

ISSUE #39

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

JULY 2003

Blasters shows

(Phil, Dave, John, Bill, Gene)

7/17 Chiari, Italy at Palasport
7/18 Lerici, Italy at Piazza Della Rotunda
7/20 Peer, Belgium at Belgium R & B Fest
7/21 Amsterdam, Netherlands at Paradiso
7/24 Madrid Spain at El Sol
7/25 Bilboa, Spain at Azkena
7/26 Gijon Spain at Teatro Albeniz
7/28 Glasgow Scotland at Renfrew Ferry
7/29-30 London England at Dingwalls
8/13 Santa Ana CA at Galaxy Theatre

Blasters shows

(Phil, John, Jerry, Keith)

OPENING FOR REV HORTON HEAT

8/04 Albuquerque, NM at Sunshine The.
9/10 Bend, OR at Midtown
9/11 Portland, OR Crystal Ballroom
9/12 Seattle, WA Showbox
9/13 Spokane, WA Fat Tuesday's
9/14 Boise, ID Big Easy
9/17 Minneapolis, MN First Avenue
9/19 Madison, WI Orpheum Theatre
9/20 Detroit, MI St. Andrews Hall
9/21 Cleveland, OH Agora Theatre
9/23 Rochester, NY at Water St Music hall

DAVE ALVIN Shows

With The Gully Men

9/6 Santa Monica CA at McCabes
10/3 Reno NV at Hawkins ampitheatre
10/4 San Francisco CA at Strictly Bluegrass festival
11/01 Shoreline WA at Little Theatre

The Blasters Go On Tour, New Album & DVD to Follow

Latest News: -- The Original Blasters are touring Europe from July 17 - 30, 2003 (see side bar). They will be taping a BBC TV appearance while in London for the "Top Of The Pops 2" program. -- Chris Gaffney will be opening up for the Blasters in Glasgow, Scotland. -- The Blasters (Phil, John, Jerry, and Keith) have been hard at work on finishing their new album. Reportedly, guitar tracks were recently finished and currently they are working on completing Phil Alvin's vocal and harmonica tracks. They expect mixing to be done before going out on the road with Reverend Horton Heat in a support slot. They are very confident the album will be out before the end of the year. -- Dave Alvin has been writing songs for a new studio album. He expects to start recording in October. His 2nd book of poetry will be released at the same time as the album. -- The Original Blasters have been in negotiations to record and release a DVD. The 8/13 Santa Ana show will be taped with special guests who influenced the Blasters, joining them on stage. Stay tuned for further info. -- Mobile Fidelity has put out a special edition of Dave Alvin's Blackjack David on CD and a 2 LP vinyl set will follow. Mobile fidelity specializes in Audiophile CD's and LP's remastered from the master tapes with sonic clarity. It can be ordered for \$25 at www.amusicdirect.com or by calling 800-449-8333 -- Rick Shea is working on an

album of country duets with Patty Booker. -- On August 15-18, 2003 look for Keith Wyatt at the Jamsa Blues Festival in Finland. Keith will be playing with a Finnish blues band that specializes in the Freddy King blues style. -- Tom Russell recently performed Dave Alvin's song "Bus Station" on The David Letterman show with Nanci Griffith. -- The Pine Valley Cosmonauts CD called "The Executioner's Last Songs" on Bloodshot records has two Dave Alvin vocal lead songs on it: "Louis Collins" and "The Green Green Grass of Home." Dave also is credited with playing guitar on two tracks. It's a specially priced double CD. -- Chris Gaffney has a new project with Dave Gonzolas (of the Paladins) and Teddy Morgan. They've recorded a demo, and are shopping for a record deal. -- Hank T. Morris & the Amazing Buffalo Brothers have recorded "So Long Baby Goodbye" for their new album Seven Nights to Rock. Hank T & Co are a part of the big cult rock revival band movement in Sweden - never on the charts or on radio, but they sell quite a bit of records and have a reputation as a great live band at the Greaser / American car festivals up north in Sweden. --AM

SPECIAL ROAD CREW ISSUE *Inside this Issue: Interviews with the Blasters soundmen, a look at 24 hours on tour with the Blasters and the history behind Dave Alvin's "Andersonville."*

THE BLASTERS SOUND ENGINEER INTERVIEWS

What does a Sound Man do? He mixes all the instruments through the venue's (house) PA system so you, the audience, hear the Blasters songs and each of the individual instruments mixed like on a studio album. At times they handle other duties like road managing, driving the van, and loading in and out the equipment. Here we have interviews with the two men who have controlled the Blasters sound for the last 23 years.

