

2006 re-print and expanded edition

AMERICAN MUSIC

The Blaster Newsletter

Issue #3 June '94

Latest News: As of the first of the month, Phil Alvin said most of the recording of the solo album is finished. He is currently working with an artist on the cover design. The album is as he calls it is: "a duet album," because of all the guests appearing. The title of the new release is County Fair 2000. No release date is set, but don't expect to see it before August. -- Dave Alvin has just released his fourth album called King of California, and is going out on tour in support of it. He is also taping a video to promote the new CD. Dave will also be taping some radio interviews while in Philadelphia, The World Cafe for WXPB and Fresh Air for National Public Radio. Listen for the airings of these anytime after June 21.

GIGS: DAVE ALVIN

June 11 Philadelphia PA at Tin Angel, June 12 Alexandria VA at The Birchmere, June 14 Albany NY at Pauley's, June 15 Cambridge MA at Middle East Café

June 16 Pittsburgh PA at Graffiti Showcase, June 17 Buffalo NY at The Marquee, June 18 NYC at Bottom Line, June 25 London UK at Weavers, July 1 Hollywood CA at Jacks Sugar Shack, July 2 Hollywood CA at Jacks Sugar Shack, July 9 San Francisco CA at Paradise

GIGS: THE BLASTERS

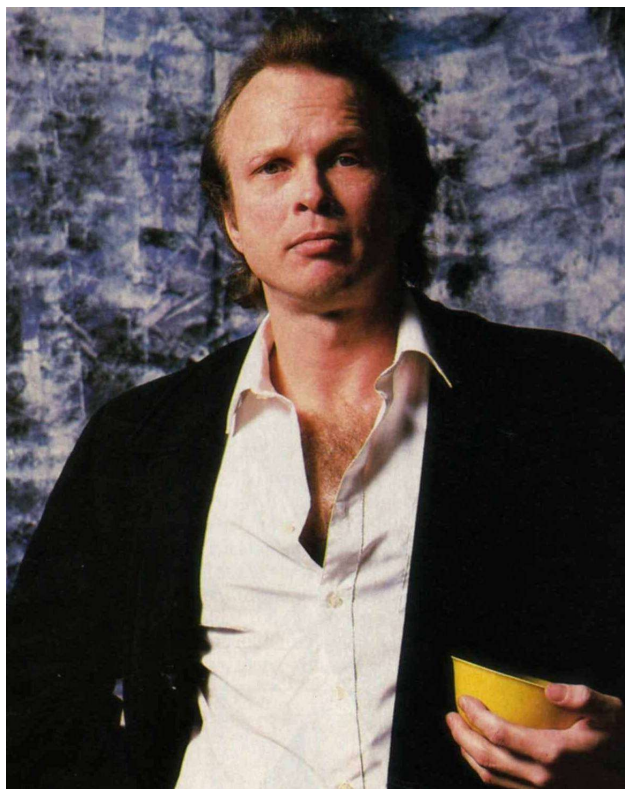
June 17 W. Hollywood CA at House of Blues w/ The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, July 3 Solana Beach CA at Belly Up Tavern

A CONVERSATION WITH PHIL ALVIN part 2

On March 28, 1994 I interviewed Phil Alvin on a variety of topics including: his upcoming solo album, the new Blaster album, other current musical projects, and what he has been doing in the period of time since he last recorded in 1986. In this issue part 2 of the interview will cover the new Blaster album which is tentatively scheduled for release in the fall.

AMERICAN MUSIC: How did James Intveld come to be the new Blasters guitarist?

Phil Alvin: Greg Hormel's sister was very ill with cancer and Greg couldn't make a lot of these road trips and it became pretty clear that he was going to have to just bow out. At the same time, I was doing some solo gigs at the King King (Hollywood club) covering for Bill Bateman who was on tour with the Red Devils. It was their gig, so he wanted me to take it, so some other band didn't come in and grab it. He knew I didn't want it forever. That's when James Intveld, a long time friend of mine, came down and played lead guitar with me one night. We were both a little drunk and I listened to James's playing. He wasn't playin' silly little rockabilly licks, he was sittin' right down hard on the guitar like Otis Rush and really playing good American guitar. I thought, "Man, this is a great lead guitarist. What the hell do all these people have him only playing bass in their bands." I understood why the guys who he'd be playing bass mostly didn't want him to sing because if he did, they would lose their gig, because he's such a good singer. So, I had him come down to one rehearsal and that was it. He was just so

