

**2025 re-print and expanded edition**

# AMERICAN MUSIC

The **Blasters** Newsletter

Issue #10 Feb. '96

## DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES HIGHTONE ARTIST'S TOUR

2/15-16 Austin Tx at Continental  
2/17 Dallas Tx at Herman Hall  
2/18 Houston at Fabulous Satellite  
2/20 Nashville at Ace of Clubs  
2/21 Atlanta Ga at Variety Playhouse  
2/22 Salomons Md at HolidayInn  
2/23 Alexandria Va at Birchmere  
2/24 Cambridge Ma. at House of Blues  
2/25 Phil Pa at T.B.A.  
2/27 N.Y.C. at Tramps  
2/28 Cleveland Oh at Wilbert's  
2/29 Detroit Mi. at Majestic  
3/1 Chicago IL at Majestic  
3/2 Minneapolis MN at First Avenue  
3/5 Seattle WA at Backstage  
3/6 Portland Or. at La Luna  
3/7 Santa Cruz at Palookaville  
3/8 San Francisco Ca at Slims  
3/9 Santa Monica Ca. at Alligator lounge  
DAVE AUSTRALIAN TOUR  
4/3 Sydney Aus.  
4/4 Melbourne Aus. at Continental Cafe  
4/5 Queensland at Jhnnos Blues bar  
4/6-7 Byron Bay at East Blues Festival  
BLASTERS TOUR DATES  
2/8 Long Beach Ca. at Foothill

## James Intveld Leaves The Blasters

**LATEST NEWS:** : James Intveld submitted his resignation in Dec. 95 as lead guitarist of the Blasters. With steady work in acting, James' schedule with Blaster touring has conflicted too much. He didn't want to bow out while touring to promote the new live album and leave the rest of the boys in a hole to find a last minute replacement. James Intveld played his last show with the Blasters on Dec. 26 at Jack's Sugar Shack in Los Angeles.



It was a memorial concert for James' brother Ricky Intveld who lost his life in the Rick Nelson plane accident a decade ago on New Years Eve. Understandably, James will never fly on that day. This prevented him from playing the last Blasters show of 1995 in Golden Colorado on New Year's Eve. The Blasters have not named a replacement, but for the 12/31 show, a temporary replacement, Ian Espinoza played and did a fantastic job of learning the Blasters set on short notice. The band continues to audition new guitarists. -- The live Blaster album has been temporarily shelved by the record company. When the Blasters find a new guitarist they will re-record some of the tracks, if not all. -- The Blasters have one gig scheduled at The Foothill in Long Beach CA and are using Tommy Kay on guitar -- Dave Alvin will be touring Australia in early April with fellow HighTone artist Chris Smither. Finishing the tour Dave's California Kings will back him at the Byron Bay Blues Fest. Dave will be playing Ireland soon, no definite dates are scheduled. -- Dave will be recording a live album in May in Austin TX at The Continental Club. -- James Intveld will be touring europe in support of his Bear Family album and will be backed by Russell Scott & the Red Hots. The tour starts Feb. 6 for a week in Switzerland and a week in Germany. James will be putting together a band to tour the states sometime after working on getting a U.S. distribution deal for his CD. -- The Setzer, Bazz, Bateman trio project mentioned last issue is on hold. The Stray Cats with Setzer's Big Band are doing a special concert in Japan with possibly more dates added. -- Guitarist Mike Eldred of Lee Rockers Big Blue has left the band freeing Rocker for this Stray Cats' reformation. —Am

**INSIDE:** Concert reviews, the resignation of James Intveld from the Blasters, remembering Country Dick Montana, Dave Alvin on the Knitters, Answers to your Questions from the band, and another Blaster quiz contest.

## HIGHTONE RECORDS SETS ROADHOUSE REVIVAL TOUR

OAKLAND CA. - HighTone Records has announced the kickoff of the ROADHOUSE REVIVAL TOUR, featuring Dave Alvin, Rev. Billy C. Wirtz, Big Sandy & His Fly-Rite Boys, Dale Watson, and Buddy Miller, whose collective roots-rock blend of rockabilly, honky-tonk, country and rock 'n roll will have the paint peeling from the walls of the 19 shows the tour will hit across the U.S.

Blasting off in Austin, Texas at the Continental Club on February 15 & 16, the tour will travel through the South, Northeast, Midwest and Northwest, culminating with a grand finale in Los Angeles on March 9.

The three hour performance will showcase each artist with a full band, with the exception of Rev. Billy C. Wirtz who regularly performs solo on piano.

It is fitting that HighTone Records presents this tour of American roots music, since the label has ruled the Americana music chart since its inception. The ROADHOUSE REVIVAL TOUR coincides with the start of the new HighTone Records/Rhino Records/WEA Distribution deal.

## DAVE ALVIN - THE KNITTERS project

*The Knitters was a country folk group formed in 1983 by John Doe & Exene Cervenka of 'X' and Dave Alvin. It was considered a side project to their regular bands, but in early 1985 they released a full length album. This association was a prelude to Dave's departure from the Blasters and his joining 'X'. Dave Alvin gives us the details.*

**Formation:** The Knitters was kind of an excuse for John and Exene to get out of their role in X, and it was a way for me, to put it bluntly, to get drunk and have some fun and really play with friends. We became really good friends. The first couple of gigs we played were benefits. It was just me, John, and Exene and the next gig we added D.J. Bonebreak then Jonny Ray Bartel fell in. Then, we started taking it a little more seriously, just a little.

**Song selection:** It was kind of from everybody's record collection, mainly John and Exene's. Like *Poor little Critter on the Road* was a song on a record that they bought up in Bakersfield and with that title they knew they had to have it. John always wanted to do a Merle Haggard song, so we did that. John and I wrote *Wrecking Ball* while watching the Super Bowl one year. Other than that, I didn't get much into writing for them at all.