Rob 'Babo' Tomaszewski - The Original Blasters Soundman 1980-85

American Music: How did you get the job with the Blasters?

Babo: I was working as a sound engineer in a club called Berkeley Square in Berkeley, CA. It was a pretty hip club with a lot of great acts stopping there in the late 70's and early 80's. The Blasters came through there and I really liked them and their music. I wanted to be their sound man, so I had hooked up with their road manager, Wally. I went to LA and hung out at The Whiskey a few times to see the Blasters. It took a year before they wanted to hire a sound guy and asked me. Of course, I jumped on it.



Babo and Rick Brown met again on the reunion tour in 2002

I remember one of the first shows I did with them was a pretty big show in San Francisco with the English Beat and the Bangles in late '82 at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium (now called the Bill Graham Civic Aud). I remember hardly doing a sound check and then requesting a set list. I said, "I need to know what's going on with you guys." They wrote a set list out on a paper bag (laughs). I saved that and still have it somewhere.

Once I signed on with the Blasters, I stayed on into 1985. We toured endlessly and would only come off the road for the Blasters to record. I would hook up with other bands and continue working. I was working for a big sound company out of L.A. called Electrotech. I did a few tours with the Clash, and Big Country, and Los Lobos and the Del Fuegos. Doing sound or tour managing.

But the Blasters occupied most of my time. I think we drove our Dodge van with the U-haul trailer on every interstate in the country end-to-end (Laughs). That's not far from the truth. Most of the time it was clubs, but we did open for some acts in big venues. Most notably being Eric Clapton in 1983 on a national tour. The Blasters were really well received. We did a regional tour with The Kinks, also plenty of festivals. Summer Fest in Milwaukee was always a big hit for us. Lots of beer (laughs).

AM: How did you get the nickname "Babo"?

Babo: I was in college in Ann Arbor in the 60's. People tried to call me Bob, which I hated.

Bob is something that goes in the water when you're fishing (laughs). One day somebody called me Babo and it stuck.

AM: What made you leave the Blasters?

Babo: We had been touring so much and it was so much driving. On the long drives, it was just me and the road manager Wally, while the band flew. We were the whole crew. It was endless touring. At that time, we were expecting an upcoming tour around the world which I was really excited about. It was to include Australia, Asia, and eastern Europe.

I remember we loaded out of a club called "My Father's Place" on Long Island and drove straight across the country in three days and loaded into the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver. I could barely stand up - we were so tired. At that point I said to Wally, "I never want to drive across Canada again." He said, "Don't worry, we're gonna go around the world soon. It will be a great trip."

After that we did Farm Aid in Sept. of '85. My job was to drive the van from Champagne, Illinois back down to

L.A. and get ready to go on this round-the-world trip. Sometime while we were in Champagne, we were notified that the round-the-world thing wasn't gonna happen, but we were going back across Canada. I just couldn't do it! It was too many days and nights in the van.

I drove the van back towards L.A. and it had rained and somehow the band's gear got wet. I stopped in Missouri when it was sunny and took all the gear out to dry in the sun in some park. People were coming by, including a guy who played in Rex Allen's band, and asked if I was having a "Sale" (laughs). I was pretty miserable.

I knew Rick Brown for a while and because I was getting tired, I had kept him in my pocket as a replacement. I just called Rick and said, "Are you ready to get in the driver's seat on this?" and he was. So, I called Wally who wasn't with me because I was driving with a merch guy and told him: "I'm gonna get this stuff back to LA and then I'm done - I'm too burnt." He didn't quite believe it, but I told him I had my replacement already.

I got to LA and their next gig was up in the Northwest. They used a guy named Tommy Pachecko to go on ahead up to Canada with their gear in the van. There was a controlled burn going on in Sacramento that blew smoke across the freeway. Everyone was blinded and that van was in a horrible 30-car wreck, where a bunch of people died. The San Francisco Chronicle had an aerial photo of the wreck on their cover of the pile up. Right in the middle of all that was the crunched up Blasters van. I still have that paper and I wrote on it: "Can you find the Blasters van in this picture?" I was a good time to leave the band. That's when the wheels



Babo, his wife Kelly and a friend.

came off (Literally).