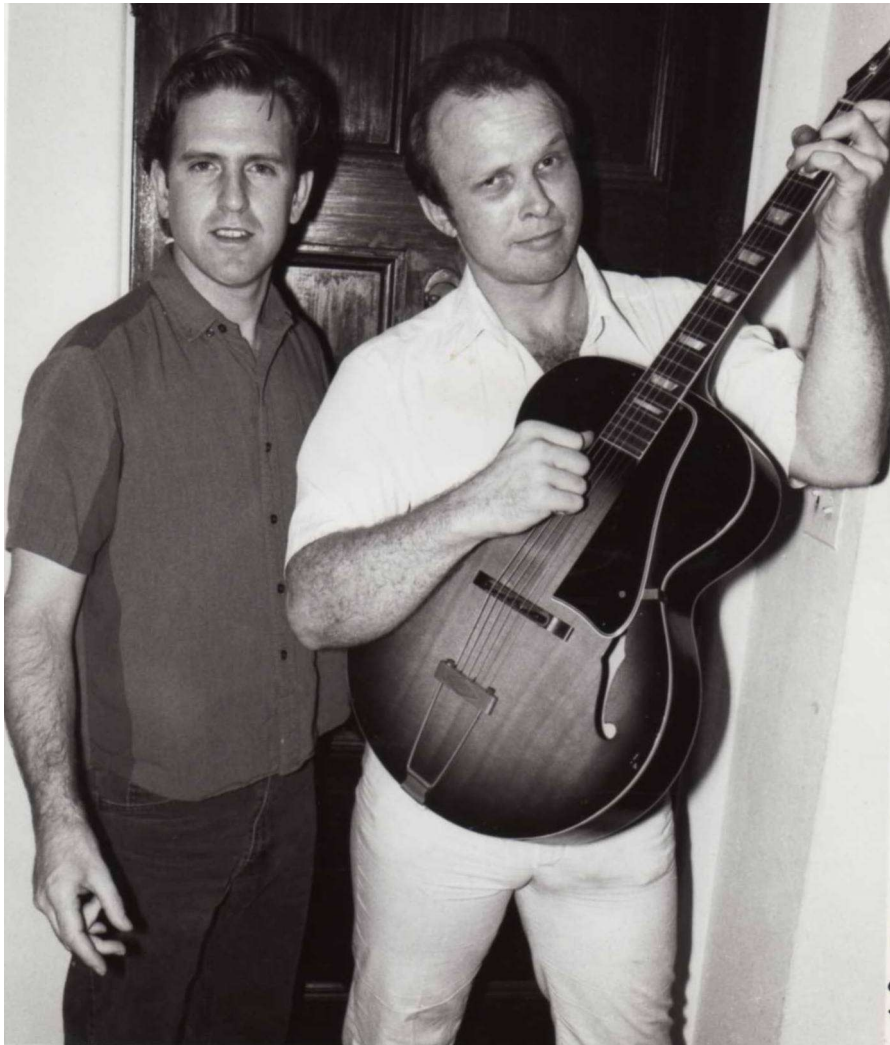


damn good. That also added more impedance for me to want to do Blaster gigs and just play music again. This jam, it was just like playing with David (Alvin) again. Really the best.

AM: How did Dave Carroll become the new drummer?

Phil Alvin: Dave Carroll was really “the” drummer in Downey years ago. He lived with Bill Bateman most of their teen-aged years at Bill's house. Johnny Bazz, the bass player in the Blasters, was the drummer in most of my bands. One of the reasons was that Dave Carroll could also sing and he was the only other guy in Downey that could put a band together and front it as well. He and I were sort of competitors. But from our late teens, 18 to 23, David Carroll and I played in a band.

AM: He played on your Unsung Stories album, didn't he?



Phil Alvin: Yes. He had been living down in Louisiana for about 6 years, I called him to come up here because, we had some money and he's such a great musician. This guy has taught me many, many things about music. He's a great guitar player, and a real good singer. So I said to Bill (Bateman), “Look man, you have to figure something out with the Red Devils because I'm going all out touring with the Blasters, and you can't do both.” That was really hard for Bill, because Bill had built up that Red Devils thing - then it fell apart. When he started that band, I was going to school, Johnny was running his high end audio store, and Bill was playing music on top of this music. I said, “Man it's dangerous to his future in the Blasters. If I get successful in mathematics, it's not in any way going to interfere with the Blasters or if Johnny is with his audio business, but if your Red Devils thing takes off, your gonna be looking at the same time periods for touring as the Blasters are. Bands go on the road at peak touring periods like, the end of school, the beginning of school, the summer time and all that. So I said, “If you go, you'll

have to make that decision.” Boy, he didn't want to. So I just had to finally give him a dead-line. Dave was very nice to just sit and wait for a month and a half while we tried to get Bill to figure out what he wanted to do.

AM: In the summer of '93 you were playing with the current line-up under the name "The Phil Alvin Quartet." Why wasn't it billed the Blasters?

Phil Alvin: I was going under the name “Phil Alvin Quartet” just because I wasn't going to call it the Blasters until I knew about Bill. The Phil Alvin Quartet was going to be the Blasters with or without Bill Bateman but we were giving Bill a chance to come in.

AM: You also did some shows in the summer of '93 billed as Phil and Dave Alvin, didn't you?

Phil Alvin: Yeah we had done a couple of shows where David came and it was really the Blasters. Once James Intveld settled in, I didn't want to do that anymore just because there's been enough confusion over who the hell are the Blasters. David and I do not, nor have we ever hated each other in any way, shape or form. Brothers fight and that's just the way that it is. There's no animosity between David and I, when ever David and I get

together musically it's always very good.

AM: What are some of the songs we will hear on the new Blaster record?

Phil Alvin: There are two original songs, one by me called 4-11-44 about lotteries and one by James Intveld called SLIP OF THE TONGUE. This is really an EP. There is a Muddy Waters tune on there that a friend of Muddy's taught me. His name is Marcus Johnson, he'll be on the solo record.

Marcus Johnson was Muddy Waters good friend and that's a fact. I used to think he was jiving me until the first time he took me to a Muddy Waters show. We went down to the Ashgrove (famous L.A. blues venue), there was a lot of people waiting around and all of a sudden the camera's come in, and here's Pete Welding interviewing Muddy Waters as he walks in and across way in the corner is where me and Marcus are standing. Muddy Waters walks in the front door of the Ashgrove and about 10 seconds after he walks in, his eyes walk over and he catches Marcus in the corner and his hands just push everybody aside, Pete Welding, the cameras, and everything. He just goes, "Marcus" (with a loud voice), pushing them away and ran to the corner. Marcus is just the coolest cat in the world. But Marcus told me there was one song that Muddy used to kill with live but they didn't quite get it right when they did it on the record. That's a tune called JUST TO BE WITH YOU.

AM: We heard a great version of that the Blasters did on the Folkscene radio show in October '93.

Phil Alvin: If you heard it on that radio show, I meant that thing from the bottom of my heart! There are two engineers down at KPFK studios and they are top flight. I was almost going to take that version and just put that on the record.

AM: What record company is the Blasters EP being released by?

Phil Alvin: It is Sony/CBS. They are making new labels, new little names, and this is one being run by David Krebbs. I don't know what the name is. The deal they offered was so fair that I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth at all.

AM: Well there are a lot of people who have waited a long time for this record and are really looking forward to it.

Phil Alvin: I thank everybody, I'm so surprised, we were down at Austin at that South By Southwest (a music industry showcase forum) man and the people were just so generous. The audiences were so, oh man, I can't believe anybody knows who the hell I am right now. But that's great, thank you everybody. It's so nice that people wanna hear me. Good . . so I'll play.

AM: Who is producing?

