

2025 re-print and expanded edition

AMERICAN MUSIC

The Blasters Newsletter

Issue #17 Nov. '97

DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES

With the Guilty Men

11/14 Jacks Sugar Shack w/Candye Kane
Show with Kelly Joe Phelps

11/29 San Fran at Noe Valley Ministry
12/12 Santa Barbara Ca at Labarro Thea.

BLASTERS TOUR DATES

11/26 Long Beach Ca at The Blue Cafe
12/17 Anapolis MD at Rams Head
12/18 N.Y.C. at Tramps
12/19 Alexandria Va at Birchmere

SPECIAL AMERICAN MUSIC CD ISSUE!

LATEST NEWS: : American Music was released on Sept. 16; the 2-LP vinyl edition has a bonus track. The vinyl can be ordered direct for \$20 postpaid (in the US) from HighTone Records 220 4th St. #101, Oakland, Ca. 94607 -- Sept. 23. The Springsteen tribute album was released with Dave's SEEDS and he's really proud of it. He says he really has made it a Dave Alvin song. -- Dave has another book of poetry planned for early 1998 tentatively called THE CRAZY ONES. -- The Blasters did a studio recording at G.I.T. in Los Angeles where Keith Wyatt teaches. The band played live in the school's performance hall that was open to the public, though it wasn't advertised. It was recorded on 16-track digital. The band will soon decide whether they will release it. -- Dave's next studio album is going to be in the vein of King of California; Greg Leisz will produce it. Rehearsals start in December, recording in January and release in June. Greg is currently on tour with k.d. lang. Song titles include ABILENE, MARY BROWN, EVENING

BLUES, CALIFORNIA SNOW and I HATE THE WAY YOU SAY GOOD-BYE. In promotion for the new album HighTone may release a special CD just for radio. It will have a single from the album that would be pushed for ra-

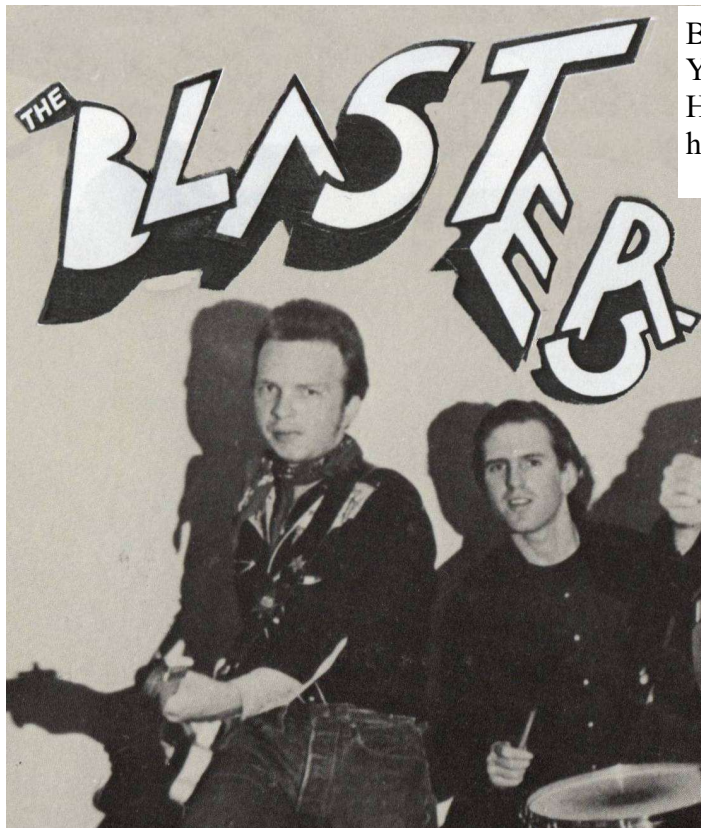


Photo: Sally Lundberg

INSIDE: *American Music* interviews. Phil Alvin, Dave Alvin, John Bazz, Bill Bateman, Rockin' Ronny Weiser, and Bruce Bromberg. Dave Alvin and KJP in Jamestown NY

dio and a few unreleased tracks. For this project, Dave may be doing Bill Broonzy's HOW YOU WANT IT DONE. -- Dave spent every Friday in August at L.A.'s Jack's Sugar Shack playing with the Guilty Men under assumed names as they practiced new material for the forth coming album. The crowds still came knowing exactly who the billed "King of California" was. Each week, the band came up with names for the band like "Phil's Brother's Band" or "The Artist Formerly Known As Phil's Brother." They had so much fun playing these off-the-cuff gigs, that they did it again in October on the 18th opening for The Derailers and on the 25th for Chris Gaffney. In the set there were a few surprises like Freddie King's instrumental SIDETRACKED and Big Joe Turner's CHAINS OF LOVE. -- In March Dave will be going back to the producers seat to "make a tougher record" for Katy Moffatt in Austin. -- On 12/12 Dave will be playing with the Guilty Men at the La-barro theater in Santa Barbara. Dave relates a funny story about this old adobe brick theater which is a historical landmark. "The Blasters were booked there in 1982 and this was at the time when we had stage divers and we would really get the crowd revved up. There was a riot and they trashed the place (laughs). So the Blasters were banned from Santa Barbara, but now I'm returning to the scene of the crime." -- Dave will be playing a gig in San Francisco with Kelly Joe Phelps at The Noe Valley Ministry. Dave says he will be bringing along a few Bluegrass musicians. A Pedal Steel player and a Mandolin player for the gig. -- The Derailers album that Dave produced is finally coming out on Nov. 18 on Watermelon/Sire records. -- Bill Bateman is working on a new band with an upcoming roots rock singer/guitarist named Chris Masterson. They have done some recordings and are looking for a record deal. — Am

AMERICAN MUSIC -THE ALBUM - THE HISTORY

The Blasters' first album, American Music was recorded in 1979 by a low-budget rockabilly record label called Rollin' Rock Records. The recording of the album brought the band into the public eye, forcing them to take big steps in this period. The re-release of the album on HighTone records here in 1997 should not be confused as being a reunion of the old band. It is simply a reissue of a legendary piece of music that has finally been unearthed. The Blasters career and Dave Alvin's solo career have taken different paths since the initial release but both have had a satisfying degree of success and they're continuing that plan. In this issue, we will observe the state the band was in at the time of recording their first album, the proceedings at the sessions, the aftermath, and the recent reissue on HighTone records. All this seen through the eyes and words of the original band members: Phil Alvin, Dave Alvin, John Bazz, and Bill Bateman. Also we will hear from Rollin' Rock's Ronny Weiser and High-Tone's ace producer Bruce Bromberg, all in their own words.

Bill Bateman: In late '78 Phil and I quit the James Harman band. I was on drums and Phil was on lead guitar. So next we made this duo where I played guitar and drums at the same time and he would play guitar and harmonica. We started playing a place in Long Beach on the weekends. It was a bar that Dave wrote FLATTOP JOINT about. Dave Alvin came in one night with his buddies and sat in on gui-

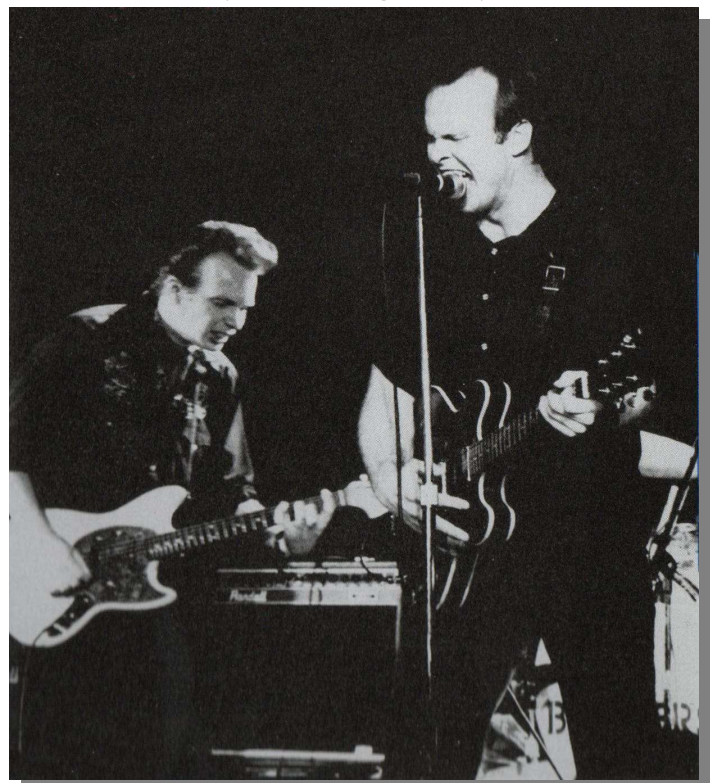


Photo: Joel Aparicio

tar. We got the standing ovation that night so we put Dave in the band. We had this guy on bass named Mike Kennedy. He had a few personal problems and got himself killed. I suggested putting Johnny Bazz on bass, plus he had a van and a place to practice, (laughter). He got pretty good on the bass.

John Bazz: Back in the old days, we were rehearsing in Bill Bateman's living room. We were all on just guitars. And we had Bill's record player to learn songs, so we started playing at my dad's Spring factory. We were using my dad's delivery truck to get to gigs. We were using the phone to call everybody to get them down to the show. We would use the postage machine for a little mailing list. So we were indebted to my dad and his business partner Chester Houston. So I always like to thank them. We never paid a dime back.

Phil Alvin: We had made a tape at Bazz's father's factory with James Harman as engineer. We needed the tape to take around to clubs to get gigs. I remember the 88 Club made it clear to me that I had to make a tape. It became our demo tape, but it had no originals on it.

Dave Alvin: It had stuff like BAREFOOT ROCK, HONEY DON'T and 20 FLIGHT ROCK. Another song we were playing was a Sonny Boy Williamson song called NO MORE NIGHTS BY MYSELF. We did a lot of covers. Before we had a name - when we would just rehearse we even did a reggae song called OCEANS 11 from the Jimmy Cliff soundtrack, but we made it more R & B. We did a Bob Dylan song that I sang; it

was a record that was released for a week and then pulled called PLEASE CRAWL OUT YOUR WINDOW. We did it at a private party and that was the end of my singing career for a few years.

Phil Alvin: When we were out taking our tape around Hollywood, we ended up at the Denny's on Sunset Blvd. We were getting coffee. Johnny had read this article on Rockin' Ronny, who had a label that recorded authentic rockabilly.

