

2025 re-print and expanded edition

AMERICAN MUSIC

The Blasters Newsletter

Issue #14 Feb. '97

DAVE ALVIN HITS THE ROAD FOR EAST COAST ACOUSTIC TOUR

DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES

ACOUSTIC w/Kelly Joe Phelps

2/8 Philadelphia PA at Tin Angel
3/1 Bethlehem PA at Godfrey Daniels
3/3 Syracuse NY at Happy Endings
3/5 Somerville MA at Johnny Dee's
3/6 N. Hampton MA at Iron Horse
3/7 Piermont NY at Turning Point
With Guilty Men

3/8 L.A. at private party
3/13 guest with Skeletons at SXSW
4/10 Long Beach CA at Carpenter Cntr.
of Perf. Arts w/Joe Louis Walker, Billy
Boy Arnold, Gatemouth Brown

4/11 Reno Nv at ?
4/12 San Jose Ca. at United Farm
Workers benefit

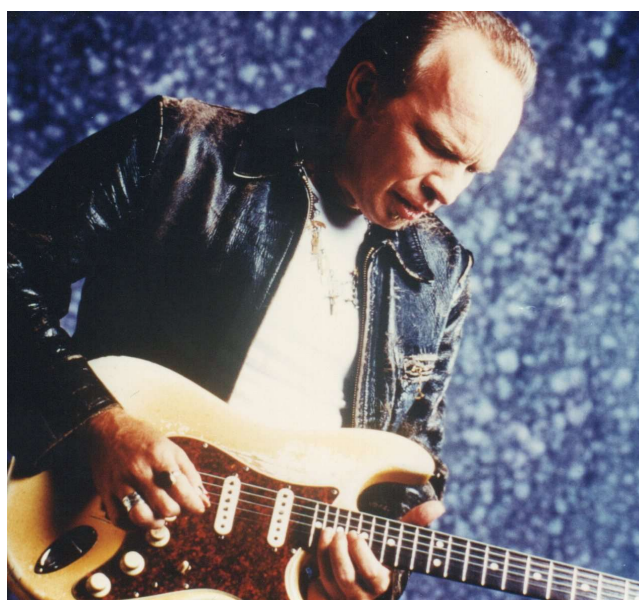
TOUR of ITALY w/Guilty Men

4/17 Chiari (BS) at Cinema Comunale
4/18 Codevilla (PV) at Thunder Road
4/20 Molfetta (BA) at TBA
4/22 Scandiano (RE) at Club Corallo
4/23 Ferrara at Renfe Club
4/24 Ponderano (BL) at Babilonia
4/26 Colere (BG) at Palacolere
4/29 Milano at Blueshouse
4/30 Cortemaggiore(PC) at Filmore
5/2 Sesto Calende (VA) at Sala marna

BLASTERS TOUR DATES

3/28 Chicago Il at House of Blues
3/29 Detroit MI at Magic Stick

LATEST NEWS: : In early March, Dave will do his second acoustic tour with Kelly Joe Phelps on the west coast in June '96. This one hits the east. KJP will do his set and back up Dave in his. Dave predicts playing some rare new songs. Kelly Joe has been getting a lot of attention lately as a blues slide guitar virtuoso. - The Blasters played a private party on January 18 in Utah for the director of the ID4 movie for the Sundance Film Fest - Dave will make an appear-



ance at the SXSW music conference HighTone showcase show with the Skeletons on March 13. - Dave has been asked to record a song for a Bruce Springsteen tribute album for Capitol records. - Dave Alvin played a couple of local gigs with singer Brenda Burns Boaz in early January in L.A. Brenda is the wife of Dave's bass player Gregory Boaz. Her CD called 'A Song Away From You'

has guests Jerry Angel of the Blasters and Juke Logan - Dave Alvin is writing songs for his next studio album for a January '98 release. - The recording of the Derailers' album, which Dave will produce, has been put off until March. - Dave produced Candye Kane's new album called 'Diva La Grande' for Antone's/Discovery Records in December in Austin at Willie Nelson's studio. Dave plays on 2 tracks and Big Sandy and the Flyrite Boys on one. It's due out in May. - Dave just wrote an article for the March issue of 'LIVE' magazine where he recalls the greatest performance he has ever seen. - The Jan./Feb. issue of 'Country Music Magazine' features a great article about the history of HighTone Records. - James Intveld makes an appearance in the movie 'The Bet' with his band The Gigolos playing at The Derby club in L.A. - Phil Alvin independently recorded the January House of Blues L.A. show, but it is not known whether it is meant for release or is a test for the soon to be recorded live album. - Rumors have been circulating that Private Music, which was to put out the Blasters live album, has gone out of business; this hasn't yet been confirmed. Am

INSIDE: Blaster guitarist Keith Wyatt interviewed, The Legend of the Pleasure Barons, and more Q&A's.

