

ISSUE #37

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

NOV - DEC 2002

Blasters East Coast Reunion tour Coverage

BLASTERS shows

(Phil, John, Jerry, Keith)

2/1/03 Clear Lake IA at Surf Ballroom (Buddy Holly Tribute show)

DAVE ALVIN Shows

With The Gully Men

1/9 Austin TX at The Continental Club
1/10 Dallas TX at Sons Of Herman Hall
1/11 Houston TX at The Continental
1/12 New Orleans, LA House Of Blues
1/13 St. Francisville, LA at Magnolia Cafe
1/15 Tampa FL at Skippers Smokehouse
1/17 Jacksonville FL at Marquee Theatre
1/18 Greenville SC at The HandleBar
1/19 Atlanta GA at Smith's Olde Bar
1/22 (tentative) Oklahoma City OK at Blue Door (solo acoustic)
2/1 Pasadena CA at Neighborhood Church (Dave acoustic with Shea and Kearns)

Dave solo acoustic

3/21 Annapolis MD at Rams Head
3/22 Philadelphia PA at Tin Angel
3/23 Arden Delaware at Arden Concert series

photo: Lori Eanes



Latest news -- The Blasters have been in negotiations for a possible PBS TV special and DVD release combining new and old footage. More on this as it develops. -- Dave Alvin will spend his off time in early 2003 writing and hopefully recording his next studio album. -- In November, 2002 Dave Alvin recorded a song for a Waylon Jennings tribute CD. -- When the Blasters reunion stopped in New York, VH1 taped interviews with Phil and Dave. They say the footage is airing around the holidays. I haven't been able to see it yet. It's going to be up to the Blasters fans to catch it on tape. There are two VH1 channels: VH1 and VH1 Classics. The Classics channel has been airing Blasters videos. -- Dave Alvin wrote a song for ((continued Pg. 2)))

Inside this Issue: Reports on the Blasters reunion tour on the east coast and their first ever show in their hometown of Downey CA.

the new Iguanas' CD due out in March. -- Dave contributed liner notes to the Dwight Yoakam 4CD box set called Reprise Please Baby, released this fall by Rhino Records. -- Mobile Fidelity will be releasing Dave Alvin's BlackJack David on CD and a 2 LP vinyl set. Mobile fidelity specializes in Audiophile CD's and LP's remastered from the master tapes with sonic clarity. Order the album from their web site <http://www.eyeneer.com/Labels/MFSL/> Look for the release January 2003 -- There have been a lot of rumors circulating that Dave Alvin would be joining Bob Dylan's band as his guitar player. On 9/11/02 Dave Alvin issued an exclusive statement to the BlastersNewsletter web site about the 'Joining Bob Dylan's band' rumor. "I am not joining Bob Dylan's band. In Colorado, I only sat in with the band. Charlie (Sexton) is staying with the band for the rest of the year." Dave also revealed that he would be reuniting once again with the 'Original Five' Blasters to promote the October 15, 2002, release of the Trouble Bound CD. -- Dave Alvin has struck a deal with Villagerecords.com to sell a very limited number of the Outtakes in CA disc. Go to www.villagerecords.com to buy a copy. It is expected that it will sell out quickly. OUTTAKES is usually only sold at live shows. -- On Ben Vaughn's new 2002 CD Glasgow Time, (available as an import on Shoeshine records) he recorded his version of TIME WILL CATCH US, a song he co-wrote with Dave in the early 90's. Barrence Whitfield was the first to record the song. Ben Vaughn is best known as a singer/songwriter and did the music for the TV show "3rd Rock From The Sun." --AM

The Original Five Blasters -- Sugar Bowl Bluegrass Festival -- Norden, CA 9/1/02 by Maureen Oels



It was at the bluegrass festival at Sugar Bowl ski area near Lake Tahoe - kind of a strange gig for them. It would have been a better venue for one of Dave's acoustic shows because none of the other bands were electric. The Blasters were the headlining act. The show was outdoors - very bright - the sun was shining in everyone's eyes the whole time. Everyone except Phil and Bill had their Ray-Bans on. Both Phil and Dave were early for the show, and holed up in a room nearby the stage posing for photos (the publicity shot seen on the cover of this newsletter, featuring Phil holding his guitar with the Blasters behind him; was taken at this session.) When the time came to play, they walked around the chair lifts and through the weeds to the stage like everyone else - there was no star treatment at this one.

Phil was in great form - his voice was ready and rested, cracking jokes between songs - calling out what to play right before each song (very unusual because Dave usually writes the

set list ahead of time). Phil was talkin' zydeco all through MARIE MARIE. I thought it was a play on the zydeco version Dave does at some of his shows.

The sound system was not their own, but rented and not what they're used to. I think it was causing them some frustration. But Dave had a big smile on his face through the entire set, so at least he was enjoying it. John had his groove on tight, and with Bill rockin' his ass off -- they kept the crowd rockin' the entire time. Gene was the boogie-woogie king as always.

Unfortunately, the Blasters set was way too short - they barely played fifty-five minutes. It seemed to me, they were much more relaxed than at the official Blasters Reunion shows, but a little less serious on the music too. There were very few real Blasters fans there. Anyway, it was over way too fast for me. But, while they were on stage, I was in Blasters heaven once again. Oh yeah - Did I mention "Lightnin' Dave" was scorchin'? That guy is the greatest! There were not a lot of his famous rock guitarist jumps or anything, but he blew them away as always. It always is so great to see Dave rockin' hard again.

Set List: joe turner medley / trouble bound / american music / border radio / i'm shakin' / red rose / dark night / blue shadows / help you dream / cryin' for my baby / so long baby goodbye / tag along / marie marie / one bad stud —Am

The Original Four Blasters play their first ever gig in their hometown of Downey, California.

by Mas Tachiyama



An organization called "The Friends of Johnie's" are trying to save Johnie's Broiler, Los Angeles County's last and largest intact drive-in restaurant (located at 7447 Firestone Boulevard in Downey, California). They asked the Blasters to play a concert in Downey to raise awareness about the danger of losing the building to renovation by a used car dealership that bought the property. (Check out the first inside page of the Blasters Testament CD booklet to see the Blasters standing in front of Johnie's). The "Original Four" Blasters played a benefit concert in

Downey on 10/30/02 at The Rio Hondo Country club.

