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The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

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Dave Alvin & Phil Alvin Receive Grammy Nomination

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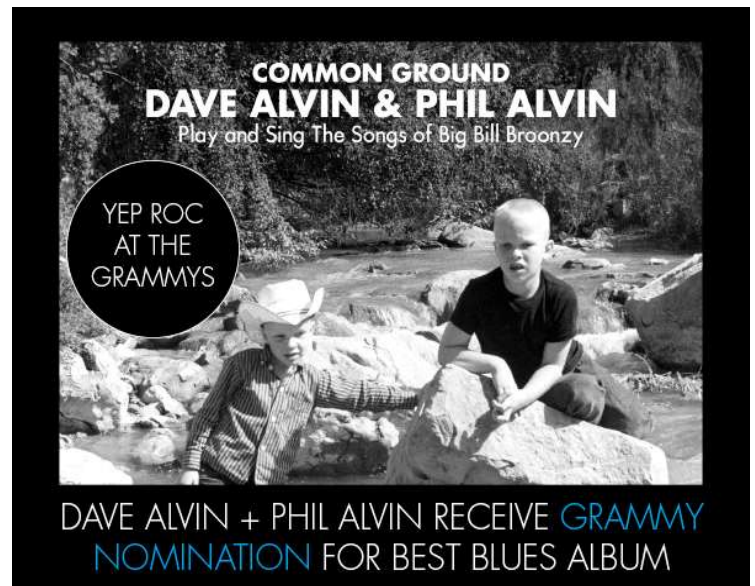
DAVE ALVIN & PHIL ALVIN'S FIRST ALBUM IN 30 YEARS RECEIVES GRAMMY® NOMINATION FOR BEST BLUES ALBUM 'COMMON GROUND: DAVE ALVIN + PHIL ALVIN PLAY AND SING THE SONGS OF BIG BILL BROONZY' GARNERS WIDESPREAD ACCLAIM

Yep Roc Records' recording artists Dave Alvin and Phil Alvin earned a GRAMMY® nomination for Best Blues album yesterday for their widely acclaimed Common Ground: Dave Alvin + Phil Alvin Play And Sing The Songs Of Big Bill Broonzy.

Their first album together in 30 years, "the brothers shine" (*New Yorker*) on Common Ground: Dave Alvin + Phil Alvin Play and Sing The Songs Of Big Bill Broonzy, which heralded high praise from press including, "rare and special" (*Hollywood Reporter*), "blew our minds" (*Wired*), "A joyous, loving tribute" (*Electronic Musician*), "Akin to Dylan on steroids" (*Uncut*).

"We argue sometimes, but we never argue about Big Bill Broonzy," says Dave Alvin when explaining why he and brother Phil were inspired to record Common Ground. The Alvin brothers, who founded seminal early L.A. punk roots band The Blasters in 1979, have shared a fascination with Broonzy since childhood. After an illness nearly took Phil's life in 2012, they resolved to return to the studio and pay tribute to the blues legend.

Common Ground includes 12 songs that capture a 30-year cross section of Broonzy's canon, performed by the Alvins' in their signature style of rollicking roots and stomping country blues. The 57th Annual GRAMMY® Awards are set for Sunday, February 8, at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.



In This Issue: Keith Wyatt on The Blasters East Coast tour, The 2014 Common Ground Tour, and Don Heffington's Gloryland.

Latest news: -- Dave Alvin and Anne McCue perform a duet on DEVIL IN THE MIDDLE from her forthcoming album Blue Sky Thinkin' which will be released on Feb. 10 via Flying Machine Records. The song is described as a "darkly dramatic" and was co-written with David Olney and John Hadley. Olney will be among the guests on Dave Alvin's West of the West 2015 train trip from April 17-27. The trip starts in Los Angeles and is tentatively scheduled to travel through Texas, Chicago, Denver and Emeryville before returning to Los Angeles. Other performers who will be on the train for part of the journey include Phil Alvin, Rick Shea, Christy McWilson, Peter Case, Sarah Borges and Robbie Fulks. For information, visit rootsontherails.com. "Tulare Dust: A Songwriters' Tribute to Merle Haggard," originally released in 1994 on HighTone Records, has been reissued in an expanded edition with a second CD on Frontera Records. Produced by Dave Alvin and Tom Russell, the original CD features performances by John Doe, Katy Moffatt, Dwight Yoakam and Lucinda Williams, among others. Dave performs KERN RIVER, which he later redid in 2006 on his West of the West CD. The second CD features highlights of a "Tulare Dust Concert" in San Francisco with many of the same artists. -- Greg Leisz, who has served as a sideman and producer for Dave Alvin and was a member of the All-nighters in the late 1980s, is the subject of a 22-page illustrated profile in the latest issue of Fretboard Journal. The profile, written by musician Joe Henry, also features comments from Dave on working with Greg. Fretboard Journal is noted for its color photography and features pictures of Greg and his instruments. www.fretboardjournal.com -- Dave and Phil picked up a nomination for Best Traditional Blues Album for Common Ground for the annual Blues Music Awards in Memphis. The ceremony is in May. -AM