THE BLASTERS NOT LIVE AT THE CHICAGO HOUSE OF BLUES

The Blasters had a one night stand planned for the House of Blues in Chicago on Feb. 1, but only three quarters of the Blasters made it to Chicago that night causing the show to be canceled. Doors had opened at 8PM and at 9 PM the announcement was made to the House of Blues crowd that the show was cancelled. Soon the lines were out the door to get ticket refunds. What a big crowd the Blasters brought in.

Phil Alvin had a problem picking up his plane ticket which was being held at the departure gate in L.A. He had no identification and he couldn't prove to the gate agents he was the name on the ticket. Phil had called the airport the day before and told them he would bring a couple of Blaster albums to prove who he was and they said, "Okay no problem." When he got to the airport, just before the flight left, they wouldn't honor the original deal. Phil was fuming mad and says he wants to sue American Airlines.

This wasn't the first time Phil tried to gain access somewhere without ID. Years ago Phil was meeting the Blasters in Vancouver for a gig and upon trying to cross the Canadian Border the officials stopped him demanding ID. Phil turned around and drove to the nearest record store and bought "The Face" album and showed that as ID and they let him on through. Not this time. The House of Blues people realized how profitable a Blasters show could have been and re-booked them for March. Hopefully Phil will have some form of ID by then. —*AM*

Blaster Guitarist KEITH WYATT

Keith Wyatt joined the Blasters as their lead guitarist in May of '96. The band spent four months trying out guitar players, looking for the guitarist that would take over after the departure of James Intveld. Keith is it. He is a teacher at the Musicians Institute in Los Angeles, writes magazine articles and performs on instructional videos for playing blues guitar. His blues guitar technique has gained a large following in Japan and Keith often travels there to give seminars and promote his instructional videos. This interview took place on February 1, 1997 at Chicago's 'House of Blues'

— by Billy Davis

KEITH WYATT: I grew up in Washington D.C. and at that time you were into psychedelic or Soul. I was into Rock 'n Roll - blues influence. I started playing guitar when I was 15 and was playing whatever was popular at the time. As I got more into it and started to read about the English rockers that I admired, I found myself looking for their influences. So that's how I got back into blues like Albert King and Muddy Waters and all the guys. I started out like everybody, taking lessons playing guitar, playing in bands, doing cover songs, and trying to do originals. I went away to college in '69 and '70 to Allegheny college in Pa. and the University of Maryland and then came back. Then in '73 I went to San Francisco to see what was happening. Then I started getting seriously into blues, all the Chess stuff,



Photo: Billy Davis

Albert King, and Stax stuff.

I was playing in bands, playing a lot of different styles. To this day, I listen to a lot of different music, anything as long as there's some soulful aspect to it. I don't mean just soul in the Motown sense, but just anybody who seems to be playing from the heart. My personal interest has always been playing and studying blues as an art form.

AM: So you weren't just playing in blues bands in the '70's?

KW: It ran the gamut from straight ahead rock to new wave and progressive rock. Sometime later, I can't remember when, I was playing that stuff and my personal interest was particularly roots music, I met James Intveld through his bass player at that time named Patrick Woodward. Pat had gone to the Musicians Institute in Hollywood and we had played to-

gether a little bit and realized we had the same musical interests and sort of an affinity. This was in the early '80's when the rockabilly revival was kind of happening. I remember Pat saying, "You won't believe this. I'm playing with these twins, James and Ricky Intveld. We play these gigs and make a ton of money and it's just the simplest stuff in the world but everybody's going nuts for it!" He appreciated and loved the music, but they were playing music that was at that time already 30 years old and there is a big audience for it. So Patrick introduced me to James and then me and James, Patrick, and Ricky played some gigs together for awhile.

AM: All the L.A. musicians seem to know each other in some way.

KW: Oh Yeah, it's totally incestuous. L.A. as big as it is, everybody knows everybody. So anyway then Ricky and Patrick left to go join Rick Nelson's band and then you know that whole tragedy. Meanwhile, I was playing with James on a string of Monday nights in a club in Pasadena for like three and a half years. We were doing rockabilly and all the fifties stuff then the club changed its policy and it stopped. Then I hooked up with a harp player named Juke Logan and we played a couple of years on Wednesdays in a couple of clubs in L.A. We did a ton of gigs but never got on any labels to record anything whatsoever. So there is a scene in L.A. like there is in any city where there are a bunch of musicians who intersect all the time and play together and eventually you run into all kinds of different people. So it's by word of mouth.

I've played with Jerry (Angel) a hundred times in all different situations. Finally last year Jerry had called up and said the Blasters are looking for a guitar player. Jerry gave me a live tape and said learn these 3 or 4 songs. So I went down and played with Jerry, Johnny, and Phil and it felt pretty comfortable right from the start. We played together one time just to



Photo: Josh Lewis

get to know each other, jamming for a hour or two at the most and then Phil went into a long shpeil about Hawaiian music (laughing).

