

**2025 re-print and expanded edition**

# AMERICAN MUSIC

The Blaster Newsletter

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## THE BLASTERS TO RECORD A LIVE ALBUM

**LATEST NEWS:** : The Blasters are set to record a live album at The House of Blues on July 8th. The record company is called Private Music using the name 'On the Spot,' the label has recently put out live albums by Taj Mahal and Dan Hicks. Distribution is handled by BMG/RCA Victor. It's projected for release in September. — Phil Alvin on the latest Blasters news: "We played this gig at the House of Blues at the end of March and Bruce Springsteen was there. I've known him a couple of years but he is real good friends with James Intveld. James played bass or guitar on his (Springsteen's) wife's record and James hung out with him in New York. Aside from knowing all about James, he knew all the Blaster stuff. I didn't know much about how he could play guitar, but man, he knew all the Blaster tunes! Springsteen was playin' great.

The show was already sold out, but when Springsteen got there, the management got so excited. All the buzz was going gone. The House of Blues guys called and said they wanted us back by popular demand. So we said, why don't we just make a live record and call it 'The Blasters Live at the House of Blues.' They were hep to it. Then with Sony we'll follow it up with a full record." Later in the N. Y. Times, Bruce Springsteen stated that, 'The thrill of playing blues guitar with the roots-rock band Blasters at a recent concert of theirs, he said, has led him to start "toying around with the idea of making a record that is centered around loud guitars.'" — The Blasters toured the east coast in May. Originally they were scheduled for April but guitarist James Intveld had some gig commitments in the same time slot that he couldn't get out of. -- Dave Alvin played in San Francisco on April

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*County Fair 2000*



15 at the Fillmore. The show featured Dave, Merle Haggard, and some of the artists that appeared on High-Tone's 'Tulare Dust' Haggard tribute album. — In April, Dave finished producing sessions for Tom Russell, Chris Gaffney and Big Sandy. The Chris Gaffney CD called 'Loser's Paradise' has just been released and Dave Alvin plays guitar on a few tracks. Dave and Big Sandy returned once again to Capitol's studio B for Big Sandy's second record for HighTone. It has just finished the mixing process and is due out in July or August. — Rockabilly legend Ronnie Dawson said that he and Dave have discussed the possibility of Dave producing for him. Stay tuned. — The Red Devils have officially broken up. No word on what Bill Bateman is doing now. — The Blasters are talking about touring Europe in September, more on that next issue. —Am

## PHIL ALVIN ON THE MAKING OF COUNTY FAIR 2000

**NO DIALOGUE BETWEEN SONGS AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED-** I was pretty upset with a few things. As usual, no matter who the record label is, they want to say something. Based on the fact that I tested this everywhere from the parking lot, to Watts, to the Hillside residences of Pasadena. I played the dialogue inside the songs and everybody loved it. The (loss of the) dialogue helped in this sense, other than the Jerome Bowman song, they didn't fuck with the music because they felt they had done something by cutting out the dialogue primarily. So from now on, I'll always have dialogue on my records, in fact I will have bad dialogue and I'll cut it myself, but I will let them tell me I have to and then they will leave the music alone. Every time they said, 'cut the minimal out,' until they said cut it all out and then I begged. Then they fucked up on the mastering cues, which they kind of did behind my back after I had been down there to give the mastering cues. Fayard Nicholas was supposed to introduce the record and I begged to get the Fayard Nicholas and the Billy Boy Arnold parts in, but that was the only thing that was going to go. I got the most I could get. For my experience of making records, I've got more on this record the way I wanted it than any thing that had ever come before. And that in itself is a plus. I had a tape (of the dialogue) and we were at the Derby, so I was playing it. The problem is, the music is going and everybody is happy. When the dialogue comes in its just talking inside a room of talking in a live club and people don't listen. Things like this you do at home or in your car. There are settings where you do and where you don't.

**8 MONTHS IN THE MAKING-** It takes time. I had to put these bands together and get the spirit to write the songs as well as dealing with record companies telling me they were sending me money. I would tell the guys in the Faultline Syncopaters a date. It takes a long time to get ten guys to have the same day open. All of a sudden there is no money. I was there for the all mixing, but they tricked me in the mastering, even though I was there for the mastering session, the mastering cues - they didn't do them all right.

**LINER NOTES-** I wrote liner notes, but the record company didn't put them on. My liner notes was just a paragraph of where our music came and it was "an echo of its birth." The heels of the drug pushers in this country were African American and European indentured servant work leaving the American slave to feed the drug pushers and we died off until the Africans got here and taught us agriculture they became worth more than the Europeans. And now the western European offers some fruit back to the African that taught him to plant it, hence the image there on the front cover.

### Phil Alvin's County Fair analogy

*Original liner notes written by Phil Alvin (not included in the Cd)*

American Music echoes its birth, inheriting its richness from native American slaves and Afro-European indentured servants who bred cooperation and love in the fields of the tobacco, poppy, and sugar pushers. European and African intermarriages proportionally, agricultural skills make Africans worth more. The pushers enslave the valuable Africans ripping our communities apart. Light and Dark skinned family members now sing our songs while hidden in black face. They pick Spanish slide guitar and Sombreros, overalls, and grass skirts joined by Chinese symbols, accompanying Irish tenors and polish Kizmer bands. We are still here at the swap meet at the County Fair.

**ALBUM COVER-** Ed Boswell did the art on the record. Ed and I were looking through pictures to make the collage and to make the album cover. Ed suggested that this was a very strong picture and I wasn't really looking at it. Then a week later Jerome Bowman looked at it and said, 'That's the album cover.'

**JAMES HARMAN'S NON-APPEARANCE-** James that Chump (laughing)!! He was too scared to play by the new rules. I kept going down after his gig, he was on the road and stuff, he was going to sing "She Loves Me So Good" with me. In fact I was going to have him and Jerome singing that because in the story everyone was on their way to first seeing Corrine—which happens in "Satellite Man." Everyone knows where Corrine is but I don't know her address. They are all singing, 'She loves me so good,' Jerome says, "Yeah, she's the kind of girl you want to keep in touch with." That starts the song. I literally wrote a little minstrel sketch.

**VIDEOS-** Eddie Baytos made a video of Fayard and us making the thing and we had video setups planned to film a play, but the record company said, 'Oh no, we've got these videos you guys made while you were in England doing County Fair and we were going to release those.' Well, they called us off and they haven't got 'em. They got a publicist girl involved with this thing that I don't know whether or not she just. . . she just doesn't like me (laughing)! At least there is the Eddie Baytos video, sometime that will be done.



## THE BLASTER SONGS

**COUNTY FAIR -THE WRITING OF-** The publishing credits as well as many of the musicians credits, not by my fault and for whatever reason are given wrong on the record. In fact, I have the whole writing credit on this song. The record company was trying to minimize the amount of money they were going to have to pay. The last version that I know of to be made and the one that influenced me to write probably half of the lines was by J.E. Mainer. The whole first section was written by me. I know about 20 versions of Country Fair. Was J.E. Miner the writer of County Fair? I'll give you an example. I know that neither Poor Joe Williams or Lightnin' Hopkins wrote 'Baby Please Don't Go.' But Poor Joe Williams got his name on it because he recorded it first and he wasn't stupid. But nobody knew how to play it until Lightnin' Hopkins did, and most of the money generated was because of the way Lightnin' played it. Who should get paid?

**THE SESSION** - It was cut at Bruce Witkin's in Hollywood. That was the first one we cut. I just ran in and we were actually cutting the (Blasters on Sony) EP. We had actually cut the EP and it was finished. I ran in and said, "I'm making this solo record. Here this is the County Fair tune. It goes like this." I hadn't even written all the words yet, I was just singing the vamp part and I knew I was gonna write some words. That's just live, what James Intveld solo's on is just live, man we played it only three times.

**PERSONNEL** - Actually Dave Carroll is the drummer. That's another thing the record company screwed up on

(in liner notes) All the rest of the album is Jerry Angel.

**EQUIPMENT** - I played my Epiphone and James is playing his Stratocaster.

**BLUELINE-** In February, there was a lot of calls from Germany to make The Blueline a single. They wanted to put some promotion behind it.