**The Arrangements:** Those were all kind of loose arrangements. In *Baby Out Of Jail*, It was my idea to put in the 'Raunchy' guitar lick, you know, the Bill Justis record. I did some arranging, but it was mainly a group effort. A lot of the arrangements kind of happened while we were playing gigs, "Oh yeah that works! We'll do that again."

**The Album Deal:** Once we had D.J. and Jonny Ray and it was a band, we started playing gigs and we did really well because everybody wanted to see this thing. So, Slash Records saw it as a way of making money. It was kind of at the tail end of when I had sort of a wide-eyed optimistic idealistic idea about Slash Records. It was a way of John and Exene to stay with their punk identities, because they had just signed with Elektra records and there was a little backlash as if they sold out.

**Dave approached the guitar parts with Scotty Moore in mind:** Scotty Moore and I'd say Luther Perkins, Johnny Cash's guitarist on the old Tennessee Two records. I couldn't play like Albert Lee, but I didn't want to. I liked the simplicity of Luther Perkins and it fit the band more.

**In The Studio with a different band:** It was very liberating because The Knitters never argued. It was always fun, so when they asked me to join X, it was like this really loud Knitters. Some of the things that devel-



Photo: Gary Leonard

oped in the Knitters shows went over into the X shows. Like the Knitters did *Long White Cadillac* for awhile and it worked its way to the X repertoire. Billy Zoom was technically the producer. I think we cut it in two days and it took a day to mix.

**The Knitters Became X:** The night that Gene Taylor left the Blasters was this gig in Montreal (Nov. 1985), and it was maybe the worst gig that I ever played. It was obvious that this wasn't working anymore. The T-Birds had opened up the show and Gene just walked off the stage at the end of the night and went right out the back door and got on the T-Birds bus and left. That night I decided I'm quitting. Everybody was so pissed off at each other. I flew to New York the next morning to do a Knitters gig at Irving Plaza and when I got to the gig, John said, "Billy's (Zoom) leaving the band, you want to join?" I said "Yeah!!" without hesitation. Once I became a member of X, the Knitters became X.

**The Radio Tokyo Tapes Compilation LP:** That was the first thing we ever recorded. That one track was a medley of *Honky Tonk Angels* and *Wild Side Of life*. It was different songs than the album and was done a couple of months before the album. It was on Enigma Records. We did a track for a Jonathon Daily movie. We re-cut a track from the Knitters' record called *Someone like You*. We had peddle steel and a phony string section on there. That came out long after I was in X and when I was leaving X.

**Knitters Reunion:** We got back together and did a tour in the winter of 91-92 doing the West Coast cities and everything was sold out. — Am

*The Knitters 'Poor Little Critter on the Road' album is available on CD - Slash 25310-2.*



**BLASTER CONTEST #2 -** QUESTION: Between 1980-85 the Blasters released 4 albums and a live EP. The cover photo's of the 5 releases either pictured the whole band or a single member. Of the original four Blaster members, which member never appeared alone on an album cover? PRIZE- A promo poster for the Blasters 1982 live at the Venue EP. Winner will be picked from correct answerers in a random drawing. Deadline May 1, 96. Send to Blaster contest 80-16 64th lane Glendale N.Y. 11385

**BLASTER CONTEST #1 ANSWERS -** Name all the members of the Blasters since 1980: 1 singer (Phil Alvin), 1 bassist (John Bazz), 3 drummers (Bill Bateman, Dave Carroll, Jerry Angel), 5 guitarists (Dave Alvin, Hollywood Fats, Billy Zoom, Greg Hormel, James Intveld), and 2 sax players (Lee Allen, Steve Berlin). Not mentioned but not forgotten, Gene Taylor on piano. Brian Young of Belfast won a Phil Alvin 'County Fair 2000' CD.



# Remembering Country Dick Montana

Country Dick Montana, AKA Dan McLain, of the Beat Farmers died of an aneurysm during a concert in Whistler British Columbia Canada on November 8, 1995. He was 40 years old when he collapsed at his drum kit during a performance by the Beat Farmers.

His involvement in music began in the 70's as a record store owner in San Diego. He played in bands The Crawdaddys and The Penetrators before forming the Beat Farmers in 1983. He was also a member of the Pleasure Barons with Dave Alvin, they released an album on HighTone records. Beat Farmers' albums can be found on the Rhino, Curb, and Sector 2 labels.

Dick recorded a solo album that is tentatively titled 'The Devil Lied To Me.' Dave Alvin played guitar, John Doe played bass and Rick Solem on keys. Rosie Flores and Katy Moffatt make guest appearances. Rumor is, it will come out on Sector 2 Records. In attending many of the Blasters/Beat farmers recent shows together I was able to meet and talk to Country Dick often. I immediately liked him and it was obvious how he brightens a room with his presence. I was not fortunate enough to get to know the man personally, but here are some friends who did:

**James Intveld:** We did the last gig with those guys in San Jose and then they went to Vancouver and that was where he died. It was the next show, so they didn't play a whole show without being on tour with us. At the end of the night in San Jose, me and Johnny Bazz were on stage with them playing, we did *You Can't Judge a Book* with them, the song they use as an encore. We were all up there jammin' together and God, that was it—so much fun. People look at Country Dick as this wild, crazy, drinking cowboy. If you ever sat down to talk to him you find that he is a very sensitive kind person. He had a really sweet sense about him that you can't see when he's up there flingin' beers and cussin' and telling dirty jokes. I personally didn't know that about him until we spent two months together on the road.

**Dave Alvin:** I miss Dick real bad. He was always very supportive of me, maybe when I was in one of the downest periods of my life and I always thank him for that. Then there are other things about Dick that are just funny. I went to one of the memorials in San Diego and it was weird because it seemed like everybody there was just waiting for him to show up, so the party could begin. The Country Dick character lives on in my life. . .but he turned himself into that character. He was one of the sweetest, I mean that, the sweetest guys I ever met.