The Blasters East Coast US Tour *September 2014 by Keith Wyatt*

The tour kicked off on August 29 at the Earl in Atlanta. Bill Bateman and Jamie Casillas, our roadie, left LA in the van with the gear on the previous Monday, arriving in Atlanta late Thursday while the rest of us flew on Friday afternoon. After the unrelieved brown landscape of drought-stricken California, at first sight the blanket of green that covers the Southeast was overwhelming, especially after an exceptionally wet summer that had filled rivers and lakes to the top. To those of us in LA trying to save every drop, it takes a while to realize that back East there's no guilt in taking a long shower.

The Labor Day weekend brought thousands of visitors to Atlanta; besides football and NASCAR, there was the huge annual sci-fi/fantasy/superhero cosplay gathering known as Dragoncon, which explained the somewhat bizarre combinations of clothing and makeup flaunted by a number of other hotel guests. Since our last tour of the Midwest in May, Phil had been touring nearly non-stop with his brother Dave behind the release of their album Common Ground, so once again we had to play the first show with no rehearsal, but as usual, as soon as we hit the first note, motor-memory kicked in and the rest followed automatically. Playing on the fly can actually be an advantage in that it heightens the sense of spontaneity, so while the arrangements might have been rough around the edges, the extra spark provided compensation. Either way, the near-capacity crowd was energetic and supportive, so it was a good kickoff for the tour.

The next day we left Atlanta for central Tennessee and the annual gathering known as the Muddy Roots Festival, held on a farm in Cookeville about 50 miles east of Nashville. The lineup runs the gamut from acoustic bluegrass to singer/songwriters to hardcore punk, with an emphasis on home-grown American music styles that makes it a



perfect fit for the Blasters. We were scheduled to play on an outdoor stage at 10 pm, but at 6:00 the rain began alternating between light showers and torrential. We arrived at the site around 8:30 during a lull, but a few minutes later, the skies opened up with no relief. The Weirdos managed to finish their show outdoors, but between lightning and the unrelenting downpour the promoter decided to move our set into a tent. While it was fairly dry inside, the ground around the tent was a sea of ankle-deep, reddish-brown mud and scanty plywood planking provided little protection. With the help of a very patient staff, we finally managed to get all of the gear loaded onto the flatbed-truck stage and start the set. The crowd seemed oblivious to the elements, however, and kept the level of enthusiasm high. Even though everyone was soaked to the skin and splattered with mud, I guess you don't plan to attend an event called "Muddy Roots" unless you're ready to encounter the elements. After the set we loaded out and twisted through some narrow country roads back to the hotel, where the next morning we found our boots, the inside of the van, and most of the gear covered in dry, red Tennessee mud, souvenirs of a memorable night.

Sunday the weather was dry again as we drove to Newport, Kentucky, just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. We had been booked months ago for a show at Southgate House, a converted 19th-century Victorian brick church, but apparently the promoter had forgotten that the annual massive Labor Day fireworks display was scheduled for the same night. Bridges across the Ohio were closed, major streets were blocked, and National Guard troops were on patrol. Parking near the river, where the

club is located, was virtually nonexistent, so fans had to park blocks away and hike in. The obvious result was a light turnout, but while few in number, the audience made us feel very welcome. Touring entails a variety of 'unknowns' that occasionally result in situations like this, and for both the band and the audience, adversity actually makes a show more memorable. In any case, as every experienced performer knows, whether it's a dozen people or a thousand, they deserve the best you've got.

On Labor Day itself we moved back south to Lexington, Kentucky, in the heart of horse country. Since it is located between bigger cities, Lexington is often bypassed by booking agents in favor of larger markets, but the club (Willie's) was worth the detour. After months on the road, Phil's voice was starting to show some wear, for which he apologized profusely, but the capacity audience was very supportive and we were thanked repeatedly for coming to Lexington.

Tuesday, a day off, was spent driving to Columbus, Ohio, in advance of our next show on Wednesday at the long-established Rumba Room. By show time the club was crowded with people pressed right up to the edge of the stage and by the end of the first song, AMERICAN MUSIC, it was clear that it was going to be an extremely hot night, temperature-wise. Between the number of bodies, lights and complete lack of moving air, the stage quickly turned into a sauna and band and audience alike were soaked through before the set was half over. After each song we had to pause to breathe, drink some water, and try to wipe off the streams of sweat with rough, wash-cloth-sized towels. It helped that the crowd was excited, but the set became as much a



survival challenge as a musical experience: Bill was starting to hyperventilate and my hands were so wet that my fingers kept slipping off the frets; by the end, all of us were as wet as if we had stood in the shower with our clothes on. We could only wish that the promoter would experience the same conditions – odds are that at least a stage fan and real towels would be provided by the next show.