**THE WRITING** - Bobcat Cavette is a good friend of Lee Allen's and of mine. He is a Sax player from New Orleans. I said write a line for Blueline. So when the record company was asking me who the writers were gonna be, I put down Bobcat Cavette, because I was assuming he would write a line. He never wrote a line. That's another mistake by the record company (of crediting Cavette.) The actual guy who helped me write that song is Gary Masi, the same guy that played on 'Oh Doctor.' Gary Masi used to be the guitarist in the Blasters before David. When I couldn't find him, that's when I put David in there.

**THE SESSION** - Me and James did all the voices. I sang the bass. I can sing the three octaves in C as of that song. That was stunning because I actually was singing the lead part almost in a bass. That was cut at a few places. We cut the track at Cesar Rosas' place, but cut the vocals at Bruce Witkin's. I told Bruce roll it by one more time let me try to shoot 'a Clyde McPhatter' at it, meaning a high voice. So I'm singing it and I get to the last line and I realize that I'm going to have to go way up there and I hit it. It was the first time in my life ever, and I thought it was great. And that happened at 41 (age), and life keeps getting better and better. It was a little bit nasal, but not much. I couldn't do it again because we had to take it to the mastering studio.

**EQUIPMENT** - I didn't play anything on that that is just James (on guitar).

**KEEP IN TOUCH-** **THE PERSONNEL** - Jerome is singing in the background and plays lead guitar on there but I wanted him to sing it. Same thing with the record company making me minimize the dialogue, at first I had Jerome singing the whole thing then the record company said this is a Phil Alvin record. So then I had Jerome and I singing a duet. Then they decided, 'We think this is a poor song. We want you to sing it alone.' They would not take it any other way. Dave Carroll sings back ground vocals on 'Keep In Touch.'

**THE MEETING** - Jerome Bowman was born in Pasadena. He started the Pretenders with Chrissie Hynde in Paris. He recorded in europe and made some records under the name Dr. Counterpunk. I'm driving down Colorado Blvd in Pasadena and I look in my rear view mirror and I see a silhouette of an arm pulling away from the guitar the way a real guitarist plays. I don't normally stop for street musicians especially if I can't hear 'em, but I saw this guy. I made a U-turn in the middle of the street but he was gone. I went to a market and as I was getting out of my car, I saw him again. I said, 'He and I are the only two minstrels in the country.' I said to him, 'You know it's pretty hard to find a young black guy who plays minstrel music.' He didn't know who I was, so I picked up the guitar and started playing. After that I called up Hightone to get him on the record.

**EQUIPMENT** - Me on my Gibson L-4 guitar, James on standup bass, Jerome is playing my Epiphone - which is on the cover of the Rollin Rock album.

## THE DUET SONGS

**WRECK YOUR V-8 FORD-** With Billy Boy Arnold - **THE MEETING** - I never met Billy Boy Arnold and Art Fein called me up and said he was having Billy Boy on his television show (Lil' Arts Poker Party) and would I come out and play guitar behind him. I said, 'Sure enough, I'll be right there!' Billy was pristine, he looked younger than me for Christ sake! He sounded fantastic! I sent Billy Boy a tape of the song and he got it two days before the session.

**The SESSION** - It was done at Chess studios. That wasn't my idea. I called my friend Marcus Johnson, who I put down as associate producer and said I needed a studio. So, I get out to Chicago and he puts me in a hotel. That morning, we drive over to Chess studios, one of the three studios. They're all on Michigan Ave., all close to each other. This one I think was 1856 S.



Photo: Peter Amit

Michigan. It was just being dusted off and after not having been used for about 15 years. The first day was spent cutting bass and drums with Dave Meyers. Billy Boy and I rearranged the original and then we came back the next day to record.

**THE PERSONNEL** - The bass player is Dave Meyers from the Meyers brothers and Fred Below. They were in Little Walter's band and Junior Wells band. When Dave Meyers touched that guitar, there wasn't any doubt who arranged all of Little Walter's and all of Junior Wells songs. Then he picked up THE Fender bass that had been used plenty of times in that studio and I was just in heaven. Phil Thomas was one of Muddy Waters early drummers and also Jimmy Reed's.

**CHOICE OF THE SONG** - Bob Hite (Canned Heat) taught me about the history of American Music. He was my really good friend. Just a few months before he died, he had this record by Blind Teddy Darby with Petie Wheatstraw on piano done in 1932 that we listened to. The problem with the song was Blind Teddy Darby tears down his girlfriend's car. It was much too violent an image to be projected now-a-days. So, Bob and I were talking about having one guy tear another guy's car down. When Bob Hite died, the lawyers took all his records and sold them for next to nothing. So, I've set about trying to access as many of these really important songs as I can. That was one of them. I have a few more. I've decided, now we will do this for Bob Hite, I wish I would have put that (dedication) on there.

**PHIL, LEAD GUITARIST** - Bruce Bromberg remixed my V-8 Ford and when he did he fucked up my lead guitar. Bromberg had heard some thing that nobody else could hear, that Billy Boy had jumped on his microphone hard at one point and he thought it was really upsetting. He had Travis Dickerson or someone remix it and that's where they lost my solo. That's the only song that I've ever put out a lead guitar solo on. I was devastated. They were telling me, 'There is nothing you can do about it.'

**EQUIPMENT** - I was originally was going to put a mandolin on it like Johnny Young. We cut the song in Chicago, but I didn't put the lead guitar on it. I came back here (L.A. studio) and there was a vintage Les Paul. I was kind of in a hurry, so I started to play and the guy had kind of slinky strings on the thing which I can't smack the way I smack. So, I cut two tracks and figured I'd come back tomorrow. I got my Harmony Meteor which is a really loud guitar and I plugged in to the same amp that I set up day before and I said, 'Listen, you can't tell the difference between this and the Les Paul! You go buy this \$200 Harmony Meteor and they are going to pay \$8000 for this Les Paul. I'm sorry your stupid! That guitar track is a composite of four different tracks, two from the Harmony, two from the Les Paul and you can't tell the difference.

**OH, DOCTOR** - With Gary Masi & Cesar Rosas - *THE WRITING* - A song Gary Masi wrote 20 years ago. Me, Dave Carroll, and Gary Masi were at a restaurant and Gary Masi had a girlfriend who was a waitress. She quit him right there and he was just broken hearted. We sat in the coffee shop after it happened and when we came out, Gary was playing his guitar, singing this song. He had two front choruses and he wrote the rest of the song and it was kind of a joke that it was the "Heart Transplant song." I could never get the tune out of my head for twenty years, so I figured I got to get Masi and rewrite those joke lines. And that's what we did. I think it's the best Jimmy Reed song he didn't write.

**THE SESSION** - That was at Cesar Rosas' house. It's a great little studio he has in his garage. It's not a garage anymore, it's a full studio. We also mixed County Fair at Cesar's and over dubbed the vocal there. We cut the tracks to Blueline and we cut the

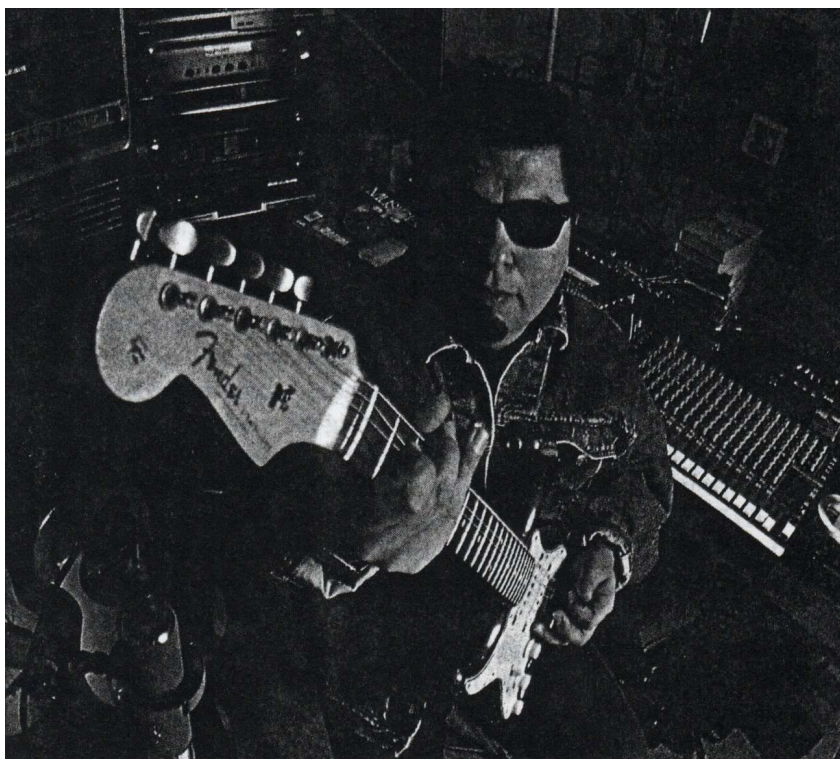


Photo: Jay Blakesberg

Jerome song at Cesar's. Oh Doctor was the only one in its entirety that we cut and mixed at Cesar's.