Channel 9 (in Los Angeles) ran a feature on its evening news with comments from the Blasters and the Friends of Johnies. It was a great home coming gig; the entire band was in a good mood from the beginning. The Rio Hondo CC was built in the early 60's and was a perfect venue for the music. The sold-out show held only 400 people. The stage reminded me of an old elementary school stage, low lit, small (approximately 20' x 15'), with a two-foot high stage with stairs on both sides. Old beige curtains line either side with a matching header on top meeting the old off-white painted walls. Needless to say, there wasn't much room for the band to move, but Dave made use of the little space he had. —Am



Because of the low stage, the band was close to the crowd who moved with the music and caused the floor to move up and down. I couldn't imagine a more perfect place to see them play. I think this will be my all-time favorite venues I've seen them play in, unless they play in my back yard!

The Blue Shadows opened the show. John Bazz on upright bass, Bateman on drums, a harp player named Jack Rudy, and a lead singer playing slide steel guitar named Jake Matson. They were great... with a modern Son House sound. I hope they open more for the Blasters on the tour. They are a must-see in my book.

Blasters set list: red rose / trouble bound / flattop joint / what will lucy do / never no more blues / long white Cadillac / I'm shakin' / crazy baby / common man / border radio / cryin' for my baby / sadie's back in town / dark night / so long baby goodbye / one bad stud. Encore: american music / marie marie.

'I fell in love' was on the set list before 'Marie Marie', but they didn't play it. Dave has been trying to get Phil to sing that one all year. Apparently Phil didn't want to do it - along with some other songs he nixed which were practiced earlier. The reason may have been that when they tried it in sound check, Phil messed up the lyrics and couldn't remember the right words. In the sound check the band tried a few different songs. Other than Phil pulling out a few rare blues songs that the band jammed on, they tried 'Come On In This House' and 'Cry For Me,' both of which wouldn't be heard in tonight's show, but would be later in the tour. The most interesting song they worked on was a version of Lee Allen's 'Walkin' With Mr. Lee.' But in this version, Phil played Lee's sax part on his harmonica. It was played perfect in sound check, and it would have been a cool addition to the set since the band wasn't planning to use the Lee Allen tribute song recording to open the show. I asked Dave why they never used it in any show: "I don't know - never did it before - never did it again (laughs). But it was cool!"

The Blasters played hard like they always do. One funny dedication of Phil's was for 'Long White Cadillac.' And it was the first time in a long many years that Phil didn't use the "Rehabilitation program" dedication. In Downey he said, "This goes out to Captain Roy Campos from the Downey Police Department. (years ago) Rookie Roy Campos got me off big time. I swear to God, I wouldn't have seen you till tonight, anyway." The audience laughed.

After the 17 song set, Phil said, "Thanks for coming out to Johnies. I hope we saved the place." Dave followed him and said: "Well, it's great to be back home. Good luck to Johnie's Broiler and Harvey's Broiler (the original name in the 60's) and everything else. Thanks for coming out to support a worthy cause. Goodnight." The band came out once more to the cheering crowd to play "Marie Marie" and Dave finished the night saying: "Well, 22 years ago we always tried to play in Downey and the cops always shut us down and tonight's no different.

Thanks for coming.” Dave was referring to there being a curfew in Downey: “We were told to finish at a certain time and we went a little over but they were cool about it.”

Analisa Hungerford, who led the organizers of the event, said, “What can I say? The show was a huge success! We got tons of support letters and a feature on our local news. It was a perfect night and the guys were great! What a moment and what a memory!”

Dave later somberly recalled, “It was a lot of fun, but at the same time it was sad because a lot of people weren’t there that should have been.”

Johnny Bazz is the only band member with a surviving parent and so many of their old friends are gone now. Finally playing in their hometown brought back a lot of memories for all the Blasters boys.

One week later the report came in: Great News for the Friends of Johnie's Broiler. “We went before the State of California, and the 'Commission For Historical Resources' voted unanimously to have Johnie's added to the historical resource registry for the State (7-0). This decision insures the building cannot be demolished. The commission urged that it be placed on the national registry! (That's the next quest for the Friends of Johnie's). The Friends of Johnie's considers this a major victory. A classic American icon has been spared!”

Check out the Friends of Johnnie's web site and please sign their petition to save Johnnie's Broiler. www.johnniesbroiler.org --AM

The Original Five Blasters US Reunion Tour Eastern Leg, November 6 - 18, 2002

11/6/02 -- Chicago, IL at Fitzgerald's

Set List: trouble bound / red rose / real rock drive / no other girl / i'm shakin' / long white cadillac / crazy baby / help you dream / common man / blue shadows / hollywood bed / don't lie to me / cryin' for my baby / dark night / border radio / so long baby goodbye / american music / Encore: I love you so / one bad stud / marie marie

It's the opening night of the tour and the two shows here in Chicago are completely sold out. There were some pre-show jitters among the band, but they came out, and the crowd went crazy - That made it easier. Phil arrived from his hotel just in time to come on stage wearing his scarf and South Central jacket. He started off saying, "We're the Blasters. Pretend you didn't have anything better to do." It was exciting for everybody seeing the original Blasters together again, and it would be like that at every city along the



The Blasters afternoon rehearsal



photo: Billy Davis

Dave and Cocoa

'No Other Girl' and 'Cryin' For My Baby' were a little rough with changes and lyric spots missed. In 'No Other Girl,' Gene Taylor took his piano solo, but Phil cut him off and started singing the next verse. It threw off the whole band, but Gene kept soloing though, and by the next chorus, they had to all find a way to come together. Phil never knew what happened so after the song, Dave whispered something in his ear. Phil turned off mic and said, "I'm sorry Gene." Then he made a joke of his mistake by saying to the audience: "I thought Gene was a little light on that last solo, so I cut him off (laughs)." In 'Trouble Bound,' Phil messed up some lyrics and Dave just threw his hands up in the air. None of this detracted from the opinion of many people I talked to in the crowd who claimed it was one of the best concerts they had ever seen.

Dave did his trademark leaps in 'Crazy Baby' and 'American Music.' Some of the songs that were stand-outs tonight were tunes that feature Dave on lead guitar -- 'Dark Night,' 'Common Man,' and 'American Music' - when Dave really lets loose on guitar. In fact 'American Music' was one that in the March reunion shows, Dave held back on his solo keeping the song at three minutes. Tonight Dave did what he does in his Guilty Men shows -- he continuously soloed and continued every 12 bars into more solo. This got the crowd pumped up. Phil was forced to leave off the last bridge and chorus because Dave had built up such momentum and loudness; they just ran it to the end. Wow, just a great version!

