

ISSUE #97

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

Celebrating 30 Years 1994 — 2024

OCTOBER 2024

Phil Alvin's 30th Anniversary of County Fair 2000

Latest News: Can't Steal My Fire: The Songs of David Olney was released on Oct. 25 on New West Records. Dave Alvin performs STEAL MY THUNDER with the Rick Holmstrom Trio. Other artists include Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Buddy Miller. II III Tonight I'll Go Down Swingin': A Tribute to Don Heffington (Nine Mile Records) was released on Oct. 18 and features Dave's performance of AVENUE C. Musicians backing him include Michael Jerome, drummer for The Third Mind; guitarist Greg Leisz; and bassist Bob Glaub. Other artists on the 20-song album include Tony Gilkyson, Jackson Browne, and Peter Case. Proceeds from the album will go to Sweet Relief, which helps musicians with their medical bills. II III Dave Alvin has provided a blurb for Down on the Corner: Adventures in Busking and Street Music by Cary Baker. The book will be published on Nov. 12 by Jawbone Press. For his blurb, Dave writes: "Reading Cary Baker's excellent book on busking brought back memories of when I was in The Blasters and how our band arguments usually ended one of two ways: either with fists and tears or with my brother Phil loudly proclaiming that he was the only guy in the group who could walk outside and make a living by singing on street corners. Cary's exhaustive research and passionate reporting show not only why my brother was proud to have been a busker, but it also makes a solid case why busking is as much part of the history of American roots music as record labels, juke joints, and lost highways." Dave told The Blasters Newsletter: "I wrote about when Phil used to do that as a teenager and he got arrested in San Francisco." (((cont. page 2)))

In This Issue: Phil Alvin on County Fair 2000, Dave's AMA Lifetime Achievement Award, and World Cafe concert review.

Latest News (Cont. from page 1.) - The Third Mind has scheduled some West Coast shows for December 2024. They have a live album prepared for release on Yep Roc Records in the spring. **II III** Dave is among the musicians interviewed in Love at the Five and Dime: The Songwriting Legacy of Nanci Griffith by Brian T. Atkinson. The book was published Sept. 9 by Texas A&M University Press. Of her, Dave says, "I admired the way Nanci survived an incredibly difficult business as a woman on her own terms. She never sold out. Nanci had a passion for songs and songwriters." Nanci, who died at 68 in 2021, and Dave occasionally shared a concert bill and visited Cambodia together in 2001. -~~am~~

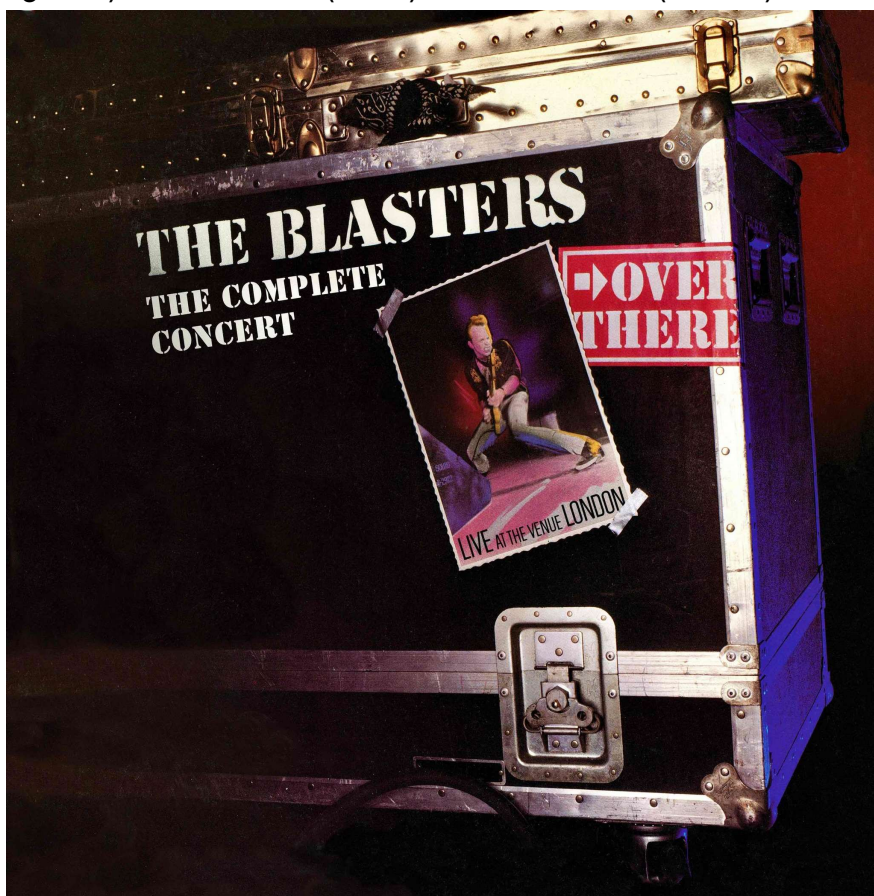
New Release: Over There: Live at the Venue, London The Complete Concert by The Blasters.

On November 29, 2024 Liberation Hall Records releases a limited pressing of the complete Blasters 1982 Live at the Venue concert on a double-vinyl LP for Black Friday Record Store Day. CD and digital editions will be released December 6.

Originally released by Slash/Warner Bros. as a six-song EP in October 1982, this newly expanded edition is a gale-force definition of the Blasters' full power on stage. 'Over There' is now available for the first time at the concert's full length, adding 13 unreleased tracks to join 10 previously released tracks. The band's lineup comprises Phil Alvin (vocals, guitar), Dave Alvin (lead guitar), John Bazz (bass), Bill Bateman (drums), Gene Taylor (piano), Steve Berlin (baritone saxophone), and Lee Allen (tenor saxophone).

The original recordings were produced by the Blasters with associate producer Art Fein and engineered by Pat Burnette.

This expanded edition reissue is produced by the Blasters with Chris Morris and Antone DeSantis. Morris also contributes a new essay, which complements the original sleeve notes by former Slash Magazine editor Claude Bessy.



30th Anniversary re-release of Phil Alvin's *County Fair 2000* on Liberation Hall Records on vinyl and CD

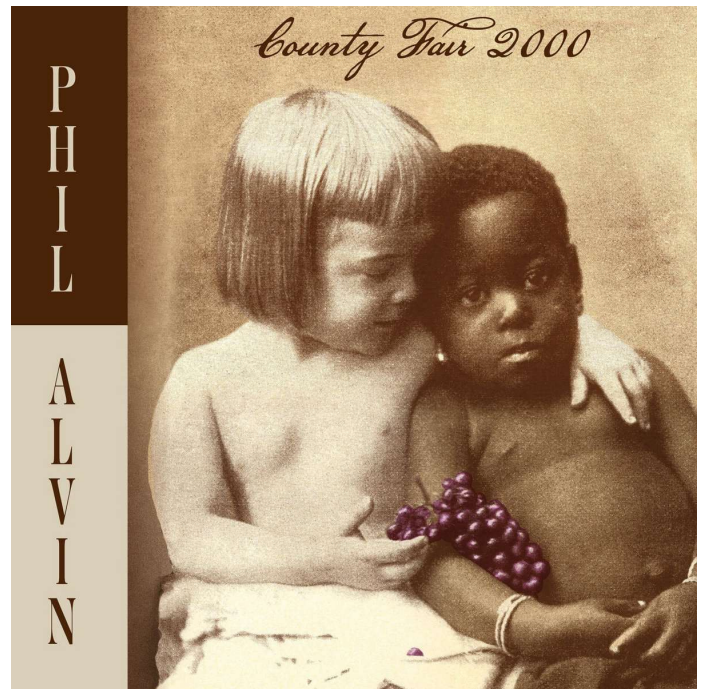
By Billy Davis

On Sept. 20, 2024, Liberation Hall Records re-released Phil Alvin's 1994 HighTone Records solo album County Fair 2000. The 2024 Liberation Hall release on CD and digital also includes a vinyl album version in a gatefold sleeve. The vinyl version deletes 4 songs ["The Terror," "Oh Doctor," "Old Rugged Cross," and "Ankh"] and shortens "What's The Reason..." due to time limitations. The full 55 minutes are heard on the CD and digital.