*EQUIPMENT* - There are five guitars on that song. My Epiphone, Gary Masi's Kay, and Cesar on his Strato-caster. James played one of Cesar's basses, but they tuned it up and played it like a guitar.

**BLUES INTO GOLD-** With James Intveld and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. *THE WRITING* - James and I wrote Blues into Gold in an hour and a half in the French quarter. I said, 'Lets write a tune to do with the Dirty Dozen Brass band and call it 'Turning Blues into Gold,' it shouldn't be too hard to write, just figure out some blues that you got, now your out on the street trying to make some money on it, turning it into gold.' So James had a couple of ideas. We went back after we had coffee and just cut it right there.

*THE ARRANGEMENT* - We used the Tuba and the drum parts for the real core of that song. This guy Julian did the tuba and he is just brilliant. I didn't play anything. James had my L-4 down in New Orleans and they cut the rhythm track and we didn't want to put anything else on it cause that sparseness was good.

**DANNY BOY'S MOURNING SUNSET-** With The Dirty Dozen Brass Band *THE CONCEPT* - I went down to New Orleans in particular for Gregory Davis. He is the leader of the Dirty Dozen Brass band. Sunra and I were going to do this record, but Sunra died. I told Gregory, we will play the 'Old Rugged Cross.' That's one of the dirges, you go down to the second line to the funeral to the cemetery to bury the body and that will fade into Ahnk, one of Sunra's pieces. Then we will fade into 'Didn't He Ramble,' the joyous music which you play coming back from the funeral. So that's a tribute to Sunra. However something different happened. I flew into New Orleans with my little banjo on March 14 and I called Gregory Davis who was crying. Why? Because Danny Barker (legendary New Orleans jazz musician) had just died. He wrote "Don't You Feel My Leg." He played Banjo in Jelly Roll Morton's band, he was Cab Calloway's banjo and guitar player, he was Charlie Parker's guitar player, he was the guy who started the youthful brass band movement in New Orleans. He died at 93 that day. He was best of friends with the Dirty Dozen Brass band, so they could no longer think of Sunra. They were not even going to be able to play his (Barker's) funeral, they were leaving town that Thursday. So when I walked in the next morning in to the studio, I was just going to do just 50 seconds of the Old Rugged Cross. It became a four minute thing and Gregory was giving a speech and they were crying while they were playing. So that's how it became a tribute to Danny Barker and Sunra. James Intveld flew down, and the next day we cut the happier part 'Didn't He Ramble.'

*PERSONNEL* - Ike 'Diz' Williams is one of Lee Allen's best friends, he played with Ray Charles band and is a well known trumpet player. Diz has played with the Blasters many times when we were doing Joe Turner's stuff. Lee Allen was dying through this whole record. I went over to see Lee as I was on my way to Travis Dickerson's studio in L.A. to cut Ankh. Diz was there and I hadn't seen him in a long time. Also, Miles Davis had just died - a great shame that so little was done on Miles' death. I was almost going to say 'Danny Boy Miles Away from Mourning Sunset' to say good by to Miles too. So I said, 'Hey Diz, I'm going to a recording session that no one is coming to. Why don't you come down and we'll do one for Miles.' I was originally going to do Ankh as a piano solo. Diz heard it through once and we played it with trumpet and piano.

*BANJO* - I hate five string banjos! I like even string banjo's. About a week before I went to New Orleans, I was in San Jose and I stopped by a garage sale and saw what I thought was a clock banjo. I strummed that little thing and I couldn't put it down. So now I've got five of them during the making of this record. I used a wild British Banjo that I picked up while we were on tour there in July.

*FINALE* - James and I went to Danny Barker's funeral. In fact at the very end of the record you hear the music come on for the last little 10 seconds. That is actually in the streets of New Orleans, from Danny Barker's Funeral March 17, 1994. It was more than. . . I can't express what a scene it was. It was phenomenal!

**MR. SATELLITE MAN-** With Mary Franklin and Top Jimmy - This is getting a lot of air play in particular in rotation on a lot of Jazz stations down in Texas right now. An Austin station is playing it a lot.

*THE PERSONNEL* - Top Jimmy's mother was a good friend of mine when I worked at the Chinese theater. Her name was Mary and I used to let her kid in for free all the time. That was Top Jimmy.

*THE CONCEPT* - I wanted to practice an operatic style. It is a story song. It has a complete little plot. There is a fight between me and Top Jimmy about this girl and she ends up throwing the both of us away. It was done

just the way I like it, just the way music should be.

*THE SESSION* - Nobody was there, so I played piano and I strummed an acoustic guitar to give (Top) Jimmy a rhythm and I just wrote Top Jimmy's words. Ed Boswell helped me on Jimmy's words. Then Mary Franklin came in a couple of days later and I wrote her words and I wrote my words three weeks later. Nobody was in the studio singing their lines at the same time but it worked great. It was cool because I really used this ADAT recording technic to its max. The only conflict was that I originally had Jimmy singing the end of the song. Then I realized that Mary Franklin should sum it up so we moved Jimmy's voice off, and physically bring it back to between the one and five change. Then I sang the front of it at the tape until we got one that made it natural and Jimmy fell into me. I took the whole thing and went over to another studio and put the Blasters on it.

*EQUIPMENT* - James found a mandolin hanging on the wall of the studio. I already had a guitar part on it. I played my Gibson L-4. James was trying to see if he could have more instruments on the record than me (laughing.) Were still not sure. Its close.

## THE FAULTLINE SYNCOPATERS SONGS

**WHAT'S THE REASON I'M NOT PLEASIN' YOU-** With Mary Franklin - *THE WRITING-* The song was actually written by Fats Waller. When Fats Waller needed money he would go and sell one of his songs to four different people in a given day. So he sold 'What's the Reason.' I wrote the whole second section of that. This is another publishing issue that may be too long to go into but in actuality in terms of how BMI is going to pay people, yes I am entitled to royalties. Should my name have been there? Yes it should. The record company has to pay what are called mechanicals. So they thought if they put it out that way they wouldn't have to pay me. The original version was done with Jimmy Greir's Orchestra who were the Biltmore hotel Orchestra in New York. It was originally sung by Pinkie Tamlin.



*THE PERSONNEL* - Mary Franklin was our manager in a very old version of the Blasters. She was a singer a dancer and a songwriter. Her professional name during the fifties and the forties was Mary McGill. She wrote a lot of stuff for Murray Adams. She had some R&B hits. James plays bass on all the Syncopater stuff.

**THE TERROR-** I'm the banjo player *THE ORIGINAL RECORDING* - Cliff Jackson was a brilliant arranger in the tradition of Fletcher Henderson. It was Cliff Jackson and the Crazy Cats, they only made one recording session and it was very badly recorded. They were from Harlem.