John Bazz: There was an article in the L.A. Reader. We were just practicing and didn't have gigs. We would do talent shows like at the Sweet Water. I remember reading an article on rockabilly from the perspective of a few girls named Anna Statmen and Pleasant Gehman. They were the local rockabilly chicks and we came to know them quite well later. Then they mentioned a guy named Ronny Weiser.

Dave Alvin: It was the first time we saw the magazine; that's how out of it we were. It was an article on Levi and the Rockats. There



PHOTO from inside back of CD case. **Dave Alvin:** That was taken in June of '79 when Bazz joined the band. That is the earliest photo of the band. Bazz was dating this girl who lived in Signal Hill and we went over there and had a band meeting and I think she took the photo.



Rollin' Rock Studios (left to right) Mike Foresta, John Bazz, Phil Alvin, Bill Bateman, Dave Alvin, Ronny Weiser, James Harman, (kneeling) Johnny Legend. **Dave Alvin:** I think that was taken by Bazz. He had one of those tripod cameras with a timer on it. You can see he has one of those looks like he just ran over into the picture. James (Harman) and Mike (Foresta) recorded our demo and they were there to make sure this guy wasn't screwing us over. We were real distrustful...what's changed. (laughs)

Ronny Weiser: It's funny that Johnny Legend was there. He might have been renting a room from me at the time.

Phil Alvin: Mike Foresta was James Harman's bass player at the time. He was an engineering student and I was his math tutor. Johnny Legend is a good friend of mine. A great guy. When Johnny Legend was there with that look (bearded long haired) and that he was playing rockabilly for Rockin' Ronny, then I knew I had Ronny from the beginning. You'll notice that there is someone who looks pretty much the same in all those pictures as he does now. That's me. I found out that fashion has very little to do with music so my hair and my clothes are about the same.

haven't heard of you. I'm going to Europe to sell records right now. You'll have to call me when I get back." I said, "I'm in Hollywood right now and I'll come over your house and play you authentic rockabilly right this instant." We got there just around sun down and we rang the doorbell. He had a front gate and dogs that came out and met you first. So we were playing with the dogs and I had my '41 Epiphone guitar (which is on the front of the original album; it was a guitar that my mother bought me for \$100 on my 14 birthday and I still have it.) Ronny came out, and he thought we were the truck driver, because he had a bunch of records that he was shipping with himself over to England. He said, "Let's hear what you can do." I think I played two choruses of MYSTERY TRAIN and he said, "Come in and we'll talk." I had the tape and he put it on. Rockin' Ronny said, "It sounds pretty good. Do you have originals?" And I said, "Yeah, sure we have a lot of them." I told him the reason we didn't record them was

was a little blurb on the side about Ray Campi and Ronny Weiser. So we figured we'd call.

Phil Alvin: So we called him and Rockin' Ronny answered the phone and I said, "I hear you record authentic rockabilly." And he said, "Yes. That's right!" (Ronny impersonation) Ha! Ha! "Well, I'm Phil Alvin and I have a band called the Blasters," and he said "Well I

because we didn't want anyone to steal them. Ha! Ha! I was thinking on my feet.

John Bazz: We knew we were good. We were cocky enough to tell him we were the best thing in L.A. We were also older, in our mid twenties. We all had, with the exception of David, been in numerous blues bands. So, here we played up the rockabilly thing be-

cause we knew he was more into rockabilly. We just did what we could to get our foot in the door.

Phil Alvin: Ronny kept saying rockabilly! Rockabilly! Rockabilly! And I can only take that for a minute. I told him, "Where I come from you get beat up if you use little words like that." So he said, "What do you call it?" That's when we said "American Music." So then the truck driver comes in to pick up the records, the guy that Ronny thought we were earlier. The guy walks in and our tape is playing, I think, 21 DAYS IN JAIL.

Dave Alvin: (from the CD liner notes) The Blasters owe a lot to a truck driver whose name I've forgotten. Ronny dug the tape but still wouldn't make a commitment to record us, until this truck driver came by. "Who's this playin'?" He asked Ronny. "It's us." Phil

said. "Is this what these records are? If it is, I'll buy a copy. My wife and I dig this kind of music."

Phil Alvin: Ronny asked him, "What would you call that music?" He said, "I guess that's rhythm and blues." Immediately Ronny said "Okay we'll make a record."

Ronny Weiser: I Heard the tape and that was all I needed to hear. I didn't get to see them live until after the LP came out. I think I saw them when they opened for Ray Campi.

Phil Alvin: When David and I were driving back, we talked about doing originals and AMERICAN MUSIC and FLATTOP JOINT came up as notions.

Dave Alvin: Ronny said he couldn't do an album of all covers. We had a band meeting about it and my memory of it is that everyone was supposed to come into it with a song or

two each in a week. I came in with AMERICAN MUSIC and I DON'T WANT TO at our next rehearsal.

SONGWRITING

Phil Alvin: To me, writing the words to the song meant writing the song. . .at that time. I think David had a better concept of publishing - not as a business, but as a notion - better than I did.

John Bazz: Usually, 9 times out of ten, they wouldn't tell me what to play on bass. I often left the

Photo: Sally Lundberg



WHITE BACKGROUND PHOTO -This is an alternate shot from the original album sessions. **Dave Alvin:** . My father printed the photos and did some early promo shots that weren't used in the packaging. We used to rehearse at a Johnny's Dad's Factory in garden Grove. That was a lunch room for the employees and they had that white wall. The shadow effect was accidental.

room, while they were working songs out. Then I would just come in when I thought of a killer bass line.

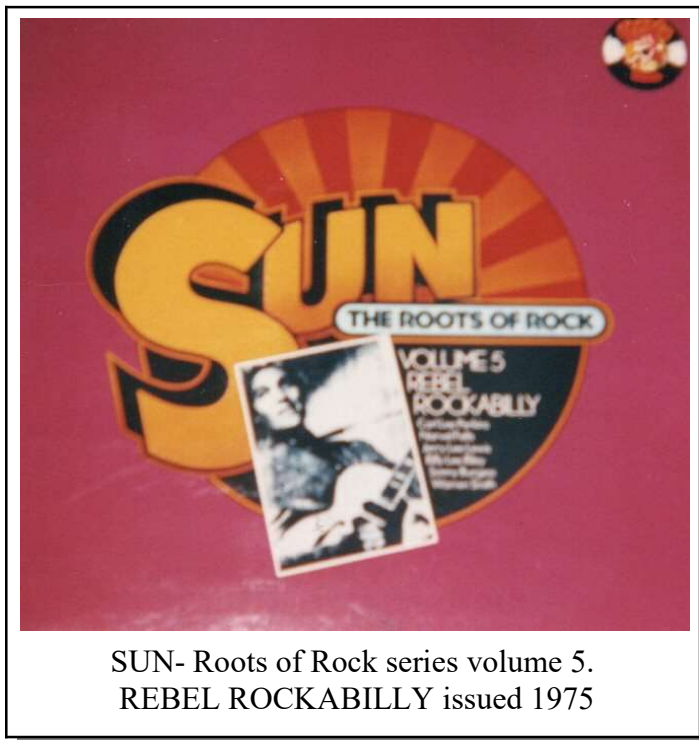
Dave Alvin: Songs coming from poetry came later and the first was probably BORDER RADIO. But the fact that I had studied poetry and had learned to use meter and rhyme really helped. I had a vague idea of how to have a subject and keep it coherent. When I write, I write verse, verse, and the chorus comes later. I didn't consider myself a songwriter and I didn't know any songwriters. My whole concept of songwriting was that you had to be Bob Dylan or Joni Mitchell and you had to be from somewhere else besides Downey. I wasn't trying to write masterpieces, I was just trying to write songs that would compete with any other white blues band. We didn't want to have a straight blues band but it had to be blues-based and popular.

AMERICAN MUSIC-- Dave Alvin: The little guitar riff is based on a Tampa Red guitar piece. But it's not quite, because I didn't know how to play it right. (laughter) We had tried to learn Chuck Berry's TOO MUCH MONKEY BUSINESS and it just never gelled. But Phil was always saying we need a song like that. So musically there really is no resemblance, but it was just the spark. That song might have been the first one I wrote. Just the kind of quasi - Elvis character popped in my brain. You know, "US soldier boy on leave in west Berlin..." It had a Chuck Berry sound to it like the BROWN EYED HAD-SOME MAN. So I thought it had a different slant. I really consider AMERICAN MUSIC the first song I ever wrote. I think I sang the song once and then Phil had it.

Phil Alvin: A great part of that is a Tampa Red song called THE LOUISIANA BOOGIE. **I DON'T WANT TO-- Dave Alvin:** Phil and I were riding in a car and he was bitching so I combined bitches I had in life and that he had. I had to write songs that Phil could relate too.

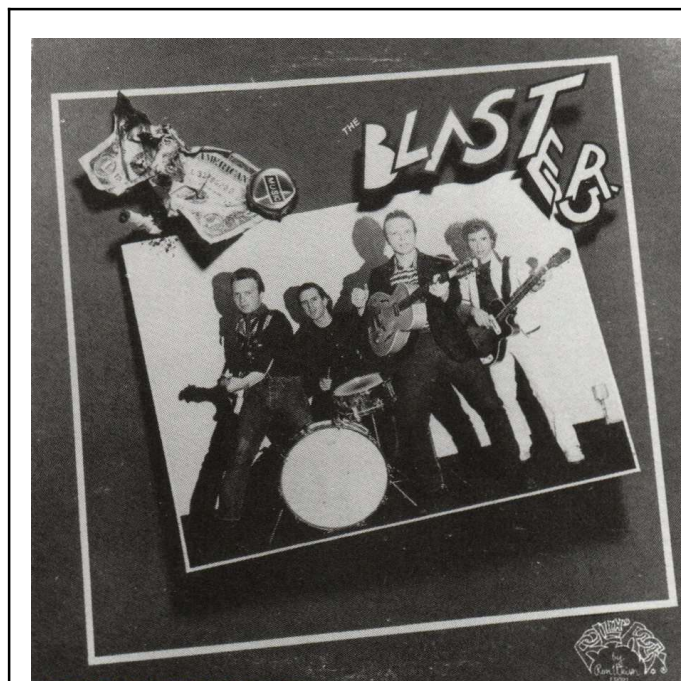
I went to the first rehearsal with those 2 in Bateman's living room. There I figured out the little intro.