**Phil Alvin:** It is the greatest fuckin' shame. It killed me, man. I hadn't hung around with Dick for about ten years until we recently did that tour. We were hangin' out every night and Dick was on the minstrel line. Dick made a minstrel album, he didn't know about mine either. I heard the thing and it was extremely good music! I knew Dick was a good drummer, but he always did so many joke songs. But he made this great record. He was the sweetest most genuine guy and now I can't sing *I'm Shakin* without cryin'. He would join me on stage on that song. I really loved Country Dick and it was a great loss for us. It was a great blessing that he was here and I'm cryin' right now. A bigger loss than we know.

On the Beat Farmers new CD 'Manifold,' in the song *Texas Heat* Country Dick sings: "I never told you how I love you, I'm sorry for that now. I'll never have that chance again, I wish I could somehow. I'm sendin' out my last farewell, sendin' my last goodbye. I hope this message finds you well, Texas heat is high." —Am



Photo: Joey Harris

## **JAMES INTVELD RESIGNS FROM THE BLASTERS**

James Intveld played guitar for the Blasters for two and a half years and brought great credentials. He was the coveted guitarist that has eluded the Blasters since the departure of Dave Alvin in 1986. During his tenure with the Blasters, they did two European tours, recorded Phil Alvin's solo album (which the Blasters played on) and toured extensively for the first time in many years. In this magazine, fan response towards James was exceptionally popular. James sacrificed a lot for the privilege of playing with the Blasters. In 1995 he turned down many acting jobs and recently turned down some recording session work that would have brought in a lot of money. He put out a solo album for Germany's Bear Family Records in August of 1995 and in late November he submitted his resignation to the Blasters. James: "I left the Blasters to pursue my own career. I just don't have the time to put into the Blasters anymore especially since my solo record is out. I need to hit now while the record is just out. Also, the Blasters will have the new live album coming out soon and I figured it wouldn't be fair to the band if I was on the new record and my pictures were on there and I'm leaving. It's better to have the new guy on there.

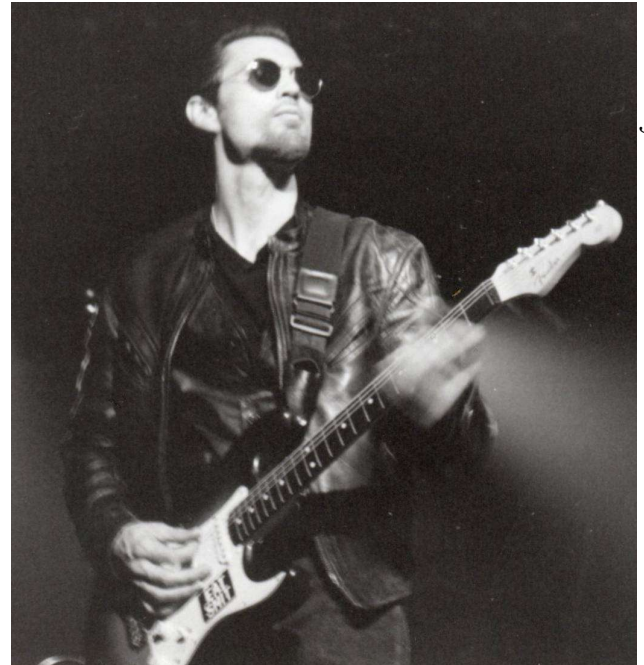


Photo: Billy Davis

I dig those guys because they're my friends and I want the best for them too. I'm going to miss playing that gig, playing guitar like that is just wild, its fun! It's going to be something that I'm going to miss a lot, but I have to move on."

Phil Alvin comments, "James is one of the best musicians I ever played with. It was an honor to play with him and to contribute anything to him. My intention the whole time, was to see James take some musical growth. It was clear that ultimately James was going to sing his songs and I was going to sing mine. We've had so much respect for each other. I wish he would have waited to put the live record out because it would have put him in higher visibility. I think we will still have a few tunes on the live record with James. One of the best and most musical times of my life was the making of 'County Fair 2000' with James and playing for those two years was one of the best. He is a gentleman who will always be one of the great Blaster guitar players. James is my good friend and will be for the rest of my life." John Bazz also says: "Oh yeah were going to miss him dearly. We really felt that he really epitomized the whole Blaster personae as far as playing and attitude. A total pro from start to go. On a personal level he was a really cool guy to hang with, just his whole disposition." James plans to get really busy with his solo music and with acting, so watch here in American Music for all the latest coverage on his career. —Am

**COLLECTING BLASTERS:** some official Blaster tour T-shirts with the Cadillac logo are still available from the recent tour. Only white x-large shirts are left. Priced at \$15 each plus \$2.50 postage in the U.S. A. payable to "The Blasters." For overseas add \$2 postage and pay by International money order or checks drawn on a U.S. bank.

Send to "Blaster T-shirts" P.O. Box 14354 Long Beach Ca. 90803

--California radio station KSCA 101.9 has put out a CD with on air performances by guest artists. Dave Alvin's live *King of California* Is on there. Phone order at 1 800 448 9692 or at Virgin Megastores at \$14.99 (thanks to Mas Tachiyama for this info)

## THE BLASTERS SAY HELLO TO 1996 by Kevin Dennis



I've seen rock and roll front men do a lot of things on stage, mainly the usual rock and roll stuff: drink too much, smoke funny cigarettes, pour beers onto the heads of rowdy dancers, berate the audience and/or the sound guys.

On New Year's Eve I witnessed a rock and roll first. The band leader squinted at his wristwatch, moving his arm back and forth in a vain attempt to discover the single spot where time would magically focus. That spot was never to be found. Mumbling in exasperation, he fumbled in his coat pocket and yanked out a pair of eyeglasses, whipped them on and announced that there were still seconds left before the new year began. That's how Phil Alvin welcomed 1996.

The Blasters played their third Denver area show of 1995 on December 31 at the locally infamous Buffalo Rose Saloon in Golden, Colorado. Infamous in that the Buffalo Rose routinely hosts ghosts from rock's past: "Whatever happened to...?" bands like Savoy Brown, Iron Butterfly, Head East, Edgar Winter, and Badfinger routinely grace the stage in Golden, and the barn-like club seemed a comedown from the more hip, happening venues the Blasters had frequented in February and September. But wherever the Blasters

hit the stage, that place is the place to be.