**LOW DOWN RHYTHM-** With Fayard Nicholas and Eddie Baytos - *DISCOVERING THE ORIGINAL* - One day Bob Hite took me and James Harman record collecting and he said, (in Phil's best gravely voice imitation of Bob Hite) "You guys don't know shit about record collecting. Let me show you assholes! I'll let you go through all the records first, and then I'll show you what you missed.' So me and James go out and were pulling records and pulling records and we go back to Bob Hite's house. He says, 'Well it was Harlem today. You guys didn't get it. You missed it.' So what did Bob Hite have? He had 'The Terror,' 'What's the Reason I'm Not Pleasin' You,' and a tune called 'Low Down Rhythm,' by some goof ball band called Lloyd Keating and his Music. So every one of the Faultline Syncopater tunes, is a tune that Bob Hite found on the day that I went through the box and missed everyone of them.

*THE PERSONNEL* - I had known Eddie for a long time. Eddie Baytos of the Nervous Brothers is a great dancer and musician, he is on a lot of re-

cords. He is from New Orleans. He won a Cable Ace award for choreography and dancing in music videos. So, I called up Eddie to teach me how to Tap dance. I knew I was going to fail (laughing). Eddie suggested we get some of the older dancers and mentioned he was talking to Fayard Nicholas the other day. I said “Eddie!, Eddie!, Talk to Fayard!! He is just the greatest in the world.” He is a ball of joy at 80 years old. A great human being. Fayard was going to be the narrator of the whole album. It was supposed to start with him saying, ‘Hi friends this is Fayard Nicholas. Welcome to the County Fair.’

*THE RECORDING* - I walk up to Eddie and its supposed to be Eddie tap dancing, there is supposed to be tap dancing in the background, another mistake they made.

*THE WRITING* - Sammy Fain wrote the first line and I wrote the second line. (The publishing is the same as is with ‘What’s the Reason.’) It’s a song from ‘The Hollywood Review’ a Hollywood music movie from 1929.

## THE PHIL SOLO SONGS

**THAT THING-** *THE WRITER* - I haven’t heard the song for many years but I think it is closest to the Clifford Gibson version. I always liked the guitar parts. I used the L-4 (Gibson).

**SHE LOVES SO GOOD-** *THE WRITER* - That’s Frankie ‘Half-Pint’ Jaxon. He performed in drag, he made Little Richard look like a stevedore (laughs). A guy who helped me write a couple of lines is ‘White Boy James,’ named because he came from Compton and he happened to be the only white guy in the school. I would be singing on stage and all of a sudden I would see someone walk by and make my face at me. It just cracked me up it was so funny. I wanted to get him on the record, but since they already yanked Jerome off the duet, it looked like I wasn’t going to get any other duets unless they were in the Blasters or extremely famous people.

**CALLIN’ CORRINE-** *THE ARRANGEMENT* - Another Frankie ‘Half-Pint’ Jaxon song He did a beautiful version with a clarinet. I originally wanted Woody Allen playing Clarinet and a piano player singing. Do you remember ‘Buffalo gals won’t you come out tonight?’ That song spurred many other songs. One was ‘Corrine Corrine.’ I wanted to do this other song that branched off from the same family that Buffalo gals came from called ‘Ain’t you comin’ out tonight.’ I always thought that the two branches could be brought back together in one song. Which is also an interesting event that two songs spawned from the same original song took on their own lives and now I can put them back in one song again.

**STARLIGHT-** *THE MARKSAPHONE* - With your right hand you play a keyboard, with your left hand you pluck the bass strings. It’s a great instrument. I’ve got the only amplified Marksaphone on the planet.

*ORIGINAL VERSION* - There are two songs inside of that song. Both of them are 17th and 18th century spirituals. The one ‘Lay my Body Down,’ Starlight is my title for it. The first time I had heard a medley of more of these songs was from Carl Sandburg. There is a record that I had found called Negro Spirituals. The spiritual has many different titles but it says, ‘I walk in the moonlight, I walk in the starlight, I lay my body down.’ Now that doesn’t make any sense. Then the song ‘All Night Long,’ I had to change all those words, sort of my anti-gospel gospel song, or the gospel according to Phil Alvin (laughs). The only line that stays the same is, ‘Never seen the likes since I was born. People keep coming but the train has gone.’ I think that is a very powerful line.

*THE PERSONNEL* - They took me out to dinner next to Bruce Witkin’s studio and I had had to do ‘Starlight’ without the Marksaphone and that was killing me too! In fact that was killing me more (than the loss of his lead guitar solo on V-8 Ford). They said, ‘don’t worry,’ cause the stuff was at the mastering studio, ‘its a great record.’ But luckily they were backed up (The mastering studio.) So it dawned on me that (Bruce)Bromberg might want to play on the record. So I wield the conversation around to how nice it would be to re-record Starlight with the Marksaphone and to really speed things up Bruce, you could play guitar on it. After a couple of beers he went for it. Bruce Bromberg said he always put his name down as Robert Lily. Why is it because your embarrassed? (laughing) I don’t know. —Am

# Obscure Oldies by the Blasters

*A Blast to the Past*

by Janne Kurunsaari

The Blasters are well known for the song writing talents of Dave Alvin through his classic original songs but they have also prided themselves by playing many obscure and not so obscure cover songs on their records and in live shows. This is a little look back at the original artists.

**REAL ROCK DRIVE:** This was the first record for Bill Haley and the Comets done in 1952 for the Essex label. They were formally known as Bill Haley and the Saddlemen. A few years later they hit success on Decca records and the rest is history. An earlier attempt of this song by Tani Allen in 1947 was cut by the name 'Tennessee Jive.' Johnny Horton also did 'Tennessee Jive,' but after Bill Haley's version. The difference between the two songs is when Tani Allen sings, "Its Tennessee Jive and it's played in a real gone way," Bill Haley sung it, "Its Real Rock Drive and it's played in a real gone way." Dave Alvin did a tribute to Bill Haley when he wrote 'Haley's Comet' for his solo 'Blue Blvd' album.

**BAREFOOT ROCK:** Done by Herman Parker better known as Little Junior Parker, the same man who originally did 'Mystery Train' for the Sun label in 1953. In 1954, he got to be the leader of the Johnny Ace Revue band after Johnny died in a game of Russian Roulette. He also toured with Bobby Blue Bland on the Blues Consolidated tour between 1954-61. He cut 'Barefoot Rock' in the late fifties and had an R&B hit with it for the Texas based Duke label.

The Blasters used pretty much the same arrangement when recording it first for the 'American Music' album (1980) and then the 'Non-Fiction' album (1983). Only the horns were missing on the 'American Music' version replaced by Phil's harp.

**I WISH YOU WOULD:** This one is truly a Chicago Blues classic done by Billy Boy Arnold. He recorded it for the Chicago based Vee-Jay label and really built his blues credibility on the Chicago blues scene with the song. Billy Boy is making a big comeback and can be heard in a duet with Phil Alvin on 'County Fair 2000.'

**CRAZY BABY:** A late 50's garage band from Peoria IL. called the Rockin' R's cut this one as a B-side



to their debut single 'Beat' on the Tempus label. Recorded in a room "The size of a bathroom," the Blasters did justice to it when recording it in Rockin' Ronny's living room for the 'American Music' album. In the Blaster version, Ronny's dog can be heard barking in the back ground. John Bazz said, "Sometimes when I'm on stage, I still hear that dog barking." The Blasters changed this one over the years adding a crazy railroad drum beat to it for their live shows.

**NEVER NO MORE BLUES:** Originally sung by the singing brakeman Jimmie Rodgers back in 1930, but the Blasters took the arrangement of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys version. The Texas Playboys singer Leon McAuliffe liked to yodel like Jimmie, but Phil Alvin took it a step further and added a breathtaking yodel to the version heard on the 'American Music' LP. Phil said he never heard the Jimmie Rodgers' version until after he first recorded it. The Blasters re-recorded it for their first album on Slash records.

**BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ:** Cut originally by the Los Angeles Doo Wop band the Hollywood Flames. They had earlier backed Bobby Day on his hit 'Little Bitty Pretty One,' but changed their name to the Holly-



wood Flames and 'Buzz Buzz Buzz' was their only national hit.