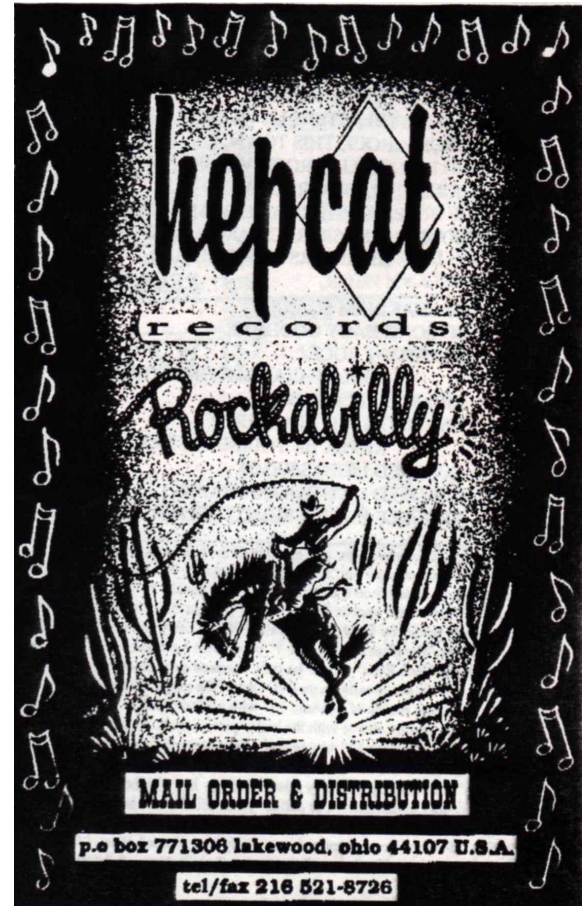
Phil Alvin: I have produced every Blaster record, but the record company always sticks some name on there.

AM: Like Don Gehman on the Hardline album?

Phil Alvin: That was the only time that anybody had ever produced that didn't quit and run away once they got a hold of their money. He produced JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY and COLORED LIGHTS.

AM: Will Lee Allen be on the Blasters album?

Phil Alvin: I hope he is. We were on the road and he had sort of a seizure in August '93 in San Francisco, just as we were about to leave on the plane. We had to call the paramedics. Lee Allen is a battle horse on the road, there is nobody in history who has ever been like that guy. That cat since 1948 has been putting bands to bed and waking them up for breakfast and he was doing the same with the Blasters. Well, the doctors thought he had a very small stroke because of his high blood pressure. They did an MRI and found nothing but when they checked the rest of his body they found 2 very small spots of cancer on his lung. So they sent Lee back down here on chemo-therapy for six months. Well in three months time the cancer was completely



gone from the lungs but they thought the cancer had already dispersed to his brain and that could have caused the seizure. They took two other MRI's and still never found any stroke, but on the fourth MRI finally they found this very small mini stroke. So if anything, the good Lord said we want Lee Allen around so I'm gonna give him one of these little mini strokes so they can find this cancer now. So pretty soon Lee will go on therapy for the mini stroke and hopefully he'll be able to go through that in time to overdub the Sax on the cuts on the record.

AM: Is Lee going to cut down on the touring from now on?

Phil Alvin: Oh yeah. I don't know how long it will take. I want him out as fast as possible just for his own good ,but let him go into his therapy and get himself right. I may bring just a couple of Lee students on the road for some stuff, but I prefer not to. I like all these guys, but Lee's my man!

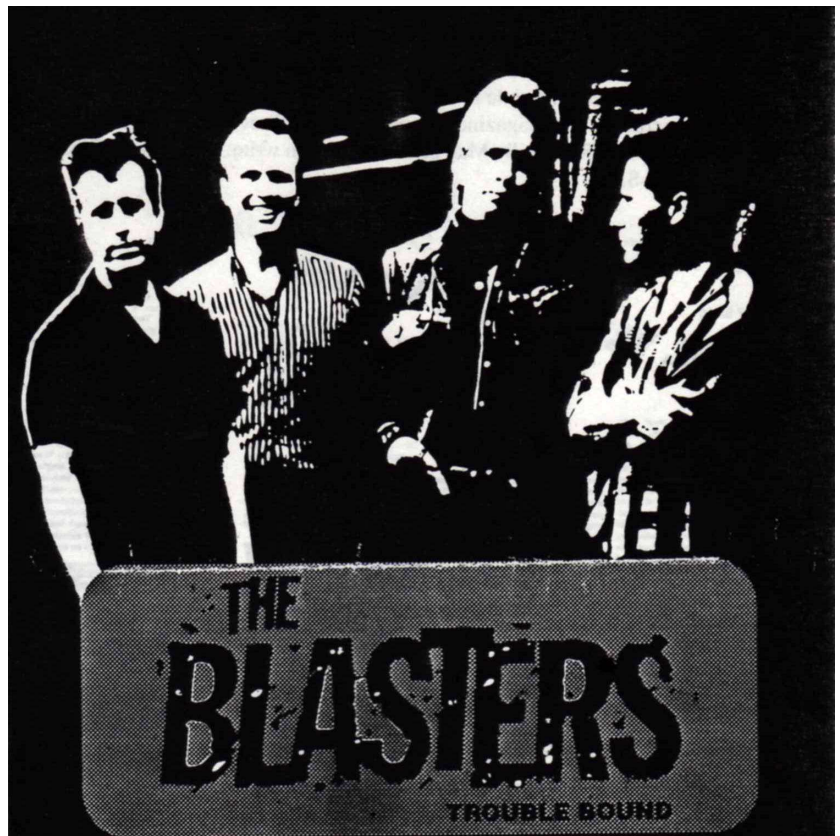
AM: Do you plan on putting out new records now on a regular basis or do you have other projects outside of music to conquer?

Phil Alvin: Yes, but I still intend to publish mathematics because that has been my life's battle. Since I was 15, I remember my mother telling me, "Your gonna have to figure out what your gonna do." I said, 'Why can't I do both of them, I don't understand.' And to this day I don't understand. To me, as soon as I finish the mathematics thing, all I want to do is play music and when I finish the music thing, all I want to do is mathematics. They sort of keep me in harmony together. -~~AM~~

BLASTER T-SHIRT OFFER !!