AM: Any funny stories from the road?

Babo: Oh Yeah, plenty. I remember Phil was getting increasingly into computers back in '82 or '83 calculating his math problems. We called Phil "Captain Beep" or "Beeper" because he was always punching the keys and they would make a beep sound. That would go on all night long - a lot of times we would drive all night to the next town and sleep in the day. He actually put an inverter in the van to get AC power - he installed it himself. I was really impressed that he did that and didn't screw up the van. I remember one time the van broke down, and the four way flashers were the only light we had and here's "The Beep" standing out there punching away on his computer in the middle of the night to the light of the tail light flashers (laughs) on the side of the road.

Everybody in the band was pretty normal. Phil was the colorful one and he's the one the most stories are about. He collected so much stuff. He would buy antiques, carpets, and marble heads. He would put it in the trailer with the gear so we always had all this extra stuff to off load at the hotel. And it was all very heavy. We always had to move it off into Phil's room. So it took even longer to load the stuff back into the trailer when we left town.

Here's another one: I remember the first show of the Eric Clapton tour in Pine Knob Detroit. Clapton's stage set had a cage around the drum riser. When Clapton went on stage, the drummer ran into the bar of the cage and knocked himself out cold. The band started playing not knowing what happened. Right away the Clapton people approached Bateman about playing for them. He was willing to do it, but the drummer was revived in about 10 minutes and did finish the gig. Then, on the last show of the tour - there's always a lot of pranks that happen - the Clapton crew had rigged this bag of junk above the stage filled with confetti, streamers, shoes, papers and just junk. They planned to dump it on Eric. But as luck would have it, Eric invited the Blasters up to sit in and Phil was standing right in the spot next to Eric. Maybe they planned it all along, I don't know - but they dumped all this stuff on Phil's head - (laughs) That's rock n Roll!

AM: What do you remember about the legendary "Phil-At-The-Canadian-Border story?"

Babo: We did a gig in NY and were going to Toronto. Phil and Gene got a car to go ahead. Phil somehow lost Gene. I never knew what happened. But Phil got to the Border crossing without Gene and had no ID or anything. He got his ID by going to a local record store and bought a Blasters album to show them his picture on the record. They went for it and let him go (laughs).

We got to the border the next day and were waiting a while during one of their routine checks and one of Canadian Immigration guys said, "Oh! You're with that guy who came through yesterday? Here's his address book. He left it here!" (laughs)

AM: Tell us about your approach to the Blasters sound.

Babo: What I liked was that they were pretty straight ahead. I loved the instrumentation of the band because Gene is so good, and they were using horns. One of the things I do have a talent for is making drums sound like cannons. I like to use drum's natural tone and not take all the rings out. Maybe just one problem I had with the Blasters was in trying to get a good kick drum sound. It's really hard to get a good kick drum sound when you leave the front head (skin) on. I asked Buster Bateman if he would let me cut a hole in it. He refused, got upset, and said: "You can't ever do something like that! Are you crazy?" I tried different mics and even

mic-ing from both sides of the kick drum - but it was a minor problem.

There were never any problems, really. Any bad Blasters show was still a darn good show.

AM: You worked sound for the Blasters on a few of their March reunion shows. What was your impression?

Babo: I thought it was great. It had been so many years - when they played at Slim's, which was the first reunion show I did, It all came back to me about why I had spent so many years working for so little money, driving in that van. When I was working for Electrotech I was offered much more prestigious gigs, but I turned them down because I loved this music so much.

If the music isn't right and the people aren't right, I'm not gonna work for 'em.

So those reunion shows were great and they didn't even have Lee Allen. But the spirit of Lee was there, that's for sure.

AM: What do you remember about Lee Allen?

Babo: Well, I got hooked up with Bread and Roses, a non-profit organization that takes entertainment to people in institutions - like hospitals, convalescence homes, prisons, psych wards and rehab centers. Every year we would do a big festival for them at The Greek Theatre in Berkeley with some big stars. Lee Allen did that one. At the 1990 show, we hired a woman to co-produce the show in 1990, named Kelly. She's my wife now. Lee Allen met her and was kind of a catalyst to us getting married. I wasn't the marrying kind of guy and he came to me and said, "What are you waiting for?" He posed the question at a time in my life when I ran out of excuses (laughs). I wasn't waiting for anything anymore. So, Lee was the matchmaker for me and my wife. Lee was very special.