**I'M SHAKIN':** Written by Rudy Toombs but recorded by Little Willie John back in 1959. James Brown once said of him, "He was a soul singer before anyone thought to call it that." Surely one of the best voices in American Music history. He made the remarkable hit, 'Fever' at the age of 18. He died under dark circumstances in 1968 while doing '8 to 20' at Walla Walla prison. Tom Russell did him justice when writing 'Blue Wing' which Dave Alvin recorded on his 'King of California' album.

**HIGHWAY 61:** You've heard of Route 66 and Highway 49 but this one was cut by Robert Luandrew alias Sunnyland Slim for the Cobra label. As a pianist, he has had one of the longest careers in blues music and owns one of the biggest recording catalogs in all of blues.

**LOVE YOU SO:** Elias McDaniels AKA Bo Diddley used to play blues on the street corners of Chicago with Billy Boy Arnold in the early fifties. He made it big though as a Rock n Roll singer on the Chess label with Chuck Berry. This song can be found on Bo's album 'Have Guitar Will Travel.' In 1982, the Blasters opened some shows in Europe for Bo Diddley.

**STOP THE CLOCK:** Done by Bob Ehret and his Orchestra for Alladin records. Fats Domino recorded a completely different song with the same title.

**HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL:** Jerry Lee Lewis did this one in 1958 for the movie of the same name starring Mamie Van Doren and Russ Tamblyn. The single was released six days before his tragic tour of England that sent his career down the tubes. The Blasters did a wild version of this in their live shows and included it in their 'Live At the Venue' EP.

**ROCK BOPPIN' BABY:** The debut single for Edwin Bruce in 1957 on the Sun label. He was backed by Sun's finest musicians: Roland Janes and Stan Kesler. In the late 60s, Bruce gained some popularity in the country field.

**KEEP A KNOCKIN':** By Little Richard also known as Richard Penniman. He did this one for Specialty Records in 1957 featuring future Blaster member Lee Allen on Tenor Sax and Bill Bateman's major influence, Earl Palmer on Drums.

**GO GO GO:** Also titled 'Down The Line.' It was the flipside to 'Ooby Dooby' done by Roy Orbison in his rockabilly days on Sun

records. He wrote it as a parody of a Rock 'n Roll song with the assistance of Johnny Cash. It has become a classic Rock 'n Roll song.

**ROLL EM' PETE:** Originally done by the Blasters grandfather, Big Joe Turner, and dedicated to his pianist Pete Johnson. 'Roll em' Pete' is one of those songs that started the boogie woogie craze in the 30's and early 40's. Big Joe Turner was a critical link between R&B and Rock 'n Roll. Dave Alvin said that while recording the Blasters first two albums, they used Turner's 'Shake Rattle & Roll' to try and adjust their sound in the studio.

**WHAT WILL LUCY DO:** First cousin of Lightnin' Hopkins, Frankie Lee Sims had his only hit with this song also known as 'Lucy Mae Blues' in 1953 for Specialty. Like Phil Alvin, he was a self taught guitarist and a school teacher. The Blasters version can be found as an outtake from 1982's London Venue concert on Warner Bros. various artists collection 'Attack of the Killer Bees Vol. 1.'

**TAG ALONG:** From the swamps of South Louisiana came Rocket Morgan. He did this one for Jay Miller's Zynn label.

**ONE BAD STUD:** Written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, it was recorded by the Doo Wop band 'The Honey Bears.'

**SAMPSON & DELIAH:** A traditional song that Dave Alvin said they used the Staple Singers version

as a base. It has the same lyrics but done by a full band. Reverend Gary Davis also recorded an acoustic version of the song with slight change in the lyrics.

**CRY FOR ME:** Done by Elmore James, one of the legendary Delta Bluesman. He cut it in Chicago for Vee-Jay records. Elmore died in Chicago on May 24, 1963.

**JUSTINE:** Los Angeles duo Don & Dewey did this one for specialty in 1958. Dewey Terry played piano and sung lead while Don 'Sugarcane' Harris played guitar. John Doe, who guested on the Blasters recorded version of this song, has an unbelievably similar voice to Don & Dewey as does Phil Alvin.

**LIGHTS OUT:** This song written by Seth David and Mac Rebennack AKA Dr. John, was done by New Orleans native Jerry Byrne for Specialty in 1958. Jerry only had three singles released, but who needs more than one when one is a Rock 'n Roll classic.

**DADDY ROLLIN STONE:** By Jimmy Ricks who was a bass singer in the Robins later known as the Coasters. He left the band and started a solo career and made classics like 'Summertime' and this Otis Blackwell penned tune.

**HOODOO MAN:** Junior Wells born in Memphis Tenn. made a name for himself in Muddy Waters band on harmonica after Little Walter left the band. Junior cut 'HooDoo' as his second single for the States label in 1953. He later made a breakthrough with the song when he recorded it on an album called 'HooDoo Man Blues' for Delmark in 1965.

**SADIE'S BACK IN TOWN:** Wildman Sonny Burgess from Newport AR. recorded in the fifties for the Sun label. This was his last single for Sun and was actually released on Phillips International. It was a remake of an earlier tune he recorded called 'Sadie Brown' Roy Orbison stated in an interview how wild Sonny was, "He had dyed red hair, he had on a red suit and played a red Fender guitar." In 1991 Dave Alvin recorded an album with Sonny Burgess called 'Tennessee Border' for HighTone records.

**TOO TIRED:** 'Gangster of Love' Johnny Guitar Watson was Dave Alvin's major guitar hero. He recorded this one in 1955. Born in Houston, Texas, he later moved to Los Angeles and got to play with folks like Don & Dewey, Louis Jordan, Little Rich-



ard, and Sam Cooke. In the sixties, he toured with Larry Williams and it was said that he had, "Demonstrated guitar dynamics that blew the roof off."

**CALIFORNIA SUN:** A sixties hit by the Rivas, but earlier Joe Jones did the original.

**GOT LOVE IF YOU WANT IT:** Original by James Moore also known as Slim Harpo and Harmonica Slim. He had a very unique Louisiana swamp sound and recorded for Excello.

**DRINKIN' WINE SPO-DE-O-DEE:** Brother of Brownie McGhee, Sticks McGhee had a hit with this in 1949.

**WHAT AM I LIVIN' FOR:** King of the Stroll, Mr. Chuck Willis died in a car crash in 1958. This posthumously released single went number one on the R&B charts and number nine on the pop charts. The flip-side was 'Hang Up My Rock 'n Roll Shoes.'

**WINDOW UP ABOVE:** A George Jones country standard from the early 60's released on Mercury. He also flirted with rockabilly back in 1956 under a pseudonym 'Thumper Jones.' Later he stated that he hated those tracks. The Blasters changed this song a lot and you can hardly tell that it's the same song - but it's a damn good one.

**NUMBER NINE TRAIN:** Alden Bunn is better known to blues fans as Tarheel Slim. His powerful

single from the late 50's had two classics on it. This song and 'Wildcat Tamer.'

**JUST TO BE WITH YOU:** A Muddy Waters late 60's track in which Phil Alvin stated, "Muddy used to kill with it live, but never quit got it right when they did it on record." This song is expected to appear on the forth coming Blasters EP.

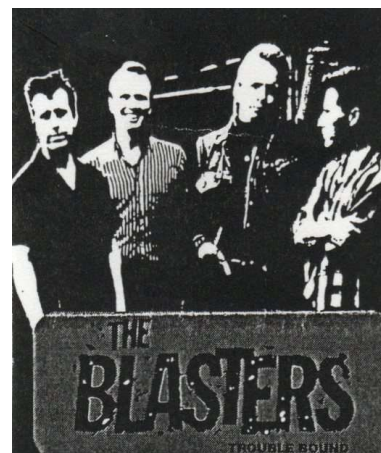
**REBOUND:** Charlie Rich signed with Sam Phillips', Phillips International label and cut this song. He never achieved success with Rock 'n Roll but did well in the country field in the 70's. This one fits the Blasters like it was tailor made for them.

**IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT:** Done in 1963 by the 'Arkansas Twister,' Bobby Lee Trammel. Sonny Burgess has said of him, "He was the wildest, and I've seen them all."