We scheduled a couple of rehearsals, but for reasons I won't go into, Phil didn't make the rehearsals (laughing), so we had about a 45 minute rehearsal and we went up to play the first full on gig in San Jose (5/16/96). Then we played in San Francisco at Slim's. I had played some of the cover songs with James. I knew the style and knew the band, so it wasn't a big thing to learn the songs. I had played with James for so long and knew his style of playing. I hadn't really even talked to James in maybe 5 years and when I heard the Blasters live tape with James on guitar, I thought he sounded pretty good. He's got the feel and the style down. He knows what to play. It was a pretty good tape that was done at the House of Blues a few years ago. (7/8/95)

AM: How did you approach how you would play the Blasters' songs?

KW: I feel your style is based on the players that you're playing with at the time. I didn't feel I had any responsibility to play like James unless the phrasing or the lick he was playing was integral to the song. That is where the Blasters come from. They are hard edged and you need the power. You have to play double stops and fill up that sound. Even though Phil is playing guitar, it is essentially a 3-piece with vocals and my guitar has to fill up all that room.

AM: I heard your playing on the Santa Monica Pier radio broadcast and your style sounded pretty unique.

KW: I appreciate that. At that time I was still getting my feet on the ground with the band, and really learning the songs, and trying to find my place and find how to approach the songs. Although we don't play that often, we have done enough gigs playing the way I play that I'm comfortable. I told Phil if you are



Photo: Billy Davis

hearing me play and it's not going the right way, just let me know. He hasn't said anything so I just go how I want to go. I completely respect the tradition of the band and even beyond the band where it comes from. So I don't feel like I'm going to turn it into some kind of personal statement beyond interpreting the music with my own influence. After hearing the live tape, I studied all the records; I heard how Dave did it. Dave is a derivative player and in listening to him and James, I knew where they were coming from. Then you go back to Hollywood Fats; I knew Fats through a friend, Jimmy Wood. I met Fats in '74 or '75 and he was an amazing player. So knowing Fats was in the band after Dave and then Smokey and James - there is a major guitar tradition and it's really an honor to be involved in that. But part of that whole thing is you've got to do it with your own style. The Blasters always sounded like a band that was true to a tradition that goes back forever. Phil Alvin is a unique singer and he has a personality and style that is different and in blues the hardest thing is to have a unique style because it is so simple and there have been so many people that have been so powerful. To say that anybody has set themselves apart as a unique individual is amazing enough.

AM: The Blasters recently added *Dark Night* to the set after years of not playing it. How did you learn that one?

KW: I learned that off the ‘Blasters Collection.’ The basic feel of the song is something I have been playing for years as my derivation of Robert Johnson and that whole era. It’s sugar pick blues and it’s got that rock quality too. When I heard that song, it captured my attention more than many of the songs in the Blasters set because I felt it really had a great combination of old and new styles. I was surprised they hadn’t been doing that with James. It’s a great song, it kicks! It’s a great platform to build a mood.

JOHN BAZZ: Has Keith talked about the Dime Bags yet?

KW: I forgot about the Dime Bags. (laughing)

JOHN BAZZ: The whole reason you’re in the band, is because of the Dime Bags.

KW: (Laughing) You never heard of the Dime Bags? The bass player was Gil T. The drummer named Jerry Angel (laughing) and....Hey Jerry, you were playing with Gil T. and who was playing guitar?

JERRY ANGEL: Tony Gilkyson

JOHN BAZZ: That was the Dime Bags. Gilkyson split and you filled in. I never saw you play with the Dime Bags, but I heard about you. The Dime Bags were THE band!

KW: (laughing)

JOHN BAZZ: The Dime Bags had this stellar reputation. The Blasters were looking for a guitar player and I remember hearing stories about you. I didn’t know who you were, but I mentioned to Jerry, “What about that guy you played with in the Dime Bags? and Jerry goes “Keith!!” (laughing)

JERRY ANGEL: It was one of those things like who’s buried in Grants tomb?...Keith!! (laughing)

KW: That’s hilarious. When I was just going through the chronology, I totally forgot about the Dime Bags. It’s hard to miss Gil T. We used to play a place in the bottom of a hotel that was torn down to make the subway in L. A. We would play there every week for quite

awhile, it became kind of a scene literally underground. We were doing loud blues. I think it stopped because Gil moved to Austin.

AM: How did you get into the guitar teaching stuff?