AM: What else did you do after the Blasters?

Babo: I worked with Los Lobos and Dwight Yoakam. I did go back on the road with Robben Ford. I did a lot of tour managing. I worked for Eddie Money.

Also during and after the Blasters I worked for John Lee Hooker as his tour manager over a span of 15 years on and off. We toured Japan, did festivals and lots of weekend stuff.

I liked working for him, he was a penny pincher, but it was a lot of fun - because of his stature in the industry we were taken care of like royalty and respected. John was a low-key guy who sat in the hotel and watched baseball. The early years were a lot of fun and later his family got involved and started to assert their influence on us. They didn't have music-industry savvy and it made my job harder. They blocked my access to John and questioned everything, so I left about a year before John died.

AM: Any other last memories about the Blasters?

Babo: I miss the early days. One last thing I can add about my experience with those guys is how much they really broadened my musical experience. We spent endless hours in the van playing tons and tons of tapes. Lots of it made it into my record collection. It was a great experience. It was two-fold: The Blasters experience and then all the great old R & B and Country acts. It was a very educational and informative time to be with those cats.

You know when you do this type of work there's a lot of pay back that has nothing to do with money. It's what you get out of it as a 'life experience.' It was that way with the Blasters and with John Lee. —**Am**

Rick Brown

Blasters' and Original Blasters' Soundman 1985 - current

Rick Brown has been the Blasters sound technician since 1985 and has traveled with them on almost all of their high profile tours. What does a soundman do? He mixes all the instruments through the venue's (house) PA system so you, the audience, hear the Blasters songs and each of the individual instruments mixed like on a studio album.

Also acting as tour manager, Rick drives the band van as well, so he's been there for the Blasters behind the scenes. Here he shares some of the stories from his 18 years.

American Music: How did you get the job as Blasters soundman?

Rick Brown: I already knew Rob 'Babo' Tomaszewski (Blasters soundman from 80-85). He had my number in case he needed someone to fill in. In Sept of '85 I got a call from Rob from the road. He and the Blasters had just done the first Farm Aid in Illinois. Rob was driving back to L.A. and all of the band's gear had gotten rained on. He loaded the gear out onto the side of the road to dry out. He called me and said that he was fried and couldn't do it anymore.

AM: What did his job entail that was stressing him out?

RB: Just dealing with the Blasters every day for five years. He wasn't even gonna get a rest because they were starting another tour. So he asked me to fill in.

AM: What was the first show you mixed for the Blasters?

RB: It was the Whiskey A Go Go in 1980. I was working there at the time so whenever they did The Whiskey, I mixed them.

AM: What were you doing in those early years before joining the Blasters?

RB: I started doing live sound in '79 at Madam Wong's. It was a good enough place to learn the ropes. Before that, I played drums and guitar in a band and worked in a recording studio. I'd rather mix than play in a band. I just like it more.

After The Whiskey job, I got to tour working for Billy Burnette, Sparks, Man From San Diego, DFX 2, Bobby Womack, and X. I did a European tour with The Textones in '86 and then worked for The Paladins while also with the Blasters. I did John Doe's solo tour in 1990 then I worked steady at the King King from '91-'93 and had to turn down a Blasters '91 tour of



Rick Brown in his work area.

Scandinavia. I was at the King King in the years when the Red Devils were the Blue Shadows, and they were really happening. Later I tour-managed Laika & The Cosmonauts in '95. Also in '94-'95, I tour-managed and did sound for Reverend Horton Heat.

I only do sound for bands when I care about the music. If I don't like the band, I can't do a good job on the mix. The Blasters are my favorite band, then probably Reverend Horton Heat.

AM: What do you remember about the time when you just joined the Blasters?

RB: I remember having a good time drinking beer in Vancouver with Dave and getting to know him. He filled me in on the dynamics of the band members. Also hanging out with Lee Allen was awesome. He would always give love advice and it was very funny.

AM: So you were there when The Blasters members started leaving the band. What do you remember about Gene leaving in November of '85?