'I Love You So.' was a complete surprise. Few people request it even though it's an excellent live song. It requires quite a powerful voice to sing it, and Phil did it with that power. During 'So Long Baby Good-

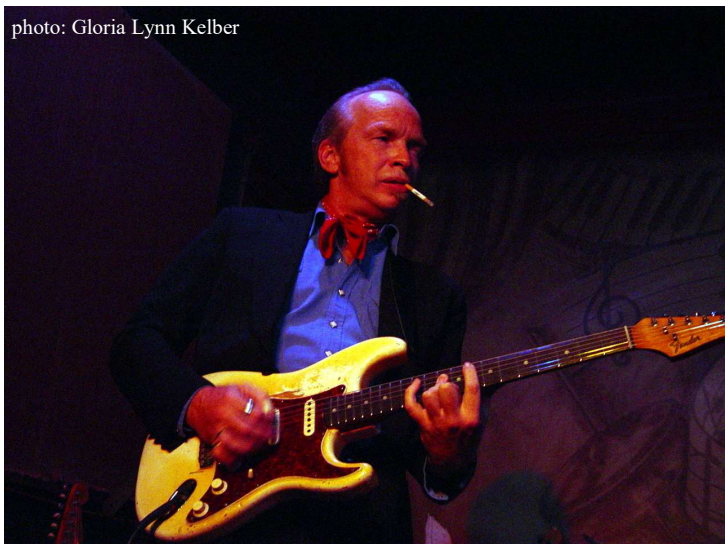
tour. Fitzgerald's has a small stage, so all the guys were in close quarters. They seemed to play their instruments a little more to each other. John Bazz started out standing behind Dave. In the second song, Dave kicked Bazz in the butt, which startled him. Dave made John move out in the open, so they were all side-by-side.

After 'Red Rose', Phil picked up a piece of paper from Gene's piano and started laughing. He said, "Who wrote the set list in pencil (laughing)?" The audience laughed and Phil continued: "I can sing better (now), but when you reach 40, you lose your eye sight." Dave was the only band member not laughing - maybe Dave wrote the set list. There were some great surprises in the set like 'Real Rock Drive' - an exceptionally fast version, 'I love You So' (the Bo Diddley song from the Blasters "The Face" album) and Gene Taylor taking vocals on 'Don't Lie To Me.' Since it was the start of the tour with very limited rehearsal, a few songs like



photo: Billy Davis

photo: Gloria Lynn Kelber



bye,' Gene Taylor started a little horseplay: he stood next to Phil cranking his hand as if he was an organ grinder. Gene held out his hat, and a few fans threw dollar bills in the hat.

By now Phil was totally engulfed in doing his Lee Allen solo on his harmonica. Suddenly dollar bills were being hurled at Phil. This didn't distract Phil, who continued the great tribute solo to the Blasters late mentor, Lee Allen.

A funny thing happened in 'One Bad Stud.' Typically, the last two chords of the song have pauses between them as the band goes

silent and waits for Dave's cue to hit the final big chord of the song. In rehearsal, Dave didn't pause long enough, so Phil demanded there had to be more space. Dave asked, "How Much?" and Phil said, "You can wait forever!" So in the show, Dave gave Phil what he wanted and more. He hit the chord. The band stared at Dave waiting for the cue. Dave threw his pick in the air. He hit the next chord (with one to go). Then threw his pick up again, looked at the audience then the rest of the band, took a slug of beer and finally hit the big chord. The rest of the band started smiling after their anticipation was over. Dave worked it very well and got a response from the crowd.

The audience tonight was the most energetic that I have seen on the reunion. During some of the songs, you could feel the floor vibrating from the combined motion of everybody rockin' to the songs. During 'Marie Marie,' the crowd sang the words so loud we couldn't hear Phil sing them.

The owner let the party continue backstage into the AM hours as Gene Taylor played piano and was accompanied by Phil, Dave, and Chris Gaffney trading off blues and country songs. What a night. No one wanted to leave.



photo: Billy Davis

11/7/02 — Chicago, IL at Fitzgerald's

Set List: red rose / trouble bound / what will lucy do / i'm shakin' / long white cadillac / crazy baby / help you dream / common man / no other girl / blue shadows / hollywood bed / tag along / cryin' for my baby / border radio / so long baby goodbye / american music. Encore: dark night / one bad stud / marie marie.

It was a second night at the same venue, so the band skipped sound check because their equipment was set up from the night before. They started with 'Red Rose' making hand signals

to soundman Rick Brown, to get the levels adjusted to what they were hearing on stage. By 'Trouble Bound,' Bill Bateman was whacking the drums hard, drawing a lot of attention from the audience. This was gonna be a good night. The rhythm section, Bill and John, each wore matching plaid shirts, they must have shopped in the same place, or got a two-for-one deal. Ha! Ha!

After 'Red Rose,' a girl in the audience handed Phil a red rose. He kissed her hand, smelled the rose, and politely put it down on Gene's piano. Throughout the show the band looked really loose. Dave was smiling and each member seemed to be having fun just playing as the Blasters. Gene who is always a fan favorite, was playing to the audience in front of him and at one point took off a bunch of bead necklaces and gave them out to girls in the front row. Dave has to be one of the fastest string changers I have ever seen. He broke a string in 'Hollywood Bed,' so the rest of the band started Gene's song, 'Tag Along.' By the start of the second verse, Dave had changed it himself, tuned up, and was playing again.

In the encore, the band played 'One Bad Stud.' Dave took the solo at the end, and suddenly the song started speeding up real fast. I'm not sure who initiated that, but Dave had a yeah-let's-go-for-it grin on his face. The crowd started to cheer feeling the speed. Next they started Marie Marie and Dave had some fun with that at the other guys' expense. Instead of playing that chopping chord quickly, Dave made it last maybe too long. Everybody stopped. Even Phil looked over at Dave with a surprised look. Dave nodded and Phil started the lyrics on his own. The crowd started to go crazy, singing along with Phil. During the song, loads of cocktail napkins started flying in the air from all over the audience. It looked like New Year's Eve. I hear that it's a tradition on New Years Eve at Fitzgerald's, and I guess the Fitzgerald people consider the Blasters show here a very special event. As everyone walked off the stage, Dave approached the mic, yelled the members' names, and said, "It's good to be back in Chicago with these guys."