KW: Back in the ‘70s playing in bands, I was struggling. I thought I’m having a good time playing, but I don’t know what to do with it. How can I turn this into a career? I heard about a school in L.A., The Musician’s Institute, it was called G.I.T. at that time. I knew of the guy that started it called Howard Roberts. Funny enough, the first guy I took lessons from: when I stopped, he said ‘let me give you one last piece of advice.’ He said, ‘If you want to get better, you should listen to this guy Howard Roberts.’ I never did; then I read about him starting a school to teach guitar players to earn a living. I said, ‘That’s what I need,’ (laughing) because I don’t have a clue! So this was a good excuse to move to L.A. from San Francisco. I went to the school and at the time it was pretty jazz oriented. I got to know Howard and we wound up writing curriculums together. In college I was studying English, so he knew I was kind of verbal and could explain things in a relatively consistent way, which is one of the elements of teaching. We wrote a ton of shit and after I graduated from the school, I started teaching. That essentially led to the Guitar School Magazine column.

I did an instructional video for this guy from Seattle in 1989 and coincidentally I was going to Japan. So it became popular over there. It’s called “Rocking the Blues” released through Warner Bros. (REH Warner) Then I did some beginner videos. I just did 2 slide guitar videos and 2 acoustic blues videos for Warners. I also did some CD ROM things for Hal Leonard called “Play Blues Guitar,” “Play Rock Guitar,” and “Play Guitar.” I have 10 instructional videos distributed by Warner Bros. and 3 CD ROM things for Hal Leonard. I have

the Guitar School Magazine column and I've written several articles for Guitar World magazine called Blues Primer, and Slide Primer and things like that. I did a video with Albert Collins where I played with Albert, interviewed him, and so on. I also directed a ton of videos by other players. So there are a bunch of interrelated areas that all kind of come back to playing guitar. And then there are the Blasters.

AM: Any other bands your playing in?

KW: Yeah I'm playing with band called The Crying Knobs. We did some recordings for a TV show called 'The Big Easy,' a detective show on the USA network. We have 3 or 4 of the songs on the soundtrack CD. Also we did a recording for a movie called "Two Days in the Valley" and that is on the soundtrack. Now we are doing some original tunes that I have written. We recorded 5 tunes a couple of weeks ago. That's sort of a side thing. I'm hoping that we can kind of get the Blasters taking off again. Shows like this are great, if they happen because there are a core of Blasters fans everywhere. So we come to Chicago

and there are all these people that will pay money to come and see the Blasters. I mean that's fantastic and to have this happen (the show cancellation), it's unbelievably frustrating. I can see that when we are on stage the potential is fabulous. The songs are great, Phil sings great, and it feels good.

AM: Any other recordings you have done in the past?

KW: I also played on TV series called 'Private Eye.' James (Intveld) and I played with Lee Rocker and Slim Jim and we played a couple of gigs and Lee Rocker became a side man in Private Eye so that's how we ran into each other that way. I played on a TV show called 'Angel Street.' Another called 'Sliders' and there's another that I can't recall. When you live in L.A. you meet all these people and you do these little things that are only a few hours at time.

AM: Any plans on including riffs or techniques on the Blasters in one of the Guitar School columns?

KW: Actually that is a good idea. I think I will do something with that. —Am

The legend of the Pleasure Barons

By Billy Davis

In 1989, Country Dick Montana, drummer and singer of the Beat Farmers had an idea. He wanted "To go Vegas" with a big band. The Vegas lounge act persona had become chic and the time was right to get some of his friends to put together an all-star tour paying a humorous tribute to Vegas crooners. Dick wanted to have a wild time and who better to add to the tour than one of his best friends, Mojo Nixon. The trio that would front the band was complete when long time friend Dave Alvin came in and clarified Dick's idea, "At some point almost everybody who has ever had a hit record is going to wind up playing Vegas at the end of their career. What would happen in the worst case scenario to guys like me, Dick, and Mojo





would probably be playing a lounge doing not only our famous songs but other people's songs." So the band adopted that persona and selected their

songs to meet what would be expected from a Vegas lounge act. Next a backing band had to be put together. They brought in a combination of musicians from L.A. and San Diego. Jerry Angel, Gil. T. and Juke Logan made up the core of the instrumental backers with Joey Harris from the Beat Farmers. A section of horns, chorus singers, and peddle steel player were added.

Baron drummer Jerry Angel remembers being asked, "This is how it was described to me over the phone. 'We're doing a run from border to border, San Diego to Vancouver. Probably, no nights off. We're going to run our asses into the ground doing one-nighters. Then record the thing when we end up in Vegas. . .if we make it.'" Already all involved knew it was going to be a party. Everyone expected

some wild antics from Country Dick and Mojo Nixon on the same stage.

Dave Alvin took a different approach, "My role or character I played in the Barons was this Humphrey Bogart cynical guy. I would sit on the bar stool all night long, unless it was my song, and look bored. It was the only thing you could do when you had two maniacs flying across the stage running into each other. So how could you compete."

The assemblage of the band displayed a certain musical hierarchy in the Southern California music scenes. Jerry Angel: "The Pleasure Barons were a hybrid of the L.A. and San Diego heads of state. Anything below the Orange County line is Country Dick Montana land. He led the way. Over the years, bands would play here and there. I don't remember a time of not knowing who Country Dick was or the Beat Farmers."