RB: We did a co-headline bill with the Fabulous Thunderbirds. At the Montreal show, I remember going backstage after the show, and Gene was trying to talk to Phil, and Phil was ignoring him. Gene said to me, "I know a way that Phil won't ignore me." I didn't know what he meant but he got on the T-Birds tour bus, and it drove off. Then we thought, "Maybe he was serious." We did the last few shows of the tour without him."

AM: What do you remember about Dave leaving the band and his last show in New York City at "The World" on 3/28/86?

RB: He had talked to me about being interested in joining X. I told him he needed to do what he needed to do. I knew he was starting with X on 4/1 because the Blasters were on a break. I imagine everybody knew, but I don't remember if we thought he was leaving permanently. After Dave left, they got Hollywood Fats. I never heard of him, but Phil said that he was the greatest guitar player ever seen. His first gig was at The Palace in L.A. That was really great!

AM: So Babo never wanted to come back?

RB: I think he had had it. But anyway, the Blasters and I became such good friends and it was working out good. Anyway after that Dave came back to cover for Fats and we did Italy, Spain and England. Then Billy Zoom joined for a summer Scandinavian tour. He fit in really well but didn't play much blues. Billy seemed to have a really good time but I don't think he cared for the music much.

AM: How have the Original Blasters changed over the years?

RB: Dave's approach has changed; he uses a lot more sustain and is an improved player. Phil seems the same, but has more sore throat and hoarse nights than he used to. John and Bill are the same - they hold it down and play great. Gene, too.

AM: Any good stories of the band on stage?

RB: One of the times that John broke a bass string, he didn't want to change basses so Tommy Pachecko, the tour manager, changed the string while Bazz played the song. That was funny to watch. Another time we had both our vans break down on the road on the way to a gig in San Francisco at Slim's. A tow truck towed us to the gig, and we arrived just before show time. Lazy Lester had opened the show with Larry Taylor on bass and Richard Innes and somebody else on guitar. The Blasters started on time but playing on the other guys' gear. After each song we would pull an amp or an instrument off and replace it with the Blasters stuff, so by the end it was all of the Blasters gear on the stage.

AM: Any other cool bands you met along the way?

RB: When we played Summerfest in Milwaukee in '86, Stevie Ray Vaughan didn't like a band

that was playing before him. So he got the Blasters to play before him. He was good friends with Fats. Stevie was nice people. After he died, his girlfriend called Dave Gonzales of the Paladins and told him that Fats had kept a letter Dave Gonzolas wrote to him. She said, "He really cared about you guys (The Paladins)." That was really nice.

The Blasters are truly lucky to have had top-notch soundmen. We all benefit from these guy's experience each time we hear the Blasters live. Look for Rick out on the road with the original Blasters in Europe and Rob with various bands in the San Fran Bay area.

24 Hours on the Road with The Original Blasters

I got a chance to work for the Blasters as a roadie on their west coast reunion tour in December of 2002. I thought it would be interesting to give everyone a look at what goes on behind the scenes on the day of a Blasters concert. Here is a look at 24 hours starting in Vancouver BC on December 9, 2002.

by Billy Davis

The Blasters band members flew into town from L.A. at 4 PM just in time for sound check. The three-man road crew consisted of the tour manager Mick Weick, sound technician Rick Brown, and me -- the "back-line tech" (at least that's what I was called when Rick Brown announced our crew titles to the Canadian border official who questioned us). We left Ventura, CA, at 2 AM--right after the show on 12/6--driving 1300 miles straight in 22 hours in the van full of the Blasters equipment. What a drive! Rick Brown drove the very-tough night-time hours and then Mick and I switched off in the day. This schedule allowed all of us to get sleep in the van, and when we arrived, we had almost two full days off in Vancouver.

At 4 PM we loaded in the equipment from the van to set up the stage. Rick Brown started setting up the instruments, but focused more on what microphones were used and what kind of arrangements had to be made at the soundboard. By now we had the routine down, and there are small details for each band member to remember. When setting up Bill Bateman's drums, everything is exactly the same each night. His snare drum tilts away from him, the brand name on the skins has to always aim straight up, and a hammer and



Tour manager Mick Weick



The full band and crew: Chris, Gene, Dave, Billy, Bill, Rick, John, Phil, and Mick.

nail is laid out for him next to his drum seat. After he decides on the positioning of the drums in soundcheck, he hammers the nail through the kick drum pedal to hold it in place.