Mr. Alvin and company, featuring a new Blaster, guitarist Ian Espinoza, began the snowy evening with a sizzling *American Music* and quickly hit highlights of the Blaster canon -- *Border Radio*, *Red Rose*, and *I'm Shakin'*. Phil stepped back into the shadows as Espinoza took an extended solo on *Slip of The Tongue* that earned him an ovation from the crowd and a smile from Phil, who introduced him in appreciation. Unsung were bassist John Bazz and drummer Jerry Angel.

Phil, eyesight restored, then sent 1995 down for the count. The band slipped offstage for a moment as the audience cheered, toasted, kissed, popped balloons, and hooted and hollered. 1996 began for the assembled with *Marie Marie*, a two minute jump start of pure adrenaline. *Help You Dream* was dedicated to brother Dave Alvin -- Phil opined that he was probably slouched in a bar somewhere -- and a scorching *So Long Baby Good-bye* went out to the late Lee Allen, a former Denver resident. The evening's final dedication, went out to "all those who volunteered for rehab" - a hyper-speed *Long White Cadillac* ended the show. The Blasters returned for two single song encores: *One Bad Stud* and a stomping, four-on-the-floor version of *Matchbox*. What better way to welcome a new year!

I understand this was Ian Espinoza's first show with the band. If this was an audition, he passed with flying colors in my book. Ian's style falls between Dave Alvin's brutally effective sledgehammer primitivism and lately departed James Intveld's stylish, bluesy melodicism. I saw Intveld with the band in February, 1995, and he seemed slightly bored re-playing Dave Alvin's classic licks on the repertoire tunes, but came alive on the pure blues and new songs taken from Phil's "County Fair 2000" recording. Ian's no-frills approach to the music energized the audience. Just a note for those keeping track: the Blasters played no songs from "County Fair 2000". It was a great show anyway. —Am



## **BLASTERS at THE FOOTHILL in LONG BEACH Ca. 2/8/96 -**

The Foothill club in Signal Hill is a huge joint with lots of history. It's basically in Long Beach and originally opened in 1944. It featured burlesque shows, and it was one of the first country bars in California, and the first to get a dance license in Los Angeles county. In 1953 it caught fire and was rebuilt.

Now the club features all types of music, but when the Blasters and the Paladins stormed the house on February 8, you just had the feeling that this is how it was meant to be. I don't recall the first band that went on, but they were an instrumental surf band, and sounded okay. But then the Paladins took the stage and played their hearts out as usual. Their brand of screaming blues never ceases to amaze me.

It was a week night and it was late when Phil finally took the stage with his band. The latest lineup included Tommy Kaye on guitar, replacing James Intveld after 2 years of his service. This was the first time performing with them and they played mostly older material. It was difficult to concentrate on the show, as there were many friends in the crowd of about 200 or 300. Kim Wilson of the Fabulous T-Birds was in attendance, along with the Blazers manager, owners of other local clubs and more that I can't even remember.

I probably could've done a better review of this show if I hadn't met a sweet young thing and devoted most of my attention to her. But a Blaster show in the Los Angeles area is nothing rare, fortunately, and I'll be seeing them again soon.

-- Cameron Grindstone



Photo: Cam Davis

St. Louis Post Dispatch 9/29/95 Submitted by Mike Smith

### **REVIEW ROCK**

## **Still A Blast 10 Years Later**

By Steve Pick

TEN YEARS AGO, the last time I saw the Blasters, Phil Alvin was leading a band at a crossroads. His brother Dave, who had played lead guitar and wrote all the group's classic songs, had left the Blasters. For a short time, his replacement was Hollywood Fats, a brilliant guitarist, and the gig at Westport Playhouse that year was virtually perfect.

Unfortunately, Fats died shortly thereafter, and the Blasters went into limbo. Phil Alvin pursued a degree and career in mathematics, and the band was not heard from in these parts until Tuesday night at the OtherWorld.

Tuesday, with three relatively unknown musicians accompanying him, Alvin roared through a set of golden oldies from the days when this was the most original rockabilly and roots-rock-inspired band in the country. Songs such as "Border Radio," "American Music," "Long White Cadillac," "So Long, Baby, Goodbye" and especially "Marie Marie," all written by Dave Alvin, have held up as well or better than just about anything else from the early '80s.

Phil Alvin remains a great rock 'n' roll vocalist, a man who draws inspiration from Cab Calloway, Elvis Presley, Little Willie John and countless other giants of American music, and who has the chops to live up to them. The current incarnation of the Blasters is not as loosely swinging as the original one, nor as technically proficient as the one with Fats, but it produces an excitement level that could not be beat.

Ten years ago, the first time I saw the Beat Farmers, they were a new band with a seemingly bright future. Their debut album, "Tales of the New West," remains one of the '80s cornerstones, a masterful mix of roots-rock influences with taste and restraint, as well as great songs.

The band's lineup has remained nearly intact, with only one change, made nine years ago, but the music has not remained so bright. Their performance as the second act on the three-band bill was devoid of originality. It had energy, but little memorable material, an overabundance of uninteresting guitar solos and a sloppy presentation.

Ten years ago, the last time I saw the Bongoes, they were just on the verge of breaking up, as their brand of intriguing pop music was showing no signs of catching on to a large audience.

James Mastro, one of two songwriter/vocalists in that band, led the Health and Happiness Show, the first act on Tuesday night's bill. This time around, his material was spotty — he sometimes went for quirky time or key changes in the middle of songs that didn't make much sense in context — but his choice of musicians was impeccable. Particular mention must be made of Richard Lloyd, once of Television and a frequent associate of Matthew Sweet, whose lead-guitar lines were stunning in the dexterity of their execution and the originality of their development.