MARIE MARIE-- Dave Alvin: I was laying in bed at night strumming guitar and the melody came to me. I went into the kitchen and I played the melody for Phil. The next day we had a rehearsal, and I wrote the lyrics in a half hour before the rehearsal. This was only a few



days before we cut the album. I was thinking of a couple of different things. There was this country road that went through these foothills from Whittier to Cohena, California. I had a memory of driving there when we were little kids and I remember seeing this girl on a porch with a guitar as we were driving by. That image has always stuck with me. Marie was a Cajun name, but I didn't want to write a Cajun song because I'm not Cajun. I really wanted to hear the band play it. Bateman came up with the idea of the opening chord. The first real argument in the band was on MARIE MARIE. It was over the vocal inflection of the melody. I didn't know anything about singing, but I heard a melody in my

head. Phil was approaching it with less of the Cajun quality and more like hard blues - harsher. We kind of compromised.



Original Rollin Rock LP Cover 1980 **Dave Alvin:** Was designed by Steve Bartel. The Blasters logo was...this is going to sound egotistical but...we had a mailing list and we would send out flyers using the factory Xerox machine. The rough idea was the logo I was using on the flyers and Steve bent it and straightened out the lines. Steve Bartel did buttons of the logo (which can be seen on Bazz shirt).

Phil Alvin: I think that was the last song that was finished. When David sang MARIE MARIE to me fully and complete, I had nothing to add except the statement, "Give me a Dra Ma Moo in it." He knew exactly what that sounded like, in fact every note and inflection.

Dave Alvin: I still can't believe I've written the songs that I've written, but I especially can't believe I wrote that one. If I could write another MARIE MARIE I'd be impressed.

FLATTTOP JOINT-- Dave Alvin: It was about a couple of bars we knew mixed with the perfect bar.

BARN BURNING--Dave Alvin: We did a bunch of blues but didn't have a rockabilly

blues like Big Joe Williams. The drum fill came from a Big Joe Williams record. The title came from a William Faulkner short story that I had read a year before in college. I didn't like the story very much, but I liked the title. I liked the mood of the story. What I was trying to do with it then, and I was able to pull it off better on the King Of California version. - I changed the lyrics. I wanted to use the barn burning as a metaphor for one the many original sins of the United States.

SHE AIN'T GOT THE BEAT-- Dave Alvin: I was trying to write something between Eddie Cochran and Jackie Wilson. The first note on the vocal, "SHEEEE" is like a Jackie Wilson note. I brought it into rehearsal and it didn't click. Phil changed the lyrics and the melody. He really brought in the Jackie Wilson thing. It was 100% better than what I had.

Phil Alvin: Bill Bateman and Belinda of the Go-Gos got together and the Go-Gos had a song called SHE'S GOT THE BEAT. So, David wrote this sort of off-handed rebutting song. The song was handed to me to make it a Bo Diddley song. There were some un-rhythmically worded bridge or vamp in the song. We used to play that Eddie Cochran song called 20 FLIGHT ROCK, so I saw that some of that rhythm could be put in there.

SHE'S GONE AWAY-- Phil Alvin: I found this 1928 Joseph Falcone and Clemo Braugh '78, a Cajun song. It was the Cajun wedding march. I didn't know what the hell the guy was saying, but they must have been powerful words. And what I always do when I write, but never when I talk, in writing non fiction or music, is to minimize my language. Or optimize it, I should say. (laughs)

----GOING TO THE SESSION----

The band had prepared their originals and were really finding their identity: They made a conscious effort to not fall into the category of blues or rockabilly.

Dave Alvin: We were trying to be less predictable than the average white blues band. In some ways Phil was as good or better than the other white blues singers. I was not anywhere near (that as a guitar player), when you had great guitar players like Hollywood Fats and Junior Watson playing in all the local blues clubs. There was no way we could compete as a straight blues band so that's why we didn't do straight blues.

We went and saw Ray Campi before we made the record and I bought one of his albums. I thought it was great. I remember dating a girl who was working at a record store in Downey. I went in there bought the Ray album I bragged, "We're making a record on this guy's label." Then we went and saw Ray play The Palomino and we enjoyed the show. We knew we sounded different.

Phil Alvin: Bill Bateman and I were the confidence of the Blasters. David was very shy, but when he hit his guitar....Yeah. Johnny was a drummer and was a guitar player. A lot of guitar that I learned was taught to me by Johnny. So he just started on bass. As soon as they

couldn't figure out a part, I would give them one. Pretty soon no one wanted to hear from me.

Bill Bateman: None of us thought we were gonna be big stars after we went to Rockin' Ronny's house. When we pulled up to his house in the valley, it was a regular old house with the yard torn up from the dog and an old car that didn't run. The garage was turned into a recording studio and there was a bed out there for floppers. It was not glamorous, but we still had a great time. We played 2 days. We did different songs at the first session than the second session. James Harman has that first session in its entirety in his possession. He had a tape recorder; I think a one-inch 2-track.

Dave Alvin: We got there about noon or one, and it might have been a week day in October or November. We were really excited. We knew it wasn't state of the art, but we also thought this was our beginning. Elvis made his records on Sun. And we're gonna make a Rollin' Rock record. We also thought this might be the only record we'll ever make. (laughing)

----THE SESSIONS--1ST DAY-- ---OCT.-NOV. 1979---

Dave Alvin: It was in a regular suburban garage. Bateman was in the far right corner, and I was next to him. Ronny was on the opposite side. There might have been a minimal baffle around the drums.

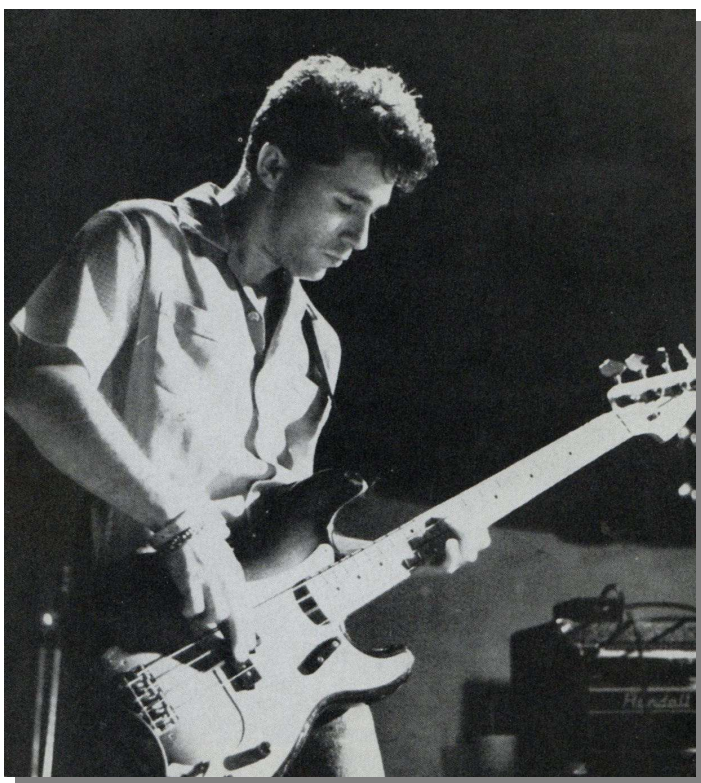
Ronny Weiser: The drum set was in the corner next to the recorder not across the room caddy corner.

Dave Alvin: We might have cut AMERICAN MUSIC first. We did the originals, then the covers. Ronny had us play each song twice. If we didn't get it we'd move on and come back to it later.

---THE SONGS---

The recording sessions and the origin of the cover songs.

Photo: Joel Aparicio



AMERICAN MUSIC-- Phil Alvin: That was the first song we recorded.

REAL ROCK DRIVE-- Dave Alvin: We had it on a 78 by Bill Haley and his Saddlemen. That one went real smooth. I love the way Phil sang it.

BAREFOOT ROCK-- Dave Alvin: I think we overdubbed hand claps on there. I know I wasn't a part of what ever overdubs were done. I only saw Bill doing click clack overdubs on FLATTOP JOINT. I probably went out back because we couldn't smoke in Ronny's room and I was so nervous to finish playing so I could get a smoke and drink beer. I think we went through a case or two of beer of Budweiser and Bicentennial beer. I prefer the Rollin' Rock version to the Non Fiction version. It has a tougher edge. I still have the album on Duke by Junior Parker called TWO IN THE BLUES. I think Bateman had the 45.

Bill Bateman: Yeah, there were hand claps on there. We all stood back and clapped.

I DON'T WANT TO-- Dave Alvin: I remember botching the intro a few times. It was about the most complicated guitar part I could come up with and still is. (laughing)

Ronny Weiser: Phil dedicated that to me on that live record they recorded a few years later in England (Over There: Live At The Venue) and the reason for that is because I love that song.

MARIE MARIE --John Bazz: Originally in MARIE MARIE I played it wrong. There is a note that is a half a step off. It's unorthodox, but I changed it later. I remember then hearing the guy in Shakin' Steven's band, (who had a big hit in England with the song) and he played it wrong, too, so he just copied me. In some ways, it was complimentary to hear a mistake repeated.

I WISH YOU WOULD-- Dave Alvin: We didn't know the Yardbirds had cut it, so to us it was a new song. We got that off an old VeeJay 45.