Thursday brought us to Musica in Akron, Ohio. Akron is close to Cleveland, where the band has played several times, notably at the venerable Beachland Ballroom. Although this show was handled by the same promoter as in Columbus and the venue was similar in size, there seemed to have been problems with advertising and/or other event conflicts; either way, the turnout was very light. As in Newport, though, a smaller show feels more personal, and the enthusiastic response energized the band accordingly. Even though it was probably a loss for the promoter, for the band and audience it was a definite win.

Friday was at the familiar Magic Stick in Detroit. Aside from the 30-stair climb to load in and a sudden, intense rain/wind/hailstorm that knocked out power to a wide swath of the Detroit suburbs, it was a good show. The Magic Stick is a sizable room with a big stage, which both affect the way a performance feels – a bigger stage allows for more movement and a big room lets the sound develop more fully. It also helps to have the audience right up against the stage so you can actually see people and feel the energy they send back to you. Factors like these help bring out the best in a band, and all things considered, it was a good night.

Saturday was a long day. That night's show was in Toronto, and due to customs regulations it's difficult to bring merchandise – t-shirts, CDs etc. – across the border. As a result, instead of taking the three-hour direct route through Canada, we had to go the other way around Lake Erie via Cleveland in order to drop off the merch at the Buffalo hotel. A border crossing is always an adventure, and while the Canada/US border is "friendly," it can be more difficult for a band to enter Canada than Europe or Asia. This time, however, we got across OK and drove the last 90 miles from the border to Toronto. The city has a very active nightlife and our venue, the Horseshoe Tavern, was located on Queen Street, the epicenter. The Blasters have not played Toronto in decades, so there was plenty of pent-up demand; the show was nearly sold out and the crowd was all in from the first note. We were feeling pretty ragged after the 9-hour haul from Detroit, but as good crowds almost invariably do, this one once again revived our flagging spirits.

We spent the first part of Sunday, another sorely needed day off, driving back across the border to Buffalo via Niagara Falls. Even from the highway, the falls are spectacular and the air seems to sparkle with the energy of unleashed power. The weather simultaneously turned from the muggy heat of summer to the crisp air of fall, making our crossing back to the good old US feel that much sweeter.

Buffalo has taken its share of knocks over the years, with its economy going into decline as its long-time mainstay industries of heavy manufacturing and grain shipping moved elsewhere, but the size of the city's past wealth is still evident from the architecture. The ornately detailed stonework of monumental structures like City Hall and other downtown buildings, even if a bit worn around the edges, conveys both substance and style. There are also signs of a newly-emerging economy, and the variety of neighborhoods and broad streets lined with solid brick and stone houses provide a personality lacking in more modern cities. It seems like just the sort of place where someone can live both comfortably and inexpensively while working in the virtual economy, although

of course it helped that the September weather was still warm and sunny – February may not be quite so inviting. Regardless of climate, or perhaps because of it, people who have spent their lives in Buffalo have a strong sense of belonging that is not easy to find in a more transient city like L.A.

The show on Monday was at the Sportsman Tavern on the Northwest side of the city; not a gentrified neighborhood, but as we have seen in other cities, a venue like that can be the spark that stimulates regeneration. From the outside it's just another neighborhood bar (reminiscent of the Tip Top Club in Grand Rapids), but inside the owners have done extensive renovation to create a first-class music venue with a professional stage and even a balcony. As in Toronto, the crowd was primed for the Blasters after decades of absence and it was another very strong night all around.

Tuesday brought us to another musically under-served city, Rochester. The venue there was the Abilene (which happens to be named after a Dave Alvin song), and it was another example of hidden charm, an intimate (i.e. small) room that works in both the band's and the audience's favor by putting everyone on the same level, and with no microphones except for vocals; the sound comes right off the stage, old-school. Again, the audience appreciation was overwhelming and gave us every reason to make a return trip before another few decades have elapsed.

Wednesday, our last day off, was spent driving 350 miles to Wilmington, Delaware, where we checked in and rested up for the last four back-to-back dates of the tour. The following night we played at the unique Arden Gild Hall, a converted 19th-century barn that since 1910 has served as a community center for the leafy village of Arden. Although the infrastructure has been modernized somewhat over the years, it looks much the same as it did in photographs from the '20s and even a 1947 appearance by Leadbelly. The night was humid and between a large crowd and stage lights we quickly worked up a significant sweat, but that comes with the vintage, pre-air-conditioning ambience. The audience was again highly responsive and the gig was one to remember.