This show was the better of the two. This one was better, performance-wise, for the band. Dave would later say that he felt this was the best show of the tour.

11/8/02 -- Cleveland, OH at The Beachland Ballroom

Set List: red rose / trouble bound / what will Lucy do / i'm shakin' / long white cadillac / crazy baby / help you dream / common man / no other girl / hollywood bed / tag along / cryin' for my baby / dark night / border radio / so long baby / american music. Encore: don't lie to me / one bad stud / marie marie

photo: Gloria Lynn Kelber



photo: Gloria Lynn Kelber





Bill Bateman finds an old juke box in the Beachland bar after the show.

A near sell out crowd packed the old ballroom that looked like it was right out of the fifties. Complete with neon sign outside. Phil's voice sounded a little raspy (the third show in three days). The excited



photo: Billy Davis

crowd didn't notice, but he got better as the set went on. When Phil reached 'Cryin' For My Baby,' his voice started to go again, so he came up with a new idea. During the chorus of the song he sings "Oh, Oh. . . Oh, Oh" going low, then high with his voice.

The high wasn't coming out right, so he sang the low part, then made a quick switch with the harmonica playing the high part. It was an interesting idea.

A historic moment happened next between the Alvin brothers. Dave started the guitar line in 'Dark Night.' Phil waited for his time to start singing and got confused - something was throwing him off and he started singing the wrong lyrics. Dave yelled over what the first line should have been and Phil turned to the mic to sing it. Suddenly, Dave raised his arms and stopped the band from playing. He walked to Phil's mic, grabbed it and announced to the crowd "This is a big moment in Phil's life. This is the first time I will say this in public." Dave looked at Phil and said: "You were right and I was wrong." The crowd all laughed and Dave walked away smiling. It turns out Dave was playing the song in the wrong key. Phil came to the mic to continue the joke and said back to his brother: "Don't think that's the first time you should have said it." Everybody has been getting along so well on the tour, and there have been lots of fun moments. The band is traveling in a van and a car, and believe it or not, Phil and Dave have driven together between cities.

11/9/02 — Cincinnati, OH at Bogart's



photo: Josh Lewis

Set List: red rose / trouble bound / what will lucy do / long white cadillac / i'm shakin' / crazy baby / help you dream / blue shadows / common man / no other girl / hollywood bed / tag along / dark night / border radio / so long baby goodbye / american music. Encore: don't lie to me / one bad stud.



Dave airborne, as the band watches on.

Bogart's is a big venue that hosts a lot of the new pop bands. The stage is big with a



Hotel room jam in Cincinnati

an expanded form. Lately Phil has been delaying the opening vocals, and letting Dave take the groove of the song a little further. Then during Dave's solo, he's been taking a free-form approach and finishing his solo with a long slide trill on the guitar that goes a long time as the note played gets lower and lower. The crowd loved it every time Dave's excitement made him leap in the air.

Tonight, Phil Alvin took the opening guitar part to 'Dark Night.' Last night, Dave started the song off wrong and then made his "Historic moment in Phil's life" comment. 'American Music' is a song that seems to be getting better and better. In using it as a finish song, Dave has expanded the solo much like he did with the song when he plays it with the Guilty Men. This may now be the definitive version. The crowd sure gets pumped up as Dave finished the song with a wall of noise coming from the guitar and a leap by the guitarist in the air just caps off the explosion of the song. In the encore, the band played an old song Gene Taylor has sung with the Blasters before called 'Don't Lie To Me.' The last time they played this was in the 1985 tour. Great boogie-woogie piano in that one.

Then next was 'One Bad Stud.' The band walked off the stage and the house music came on. While the crowd cheered for 'Marie Marie' to be played, the house lights came on. Sorry, but I have to criticize the Cincinnati audience, because they just stopped applauding when the lights came on. They let the Blasters off the hook. This happened back in March in Petaluma, CA. But there, the crowd kept cheering loud and wouldn't let the Blasters leave without doing their signature song. At that California show, the lights went out and the band came back out. So, Cincinnati, you weren't loud enough.

Backstage, Phil Alvin laughed because he recalled, "In the past when people asked for 'Marie Marie' I would say 'you can cut my toe off with a brick, if I don't do that one. I'm lucky I didn't say that tonight.'" John Bazz walked by and added: "I would have brought out the brick."

photographer pit and a concert arena lighting rig.

Phil's voice was a little rough early because of it was his 4th show in 4 nights. But as he has done in other shows, his voice tends to get better throughout the set. 'What Will Lucy Do' has been a special treat this tour. Originally done by Frankie Lee Sims, the Blasters did this song in the early eighties (it appeared on a compilation called Attack of the Killer B's) and haven't played it live since. You can hear one of their best renditions of the song on the Testament compilation set. 'Long White Cadillac' is a song that is slowly taking on



The Blasters show is becoming a well-oiled machine. Everything is going real smooth and everybody is getting along. And after all these years, these guys really do like each other - they all stick together at the parties after the show - and that's great to see.

11/11/02 — Annapolis, MD at Rams Head (Dave's birthday)

The band gathered at sound check and played a few different songs. They did Howlin' Wolf's 'Smokestack Lightnin'' and Phil played a harmonica instrumental by Little Walter called 'Off The Wall.'

Set List -- red rose / trouble bound / cry for me / long white cadillac / I'm shakin' / crazy baby / help you dream / blue shadows / common man / no other girl / hollywood bed / tag along / got love if you want it / dark night / border radio / so long baby goodbye / american music. Encore: santa fee / one bad stud / marie marie



This sit down club had only about 200 seats but the ticket price was high, and it still sold out. The Blasters don't usually play sit-down clubs because they like the energy they get back from a stand-up-dancing crowd. But this still was a good one. Everybody was wondering if Dave Alvin would find the inspiration to leap in the air during his solos. In 'Crazy Baby' Dave started his solo then glanced up in the air to see if he had the headroom. There was a big PA speaker above his head, so he stayed earth bound. This show included a few rare songs, one being Elmore James' song 'Cry For Me.' That song was first recorded by the Blasters at their 1980 Rolling Rock sessions. It wasn't released until 1997 when Hightone records released the Rollin Rock album on CD with a pressing also on vinyl. The vinyl edition includes 'Cry For Me' as a bonus track. (A different recording of the same song was originally released on the Blasters Collection in 1990).