CRAZY BABY-- Dave Alvin: It was different

than the Rockin R's version. Phil had done a cross country drive, and he bought that '45 in a junk store in Oklahoma. For the longest time, we thought they were from Oklahoma, but they were from Indiana. Of course, we have the barking dog on there. (Listen 1:47 in to the song to hear Ronny Weiser's dog, Crystal)

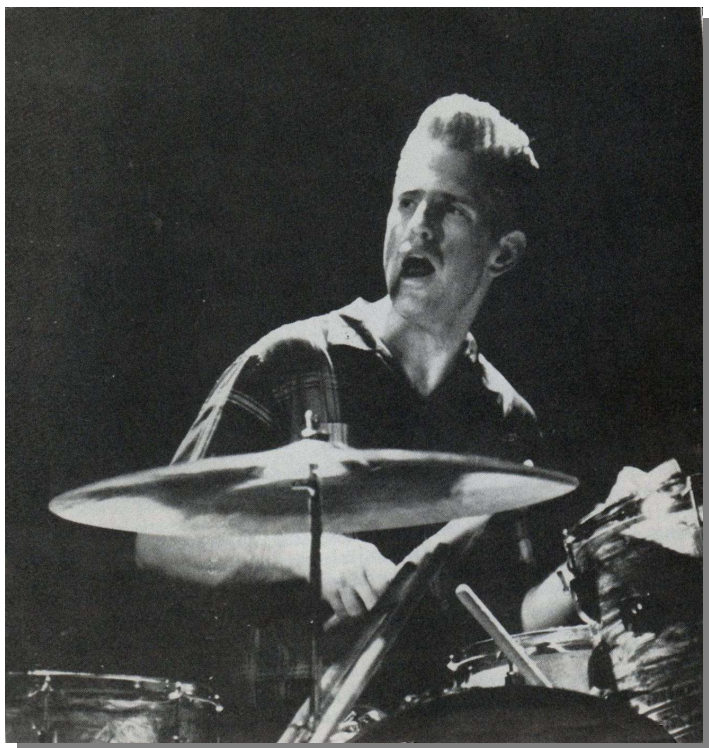


Photo: Joel Aparicio

NEVER NO MORE BLUES -- Dave Alvin: It's an old Jimmie Rogers song and we have his version on some reissue, but the version we based ours on was a 78 of Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys with Tommy Duncan singing. Jimmy Rogers didn't do the long yodel, but Tommy did, so that's where we got that from. Phil's yodeling ability was amazing in those days.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ-- Dave Alvin: This was a saxophone song that we made a harmonica song. It was the Hollywood Flames on Ebb records. They were a real east L.A. R&B band. It's low rider classic. That was always a fun one to play because I got to do a harmony part with the harmonica that Bill Bateman taught me.

SHE'S GONE AWAY-- Dave Alvin: We bor-

rowed Mike Kennedy's lap steel guitar; the guy that was our original bass player. I played that in an open E tuning or open E out of tuning (laughs). I think I played flat (lap steel) on one other record, and I've never put it on record again. There are a lot of Cajun records, especially from the 50's, with lap steel that's out of tune and funky sounding. In some ways it's really one of the more authentic sounding cuts. We were trying to be authentic but not out of tune. (laughs) Even then we knew it was out of tune, but we said yeah it sounds like one of those old records.

BARN BURNING-- Dave Alvin: That was a bitch. That double and triple picking was real hard. It gets you in your wrist and your elbow. I think we cut it twice and by the third time I was done! (laughs) You can hear it speeding up, and that was to just get it over with.

21 DAYS IN JAIL -- Phil Alvin: That's me on every bit of that guitar. It was so hard to play and sing at the same time. It would kill me when I had to do it on stage. That was one of the few lead guitar songs I did in the Blasters. That song was in my repertoire by the afternoon of the day that I found the record. It's a great song.

Dave Alvin: It has a slightly different groove than the Magic Slim version; it's more like Fats Domino. Phil sang the hell out of it. It came from the old Cobra 45.

LOVE 24 HOURS A DAY--Dave Alvin: Hank Ballard had recorded it, but we got it off an Excellor 45 by a guy named Louis Brooks and his High Toppers. That one wasn't played live very much, but I think because it was a straighter blues. That's why Ronny didn't want it in there.

I FELL IN LOVE -- Dave Alvin: Ken Cook on Sun records. I got it off a Charly records reissue album called Rebel Rockabilly. That one album is pretty influential. I don't have it anymore because Phil borrowed it to learn LOVE IS MY BUSINESS, which is another song we wanted to do in the Blasters and we never got around to doing it. We played that in our set up until 1983. For a long time that was our second song after starting with CRAZY BABY. There is no writing credit because when HighTone did the search for it, they found like 27 songs with that title; and they narrowed it down to a couple that could have been it, so they decided that instead of giving the money to someone who may not have written it, whoever owns the publishing will probably get a hold of HighTone. *(The writer is H. Hopson)* I think what always separated us from other

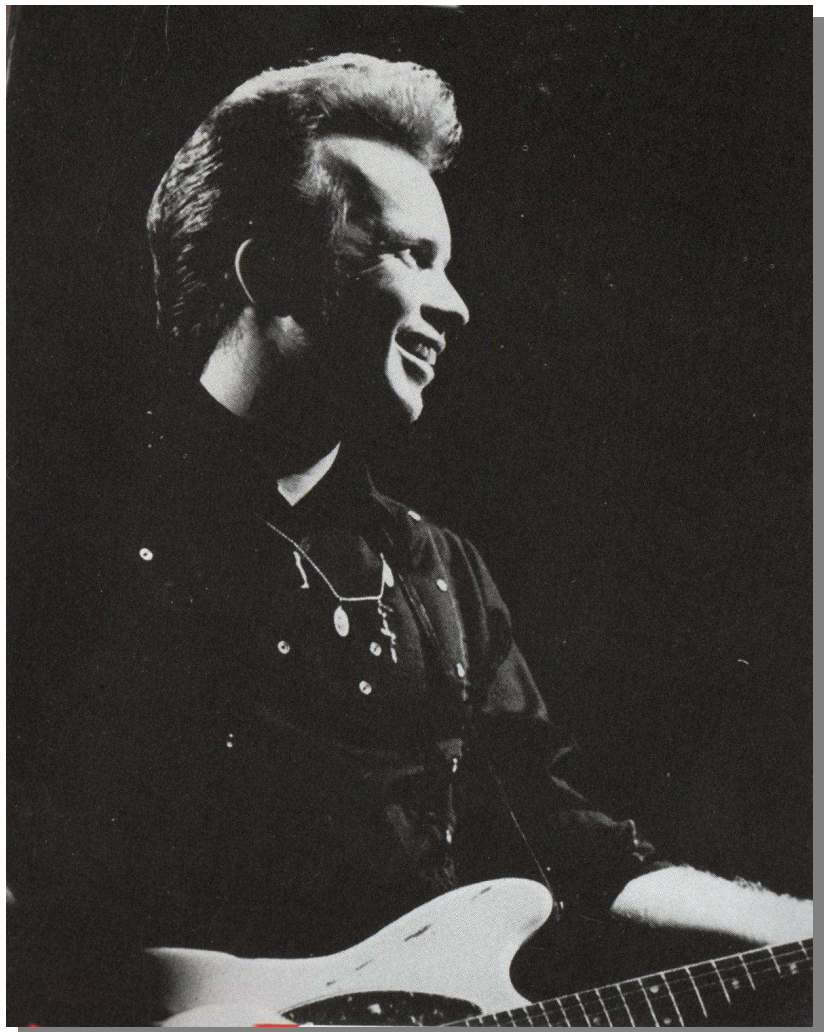


Photo: Joel Aparicio

rockabilly bands was our rockabilly influences. Even though I listened to Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran, there was something that got me in my gut about the Sun Stuff. The Sun stuff - out of all the rockabilly - had the most R&B and blues bent to it. It was the darker side of rockabilly. Memphis, New Orleans was a big influence (*4 of the songs here were originally recorded by Sun/Memphis Recording Service artists*)

SO GLAD--Dave Alvin: This was an old Howlin' Wolf 78 we had on Chess. That, I WISH YOU WOULD, and HIGHWAY 61 (off the Slash record) are probably the hardest Chicago blues we ever cut. The guitar is pretty much note for note what was on the record. I think we added an extra instrumental section at the end of the song.

Phil Alvin: I was very proud that David could play the Hubert Sumlin guitar.

ASHAMED OF MYSELF--Dave Alvin: An old Floyd Dixon song recorded in New Orleans with Paul Gayten's band and with Lee Allen. It was either on Argo or Checker, one of the Chess subsidiaries.

Ronny Weiser: One of my favorites. I had trouble leaving that one out of the original al-

bum.

Phil Alvin: It was the first time I found a record on Checker/Chess that had Lee Allen on it. I hadn't talked to Lee since like 1975 and this record reminded me. It was at that time that I called him back up and I owed him \$65 since 1975, but he didn't remember. (laughs) I paid him anyway.

LONE WOLF-- Dave Alvin: That was Ray Harris song off that same Sun reissue album. We did that live probably more than any of these other unreleased songs. For a long time, that was our show closing or encore song. Back in the punk rock days - when we would be playing with X or Black Flag, or the Cramps - LONE WOLF was always there. It was a way of getting the pit happening. It was always wild. That ending would go on for another 40 seconds than what's on record with me jumping up and down and Bateman kicking the drums over.

Phil Alvin: Yeah that is a helacious song. I want to try doing that again.

CRY FOR ME-- Dave Alvin: An Elmore James record on VeeJay but the guitar line wasn't Elmore playing. It was him singing but a guy named Eddie Taylor does the guitar line. It's an ok version, but I think the one on the Blasters Collection is better because it was recorded better. But it's cool. I remember we had big arguments (when learning the song) because we couldn't hear the bass on the old 45. The argument was over whether Bazz should play a walking bass line in the solo or just a chunk-a-chunk sound.

---THE SESSIONS--2ND DAY--SONGS AND OVERDUBBS

Bill Bateman: I played along on the rims on FLATTOP JOINT and REAL ROCK DRIVE. I overdubbed playing a clickety clack just to give it a little extra percussion. It kind of sounds like an upright bass being slapped.

Ronny Weiser: We added hand claps on

Photo: Joel Aparicio



BAREFOOT ROCK to make the beat warmer and tougher--and more swinging. On CRAZY BABY we have a down beat snare that we overdubbed.

Dave Alvin: I think Phil might have put an acoustic guitar overdub on AMERICAN MUSIC.

Ronny Weiser: Based on my experience in recording Ray Campi and a lot of other Rockabilly stuff, on some songs I thought an acoustic rhythm guitar would add to the fullness of the sound. So on several of them there is an acoustic guitar played by Phil. I have said through the years, that I really enjoyed recording this record because there was no production on my part. I Finally could relax and let the tape go with the Blasters. Until I started these remixes, I had forgotten that there were these overdubs. So there were a few little touches of Rockin' Ronny Weiser Rollin Rock mentality that were added. So I just take 1% of the credit.

Dave Alvin: For Phil's harmonica, my memory of it is that it's all live. He was playing amplified harmonica through one of James Harman's amps. Maybe one or two other times at a Blasters' session did he play amplified harmonica. Usually he played unamplified harmonica right into the microphone through the P.A.

Phil Alvin: I remember James Harman bringing his harmonica rig down there.