John Bazz likes his amp to sit to the right of Bateman's drum riser, but stands in front of the drums when he plays and not in front of his amp. He always has two heads (the head is the amplification section which is separate from the speaker cabinet in an amp) on top of his

speaker cabinet in case one blows out.

Phil likes his amp to sit to the left of Bateman, standing 18 inches off the ground on a chair or milk crate. His harps have to be laid out on top of the amp with his glasses so he can see each harmonica's key. Phil has to have a Gatorade and water near his amp at showtime for his throat and for replenishing his energy lost in the buckets of sweat he works off. This tour he has been carrying two guitars, both old semi-hollow body Kay's. Today I plugged in the guitars to check the amp sound and tuned the guitars.

Gene Taylor likes his piano amp angled up towards his right ear while he hears the monitor mix through the angle wedge speaker, which is aimed at his left ear. A microphone is tested out on a short stand, and is left behind him so when it's his time to sing "Tag Along", he reaches behind for the stand and pulls it up in front of him. Then of course at showtime, Gene requires a tub of ice next to him with a few six packs of Budweiser. Mick Weick has been setting up the piano, plugging it in and testing the sounds. For Dave Alvin, I just set up his guitar amp up on top of its cover to raise it to chest level. Dave likes his "Fender Concert" amp slightly angled towards the center of the stage, so when he wanders away from his pedal set up, he still hears the sweet-spots from the amp. When I was setting up the amp, I looked in the open back and noticed that three of the four speakers were Fenders and the fourth was a Celestion speaker. Celestion is very respected brand, and is known as a hot sounding speaker - It brings out more tone from the guitar and provides great sounding distortion on the heavier rock stuff. I pointed out the Celestion speaker to Rick Brown, who got excited and from that point on specifically pointed the mic at that speaker so the house PA would pick up mainly that speaker for the mix of Dave's guitar sound.

Chris Gaffney acting as Dave's guitar tech, sets up Dave's guitar foot pedals. Next, the band comes in and tests out the sounds. Phil Alvin didn't come to soundcheck, preferring to rest his

voice at the hotel.

After the soundcheck the venue usually provides a meal or offers a 'buy-out', which means they give each band member cash to buy their own food. In this case they offered the 'buy-out'.

The band and crew split up trying different places. I left with Dave and Chris and went back to the hotel bar where they had a limited menu of appetizers and burgers.

Then some of the guys went back to their hotel rooms

to rest; the period of time between soundcheck and the time their set starts can sometimes be the only rest time the band can enjoy on a show day, so everyone pretty much relaxes.

I went back to the venue a little early to check out the opening band, a local rockabilly band, and also get the set list together. Mick Weick was working for the Blasters for the first time on this tour; he regularly tour manages Greg Allman. He was doing too good a job so far on the tour by taking the set list I gave him and making photocopies for the band and crew. Every show, he had them lying on the table backstage for the band members to approve. The problem with the prepared photocopies, was that it was the same set list from the last 7 shows. Hoping for variety, I asked Mick to not make it so easy on them because then normally Dave sits down right before the Blasters set and writes a set list off the top of his head. That usually makes for some interesting additions depending on his mood. But with prepared set list copies all ready, Dave was getting lazy and letting the set stay the same. We let Dave write out the set list this night, but he had memorized so it wound up being the same anyway.

So if anyone out there got a souvenir set list from the stage from this show on, you'll see it's in Dave's handwriting. The previous 6 shows are in my handwriting - sorry, my mistake. Showtime came and the band arrived backstage. I made sure Phil had his guitar from the stage to warm up on. Chris took care of Dave's guitar.

As the band took the stage, it was very exciting because there was a big crowd even on a Monday night. During show time, Rick Brown ran the sound, Mick made calls to advance the next show, and Chris Gaffney stood on the side of the stage ready at any minute for guitar tech emergencies. I, having the best of both worlds, was free to watch the show.

After the show, the band hung out in a meet-and-greet room next to the stage. Evan Johns attended the show and was seen hanging around with Dave Alvin. Meanwhile, we, the road crew, started packing up the band's gear. Then the venue sent us away with Subway sandwiches to bring back to the hotel.

Normally the band will get together for a few drinks after the show, but everybody was tired from the long day and went to sleep.