This is the fifth release by Liberation Hall of Blasters/Phil Alvin albums. Their press release says this about County Fair 2000: "Chiefly inspired by popular music from the 1920s-1940s. Singer-songwriter-musicologist Alvin drew from the deep well of American blues, jazz (both hot and avant garde), R&B, gospel, and early 20th century popular songs for the collection's material. He is joined on the album by the 1994 edition of the Blasters and an illustrious lineup of guests: Cesar Rosas of Los Lobos, Chicago blues ace Billy Boy Arnold, New Orleans' Dirty Dozen Brass Band, blues shouter Top Jimmy of Top Jimmy & the Rhythm Pigs, and L.A. street musician Jerome Bowman."

Chris Morris wrote the liner notes and details the making of the album through interviews with James Intveld, who was the Blasters' lead guitarist at the time, John Bazz, Blasters manager Greg Lewerke, and Ed Boswell who designed the CD's art.

Morris touched on the notion that Phil Alvin conceived of this as a concept album with spoken word narratives that linked all the songs as a story. Some of that dialog did appear on the album, with Phil conversing with bluesman Billy Boy Arnold on I'M GONNA WRECK YOUR V8 FORD and



with Mary Franklin on WHAT'S THE REASON I'M NOT PLEASING YOU and then some bits of Fayard Nicholas and Eddie Baytos.

In 1994 I did two interviews with Phil Alvin. One in preparation for the album and one after it was completed. What's most interesting is to hear from Phil what his intention was, assuming a record company like HighTone would let him have complete control.

Interview Part 1 [1994]

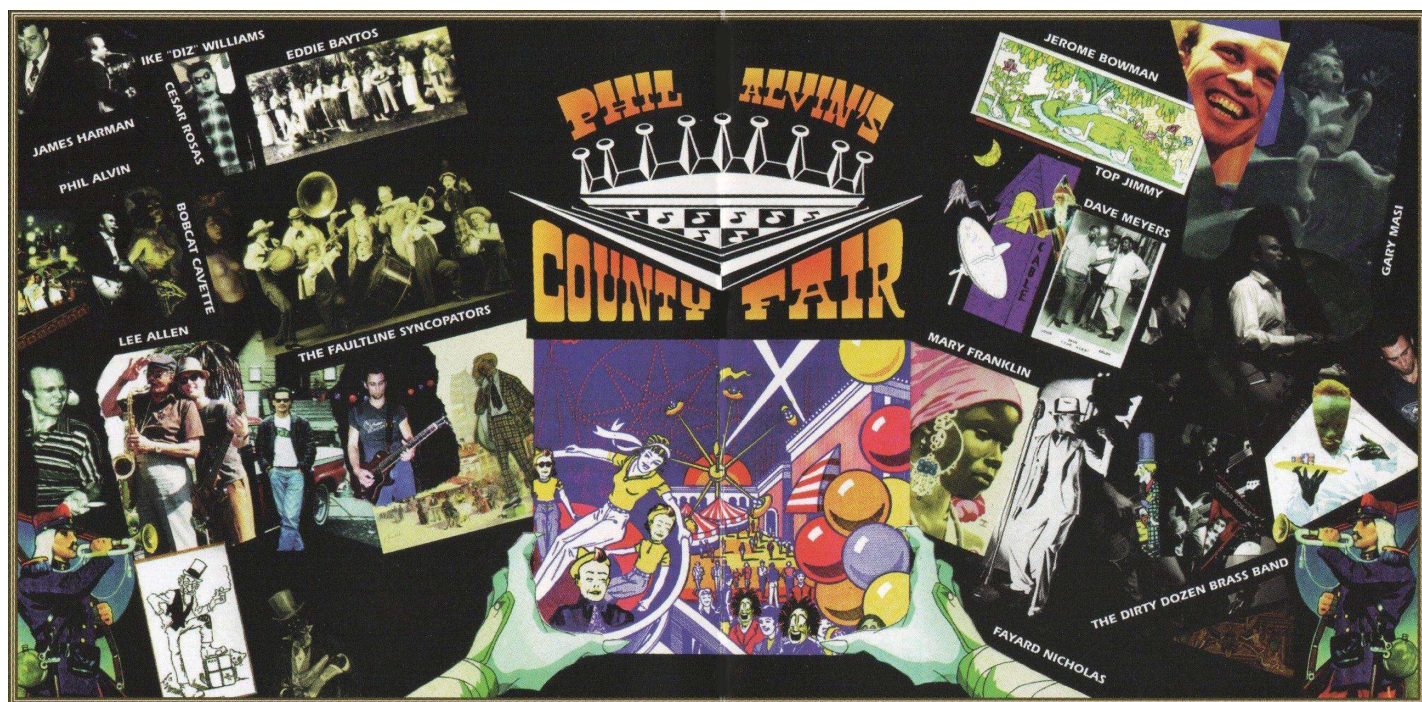
Phil just returned home after recording the Dirty Dozen Brass band in New Orleans.

Phil Alvin: This solo record has so many projects in one thing. I have a ten-piece band, the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. I've got like 30 different musicians on there, and man it just kicks! I'm learning and I've got much more respect now for Sun Ra, Fletcher Henderson or Duke Ellington and anybody who ever had more than four guys in his band, Geez!!

AM: What songs can we expect to hear?

PHIL ALVIN: When I set the budget at HighTone, I told them what songs would be on side A and side B. They told me there are no sides anymore on these things called CDs. So, I said, "Ok, if you took away the sides, I will take away the tracks. I'm gonna do sort of a radio show or a play - with characters talking and songs coming out of it."

It will start off at the end of a Blasters' rehearsal over at Johnny's [Bazz] house and his kids are gonna say, "Ahh, Uncle Phil, why don't you play another song," and Johnny will say, "Why don't you play that old 'County Fair' tune - because I'm taking the kids to the county fair tomorrow." The first Blaster song is called COUNTY FAIR. It's a great tune, sort of



half-written by me and half by J.E. Mainer and it's probably an old minstrel song from ancient times.

Johnny then says, "Phil, you're taking the van? Do you have enough gas in there?" Of course I don't, and I run out of gas. Then, Billy Boy Arnold drives by and says, "Hey, can I help you out, friend?" and I'll say, "No I'm just priming my carburetor here. I seemed to have sucked up some scum off my engine." He'll say, "Speaking of suckin' up scum, ain't that you, Phil Alvin, who was out with my girl last night?" And he says, "You know, Phil, I ain't a violent kind of a guy, but brother, I can't just let this go down. So I'm gonna have to wreck your V-8."

So we go into a tune that was Bob Hite's [of Canned Heat] favorite song - one of the records I was able to salvage from Bob Hite's collection. It's a very rare record that no one has ever heard. It's a tune by Peetie Wheatstraw and Blind Teddy Darby called I'M GONNA WRECK YOUR V-8 FORD.

Next, he's gonna drive me down to THE BLUE LINE, which is a new train we have here in L.A., 'cause I'm trying to get over to my girlfriend CORRINE'S house. I then follow her from New Orleans to Chicago to Harlem showing her the different kind of jazz styles. I sing a tune called THE BLUE LINE that I wrote. Then I'm walking, I get tired and I fall asleep. The ghost of music past and the ghost of music future is gonna come visit me. I'll say, "Where's the ghost of music present?" They will say, "There has never been any music present, 'cause all you ever have is music past and music future [laughs]." Because singing is always in the present. The ghost will be played by James Harman.

A guy that almost inspired this whole project is named Jerome Bowman. He is a phenomenal guitar player and songwriter that I met in Pasadena playing on the streets. He stands straight up and plays like me. They call him "The Scarecrow," a strong, lanky guy that sings loud. He and I are gonna do a lot of stuff with James Intveld.

Sun Ra's Arkestra is going to be on one song, Joey Altruda from "Jumpin' Joey" is doing all the charting and arrangements of all the large band songs. I can't do that. I have already been down to New Orleans and



Jerome Bowman

cut an original song called TURNIN' BLUES INTO GOLD. It's a trio between Gregory Davis a trumpet player leader of the Dirty Dozen Brass band, James Intveld and me. I'm just stoked over that song.

AM: Tell us about your L.A. jazz band called the Faultline Syncopators.