## Q. from you & A. from the band

**For Dave Alvin:** You write some great lyrics. I would like to know about the back ground to my favorite Blaster tune *Border Radio*. - Per Akke Persson of Lund Sweden.

**DAVE:** "I used to listen to the Border radio stations like XPRS. In the early days, Wolfman Jack used to play Howlin' Wolf and Lightnin' Hopkins, not just the standard oldies. What I kind of wrote the song about was that the girlfriends of Chicano gang guys who were in youth authority juvenile prisons would dedicate songs on XPRS to like *Angel Baby* or *Earth Angel* to the guys at the CYO camps so they would have this communication going. I always felt it was kind of a romantic idea."

**For James Intveld:** What guitars and amps are you using in the Blasters? - Brian Young of Belfast Ireland

**JAMES:** I use a Fender Stratocaster and a 1978 Mesa Boogie amp with 2 - 12 inch speakers. The Strat is a 1962 Fender reissue Strat and I use a 1963 Fender reverb unit.

**For Phil Alvin:** Will you record anymore albums for HighTone? - Christian Gago Fernandez  
of La Coruna Spain

**PHIL:** No!

**For John Bazz:** I would like to know the idea behind the movie poster and album cover idea for the 'Non-Fiction' album. - Per Akke Persson of Lund Sweden

**JOHN:** It was during the recording, we were in the control room with an artist friend Hudson Marquez. They were talking about the concept of the album cover - The image of a guy, greasy mechanic holding a rose, kind of juxtaposition to this guy. They were going to use a model and (Bill) Bateman said "Bull shit you don't use anybody but a Blaster for an album cover!" So they said, "OK, you're the guy." I loved the poster and it ties into the 'Non-Fiction' title. He was given the responsibility for the design and layout.

**For Dave Alvin:** I read that director Allison Anders made a movie called 'Mi Vida Loca.' Is this the movie 'Border Radio' with your song in it? Is it available on video? - Per Akke Persson of Lund Sweden

**DAVE:** 'Mi Vida Loca' was the title of the theme music for the 'Border Radio' movie. Its not the same movie but I think that's where she got the title. With her kind of prominence these days I'm sure it will get reissued on video.

**For Phil Alvin:** I am a collector of Labor Union Memorabilia and was wondering what union and position your father held? - Steve Dafoe of South River NJ

**PHIL:** My father was in public relations for the United Steel Workers Union, the USWA as well as the education director. He published the Steel Labor Magazine as west coast editor from 1955-85. He was also Vice president of the California AFL-CIO from 1980-93 and is still active where he sits on the board of Keiser Resources.

**For Dave Alvin:** What guitars and amps did you use in your Blasters days and what are you using now?  
- Brian Young of Belfast

**DAVE:** Now I'm using the same amp as the last two years in the Blasters. It's a Fender Concert Amp - a later model from 1982. It's like a glorified Super Reverb. The old concert amps don't have reverb, but this does. I use the same basic stratocaster from about 1983 on - a '64 strat standard with stock pickups. On the Rollin Rock record I played a '60 or '61 strat that James Harman lent me for the session - he was down there drinking beer with us. According to James, that guitar was once owned by Magic Sam. James has a pretty incredible guitar collection. I played through a Randall, I don't remember the number but it had two 10" speakers. The Fender Mustang that I played in the early days of the Blasters was found by James & Phil in a pawn shop in Santa Ana. It's a '64 with shecter pickups. Somebody told me that it doesn't look like a Mustang neck but more like a modified strat neck possibly done at the factory. It was used on some of the first Slash record, the



Live EP, and some of 'Non-Fiction.' On the first Slash record, a lot of that is a Les Paul. I borrowed it from James, a '55 or something Gold Top. On 'Hard Line' we rented guitars. I used a 1954 Telecaster and I was running it through a Randall 300 amp, that was my stage amplifier at the time.

**For Phil Alvin:** What happened to the Sony/CBS record deal? - Per Ake Persson of Lund Sweden

**PHIL:** The Sony deal was offered to us by David Krebbs who was Aerosmith's manager and who they put at the head of Sony's new rock label. The deal stood and was a very good open offer, but Sony label itself has had some trouble. David Krebbs is a little disillusioned with it. On the suggestion of David Krebbs, that's why we have gone to do the Private Music (live album) thing.

**For Dave Alvin:** Do you and Phil still get along? Just curious. Hope you do. - Dr. Mad of St. Petersburg Fl.

**Dave:** Yeah. We get along like brothers. It's just good that we're not in a band together.

**For Phil Alvin:** What are your thoughts on Michelle Shocked's 1992 CD 'Arkansas Traveler,' in which she raises some of the same points concerning white performers and black music in the tradition of the minstrels you explored on 'County Fair 2000'? - Steve Dafoe of South River NJ

**PHIL:** A very funny thing just happened. I don't know Michelle Shocked. The person I feel to be behind Michelle Shocked's realization of these is Bart Bull, a writer. When I left New Orleans on this tour (10/95) I received an envelope from Shocked and Bart Bull. It contained a work in progress by Bart Bull that he has titled 'Does this road go to Little Rock.' Which is one of the lines from 'The Arkansas Traveler,' which is one of the ancient minstrels songs. Bart Bull's book in progress is right on target with the same things I've had. It just goes to show that music does its job, it echoes the truth through generations. Bart Bull must have heard me doing the minstrel preach and I think he was trying to make contact. I have his number, but I was waiting for an opportune time to call and say 'Hey great work in progress.' That's really wild, man that's a great question. Steve, they are absolutely spiritually linked. But I think Bart Bull deserves some credit as the thing that may well have informed Michelle Shocked. Maybe I will call him this week. That was a super hep comment from Steve, Right on the money! —Am