Phil Alvin has been coming up with some different dedications. He dedicated 'I'm Shakin'' to Cincinnati and King records. Then he intro-ed 'No Other Girl' saying, "This features Gene 'Red Shirt' Taylor on piano" -- because Gene was wearing a bright red silk shirt. Gene got Phil back a little when during Gene's vocal song, 'Tag Along' he changed the lyrics: "Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jill knocked Jack down and broke his crown, she caught him foolin' with Phil Alvin's daughter (instead of 'foolin' with the neighbor's daughter.') Phil just grinned back. Gene was featured again on 'Help You Dream' where he plays an improv. part in



the middle. Today's version ran the song up to seven and a half minutes.

The time came on the set list for Phil to play a harp song. On the set list it said "Big F - or - harp" This way Phil could choose. He surprised everybody and pulled out 'Got Love If You Want It.' The set finished with 'American Music' and the band got a standing ovation. The band came back out and Phil started yodeling an old country tune. The band picked up on it and started playing, but they only played about 30 seconds of it. Phil sounded like he was straining his

voice so he joked, "If you ever heard a horse (hoarse) yodel . . ." Maybe the band is preparing that one for their set. Gene Taylor took the vocals over for an obscure piano led song by Baby Boy Warren called 'Santa Fe.' Of course it was a great song and a treat for everybody. No one I talked to had ever heard the song before, including some of the band members. Lastly they did 'One bad Stud' and 'Marie Marie.'

Before 'One bad Stud,' Phil announced to the crowd, "It's David's birthday today. This is the first year that he is gonna be a year older than me." Then Phil started singing 'Happy Birthday' while looking over at Dave with a smile. Gene accompanied on piano. Suddenly Dave takes off his guitar, sets it down, and starts walking towards Phil. Phil stops and with a big grin challenges Dave, "Let's go right now." Dave turns around because Phil stopped singing and Phil says, "I was waiting for the punch line," and Dave responded, "You never have one." Everybody laughed as Phil grinned bigger and then said: "I'm the straight man." In 'Marie Marie' Dave played his solo and looked at his headroom again. This time he took a chance and jumped in the air and the crowd went crazy. A great end to a Blasters show. Dave said in the mic as he left, "Hope you had a good time and don't forget the immortal words of Thomas Wolfe, Good Night." Hmmn. Did Dave mean, "You can't go home again?" which is Wolfe's most famous quote.

I had a definite feeling this had been a rock concert when I walked out into the parking garage and there was a line of cars waiting to pay to get out. Someone was blasting 'American Music' on a car stereo and you could hear it echo throughout the whole garage. The excitement continues. I hope the band realizes how much this tour means to us fans.



Phil playing his banjo-uke

11/13/02 Alexandria, VA at The Birchmere

Set List: red rose / trouble bound / what will lucy do / i'm shakin' / long white cadillac / crazy baby / help you dream / blue shadows / common man / no other girl / hollywood bed / tag along / got love if you want it / dark night / border radio / so long baby goodbye / american music. Encore: don't lie to me / one bad stud / marie marie.



photo: Billy Davis



photo: Billy Davis

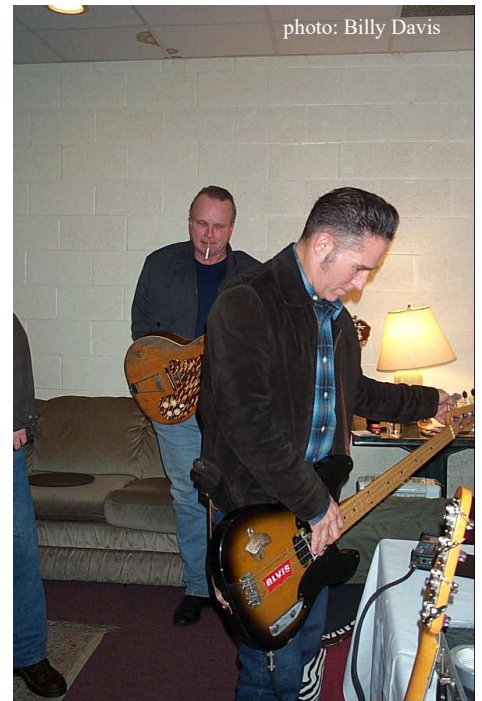


Soundcheck at the Birchmere

The Blasters have a good following in the Washington, DC, area. For this show, fans started lining up at 2 PM in front of the venue to get the front 'first-come' seats. The show was completely sold out in advance. The Blasters came on to a loud ovation from a crowd who knew very well that it had been 17 years since the Original Blasters had been in the DC area. Phil mentioned to the crowd remembering the first time they played DC back in '82: "We played a place called the Psycodilly with Tex Rubi-



photo: Billy Davis



Backstage at The Birchmere

nowitz and . . Louis Armstrong." That 'Louis Armstrong' reference is an inside joke. Back stage at the last few shows, the Alvin brothers have been having a disagreement about what city Louis Armstrong started to make it big in. So Phil threw that in, always trying to get the last word - all in good fun.

Phil Alvin sounded good on vocals, a little hoarse in a few spots. He joked to the audience "I went into a barn and came out a little hoarse." The crowd half-laughed at the bad joke. Phil tried to save face saying, "David wrote that for me." Bill Bateman was the player of the night. He was playing very aggressively like his reputation in the old days. 'Long white Cadillac' was one he was bashing the drums on, during 'No other girl' he raised the sticks high in the air as he crashed down on his snare drum for every beat. Especially impressive were his tasteful drum rolls during Dave Alvin's solos in 'Common Man.' Bateman brought the level up a notch and Dave Alvin was noticing - he started playing harder on his guitar. Just watch Bill Bateman and you'll see him close his eyes, grimace, and upon making contact with the drums, he opens his

mouth imitating the sound of hitting the drums. Great energy! Great playing! In the last few songs of the night, Bill's snare sound was noticeably different - he paid the price by breaking the snare drum skin, but played the end of the show with it sounding broken. Wow!