The next night we were in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, the latest New York location for the well-known Knitting Factory. In the past few years the neighborhood has become uber-hip and the streets were crowded with club-goers of every description. New York crowds have an edgier vibe and we responded by bringing back BONE-



YARD (an instrumental based on the old Dick Tracy TV cartoon theme that we recorded on the 4-11-44 record), a loud, aggressive splash of SoCal surf right in the heart of Brooklyn. It was a good show, and with good New York pizza also available right across the street, it was an all-around win.

Saturday we were at the Sellersville Theater in the rural Pennsylvania town of the same name, a venue and location that are opposite in virtually every respect from Brooklyn. Converted a couple of decades ago from a movie house to live music, the theater has built a strong regional reputation and attracts a number of touring acts. Angled theater seating insures good sightlines from every point in the room, so it's a comfortable night out for a more suburban-type crowd, especially when combined with dinner at the exceptional restaurant next door. We have played the Sellersville Theater several times over the years, but this was the best turnout yet and it was good to see a number of returning fans.

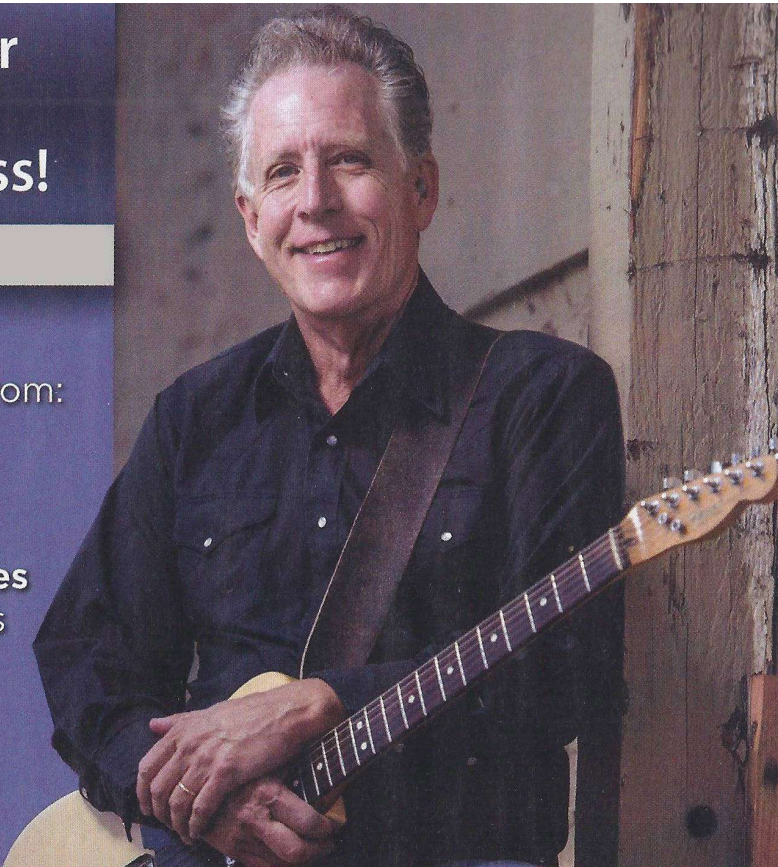
The tour finally ended on Sunday in Washington, D.C., at Gypsy Sally's on the Georgetown waterfront. I grew up in the DC area and remember that when you went down toward the Potomac from M Street and crossed the C&O Canal, the neighborhood quickly turned from Colonial charm to gritty, industrial no-man's land. However, rising property values have transformed the area and the neighborhood which now features a string of clubs and restaurants opposite an inviting waterfront park, even the shadow of the elevated freeway.

The band was feeling the results of fourteen one-nighters and several thousand miles of



driving, but the last show of a tour always inspires some extra effort and this was no exception. The combination of Sunday night and a relatively late show time would be expected to dampen the turnout, but the club was packed when we hit the stage and the audience was as enthusiastic as any on the tour. For me, even after a 40-year absence, DC is still my hometown, so the response was especially gratifying.

The next morning it was time to wrap things up and head home – Phil and John by air, Bill and Jamie by road – while I stuck around for an extra day to catch up with family and friends. The end of a tour usually brings both relief and let-down; relief to be going home (although with L.A. locked in a multi-day 100+ degree heat wave, it was a little less inviting) together with a letdown from the energy of the tour. Touring can be an exhausting combination of long drives, little sleep and bad food, but we all became musicians in the first place in order to feel the excitement of performing in front of a great crowd, so it's always hard to let it go. The band is scheduled to get back together after Thanksgiving to reprise last year's West coast "Xmas Family Tour" with X, so before ya know it, it will be time once again to load up the van and hit the highway. —~~am~~


A photograph of Keith Wyatt, a man with grey hair, smiling and holding a light-colored electric guitar. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt. The background is a rustic wooden wall.