A limited edition printing of The Blasters Trouble Bound T-Shirt is now available. Act real fast because we won't be able to 'Stop the Clock' on this one selling out. The print (pictured here) is red and white on a black shirt available in sizes- small, med., large, X large. If you order more than 2 shirts at a time or are ordering after Aug. 15, 1994, write in advance to reserve sizes. Price is only \$12 each and that includes Air-mail shipping all over the world. What a Deal!! Payment can only be made in U. S. currency cash only. Sending cash in a registered letter is the safest way to go. The biggest Blaster fan in Finland, Janne Kurunsaari is selling these shirts non-profit and deserves all the credit. To order, don't forget to indicate size, and write to:

Janne Kurunsaari
Ryytimaantie 1 A 18
00320 Helsinki Finland



BLASTER DISCOGRAPHY

LP'S/CD'S

1980	AMERICAN MUSIC	ROLLIN ROCK 021	LP
1981	THE BLASTERS	SLASH SR109	LP
1982	THE BLASTERS	SLASH/WB BSK3680	LP
1982	THE BLASTERS(alt. cvr)	F BEAT XXLP 15	LP
1982	OVER THERE	SLASH/WB 23735	LP
1983	NON FICTION	SLASH/WB 23818	LP
1985	HARDLINE	SLASH/WB 25093	LP
1990	BLASTERS COLLECTION	SLASH/WB 26451-2	CD

7" SINGLES

1981	IM SHAKIN/NO OTHER GIRL	SLASH SR110
1982	IM SHAKIN/NO OTHER GIRL	SLASH/WB50047
1982	IM SHAKIN/NO OTHER GIRL	F-BEAT XX25
1982	SO LONG BABY/BORDER RADIO	SLASH/WB 29975-7
1982	SO LONG BABY GOODBYE/ AMERICAN MUSIC	F-BEAT XX27
1982	SO LONG.../MARIE MARIE	WARNER 17 953(Ger)
1983	BAREFOOT ROCK/BUS STATION	SLASH/WB 29678-7
1984	I CAN DREAM(DAN HARTMAN)/ BLUE SHADOWS(BLASTERS)	MCA 52378
1985	COLORED LIGHTS/HELP YOU DREAM	SLASH/WB 7-29055

VARIOUS ARTISTS& COMPILATIONS

1980	VARIOUS	TEENAGE CRUISERS	RHINO RNL016	LP
		(ROLLIN ROCK VERSION OF "MARIE MARIE")		
1983	VARIOUS	ATTACK OF THE KILLER BEES	SLASH/WB 23837	LP
		(LIVE AT THE VENUE OUT TAKE "WHAT WILL LUCY DO")		
1983	VARIOUS	SLASH EARLY SESSIONS(2 TUNES)	SLASH 23937	LP
1984	SNDTRACK	STREETS OF FIRE	MCA 5492	LP/CD
		(BLASTERS "ONE BAD STUD","BLUE SHADOWS")		
1985	VARIOUS	SLASH CUTS (2 SONGS)	SLASH/LONDON SLAP8	LP
1988	SNDTRACK	BULL DURHAM	CAPITOL 90586	LP
		(BLASTERS LP VERSION OF SO LONG BABY GOODBYE)		
1991	VARIOUS	ROCK THIS TOWN, R. A. B. HITS V. 2	RHINO R2 70742	CD
		(ROLLIN ROCK VERSION OF "FLATTOP JOINT")		
1993	VARIOUS	CLASSIC ROCK WILD V. 3	PRIORITY P253712	CD
		(BLASTERS AMERICAN MUSIC)		
1993	VARIOUS	CLASSIC ROCK AMER. MUSIC V. 4	PRIORITY P253737	CD
		(BLASTERS MARIE MARIE)		

PROMO'S

1981	IM SHAKIN/IM SHAKIN	PROMO SLASH/WB S50054	7"
1982	SO LONG BABY GOODBYE	PROMO SLASH/WB S50047	7"
1983	BAREFOOT ROCK/ FOOLS PARADISE/LONG WHITE...	PROMO SLASH/WB 2017	12"
1983	RED ROSE/RED ROSE	PROMO SLASH/WB 7-29566	7"
1984	ONE BAD STUD(BLASTERS)/	PROMO MCA 1210	12"
1985	COLORED LIGHTS/REMIX	PROMO SLASH/WB 7-29055	7"
1985	COLORED LIGHTS/DARK NIGHT	PROMO SLASH/WB 2259	12"
1985	TROUBLE BOUND(REMIX)/(EXTENDED)	PROMO SLASH/WB 2346	12"

This Blaster discography excludes members solo releases and also promotional releases in the case where there is no discernible difference other than a stamped mark, from the regular release. Please note that all releases are accompanied with promo versions for radio play and so forth. In the case where a promo has an interesting cover or track listing different than the regular release, it is included here.

American Music is the first and rarest Blaster album pressed at only 4000 copies by a small rockabilly label that sold its records by mail-order. Currently collectors are charging around \$100 for the disc. There is a different pressing circulating that is believed to be a bootleg. For more info on that, see the "Collecting Blastars" column else-

where in this issue. One track from this album was included in a various artists release by Rollin Rock records later in the year called Teenage Cruisers which was a sound track for what was called "The first Rockabilly porn flick." The band had nothing to do with the movie and the inclusion of their song was without their consent. The next album called The Blastars was released first by the independent label Slash, then with the help of Warner Bros. distribution (as so indicated on the label), and finally in the U.K. by F-Beat records with a different cover. The Slash version is unique because of its lyric inner sleeve. A Japanese pressing of this album under Warner Bros. label came with an English/Japanese lyric sheet. The F-Beat LP has a colorful cover and pictures of the band - it's a tough one for collectors to find. The first 7" single from the album, I'M SHAKIN was released by all 3 labels like the LPs, but with the same picture sleeve on all. The second single, SO LONG BABY GOODBYE was released by Warner Bros. and F-beat with the same cover but different B-sides. A Warner Bros. German release had a different cover and B-side. The next release was a 6 song live EP called Over There. The cassette version has a bonus track called WHAT WILL LUCY DO which would appear the following year as the Blastars only contribution to a various artists LP called Attack of the Killer B's. 1983 also saw the release of a compilation of tracks by Slash artists Called Slash Early Sessions which featured previously issued songs. In 1983 the Blastars released another LP called Non-Fiction. The first single was BAREFOOT ROCK. The 7" came with a picture sleeve, while the promo 12" came in a plain print cover