When time came for Gene Taylor to sing his song he talked to the audience a little about what song he would sing and said, "We had a little argument about my favorite song that everybody in the band except one voted for. David Alvin got out-voted." Dave started laughing out loud. Out of nowhere, a pick came flying at Gene and he ducked. Everybody else in the band was laughing. Then Gene changed the subject and said "Bazz, I need your assistance", as he held up a bottle of beer. John Bazz knew exactly what that meant and walked over to Gene with his bass. He held up the bass and Gene put his bottle against the guitar body and popped the cap off. It turns out Bazz has a metal bottle cap opener mounted to the guitar behind the bridge. That got quite a laugh from the crowd and Gene said, "Johnny Bazz's contribution to comedy."

When the Blasters finished each encore song, Dave approached the mic and said first: "Thanks for coming to the family reunion" And the second time he said: "Thanks for coming to the Birchmere. Next time: a dance floor." The band came out for 'Marie Marie' and the whole sit-down club stood up clapping. Throughout the whole song, they clapped and danced and yelled back at the band. The Blasters seemed to feed off that, and it was easily the best song of the night. It was a great crowd. The Blasters walked off and Dave said "See ya in 20 years." These Blasters seem to be getting tighter and tighter.



11/14/02 Philadelphia, PA The Theatre of Living Arts

The sound check was very interesting. Phil Alvin arrived early for sound check so he sat at the piano and played some old style songs. One of the stagehands walked by; Phil stopped and whispered over to him jokingly, "I played Alfalfa in the original Our Gang." Then the rest of the Blasters arrived and they played "Red Rose" and "I'm



Gene Taylor on drums in soundcheck

Glad You're Dead You Rascal You." Meanwhile, Gene Taylor was having a hard time hearing his sound on stage because of these big woofer speakers under the stage. He couldn't hear and complained loudly. These big rock clubs have speakers under the stage to increase the thump of the low-end sound during loud concerts.

Set List: Same as last night in Alexandria at The Birchmere except for the Gene Taylor-sung encore song 'Don't Lie To Me' was replaced by 'Santa Fe.'





photo: Billy Davis

Sound check with Gene playing guitar



photo: Billy Davis

The Blasters have been refining their set so they can finish off the tour in top form in Boston and New York. So set changes aren't expected.

The band came in expecting the venue to be a sit-down theatre. Actually it is a smoky, dark rock club with all standing capacity - that's exactly what the Blasters like. By the time the Blasters hit the stage, the club was jammed. It was the biggest crowd of the tour - a sell out of 700 or close to it. This show was the best of the tour so far. The band sounded great and played on a big stage with a completely wild crowd.

Phil dedicated 'Help You Dream' by saying: "This goes out to me at the hotel bar last night." Then he dedicated 'Blue Shadows' - "We'll do this for an old Blaster from Philadelphia named Steve Berlin." 'American Music' was dedicated to Ripley's and the Chestnut Cabaret, two Philadelphia venues where the Blasters played regularly in the early eighties.

Once again Bill Bateman drew a lot of attention, hitting the drums hard and driving the band right along. I think everybody rocked harder tonight as they fed off the crowd and each other.



photo: Josh Lewis

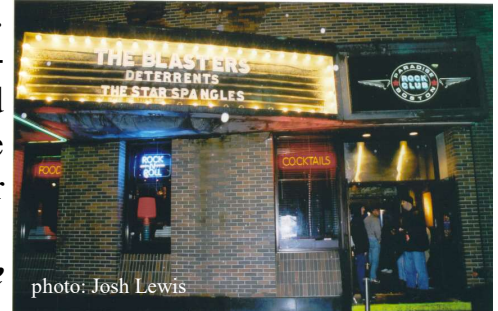
The Blasters with Tyrone Hill

In the encore, Phil Alvin brought Tyrone Hill from Sun Ra's Arkestra to the stage. He played some great trombone to 'One Bad Stud' that really fit the song well. Sun Ra and the Arkestra played on Phil Alvin's 1986 solo album 'Unsung Stories,' so Phil already knew Tyrone Hill. The story goes that when the band's van was pulling into town for the sound check, Phil spotted Tyrone walking on the street and demanded the band pull over so he could invite him to the show.

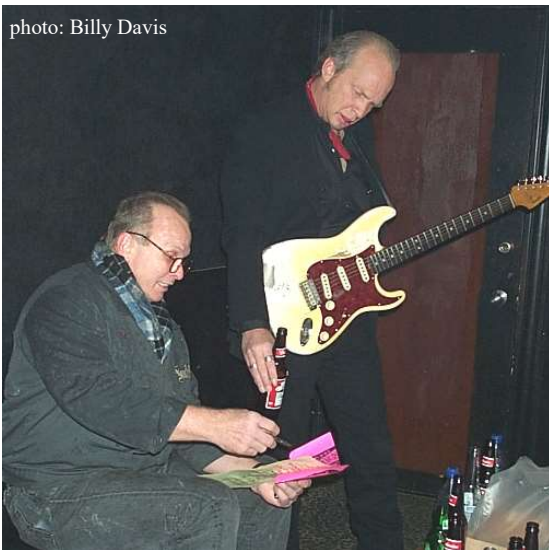
The band came out for their second encore and Dave approached the mic, thanked the audience and said, "See ya in another twenty years." Phil followed up with a comment, "I don't know who is paying his bills, but I better be back sooner than that." The show ended and a lot of fans hung around for autographs. I heard a few people say that this is as good as the band ever was. People were just blown away.

11/16/02 Boston MA, at Paradise

The Blasters were missing Gene Taylor on piano for this gig. He was in Detroit at the Fourth Annual Motor City Boogie-Woogie Festival at the Redford Theatre. The show benefited the non-profit American Music Research Foundation. Gene had a commitment to this benefit long before the Blasters tour was booked.



Set List: red rose / trouble bound / too tired / never no more blues / border radio / I'm shakin' / crazy baby / help you dream / common man / real rock drive / come on in my house / cryin' for my baby / dark night / long white cadillac / so long baby goodbye / american music. Encore: honey don't / one bad stud / marie marie.



Phil and Dave make up the set list.

Without Gene Taylor playing, the Blasters had to shuffle around the set - which made it very interesting for all of us following the tour. They changed arrangements where Gene had a piano solo, added other songs that the Blasters recorded on the piano-less 1980 Rollin rock album, but they dropped other songs that needed Gene's parts to make it work like: 'No Other Girl' and 'Hollywood Bed.' I talked to quite a few people in the audience who asked where Gene was and they were very disappointed he wasn't playing.