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"For 35 years I taught blues (among other things) at Musicians Institute, and that gave me a unique opportunity to work with hundreds of players and identify the challenges people typically run into when learning the style. That experience gave me the foundation to show players at different levels what makes blues unique and how to develop a blues sound. What I like about this approach is that I can interact personally with students via video and get into their specific questions instead of the usual one-way on-line presentation. The curriculum is built around dozens of video lessons that I wrote soon after the publication of my last Hal Leonard book, "Blues Guitar Soloing," which had solidified and expanded on the ideas and techniques that I taught at MI. Next to playing, teaching has always been my favorite thing to do, and since I left MI last year I feel very lucky to have the chance to keep doing it in the virtual world." —Keith Wyatt

Artistworks.com

Don Heffington:

Dave Alvin's studio drummer sets out on his own for Gloryland by Tom Wilk

Don Heffington has had a varied musical career. He was a member of Lone Justice and has played drums on sessions with such artists as Bob Dylan, Emmylou Harris and Dwight Yoakam. He has been the drummer on four Dave Alvin albums – Ashgrove, West of the West, Eleven Eleven, and Common Ground. In 2014, Don Heffington released Gloryland, his first solo album. In a recent email interview, he discussed Gloryland and working with Dave Alvin.

Q: How did the idea to write and record Gloryland come about?

A: My friend Jill Markey is an artist and one day she mentioned to me that she would really like to do an album cover. That was the original impetus for doing the thing. I dug her artwork. It kind of grew from there.

Q: From reading the credits on your Web site and All Music Guide, you go beyond drums/percussion. I saw you also play guitar and harmonica, for example. What instruments do you play on Gloryland? I thought I heard tuba on some tracks.

A: I played most of the instruments on the record. My friend David Vaught kicked in on some of the stuff. That was it. It was just the two of us. I would record a vocal and guitar at my place and then I'd take it over to David's studio and we'd both overdub on it. He was great with sounds. I mean GREAT. He'd pull a lot of the stuff

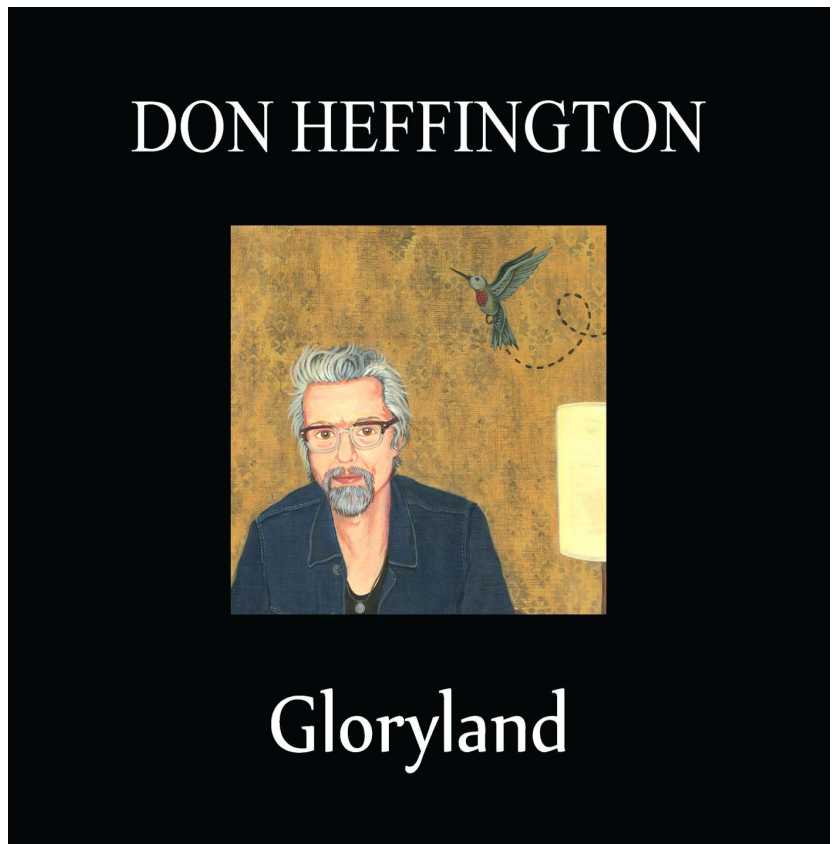
up on a keyboard, tuba for instance. But here's the rub: David died after we recorded the first four or five songs. Pancreatic cancer. It was a shame. So I had to finish the thing on my own.