Bill Bateman: We decided that using a Bullet mic for the Harmonica with a Fender Bassman didn't work. What we actually used was a Shure 58 ball microphone which had a custom volume control on it, plugged into a Randall P.A. system with a solid state P.A. head. That was Phil's harmonica rig for a few years until it was stolen from us.

In 1984 or 85 an assistant of Ronny Weiser's at the Rollin' Rock studio named David Zalkus, brought Blasters' piano player Gene Taylor into the studio to overdub piano parts

on the 7 unreleased tracks. Chris Morris' liner notes in the new CD reissue -- in error - - claims this to be Taylor's first recorded work with the band, when actually it was probably his last. Taylor had played on 4 Blasters albums between 1981 and 85.

Ronny Weiser: David Zalkus was a friend of mine who used to watch the house when I went to Europe and watch the dogs. He recorded Gene Taylor, and I didn't know it happened. Gene was on a few other songs but there were some tuning problems.

Phil Alvin: David did that with the intention of trying to get a licensing agreement to put it out.

Dave Alvin: It was done only on the outtakes. on SO GLAD, I FELL IN LOVE, and LOVE 24 HOURS A DAY. But it just didn't fit. It did on the Howlin' Wolf song. The piano was in tune, so it made the guitar sound out of tune on some songs.

Bruce Bromberg: There were a number of songs that have the Gene Taylor overdubs. On SO GLAD we felt it fit the song. But LOVE 24 HOURS A DAY, it showed that the piano and guitar were out of tune, so that was that. We couldn't use them.

----INSTRUMENTS, EQUIPMENT, and PRODUCTION---

Dave Alvin: The guitar I played was a white Strat borrowed from James Harman who claimed Magic Sam owned it. It might be true; James has a great collection of guitars and amplifiers for a guy who doesn't play guitar. I restrung it with heavy gauge strings. Phil played his '41 Epiphone. I had my Mustang at home for about 4 months. That was my first guitar I owned. The slide guitar was a white Supro lap steel that is heard on SHE'S GONE AWAY. Bazz was playing a '56 Kay bass. Phil played through a Randall amp. I played through a Fender Bassman that belonged to James.

Bill Bateman: We brought our own equip-

ment. I brought my Slingsland set, and I provided some amps because I worked at the Randall Amp factory at the time. There was only one mic on the drum set. That was a \$75 electrovoice mic over the top of the drums. It was about 4 inches over my forehead. I sat with the amps all around me. We didn't play that loud either. I was surf music volume. It was easy. Just turn the machine on, and let it go.

Ronny Weiser: I used an 8-track Tascam half-inch tape recorder. Microphones used were Shure RE20 and RE15. Here is how the tracks on the eight track were set up: Track 1 = Phil's voice and harmonica without echo (dry), 2 = Phil's guitar, 3 = bass, 4 = Drums, 5 = Dave's guitar, 6 = overdubs, 7 = Phil's vocal and harmonica with echo, and 8 = overdubs. I think the bass went through an amp for the band but there was also a direct feed right into the tape recorder. The drums had one mic over head. When I started re mixing for the new release, I found there was an ambiance mic to dirty up the sound. It wasn't necessarily a drum mic; but it was a mic that was thrown up to a corner of the garage to suck in some of the noises of the room with the guitars clashing against the drums. That mic could be turned up or down. For some, I turned it off and some I turned the sucker up. I didn't use reverb, but I did use tape echo. It was the AKAI tape recorder, which I used to use as a mastering machine that then became a vocal echo machine. On Phil's voice there is a clear-cut voice echo, which I added later. Track 1 has the dry voice that I ran through the Akai (about a \$140 machine) and back into track 7 with the echo.

----AFTER THE SESSION----

Dave Alvin: My memory is that we cut more songs. I have a pretty firm memory of cutting (Sonny Burgess') Sadie Brown (*also from that REBEL ROCKABILLY album*).

Phil Alvin: We did very few takes of each song. Bill had always played drums and he is

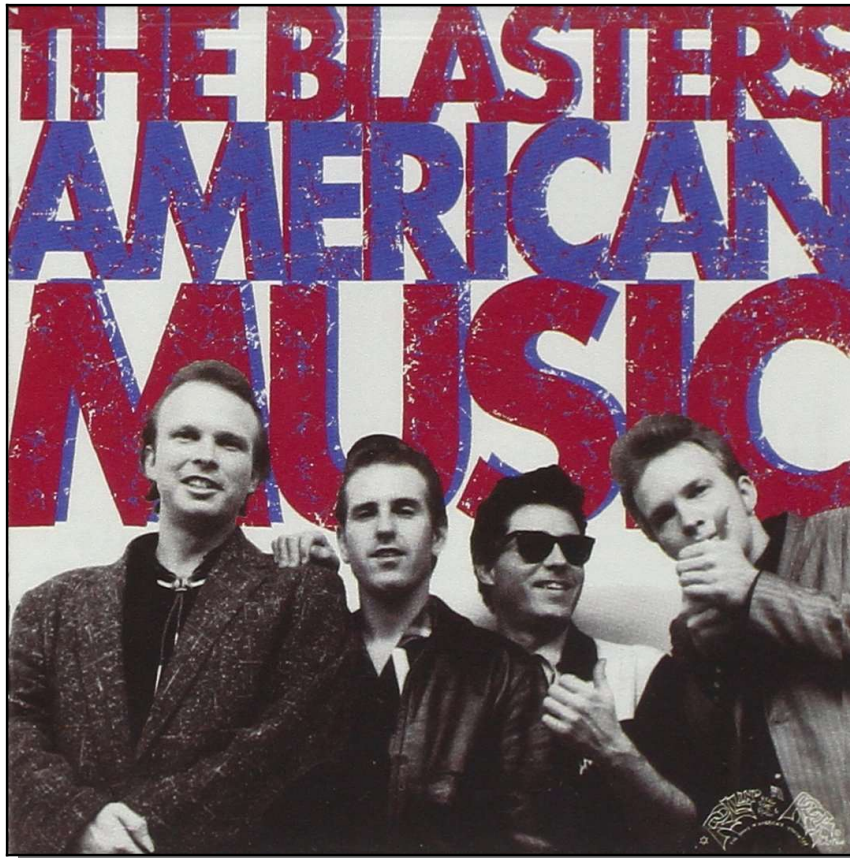
one minded when he gets things going. And that was a great asset for us. My recollection is that we did only the songs that you hear on that new release. Ronny was so cheap that we didn't have the tape running while we were between songs.

Phil Alvin: Rockin' Ronny wanted to put the album out as Phil Alvin and the Blasters, and there was a big fight. The rest of the Blasters had conceded it, but I said, "No." It was particularly obvious that I was the one piece of confidence on the stage at that time. If your listening to records you may have a mental image of the Blasters, but if you come see us live, the one thing you will come back with, and I had never seen this until people had taken a lot of pictures of me, is this strange face grimacing this song out in some kind of crazed gesture. Penelope Spiros picked the Slash cover after seeing that. We have these old films on 8mm and there's this one where David is about 6 and he's playing in this sandbox that my Dad had built. I had broken my leg playing basketball, and there I'm on crutches as my brother is playing in the mud. I'm showing off and I put my crutches on the end of the sandbox and I fell on my broken leg. All you see is this face and my Dad just focused in on my face and there it was. That Face. The first time I saw it, I said, "Oh my god: it's that face. The first time I saw the Slash cover, I thought it was a cesarean birth. Just a big pink thing with a slice going through it! (laughs) It was a big step to forget what I looked like.

Dave Alvin: (from the CD liner notes) After that we drove back to our side of town punching each other in excitement and jumping up and down in the car seats like little boys. We yelled at strangers in passing cars that we'd made a record and we were gonna be famous. I remember at one point we all had our heads out the windows, laughing, cursing, screaming, and howling at the moon.

----THE CD REISSUE----

The Rollin' Rock label recently signed a deal with HighTone/HMG records to reissue the old recordings on CD. It was only natural



CD Cover photo- **Dave Alvin:** It was taken by James Austin who had a radio show in the San Fernando Valley called "Bop Street." He had gotten a test pressing of the Rollin' Rock album before it was released, and he played it on the air. He wanted us to be guests on the show. In the first or second week of 1980, we played a club called Blackies. So right after the gig at about 1 AM, we drove to the station and he snapped that photo of us.

that HighTone wanted to reissue Rollin' Rock's biggest discovery, The Blasters.

Bruce Bromberg: When we made the deal with Ronny, my job was to get the thing mastered. Ronny would send me DAT's (digital audio tape) of different mixes.

Ronny Weiser: Here is what happened. Dave Alvin was supposed to come over to help with the mixing but he had some other commitments, so Bruce Bromberg of High-

Tone records came. I had already put the original mixes of the first 13 songs on a DAT tape. When Bromberg was here, we basically remixed all of the tracks, the old ones and the new ones. Then we started listening to the whole mess and making notes.

Bruce Bromberg: Sometimes I would help decide what to use, but for the most part I left it up to him. He wanted to remix the stuff but when I got there he played me a DAT of the original two-track (album released songs), a direct copy of the original two-track master. It had a lot more balls to it then the original LP. We didn't want to have to use the original tapes because there were a lot of problem with tapes, like Ampex, shedding oxides. We experienced this and were having speed fluctuations.

Ronny Weiser: The Ampex 456 tapes on which this stuff was originally recorded in the late seventies was shedding oxide - not just on the Blasters, but a lot of other Rollin' Rock tapes from the 70's. So you really don't have the luxury of sitting there to do a normal job. Your under the gun wondering whether your going to make it or not. Whether

the tape is going to completely fall apart.

Bruce Bromberg: When that stuff comes off, there goes your high end sound. You can actually see it coming off and gumming up the recording heads. It's sticky and gooey and you lose part of your music. I wanted to take them to a studio and bake the tapes (a process of heating the tapes to re-adhere the oxides). Or take the tapes into some smart money studio and work on them. But then he and I felt

that wouldn't be in the spirit of what the songs represented. We fooled with them for a day or two and then decided to go with the original mixes that were transferred to DAT.

Ronny Weiser: There was one song that wouldn't fly and we had to cop it from the original stereo master. It just couldn't be re-mixed. It kept slowing down and clogging the

heads. I think it was BARN BURNING. So what could have been a pleasurable interlude of listening to all the chit-chat in between songs, didn't happen because of those tapes. I did hear some funny stuff. In one track I said "Come on guys let's wake up and do some rock 'n roll." It wasn't just a run of tape it was a couple of years of Ampex tape that was bad.