The Pleasure Barons show was broken into 2 programs. Drummer Jerry Angel played in both: "The first half was us, the backing band called 'The Shovel Heads.' Everyone in the band did a few songs then there would be a short intermission and the real show would kick in. We would transform ourselves into this Vegas

Dave Alvin on the Tour.
"We never crossed the Mississippi because it was too far from Vegas. Ha Ha!"





show review with all of us in tuxedos. That was 'The Pleasure Barons' and leading the way was Country Dick!"

The band picked very 'Vegasy' songs and standard hits like *Closing Time*, *Take a Letter Maria*, *Games People Play* and a few Tom Jones songs. Everyone had a unique take on their songs. Dave did a Jerry Lee Lewis version of *Que Ser'a Ser'a*, Country Dick dueted with chorus singer Caren Abrams on 'Jackson' and Mojo did his crazy original songs. The tour went smoothly except for Dave who had to be hospitalized for 12 days after contracting meningitis.

The band did make it to Vegas and recorded the live album at Calamity Jane's. They also recorded a show at the Coach House in San Juan Capistrano and another gig in San Diego. The combination of these shows became the live album. Triple X records handled the production but eventually pulled out of releasing the album. Larry



Pleasure Baron Weird Tales #1

Dave Alvin: "The whole tour was based on this Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Liza Minnelli show. There was a part in the show where they sat on stools and did their ballads. So Dick wanted me and Mojo to do our quiet songs. Dick was adamant that I do *Every Nite About this Time*. It was his favorite song but it didn't quite fit in. We were playing Santa Barbara; I'm doing the song and everything is quiet but there is one guy who is just heckling, going berserk, and screaming that I suck. For the last straw he screams, 'Dave! You look like Gerald Ford!' So I stop the song and said, 'Huh??' Mojo says in the Mic, 'Dave, do you want me to f**k that guy in the ass?' I said, 'Yeah!!' and Dick says, 'Go get him Mojo!' So Mojo jumps off the stage, the spot light follows him and he grabs the guy throws him face down on the ground and jumps on him. The guy got up and ran out of the building. No more heckling (laughing). That was my favorite memory of the tour.

Sloven of HighTone records enjoyed the humor in the Pleasure Barons and released the album in 1993. In selecting songs for the album Dave Alvin wanted *Gangster Of Love* which he felt never really fit in on his solo albums. "That was one of my favorite things I ever did because it was really my first live recording. I'm really proud of the arrangement and the playing on *Gangster of Love*."

With the release of the album by HighTone, the Pleasure Barons went out on a second tour. The lineup of the backing band changed. Jerry Angel was committed to the Divinyls at the time and was replaced by Mike Middleton. John Doe became the new Shovel Heads bassist and Rick Solem replaced Juke Logan on keys. The new chorus singers were Katy Moffatt and Rosie Flores. The set list was similar to the first tour, but

Baron Drummer Jerry Angel; “It was insane. We played the Commodore ball room up in Vancouver and they were taping down the monitors with garbage bags because they knew the beer would be flowing. When Dick stepped out on stage, sure enough it was a fountain of beer! And there was Dick standing in his glory.”



this time there were more stage props. Dick had a bar on-stage and when he wasn't singing he would be behind the bar making martinis like your jovial host. If Katy or Rosie weren't singing, they would be sitting at the bar being served by Country Dick.

Dave Alvin, “Soon after the tour Country Dick found out that he had cancer. He had to go in for an throat



operation and wanted to record once more with his voice still at 100%. Dick went into the studio bringing friends and songs from the '93 Pleasure Barons tour to record tracks that would become his solo album. They recorded a bulk of songs from the tour in one day.” Later Dick continued work on the album adding tracks and overdubbing. Essentially Country Dick's solo album was like a second Pleasure Barons' album. But Dave Alvin remembers that the Pleasure Barons were the Country Dick Montana Band: “The Barons were his baby, his dream.”

Country Dick Montana, AKA Dan McLain, of the Beat Farmers died of an aneurysm during a Beat Farmers concert in Whistler British Columbia Canada on November 8, 1995. He was 40 years old when he collapsed at his drum kit during the performance by the Beat Farmers. He didn't live to see the solo album released, but some say that Dick's crazy sense of humor would have said that he died just to get his solo album out. Bar-None records released the album in 1996 titled 'The Devil Lied To Me.' In 1995, Country Dick was circulating a tape of the album trying to land a deal and Phil Alvin recalls hearing it while on Blasters/Beat Farmers tour: “I



Pleasure Baron Weird Tales #2

Jerry Angel: "Every night something would happen. I remember Country Dick had this coat with fake fur on the lining and it was always drenched in beer. It would never dry out because we would play every night. Then you have Mojo on his shoulders holding onto Dick's head while his hat which has been saturated by beer is being pulled over Dick's eyes. There's Country Dick trying to keep his balance with a beer in his hand and Mojo on his shoulders squirting beer all over everybody. I remember Mojo always used to look for places to hide. If the club had rafters, he would be up there. One time he couldn't get down. He would do everything for a laugh."

knew Dick was a good drummer. He always did so many joke songs, but he made this great record! It was a minstrel record!" The album is truly an underrated gem.