PHIL ALVIN: The Faultline Syncopators are doing a song with Fayard Nicholas called LOW DOWN RHYTHM. They're also gonna play on two of the Harlem numbers. My real intention is, with Joey Altruda and these guys, is to make a lot of good two-beat charts and get kids from colleges, good players and link them up with some of the older and more experienced players to make sure that two-beat music will be handed down properly. The one thing that has always bothered me about horn arrangements in post-1936 music is that they go for 4/4 time - It's a very lazy thing. The hotter music called "Hot Jazz" is 2/4 time. You count one-two, one-two, one-two. This makes players have to really work. If you have four beats you can take a long time to phrase stuff. Now, music has a tradition of four beats, it's difficult to sell horn bands to youthful, energetic people. The money from this solo record will help in getting some charts up, which is what Joey and I are doing for the Faultline Syncopators. We're gonna play two-beat music to dig it into your ground. This is a side project that I hope to do for the rest of my life."

Looking back now on County Fair 2000, I think this is the peak of Phil Alvin's talent. I give HighTone Records a lot of credit in allowing Phil to make a record of so many styles of music that he loves. It's hard to believe that anyone could find anything wrong with this collection. But immediately following its release, Phil Alvin had many complaints with how HighTone records edited the recordings. The music business dynamic of artist vs. record company is a scenario we've heard time and time again. I'm sure we can understand that both sides of that partnership have their reasons. Often that artistic conflict results in great art. In Phil Alvin's case, I think that hearing how the artist envisioned the project, even if in the end it's not to his liking, is a worthwhile look into the creative process. This next interview with Phil was conducted in the spring of 1995 after County Fair 2000 was released.

Interview Part 2 [Spring 1995]

PHIL ALVIN ON THE MAKING OF COUNTY FAIR 2000

Phil: "I was pretty upset with a few things. They cut out most of the dialogue between songs. Fayard Nicholas was supposed to introduce the record and I begged to get the Fayard Nicholas and the Billy Boy Arnold part in. I got the most I could get. For my experience of making records, I've gotten more on this record the way I wanted it, than any record before that I was involved in. So that in itself is a plus.

I wrote my own liner notes but the record company didn't put them on.

My liner notes was just a paragraph of where our music came from and that it was an echo of its birth.

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 Klesmere bands. We are still here at the swap meet at the County Fair.

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,' and I was convinced.

AM: James Harman didn't make it on the album as originally planned?

Phil: 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 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 see Corrine, which happens in SATELLITE MAN. 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.' Which leads into KEEP IN TOUCH. I literally did write a little minstrel sketch.

THE BLASTER SONGS

COUNTY FAIR - The last version of this song 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 twenty versions of COUNTY FAIR. Was J.E. Mainer the writer? 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. But really no one knew how to play it until Lightnin' Hopkins did. So most of the money generated was because of the way Lightnin' played it.

In the liner notes the credited musicians is wrong. Actually Dave Carroll is the drummer. The rest of the album is Jerry Angel.



Larry Sloven and Bruce Bromberg of HighTone with Phil

THE BLUE LINE – B. Cavette is listed inaccurately as a songwriter on this song. Bobcat Cavette is a good friend of Lee Allen and I. He is a saxophone player from New Orleans. I asked him to write a line for THE BLUE LINE. So, when the record company was asking me who were the writers on the songs, I put down Bobcat Cavette because I was assuming he would write a line. He never wrote a line. 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. At the session, James Intveld and I 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.

We cut the track at Cesar Rosas' place and 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 to the last line and I realize that I'm going to have to go way up there. I hit it! It was the first time in my life, and I thought it was great. I'm 41 and life keeps getting better and better.

KEEP IN TOUCH - I wanted Jerome Bowman to sing it, he wrote it but the record company said this is a Phil Alvin record. So, I tried me and Jerome singing a duet. Then they said, 'We think this is a poor song, we want you to sing it alone.' They wouldn't take it any other way. Jerome Bowman is singing in the background and plays lead guitar on my Epiphone – the one I have on the cover of our Rollin Rock album. Dave Carroll sings background vocals but isn't credited. James plays standup bass and I play my L4 guitar.

I first met Jerome Bowman when I was driving down Colorado Boulevard in Pasadena and I looked in my rear view mirror and I saw 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 did for 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 told him that, "He and I are the only two minstrels in the country.

And you know, it is 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 immediately called HighTone to get him on the record. He was playing as a street musician but had recorded in Europe and made some records under the name Dr. Counterpunk.

THE DUET SONGS



Billy Boy Arnold 1994

WRECK YOUR V-8 FORD (with Billy Boy Arnold) - For years, I wanted to record this 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 Peetie Wheatstraw on piano] done in 1932. So, Bob and I were talking about the lyrics. The problem with the song was Blind Teddy Darby tears down his girlfriend's car - much too violent an image to be projected nowadays. So, we thought to have one guy tear another guy's car down. I wanted to do this one for Bob Hite. I wish I would have put that dedication in the liner notes.

I met Billy Boy Arnold for the first time when Art Fein called me up and said he was having Billy Boy on his television show [Lil' Art's Poker Party 6/23/93] and would I come out and play guitar behind him. [Ed. Note - this show is available on YouTube.] I said, 'Sure enough, I'll be right there!' Billy was pristine. He looked even younger than me for Christ sake! He sounded fantastic!

I wanted to record this in Chicago, so I called my friend Marcus Johnson, who I put down as associate producer, and said I needed a studio. He set up Chess Studios. I sent Billy Boy a tape of the song and he got it two days before the session.

On the first day at the studio

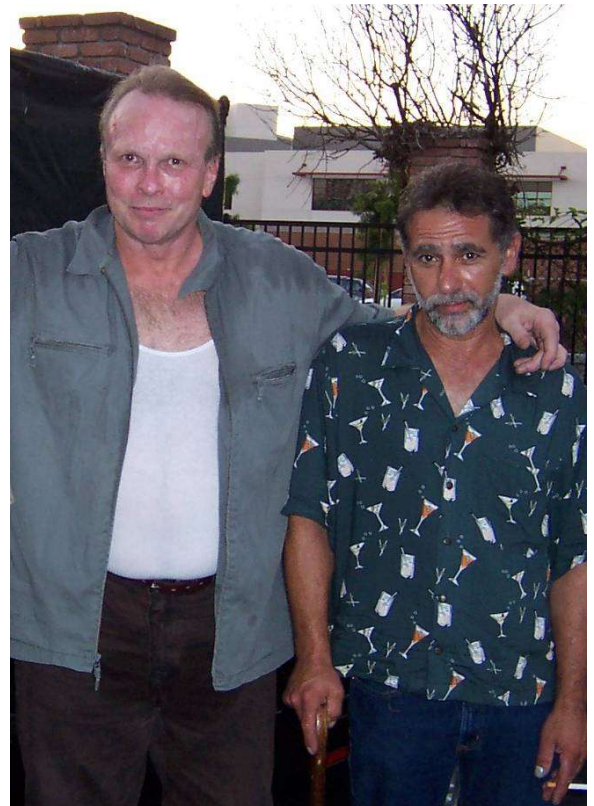


Dave Myers

Dave Myers [played with Muddy Waters, Junior Wells and Little Walter] cut the bass guitar and drums. When Dave Myers touched that guitar there wasn't any doubt in my mind who arranged all of Little Walter's and all of Junior Wells' songs. Then he picked up THE Fender bass that had been used so many times in that studio and I was just in heaven. Phil Thomas cut the drum track. He was one of Muddy Waters' early drummers and also Jimmy Reed's.

Meanwhile Billy Boy and I rearranged the original and then we came back the next day to record our parts. That's the only song that I've ever put out a lead guitar solo but it got lost in the mixing. I was devastated. They told me, 'There is nothing you can do about it.'

OH, DOCTOR – (with Gary Masi and Cesar Rosas) – It's 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 brokenhearted. 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



Phil Alvin and Gary Masi

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 all these years, so I figured I've got to get Masi and rewrite those joke lines, so we did. I think it's the best Jimmy Reed song he didn't write [laughs]. There are a lot of guitars on that song; my Epiphone, Gary Masi's Kay, and Cesar on his Stratocaster, James played one of Cesar's basses, but they tuned it up to played it like a guitar. We cut it at Cesar Rosas' house. It's a great little studio he has in his garage, but it's a full studio.

