benson. Ray Benson of the western swing band Asleep At The Wheel said this about Dave, "I know this guy since he was a little boy." The Blasters first road trip was with (Ray Benson's) Asleep At The Wheel back in 1981. The Grammy officials took a formal portrait of Dave with his Grammy (pictured on the newsletter cover) and then a roots music portrait of Dave with Taj Mahal, and Emmy Lou Harris.

Dave was interviewed backstage by the Grammy people for their official record and here is how the interview went:

The Grammys: We're backstage at the Grammys with the Best Traditional Folk album winner Dave Alvin. How does it feel?

Dave: Ah, eh, it feels like I drank about 27 Red Bulls all at once. I am rushin' man! I could run around the world right now.

Grammys: A shot of energy, oh my! Now who's the first person you'll call to share the good news?

Dave: My girlfriend is sitting right next to me, so that was it. But, as soon as I can get outside to have a cigarette I gotta call everybody on earth. I'm gonna go scream!

Grammys: How were you introduced to the Folk music that perpetuated you being a folk artist your self.

Dave: My brother and I had great cousins who taught us about music. My brother Phil and I would sneak into blues clubs to see guys like Lightnin' Hopkins, Big Joe Turner, Lee Allen. T-Bone Walker, and Eddie Cleanhead Vinson. So that's where it all began for me.

Grammys: Congratulations on your Grammy win and thank you.

Dave made press all over the country with a final comment to a tired Grammy awards topic. Here is how the AP paragraph went, setting up Dave's comment:

In the press room, talk of Eminem dominated: Grammy winners from Christian bands like Petra to blues men like Taj Mahal were asked for their opinions. One of the best answers came from the winner of best traditional folk album Grammy, Dave Alvin, whose opinion on Eminem was, "I like the brown ones."

In another press interview Dave was asked, "What will you do next?" He replied, "It's all down hill from here. I'm gonna sell this award, and buy a farm." The interviewer came back with, "I really hope that isn't your plan?" Dave grinned and said, "I doubt it (laughs)." ~~~*AM*



Winners Dave Alvin, Emmylou Harris and Taj Mahal

Dave Alvin: His recordings of Words Without Music

by Tom Wilk

Dave Alvin is well regarded as a lyricist and poet, able to tell a memorable story or create a lasting image in just a few lines. His work with the Blasters and as a solo artist has been well documented, but one facet of his career has slipped between the cracks: his spoken-word recordings. Out of print for the most part and difficult to track down, these recordings offer - another side of Dave Alvin.

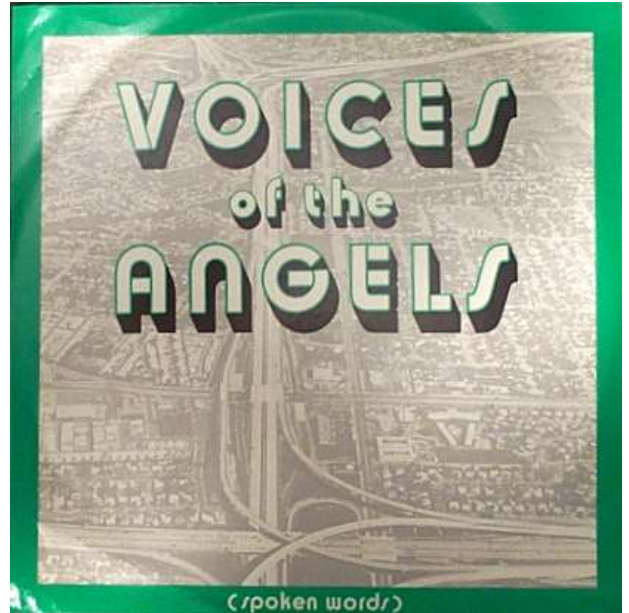
Between 1982 and 1991, Dave made a total of nine recordings for four anthologies of poetry and the spoken word. Poetry gave him the chance to be a front man, an opportunity unavailable in the Blasters. His work appeared alongside such artists as John Doe and Exene Cervenka of X and the Knitters, D. Boon of the Minutemen and Gerald Locklin,

one of Dave's poetry teachers. Five of Dave's recordings would be published in Any Rough Times Are Now Behind You, his 1995 volume of poetry published by Incommunicado Press. The recordings range from less than 60 seconds to nearly six minutes. All told, they add up to about 22 minutes.