**OKIE DOKIE STOMP:** Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown was one of the most innovative guitar players of the 50's blues scene. 'Okie' was cut for the Peacock label in 1954. This tune was Hollywood Fats' star turn on lead guitar in the Blasters' live shows. The Blasters' next guitar player Greg Smokey Hormel was featured on this one too. —Am



**BLASTERS t-shirt offer** We have a very limited number of Blaster Trouble Bound T-Shirts left from Janne Kurunsaari of Helsinki Finland. The print pictured here is red and white on a black shirt. Sizes available -Med. & Large (the large is very large) They are being made available to American music subscribers at \$15 each postpaid if by check payable to Billy Davis. Remember there are only a few left! Send to 80-16 64th Lane Glendale N.Y. 11385 U.S.A.



**FROM THE EDITOR:** Any Jerry Lee Lewis fans out there may be interested to know that Sterling Ragland, a Blaster fan and American Music subscriber is running a Jerry Lee fan club that Lewis recognizes as his only official fan club. For info write J.L.L. fan club P.O. Box 593 Broadway N.J. 08808. Next issue: A James Intveld exclusive interview and a look back at the making of Dave Alvin and Sonny Burgess' Tennessee Border album.

# In Performance

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## POP

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### Giving a Rhythmic Nod To the Old-Time Minstrel

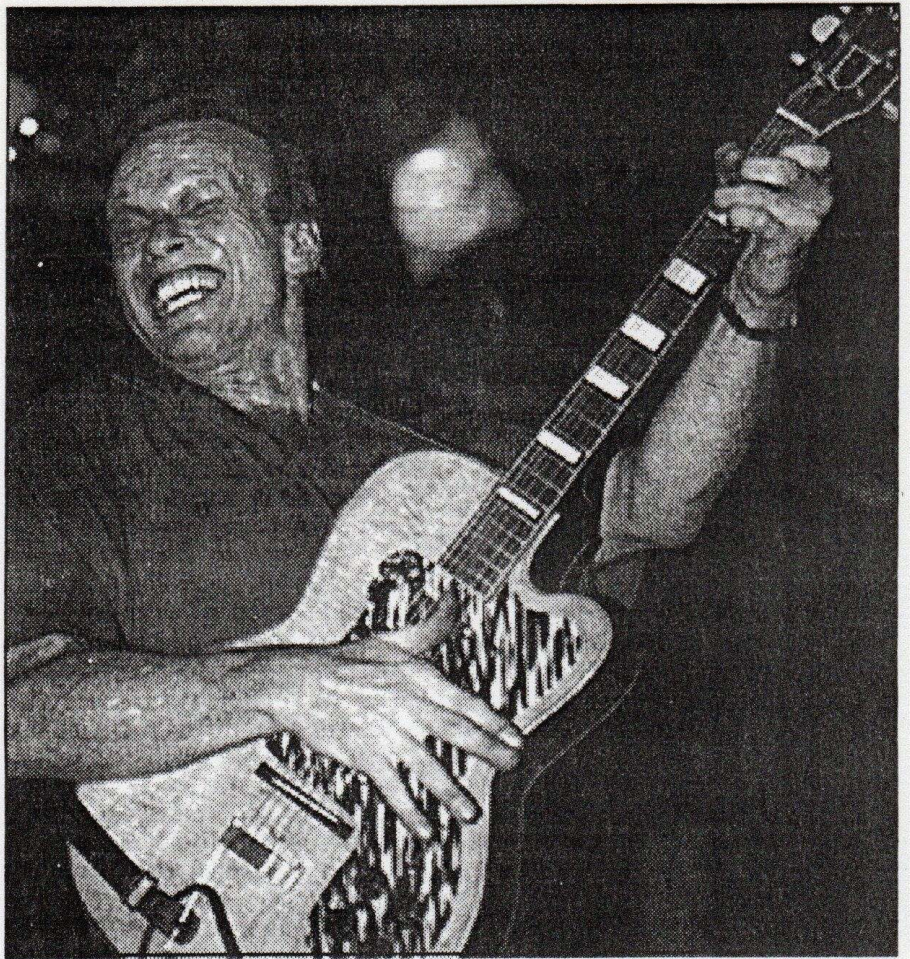
*The Blasters*  
*Tramps*

"There's nothing I hate more than the notion that music has something to do with time," Phil Alvin said on Saturday night, 12 songs into a concert with his band, the Blasters. It was a good sign that the Blasters' first performance in Manhattan in eight years was just beginning. Mr. Alvin is one of roots-rock's more peculiar characters, and on Saturday he led one of roots-rock's best bands, twisting through the back alleys of American culture in songs about all things just barely legal: border radio, the lottery, bad pick-up lines.

The Blasters rose from Los Angeles in the early 1980's, bridging the gap between the city's emerging roots-rock and punk bands, and fragmented in 1986. Their current lineup includes James Intveld on guitar, Jerry Angel on drums and their original bassist, John Bazz.

On Saturday, the Blasters played for two and a half hours, slowly getting drunker, wilder and more unhinged as the night progressed. In the process, they tapped into the mania and eccentricity of some of the rock-and-roll forefathers who continue to inspire them. Mr. Alvin sang in a deep, smooth voice and gritted his teeth in a manic grin as he played energetic rhythm guitar, letting Mr. Intveld, whose guitar had a deeper, fatter tone, cut in occasionally. The Blasters' savvy, genre-jumping rock, or "American minstrel music" as Mr. Alvin called it several times, sagged in places but never let up, especially during revved-up, unpredictably paced versions of "Marie, Marie," "I'm Shakin'" and "The Blue Line."

NEIL STRAUSS



Rahav Segev

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Phil Alvin performing with his band, the Blasters, at Tramps.

