

ISSUE #36

# American Music

## The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

SEPT 2002

**BLASTERS shows**  
(Phil, John, Jerry, Keith)  
2/1/03 Clear Lake IA at Surf Ballroom  
(Buddy Holly Tribute show)  
**DAVE ALVIN Shows**  
With The Gully Men  
9/12 Watsonville CA at Santa Cruz  
fairgrounds  
9/20 Hollywood CA at The Roxy  
9/21 Fresno CA at Forestier Under  
Ground Garden  
9/22 Sacramento CA at Riverbank Fest  
Dave solo acoustic  
9/27 Columbus OH at Col. Music hall  
9/28 Bloomington IN at Lotus fest

## The Original 5 Blasters To Release A Live Album On HighTone

### THE BLASTERS TROUBLE BOUND



**Latest news --** The 'Original Five' Blasters will release a live album on HighTone Records on October 15, 2002 titled Trouble Bound. The album will consist of the best recordings from The Blasters, Hollywood, House of Blues shows from March and June. Here is the track listing RED ROSE, TROUBLE BOUND, LONG WHITE CADILLAC,

CRYIN' FOR MY BABY, I'M SHAKIN, BLUE SHADOWS, HELP YOU DREAM, COMMON MAN, HOLLYWOOD BED, TOO TIRED, I WISH YOU WOULD, SADIE'S BACK IN TOWN, DARK NIGHT, SO LONG BABY GOODBYE, AMERICAN MUSIC, ONE

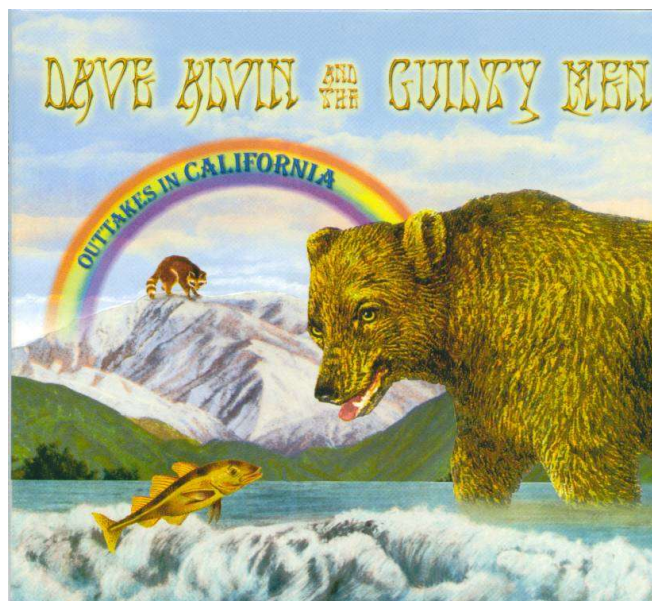
*In This Issue: Rick Shea & Brantley Kearns are interviewed about their new album Trouble And Me, The Original Five Blasters record a live album, and The Knitters tour again.*

BAD STUD, and MARIE MARIE. It is expected that the Original Five Blasters will do more shows around the release of the live album. -- In a surprise appearance, Dave Alvin played two songs as Bob Dylan's guitar player, Charlie Sexton (Dylan's regular guitar player) walked off the stage and Dave walked on. They played TO BE ALONE WITH YOU and LAY, LADY, LAY. -- Dave Alvin self released CD Outtakes In California live disc is a companion to the live HighTone disc Out In California. It will only be available for sale at Dave Alvin shows. Due to certain legalities, it may not be available by mail order or through distributors. -- Skip Heller's new album on Innova Records called Homegoing features Dave Alvin on lead vocals on two cuts. It's due out October 2, 2002 and available through Amazon.com -- Former Guilty Men piano player Rick Solem has been very busy lately doing TV and film work. An August released movie has Celine Dion singing one of Rick's songs over the closing credits. In the movie, a little girl plays a piano solo, which is actually Rick. Rick is still playing with the southern CA based band 2000 lbs of Blues, recently recruiting Kid Ramos for their weekly Blue Café gigs. He's also been playing with Dave Edmunds on an informal basis. -- Singer / songwriter James McMurtry has recorded a version of Dave Alvin's song DRY RIVER as the opening track on his upcoming CD Saint Mary of the Woods, that will be released on Sugar Hill Records on Sept. 17. -- The Blasters were supposed to play the Hootenany in Irvine CA on 7/6 and cancelled last minute. In a confusing situation, Phil Alvin arrived just before show time, but the Hootenany rules require early show up times to get equipment on the stage. -- Smokey Hormel has returned to working with Beck. The duo are doing an acoustic tour across the US the rest of this year and a new Beck acoustic album is due out on 9/24 called Sea Change. -- There is some breaking news expected before October 4, 2002 that will be released through the web site and a postcard mailing. Be on the lookout at [www.BlastersNewsletter.com](http://www.BlastersNewsletter.com)

## DAVE ALVIN AND THE GUILTY MEN OUTTAKES IN CALIFORNIA CD

Dave has put out this companion CD to his Out In California Live CD. Dave says he loves the album cover: "The Bear and rattlesnack return for more antics." It has all the outtake songs from the Long Beach, CA, Blue Café show that was recorded for the HighTone single disc live album. The CD is only available for sale at Dave Alvin shows and will stay in print as long as the fans want to buy 'em..

**Dry River**  
**New Highway**  
**Dark Eyes**  
**East Virginia Blues**  
**Barn Burning**  
**Border Radio**  
**Trouble Bound**  
**BlackJack David**  
**Why Did She Stay With Him**  
**Help Me Baby**  
**Long White Cadillac**  
**Honky Tonk**





# THE RICK SHEA AND BRANTLEY KEARNS INTERVIEW

*Rick Shea and Brantley Kearns have been making a name for themselves in Southern California as a guitar and fiddle duo while splitting their time as members of Dave Alvin's Guilty Men. Rick Shea has spent the last 4 years as a regular member of Dave Alvin's Guilty Men, while Brantley Kearns has been a part-time member. With this year's release of the Rick and Brantley duo's first album, titled Trouble And Me on Tres Pescadores Records, Rick & Brantley have now earned national recognition.*

**By Billy Davis**

**American Music:** How did the both of you meet and become a duo?

**Rick:** I think we met through Dick Fegy at Nashville West - a Honky-Tonk in El Monte, CA.

**Brantley:** Either that, or (playing with) Heather Myles. It was all pretty much about the same time.

**Rick:** Heather was the first time we played together. . . but actually you came out and sat in with us at Nashville West in Dave Carpe's band.