Gene is an important part of the band as Dave Alvin said, "I realized at the Downey (10/30/02 Rio Hondo Country Club) show when Gene wasn't there, that he brings a lot to the table in the Blasters." In the first song of the night, Dave had to make up a solo on the spot to re-

place Gene's solo in 'Red Rose.' It worked fine.

Backstage before the show, Phil and Dave sat down and made up the set list only minutes before hitting the stage. Normally Dave has been writing the set list every night. But tonight the brothers wrote it together to discuss whether they could or couldn't do certain songs without Gene. Phil wrote down 'Help You Dream' and Dave protested because of the slow-down middle part, which always features some of Gene's best playing. Phil said, "All right, then I'll play it," and it remained on the list. When the time came to do the song, Dave came up with a cool part and the song was a success.

They added some other surprises. On the set list, the third spot said simply 'yodel.' They did the Jimmie Rogers tune "Never No More Blues" which features some challenging yodeling for

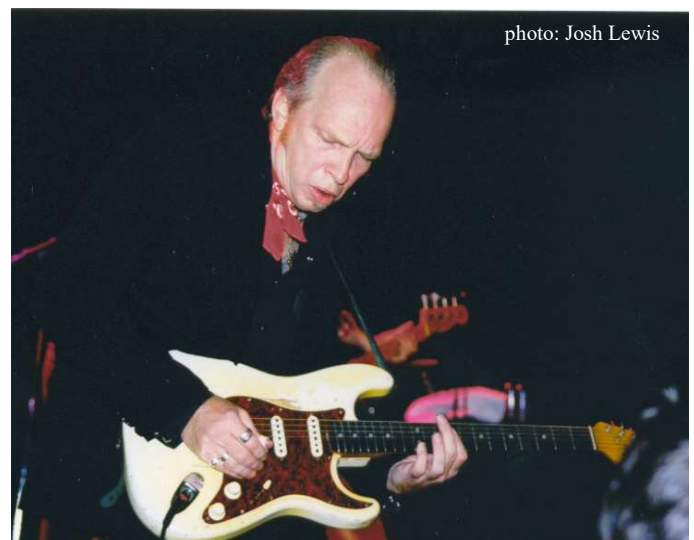




photo: Josh Lewis

Phil. Before the song, Phil stated: "Working with my brother again, I have toned down my vernacular. There were few cowboys." Then they started the song. Phil usually goes into a long rant before this song saying that there never really were cowboys like you see in the movies; the cowboys wore sombreros and weren't glamorous. Phil decided to cut short his speech.

Another song that was only heard once on this tour in Chicago was 'Real Rock Drive,' the old Bill Haley song. Also of the original Rollin Rock songs in the band's repertoire, in the sound check they practiced

"I Fell In Love" and "Sadie's back In Town." But those two never made their way into the set. A blues song the band has been playing in sound check a few times was played tonight called "Come On In This House." That's a Phil Alvin harmonica led tune that is a regular in the 'New Blasters' (with Jerry Angel and Keith Wyatt as members) set list. Some other songs made it into the set that can be heard on the 'Trouble Bound' live album but haven't been played on the East coast tour. They were 'Too Tired' and 'Cryin' For My Baby.'

Dave Alvin said he was nervous playing the show. That's usually when Dave gives his most intense performances. He kept pretty serious on stage; maybe he was worried about the arrangement changes or because this famous rock club was packed with a big crowd.

The club had a cool lighting rig with swirling lights and switching multi-colored spotlights. I don't know if Dave liked it because at one point during 'Long White Cadillac,' one of the automated lights turned right at him in yellow and Dave stuck his middle finger up at it.

Dave led the crowd tonight capturing most of the attention with his split leg solos and jumps high in the air. Dave even got to wander the stage. During 'Crazy Baby' and later in 'American Music,' Dave walked behind Phil, just playing his guitar, on into the spot far right that Gene normally occupies. Phil even glanced around to see what was going on.

The only different Phil dedication of a song was for 'American Music,' "This goes out to the Rathskeller, to 'The Del Fuegos and 'Treat Her Right (Boston bands the Blasters shared bills with)." The Rathskeller was one of the first few clubs the Blasters played in Boston. Also Phil must have been caught up in the moment or it was a Spinal Tap scene: he thanked Laura Minor as if she were one of the opening acts. This was one of the few winter shows that she and her band didn't open for the Blasters.

For the encore, the Blasters got courageous and tried the Carl Perkins song 'Honey Don't.' At the L.A. House of Blues in June 2002 when they had recorded the 'Trouble Bound' live al-

bum, they tried the tune in the encore, and they messed it up. The piano and guitars weren't playing the same chord changes, so the song couldn't be included on the record. Tonight backstage before they were to come out for their first encore, Dave stressed, 'Stay on the one (chord).' The band played it and except for a moment of confusion about when to end the song, they did it perfectly. That song alone was worth seeing this show.

Actually what made tonight possibly the best show of the tour is that Phil's voice was perfect. He sang everything with total power and had no hoarseness at all. If you were there, you know. 'One Bad Stud' was very interesting in the set. Dave had to play a solo in place of Gene's solo and did some interesting things with it. Near the end of the first solo, Dave turned and waved to Bateman to lower his volume and for Bazz to hold the chord progression on the song. The audience didn't know, but the rhythm section seemed to know what Dave was doing - I guess from years of playing together. Bazz held his groove and in a way sounded like he was taking a bass solo. No one in the audience seemed to know what was going on. Then it made sense, as Dave took off his guitar for a new one - he had broken a string. Cool transition, though.

Dave was having some fun adding stuff on guitar. In 'Long White Cadillac' in a break he started the 'Pipeline' riff. Phil started smiling and motioned to Dave to go further into 'Pipeline', but he shook his head and went back to the regular 'Cadillac' riff. More guitar fun happened in the break before 'Marie Marie.' Phil stood at his mic waiting for Dave to chop the first chord to start the song, but Dave started playing some weird, almost middle eastern sounding, notes. Phil held his breath ready for the first lyric, but then just looked over a little to Dave with a grin wondering, "What is he doing?"

This was a great show, just like the Philadelphia venue, the band felt right at home in the dark, smoky, loud, beer-soaked, rock club. This is where the Blasters shine.