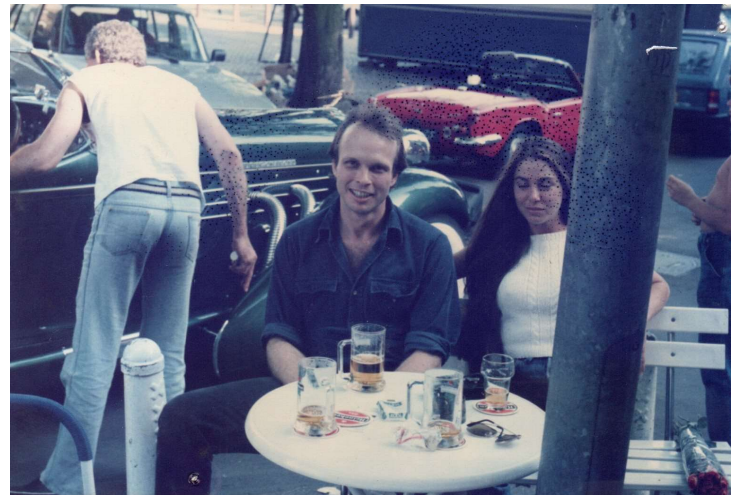
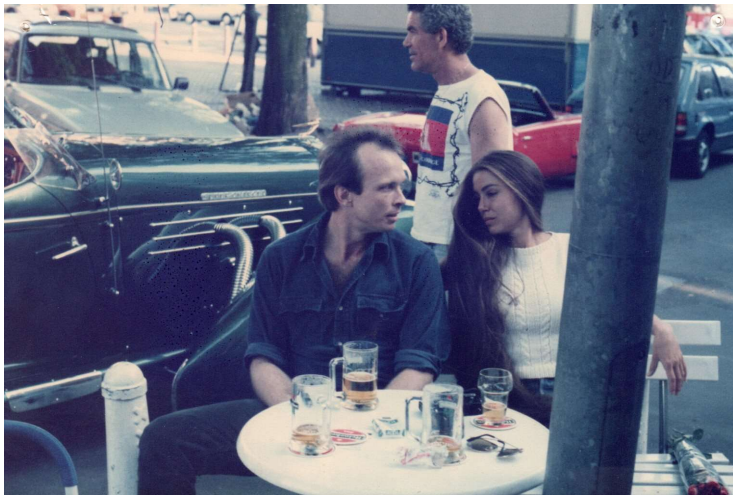
**FROM THE EDITOR:** Keep those questions for the band coming. -- A subscriber brought to my attention the problem of trying to send payment from out of the U.S. for merchandise from companies listed in AMERICAN MUSIC and additional to the actual cost of the item, international checks can cost 10-12 US Dollars fee in some countries, and most companies don't take cash. So from now on for overseas people I will list here ways I can help you. For the Dave Alvin book, send \$21 U.S. Cash to me. (breakdown: \$15 book price, \$3 postage book to me, \$6 postage Airmail to you) allow 4 weeks for delivery. I hope this at least makes it a little less expensive. -- Speaking of expense: the subscription rates have gone up, its now the two year anniversary of *American Music* and I've kept it at \$1 an issue until now. So any new renewals now follow the new rate, sorry. -- Speaking of the two year anniversary, in case anybody is interested I'll tell you how AMERICAN MUSIC happened. The newsletter idea was born when I was on vacation in L.A. in December of '93 and the Blasters were playing the Palamino. I hadn't heard what my favorite band had been doing for all these years, so I went to the gig and after it, met Phil. I told him of the dilemma of hearing no Blasters news especially on the east coast, and what he needs is a Fan newsletter. Phil said it was a great idea and when I volunteered for the job, Phil gave me his phone number so we could together get this thing going. Here we are. —Am

# **The Blasters - Amsterdam Holland at The Paradiso Club**

## **July 14, 1985 by Ed Postma**



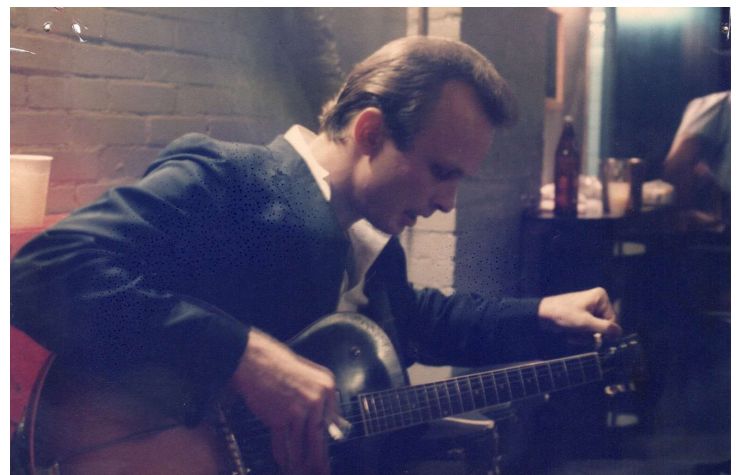
**Ed and Akke with the Paradiso Posters**