**Brantley:** That was about 1987 because I remember I was still playing in Dwight (Yoakam)'s band.

**AM:** Did Dave Carpe have you both playing in his regular band?

**Rick:** I was in this house band at Nashville West and Brantley just came and sat in with the band once in a while.

**Brantley:** I did end up staying there, playing with Dave Carpe later.

**Rick:** So that was the first time we played, but then we started doing a regular thing playing with Heather Myles out in Riverside, CA. and did a tour of Europe in 1992 with her.

**AM:** At what point did you both break off and start playing as a duo?

**Rick:** I think we probably already had been playing at that point. It wasn't just a duo but with other band members. The duo started in about 1995.

**Brantley:** We were more like a four-piece then with Dave Hall and John Lee White.

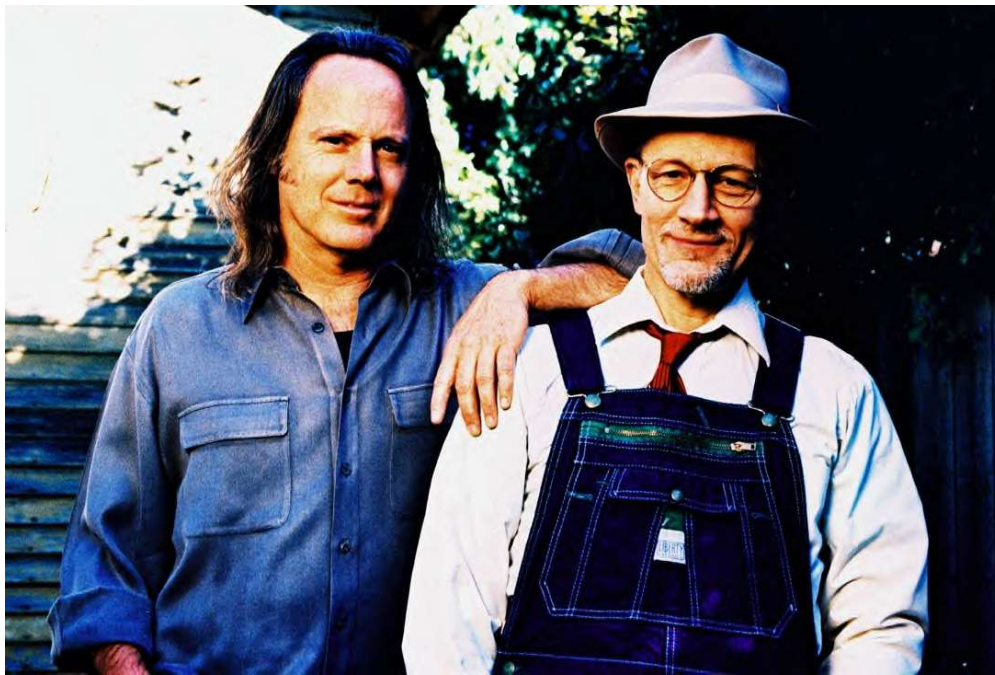
**Rick:** And electric guitar and fiddle. That was pretty much the lineup.

*(Ed. note - This version of the band's lineup can be heard on Rick Shea's CD of his earliest recordings, called Shakey Ground on Wagon Wheel Records)*

**AM:** Were you both singing vocals on songs in the early days?

**Rick:** Yeah, from the beginning in the bars and honky-tonks, we would take turns on vocals.





Heather was always pretty loose and she would let us sing songs in her sets.

**AM:** How long has the Rick & Brantley album been in the making and why did it happen now?

**Rick:** We probably started talking about it 5 years ago. At that time, Bruce Bromberg at High-Tone Records started talking to us, and he was always a big fan of us. So just before the Sawbones

album (Wagon Wheel Records, 2000), I started pushing for a Rick and Brantley album and started drawing up budgets. HighTone seemed interested, but we couldn't get anything off the ground. So I started talking to the guys at Wagon Wheel / Aim but they wanted to release the Sawbones album, so we put the Rick and Brantley album on hold.

**AM:** Sawbones seems very different, even though you were both very involved in the making of that album.

**Brantley:** Sawbones was about 80% Rick's stuff.

**Rick:** Yeah, one cover song.

**Brantley:** Sawbones was more of a mix of electric and semi-acoustic. Trouble And Me is more of a traditional sound. I think it was an evolution of us playing together. I really don't know what to call anything anymore (laughs).

**AM:** Why has it been so long to hear you featured on an album of your own?

**Brantley:** I've always thought the ideal situation for me would be a featured side-man whether singing or playing. I've been in that frame of mind. I'm always singing on something even if it's in the car, and I don't even have a radio in the car.

**AM:** How did the Trouble And Me album finally come about?

**Rick:** I did an interview with Randy Lewis of the L.A. Times while we were doing an acoustic show in Anaheim. I mentioned I was shopping that project around and he put it in the article. Tim Hewett (who I have been friends with for a long time) and Brian Thomas of Tres Pescadores Records got in touch and said they were interested in putting the album out. They had put out the Chris Gaffney album (Live And Then Some, 1999) and the \$1000 Wedding album. I was already in the process of talking with Wagon Wheel, but they said they wouldn't be ready to do it for quite a while so it would be fine if we did it with Tres Pescadores. It all happened very quickly. We recorded it in about three weeks time.

**AM:** How did you get Dave Alvin to produce the project?

**Rick:** Dave had wanted to be involved from the beginning. Dave is always difficult to schedule with because he is doing so much all the time, but some time had opened up and it worked out pretty easily. Dave got busy shortly into the project finishing up his Out In Cali-



fornia album, so Brantley and I put in a lot of the time in the second half of the project - finishing. Dave came back for the final touches.

**AM:** How did Dave Alvin affect the project?

**Rick:** Dave had a big influence on everything. He is really good at seeing an overall concept to things like an album or project. I have tremendous admiration for him and his ability to do that. That's what he saw, the influences that Brantley and I both brought to the project and ultimately what it turned into. The whole concept of CAROLINA, CA encapsulated that. Dave's suggestions on songs made a big difference as well as the arrangements. As for the playing, Dave tends to stay out of that. That to me is the best approach as a producer to let the musicians who have played the instruments all their lives - to let them play.

**Brantley:** I first knew Dave as a rock & roller with the Blasters because when I played with Dwight, we were on the same bills. Dave and Dwight were big admirers of each other.

**AM:** How did the title of the album come about?

**Rick:** CAROLINA CA was certainly in the running. LOAFER'S GLORY was a favorite of mine. Dave wanted CAROLINA CA.

**Brantley:** I was kind of blowing-in-the-breeze. I couldn't really say one way or the other. But Trouble And Me has a nice ironic ring to it (laughs).