with 2 extra songs from the album. The second single from the album, RED ROSE was released as a promo in a blank sleeve. In 1984 the Blasters contributed 2 newly recorded songs to the Streets of Fire movie soundtrack. This is also now available on CD. One of the songs, BLUE SHADOWS was released as a B-side to a Dan Hartman song from the movie. The other song, ONE BAD STUD was released on the A-side of a promo 12" with a Marie McKee song on the flip. The next LP called Hardline yielded the single COLORED LIGHTS, which would be the first U.S. released Blaster picture sleeve with the bands picture on it. A promo 7" was released that had a remix of the song and a promo 12" picked a different song from the album for its B-side. Another promo 12" was released for a song that would not see regular release, called TROUBLE BOUND. It has a very interesting remix and an extended version of the song. This 12" is the most collectible of all the promos because of the remixes and its cartoon cover. Another Slash compilation was released this time in the U.K. called Slash Cuts featuring 2 previously released songs. In 1988, the Soundtrack for the movie Bull Durham was released with a song from the Blasters first Slash album and in 1991 a rockabilly compilation CD called Rock this Town included the song "FLAT TOP JOINT, originally from the American Music album. In 1990, in an effort to retain the rights to the Blasters master recordings which would expire in 7 years after its initial release, Warner Bros. issued a greatest hits type compilation CD called the The Blasters Collection. Warner Bros. surprised everybody and pleased Blaster fans by adding 3 previously unreleased tracks to the compilation. In 1993, Priority records included a Blaster song on each of its 2 compilations of rockabilly tunes. A future issue of AM will feature a picture discography of all these releases.

COLLECTING BLASTERS

I just picked up a second copy of the Rollin Rock LP American Music, and it appears to be a different pressing or most likely a bootleg. There was only one pressing of 4000 made of this LP legitimately. A member of the Blasters claimed to know of a source of American Music bootlegs out of Washington D.C., which is where my copy in question came from. A large batch of bootlegs were available in Europe as early as 1987. Here are the differences as I refer to them as, what I believe they are, the original and the bootleg I have. The outside sleeve on the original is a heavy stock paper which is consistent with Rollin Rock releases of that time. The Boot has a very shiny finish and the faces of the Blasters on the cover are washed out (too light). It appears to be a photo taken of the album cover, then printed on the boot. On the rear bottom edge you can see the seam where the original's paper would meet, but it is photo smooth.. The edge binding on the original is gray like the rest of the album and reads "Rollin Rock LP 021 American Music The Blasters," while the Boot's binding is white and reads "American Music The Blasters Rollin Rock LP 021."

The disc has differences too. On the original, side 1 the label's print is in red and side 2 is in blue. On the Boot, both sides are in blue. The original also has, etched in the trail off grooves "LP-021a or b (for sides)," while the boot has no markings. I assume it is the aforementioned bootleg, unless there was a later European pressing I'm not aware of. I would be interested to here from the privileged few American Music owners out there and see what type of pressing you have. Watch this column for more info on this.

Anyone looking for an original copy of American Music can try contacting Ken Freck at Musical Memories 833 East Kilbourn Ave. Milwaukee Wi. 53202. He has a copy that he may sell at the right price. Send him a bid and cross your fingers. Currently the lp goes for \$100-\$125. That price should go up soon with the bands notoriety of releasing a new album. Lets get this copy into the hands of a real Blaster fan.

FROM THE EDITOR: If you would like to have your name listed in the newsletter for tape trading with other Blaster collectors, please write me with your address. If you would like to write an interesting story on the Blasters or have a good idea on something you would like to see in the newsletter, let me know because your input is very important. On page 3 of this issue is an ad for Hep Cat Records. This is a great source for all your Rockabilly needs via mail order, carrying imports by High Noon, Big Sandy & the Flyrite boys, and many others. All CD's are \$14 and lower at unbeatable prices! Write for a catalog.

I just wrote and submitted an article to an east coast Rockabilly Fanzine about the Blasters comeback and they were kind enough to print it. (article pictured) The magazine is a great source of coverage of all rockabilly music and is highly recommended Its called Original Cool.

ORIGINAL COOL

— ROCKABILLY • NEO-ROCKABILLY • PSYCHOBILLY • ROCK 'N' ROLL 'ZINE —

BY BILLY DAVIS

THE BLASTERS
(STILL) MADE
IN AMERICA

In the early 1980's, the Blasters were on top of a blossoming rockabilly scene that saw very few bands enjoy any lasting success. The group played a brand of original music they called not rockabilly, not blues, not Cajun, not country, but American music—an entirely accurate label as elements of all those forms could be found in their sound. From 1981 to 1986, the Blasters achieved worldwide success touring, performing on television and recording albums for Warner Brothers. In '86, they ceased recording and slowed their vigorous touring schedule due to a significant lineup change—lead guitarist/songwriter Dave Alvin departed for a successful solo career—as well as vocalist Phil Alvin's academic pursuits.

Now, after eight years of sporadic touring and no recorded output, the Blasters are finally making some big noise, performing three songs on Phil Alvin's solo album, due for release in June on Hightone, and on a six-song Blasters EP for Sony/CBS Records scheduled for August. Though the band has continued to exist in different forms since 1979, this is, in a way, a welcome comeback for the Blasters—a return to the public eye.

The latest inception of the Blasters came together early in 1993 when Phil Alvin, who had been writing a mathematical thesis on the set theory of natural languages, was highly vindicated in his studies, gaining the support of the world's top theorists in the field. With that major achievement behind him, Alvin just wanted to play music again. He'd never really stopped gigging locally; now he wanted the band to return to international acclaim. But with Dave Alvin absent, the Blasters were without a lead guitarist and songwriter.