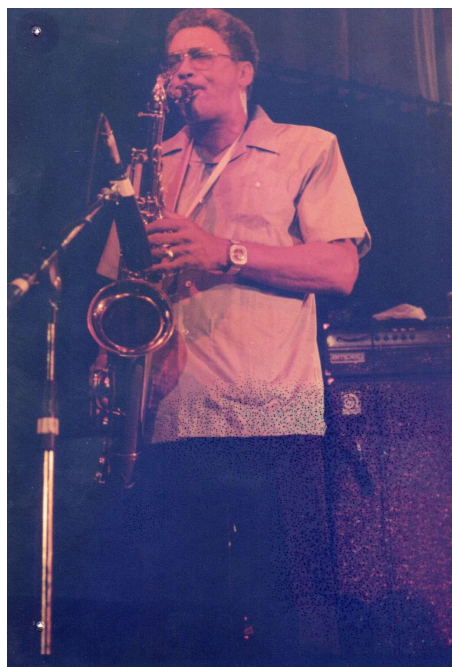
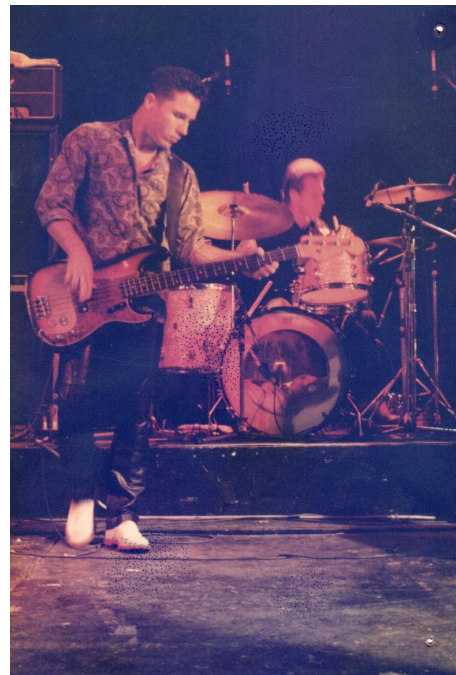
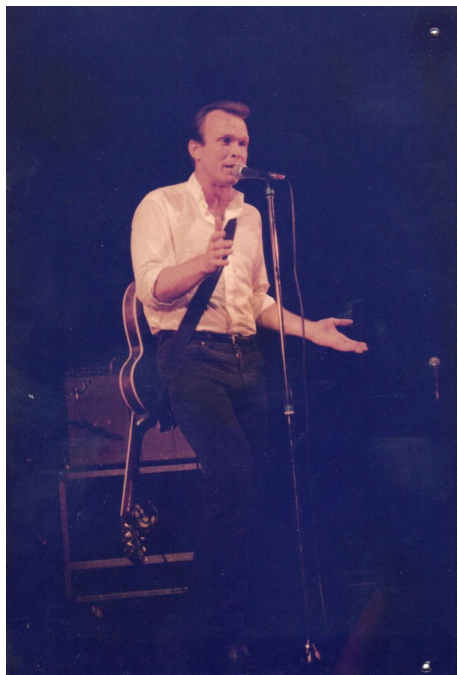
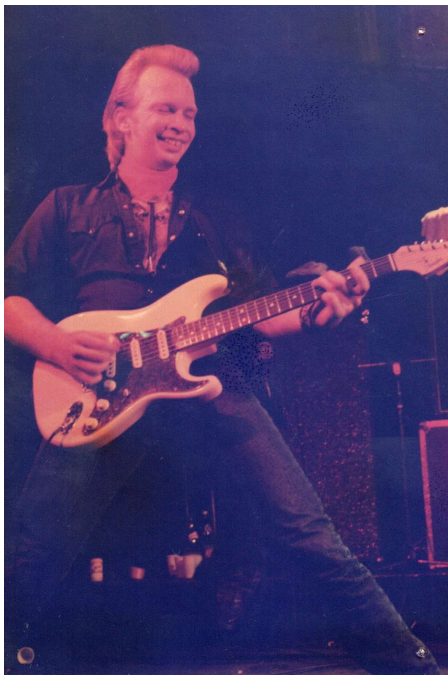
**Phil with his girlfriend Christina**



**Phil and Christina hanging laundry out to dry**









POP BEAT

# THE KNITTERS GO FOR RIDE IN COUNTRY

By JON MATSUMOTO

**L**ots of country-rock bands do songs by country standouts like Merle Haggard and Johnny Cash.

But when's the last time you heard a country-oriented group also do songs by two of Los Angeles' premier rock groups, X and the Blasters?

Meet the Knitters, a strictly-for-fun outfit put together by members of those very two L.A. rock bands: X vocalists Exene Cervenka and John Doe and Blasters guitarist Dave Alvin.

At the Cathay de Grande last weekend, the Knitters went through an hour of country songs with an affection and sincerity that would have warmed the hearts of any honky-tonk crowd.

The tunes ranged from countrified versions of X's biting "I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts" and the Blasters' melancholy "Long White Cadillac" through such well-known country tunes as Haggard's plaintive "Mama Tried" and more obscure works (for example, Red Foley's old, playful "Tennessee Border").

Explained Cervenka: "We thought, 'If we really like this music this much, let's do it seriously.' We didn't want to have it *sort of* country and *kind of* rock. X is a rock 'n' roll band, not a folk-country band, so our idea was to get a new band together and have fun with this kind of music."

Besides a different musical style, the trio also gives the members a chance to be on stage without the pressures that accompany big-time touring or album projects. At this point, the new group allows the musicians to just have *fun*.

Though formed last year at a benefit for a local club, the trio has made few local appearances because of the demands of the members' primary bands.

But X and the Blasters have some time off now, so you'll be seeing the Knitters around town a bit this month. The trio—sometimes augmented by a bassist and/or drummer—will be at the Music Machine

## Los Angeles Times

Saturday, June 2, 1984

on June 14 and will open for John Prine at the Beverly Theatre on June 22.

Besides doing cover songs, the Knitters at the Cathay unveiled some original tunes, including country weepers and hard-edge dance tunes. Doe and Cervenka traded off on lead vocals, with Alvin adding a subdued (by Blaster standards) country-styled electric guitar. Alvin compared his approach to that of Elvis Presley's early guitarist Scotty Moore.

Artistic freedom seems to be an underlying theme with the Knitters. "Playing with the Knitters is great because you can bring in any kind of song," remarked Alvin. "I'll come in and say, 'Hey, we've got to do this old George Jones song,' or Exene will say, 'Hey, we've got to do this other song.' I also get to play a country-ish guitar that I don't get to do with the Blasters."

He added, jokingly, "There just aren't any strict Knitter rules, outside of the one that says that I can't sing, which is a good rule."

Cervenka agrees that the trio permits the band members to experiment with ideas that would seem out of place with X or the Blasters. They can even get maudlin or silly, she said, two qualities that she feels cannot be convincingly expressed by a rock band.

Cervenka even thinks it's possible that the Knitters will eventually record an album, but only if they can keep everything simple. Not only do Cervenka and Alvin discount any notion that their involvement with the Knitters might damage the harmony of the Blasters and X, they believe that their folk group helps bolster their primary bands.