**Rick:** I think we just tried it out on all the test audiences and it worked.

**AM:** What style do you consider this album?

**Brantley:** I think it's a little bit of everything. It's not true bluegrass 'cause there's no banjo in there.

**Rick:** I think it's acoustic music. That's a general enough term that covers the whole album.

**AM:** Let's go song by song.



## CAROLINA CA

**Rick:** That was a mandolin riff that I had worked up. I wasn't sure what to do with it but turn it into an instrumental. Dave liked it and put in a lot of time in the pre-production, working out what songs would be included. I worked up the arrangement. Brantley and I put a lot of time into seeing what worked with it. We played it a few times with the band, and then after we polished it up, Dave came up with the title. He had a concept for the album. That song is kind of the influence of music from North and South Carolina through Brantley and then the California music that Brantley and I have spent our lives playing.

**Brantley:** The song has some interesting changes in it and it was pretty challenging. We're trying to work it up to play it live.

## RACHEL

**Rick:** Rachel was one of the first songs recorded but Paul du Gre was trying out a new computer program and we were the guinea pigs (laughs). The whole first day was wiped out because of it and we had to start from scratch after that. But it all worked out.

**AM:** Tell us about the songwriter of RACHEL, named Jim Ringer.

**Rick:** Jim Ringer's stuff is all on Philo / Rounder Records. (*Jim Ringer - The Band of Jesse James: The Best of Jim Ringer -1996(PHIL1202)*, *Mary McCaslin & Jim Ringer The Bramble & the Rose -1978(PHIL1055)*) Jim Ringer and Mary McCaslin were a couple, and in the late 70's and 80's toured all around CA and lived in San Bernardino. They kind of pioneered the folk singer / songwriter, do-it-yourself, sell-your-own- albums sort of thing that a lot of people do today. As a singer and songwriter, he is not well known, but has a strong cult following. That song was a suggestion of Dave's, as was the Mary McCaslin song on Trouble and Me called SAN BERNADINO WALTZ. They were fine by me. Both songs I liked a lot and I thought they were perfect for the album.

## LOAFER'S GLORY

**Brantley:** That was a song I heard on an old Flatt and Scruggs album called The Versatile Flatt and Scruggs: Pickin', Strummin', and Blowin'. The reason it has "Blowin'" is because Charlie McCoy played harmonica on a couple of cuts. I liked the imagery of the tune and the way the story is told; it has the same type of spirit of some of the jack tales of North Carolina and Virginia. It's like the coyote tales that the Navahos tell. The jack tales are from mountain lore, and this song struck me. There is a tiny town near Cherokee, N. Carolina called LOAFER'S GLORY. It was a real Flash 15 years ago when National Geographic did a thing on N. Carolina and they had that town pinpointed on the map. I thought that Lester Flatt had written it, but it was actually written by Ezra and Maybelle Carter. It doesn't show up on any of the Carter family records. Bear family has out a box set called In The Shadow Of Clinch Mountain, which has everything they ever recorded and it's not on there. I've tried to call Louise Scruggs to get the particulars on the song, but I could never get through. I think the way that Flatt and Scruggs came to do it is that they used to play a lot of folk festivals that Maybelle Carter played. I imagine they asked Maybelle, "Is there something that you have never recorded that might be good for us?" And she said, "Yeah. There's a song called LOAFER'S GLORY" which her and her husband wrote maybe after the Carter Family broke up. I haven't been able to pin it down myself.

**Rick:** Maybe it was written in Springfield, MO. After the Carter family had broken up, Maybelle continued performing with her daughters and they were based in Springfield. The motel that we stay at there, when we're picking up the other Guilty Men or rehearsing, is right behind the old house that they lived in. I always walk around and look at it. It's a big place, all brick, and closed up. The last trip there I looked, and it was gone. It's a shame.

**AM:** Tell us about the Jaw harp or

### Rick Shea Discography

Outside of Nashville (self released) 1991

The Buffalo Show (Major Label Records) 1995

Shaky Ground (Wagon Wheel Records) 1999

SawBones (WagonWheel Records) 2000

jew's harp played on this song.

**Brantley:** It exists in many cultures. In Thailand, they are made of bamboo, or tortoise shell, but more commonly of metal. It makes a twang sound and it mikes real well. It's probably one of the most primitive instruments around. Don Heffington brought that along.

**Rick:** Don had brought that along when we were working on Chris Richards' (Jam The Breeze on Ten High Ranch Recordings, 2001, produced by Rick Shea) album last summer. Don had to send to Turkey for a whole set that plays in different keys. He had been messing around with them and he was hoping to play them on Chris Richards' album but we never found an appropriate spot. When we started playing LOAFERS GLORY, I mentioned it to Brantley and we thought it would be perfect.

## SAN BERNADINO WALTZ

**Rick:** Growing up in San Bernardino made this a heartbreaking song. It brought all of that back. That's where I grew up and I started playing this kind of music at a place called the Penny University. My wife is from San Bernardino and her family is still there, so we go back there all the time. So it was a real bitter sweet - sentimental thing, and I was happy to include it. We changed it from the Jim Ringer version. His version is just acoustic guitar and piano. We sped it up and did it a little more bluegrass style. Don Heffington walked in and played tambourine and shaker on it and it fell right in place. Most of these songs we played in only a few takes.

## CANE ON THE BRAZOS

**Rick:** That is one that Brantley has been doing forever, and we've been playing it for as long as I've known Brantley.

**Brantley:** I learned it from Jody Stecher when I lived up in the Bay area in the 60's. We did gigs together and played a lot informally. That was a song he did that I always liked. He did it in 4/4 and I started doing it as a waltz. The Band recorded it also and made it famous. It's a Texas prison work song. They would send out work crews to chop cane along the river in the 20's and 30's, thus Cane on The Brazos. There are yet more verses that Jody sings, (more) than in my version.

## PARISH ROAD

**Rick:** That is one I wrote specifically for the album. I had been working on that for a few years. It was a fairly tough song to write, I had about two or three different approaches. I wasn't very happy about it early on, and then I worked real hard on it and got it to where it is now. These types of songs are more like period pieces, almost like a film, all the imagery and language used should remind you of a period of time. It's a love song about people who shouldn't be together and the consequences of that. I set it in a rural southern setting. The recording was real smooth. Brantley and I put in a lot of time on pre-production preparing the songs.

Greg Leisz is on there. We played the song live with the band, but Greg Leisz's stuff is over dubbed - he's a pretty busy guy so we were lucky to get him in there for a day.

## SAIL AWAY LADIES

**Brantley:** This is an old traditional song. I always played it as a fiddle tune. I dedicated this to a guy named Cleg Garner who played at a lot of the square dances that my father used to take us to when we were kids. Those dances were every other week in Cleg's hometown of Farmer,

N. Carolina. He was a real friendly old white-haired guy; he was a hunting guide for the governor of N. Carolina. He used to play that song.

**Rick:** I knew from the beginning when we started this, that I wanted to include a Bob Wills song or Bob Wills-style song because that's a big part of what Brantley does. This song came up with the idea of doing it in a Bob Wills style. When we went into record it, nobody had any lyrics for it other than the chorus part, so Dave and Brantley pretty much wrote all those verses.