Q: The vocals on Gloryland are a mixture of singing and recitation. Have you done much singing in a live or studio setting? Whom do you consider your vocal influences?

A: I sang a lot when I was a kid. In fact, that's what I wanted to do was to sing. I used to sing Bobby Darin songs in the schoolyard when I was little - MACK THE KNIFE and such. So I was influenced to a certain degree by Bobby Darin, probably Mose Allison and, of course, Bob Dylan. I think everybody's got some Bob Dylan in their voice at this point whether they know it or not. But after awhile I just hung it up. I was already playing drums by that time so that's the direction I went.

Q: Some songs, such as GENERATOR and HOLLYWOOD have the feel of a poem. Have you written any poetry? I thought the lyrics on GENERATOR wouldn't sound out of place on a Bob Dylan album. I also felt some of the material recalls Captain Beefheart and Tom Waits.

A: I've always read a lot of poetry...but never wrote much. People mention Beefheart when they hear my



stuff, but there's really no connection. I can tell when I listen to Beefheart that we had some of the same influences though - that's what people hear - Albert Ayler, Giuseppi Logan, Sun Ra, The Fugs. Now THOSE were the people who influenced me. I met Waits just before his first record came out. I had heard his demos and flipped out over them and ended up looking him up. Tom used to really like that song GENERATOR. It's ancient. I wrote it when I was 19 or so. Tom used to have me sing that one and another thing called WRAPPED UP AND BLUE. So Tom was very supportive and I loved his music, but, if there is any influence, it would have been from the early years - not the later stuff like people might expect.

Q: What led you to put the Allen Ginsberg poem (Put a Kiss and Tear in yr. Letter) to music?

A: I've always loved Ginsberg. I think he was a brave and generous soul. I used to carry one of Ginsberg's books around with me in my back pocket when I was a teenager. Anyway, I read a book called Off The Road by Carolyn Cassady, Neal Cassady's wife, and it had a little poem transcribed in there which Ginsberg wrote when he was young. For some reason, I was taken by the thing and started to sing it to some chords I was playing around with. My friend Bobby Neuwirth hooked me up with Ginsberg who told me to go ahead and use it.

Q: I wanted to ask about your background. Are you from California or did you move there? Were drums always your first instrument? What led you to become a musician?

A: I was born in L.A., over by East L.A. College. I came from a musical family. Everybody on my mother's side was a musician. My Grandma taught me to play the drums when I was nine. I started out on her old Slingerland set from the 30's. She played drums, sax, keyboards - just about anything, really.

Q: How did you and Dave meet and first come to work together? I noticed you have been his drummer on all of his studio albums since Ashgrove, with the exception of the Guilty Women CD.

A: Well, we always saw each other around town. We were sort of on the same scene. I'm not sure if we ever really talked until the early '90s when I happened to be in New York and saw that he was playing at The Bottom Line. We talked for awhile that night. We had certain things in common. A love for a lot of the same music. We both played with Big Joe Turner, for instance.

Q: Looking over your credits, I noticed you worked on Tom Russell's Rose of the San Joaquin CD and Christy McWilson's albums, all of which Dave produced. Did that lead to the work on Dave's albums?

A: As I recall, Greg Leisz pulled me into the sessions Dave was working on with Tom. I suppose that's what led me to recording on Dave's solo stuff. Christy's album was also in there somewhere but I don't remember the exact timeline. Bob Glaub, who's a great bass player and dear friend of mine, entered about the same period.

Q: Did Lone Justice ever share a bill with the Blasters in the 1980s?

A: Oh yeah, we did a number of shows together back in the day. Ryan (Hedgecock) and Maria (McKee) always cited the Blasters as being a big influence on them when they were young. I think that Maria used to sit in with them when she was 18 or something.

Q: How is it to work with Dave in the studio? I remember when Ashgrove came out that Dave mentioned the band he used were all "Ashgrove" kids who went to the club in the 1960s and early 1970s. Do you have the same musical influences?

A: It's always a gas to play with Dave. The sessions are relaxed but at the same time very focused and he always surrounds himself with good people. Really some of my favorite sessions have been with Dave. The thing that's always amazing to me about Dave is that he keeps getting better! Every time I hear him he's better than the time before! And yeah, we all hung out at the Ashgrove. I saw Freddie King there, Ramblin' Jack Elliott - I saw a lot of shows there. I'm sure that Dave's influences are probably pretty broad. We both love a lot of the older blues



and folk guys though.

Q: Have you ever played live with Dave?