Shortly before Dick died, there was talk of doing the Pleasure Barons again. But all that is left now is the memories. Everybody remembers Dick with fond tales of the Pleasure Barons. Dave Alvin remembers the crazy influence that Dick and Mojo had that made them a very different band. "Usually people who have theatrical and show business bents and sensibilities don't get into this kind of music. Roots rock is not the musical area that guys like that go into. So it was really refreshing. In the Pleasure Barons everything lives for the show."

Dave on Meeting Country Dick

In 1982, somebody told me there was this new band The Beat Farmers. So I went to the Palomino club with some friends and I saw something I'd never seen at the Palomino. In those days it was a pretty straight laced country bar. There were tables right up to the stage and no dancing. The Beat Farmers played, and when Dick did his songs he was walking on the tables kicking beers over and breaking tables, unintentionally. He was spilling beer on straight laced country music customers. The Palomino ate it up. Nobody else could have gotten away with that. After that, we did a lot of gigs together. In '85 for about two and a half months The Blasters were based in London and we toured the continent from there. The Beat





Pleasure Baron Weird Tales #3

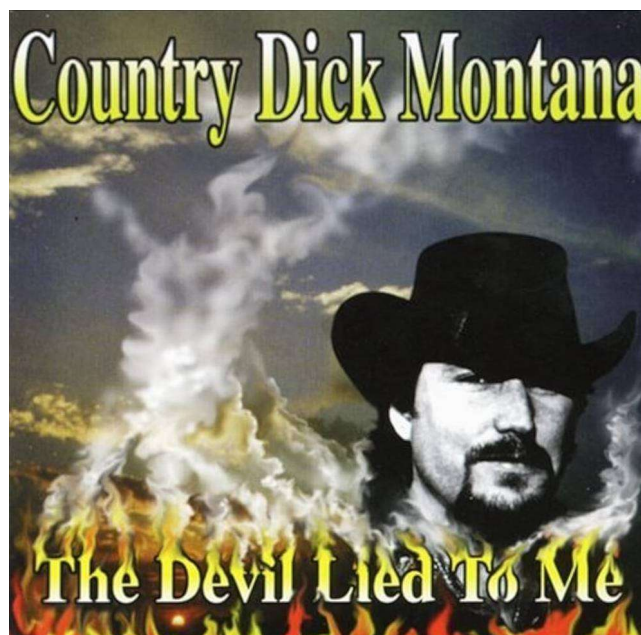
Dave Alvin: After we played Seattle on the second tour, Dick, Mojo, and I were fairly drunk. We went back to the hotel and it was three in the morning, We decide to call Larry Sloven who owns HighTone records. I called and said that Mojo had been arrested on stage at the gig in Seattle for exposing himself. So Larry said, "I cant believe this!" So I put Dick on the phone and Dick said, Yeah it's true. The vice squad came down and Mojo just felt like he had to do it. So Larry said, "What do you want me to do," and we said we need you to bail him out. Larry just said, "Aw, he did it, he can just stay in jail! I don't care!" And I just hung up the phone (laughing) It was a lot of fun!

Farmers were based there at the time and they recorded an EP called 'Glad and Greasy' so me and Gene Taylor went over and sang on that record.

Dave on Meeting Mojo Nixon

He had come to a Blasters gig in like '82 and he dropped off a demo tape of him and Skid Roper that was pretty rough, but that's how they did their music. Then when his first record came out, I saw his show in New York and he just floored me. It was funny touring with him because he's a very serious guy. He reminds me of a hillbilly Lord Buckley. Half of the things in a live show he does every night and the other half are things off the top of his head. So that's what I enjoyed the most about him.

The Pleasure Barons CD 'Live in Las Vegas' is still in print on HighTone records and features 3 tracks by Dave Alvin singing lead. Country Dick Montana's solo album, 'The Devil Lied To Me' is available from Bar-None Records. Bar-none can be contacted at their web-site at www.bar-none.com



Liner Notes
by
Country
Dick
Montana
'Live
In
Las Vegas'

HighTone
HCD 8044

TODAY'S MORNING RITUAL WAS EXACTLY THE SAME AS THE PREVIOUS FIVE; SHIT, SHOWER, SEEK-OUT, SCAN, START SWEARIN' AT AND SHRED LAST NIGHT'S LINER NOTE ATTEMPT.