**Brantley:** All except the first one, which is an actual verse. I called my friend Pete Kesler in Northern California, and he had about 6 or 7 verses. I got some verses when we went over Dave's for pre-production from one of the definitive recorded versions by Uncle Dave Macon. He was a charter member of the Grand Ole Opry, a banjo player and singer. I got some verses off that and the rest of them we made up.

**Rick:** That version with those verses didn't exist 10 minutes before we played it. That one was a lot of fun and was basically a live performance. Dave Alvin was actively involved in all the arrangement ideas and helped Brantley with the lyrics. I think it was over a lunch break when we did it. There were some pretty wild verses that were made up that weren't used (laughs). Gaffney and Dave Jackson were there, and it got a little wild. On background vocals we tried a few different arrangements. First it was Dave, James Cruz, and even Paul du Gre. In the end we ended up with Chris, Brantley, and I doing it.

## TROUBLE AND ME

**Rick:** That's a song that Ray Winkler used to perform in clubs. He was a friend of mine and played in the bars and honky-tonks in Southern California. That's one of the songs he did, and I always knew it was a great song. Buck Owens did it, and Harlan Howard wrote it. It comes from a certain era of country music that is long gone. Brantley does a wonderful harmony vocal part.

## AIN'T IT ALMOST LIKE OLD TIMES

**Brantley:** That song kind of jumped out at me. I don't know what inspired it, but I wrote it in one sitting in the early eighties. I recorded a version of it in 1982 at a studio in Pasadena for Frank Sullivan. When he moved, the master went with him.

**Rick:** Brantley used to play it like a Waylon Jennings song, but I think we tried to give it more of a back-porch view.

**Brantley:** When we were looking for songs for the album, I fished that out to see how it flew. I made a few changes on it. It didn't have a chorus, so by Dave's suggestion, one verse became a repeating chorus.

**Rick:** We were working with two or three Brantley songs at the time. One was a waltz. But the album was getting a little waltz heavy, so we chose that one. Brantley plays the twin fiddle parts and then the dobro, and I come in on mandolin.

## BLACK SNAKE MOAN

**Rick:** The original idea was to have you and Dave playing it in the style of the first version.

**Brantley:** Yeah, like Blind Lemon Jefferson.

**Rick:** We certainly wanted Dave to be part of the album, and we wanted Dave to play more,



but because of the circumstances, he played on just this one song. The original idea was Dave doing that ragtime old blues guitar with Brantley singing.

**Brantley:** The original version by Blind Lemon was actually kind of tame compared to this one.

**Rick:** My plan was to write a Cajun style song and have Brantley sing it. I had a few ideas but didn't get it together. So, the three of us got together and I brought up the idea of a Cajun song to showcase that side of Brantley's fiddle playing. . .

**Brantley:** I said, "I can do that on BLACK SNAKE MOAN." It kicks it up into another realm. It's a delta blues that is now double-delta-fied. I have to credit Ramblin' Jack Elliott for inspiration to do this song. I was aware of the Blind Lemon version. I saw Jack a lot in Berkeley in the 60's. He did that song more like a shuffle and I liked it a lot. He did it more up tempo, so that was an influence.

## LET MY HORSES RUN FREE

**Rick:** I had that one around for like 10 years. I never felt it was entirely complete. I got together with Dave - just he and I, and he seemed to like that one a lot. He had some real strong lyric ideas and arrangements. The line "Let My Horses Run Free" is from a Larry McMurtry book of essays on Texas called In a Shallow Grave. I can't seem to remember which essay it came from.

**Brantley:** When I first heard it, it reminded me of a song you could pin on a character that Melvin Douglas playing in Hud, a Paul Newman movie. That was Hud's father.

**Rick:** The arrangement fell together very easily with guidance from Dave and Brantley's wonderful twin fiddle parts.

**Brantley:** That actually ranks close to my favorite contribution to the album.

**Rick:** The little icing on that is that as I was recording the guitar part, there was a cricket in the studio, and it's pretty apparent in that song at the beginning. When we mixed and mastered, we made sure that it was in there. The cricket can also be heard at the end of the previous song - LET MY HORSES RUN FREE.

**Brantley:** We were channeling Buddy (laughs). Jiminy Cricket or Buddy.

**Rick:** He didn't get a credit, but I'm expecting to hear from his lawyer (laughs)

## BYRON'S IRON / BAKER'S ACRE

**Brantley:** That's a couple of fiddle tunes that I have been monkeying around with. BYRON'S IRON, the title is kind of corny, but I was in that kind of mood.

**Rick:** But there are direct references to a couple of your real strong influences.

**Brantley:** Byron Berline was a fiddle player that I knew of when I came to California. He came from Okalahoma and his father was a famous fiddle player. Byron came to CA in 1975, played with Doug Dillard, and had his own band and also founded the L.A. fiddle band. He had a very strong and distinctive style and is THE fiddle player in Nashville now. So he is quite an influence. So I had been goofing around with that song playing riffs that he might play. I started playing BAKER'S ACRE in the 70's when I wrote it and I was playing a lot of Bluegrass. It's like a three-part tune that changes keys. I was trying to sound something like Kenny Baker, who played fiddle for Bill Monroe for many years. Those were the fiddle players who were catching my ear. ~~~*AM*

# The Original Five Blasters reunite one more time at the Hollywood House of Blues to record a live album

By Billy Davis

*June 11, 2002. -- The Original Five Blasters reunited in March of 2002 for their first tour in 17 years. They recorded a few shows with the possibility of releasing a live album. After listening through to the tapes, they felt they needed a few more rare songs to include on an album. So they booked one more date in Hollywood, CA at the House of Blues in June. The recordings were a success and the Original Five Blasters live album titled Trouble Bound will be released by HighTone Records on October 15, 2002.*

## June 10, 2002 -- Rehearsal studio, Hollywood, CA

Phil Alvin, Dave Alvin, John Bazz, Bill Bateman, and Gene Taylor scheduled one day of rehearsal in preparation for the House of Blues show recording, at a rehearsal studio in Hollywood at 4 PM. As usual the band started out practicing songs minus-Phil Alvin. They ran through Blasters songs that they played in their first reunion shows, then concentrated on some rare songs that they had prepared after Phil pulled them out at the first set of rehearsals in March.. I'M GLAD YOU'RE

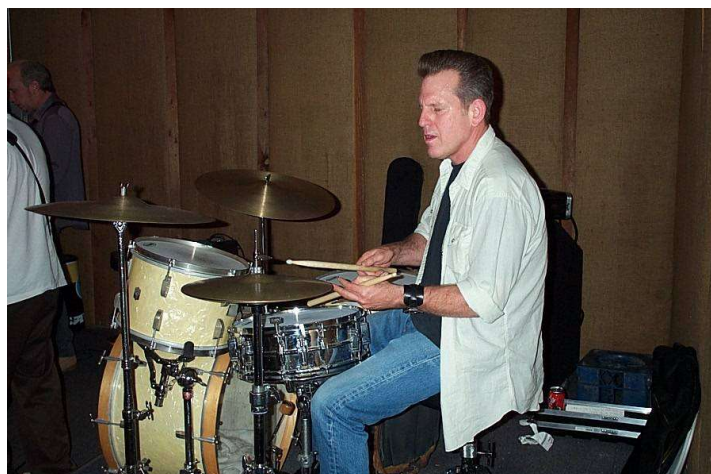


**The Blasters, minus Phil, rehearse.**

DEAD YOU RASCAL was one of them, REAL ROCK DRIVE, and ALL YOUR LOVE. Looking ahead, unfortunately the band didn't try any of these at the House of Blues show.