TURNIN' BLUES INTO GOLD – (with James Intveld and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band.) James and I wrote BLUES INTO GOLD in an hour and a half in the French Quarter. I said, 'Let's write a tune to play with the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. The theme was to "just figure out some blues that you got, now you're out on the street trying to make some money on it, turning it into gold." James had a couple of ideas, so we went back after we had coffee and just cut it right there. The Dirty Dozen Brass Band were great. 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 L4 guitar 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)
I went down to New Orleans in particular to meet Gregory Davis. He is the leader of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band. Sun Ra and I were going to do this record originally, but Sun Ra died. I told Gregory, Let's do a medley of three songs in tribute to Sun Ra. "The Old Rugged Cross" is one of the dirges, you go down to the second line to the funeral to the cemetery to bury the body. That will fade into ANKH, one of Sun Ra's pieces. Then we finish with "Didn't He Ramble," the joyous music which you play coming back from the funeral.

However, something happened. I flew in with my little banjo, this was March 14, 1994 and I called Gregory Davis, who was crying because Danny Barker had just died. Barker 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 and 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 friends with the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, so they could no longer think of Sun Ra. So, when I walked in the next morning into 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 we recorded that. So that's how it became a tribute to Danny Barker and Sun Ra. The next day we cut the happier part, "Didn't He Ramble."

Phil Alvin: "For my experience of making records, I've gotten more on this record the way I wanted it, than any record before that I was involved in. So that in itself is a plus."

James and I went to 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 recorded in the streets of New Orleans, on March 17, 1994. It was more than . . . I can't express what a scene it was. It was phenomenal!

AHNK – We recorded that back in L.A. at Travis Dickerson's studio. I got Ike "Diz" Williams to play trumpet. He was one of Lee Allen's best friends, He played with Ray Charles' band and with the Blasters many times when we were doing Joe Turner's shows. Lee Allen was dying through the recording of this whole record, so he couldn't play. But I stopped over to see Lee as I was on my way to the studio to cut ANKH. I was originally going to do ANKH as a piano solo by me before getting Diz to play on it. Diz heard it through once and we did it. It was great!

MR. SATELLITE MAN – (with Mary Franklin and Top Jimmy) – In my original story 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.

At the first session for this song, I played piano and I strummed an acoustic guitar to give Top Jimmy a rhythm to sing to. Mary Franklin came in a few days later. None of the singers were in the studio singing together, but it worked out great. I took the whole thing and went over to another studio and put the Blasters on it. James Intveld found a mandolin hanging on the wall of the studio, so he played that. I already had my guitar part on it. James was trying to see if he could have more instruments on the record than me [laughs]. We're still not sure. It's close.

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 '40s and '50s was Mary McGill and she had some R&B hits. She wrote a lot of stuff for Murray Adams.

I knew Top Jimmy a long time. His mother, Mary, was a good friend of mine when I was an usher at the Chinese theater. I used to let her kid in for free all the time. That was Top Jimmy.

THE FAULTLINE SYNCOPATORS SONGS

WHAT'S THE REASON I'M NOT PLEASIN' YOU – (with Mary Franklin) The song was actually written by Fats Waller. When Fats Waller needed money he would go and sell his songs. So that's why there are four names credited as songwriters. I wrote the whole second section of that, but they didn't credit me. The original version was done with Jimmy Grier's Orchestra who were the Biltmore Hotel Orchestra in New York. It was originally sung by Pinkie Tamlin.

THE TERROR – The original recording was by Cliff Jackson & His Crazy Kats. Cliff Jackson was a brilliant arranger in the tradition of Fletcher Henderson. They only made one recording session and it was very badly recorded. They were from Harlem. I'm playing banjo on here and James Intveld plays bass on all the Faultline Syncopator songs.

LOW DOWN RHYTHM – (with Fayard Nicholas and Eddie Baytos) – This is another song that Bob Hite introduced me to. One day Bob Hite took me and James Harman out record store shopping. Bob said, [in Phil's best gravelly voice imitation of Bob Hite] "You guys don't know shit about record collecting. Let me show this to you. I'll let you go through all the records first and then I'll show you what you missed out on." So, me and James pulled records that we thought were the best and then Bob followed behind us. When we got back to Bob Hite's house, he said, "It was

Harlem today and you guys didn't get it. You missed it." So, what did Bob Hite have? He had records of THE TERROR, WHAT'S THE REASON I'M NOT PLEASIN' YOU and a tune called LOW DOWN RHYTHM, by some goofball band called Lloyd Keating & His Music. So, every one of the Faultline Syncopator tunes, is a tune that Bob Hite found on that day after I went through the box and missed every one of them [laughs].

I had known Eddie Baytos of the Nervous Brothers for a long time. He is a great dancer and musician and is on a lot of records. He is from New Orleans and won a Cable Ace award for choreography and dancing in music videos. 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 said he was talking to Fayard Nicholas the other day. I immediately stopped him and said "Eddie!, Eddie!, Talk to Fayard for me. Let's get him on the record!!" After I met him, I have to say he is just the greatest in the world, he is a ball of joy at 80 years old. A great human being.

I wanted Fayard 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.'



Fayard Nicholas

THE PHIL SOLO SONGS

THAT THING - 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 L4 Gibson on this.

SHE LOVES SO GOOD - That originally was by Frankie "Half Pint" Jaxon. He performed in drag, he made Little Richard look like a stevedore. A guy who helped me write a couple of lines is named "White Boy James," 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 – Another song by Frankie “Half Pint” Jaxon who did a beautiful version with a clarinet. In fact, originally I wanted Woody Allen playing clarinet and a piano player singing. “Corrine” was one of those songs that spurred many others with that gal’s name in the title. “Buffalo Gals” was another song that branched off from the same family with “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. Now, I can put them back in one song again.

STARLIGHT- There are two songs inside of my arrangement. Both of them are 17th and 18th century spirituals. The first is a song called I KNOW MOONLIGHT by Carl Sandburg that I heard on the 1962 Decca album Cowboy Songs and Negro Spirituals. 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.

I played the Marxophone on this. [Ed Note - A fretless zither played via a system of metal hammers. Sounding somewhat like a mandolin, the Marxophone's timbre is also reminiscent of various types of hammered dulcimers.] 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 one on the planet.

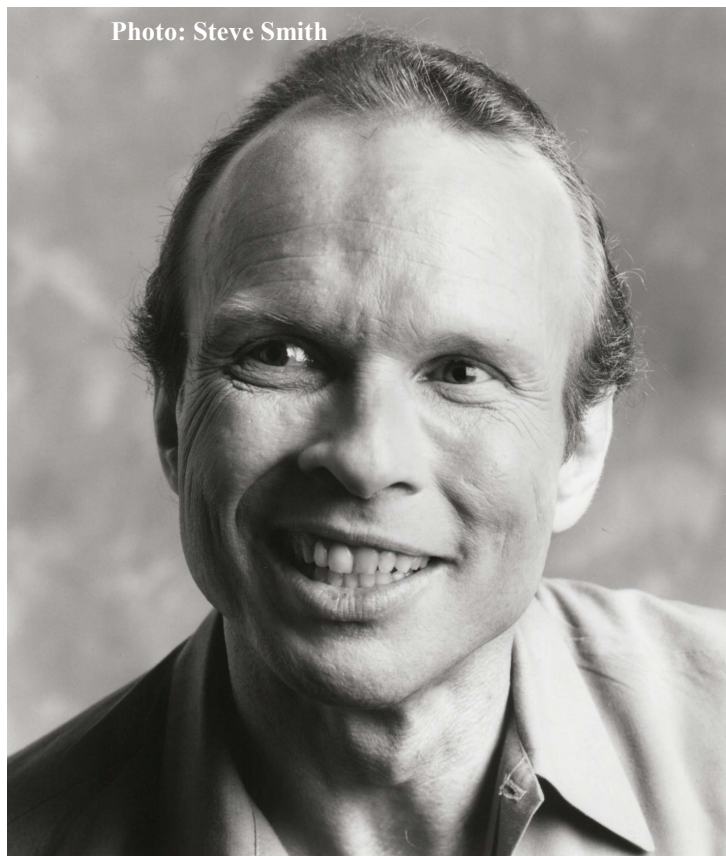


At first, I did the song without the Marxophone. The whole album had already been submitted for mastering, but luckily they hadn’t started yet. It dawned on me that maybe Bruce Bromberg [HighTone Records] might want to play on the record. So, I wheeled the conversation around to how nice it would be to re-record STARLIGHT with the Marxophone and Bruce playing guitar on it. After a couple of beers, he went for it, so I got to get the Marxophone on there.