Billy, Rick, & Mick in the van on the way to Vancouver

The next morning I woke up a little early and visited the Internet Café to send a show update back home for the BlastersNewsletter.com daily tour diaries. The whole Blasters team gathered in the hotel lobby waiting for Phil to come down so we could leave. We were all ready to leave, but Phil wasn't. He wanted to stop in the guitar shop nearby and make an offer on a new guitar. He knew he would get a good deal because of the weak Canadian dollar. Phil has been thinking about getting a new guitar because the old Kay's he's playing don't have much of a finish, and the wood is becoming wrinkled from sweat. Phil couldn't get a deal, so we left town heading for the US border.

Dave Alvin and Chris Gaffney left earlier in their own car to go to Seattle for a recording session. Dave recorded some guitar tracks for the next REM album.

In our van was Rick Brown driving, tour manager Mick Weick, Phil, John Bazz, Bill Bateman, Gene Taylor, and myself. We made it over the USA border but not before being asked to leave the van and see the immigration officials. You know, a rock band traveling in a van is always suspected of trouble. Rick Brown is the driver, so someone else in the van told Phil to let Rick do all of the talking - believe it or not, Phil kept quiet, but not without a few jokes under his breath. Those border agents are tough. They can detain you for hours if they don't like you. The non-stop rainy ride in the van was a lot of fun. Phil and Gene went at it, making fun of each other, telling old road stories, and Phil entertained everybody by playing the harmonica and we listening to some old gospel records on CD.

We arrived at the hotel and immediately checked in and picked up our merchandise, boxes we had marked "Nudge, nudge" to identify them. The hotel held merchandise that we couldn't bring into Canada because the sales would be subject to too much tax.

Again we were off to soundcheck at the Crocodile Cafe.



Most people remember the excitement of Blasters live shows, but before and after the gig, it's not all fast and exciting, so I'm fortunate to have been behind the scenes to see the little things that go into what makes their shows so special.

—Am

The band in Vancouver, waiting in the hotel lobby.

Andersonville: Behind The Music is the History

by Tom Wilk

This story appeared in the December 2002 issue of Civil War News. It is based on telephone interviews with Dave Alvin in 1991 and 2002 and e-mail interviews with Civil War researchers.

"Andersonville" is a song close to Dave Alvin's heart. "It's more than a haunting song about the infamous Confederate prisoner of war camp. It also serves as a tribute to Asa Powell, his great-great-great uncle who died in the Georgia prison.

Powell was a private with the 122nd Regiment Illinois Infantry and died of diarrhea at Andersonville on Aug. 15, 1864. Alvin first released "Andersonville" on Blue Blvd., his 1991 solo album. He released it as an acoustic number with Richard Thompson on a various artists CD called In Their Own Words, Volume 1 (Razor and Tie) in 1994 and recut the song again in an acoustic setting in 2002 for his live CD Out in California.

With its acoustic guitar and fiddle, the Out in California version sounds as if it could have been performed at a 19th-century reunion of Civil War veterans. "Andersonville," with its stark images, is sung in the voice of a doomed soldier.

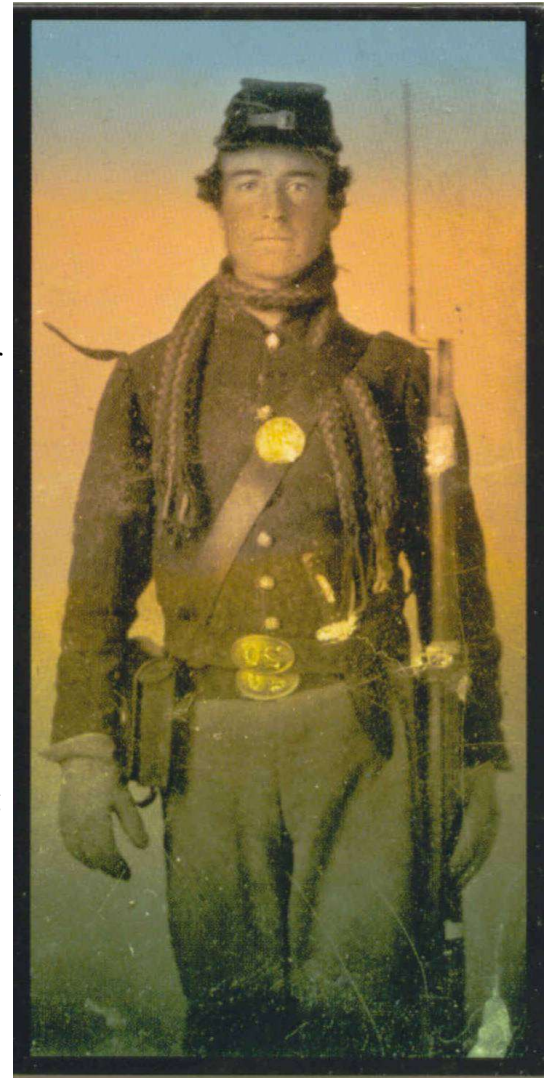
The second verse captures his hopelessness and desolation. "My uniform had faded and there's no boots upon my feet/I'm pulling worms out of the mud cause there's nothing left to eat/And the Rebs can't even feed their own so there's no way they can fill/The bellies of the Yankees starving in Andersonville."