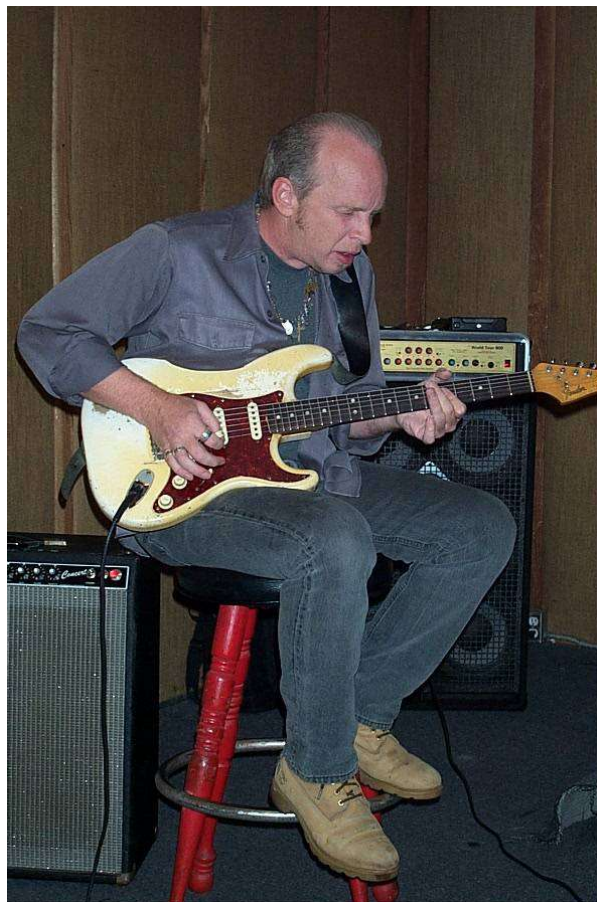
It was starting to get late in the day, and Phil had not arrived at rehearsal. Gene Taylor had just flown in from the east coast that morning on a two-day break from a grueling Fabulous Thunderbirds tour. He was pushing to finish up the rehearsal early. Meanwhile outside, the Southwest was experiencing a partial solar eclipse. At 6:30 the band figured Phil wasn't coming and at Gene's urging started packing up their equipment.

Phil finally arrived only minutes after they had broken down the drums. I asked him if he had been affected by the eclipse, and he said "No, but you know animals are affected." I think he took me seriously. The band blamed him for coming late and he came back questioning why rehearsal was ending earlier than the scheduled 4 Pm to 8 PM slot. The conversation



quickly changed to the importance of getting together to practice some unusual songs for the recorded show the next night. There was a little Phil and Dave argument over the key to play SADIE BROWN in. Dave wanted to lower the key to save Phil's voice, but Phil took it as an insult and wanted to play it in the original key. Dave pulled out his guitar and they played a quick un-amplified version. Phil did fine with his un-amplified voice booming through the room - but Dave wasn't convinced.

In my view of it all, the arguing was not loud or at all vicious. It was just two Blasters reacting passionately about the music they play, and both wanted to get a point across. I thought it was a healthy argument that showed they weren't there because the money was good; they still care very much for the songs. They kept the discussion going as they packed up their equipment and headed out into the parking lot. Dave apologized to Phil for being too edgy as Phil insisted there was no apology needed. I thought both the brothers had valid points and they seemed to be very understanding of each other. So that argument



quickly dissipated in the parking lot and the conversation changed to non-music stuff. Phil told a few jokes as Dave laughed and I was proud to see that the brothers really are getting along nowadays. Seemingly harmless, this argument could have been serious if it was 20 years ago. Those were the days that the Blasters were known for their legendary knock-down, drag-out fights.

## June 11, 2002 House Of Blues Soundcheck

The band came early the next afternoon for an extended soundcheck to rehearse a few things and set up the recording equipment. When Phil arrived, he stood at the mike and practiced a bunch of country blues songs like BIG ROAD BLUES, JACK O' DIAMONDS, and TRUCKIN LITTLE WOMAN. On the last one, Bill and Gene joined in for a boogie woogie version. The crew and sound technicians continued checking instrument sounds and setting



the stage up for the show. Next Phil started playing the final track on the Testament CD set, TAKE OUT SOME INSURANCE ON ME. He didn't finish the song and only played one verse but it was great to hear that one again. Dave finally got his guitar rig all set up and started the riff to SADIE BROWN; and the whole band fell in and you could feel the energy level go right up when all the Blasters were playing. Next they played TOO TIRED and Dave quickly told the band not to stop because they would be recording the soundcheck



Phil tries to take Dave's picture.



around between Dave and Phil. Phil brought along his new digital camera and wanted to take a close up of Dave, who fought hard by holding his hands in front of his face so Phil wouldn't get a good picture. This all happened while they were standing on stage.

The band checked each instrument playing surprise songs. Phil tested his harmonica, playing a great version of ST. LOUIS BLUES with Gene providing accompaniment on piano. The band finished and there seemed to be a real loose vibe going on. It felt like it'll be a great show.

songs as extra tracks in case the live versions were sub par. We'll probably never know what version made it on the live album. I noticed in the sound check that Phil and Dave did a lot of talking, discussing parts and acting like band mates. They discussed and practiced parts of I'M GLAD YOU'RE DEAD once again. In fact they spent quite a bit of time on the song but never recorded it. I guess they felt it wasn't working.