For Voices of the Angels, a two-album anthology released on Freeway Records in 1982, Dave contributed JAYNE MANSFIELD and NATIONAL CITY. The former is a meditation on the late film starlet who was decapitated in a 1967 auto accident. The latter features a couple together in the same house, but in separate rooms, a lyrical forerunner of THIRTY DOLLAR ROOM on Dave's 1993 Museum of Heart album. She's in the bedroom, listening to old 45s; he's in the bathroom, asleep in the tub. The songs seem to comment on the relationship between the two. Like a movie director pulling back from a close-up, the last lines of the poem switch to a nearby scene of Mexicans illegally entering the US, a scene that could have come from Blackjack David.

Dave sounds tentative in his delivery, as if he is searching for his voice, but it's interesting hearing him in a new forum.

In 1983, Dave recorded I DON'T SWEAT and OLD WHITE WOMAN ON VERMONT for English as a Second Language, also on Freeway Records. I DON'T SWEAT is a funny exchange between a father and son, probably a young adult, over the generation gap between the two. "He can do what he wants, he sweats," the narrator says of the older man. "I can't do anything. I don't sweat." It's a poem that gains immeasurably from being read aloud and would have a lesser impact if read silently off a printed page. It was not included in Any Rough Times.





OLD WHITE WOMAN ON VERMONT is another generation-gap tale with the female protagonist trying to deal with the changes her Latino neighbors have brought to her neighborhood. One can feel sympathy for the woman, a fixed point in a changing age, thanks to the narration. The poem was re-titled OLD WHITE WOMAN ON VERMONT 1982 for Any Rough Times.

In 1984, Dave recorded PRAYER for Neighborhood Rhythms, also on Freeway Records. Clocking in a 3 minutes, 32 seconds, the litany-like poem bears the influence of Dave's Catholic education. Its staccato rhythm and freight-train delivery capture the vibrancy of Los Angeles. It may be the closest Dave gets to a rap performance.

When published in Any Rough Times, the title was changed to A PRAYER FOR LOS ANGELES 1979-1986.

Seven years would elapse before Dave's final spoken-word performance on Side Affects: Poetry and Prose (Triple X Records). Side Affects is a triumph in terms of quantity and quality. It contains four of his performances, three of which were not published in Any Rough Times. TALKING TO PLANTS, reprinted in Any Rough Times, is a funny and profane account of a neighbor's attempts to deal with Tourette's syndrome. FIREFLY is an encounter between the patrons of a Los Angeles bar and police responding to a report of a crime. Once again, there is a musical subtext as one of the patrons, a would-be movie producer, buttonholes Dave and tries to talk him into doing the music for his next film.

INTERSTATE CITY shares the same name of the title track of Dave's 1996 live album, but little else. The Side Affects version relies on humor in describing an urban landscape that is one extended city as truckers travel from coast to coast with its rules of the road: keep your petal to the metal, keep the radar on and don't get caught. FIGHTING WITH BILL FOSSIL finds Dave revisiting his fourth-grade schoolyard where he brawls with Bill Fossil over the right to play in a schoolboy football game. It's a thoughtful piece about childhood, competition and cliques. At about six minutes in length, it's the most complex of the recordings Dave ably handles the shifts in viewpoint from the two combatants to the fellow fourth-graders egging them on. FIREFLY, INTERSTATE CITY and FIGHTING WITH BILL FOSSIL are the types of stories that could air on "This American Life," the National Public Radio program featuring Ira Glass. Vocally, Dave seems more assured and relaxed and in command of what he is doing.

After Side Affects, Dave withdrew from spoken-word recordings but gave poetry readings following the publication of Any Rough Times Are Now Behind You. The spoken-word recordings are worth hearing for the insight they provide into a top-flight songwriter. ~~AM



ROBERT JOHNSON'S CIGARETTE

an unpublished work in progress BY DAVE ALVIN



Robert Johnson was murdered in 1938. He was a 27-year-old obscure blues singer poisoned, they say, by a jealous husband. All he left behind were his songs and his voice on old 78 RPM records, describing a dark southern world of devils and hellhounds, violent men and lost souls, sweet women and lying lovers, redemption and damnation: A vision of America that America rarely acknowledged.