The American Music: The HighTone Records Story box set, released in 2006 included a booklet history about HighTone written by Lee Hildebrand. HighTone records owner Larry Sloven commented: "HighTone released one CD by Phil Alvin, 1994's self-produced County Fair 2000, which created nightmares for the label both while it was being made and after. At one point during the sessions, the singer lost his wallet containing money HighTone had advanced him to pay the musicians. And during a meeting at HighTone's Oakland office following the album's release, Phil noticed publicity photos the company had printed, had a reversed image of his face."

"It just totally freaked him out," Sloven says of the error. "He felt it was some kind of bad karma that could never be rectified. Phil really got going, and you couldn't get him to stop talking. Large parts of it involved Phil's theories of music and mathematics that went over the heads of us regular folk. Phil directed much of his ranting at an intern who had just started working for us that week. She disappeared, and we never heard from her again."

Photo: Steve Smith



PHIL ALVIN

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1994-1995 The County Fair 2000 Tour

There never was Phil Alvin County Fair 2000 solo tour, but the Blasters of that time did tour and play some songs from the album. The Blasters were Phil Alvin, John Bazz, James Intveld and Jerry Angel. Jerry Angel joined The Blasters on June 17, 1994 for a show at West Hollywood's House of Blues, replacing David Carroll as the new Blasters drummer. This was during the six-month period when County Fair 2000 was being recorded so, nothing new was heard in at that show. But when the Blasters played the House of Blues again in October they played some songs from the album. Phil introduced COUNTY FAIR by saying: "The Blasters have a new album coming out but they're calling it a Phil Alvin album." THE BLUE LINE was next, featuring a duet with James Intveld. Both up-tempo rock-

ers stayed in the Blasters' set until the end of 1995. In a rare appearance, Phil brought Jerome Bowman on stage to play a song that would be heard on the County Fair 2000 album. Phil said, "This is a song written by one of the best singers in Los Angeles and I say that in great egotism, Jerome "The Scarecrow" Bowman. We sang it in a duet on the record, but they yanked it and made me sing it alone." They sang KEEP IN TOUCH. Surprisingly Phil did it like the record with Bowman joining Phil only on the choruses. I would have liked to have heard the original arrangement that Phil intended for the record. Bowman sang lead on another song – a slow blues and was pretty impressive sounding just like Howlin' Wolf. What a talent – but what ever happened to the guy?

In November, Phil played a solo show at the Mint in Los Angeles. This might have been a perfect opportunity to try out some of the acoustic songs, but instead he invited up James Intveld and Jerry Angel to do some songs. They tried COUNTY FAIR with James on bass but they had some difficulty because James normally plays lead guitar on it. Phil had to carry all the guitar riffs, which made for a very interesting and stripped down version. Next, they did THE BLUE LINE with James picking up the guitar and then KEEP IN TOUCH. A really challenging one was WHAT'S THE REASON I'M NOT PLEASIN' YOU, which came out great just based on Phil's vocal performance.

In late December the band was in really good form playing San Francisco in front of the HighTone Records brass. COUNTY FAIR and BLUELINE were played and then OH DOCTOR in its only live appearance, What made Phil pull this one out just this one night? Could it be because his friend Gary Masi, who wrote it, drove Phil to the airport that day? Phil mentioned that to the audience. Phil always plays a song on harmonica in the Blasters' set along with SO LONG BABY GOOD-BYE. This one worked well in the Blasters' set.

In mid-1995 The Blasters had an offer to do a proper Blasters album on Private Music/On the Spot Records so the setlist shifted away from the County Fair 2000 songs as they added more Blasters-like songs. COUNTY FAIR and BLUELINE were the only songs that were occasionally played as 1995 came to a close.

The songs from County Fair 2000 that made it into the live sets only became possible because James Intveld was so much involved in the recording of the album, whether it was with the Blasters, or the Dirty Dozen Brass Band or the Faultline Syncopators.

James Intveld left the band on 12/31/95 and with him went the live era of County Fair 2000. . — ~~am~~

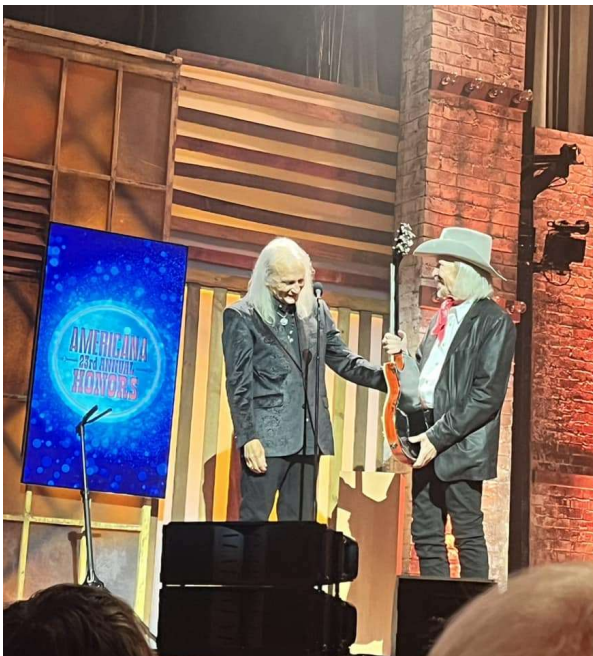
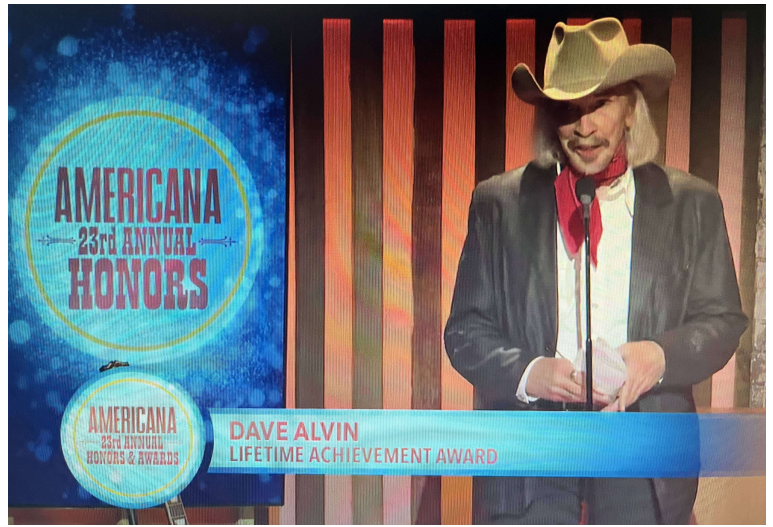
Dave Alvin receives a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Americana Music Association

On Sept. 18, 2024 the 23rd annual Americana Honors and Awards show was presented at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tenn. The three-and-a-half hour show featured performances and awards. View the complete show on YouTube. Lifetime Achievement Awards were presented to Dave Alvin, Dwight Yoakam, Shelby Lynne, Rev. Gary Davis, Don Was and The Blind Boys of Alabama.

Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore performed *FOURTH OF JULY* backed by the Americana house band consisting of Buddy Miller, Brian Owings, Don Was, Jerry Pentecost, Larry Campbell, and the McCrary Sisters.

Jimmie Dale Gilmore presented Dave with his Lifetime Achievement Award with this introduction: “It is my privilege to present the Americana Lifetime Achievement to my friend Dave Alvin. Dave and I have been friends for 30 years, but it was only in 2017 that we began working together. A collaboration that unexpectedly evolved into one of the high points in my musical career. I’m a few years older than Dave, but he has become one of my main teachers of American music and its history. His love and knowledge of American popular music seems boundless. Country, blues, bluegrass, folk, jazz, gospel, rock - all of it.