There was a little bit of horsing



Phil with Hightone's Larry Sloven and Bruce Bromberg



## June 11, 2002 House Of Blues show

As in the first reunion shows, the show started with Lee Allen's WALKIN' WITH MR LEE playing over the PA with a single spotlight on a chair with his sax, a bottle of whiskey, and Lee's photo. The crowd applauded loudly this time expecting the tribute, which was, featured at the March shows. Phil walked out and seriously said, "That was a tribute to Lee Allen who..." Phil suddenly changed his demeanor and joked, "Taught me how to drive drunk. The

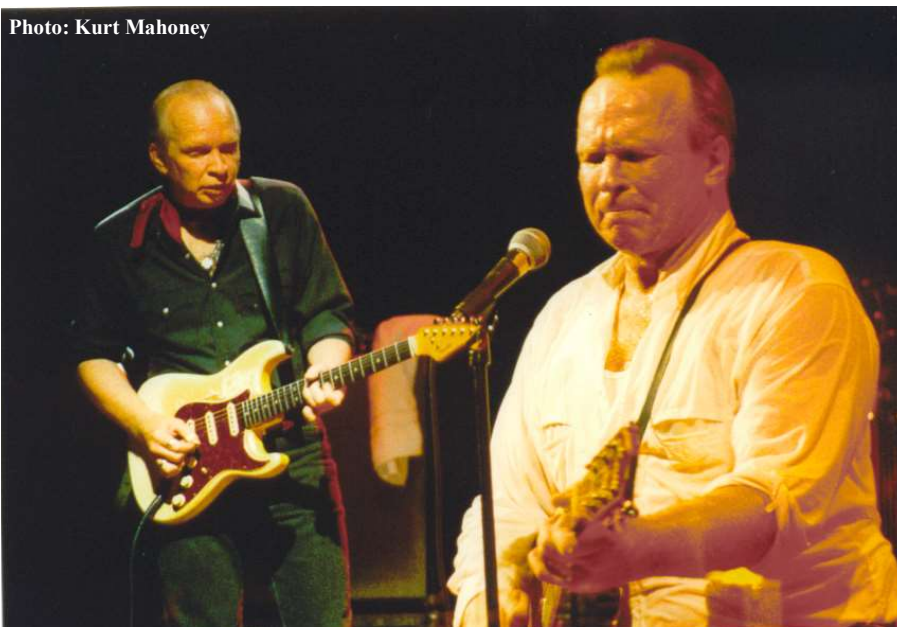


rule is: you always look as far ahead as you can see in the road and you will not drive like a drunk. I've been playing at bars since I was 16 and I've never gotten pulled over. (Laughing)." I expect that might have been a private joke as Phil looked at some friends in the crowd, or he just wanted to screw with the politically correct types at The House Of Blues.

Dave launched into the opening guitar riff of TROUBLE BOUND. It was a different opening song than the earlier shows which featured RED ROSE first. The Blasters were back again. Phil was sounding very good and dedicated FLATTOP JOINT to "Bell Gardens, CA". Phil changed the lyrics in FLAT-TOP saying something else instead of "Bar-B-Q Ribs Beer and wine," which started Dave smiling and glancing over at Phil. Dave, who was really stressed and looked the part at the March shows, appeared to be very loose and having a great time tonight. I'M SHAKIN was next, then BLUE SHADOWS. Phil sounded exceptional on this song making it an obvious choice for the coming live album. The tempo was way fast, which I thought was good, but unfortunately it didn't make the live album. Phil waved the mike at the audience and announced that they were recording a live album.

John Bazz has to be the hardest working man in the band. You can just watch him the

Photo: Kurt Mahoney



whole show and see how hard he plays the bass with his bare fingers. Early on in the set, RED ROSE and LONG WHITE CADILLAC showed him off. I even over heard a fan getting Bazz's autograph after the show telling John, "I'm a bass player and I couldn't believe how intensely you play the bass!" He was right on the mark.

A stand-out song of the night was HEAR ME CRYIN', also known as THE BIG F CHORD. Phil started it off in excellent voice

singing “Woo sometimes I get a little lonely and I think about what my baby said to me” as the band played the big chord behind him. They paused and everything went quiet. Phil responded to his own line with some humor: “She told me I’ve got to take some weight off and I better start playing more. She told me other things I won’t say. She was loquacious.” (those parts are edited out of the album version) Phil then jumped into the first lyric: “You got me walkin’. . .” and the band followed

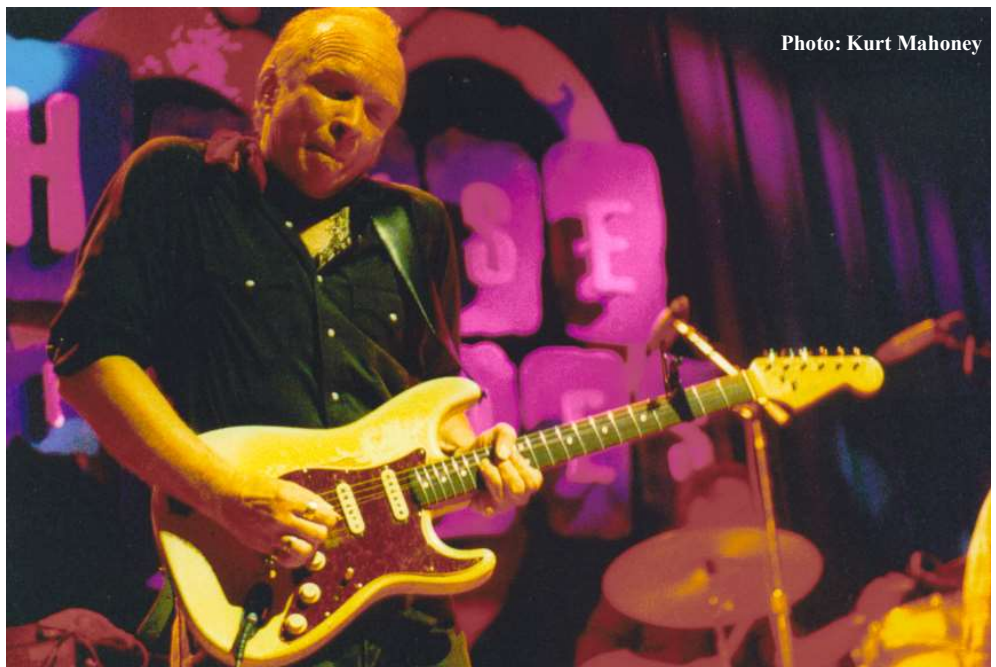


right along. What a great version - probably the ‘Original Five Blasters’ at their best. Dave took a great solo in the song and even took a bow after a rousing noise of approval from the audience. Phil kicked it up a notch by pulling out his harmonica and blowing a solo - to the complete surprise of the band. Phil had never played a harp solo on the song and Dave recalls being floored by that. “That song was great and it’s my favorite on the live album.” The new Blasters do the song in their set, and Phil never plays harp on it.

The Blasters made a conscious effort to play some blues songs like this for the album. They always felt they did blues really well, but the critics never gave them any credit for it. Here they showed them what they could do. HEAR MY CRYIN’ made the album, but once again the title was different (The Blasters call it THE BIG F CHORD). In a publisher search, the original title came up to be CRYIN’ FOR MY BABY.