11/18/02 New York City at BB Kings

This club is located in the middle of the Times Square tourist area in Manhattan, it's like a Planet Hollywood or Hard Rock Café - very expensive and aimed at tourists. When the Blasters arrived for sound check, there were tables set up covering the dance floor. The Blasters manager made an extra effort to open up the dance floor by complaining to the club staff (which is what the Blasters were told they would have). The club management wouldn't give in - I guess the club makes all their money on people sitting down and eating expensive dinners.

Being this was the biggest gig of the tour, Phil Alvin attended sound check. When the whole band plays at sound check, they of-

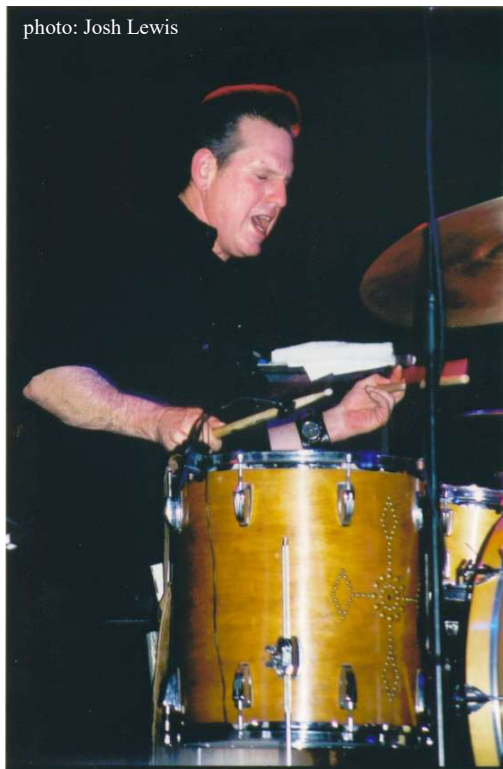


photo: Billy Davis



DRESSING ROOM



THE BLASTERS

The Blasters in New York City

ten put on a mini-concert for the club staff or who ever is hanging around. They played 'Gangster's Blues', 'Truckin' Little Woman' and a Little Walter harmonica instrumental called 'Off the Wall.'

Show Set List: red rose / trouble bound / too tired / long white cadillac / i'm shakin' / crazy baby / help you dream / blue shadows / common man / no other girl / hollywood bed / tag along / cryin' for my baby / dark night / border radio / so long baby goodbye / american music. Encore: santa fe / one bad stud / marie marie.

The Blasters hit the stage to a loud ovation and kicked off into 'Red Rose.' The club has an elaborate lighting system that spins spotlights around and flashes patterns of color all over the band; it was like psychedelic Blasters - kind of cool. On each side of the stage were big screens showing close-up camera angles of the band. Dave Alvin was standing right next to one of the screens and just as he turned and noticed it, a close up of Phil's face came on and Dave quickly turned away grinning. That was probably the biggest Phil face he ever saw. Ha!

Phil dedicated the opening song, "To Ray Avery, who passed away yesterday." He was a famous Jazz photographer.

The set continued and for some reason 'What Will Lucy Do' was skipped. Part of the band thought that they were playing it, while the others started playing 'Long White Cadillac.' After that false start of confusion, they did 'Cadillac.' 'Crazy Baby' revved up the crowd with Batman's drumbeat and Dave's vamping guitar. Gene Taylor had some spilled beer on his piano keys, so he started his entry into the song by wiping all the

photo: Josh Lewis



keys in one swipe with a towel and then quickly jumped into playing the song. Gene really took off in 'Help You Dream' in the slow-down mid section, which has become his spot to stretch out. As Phil got ready to go back to the lyrics, he joked in the mic to Gene: "Let's save some money and get our teeth fixed." The horsing around continued when before Gene's vocal song 'Tag Along,' Phil said about Gene: "I taught him how to play like that." Gene shot back: "Phil Alvin taught me everything I know, but fortunately he didn't teach me everything he knows. For that I am thankful." Gene then sang 'Tag Along' and switched the order of his verses. All the Blasters looked over at him in surprise. The audience didn't notice, but the Blasters are so finely tuned right now that they picked right up on it.

Phil thought up some different dedications tonight. For 'Too Tired' he said: "Thinking about BB King makes me think about T-Bone Walker, who lived right around the corner from Johnny Guitar Watson. So this goes out to Johnny Guitar Watson, who makes me think of my brother Dave - who lived right around the corner from me (laughing)." Johnny Bazz, as I've said before has to be the hardest-playing bass player I have ever seen. He broke a string in 'Trouble Bound' on his bass; then in 'Dark Night' he did it again on his spare bass. It was fun to watch him in 'Dark Night' try to play his regular pattern without his A string. When the bass is completely strung, you can play a pattern in a compact position, meaning you don't have to move your fretting hand too far. But without that A string, he had to move all over the neck to find replacement notes for that lost string. He was kind of laughing at himself, wondering if he was gonna pull it off - and he did.

In the encore, Phil brought out two members of Sun Ra's Arkestra to play horns. Tyrone Hill who plays trombone was brought out in Philadelphia to play on the same song. Tonight, he re-



Tyrone Hill and Dave Gordon

turned but with Dave Gordon playing trumpet. They played the best and longest version of 'One Bad Stud.' that I have heard. Each member took a solo - horn solos too - with the audience clapping along.

It got even better in the final song of the show - 'Marie Marie.' After hearing cries from the audience of "Get rid of those seats in the front!" and "Rush the stage!!" Dave apologized to the audience: "Thanks for coming. Too bad you had to sit down." When they started 'Marie Marie'



The Blasters come off stage after American Music

Dave started motioning to the audience with his hands to get up. Everybody started standing and the house lights turned on. It was a great idea because everybody could see the whole crowd, so it just made the audience cheer louder. The whole place stood, danced, jumped and clapped as the Blasters played their big finishing song. What an ending!

I thought it was the best show of the tour in terms of performance. The band was super tight. The only thing that could have detracted from the show was the table seating. Phil's voice was great tonight and he was exceptional on the blues songs like 'Cryin' For My Baby' and 'Too Tired.' Dave looked like he was thoroughly enjoying the show, dancing and twisting his feet as he played and turning to face his band mates as he played his guitar riffs. Bateman bashed the drums, Bazz broke bass strings, and Gene Taylor rocked the house. Wow!

Next issue: We follow the Blasters to the west coast for 10 shows in 15 days. Can they top this?

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