“Dave is an American troubadour – a songwriter, a storyteller, a poet. He’s also a wild blues blaster with a Stratocaster. He sings about America and Americans – about characters and places that he knows and reveres. From *MARIE MARIE*, now a Cajun zydeco standard, to his American classic *FOURTH OF JULY*, he celebrates regular life in America the way it really happens in ballads about *JOHNNY ACE* or *KING OF CALIFORNIA*, about the *BLIND OWL* and dozens more. He sings passionately and lovingly about ordinary people and their real lives. In his book *New Highway* he describes the subjects of his songs as heroes, losers, winners, the broken-hearted, the hopeful, the forgotten, the beloved, and especially, everyday folks just trying to survive day to day trapped between forces larger than themselves that they don’t quite understand. In other words he talks about regular people – Americans.





“When Dave was 13, he and his brother Phil started going to clubs in Downey, CA, and to the old Ash Grove in L.A. There he began learning from an array of American roots musicians, especially blues masters like Big Joe Turner and Lightnin’ Hopkins. Dave and Phil started their legendary band The Blasters in 1979. For over 40 years he has been writing songs, touring, producing records and playing the music he loves. He seems to remember everything –

every club, hotel, and town he has blasted through. In addition to his solo career Dave’s musical legacy includes being an essential member of legendary American bands including X, The Knitters, and the Pleasure Barons with Mojo Nixon. For all of this and so much more, I am proud to present this well-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award to Dave Alvin.”

Jimmie Dale continued: “I’m going to go off script for one second. Because this award is being given to all these people including the Blind Boys of Alabama and Dave Alvin, this has elevated my feeling for the term Americana.”

Dave walked out on the stage as Jimmie Dale hugged him and presented him with the award, which was a custom-painted Les Paul guitar.

Dave Alvin: “Thank you all. I always wanted a Les Paul [laughs]. I’d like to thank the Americana Music Association for this amazing and very unexpected honor. But I have to admit that I am not quite sure what the term Americana truly means. But perhaps the vagueness of the definition of Americana is a good thing.

“The fact that an oddball, outsider, bar room blues guitar basher, sad songwriter like me, who not only loves blues and rhythm and blues, but folk, rockabilly, country, and doo-wop, surf and psychedelic bands, as well as jazz from New Orleans to the avant garde, can find a home in the open-minded world of Americana – is an incredible thing that I treasure. Thank you.

“And you all know, it isn’t easy to survive in the music business, no matter what style or genre you may play. Now my secret to survival may sound sappy and corny, but through the years I have tried to live by one rule. That rule is to go where the love is. This means to surround yourself with people who love music the same way that you do. Surround yourself with people that love you and people that I love, no matter what the passing fads or tastes might be. That and always surround yourself with musicians that are better than you are [laughs]. That’s the big one.

“Anyway, I wouldn’t be who I am today and standing on this stage tonight without the inspiration, help and love of hundreds and hundreds of such people. I have to mention my parents Cass and Nana Alvin. My sister Mary and my big brother Phil. My very patient love Mary Zerkie. My managers Nancy Sefton and the late Shelly Heber. My lawyer David Wykoff – [laughs] that’s where the love is, and my accountant, Debra Cronin. I have to thank my cous-

ins Donna Dixon, and Mike Keller. I have to thank the poet Gerald Locklin, and blues titans Big Joe Turner, Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson, T-Bone Walker and Lee Allen, who taught me everything - and when I screw up it ain’t their fault. I have to thank my wild hometown brothers the Blasters, my old pals the Knitters, and all the members of my bands – The All Nighters, The Guilty Men, The Guilty Women, The Guilty Ones and The Third Mind. I have to thank my dear genius, genius friends Greg Leisz, Christy McWilson, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Bobby Lloyd Hicks, Tom Russell and Bill Morrissey. I have to thank the two record labels that have given me the opportunity to grow and explore and make mistakes and make a fool out of myself. I have to thank Bruce Bromberg and Larry Sloven from High-Tone Records and Glenn Dicker and everyone at Yep Roc Records, my current label. I have to especially thank a guy that should be up here with me, my dear friend the late Chris Gaffney.

“So, wherever I am, I take those people with me. And in honor and tribute to all those family, friends, musicians, and so many others, I humbly accept this incredible Les Paul award. Thank you.”

Jimmie Dale Gilmore: “Congratulations, Dave. I’d like to tell something that Dwight Yoakam just told me backstage. He said Dave was the reason that he decided to come to this tonight. I’ll tell you that Dwight and I were choking up when he said that. He meant it.”

Later in the program Dwight Yoakam was also presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award. He started his speech with comments about Dave: “Jimmie Dale mentioned something about me saying the only reason I came down here was because of Dave Alvin. I have something at home that is an urgent moment project, but the principal reason for me [to come] was that I wanted to see Dave. I wanted to see him get that Lifetime Achievement Award. He won that a long time ago before there was the term Americana. The Blasters were Americana music. Los Lobos was Americana music. The band X with John Doe and Exene were Americana music. But when I saw them give him a Les Paul, I said there are other reasons to come tonight [laughs].

“The other thing I wanted to say about Dave is that without Dave Alvin having come into my life, I don’t know where my journey would have taken me. I’m not sure that the twists and turns that lay in front of me would have turned corners into bright sunlight if it hadn’t been for Dave Alvin championing me. He came to the Palomino one night to see me and I owe him



a debt of gratitude forever.”

Dave Alvin commented on Facebook: “It was one week ago that the Americana Music Association gave me a Lifetime Achievement Award and this stunningly gorgeous, hand-painted, 1960 Classic Reissue Les Paul. The incredible painting was done by Steff Ratliff and I like how she playfully incorporated my quote about there being 'two types of folk music, loud and quiet and I play both' onto the body of the guitar. Words still fail me. There were so many dear friends, great musicians, patient road managers (Wally Hanley, Danny Bland and more), booking agents (Brad and Chris at Mongrel Music) to thank whom I nervously and absentmindedly left out of my acceptance speech. There wasn't time to thank all of the fans of my music who I owe for staying with me through all the years and all the stylistic shifts/adventures, and for keeping me creatively / spiritually / emotionally afloat. Nor was there time to mention all the smokey or non-smokey barrooms, the millions of highway miles, the interesting motel rooms, the torturous airports or the questionable food choices. All I can say is thank you to the Americana Music Association for this honor and especially sincere thanks to ALL of you friends/fans for coming along for the ride. Now let's go see what intriguing musical roads this remarkable Les Paul may lead us down.”

Dave Alvin told The Blasters Newsletter: “It was pretty emotional. It got very emotional with Dwight, after we hugged and I don't think we ever have done that. And the guitar award is amazing and was kept from me as a total secret. I knew I was going to have to play right after my acceptance speech, so I wanted to carry my Strat up with me. Jimmie Dale and my manager Nancy Sefton were in on the surprise that I was being presented with a \$3,000 Les Paul. So, while sitting backstage Nancy said: ‘Don't bring your guitar up with you.’ I argued that I needed something in my hands. Jimmie Dale jumped in and said: ‘Dave don't bring anything up there. They're gonna hand you an award that you have to hold up.’ So, I said okay. It's a beautiful 1960 reissue Les Paul. Drac, my guitar tech, has already set it up with my gauge strings and a new bridge. He handed it back to me and said: ‘This is the Third Mind guitar.’ I said: ‘You're right. It absolutely is.’ I'm gonna play it live.”

As a long-time fan of Dave Alvin, I feel this is his proudest moment, even more than receiving a Grammy. This award was given to him by his peers, by people who actually know what Americana music is; people who respect Dave Alvin and are aware of his achievements. Congratulations to Dave Alvin on the first 45 years of his career. — *am*



A Lively Show at World Cafe Live, Philadelphia PA

Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore with the Guilty Ones

by Tom Wilk

When Dave Alvin, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and the Guilty Ones took the stage at World Café Live in Philadelphia on Aug. 28, the set list was a case of the last being first and the first being last.

They kicked off the show with a spirited rendition of WERE STILL HERE, a song of resilience and survival that's the final number on the TexiCali album. It was a reminder that applied as much to the audience as the performers. Many in the sellout crowd were on the north side of 60 and responded as longtime fans of Dave and Jimmie Dale. [As Jimmie Dale, 79, wryly noted later in the show, "There are a lot of old people here who are younger than me."]