For CRAZY BABY there was a different beginning than they did in the March shows. Bateman started it off with a fast solo drumbeat, which was more like he did it back in 1982. Dave was feeling good and made one of his trademark leaps during CRAZY BABY. They proved they can still play that fast rockabilly.

For HELP YOU DREAM, Phil once again dedicated it to his brother saying, “This goes out to my brother, David....” The crowd started roaring, knowing what was coming, but this time I think Dave was ready waiting for it, too. Phil continued, “Who is embellishing the truth as we speak.” Dave laughed with the audience and held his hands out in acceptance of the dedication with a big smile.





Another show-stopping song was next - COMMON MAN. Phil started it off explaining: "Come and get me. I don't know what all this craziness is. This goes out to presidents, I think." Dave started the song out with some ripping lead guitar riffs and off they went. Phil Alvin's voice sounded exceptional tonight and later when Dave Alvin got to listen to what was recorded, he was impressed at how good Phil sounded. COMMON MAN featured Dave with a big solo that he brought way down low and then rose to climactic finish.

TOO TIRED was another song that sounded exceptional and was in the blues flavor. They played HOLLYWOOD BED; then Gene's TAG ALONG went without incident, and we saw Dave leap during his solo. DARK NIGHT was next; then the band started the rare songs. Phil dedicated one to "The rockin' man from Memphis: Sonny Burgess." They then went into SADIE'S BACK IN TOWN. The set contained a few rare songs. When Bill Bateman saw that SADIE BROWN was in the set, he shrugged knowing he would be put to the test with some fast playing. Bill did it and showed some of that skin-bashing style he was known for in the early days. That song was my favorite of the night. It's a real hard-edged rockabilly song. The end of the song was a little rough between the band members, and they wound up doing Dave's solo two times. Dave at one point literally threw up his hands when the mistake occurred, but then smiled light heartedly. The song is on the album with some editing treatment applied. Thank You, Blasters, for pulling that rarity out of the hat. Phil took the blame after the song, even though it might have been someone else who missed a cue. Phil said to the audience, "I was late to rehearsal yesterday."

As the set wound down, they played BORDER RADIO, then SO LONG BABY. Dave opened it up with a mellow guitar intro, which is more familiar to us on the song version he plays in his Guilty Men shows. But actually, it's an intro he started playing live in last days with the Blasters, back in the mid eighties. One difference from the Original Five Blasters and the Guilty Men version of SO LONG BABY, is that now Dave has gone back to playing some of his guitar parts by mimicking Lee Allen's riffs. But in this case, Phil is taking Lee's parts on his harmonica; there was very cool interaction on this one between Dave's guitar and Phil's harmonica.

I n  
A M E R I C A N  
MUSIC Dave got a roar from the crowd after he did one of his biggest leaps in the air that I have seen. They really rocked the crowd on that one and



as the band walked off into the encore break, Dave passed the mike and said "I hope you all had fun, 'cause we did."

The band returned to the stage and Dave quickly hinted, "Here's an old Hank Ballard song." They played LOVE 24 HOURS A DAY. I thought it sounded great but upon closer listening later in the mixing studio, it was determined that one of the instruments didn't make an important chord change. The same happened with the next rare song - Carl Perkins HONEY DON'T. They were left off the live album because of some minor recording defects, but it was incredible to see and hear those rarities live!

Again they finished with ONE BAD STUD and walked off again before taking a second encore. Dave passed the mike and said, "Thanks for coming out on a school night." When the band returned to the stage, Dave introduced the band and said, "It's kind of like coming home for Thanksgiving for a day or two."

The last song was MARIE MARIE, of course - they couldn't leave without doing that one. Dave played some weird notes before the start of the song. He must be learning some Middle Eastern scales. But it brought some surprised faces from the other members until Dave played the familiar chopping C Chord, then everything was all right. MARIE MARIE just left the crowd in a frenzy.

Dave left the stage last again and said "Goodnight and see you all somewhere else. He started to walk away and came back and repeated what he said earlier "And I hope you had a good time cause we did."

**Set List:** TROUBLE BOUND, RED ROSE, FLATTOP JOINT, I'M SHAKIN', BLUE SHADOWS, NO OTHER GIRL, BIG F CHORD, LONG WHITE CADILLAC, CRAZY BABY, HELP YOU DREAM, COMMON MAN, TOO TIRED, HOLLYWOOD BED, TAG ALONG, DARK NIGHT, SADIE BROWN, BORDER RADIO, SO LONG BABY GOOD BYE, AMERICAN MUSIC, LOVE 24 HOURS A DAY, ONE BAD STUD, HONEY DON'T, MARIE MARIE

I thought this was the best of the 6 reunion shows. The band sounded great; they were all loose and really getting more used to being a band again. Dave later recalled, "If we sounded that good back in the early eighties, we would all be millionaires now." It was a good show to represent the live album. In fact it's great that HighTone and the Blasters are putting out a recording so that everyone who missed the reunion tour can have a great new live CD by the original members, 20 years after Over There (Warner Bros 1982), and sounding better than ever. ~~*AM*

**THE ORIGINAL BLASTERS  
LIVE 2002  
TROUBLE BOUND  
HIGHTONE RECORDS  
HCD8148**

**Red Rose  
Trouble Bound  
Long White Cadillac  
Cryin' For My Baby  
I'm Shakin'  
Blue Shadows  
Help You Dream  
Common Man  
Hollywood Bed  
Too Tired  
I Wish You Would  
Sadie's Back In Town  
Dark Night  
So Long Baby Goodbye  
American Music  
One Bad Stud  
Marie Marie**



# THE KNITTERS SEATTLE, WA AT THE CROCODILE CAFÉ by Jon Noe

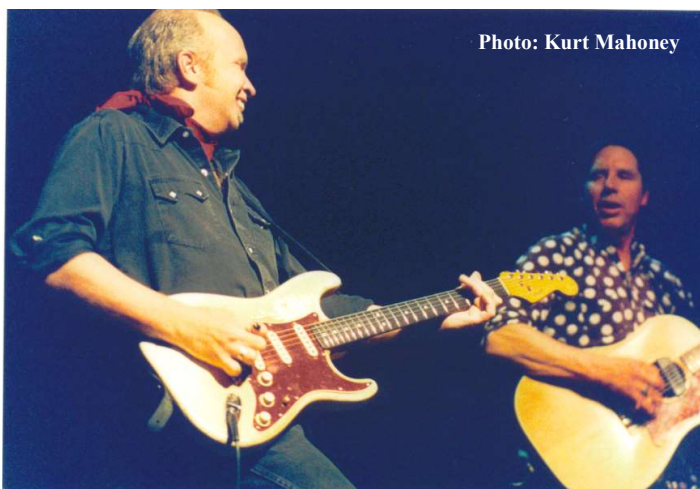
**Photos: The Knitters Santa Ana, CA at The Galaxy Theatre by Kurt Mahoney**

Dave Alvin has had a busy year. He helped put together The Blasters Testament CD, reunited with the original Blasters for the reunion tour, produced another record for Christy McWilson and toured with her, produced a record for Jill Olson of the band Red Meat, and performed with Peter Case and Chris Smither on the "Avalon Blues" tour. Last, but definitely not least, he released his own live album and is now touring behind that with the Guilty Men! Somehow he managed to squeeze in a short west coast tour with The Knitters. Dave Alvin may be "The Hardest Working Man In Show Business" but Dave says that's probably T-Bone Burnett. In interviews Dave says he's basically lazy, but his list of recent projects says otherwise.