One night Phil Alvin was playing a solo stint at a local L.A. club when an old friend, James Intveld, dropped by. The multi-talented Intveld had had a couple of rockabilly records out in the mid-'80s, supplied the vocals for Johnny Depp in the movie *Cry Baby*, had played in country singer Rosie Flores' band and was a respected session man.

Alvin remembers the jam with Intveld that night: "James wasn't playing these silly little rockabilly licks in any way. James was sittin' right down hard on, like, Otis Rush and really playing good American guitar. I thought, 'God, this is a great lead guitarist.' So I had him come down to rehearsal and that was it, he was just so damn good. This jam, it was like playing with David (Alvin) again. Really the best."

With Intveld on board, the Blasters finally had the songwriting lead guitarist who'd eluded them since Dave's exit. There was one other personnel change to make.

Bill Bateman was the only drummer the Blasters ever had, but during the group's slow period he'd built up a blues band, the Red

Devils, to great success. With the Blasters becoming active again, he was forced to choose one band on which to focus. Bateman reluctantly withdrew his Blasters membership and Dave Carroll was brought in as a replacement. Carroll, one of the top drummers in the Downey, California area, had played in and out of bands with



PHIL ALVIN, 1986

Photo: Rose Hever

members of the Blasters for many years and appeared on Phil Alvin's 1986 solo album on Slash Records.

Throughout the Blasters' downtime, the group had been offered several record deals. With their new lineup intact, they struck a deal with Sony/CBS. The Blasters had had problems before with big labels, but Phil Alvin states, "The deal was so straightforward and good that I have no complaints."

Original songs on the forthcoming Blasters record include the Intveld-penned "Slip Of The Tongue" and Alvin's "Four Eleven Forty-Four." The EP also includes a great version of a Muddy Waters tune, "Just To Be With You," taught to Alvin by Marcus Johnson, a bluesman whose music the Alvin brothers were brought up on. Johnson was a good friend of Waters' and picked up the song directly from him.

Though a concert tour is planned following the EP's release in August, Alvin realized early on that the Blasters

then decided to include the Blasters on his solo album, as he wanted to continue his exploration of various forms of American music and it would keep the band active until the fall.

Alvin's new album includes his originals "County Fair," "Blue Line" and "Turning Your Blues Into Gold" and an excellent Blasters cover of a rare Petie Weatstraw song, "I'm Gonna Wreck Your V-8 Ford." The Alvin album will be programmed in an interesting format, similar to a radio show or play with band dialogue and special guests—unconfirmed names including James Harman, Billy Boy Arnold, Jerome Bowman, Gregory Davis, Marcus Johnson, Mary Franklin—setting up each song.

What we now know as the Blasters existed amongst a group of musicians in Los Angeles long before its name. The band's members have been jamming

on guitar. It was Dave's first gig. He remembers, "There was this sound between us that I've never heard in my life, outside of a few rare exceptions. It was a kind of groove that no other band has."

The guys continued to play together, gigging at biker bars and hoot nights at country joints. Sadly, bassist Kennedy, the eldest member of the group, fell in love with a hooker and was found dead in a car with his throat cut after he tried to get her away from her pimp. The band brought in long time friend John Bazz and moved their rehearsals to an empty space above Bazz's father's office. It was there that old bandmate James Harman recorded the band's first demo with some portable equipment.

In 1980, the band members noticed an article in an L.A. music paper about a local rockabilly entrepreneur, Ronnie Weiser, who was recording what he called "authentic rockabilly" in his living room and distributing the music via mail-order. Weiser's label, Rollin' Rock, already had some reputable artists like Ray Campi, Charlie Feathers and Mac Curtis on its roster. After several tries, the band finally got hold of Weiser, who recalls, "Phil Alvin came to my house and played me a cassette of their rehearsals. I couldn't believe how great this stuff was! Finally there was a band who knew what American music was all about."

Weiser told the band that he'd cut their record if they could get some original material together. Each member agreed to pen two songs. Dave Alvin arrived at the appointed rehearsal with four tunes under his belt; the others came empty-handed. Not surprisingly, Dave was crowned the Blasters' songwriter. The group waxed 22 songs in two days on



BLASTERS, 1982

would have more than a few spare moments until then, prompting him to accept Hightone's offer to put out a solo album. Originally, Alvin was going to work with Sun-Ra, who appeared on his first solo album, but Sun-Ra passed away before the project came together. Alvin

together since the '70s in an assortment of groups playing assorted styles: R&B, rockabilly, blues, hillbilly, rock and roll, Cajun, country. In March of 1979, Phil Alvin, Bill Bateman and Mike Kennedy got together to play a St. Patrick's Day wedding. Phil's younger brother Dave was brought in as a last minute addition

Photo by Gary Lowman

Weiser's 16-track recorder on a budget of about \$2,000, resulting in the classic album *American Music*. The initial pressing of 4,000 quickly sold out; today the rare album's valued at about \$100.

Despite its being released by an independent label and available only through mail-order, *American Music* garnered the Blasters considerable notoriety. Shakin' Stevens, a British hitmaker, recorded Dave Alvin's original song "Marie Marie" which hit #19 on the U.K. charts.

Members of the rock group Queen caught a Blasters show and invited the band to open for them on the western swing of their U.S. arena tour. The Blasters gained headlining status in the L.A. clubs and procured a manager, who shopped the band to major record labels. They signed with Slash Records; a distribution deal with Warner Brothers soon after would see their records available in stores everywhere. The Blasters also added three new members: pianist Gene Taylor and Lee Allen and Steve Berlin on horns. Allen was one of the most recorded sax players of the '40s and '50s, heard on all of Little Richard's and Fats Domino's records.

The Blasters' eponymous LP was released in 1981, followed in 1982 by a concert tour and television appearances on *American Bandstand*, the *Mike Douglas Show* and *Fridays*. An appearance on a PBS special called *Soundstage* was especially brilliant, the band being joined onstage and offstage in discussion of their music by Carl Perkins and Willie Dixon. The group toured Europe in spring of 1982 and on their last English date recorded a live set of cover songs. Though it was originally planned for BBC broadcast only, the band liked the recording so much they decided to release *Over There: Live At The Venue*. The EP received mixed reviews.