With eight of the first eleven songs coming from TexiCali, the band was eager to showcase its latest release and didn't disappoint. The bluesy growl of BLIND OWL, one of Dave's new songs, featured Jimmie Dale's harmonica in a supporting role. The two effectively traded verses on the wistful DOWN THE 285. TRYING TO BE FREE, a Jimmie Dale original that dates to the 1960s, echoed the music of that decade with its power pop and soul references. BORDERLAND, which JD first released on Braver Newer World, his 1996 solo album, retains its timeliness amid the ongoing debate on immigration.

Dave was in fine vocal form on SOUTHWEST CHIEF, for which he revised the lyrics from the original version on Americana Railroad, dropping a reference to smoking. He followed that with a blistering version of LONG WHITE CADILLAC, the first Blasters song of the evening.

Like a point guard in basketball distributing the ball to his teammates, Dave structured the arrangements to highlight the Guilty Ones. Chris Miller stepped forward for a solo that fit the lyrical poignancy of TONIGHT I THINK I'M GONNA GO DOWNTOWN and featured some muscular slide guitar work on LONG WHITE CADILLAC. Drummer Lisa Pankratz was a percussive powerhouse on DRY RIVER and engaged in some rhythmic interplay with bassist Brad Fordham on the reggae-tinged version of Butch Hancock's ROLL AWAY.

To wrap up the set, Jimmie Dale served up DALLAS, one of his best-known songs, and Dave responded with a full-force version of FOURTH OF JULY that had the band firing on all cylinders.

For the encore, opening act Jon Langford and his three bandmates fittingly joined the proceedings for a celebratory performance of GET TOGETHER. It wouldn't be a Dave Alvin concert without MARIE MARIE. He stretched out the song to include guitar quotes from LOUIE LOUIE and LONELY AVENUE and an instrumental interlude of SO LONG BABY GOODBYE. The concert concluded by coming full circle with an abbreviated version of the title track from Downey to Lubbock, the leadoff song from the first joint album by Dave and Jimmie Dale.

Set list: We're Still Here / Tonight I Think I'm Gonna Go Downtown / Blind Owl / Down The 285 / Trying to Be Free / Johnny Ace is Dead / Roll Away / Why I'm Walkin' / Southwest Chief / Long White Cadillac / Borderland / Dry River / Dallas / Fourth of July / Get Together / Marie Marie / So Long Baby Goodbye (instrumental) / Downey to Lubbock



Blasters Newsletter writer Tom Wilk on his 40th Anniversary Interview of Dave Alvin

In July 1984, I began writing a weekly music column for The Gloucester County Times, a daily newspaper in Woodbury, NJ, where I had started as a full-time reporter in May 1977.

After becoming a copy editor in January, I wanted to keep my hand in writing and Entertainment Editor John Scanlon gave me the chance.

I reviewed albums and music books and previewed concerts coming to the Philadelphia area. In early October, I did a phone interview with Dave Alvin to preview the Blasters show at the Chestnut Cabaret in Philadelphia. It was my first interview with a rock 'n' roll musician and I felt a little nervous when I called Dave's hotel room in Connecticut.

Dave put me at ease as he discussed recording Hard Line, the band's forthcoming album, and working with John Mellencamp. He also talked about Streets of Fire, the movie that featured the Blasters performing two songs.

I didn't know it then, but that conversation with Dave would point me in a new direction. Writing for a variety of publications, I would get the opportunity to interview numerous musicians and musical figures, including John Fogerty, Lindsey Buckingham, Aaron Neville, Arthur Alexander, Suzanne Vega, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Jerry Wexler, and Sun Records founder Sam Phillips.

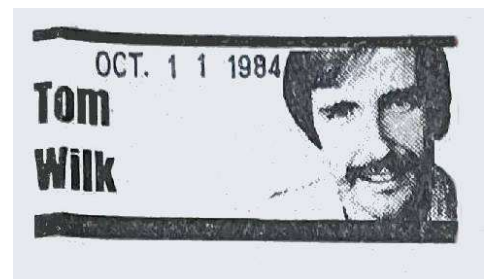
The Gloucester County Times ceased publication in 2012, merging with two other newspapers, and the Chestnut Cabaret has long since closed. As for Dave and me, we're still here, to borrow a song title from TexiCali. —Tom Wilk

BLASTERS WORKING HARD AT BREAKING THE SOUND BARRIER

October 1984 - By Tom Wilk

Since their formation five years ago, The Blasters have won critical acclaim from such disparate publications as Time and Rolling Stones for their first two albums, "The Blasters" and "Non Fiction." The California-based band, which fuses rock 'n' roll, rockabilly and the blues to come up with a blend that lead guitarist Dave Alvin calls "American Music" hopes to translates their critical raves into greater record sales for their upcoming third album, "Hard Line." The album is scheduled for release in January.

"We're in that enviable position of being a cult band, and we draw a certain amount of people everywhere we go," Alvin said during a telephone interview last week from his hotel room in New Haven, Conn. The group is now touring the East Coast and plays at 8 tonight at the Chestnut Cabaret in Philadelphia.



“Our new album is done. It’s good, but there’s a difference in the sound and arrangement from the last two albums,” said Alvin, who leads the band with his brother Phil, who sings and plays rhythm guitar.

Other members of the band are John Bazz (bass), Bill Bateman (drums) and Gene Taylor (piano). The band’s two saxophone players, Lee Allen and Steve Berlin, are not playing with the group on this tour. “We’re on the road to get the band in shape and play the new songs,” Alvin said.

“We would like to have a modest hit ... It’s frustrating when you write a good song that doesn’t get heard (on the radio), he reflected. “I wrote a song on our last album, ‘Jubilee Train’ that I thought would be on every truck-stop jukebox in the country,” he said. To his dismay, it wasn’t.

Alvin, the group’s primary songwriter, has collaborated with John Cougar Mellencamp on The Blasters’ next single, “Colored Lights.” Mellencamp is one of three producers the group used on “Hard Line.” “I came up with the song and John came up with a better second verse,” Alvin said of the collaboration.

The Blasters have attracted favorable comparisons to Creedence Clearwater Revival, a pre-eminent American band of the late 1960s and early 1970s, for their sound and songwriting. Alvin’s songwriting has taken on topics not usually tackled in rock ‘n’ roll, such as economic hard times (“Boomtown”), memories of the New Deal and the government’s inattention to the problems of the working man (“Jubilee Train”), and the death of Hank Williams (“Long White Cadillac”).

The group is branching out and made its movie debut this summer in the Walter Hill film “Streets of Fire.” The movie, which is set in the future, deals with the kidnapping of a female rock star by a criminal gang and the efforts of an ex-girlfriend to get her back.

The Blasters were featured as a bar band in one sequence of the movie, and Alvin said he enjoyed the experience. “Playing in a club with the actors was great,” he observed. “It’s fun and an easy way to make money.” However, the film bombed at the box office and quickly disappeared from the theaters. “We’re hoping it will do an ‘Eddie and the Cruisers’ when it appears on cable,” Alvin laughed, referring to the renewed life – and booming soundtrack sales – for a rock film directed by Martin Davidson that similarly came and went.

Ironically, Alvin had been asked to do seven songs for the soundtrack of Hill’s previous movie, “48 HRS,” which starred Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy. The movie became one of the big hits of 1982-83, but Alvin turned down the opportunity.

The 28-year-old songwriter said he also has been doing recording work for other artists. He recently played guitar on sessions for Buffy Sainte-Marie and the Gun Club. And he hopes to play music until he reaches a ripe old age.

Greg Lewerke, manager and 'loyal, patient advocate' for the Blasters, dies at 75

Greg Lewerke, Blasters manager, passed away Sept. 2, 2024 of pancreatic cancer at the age of 75. His industry background includes general manager of the import division of California Record Distributors and head of Vault Records, once owned by his father, Jack Lewerke. He went on to work as head of international A&R for United Artists Records, as U.S. president of Jet Records, as American manager for Electric Light Orchestra, and as head of Leber-Krebs' West Coast office (whose roster included Aerosmith and Ted Nugent, among others). In addition, he served as American manager for Nazareth, Stone Roses and worldwide manager for many artists, including the Blasters.