**DJ Bonebrake, Jonny Ray Bartel, Exene Cervenka, John Doe, and Dave Alvin**

Compared to his other projects, The Knitters is kind of a working vacation. He doesn't sing, and he isn't the front man. He just plugs in and plays. . . like hell! The band played Seattle on Sunday May 19, 2002. It was a busy night in town with competing shows by Elvis Costello, Govt. Mule, Ray Charles, and Merle Haggard. The Crocodile still managed to draw a good crowd. After a low key set of alt-country by Jesse Sykes, and a VERY LOUD set of punk-metal by the gawd-awful Throw Rag (I retreated to the bar way in the back of the club to chat with Dave and Christy McWilson), The Knitters hit the stage. As usual John and Dave opened with SILVER WINGS and followed that with a big surprise - ME AND BOBBY MCGEE! The rest of the band came on stage and they launched into POOR LITTLE CRITTER.



They all seemed to be having a great time despite the fact that the night before in Portland some gear and merch was stolen, including all the XXL t-shirts. DAMN! The rest of the set was basically the same as the '99 tour, most of the Poor Little Critter album and 'Knitter-ized' versions of X songs. The regular set ended with the amazing hillbilly punk version of BORN TO BE WILD. I have never seen Dave play that fast! The encores were CRYING BUT MY TEARS ARE FAR AWAY, ROCK ISLAND LINE and a Merle Haggard number DRINK UP AND BE SOMEBODY. John Doe said they passed Merle's tour bus on I-5 on the way into town. They waved. That's life on the road. ~~*AM*



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# Former Blasters guitar player Smokey Hormel

*Smokey Hormel played guitar for the Blasters from 1987 - 1992. Since he has left the band he has been a steady working guitar player for Beck, Tom Waits, Bruce Willis, John Doe and numerous others. Recently he has been exploring Brazilian music. The article below tells us what he has been up to.*

**(reprinted from the L.A. Times ) . Special to the Times 2/3/02 By STEVE HOCHMAN**

Ask guitarist Smokey Hormel how he came to love Brazilian music, and he sets a scene that could come from a freewheeling contemporary novel. "I grew up in the '60s in L.A. and my mom was a French ballerina and my dad was this rich guy who loved music and having parties," says the musician, a grandson of the man who invented Spam and the guitarist during the past decade for Beck, Tom Waits and the Blasters.

"One of their best friends was the Brazilian consul, and whenever Brazilian artists came to town he would call and say 'Sergio Mendes is in town.' My dad would say 'Cool, let's have a party.' So when I was a kid, people like Gilberto Gil and Antonio Carlos Jobim were all at these parties at our house, up all night drinking."

For singer Miho Hatori, who grew up in Tokyo and was part of the New York art-pop band Cibo Matto, the connection to Brazilian music seems almost mundane. "When I was a teenager in the '80s, I was into alternative rock," she says. "But one friend of mine played (a record by) Sergio Mendes & Brasil '66 and I felt, 'Man! Even though I was into rock and noise, I loved this feeling of the music. Generally, Japanese listeners just love Brazilian music. Every time, I go back there, I find more great Brazilian records I cannot get here."

So, perhaps it was fated that these two artists from seemingly different worlds would team up to play music of and inspired by their '60s bossa nova heroes, in earnest exploration of mutual, if unlikely, roots.

Billed as Smokey & Mino, they've assembled a small band that will make its Los Angeles debut tonight at the Knitting Factory Hollywood, performing songs by such Brazilian figures as Baden Powell and Vinicius de Moraes, as well as original takes on the slinky, sensual sounds.

They've recorded demos of three new songs - one of which was used in the Golden Globe-nominated Mexican film "Y Tu Mama Tambien" last year - and are writing more with plans to make a full album. The recordings show that they've already put their distinctive stamps on the music, expanding beyond the boundaries of bossa nova while remaining true to the spirit. One of the songs is from Angola (like Brazil, a former Portuguese colony), and in addition to Portuguese, Hatori sings in Japanese, English and the Angolan language Kinbundu.

"I have English with a Japanese accent, and I have that too with Portuguese," says the 30-year-old Hatori who is also a featured singer in the "virtual" and the Gorillaz. "I'm willing to learn. And Japanese sounds are close to Portuguese. Actually, the first white person to come to Japan in the 15th century was Portuguese."

The genesis of the project came in 1998 when Cibo Matto was the opening act on a Beck

tour, and the two musicians hit it off. Hormel, who has concentrated on blues and rock as a performer, has reconnected with Brazilian music via Beck, an aficionado of the the quasi-psychedelic tropicalia style of the '60s and '70s. Having renewed his enthusiasm for bossa nova, Hormel gave Hatori a copy of a Baden Powell album, and the music became central to their friendship.

"Every time I went to New York, we'd have a jam session," says Hormel, 41. "A year later I was living (in New York) and had just seen Baden Powell play what would be his last show ever, actually. And Miho and I were talking about that tape I had given her, and we decided to try to perform the songs from the album just as a challenge."

In December 2000, they performed the entire album "Os Afros Sambas," at the club Tonic in New York. The effort proved not just a diversion, but also a haven for the two.

"Cibo Matto was struggling at the time to get played on the radio," Hormel says. "I'd been watching Beck's frustration with (lower-than-expected sales for) the 'Midnite Vultures' album. It felt good to just play music without thinking of the business."

That aspect, they say, became even more important in recent months. The post-Sept. 11 show-down meant less demand for Hormel on tours and recording sessions, and Hatori and her Cibo Matto partner, Yuko Honda, decided to put the group on indefinite hiatus.

"Since (Sept. 11), Miho and I have been focused on this project," Hormel says. "I'm not making a lot of money on it, though I definitely think it has the potential to make some money. But that's not why we're doing it. For me, it's nice to play quite and hear beautiful melodies. That beat is so natural, like a heartbeat."

"A lot of the imagery is very romantic, but also about people trying to find a place in the modern world and be connected to their spirit. "You turn on the radio these days and the beats you're hearing are so unnatural. They sure don't make me feel sexy." ~~~*AM*