In 1983, the Blasters performed two



BLASTERS, 1991

songs in the movie *Streets Of Fire* and released their second Warner Brothers LP, *Non-Fiction*. Dave Alvin developed the theme of this album in a serious vein, addressing the problems of the working class. His songwriting was at its best, but the record company opted to put out a cover song as the single, bypassing all the great originals. The group toured throughout 1983 and into '84.

The Blasters' next album, *Hardline*, took a year to complete due to a number of problems. The band had recorded the entire album, utilizing their ace horn section on six tracks, when the record company suddenly decided horns were not cool; those cuts had to be canned (some of these tracks would later be heard on the Blaster collection CD). The Warner Brothers-assigned producer Jeff Eyrich—an old schoolmate of Phil Alvin's who wasn't capable enough to play in any of Alvin's former bands, let alone produce the Blasters—skipped to France after being paid, midway through recording. Phil Alvin took up the production duties, even though his mother had become ill with cancer at the same time. Faced with mounting pressure from Warner Brothers to come up with the big hit, the band eventually brought in John Cougar and his producer to help write and record a single, "Colored Lights."

Hardline was released in February,

1985, gaining the band even more media attention. They did a slew of radio concerts and TV appearances, including their third spot on *American Bandstand*, a taped concert for MTV called *Live At The Ritz, Rock Palace, Solid Gold* and the televised Farm Aid benefit. The band toured extensively, taping a full concert of outstanding performance in Europe for a show called *Rockpalast*. Unfortunately, the single and its accompanying video did not make a dent in the charts.

Meanwhile, during the band's off-time, some side projects were in the making. Dave Alvin recorded a folk country album with members of the band X under the name of the Knitters and Phil Alvin worked on an album with Sun-Ra and his Arkestra. The Blasters were coming apart at the seams.

In April, 1986, Dave Alvin left the band. Phil Alvin remembers, "When David left the Blasters, it was important to me to establish that, with as great a contribution as David's songs are to any band because he's such a high level songwriter, the sound of the Blasters had very little to do with David. The first time that David had been in (any) band was with the Blasters and all these sounds had been put down by me and the guys that I had been playing with for 15 years before that."

Upon Dave Alvin's departure, Warner Brothers and the Blasters mutually agreed to terminate their contract. The band would hardly miss the corporation's constant pressure to achieve "that radio sheen" and its consistent reluctance to release Dave's songs as singles. "How could (Warner Brothers) release 'I'm Shakin'" when there was 'Marie Marie,' which has been recorded in 21 different languages?" Phil Alvin muses. "There was always pressure on Dave from the record company to write great songs, and then when he'd come up with a batch, they'd release some other song."

Renowned blues guitarist Michael Mann, alias "Hollywood Fats," was brought in and the band hit the road immediately, performing at Farm Aid II and touring for eight months. Plans were in place for recording of a new album when Fats passed away in December of 1986. Dave Alvin was gracious enough to step in and help finish up tour obligations, as did ex-X guitarist Billy Zoom during the band's summer jaunt through Europe. The next album, though, would have to be put on indefinite hold and the Blasters would have to replan their future.

With the slowing down of the Blasters, Phil Alvin's other passion—his dream of writing a mathematical thesis—took over. From 1987 to 1992, Phil played small tours in the U.S. and abroad to keep the Blasters, joined by new guitarist Greg Smoky Hornel, in practice and earn some extra money, but his studies remained his focus. Hornel bowed out in 1992 due to an illness in the family and, today, stays local to L.A. doing production work and playing in Bruce Willis' Planet Hollywood band.

In 1991, Warner Brothers released a CD, *The Blaster Collection*, to maintain rights to the master recordings (the label must make such a release every seven years to keep those rights). Now, with the release of Phil Alvin's solo LP and the forthcoming band EP, the Blasters are poised to blast on through the '90s. ♦

Billy Davis is editor/publisher of American Music, a Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter featuring interviews, info and a tape/memorabilia trading post. 4-issue subscriptions are \$5 US, \$8 overseas. Write 62-5480th Rd., Glendale, NY 11385

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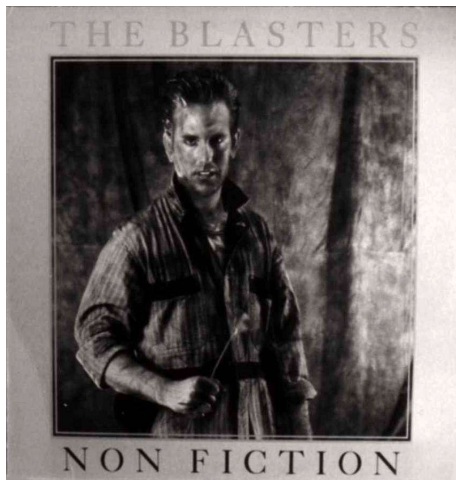
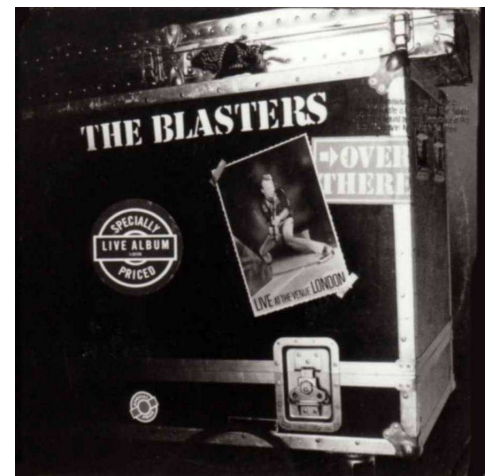
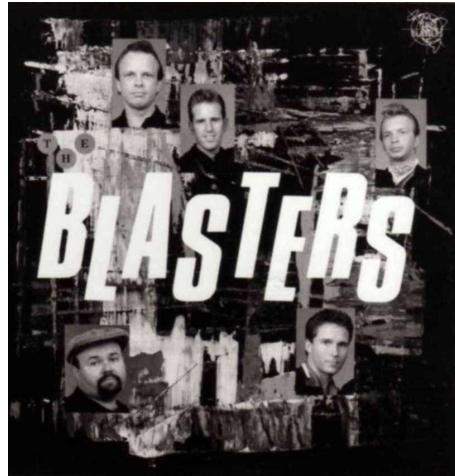
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BLASTERBILIA: VINTAGE BLASTERS T-SHIRTS