Dave Alvin posted on Facebook: "Sad news for the Blasters family. Greg Lewerke, the longtime manager of The Blasters, passed away earlier this week after a long battle with cancer. Greg was a loyal, patient advocate for, true believer in and defender of my brother Philip, John Bazz, Bill Bateman, the late Gene Taylor and the late Lee Allen.

"Greg (who took over managing the band in 1986 from the late Shelly Heber) and I had differences of opinion on many Blasters-related issues, but we grew closer the past few years as he and I swapped horror stories and humorous absurdities from our shared experiences dealing with cancer, its treatments and the often confounding health care systems.

"Thank you, Greg, for everything you did, all of your thankless efforts and struggles in the cause of keeping the guys together and working out on the road playing as only they could."

John Bazz: "He had ongoing pancreatitis for many years and it eventually developed into pancreatic cancer. We all complain about our managers no matter who you are. But Greg knew the art of the deal. He could read a contract and Phil respected him for that. Phil always said that Greg's strong suit was his ability in reading, understanding, and negotiating a contract. Greg was friends with Andrew Lauder of F Beat Records in the U.K. and got us a lot of opportunities over there with record deals and the Nick Lowe tour of 1982. He will be missed."

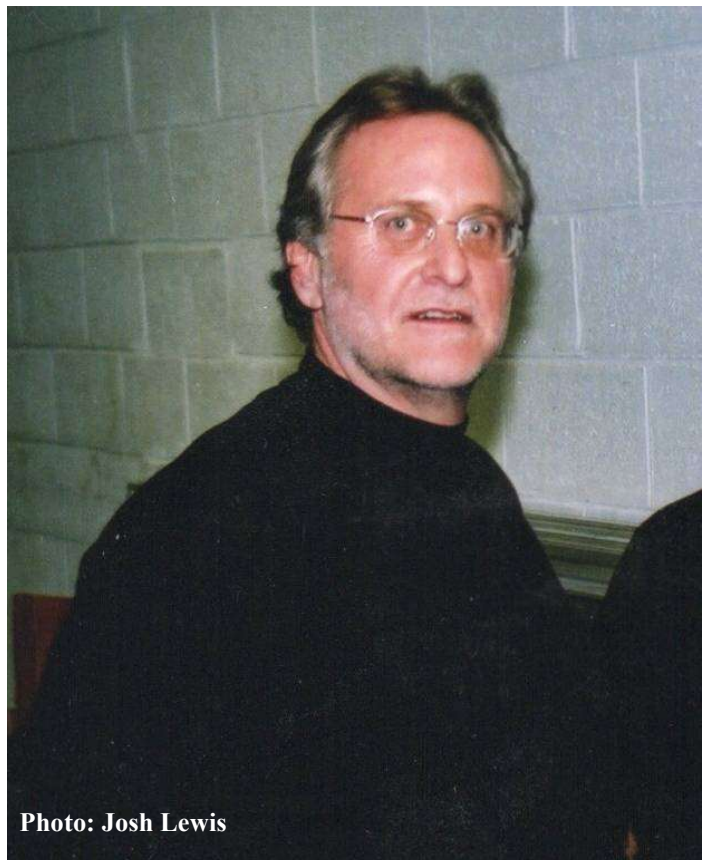


Photo: Josh Lewis

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picks

In 1986 Phil Alvin recorded his first solo album, the long out of print *Un“Sung” Stories*, making the case that, one, the Downey, Calif., native had a broader identity than “lead singer of the Blasters” and, two, “American Music” was something much deeper than neo-rockabilly or fundamentalist rock’n’roll. Nine years later, with the new *County Fair 2000* (HighTone), Alvin has realized even greater ambitions.

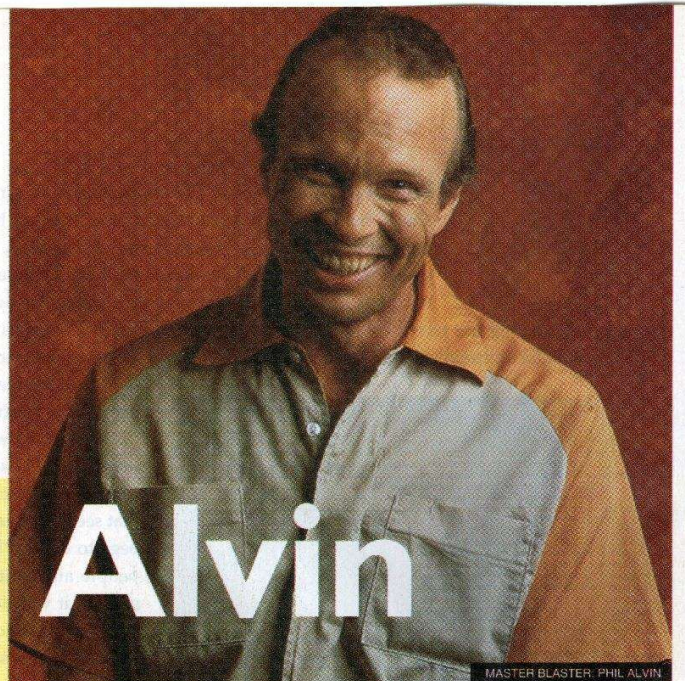
Over the course of 15 tunes, he ranges from solo efforts through full-throttle Blasters tracks to customized collaborations with the eight-piece Faultline Syncopators, the Guada La Habrians (with Cesar Rosas of Los Lobos), bluesman Billy Boy Arnold, tap dancers Fayard Nicholas and Eddie Baytos, Top Jimmy, and the Dirty Dozen Brass Band.

“I tried to bring together some collective community that will help define what the notion of American music is,” explains the loquacious singer/guitarist, “a living, breathing, full-bodied music, whose job is to collect the knowledge, wisdom and wording of the generations and update it and pass it forward. That’s not what music’s been allowed to do for probably 40 years. But it is going to do that again.”

Given the slightest opening, Alvin, an experienced lecturer on business mathematics, is quick to lay out the subtexts that run through the *County Fair 2000* repertoire—penned or inspired by such figures as Sammy Fain, Peetie Wheatstraw, Frankie “Half-Pint” Jaxon, Cliff Jackson’s Crazy Cats and J.E. Mainer’s Crazy Mountaineers string band. He talks about how indentured African servants mixed blood and beats with European colonists 400 years ago; how 16th- and 17th-century American drug pushers traded in tobacco, sugar and coffee; how two-beat music, as perfected by Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson and Sun Ra, remains hot and relevant; how the royalty system drives musicians out of music (“**The king owned songs; the king didn’t sing songs**”); how *County Fair 2000*, which retains some connective dialogue between songs, is a rehearsal for his play *Minstrel*; and how style is obsolete (“There aren’t going to be any new frigging styles, for chrissake; there hasn’t really been for 35 years! There is no new end table this year; there is no new fabric in Paris. The game is up. We have stirred the colors of our palette, now paint!”).

County Fair 2000 (issued on Oakland’s HighTone Records, the same label that records his ex-Blasters brother Dave) closes with a nod to the past; “Danny Boy’s Mourning Sunset” is an homage to both the late Sun Ra (who appeared

Phil Alvin



MASTER BLASTER: PHIL ALVIN

parties past 1999 with a deep-rooted celebration of American music

on *Un“Sung” Stories*) and New Orleans giant Danny Barker (who died just as Alvin was about to record with the Dirty Dozen), and is tagged with the actual second line march from Barker’s funeral. But Alvin sees the album as part of a continuity that will spill over onto the Internet in the 21st century. “If I happen to get drunk tonight and Cesar Rosas comes over and we make a record, in five years that’s just gonna be in our East Los Angeles database—call it up, boys, pay a quarter to AT&T, no trucks, no warehouses. So this is an assessment of where our music stands with respect to the street. County fairs and swap meets are the only places where you see all the people collect. But we can stand on the street corner of the superhighway. I know how to play on the streets; put me on the street corner of the superhighway. I don’t think it starts much different. I don’t know where it ends, but I know where it starts—*County Fair 2000*.”

—DERK RICHARDSON

Pulse Magazine February 1995