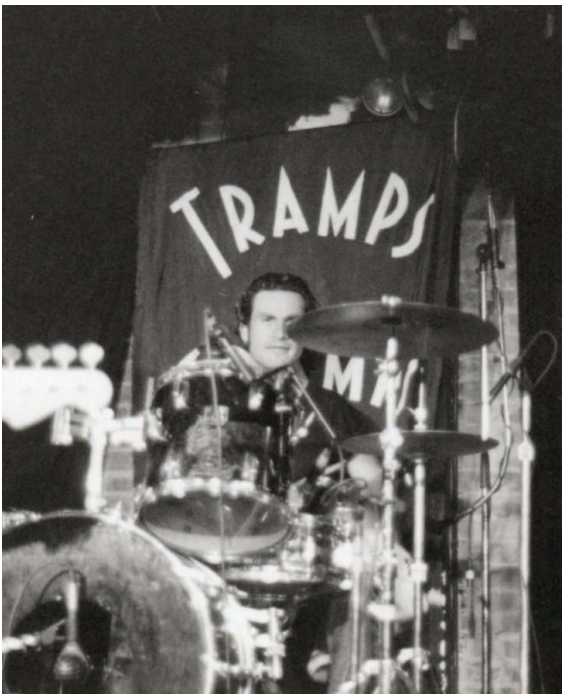
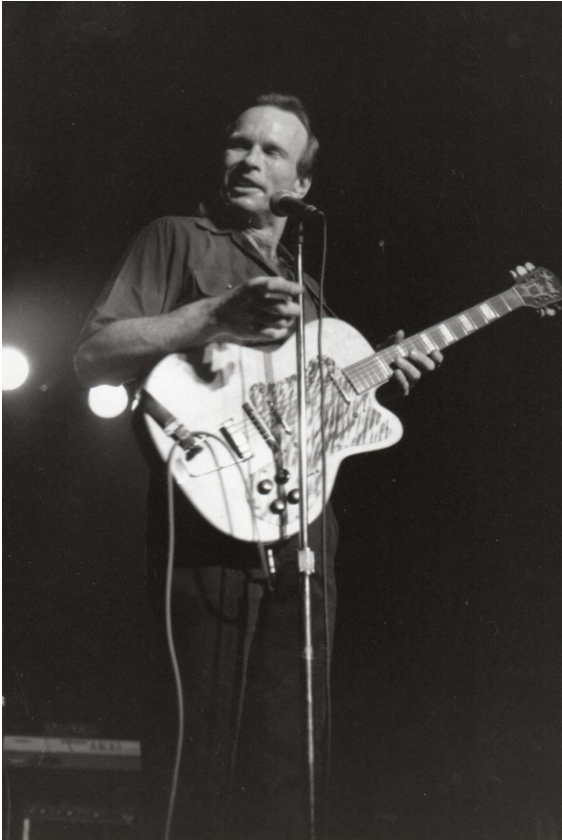
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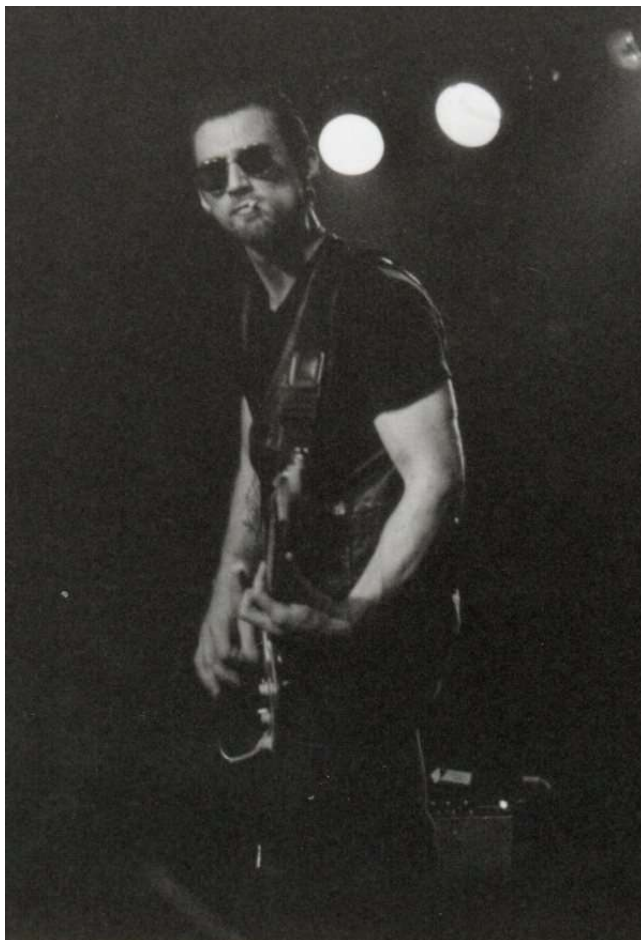
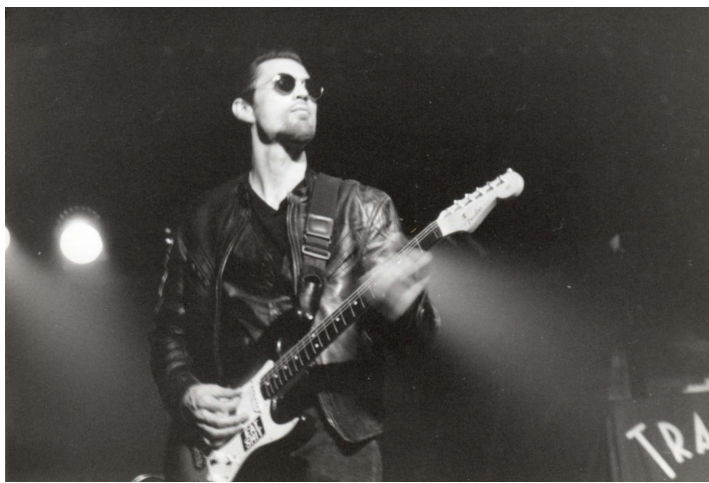
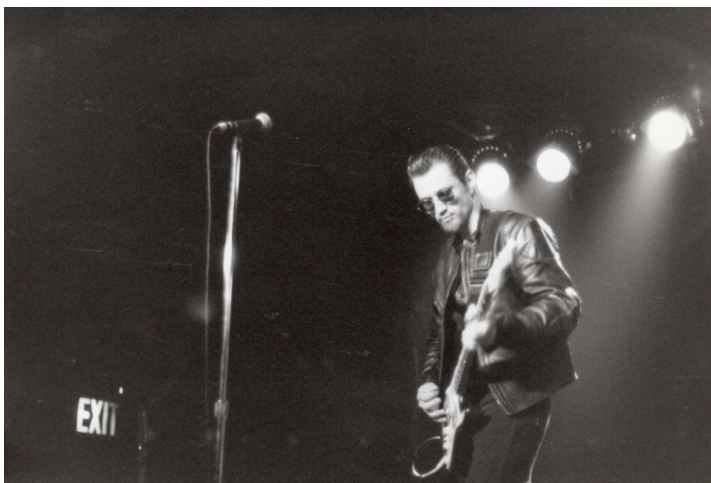
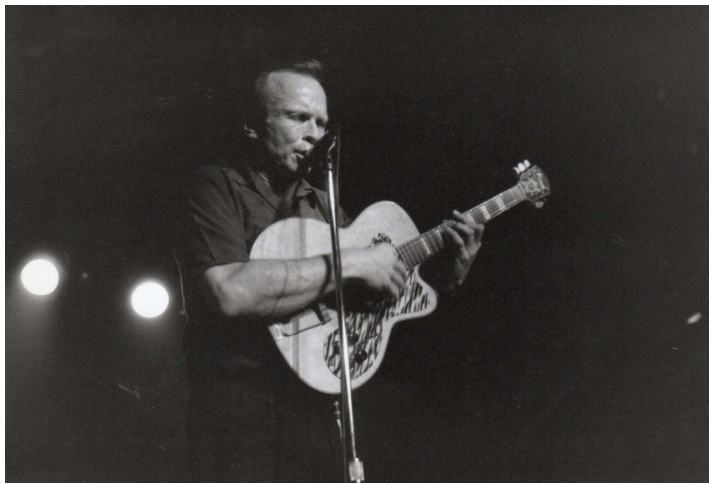
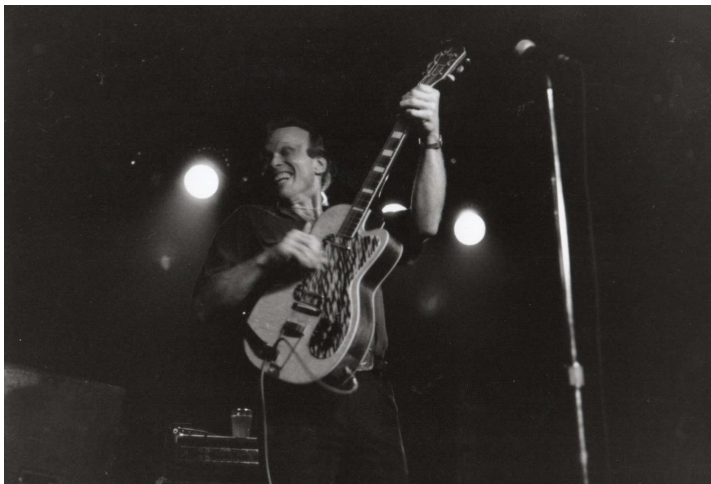
New York Times 5/15/96