A: I've done a couple of little local things with him. Usually special events and such. I did a thing with both Dave and Phil at the Grammy Museum awhile back. It's always a gas.

Q: Do you have other projects or sessions that you are working on?

A: Oh yeah, there's always something going on. I'm trying to get back in the studio to record some more of my own stuff. I've been playing with some great guys: Sebastian Steinberg, Tim Young, and David Rollicke. I want to get in there and do some stuff live this time.

Q: Listening to Gloryland, I hear a different direction from your session work. Did you have a goal or sound in mind when you began to record the album?

A: I did have a sound in mind. I wanted it to sound like an old man with the DTs falling into a Salvation Army band.

Q: On the CD Baby web site for Gloryland, it says that: "Don Heffington steps out from behind the drums to sing ten original songs in an unconventional and somewhat abstract recording which you will either love or hate." Was that your idea to put that one as a warning or notice to people?

A: I just said it because I thought it would be proven to be true. It makes me nervous though that so many people seem to like it. You know, like Bob Dylan once said "All the greats get booed." --~~AM~~

Thanks to Don for sharing his thoughts on his work. His CD Gloryland is available on CDBaby.com, amazon and iTunes. For more information, visit www.donheffington.com

Dave Alvin and Phil Alvin and The Guilty Ones

2014 Common Ground Tour by Billy Davis

The rare chance to hear brothers Dave Alvin and Phil Alvin playing together is the initial attraction of the Common Ground tour. What the fans expect to hear are Blasters songs because that's what they already know. But the Common Ground tour exceeded expectations. Fans see a great show despite hearing only two original Blasters songs. (They do play three other cover songs that were in the Blasters repertoire in the old days.) What makes this show so special are the surprises and variety. You have Big Bill songs done acoustically, Big Bill songs rocked-out with electric guitars, Blasters songs or covers, and Dave Alvin and the Guilty Ones songs. There's no doubt that a Dave and Phil show is unique and quite different from any Blasters show.

The Common Ground tour (and album) opens up even more depth in the rich musical heritage of the Alvin brothers. The brothers' personal interaction and musical performances on stage leave you enjoying all of their music in fresh new ways. I saw both bands touring this summer in the same venues with big crowds for both.

The Common Ground set list throughout the US tour in 2014 stayed pretty much the same, so the shows I describe here from mid-July of 2014 on the East Coast are a good representation of the whole tour.

As the lights dim at show time, a Big Bill Broonzy recording of his song GLORY OF LOVE is heard. The band enters the stage led by Dave Alvin and Phil Alvin. The Guilty Ones backing band, consisting of Chris Miller on lead guitar, Lisa Pankratz on drums and Brad Fordham on bass, follow.

The show starts out with 5 acoustic based songs, three of them from the Common Ground album. The first song ALL BY MYSELF features Dave and Phil both on acoustic guitars, The Guilty Ones accompanying the brothers in a more subdued manner with

Lisa playing the brushes on the drums with Brad and Chris keeping their volumes low. It's a great starter song that features both brothers trading off lead vocals on the verses.

After the opening song, Dave Alvin formally addresses the crowd: "Thank you for coming to our family reunion. That's a song from an album me and my brother recently released called Common Ground: The Alvin brothers sing and play the songs of Big Bill Broonzy. It's the first studio album we've made together in 30 years. We had so much fun, we may make another in . . . ten or twenty years."

Dave talks often between songs and the theme of the night is how important Big Bill Broonzy was in the brothers' musical development. But other important influences are also mentioned. As Phil pulls out his harmonica for the next song, Dave explained: "When my brother was twelve years old he took harmonica lessons from blues legend Sonny Terry and on this song Phil would like to show you everything that he. . ." and Phil finished the sentence: "Forgot." That got a laugh from the crowd as they started Big Bill's most famous song KEY TO THE HIGHWAY. Of course Phil's playing was great, so Dave ended the song saying: "You didn't forget much Phil."

Next they do SATURDAY NIGHT RUB, one of Big Bill's earliest songs. It's an instrumental that features some fun finger-style guitar picking between Phil And Dave. With no vocals, the brothers are able to face each other and play to each other bringing out quite a few smiles as they play a very challenging piece.

Continuing the set, Dave said: "Back when I was a member of my brother's band, the Blasters, we recorded this song on our first two, first albums (the independently released American Music on Rollin Rock Records and the Slash records major label The Blasters album) - That's a joke for you record collectors. It was originally recorded back in the 1920's by a man they called the blue yodeler, Jimmie Rodgers. I call him the father of white blues." Phil did some authentic yodeling in NEVER NO MORE BLUES. It was interesting to hear Chris Miller take on Dave's role playing the electric guitar solo, while Dave maintained the rhythm on the acoustic guitar.