Bruce Bromberg: Ronny did the other mixes of the unreleased tracks and I sat there and gave my opinions. He would set his levels of the rhythm section and when the solo's would come he would boost it. It's a real old fashioned way of doing it and it was a step back in the past for me. I'm used to automated mixes, but I have a lot of respect for Ronny. So the unreleased tracks were coming off the original session tapes and we had a lot of problems with LONE WOLF. We had to fix a section in the mastering. It's funny; it would happen in certain spots, then it wouldn't happen. It's strange. In the late 70s to the 80s Ampex tried to make the tape thinner to save money. If it was my choice only, I would have gone to a big studio and tried to fancy-mix the stuff. It



HighTone Records
1997 AMERICAN MUSIC 2-LP set, inside gatefold.

would have been extremely costly.

Ronny was good at recording slap basses. The electric bass they had was a hollow body bass that in reality doesn't sound like a good bass at all. The guy who mastered and engineered the stuff was Bob Stone; he took what he had to work with and did the best he could. When your dealing with historical material, you have to be true to the integrity of it. I never paid much attention to Rollin' Rock until this year, but now when I listen to the albums there is some great stuff. Ronny had some talent for doing it in his living room. He's very passionate about what he did and I was quite impressed when I started listening.

----LAST REFLECTIONS-----

Phil Alvin: When the record came out, it met above my expectations. Better paying club gigs, reviews in european magazines, reports of the Rolling Stones and Bruce Springsteen saying how great it is. One of the great honors was playing the test pressing for Bob Hite (Canned Heat) and he wouldn't give it back to me. He really loved that record. I knew Ronny's distribution was not good, but it was for promotion that I

made this record. I also learned about publishing. The record did us very well. By the time he would have to show what kind of legs he had, he didn't have the record anymore. I had high-powered lawyers who had done our deal with Slash and were ready to take us to Warner Bros. They called Rockin' Ronny and told his high powered lawyers that he better not put the record out any more. That began the loving feud between us. He had stopped selling them in any public way. Now whether or not he stopped pressing them, I don't know because they kept showing up someplace. Music has power because you can lie with words but music brings its own meaning.

John Bazz: In listening to it now, I'm amazed at how good David played considering that it was his first band and he was really green. The whole thing was really fun.

Dave Alvin: In a way it was the purest Blasters record. In a way it's Phil's record. It's where he was pretty much 99% in charge. Where it's taken me years to be a fully formed artist, Phil had style right then and he was the guy with the most experience and the leader.

Bill Bateman: It was all fun all the time. Nothing has come close to it since. The pressure of being on Slash/Warners was different. So recording that thing was fun. We were more of a family back then. We ate together, watched TV together, we laughed - If my girl friend wrote me a dear John letter, Phil and I would go out and get drunk and we'd laugh about it. We were like brothers, but we grew apart.

Bruce Bromberg: You have a young band where one guy is there. Phil was Phil early on and the rest of them were novices; and they certainly got a lot better. They had a lot of spirit. I have a lot of respect for Phil and I like him a lot and he's a real talent. He did the HighTone record (County Fair 2000) for

us and some of the stuff he did on there is just genius. Phil sensibility about music is that you just play it, record it, and that's it. It's done, and I like that.

Phil Alvin: Just to clear some things up, if that's of any value: The contract that Ronny had to release the record in 1980 was the same contract that bound us as exclusive artists and that was only for a year. Ronny had not told me the entire truth about what publishing royalties were. But I figured we were only doing this for a year and after that, that would be it. He did lie to me, but I like Rockin' Ronny, he is a friend of mine. He stopped releasing the record after the lawyers got together and it was unclear who owned the masters. The fact that Ronny must have believed that he didn't own 50% of them is demonstrated by the fact that he discontinued release. Ronny originally told me he couldn't practically issue any records unless he got all of the publishing. It wouldn't be worth it to him. I then started to learn about publishing. I was given an ethical and cryptic warning that publishing isn't as straight forward as people might make it sound. Recently, I was aware HighTone was talking to Ronny. HighTone thought they were doing a favor by putting the record out, and that is their malicious innocence. I don't think it should have been put out until we put out a new Blasters album. One of the most difficult things for me to say today is, who is in the Blasters?

If I put out a new Blasters record, I would have the Rollin' Rock record to follow it up so I could get paid for the first record. See, if you have another product to give them then they pay you for the first so that's why record companies sign you for 2 records. Also, I told HighTone that we have other tapes, specifically by me and James Harman that got us the Rollin' Rock deal that, in many cases, are even better recorded and have a lot

more songs than the Rollin' Rock record. What I would have done is put out a Rollin' Rock record with some of these James Harman-recorded songs. Then put out a second Rollin' Rock record with the unreleased Rollin' Rock songs and some more James Harman recordings. There is nothing wrong with the Rollin' Rock record at all as it is. Or I wouldn't have put it out in 1980.

I would like to make this thing right. I told HighTone I would call them back with a settlement agreement and the necessity to release a new Blasters record and link the promotion with whatever promotion is done on the Rollin' Rock record and to try and get the names in of who the Blasters really are by early next year. We are in negotiations right now. The response to the proposal is favorable.

I want everything to work out, too. If it does work out, I will be happy, and it will be a fair resolution.

In trying to be objective, I don't see any difference in direction for the Blasters now than in 1967 when I was 14 and we were backing up Joe Turner. In a sense the direction of the Blasters is the same: no nostalgia. History is not nostalgia. Nostalgia is hype.

There is a certain mythology in the Blasters of 1980. I have to go out of my way to make sure I know what people are thinking. There are plenty of songs that David has played better without me. There are plenty of songs I've played better without David. Who are the Blasters? The Blasters are the best band that Johnny Bazz and I can find and usually that constitutes the best players that I know.

---EPILOGUE---

This CD was released, but not without controversy -- as you can tell by Phil's above commentary. There were many factions involved. There was Ronny Weiser, who has been revising his catalog of classic rockabilly recordings made by his defunct 1970's label Rollin Rock and has licensed it for CD reissue with HighTone Records. HighTone Records couldn't leave out Rollin' Rock's top band, the Blasters. Then there are three of the original Blasters who played on those sessions and were very proud of their contributions on the original Rollin' Rock album; they felt that the fans deserved to hear the original recordings in the historical context they have been revered. Then there is the fourth original Blaster, Phil Alvin who felt the time was wrong for release due to his increasing efforts to give his new 1997 version of the Blasters an identity. It is important to note that no one is at fault and that everybody acted in a way that they felt best carried on the Blaster legacy.

Phil Alvin is the leader of the Blasters and has been trying to reaffirm and reacquaint the public with his 90s incarnation of the Blasters. In the last three years, luck has not been on his side. The band has lost a drummer and a guitarist and had two separate live recordings slated for an album release but they were halted by circumstances. One being when lead guitarist, James Intveld, left and then when the record company went out of business. Phil Alvin was all for the re-release of AMERICAN MUSIC but not until the new album with the current line up was released. He feels this reissue of the AMERICAN MUSIC album can only add to the confusion of who is in the band. In addition, rumors of a reunion of the old group started as soon as the reissue was announced adding to the confusion. Phil was willing to agree to the reissue only after he could put out a proper current Blaster album. The new Blasters are in negotiations now to release a new studio album of material. Phil feels if the album still can be done, it will right some of these wrongs. Phil remembers the Rollin Rock sessions with fond memories and wants everything to work out amicably. The urgency of HighTone reissuing most of the Rollin Rock catalog now is because they believe interest is at a peak and additionally the deterioration of the master tapes may not have been of any use in a few years.

If you look at the whole story all parties points of view can be understood. In interviewing all the participants I sensed everybody was very proud to be involved in this piece of music history and as artists nothing is more rewarding than letting the masses enjoy your creation. There was special meaning in the reissue for HighTone records president Larry Sloven, too. He is a long time Blasters fan and has released Dave and Phil

Alvin solo records over the years. If any label deserved the Blasters, it was HighTone. The reissue was put in such high regard that it was released on the Hightone label while the other Rollin Rock releases have been put on a subsidiary called HMG records.

As a fan I can say selfishly that I'm overjoyed with the CD release. Us music lovers don't have to worry about the legal aspects. For us, it's all about the music. I'd just like to say to all the aforementioned participants in this re-release, that long time fans really appreciate having AMERICAN MUSIC on CD. Thanks for a wonderful gift. -- Billy Davis —Am

The 1979 Blasters' Demo Session

Recorded by James Harman

Photos by John Bazz



Dave Alvin & Kelly Joe Phelps in Jamestown NY Sept. 22, 1997

—by Billy Davis

Dave and Kelly Joe had done successive tours together of the east coast in 1996 and the west coast in early 1997. Finally they booked a tour of the mid-west in Sept. of 1997. The farthest east they would go was Jamestown, NY, which is 400 miles west of New York City, so it may still fall into the category of the mid west. It sure felt like it, when I made the long drive there for the show. Jamestown is a remote factory town, 70 miles south of Buffalo. The town's main claims to fame are that Lucille Ball and 10,000 Maniacs came from there, but national acts almost never play shows there. It's definitely off the beaten path.

It was especially unusual to get such national touring artists such as Dave and Kelly Joe to perform there. It all came together through the efforts of Craig Frischkorn, an english teacher at Jamestown Community college. He got funding from the college programming board to finance an event that would be educational as well as entertaining. In addition to a regular performance, Dave was asked to do a poetry reading and Kelly Joe would host a slide guitar workshop for students, faculty, and towns people. The idea came to Craig after he received a visit at Jamestown Community College from Poet and Long Beach State California teacher Gerald Locklin. Locklin, who was Dave Alvin's poetry teacher and mentor in the 70s, suggested that Craig try to book Dave Alvin at the college. That set the wheels in motion.

Craig put a lot of work and personal time, many months in advance, in order to make this a memorable event for the people of Jamestown. He found it to be a rewarding experience to expose people to this music which they normally wouldn't have access to. In organizing, he went the extra mile to order CDs and books ahead of time to sell at the show. He got radio stations to do public service announcements, and special posters were printed to promote the event around Western New York and Northwestern Pennsylvania. The poster had a quote about Dave from The Los Angeles View: "He's the last of the great roots-rockers. His poetry sweats from his guitar strings and collects in a puddle on the stage." The promotion paid off: They drew nearly 300 people for the evening concert performance. People from as far as Ohio, and Rochester traveled to attend the gig on a Monday night.