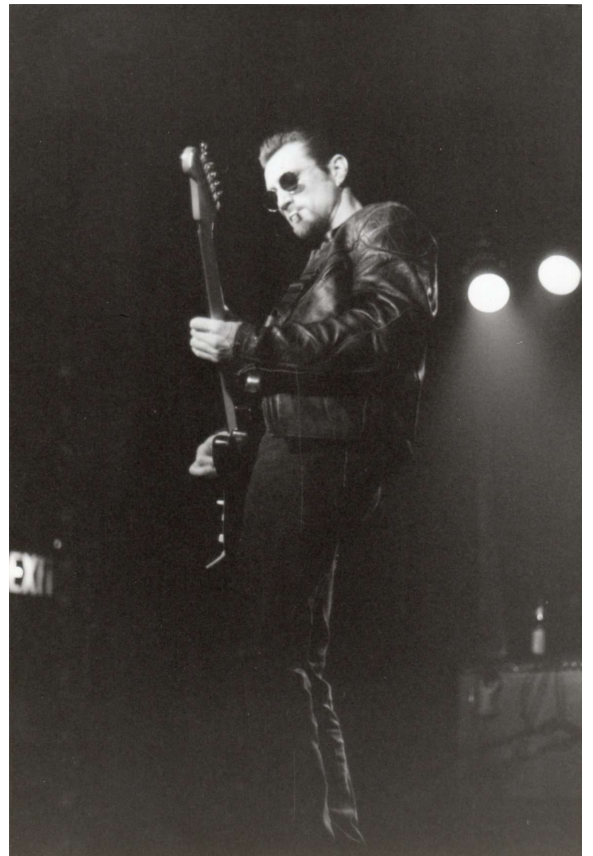
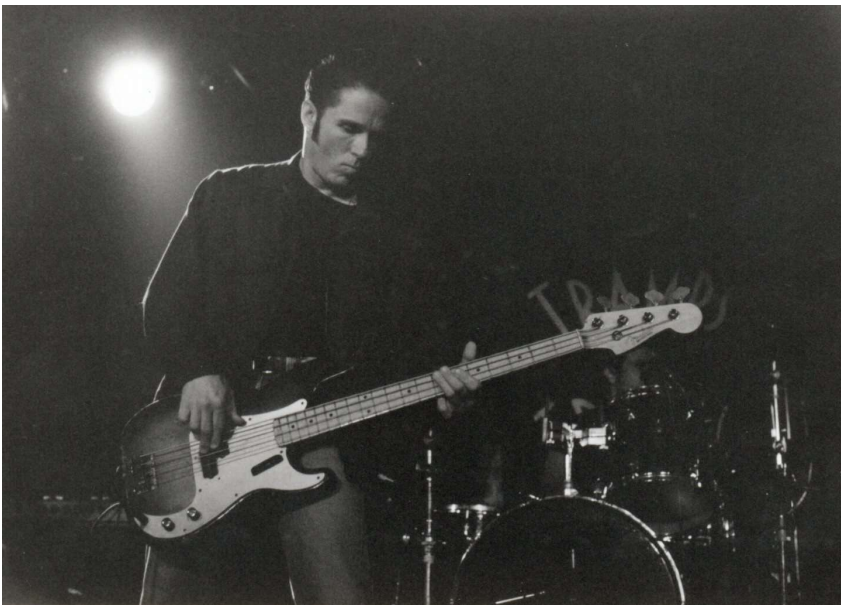
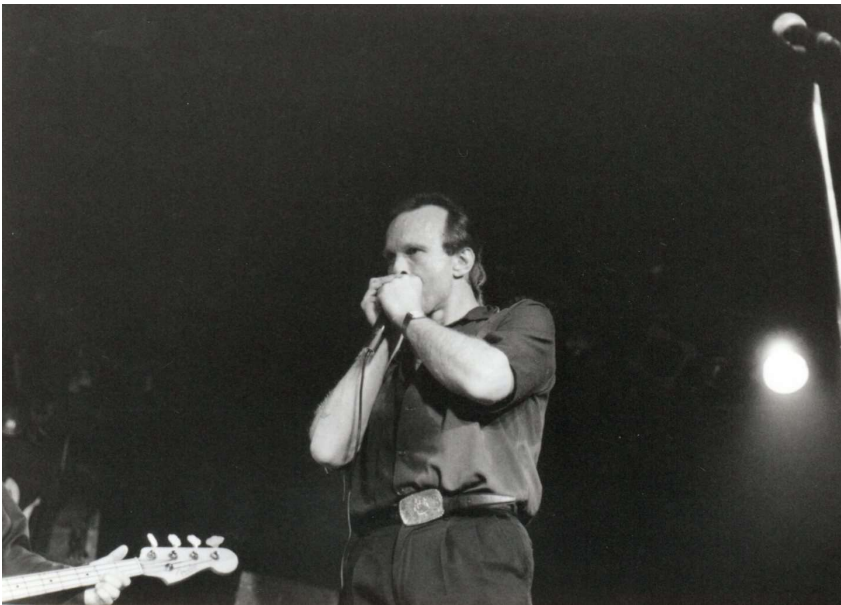
# The Blasters

New York City at Tramps May 14, 1995

Photos by Billy Davis







## Arts &amp; Leisure

Section 2



By NEIL STRAUSS

**With four Grammys,  
an Oscar and a hit  
record, rock's  
regular guy seems as  
relevant as ever.**

"Greatest Hits" album, Mr. Springsteen also recently completed a song for the Sean Penn film "The Crossing Guard" and wrote for and helped produce a forthcoming album by Joe Grushecky, a Pittsburgh rock musician. The thrill of playing blues guitar with the roots-rock band Blasters at a recent concert of theirs, he said, has led him to start "toying around with the idea of making a record that's centered around loud guitars." He has also been listening to the punk band Social Distortion and Wayne Kramer, the former guitarist with the proto-punk group MC5.

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**BACK ISSUE COPIES:** \$1 per issue in the U.S. Overseas \$2 per issue

- #1. Blastory part 1, James Intveld profile.
- #2. Phil Alvin interview Part 1, Dave Alvin's "Museum" tour review, Faultline Syncopaters profile.
- #3. Phil Alvin interview Part 2, complete Blasters Discography.
- #4. James Harman interview, Blasters 91 Finland tour.
- #5. Lee Allen tribute issue. Dave Alvin interview. Lee Allen profile. Phil Alvin Foothill club review.
- #6 Rockin Ronny Weiser interview, Bobby Mizzel & James Intveld Cd review, State of the Blasters today story.

# Phil Alvin + x = rock

## Mathematician brings Blasters to Herman's

By Steven Rosen

Denver Post Arts Writer

Phil Alvin can sing . . . and Phil Alvin can talk.

Man, can Phil Alvin talk! Not that you'll understand him. Not that I understand.

Alvin is bringing a 1995 version of his band, the now-legendary, pioneering roots-rock New Wave ravers, The Blasters, to Herman's Hideaway, 1578 S. Broadway, tomorrow night.

I had read that Alvin, 41, the group's powerful vocalist, had given up music and the band to get a doctorate in "set theory" mathematics.

So, during a telephone interview, I innocently asked what "set theory" is. I think he's still replying; I would have had to take my retirement before he could finish.

"Set theory in math is . . . the notion we have of collections of things," was an infinitesimally small portion of his answer. "What we do with language is isolate the collection of things. Mathematics is what made you say 'momma.' It's not arithmetic.

"If I say, 'red-headed people of Long Beach are stupid,' let's look at the collections there," he continued. "Red-headed people in Long Beach may be different than red-headed people of Long Beach . . ."

Sounds good to me. At one point Alvin complained, "I can't talk to nobody because no one understands what I'm saying." So let's talk about music instead.

The Blasters, from Los Angeles, tore onto the national music scene in 1982 with a self-titled album featuring songs that recalled the rockabilly and jump-blues of eras past. Except they also had the exciting,

revved-up tempos of punk rock.

Alvin sang in a booming yet suave voice influenced by Big Joe Turner and Wynonie Harris. His brother, Dave, played smokin' lead guitar and wrote some wonderfully evocative tunes. Blasters' tunes like "American Music," "Marie Marie," "Border Radio" were, and remain, riveting.

After 1985's "Hard Line" disc, the Blasters imploded. Dave temporarily joined the band X and then started an artistically rewarding solo career. Phil released one solo disc in 1986 and then wandered away from the music business to study math. (He did keep the Blasters name alive with a group that occasionally toured.)

Last year he returned with "County Fair 2000," an adventurous if meandering solo expedition through all sorts of American pop-music stylings.

And he has his new Blasters — without brother Dave but with bassist Johnny Bazz, drummer Jerry Angel and guitarist-vocalist James Intveld.

He promises a show of Blasters' greatest hits, new and old. "What you are getting is a ---- Blasters' show," Alvin said. "All I want to do is play music and this is the best Blasters. This sounds great.

"I don't want to say it's better than ever — the times are the times," he continued. "But this is so good; everybody's playing good. I sang three octaves on C and I'm 41 years old.

"I couldn't believe it. I drove around all night."

The show begins at 9:30 p.m. Tickets are \$13 in advance and \$14 tomorrow. For more information, call 777-5840.

Denver Post 2/17/95 submitted by H. Dubinski

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