PLEASURE MY ASS! JUST THINKIN' 'BOUT THE BARONS CAN KILL BRAIN CELLS. SAYING THE NAME OUT LOUD CAN LEAD TO NOSEBLEEDS, SPEECH IMPEDIMENTS AND EYE-WATERING FLATULENCE.

THIS BAND WAS A MUSICAL 50 FOOT WOMAN. SIMULTANEOUSLY SENSUOUS AND SMARMY, SHE TEASED AND BRAGGED OF LIMITLESS POSSIBILITY WHILE SHAMELESSLY STRUTTING HER ABILITY TO CREATE INDUSTRY LAUGHINGSTOCKS. WE KNEW GOING IN THAT WE'D COME OUT EITHER AS TICKER-TAPE PARADE RIDERS OF PERSONAL REWARD AND PENIS ENVY, OR AS FOOTNOTES IN A SHORT ROLLING STONE PIECE ON CAREER SUICIDE.

SO WITH HOPE IN HEARTS, STARS IN EYES AND THE AID OF 3 ROADIES, 13 MUSICAL OLYMPIANS FORMED 2 BANDS (THE BARONS PLUS A BUILT-IN OPENING ACT CALLED 'THE SHOVELHEADS') AND WORKED-UP 3½ HOURS OF 1ST RATE ENTERTAINMENT IN 6 TENSION FILLED REHEARSALS HELD IN 2 CITIES FOR A BONZAI 25 DAY-23 TOWN WEST COAST RAMPAGE WITH DEATH SIGHTS SET ON THE 1 BEAST CAPABLE OF DE-PLEASURIZING A BARON WITH ALL THE REMORSE OF A BUG-ZAPPER → LAS VEGAS, NEVADA.

IN THE COURSE OF THIS HEROIC UNDERTAKING, KNOWN AS THE 'FUCK-OFF, I'M WORKING' TOUR;
2 BARONS WERE ARRESTED (FALSELY, I'M TOLD)
3 TRAFFIC TICKETS WERE ISSUED (FOR HARDLY ANYTHING)
1 VEHICLE WAS IMPOUNDED (ACTUALLY, I GUESS IT WAS SEIZED)
2 RENTALS WERE DAMAGED (BY VANDALS, MOST LIKELY)
1 BASS PLAYER WAS HOSPITALIZED FOR KNEE INJURIES
1 OF THE WORLD'S YOUNGEST ELDERSTATSMEN SPENT 12 DAYS IN 2 KAISER HOSPITALS (DAVE SENDS A HEARTFELT "THANKS" TO EMERGENCY PERSONEL IN SACRAMENTO AND OAKLAND)
4 BARON ENCAMPMENTS WERE DISTURBED BY UNINVITED AND

PROBABLY NOT EVEN REAL POLICE OFFICERS
AND ½ OF THE CHOIR FELL IN LOVE WITH EACH OTHER

TOUR TENSIONS WERE HIGH AND EVERYTHING FROM WORDS TO BODIES FLEW IN THE COURSE OF DAILY INTERACTIONS WITH FANS, COPS, CLUBOWNERS AND OURSELVES. WITH THAT MIXTURE OF STRESS, INSANE TOUR LOGISTICS, HARD LIVIN' AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION CAME UNDERSTANDING AND NONCHALANCE TOWARDS BLOODSHED OVER MISSING ONION RINGS. HELL, WE WERE 16 OVERLY-OPINIONATED ADVENTURERS DAILY RAFTING DOWN UNCHARTED WHITEWATERS — ANYONE UNPREPARED FOR A LIVELY CAMPSITE IS WITH THE WRONG GOD DAMN EX-PEDITION!

THE PLEASURE BARONS PREDETERMINED LIFESPAN ALLOWED FOR A MORE FEARLESS COMMITMENT FROM EACH OF US. WE IMMERSSED OURSELVES IN THE RICH, WARM 'BARON-NESS'. WE BELIEVED IN IT'S STRONG SENSE OF FAMILY AND HONOR. WELCOMED IT'S SPIRITED INTENSITY AND CHERISHED IT'S PROTECTIVE SHIELD AGAINST THE COLD WINDS OF REALITY.

SURE, WE MAY HAVE COMPORTED OURSELVES LIKE PROUD PEACOCKS IN A PARK FULL OF PIGEONS, BUT THAT'S UNDERSTANDABLE BEHAVIOR IN A PERSON THAT'S SHIT-HOT AND KNOWS IT. SHIT, AT A MERE GLANCE ANY MORON COULD TELL WE WERE GORGEOUS, BUT ANY BARON WOULD QUICKLY POINT-OUT THAT WE WERE THE MOST VISUALLY STUNNING GROUP TO EVER HIT THE FACE OF THE PLANET!!

WE HAD CLASS, TOO! — YA MANGY LITTLE BUTT-EATIN' TWERP, YA BETTER BE READIN' ALL THIS — WE WORE TUXEDOS EVERY FUCKIN' DAY! (CEPT CAREN, OF COURSE, AND MY KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT SHE WASN'T WEARIN' ELEVATES HER FROM GODDESS TO FULL-ON MODERN-DAY MYTH).