Dave and Kelly Joe arrived in the afternoon from



Ann Arbor, Michigan where they had played a gig the night before. They hadn't gotten much sleep. Dave tried to cover up his tired look by wearing a baseball style cap for the performances ("New York State Pipe Fitters," a gift from a fan, he said). Not to be out done, Kelly Joe wore a hat, too. I joked to them that it was the "Hats tour." Although the artists were tired, they arrived early and were in great spirits. The crowd really appreciated their doing this very interesting extra appearance. The poetry and slide guitar workshop were to take place at 5 PM in the Weeks Reception Room, a small room used for formal banquets and meetings at the college. This was an intimate setting for the more interactive reading and demonstration.

Kelly Joe started off with a song called TRAIN



CARRIED MY GIRL FROM TOWN” to demonstrate his style. He explained his technique in playing the guitar doing a very competent job as a teacher. (He has also taught guitar at colleges in Oregon). As expected from Kelly Joe, he threw in some jokes which kept the mood light. Kelly explained how he is mostly an improviser and doesn’t work out guitar parts ahead of time. In fact, even when playing his own songs, he never plays them the same way twice. Kelly Joe finished with an instrumental version of GOOD NIGHT IRENE.

Dave Alvin got up to read poems from his book ANY ROUGH TIMES ARE NOW BEHIND YOU. He read an unfinished poem called ROBERT JOHNSON’S CIGARETTE (about the U.S. Postal Service’s questionable decision to airbrush out the cigarette from Johnson’s portrait) and a new one called CORN FLAKES (about how an ad agency tried to get Dave to record an ad for Corn Flakes!). These new poems will be published in his forthcoming 1998 book THE CRAZY ONES (Incommunicado Press).

The reception room was named after Sarita Weeks,

a benefactor of the school. Humorous and respectful about the formal tone of the room, Dave joked about maybe censoring the profanity in his own poems -- out of respect to Sarita. At one point, Dave gave a second look at Sarita’s portrait, which was behind his back. A student who was helping to sell CDs was sitting below the portrait and joked “Do you want me to get a blanket to cover it?” (bringing laughter to the crowd.)

One of the poems Dave almost read was TALKING TO PLANTS, which is about Dave’s neighbor with Tourette syndrome. He said that reading that poem at a Border’s books in Texas made the store manager a little nervous. Then Craig joked that the crowd should “buy the book” if they want to read that one. Usually, Dave tends to like to keep his poetry audience separate from the musical audience. Maybe he wasn’t comfortable mixing them on that day since there was such a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and different expectations in the audience - from teens to senior citizens. I find there is a certain Dave Alvin style that is similar in both his music and poetry, and plenty of his poems deal with his musical heroes. His music tells the story of his life and the poetry is an extension of that. An example of that is his poem FOURTH OF JULY IN THE DARK which is a longer version of his song FOURTH OF JULY.

After the performance, the students met the artists, getting autographs, asking questions and buying the CDs and books. Dave and Kelly Joe were kind and patient with everyone there.

The evening’s concert was held in the Scharmann Theater in the same building at JCC. Kelly Joe started his set with a few jokes to loosen up the crowd and then played a few songs based on songs on his new Rycodisc CD ROLL AWAY THE STONE. Phelps live versions of songs are usually about 10 minutes each in length. He played a few songs that he had never recorded before: WANDERING AWAY and SAFETY ZONE. He finished the set with a song that



is fast becoming a signature tune for him; the old folk song by Leadbelly, GOOD-NIGHT IRENE.

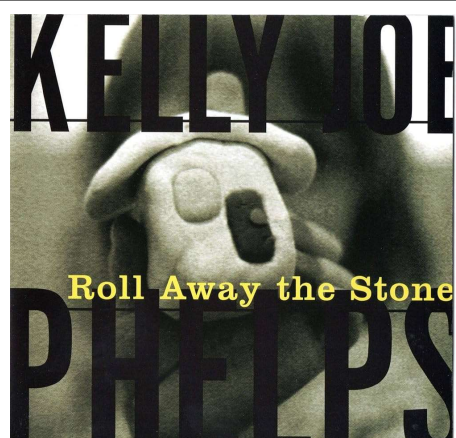
When Dave Alvin started his set, Kelly Joe stayed on stage to accompany Dave throughout the whole set. For the fans familiar with Dave's music, it was a different approach seeing Dave accompanied by Kelly Joe. Dave connected to the crowd right away when he said, "I always drive by these towns in upstate New York and its so beautiful. It's finally nice to stop and spend some time instead of just stopping at the gas station for a coke."

Dave started with a hypnotic rendition of BARN BURNING following that with another Blasters tune LITTLE HONEY. Soon after, three new songs were featured; MARY BROWN, CALIFORNIA SNOW, and ABILENE and one cover song, BLACK JACK DAVID. All of those will be recorded for Dave's forthcoming album tentatively titled BLACK JACK DAVID.

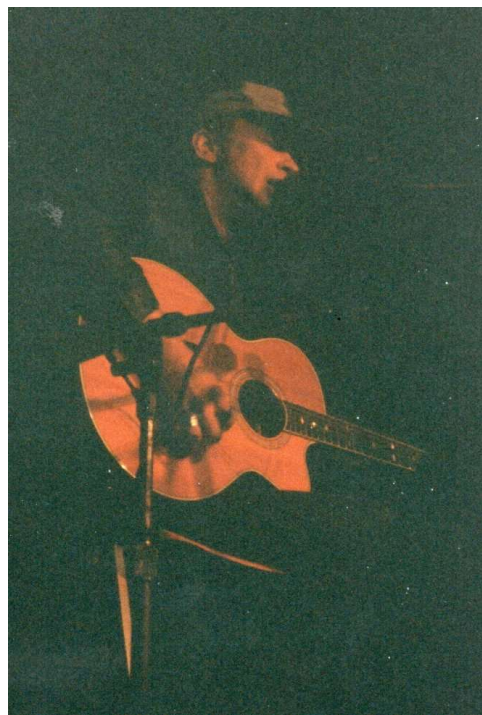
Dave does a great version of this song and he has talked about doing a folk album with Kelly Joe that would center around this song, as well as other traditional folk songs.

Dave has, rightfully so, been so high on this song that he feels its time to release it right now. So look for it on his new album. Kelly Joe and Dave did an extended jam at the end of LONG WHITE CADILLAC that came across as a highlight of the set.

I knew the audience was really enjoying the show and appreciated Craig's efforts to set it up when Dave took a minute to say "Thanks to Craig Frischkorn for bringing us out here. He's the guy that decided that Jamestown needed me and Kelly Joe. He's a great American" The crowd responded with a big round of applause. Craig later reflected that it was really a thrill



FROM PULSE MAGAZINE: On Roll Away The Stone (Rycodisc 10393) Phelps snatches up a sound born of the church and the hot breezes of the Delta cotton fields and adds it to his quiet, personal virtuosity. He sings in a gentle, soul whisper as he follows the trails of Jefferson, Skip James and Furry Lewis, and extends the path with his own ballads and spirituals. His solo voice and guitar interplay are like the durable gossamer of a wood spiders web, filigreed by subtle slide licks, tumbles of rapid notes, softly thumped and scraper strings that accent nuanced arrangements. With this elegant CD, the follow-up to his '94 debut on the little Burnside label, Phelps emerges as a star interpreter. - TED DROZDOWSKI



to help share Dave and Kelly Joes' music with a new audience right there in the small town where he lives. I was glad to see Craig take the time to sit down to watch the entire performance. After all he is Dave's biggest fan in Jamestown. Too many times people who organize an event like this are too busy and miss out on the most important thing, which is the music.

When the concert ended, the crowd buzzed enthusiastically about how they had never heard anything like this kind of music before. Several

people stayed around for pictures and autographs. More importantly, this concert was the first time many audience members had ever heard a slide guitar played in such an unusual and original style. It was the first time that many had heard a world class songwriter perform in such close proximity.

Further promoting this as an educational event, Craig Frischkorn students wrote essays on the performance. I'm told there are now a group of fans in Jamestown that are special ordering over the internet of Dave's back catalog as well as Kelly Joe's first CD. Dave and Kelly Joe now have a lot of new fans in rural upstate New York, and they truly sparked an interest and a following among music lovers in Jamestown. —Am

Dave Alvin and Kelly Joe Phelps - Jamestown NY

September 22, 1997

by Craig Frischkorn

“How did you get the King of Roots Rock (Dave Alvin) to play here in Jamestown?” someone asked me at the show. Someone else said recently, “I can’t believe we had Mojo’s October blues artist of the month (Kelly Joe Phelps) right here last month.” It really was unusual to get such top artists to perform off the beaten path in Jamestown. To put it mildly, Jamestown is not on very many artists tour schedules.

Nevertheless, we enjoyed a fantastic show right here by Kelly Joe and Dave on September 22. It all started after I did an interview with my friend and Poet Gerald Locklin, who was also Dave’s poetry teacher at Long Beach State University in the 1970s. Gerry knew I was an Alvin fan so he suggested that I look into booking a show by Dave right here in Jamestown at the community college. When Dave tours, normally he plays bigger cities in the region such as Buffalo and Rochester, but it was worth a try. I wrote a proposal to request the funding from the college programming board and checked on some dates with Dave’s management, Mongrel Music in Oakland, California. Since most colleges tend to have budgets for concerts and other student activities, everything went smoothly. And since we were doing the planning several months in advance, there was plenty of time to organize the Event. There were lots of great reviews of shows and albums in Dave’s press kit, so these helped with designing the poster. My favorite gutsy quote from the Los Angeles View. “He’s the last of the great roots-rockers. His poetry sweats from his guitar strings and it collects in a puddle on the stage.” It would be a free show, so the main thing was to get the word out. To help, lots of my friends and colleagues taped up posters and got radio stations to do public service announcements. It all paid off: we drew nearly 300 people for Dave and Kelly Joe’s show.

One thing that helped draw people for the main concert was a one-hour pre-show gig with poetry by Dave and slide guitar techniques by Kelly Joe. In a reception room on campus, students, faculty, and people from the town came to hear them. The artists must have been tired after driving all night from Michigan, but they were in great spirits and the crowd really appreciated their doing this very interesting extra appearance. Highlights of the pre-show gig included Kelly Joe’s instrumental version of GOODNIGHT IRENE and Dave’s new unpublished poem ROBERT JOHNSON’S CIGARETTE. Students were eager to meet the artists, get their autographs, and ask questions. Dave and Kelly Joe were kind and patient with everyone there.