They finished out the acoustic set with KING OF CALIFORNIA. Phil takes a bit of a backseat during this song just strumming the guitar. On this one the band starts getting a little louder especially with Chris Miller's lead guitar.

Now it was time for Dave Alvin to switch to the electric guitar and let things get loud. FEEL SO GOOD gets that going featuring the Blasters-styled electric guitar by Dave Alvin and great Phil Alvin vocals. The next Big Bill song is one that, as Dave says, "May be the first rockabilly record," called HOW YOU WANT IT DONE.

An all out electric blues is next in SOUTHERN FLOOD BLUES, which is a Big Bill song that Dave admits he "Dave Alvin-ized" to make it sound like it fits right beside ASHGROVE or OUT OF CONTROL. On this, Phil plays harmonica, not as a lead instrument, but a backup rhythm. Following this is the Blasters classic BORDER RADIO and then the Dave Alvin original about another one of his R&B heroes - JOHNNY ACE IS DEAD.

Dave has a really funny story which he uses to plug his merchandise table. Dave: "We did a gig with the legendary Merle Haggard. Merle has an old school merchandise guy, but he doesn't call himself that. He said to me: 'Dave your doing it wrong. You're calling it merchandise. Instead, call it souvenirs.' He demonstrated: 'Ladies and Gentleman on your way out tonight, pick yourself up a Merle Haggard souvenir.' Merle Haggard sells a lot of souvenirs." Dave Alvin pauses and looks out at the audience: "So on your way out tonight, stop by and pick up some souvenirs."

Next from Common Ground they do THE STUFF THEY CALL MONEY with on Phil on

harmonica and sharing vocals with Dave.

The audiences at Dave's shows are always very vocal with comments and requests and Dave always replies with a witty comeback. When people starting yelling out for MARIE MARIE, which obviously is one he saves until the end, Dave says: "Now when you go to see Peaches and Herb, do you expect REUNITED right off the bat? No. They're gonna tease you first."

TRUCKIN' LITTLE WOMAN is probably the most Blasterish song from the album and it got some people up on their feet. Dave said: "When we got our first Big Bill album, this is a song we took to right away because of the boogie-woogie beat and we thought it had dirty lyrics in it, and it does if it's sung right." Phil yelled over with a big grin on his face: "Do you want me to sing it right?" Dave said: "I want you to sing it right!"

WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR BROTHER is the song that reunited the brothers for a collaborative song on Dave Alvin's Eleven Eleven album. A funny thing happens in the middle of the song where the band brings the rhythm volume down. Phil says: "I did something stupid a few weeks ago and now I have to do that stupid thing every night." He starts playing a lead guitar solo in his unique finger picking or plucking style. Phil tried this solo idea spontaneously at a West Coast show earlier in the tour and Dave Alvin liked it. So Dave coaxes Phil into doing it every night.

Next, Phil starts SAMSON AND DELILAH by himself and the whole band joins in. This was a regular part of the set list of the Common Ground tour. Another Dave Alvin classic is played - DRY RIVER - complete with the Lisa Pankratz drum solo that she has played on the recent Guilty Ones tours. ONE BAD STUD finishes off the regular set just like at a Blasters show, but with Dave and Chris Miller trading off on the guitar solos.

In the encore, Phil Alvin sings the James Brown song PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE from the Blasters latest album Fun On Saturday Night. Phil's vocals are outstanding. The Guilty Ones version here adds the backing vocals heard on James Brown's original 1955 hit. Dave transitions into the last song with an explanation: "That's a record by James Brown from 1955 that me and my brother found on a hot sweltering Saturday at the Paramount swap meet for a quarter on a big thick slab of King Records vinyl. We were record geeks who would search every place for records - thrift stores, attics, junk stores, swap meets, radio and TV repair shops, and antique stores. Nowadays, kids push a button and they have everything ever recorded. Back in our day you had to go searchin' for it and you could hold it and touch it and smell it. This next song is one that I hope, somewhere on a hot Saturday, some record collector geeks find a scratchy thick vinyl copy of this on Slash Records for a quarter. Because then I know . . .we're immortal." Off they go into MARIE MARIE.

At the end of the song the whole band sustains the last note as Dave yelled over the collective loudness and says: "I know it's late. I know it's late. But trust me, we got here as quickly as we could. . ." The surprise song they launched into is FOURTH OF JULY. It's an obvious audience favorite judging by the audience cheer. To finish the show the band plays an instrumental as Dave introduces all the band members. As the song seems to be ending, Phil Alvin pulls out a harmonica and plays Lee Allen's saxophone solo from SO LONG BABY GOODBYE. There were no vocals, they didn't play the full song, but that solo made it an incredible ending. --~~AM~~