"You can focus on X songs more if you feel you don't have to do *everything* with X," Cervenka said. "One band can't fill four persons' needs. People I know in Los Angeles who are in bands do all kinds of things on the side—other bands, movies, videos, outside songwriting . . . just anything to work and be creative."

□

LARRY ARMSTRONG / Los Angeles Times



In spare time, Exene Cervenka of rock group X performs country music in the Knitters with X's John Doe and Blasters' Dave Alvin.



# The Knitters' Fright Wig

By James Hunter

The Knitters are John Doe, Exene Cervenka, and D. J. Bonebrake of X, Dave Alvin of the Blasters, and upright bassist Jonny Ray Bartel. If on *Poor Little Critter on the Road*, their album, the Knitters had devised some *ideas* about country music—in addition to an alert and pretty platter of acoustic country-meets-blues—then that would be one thing. Honorable or hateful, they'd have some greasy West Hollywood argument on which to hang their sawtooth tunes. But they don't, so they just camp it up, with loads of irony and attitude and even more obnoxiousness in the end.

Aside from their intriguing and/or inscrutable lyric concerns, X have been in the first rank of postpunk rock and roll formal innovators. Even when, on *More Fun in the New World*, they whined out their disappointments about the development of American pop (strayed too far from Woody Guthrie), and the practices of American radio (didn't play DOA, Black Flag, or, for that matter, X) the structures were imaginative and blisteringly executed. Now, confined by design essentially to traditional folk and c&w ballads, with quick tempos and Western swing their boldest contemporary touches, it's not as though the Knitters' music is so restorative on its own that one stays gladly oblivious to whatever attitudes may be involved. The Carter Family or Jones and Wynette, as Doe and Cervenka must know, they ain't. So for distinctiveness, they get cute. And it's not a good kind of cute.

Doe and Cervenka probably don't exactly intend this—they may think of lines like "My plane from the city was late and there weren't anyone there to meet my flight," of a country doctor prescribing "a big old cheap bottle of wine," of tropes of despair like "Life's got a bucketful of worms for the poor little critter on the road" as corrective dialectical antidotes to rock narrowism or Yuppie "sophistication" or Nashville nightmare or pop Anglophilia, or something. Or maybe they mean to be affectionate. But, for a couple who value folk naturalism over post-'60s artifice, for performer-critics who think a C-list synthesist like Howard Jones is definitionally Z-list, this stuff comes off as very inauthentic. Show me a Southern woman, behind the counter at McDonald's or at Vanderbilt, who chirps "Oh, golly gee!" the way Cervenka

does on her version of the Carters' "Poor Old Heartsick Me," and I'll show you a Shelley Duvall fan. Which is okay, but about as rootsy as Eddie Rabbitt. To his credit, Doe often sounds like John Conlee without as many miles on his tractor, and Emmylou Harris, say, should some time consider demystifying her voice as Cervenka does; when they harmonize, they've always yowled up their own Sunset Strip wild thing. But their junky vocalizing here is ruined by their junky thinking. When Doe sings Merle Hag-gard's "Silver Wings" against his and Alvin's woeful-toned picking and strumming, it comes off like a song about a man baffled by airplanes. Like when Jed Clampett couldn't work the phones in Beverly Hills. Except that the Knitters provide no equivalent for Paul Henning's sympathetic sitcom contexts. The force that figures as this group's Mildred Drysdale—Commercial Dread—is tough to top off with a funny derby.

And speaking of commercial dread... This record does come up with an argument once—the opening cuts on side two, "Cryin' but My Tears Are Far Away" and "Love Shack." The first, an accomplished heartbreaker John Anderson should cover, sounds like a digitally remastered George Jones Musicor single; as a relic, it's astute. Then, in the loose and funky "Love Shack," Cervenka starts up with "I was with you when you wrote it/I liked it better then." She goes on to explain that now she's in this run-down bar with the rest of the rabble, hearing the record on the jukebox. With unmistakable loathing in her voice, she complains "the whole damn country loves you," scoffing that the record buyers who made it successful "bought it for a quarter," and supposes that they have no inkling of how great it in fact really is, that the hit-making process of course diminished it. As formally sharp as these two tracks are, at this point I am finished with the Knitters' boho bullshit, I am wondering if any crossover king's wife at her most lovelorn could ever see things like this, and I certainly am not going to waste my time

## MUSIC

with the Knitters' all-them-barnyard-hillbillies-wanna-go-to-Hollywood finale of "Rock Island Line." Boy. If only people from Tennessee had attended a few creative writing classes then they'd realize how dumb and tasteless it is to be attracted by bright lights, bigger audiences, and California money. And also how compromising, how common, how hideous hits are.

In coldest theory, there's no defense for the backward-looking approach of "roots-rock," the growing trend for which has made the American South into a fad again. (As the materials of fads go, though, that isn't bad—more significant than George Michael's reluctance to shave close.) In practice, though, it's not as simple. Roots-rockers with less self-consciousness than Doe and Cervenka head for the past because that's where they locate the sound of urgency, straightforwardness, energy. So, as they

classicize history their way, there will be good roots-rock records, even if some of them won't include the present as terrifically as the new Blasters album does. Lone Justice gets around this problem by letting Geffen make pop marketing as much a part of the whole kick of their fine record as songwriting and Jimmy Iovine's production. Jason and the Scorchers, like the more eclectic White Animals, indicate that some punk records were sold in Nashville, and their music tries to prove this, among other things. Tom Petty manages the myths not with the literacy and conceptual unity of Randy Newman but with the mainstream pop-rock scatteredness of the scattered mainstream pop-rocker Petty is. But what do the Knitters do? They put traditional c&w into a museum and then admire it in fright wigs, hoping that a small audience will sigh and twitter for all the wrong reasons. I thought Doe and Cervenka were smarter.



The Knitters, ready for camp

GARY LEONARD



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