The chorus of the song adopts a fatalistic tone: "Some men are born to preach God's word/And some men are born to kill/I guess that I was only born/To die in Andersonville." The seeds of the song were planted in a childhood gift that Alvin received in the mid-1960s. "I was given a box with two photos - a tin-type and glass photo of my great-great-uncle," he recalled in a 2002 interview. Alvin used one of the photos (seen right) in his Public Domain CD. Also in the box, a gift from his Aunt Margaret, were some small carvings that Powell made while in the Army.

After launching his solo career, Alvin decided that Powell's life and death could be the subject of a song. He began work on "Andersonville" in 1990. "I sketched it out and it originally had eight verses," said Alvin, who then trimmed to it four verses and a chorus and dedicated it to Powell on the Blue Blvd. CD.

From the start, Alvin said he knew the song was something special. "The first time I played it was for a woman I know. Her reaction was, 'Can I go commit suicide now?'" he recalled in a 1991 interview. Today, "Andersonville" is a song that connects with his audience. "I got a lot of requests for it; it's one of my more requested songs. Alvin is reluctant to perform the song if the setting and mood are not right. "I don't want to do it live if people are talking."

Tom Wilk is a Dave Alvin fan who writes for the Blasters newsletter and also has researched and written about the Civil War.



Asa Powell

Chris Gaffney protests The Blasters Newsletter

“In my whole boxing career I was never knocked out !”

American Music: The Blasters Newsletter erroneously reported that Chris Gaffney was knocked out once during his boxing career. The error was made in the Original Blasters West Coast reunion Tour Diaries, last issue. Phil Alvin had been dedicating ONE BAD STUD to Gaffney. American Music misinterpreted Phil's comments. Chris tells us a little about his boxing career:

Chris: I was 17 and 1. I was dropped once, but never knocked out. That was in my last fight: I got thumbed in the eye and got a detached retina. I couldn't pass the exam, so they wouldn't let me fight. But I didn't know it was a detached retina until about 2 years ago. I only have about 50% vision in my left eye.

I trained with Mike Quarry (Jerry Quarry's brother) in L.A. and also with Mando Ramos at the Main Street gym around '67. I sparred with Mando Ramos who had the world light weight title. My best punch was a left hook to the body, but sometimes I switched to south-paw. I wanted to be welterweight champion of the world, but I never was.

Dave Alvin On The Blasters Trouble Bound album

I really believe it's the best Blasters record ever made. Pound For pound. It doesn't have Lee, but my problem with all the other Blasters records in general was there was too much thinking going on. Everybody was pressuring us to get on the radio; they were asking if what we were doing was cool. Phil was thinking about his voice and I was thinking too much about the guitar.

Well, we didn't really know how to make records. And part of it was the eighties recording style with compression. The band lets me play a little differently now and I have gotten better." "Crying For My Baby" is my favorite song on the album.

Pacific Blues Press Release: GENE TAYLOR's second solo record in 15 years is coming soon. You may know his name, but for sure you know some of the folks he's played with: The Blasters, Canned Heat, Ronnie Hawkins, James Harman, and of course, The Fabulous Thunderbirds (his current gig since 1993). Former band-mates Bill Bateman (Blasters) and James Harman add their talents to this CD, so don't expect just another boogie-woogie piano record. As Clifford Antone, at Antone's welcome home party at Antone's in Austin, Texas, said, "Is there a better piano player anywhere than Gene Taylor?"

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