His musical legacy and short life made him an influential legend, and later a mystery and a myth. Now he is a postage stamp.

No one except the old blues men who followed him in their youth, knew what Robert

Johnson looked like until some blues scholar, over 40 years after his death, un-earthed a torn and creased black & white photograph.

He was young and handsome with long slender fingers wrapped around the neck of his guitar. He stared out at the world without a smile; a fat hand-rolled cigarette dangling from his serious lips with a look in his eyes as penetrating and wild as his voice. He looked like he might be a little drunk or a little high. He looked like he might be looking for a fight. He looked as unpredictable as a Saturday night in a Mississippi juke joint. And now that old B & W photograph is a full colored postage stamp.

And that's a good thing. For too long, America had, out of shame and ignorance and maybe a cultural inferiority complex, has either forgotten or ignored or denigrated its powerful musical heritage and the musicians who created it. But now John Coltrane, Jimmie Rogers, Hank Williams, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Muddy Waters, Louis Armstrong, Howlin' Wolf and even Robert Johnson are on postage stamps. Maybe it's too little too late for some of these artists but it's a start and that's a good thing.

The only thing that bothers me, though, is that someone or some committee in Washington, D.



C., decided to remove Robert Johnson's cigarette on his postage stamp portrait. I'm positive that important meetings were held, hands were wrung, phone calls exchanged, memos and faxes sent, college-educated health and sociological experts consulted, and probably a study and a poll or commission. All because one day in 1936, a little known Mississippi blues singer thought he'd look sharp in a photo with a cigarette in his mouth.

I'm glad that some small steps were being taken against our country's traditional cultural elitism and racism. But I wondered if by removing Robert Johnson's cigarette, are we also trying to airbrush out our past so it resembles our supposedly more enlightened age? Are we maybe trying to whitewash the harsh realities of 1936 America that his heart was born out of, and shaped by, and ultimately in defiant reaction to?

He was man of his time, place, and class, with all the expected human strengths and weaknesses. He smoked cigarettes, ate red meat, he drank alcohol, he had numerous sexual partners - they say several illegitimate children. He never settled down in one place with one woman, but was content to live his life drifting from town to town, performance to performance, lover to lover. He probably loved his mother, but he may have hit his women or his women may have hit him. But most importantly, he also created powerful art: writing songs, playing guitar, and singing with an intensity and originality that has been unequalled since. I guess the postage stamps, like heroic monuments and statues in parks, are supposed to represent all that is good about us.

So, maybe I'm over-reacting. Maybe Robert Johnson's cigarette doesn't mean anything. Maybe it's better not to glorify smoking or any other of our human frailties. But I'm more than just a little surprised that they didn't want to airbrush a smile on his face. ~~*AM*

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James Intveld Swingin' with his big band

James Intveld, former Blasters guitar player has a new album out of roots country called Somewhere Down The Road (Molenaar records 2000) When James isn't on the road promoting his Country music, he fronts a big band at clubs in Los Angeles. Here, James himself, tells us how the Big Band idea developed.

In '92 or '93 I had been playing as a duo with piano player Bobby Mizzell at a club for a few years. I was doing a bunch of old stuff with him. I also was playing bass with Phil (Alvin) in the Faultline Syncopaters. That was that two beat jazz he was doing, like he did on his solo album (County Fair 2000 HighTone). We were playing at the Derby (club in L.A.), and the owner said, "I heard you have a band and maybe you would like to play the club sometime?" I told her, I really didn't have a set up to play this type of swing music.' I started hanging around the Derby and liked the bands.



I was doing a lot of ballads because I like ballads. When the Swing scene developed, Tammy Gower from the Derby said, "A lot of people think of Jimmy and the Gigos as a band that plays a lot of ballads and slower material. Can you play more dance music?" People want to do their swing dance lessons and dance. So I thought, 'Lets make it a Swing band.' So we started playing jump swing songs and we came up with a different name. The Swing Sinners. People were coming to the gig and were surprised that we were actually Jimmy and the Gigos. They thought we only played

slow stuff.

So they were now saying, "The Swing Sinners are this really rockin' swing band and we love to dance to them."