The people who attended this afternoon gig must have run out to tell their friends and family to come to the evening show; there were people of all ages and backgrounds in the audience, including part-time students, students with children, faculty and others. And thanks to the pollstar.com listing on the Internet. Dave Alvin fans as far as we as Ohio, New York City, and Rochester drove hundreds of miles to attend this gig, the only northeastern show on the tour.

At the main show, Dave connected with the crowd right away when he said right at the beginning, “It’s really nice to spend some time here in an upstate small town.” The crowd was enthusiastic and warm. Kelly Joe backed up Dave on all the songs and so these arrangements were new and interesting, even for those that knew Dave’s songs. The set list also included three or four numbers that were very strong, especially MARY BROWN.

Kelly Joe and Dave’s extended jamming at the end of LONG WHITE CADILLAC was like

nothing else I've heard either of them do before. Hearing all their improvisation made me appreciate the song on the new level

When the concert ended, the crowd buzzed enthusiastically about how they had never heard anything like this kind of music before. Several people stayed around for pictures, autographs, and questions, but even more importantly, this concert was the first time many audience members had ever heard of slide guitar played in such an unusual and original style. It was the first time many of them had listened to songs with words, that as they put it, have so much darkness, simplicity, and depth. I lost count of how many people said these things. Sales at the CD table were brisk. Several of my students later wrote insightful reviews for an essay assignment.

After a very long drive and powerful performance in Jamestown, James and Kelly Joe had another long drive ahead of them. After packing their guitars in the trunk of their rental car, they were off on "Interstate City" to the next gig, hundreds of miles away in Knoxville, Tennessee. Their performance was truly memorable for the crowd; in fact there's now an enthusiastic pocket of new Jamestown fans doing special orders over the Internet for Dave's back catalog of CDs and Kelly Joe's first CD. That's what I call making a good impression. We were lucky indeed to get Dave Alvin and Kelly Joe Phelps in Jamestown, New York and I'm definitely not the only one in town who won't forget it.

All the great live music would have been enough, but there is more to add: I was surprised and honored when Dave took a minute during the show to say, "I'd like to thank Craig Frischkorn for bringing us here" and the crowd responded with applause. It's really hard to express how good this felt! Dave's and the crowds appreciation really made all the months of planning worthwhile. It was just such a pleasure to be a part of sharing the music of one of my all-time favorite songwriters with a new audience, right here where I live. —Am

Dave Alvin Set List (with song keys)

Barn Burning C
Little Honey Bb
Mary Brown Dm
California Snow C
Dry River D
Abilene F
Black Jack David Bb
Mother Earth D
King of California D
Fourth of July G
Long White Cadillac E



Dave and Kelly Joe



Billy Davis, Dave, Craig Frischkorn and Kelly Joe

Review — Jamestown Community College Email Newsletter by Colin Chase

Dave Alvin and Kelly Joe Phelps at Scharmann Theater

September 29, 1997 -- The Dave Alvin and Kelly Joe Phelps concert last night at the Scharmann theater was incredible. Both of these musicians are class A, awesome. When glancing at their concert venues for the current acoustic tour, Jamestown was listed next to cities such as Memphis, Ann Arbor, and a number of other large cities. 'Why Jamestown' was probably the question on a lot of minds. Well, the answer to this is Craig Frischkorn. Hats off to Craig for having the tenacity to bring together such an event. This is exactly, in my opinion, what JCC should be doing in the way of cultural activities.

Kelly Joe Phelps was phenomenal, playing his guitar on his lap as a slide guitar. He was able to induce an ominous and yet harmonious feeling as he played his compositions. His voice was, to me, reminiscent of Tom Waits.

Dave Alvin then rocked the house with his rich chords and powerful lyrics. I'm always in awe of guitar players who can create such full sounds out of a hollow piece of wood and some strings. Dave was playing originals as well as classic blues. Looking around, I realized that I was not the only one tapping my foot and swaying my head. I feel badly for those of you who missed the concert. It was quite the show.

On behalf of the community cultural center, and all the Artistic endeavors of the Jamestown Community College, I urge you all to not miss any more of these events. You'll be glad that you went.

And once again, a heartfelt thank you to Craig Frischkorn and all of those involved in making the concert last night the success that it was. —Colin Chase

AMERICAN MUSIC SUBSCRIPTION INFO: Publishing 4 issues quarterly. Send \$8 which includes 4 issues and postcard mailings (U.S.A. only) covering Blaster and related tour dates in your region. Overseas rates are \$10 U.S. for 4 issues. Canada \$9. For overseas subscribers wanting tour updates between newsletter mailings send 2 I.R.C.'s per desired response and you will be notified by Airmail letter of regional tour dates. If paying by check, payable to Billy Davis. Mail to :

AMERICAN MUSIC 80-16 64th Lane, Glendale N.Y. 11385

e-mail: davistb@aol.com *Alternate address* : **PO Box 210071, Woodhaven N.Y. 11421**

BACK ISSUE COPIES: \$2 per issue in the U.S. Overseas \$2.50 per issue

- #1. Blastory part 1, James Intveld profile.
- #2. Phil Alvin interview Part 1, Dave Alvin's "Museum" tour review, Faultline Syncopaters profile.
- #3. Phil Alvin interview Part 2, complete Blasters Discography.
- #4. James Harman interview, Blasters 91 Finland tour.
- #5. Lee Allen tribute issue. Dave Alvin interview. Lee Allen profile. Phil Alvin Foothill club review.
- #6 Rockin Ronny Weiser interview, Bobby Mizzel & James Intveld Cd review, State of the 1995 Blasters story.
- #7. Phil Alvin on the Making of County Fair 2000. An in depth look at Blaster cover songs.
- #8. James Intveld interview, The making of Sonny Burgess' and Dave Alvin's Tennessee Border Cd.
- #9. Blasters/Beat farmers '95 tour reviews, Intveld Cd review.
- #10 James Intveld ex-Blaster, Dave Alvin on the Knitters, Remembering Country Dick, Q&A for the band.
- #11 Gene Taylor interview, Sonny Burgess interview
- #12 Dave Alvin song by song on Interstate City, reviews.
- #13 Drummer issue Interviews w/Angel, Bateman, Hicks.
- #14 Keith Wyatt Interview, Pleasure Barons history.
- #15 Dave's poetry mentor Gerald Locklin interview, Dave Alvin/Kelly Joe Phelps '97 east coast acoustic tour
- #16 John Bazz interview, Blasters visit radio station KUCI, Influenced by the Blasters story, Dave Alvin in N.C.

AMERICAN MUSIC

The Blasters & Dave Alvin Newsletter Sept. 97 Update

DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES

tour with Kelly Joe Phelps

9/19 St Louis Mo @ Off Broadway
9/20 Chicago @ Old Town School Folk
9/21 Ann Arbor MI @ The Ark
9/22 JamesTown NY @ Scharmann Theater
9/24 Knoxville TN @ Laurel theater
9/25 Nashville TN @ BlueBird
9/26 Clemson SC @ Clemson University
9/27 Tampa FL @ Skippers
9/28 Atlanta GA @ Blind Willies

With the Guilty Men

Oct. Saturdays in L.A. at Jacks Sugar Shack
opening unannounced trying new material

11/14 Jacks Sugar Shack w/Candye Kane

Show with Kelly Joe Phelps

11/29 San Fran @ Noe Valley Ministry

Dave Alvin Solo, acoustic

12/12 Santa Barbra Ca @ Labarro the.

-- Dave has another book of Poetry planned for early 98 tentatively called THE CRAZY ONES.

-- Sept 16 - HighTone records released for the first time on CD - AMERICAN MUSIC, the Blasters first album from 1980. Included are all original 13 tracks remastered and 6 bonus tracks. It will also be released in Vinyl LP format with a gatefold jacket. The LP will add a 7th bonus track.

-- Sept 23 - The Bruce Springsteen tribute album is due out. Dave does SEEDS and he's really proud of it. He says he really has made it a Dave Alvin song.

-- Dave's next studio album is going to be in the vein of King Of California. Greg Leisz is producing and will start rehearsals with Dave in November. Greg is currently on tour with K.D. Lang. In late December the recordings will begin and they will finish in January. They are trying to make a May release date. Some song titles include ABILENE,

MARY BROWN, EVENING BLUES, and a song Dave is really excited about, as he explains, "Its going to have a clever name or a mundane name like I HATE THE WAY YOU SAY GOODBYE."

-- Dave spent every Friday in August at L.A.'s Jack's Sugar Shack playing with the Guilty Men under assumed names as they practiced new material for the forth coming album. The crowds still came knowing exactly who the billed KING OF CALIFORNIA was. Each week the band came up with names for the band like PHIL'S BROTHERS BAND or THE ARTIST FORMALLY KNOWN AS PHIL'S BROTHER. They had so much fun playing these off the cuff gigs, they will do it again every Saturday in October, on the 18th opening for The Derailers and the 25th for Chris Gaffney.

-- In the spring, Dave will be going back to the producers seat to "make a tougher record" for Katy Moffatt.

-- Dave has been doing a lot of poetry readings lately in Los Angeles and San Diego. On the upcoming Kelly Joe Phelps tour at the Jamestown gig, Dave will do a reading in the afternoon before the evenings performance.

-- On 12/12 Dave will be playing with the Guilty Men at the Labarro theatre in Santa Barbara. Dave relates a funny story about this old adobe brick theatre which is a historical landmark. "The Blasters were booked there in 1982 and this was at the time when we had stage divers and we would really get the crowd revved up. There was a riot and they trashed the place. (laughs) So the Blasters were banned from Santa Barbara. So now I'm returning to the scene of the crime."

-- Dave will be playing a gig in San Francisco with Kelly Joe Phelps at The Noe Valley Ministry. Dave says he will be bringing along a few bluegrass musicians. A pedal Steel player and a Mandolin player for the gig. It should add even more to Dave and Kellys' unique pairing.

--Rumors have been circulating around the recent CD release of the Blasters first album from 1980, that the original Blasters including Dave Alvin will be doing one show to celebrate the historic release. No word on this officially but it would be a nice thank you from the band to the fans for the many years waited. Let's cross our fingers.