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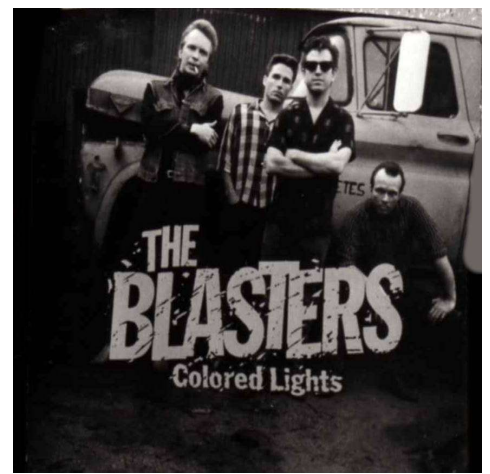
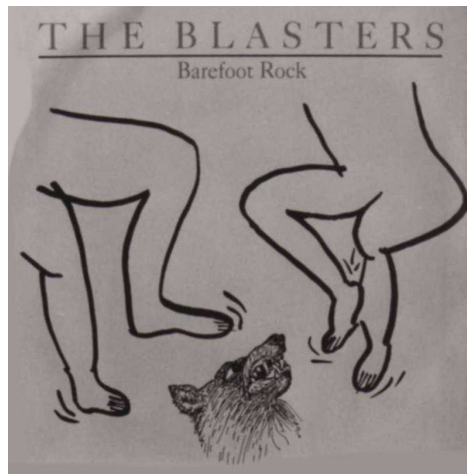
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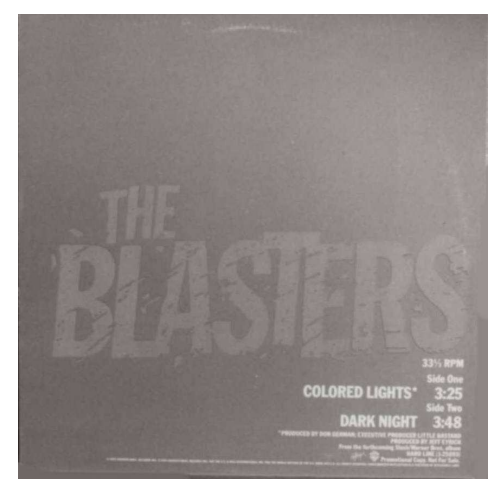
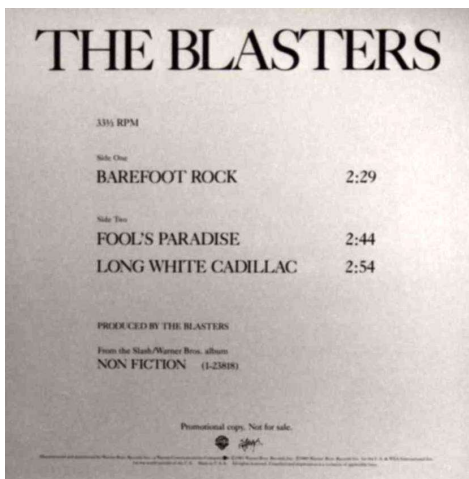
7" Singles



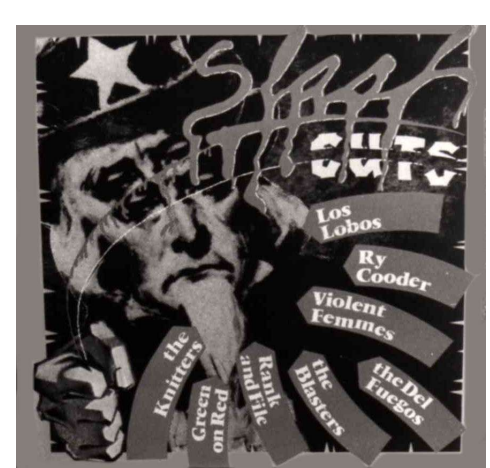
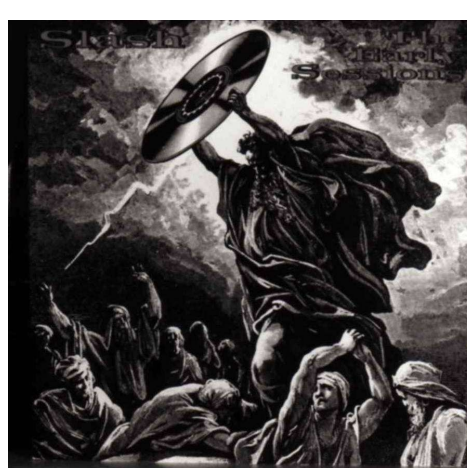
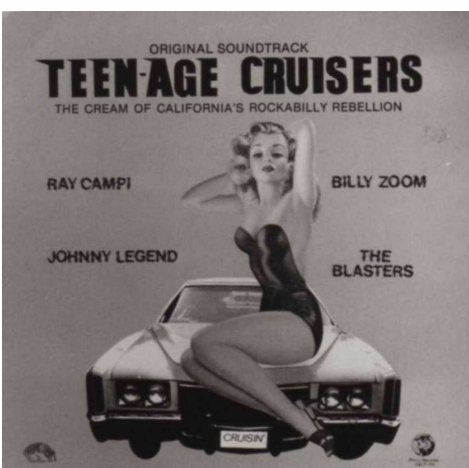
7" Singles



12" Singles



Compilation Lps



Compilation Lps



Bootleg Lps



**The Blasters at the Union Ballroom
Milwaukee WI 9/19/85 photos by Mike Hynek**