It was all the same members except now Richard Green plays piano and Smokey, who got busy and left to play with Beck. So I got Kid Ramos and then he got hired by the Thunderbirds. I then started using local guys until Eddie Perez joined. When Eddie left then Mike Turner came in. Mike is a great jazz player so it's so wonderful to have him do it.

The Derby was having a five year anniversary party in 1999. We were playing there 5 years straight. So we thought we would put a CD together of studio and live stuff, just for the anniversary party. We made them, sold them out, and paid off our debt. It was a labor of love. I wrote two songs called IN HEAVEN WITH YOU and WE GOTTA BOOGIE plus a bunch of other covers made it on the album.

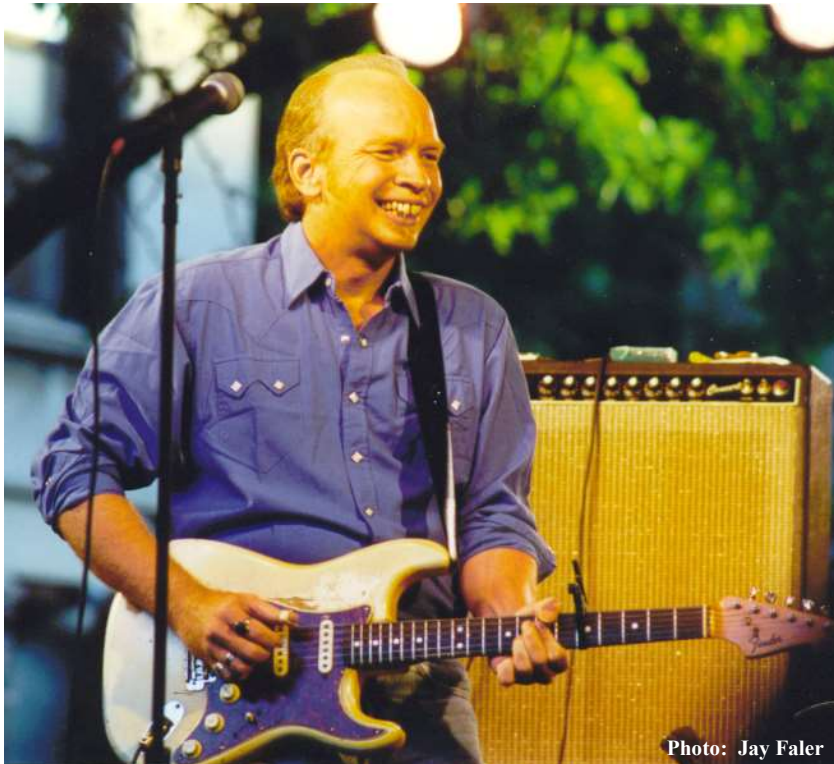
We have other originals that are half way done that didn't make it to the CD. Maybe sometime we will try to get that out but right now I'm concentrating on my roots country stuff. ~~AM

Meanwhile I was hangin' out with Phil at his all night record parties. He would play me all these songs and records. He was giving me 78's by artists from the twenties and thirties. Just turning me on to all this early music that was earlier than what I had grown up listening to. I grew up on Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Louie Prima. Phil was into Paul Whiteman, Johnny Mercer, Jack Teagarden, and Cab Calloway. He got me into all these real rare cats. So I got me into that music even more. Playing with Phil was the catalyst to me starting a Swing band. Then Tammy Gower, who owns the Derby, asked me to put together a little combo. So I said, "I'll do that." I started playing drums and singing. I fronted them for one night and then everybody said, "You have to be a band leader every night because we liked it." The band was called Jimmy and the Gigos. The first incarnation had Bobby Mizzell on piano and Smokey Hormel on guitar. I knew Smokey loved that music and could play that style really well. I got Kenny Sara on drums. He played on Phil's solo record. Then David Jackson on upright bass. Later I started using horn players. I used Bill Ungerman and Scott Steen from Royal Crown Review.

Dave Alvin Old Town School Of Folk Music Chicago Illinois October 14, 2000

by Jay Faler

(photos: Sheffield Garden Walk concert, Chicago, Illinois 7-22-00 by Jay Faler)



There were two Old Town shows, one at 7:30 and one at 10:00. I went to the late one, figuring the band might be more relaxed if they didn't have to worry about the clock and a set finish time. It was a phenomenal show. They actually played more from Blackjack David than from Public Domain which kind of surprised me. They played the following songs:

Blackjack David

Out in California

California Snow

Blue Wing

New Highway

Abilene

Railroad Bill

Shenandoah

Walk Right In

What Did The Deep Sea Say

Fourth Of July

Long White Cadillac

King Of California

Encores

1968

Goin' To San Anton'

Honky Tonk

Marie Marie



The crowd was very enthusiastic throughout (I went with a girl who had never seen Dave before and she loved it). Joe Terry and Brantley Kearns took most of the solos during the show and they were regu-



Sarah Brown on bass guitar.

larly applauded each time they finished. Rick Shea took a more supportive role and stayed more in the background than the other two guys but when he stepped up for a solo he was well received also (he was especially good on Fourth Of July).

Everything was played very well, so picking out the highlights is kind of tough. From the main set, I liked BJD, CALIFORNIA SNOW, BLUE WING, the four Public Domain songs and FOURTH OF JULY the best. I'm not sure if it's fair to say that sixty percent of the set to be "The Best" but what can I say? It was awesome.



For the encores Dave asked for requests and of course got a dozen song titles yelled at him. When there was a break in the shouting, I called for 1968 and I got it! Dave said he rarely plays a place with a balcony, so he had to honor the request from the balcony (he laughed when I told him after the show that I was on the floor and I must have thrown my voice!). It was great to hear that one. Next, he brought out Chris Gaffney who sang the Doug Sahm song GOIN' BACK TO SAN ANTON' and then HONKY TONK. The latter song must have lasted 10 minutes, and it



really turned the place over. After yielding most of the guitar solos to Rick all night, Dave finally stepped forward and took an acoustic solo and it was just phenomenal. Everyone on-stage took turns singing the chorus (“Honky Tonk all night long.”) and the crowd took the last turning singing it. It was a rousing performance and I didn’t think they would be able to top it, but they did on the next song. Dave had Chris Gaffney move over to accordion and invited Robbie Fulks (who opened the show with a well received set of his own) and they played a great Cajun-style MARIE MARIE to finish things off. It was the best version of the song I have ever heard from Dave and it generated a final round of raucous applause.

In closing I have to tell you a story that Robbie Fulks told to introduce his SCRAPPLE song (the song is about how people in Pennsylvania will eat just about anything.) So Robbie explains, “A guy writes me from Pennsylvania and asks me if I want to play in his living room. I said, ‘Well maybe sometime if I’m passing through your area.’ I quoted him a super high price, ‘So cough that up and I’m there.’ So about two days later my agent calls and says there’s a job for me to do in Philadelphia and he asked did I happen to know of anything in between Philly and Cleveland that I could do. I said, ‘Yes,’ and wrote back to the guy and said, ‘You’re in luck. I’m coming to play in your living room if you’re willing to pay that exorbitant amount of money.’ He said, ‘Fine.’

“Potentially it’s not weird because people do living room shows and house parties all the time. They invite 50 friends and charge 5 or 10 dollars a head and you play songs posing intimate.

“I rolled up there on a rainy Sunday afternoon in the middle of nowhere and I see there are no people. There is just this guy who wrote to me, his friend (he and his friend split the cost. They paid like \$900 a piece), the guy’s mother, his wife and his two little kids running around in the background.

“So, I’m playing songs like ‘*Every kind of music but country*’ and the two guys are sitting there in chairs, really into it – tapping their feet. They are so happy to have me in their living room. But off in the back, his mom and his wife are staring angrily at me from the kitchen. To them, I was this weirdo over the Internet who deprived their son and his friend of all this money that they had saved up. So, it was a very tense kind of dynamic.

“After my first set, his Mom says, ‘Okay Robbie. We enjoyed listening to your country music. So now come and enjoy our onion sandwiches’ (laughs). Now, I’m a totally optimistic guy, but onion sandwiches? It might be good? I picked up this little finger sandwich and as I’m biting into it, his Mom says, ‘You know the trick is that we take the sharp edge off the onions by marinating it in Miracle Whip for 48 hours in advance.’ I said, ‘Ahhhh!’ I bravely swallowed it, said, ‘Thank you very much,’ but it was one of the most grotesque and weird things that I have ever experienced.” Ah h, that’s showbiz. --Jay