BUT THE REAL ISSUE HERE IS THE MUSIC, RIGHT? SO...
CRANK IT UP, FUCKWAD!! HOW DARE YOU INSULT OUR BRILLIANT RHYTHM SECTION WITH THAT DISRESPECTFUL VOLUME LEVEL!

ORIGINAL RECORDING PRODUCED BY TRIPLE X RECORDS

UP...UP.. HIGHER, MAGGOT HIGHER!!!

NOW FEAST YOUR WAXY, COMMON EARS ON TRUE MUSICAL ROYALTY. I'M LISTENING TO IT WHILE I WRITE THIS, IF YOU'RE WONDERING WHERE MY ATTITUDES COMING FROM. WHICH SURELY YOU CAN UNDERSTAND NOW THAT YOU REALIZE I'M A FUCKIN' GENIUS AND ANY BAND HALF AS GREAT OR AS HALF GRATED AS BARON WHOLES HAD BETTER START LAYIN' THEIR EGGS BEFORE THEY'RE HATCHED!!

WH-H-HY YO-O-OH ILLBRED... BOTTOMDWELLING LITTLE SHITSUCKER
STAND-UP WHEN YOU'RE READING THIS!!

NOW FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON THE WAY THOSE SMOOTH, SULTRY KEYBOARDS AND THAT TEASING STEEL GUITAR PLAYFULLY MASSAGE, LICK AND SWIRL ABOUT THE CONFIDENT, POWERFUL THROB OF OUR VOLUPTUOUS RHYTHM MASTERS.

FEEL THE SENSUOUS TINGLE OF WILD ABANDON AS RAW, NASTY HORNS BLOW THE CLARITY OF PURPOSE INTO YOUR CROTCH AND YOU SURRENDER TO THE WANTON, PRIMAL MATING CALL OF OUR HOT, DRIPPING PLEASURE CHOIR.

THA-A-AT'S IT. YOU'RE DOING FINE. STAY ALERT THOUGH, CAUSE AT THIS VOLUME A SUDDEN DAVE ALVIN LEAD WILL POP ZITS ON YER BUTT YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD.

G-O-O-O-D. G-O-O-O-D. LET YOURSELF GO. FEEL THE PLEASURE. PLAY WITH IT. STROKE IT. KISS IT. STICK YOUR FINGER IN IT. THA-A-AT'S IT. NOW YOUR WHOLE HEAD. BEAU-U-TIFUL.

YEAH, YOU'RE LOOKIN' GOOD NOW. YOU GOT IT, JUST RELAX AND FLOAT DOWNSTREAM. AIN'T NUTHIN' WRONG WITH BEHAVIN'

THIS WAY. HELL, PLEASURE IS WHAT WE'RE ALL HERE FOR, AND BABY, YOU'RE WITH THE BARONS NOW! A LITTLE TRUST IS A- WHOA!!!

INCOMING HARP SOLO!!!

SEEZ, SORRY 'BOUT THAT PUSPANTS. AS GREEZY AS THEY ARE, THEM THINGS'LL HURT WORSE THAN A TROMBON—WHAT? YOU LIKED IT? WEEELL F~~UCKIN'~~ A RIGHT YOU LIKED IT!!

NOW GET ON YER KNEES AND GROVEL LIKE THE TAPEWORM YOU WISH YOU WERE GOOD ENOUGH TO COME BACK AS AND LET THE TRUTH FLY FROM YER WEAK, PITIFUL MOUTH

"THE BARONS ARE THE BEST! THE BARONS ARE THE KINGS!! IN THE NAME OF PLEASURE, I OFFER-UP MY UNDESERVING SELF, ALL MY WORTHLESS POSSESSIONS, AND MY SUPER-SHODDY SERVICES TO THE MIGHTY BARONS IN THE PATHETIC HOPE THAT I MAY BASK IN THEIR RIGHTEOUS GLOW AS I ORALLY REMOVE ANY AND ALL TRACE OF DINGLEBERRY FROM THEIR HOLY HINIES"

"THE BARONS RULE"

"LONG LIVE THE PLEASURE BARONS!"

SAY IT, DOGDICK. OR I'LL MAKE MOJO SING AGAIN.

I - CAN'T - HEAR - YOU!

THAT'S BETTER. YOU'RE VERY SWEET.

- C. DICK

Q. from you & A. from the band

For Dave Alvin: How many live dates do you do a year? How much time do you spend at home? Do you own a Home? - Hal@aol.com

DAVE: Don't own a home, wish I did. I'm home about 3 months of a year and I don't know how many gigs. For the past couple years, I'm either touring or producing somebody's record. It plays havoc with your personal life, but on the other hand it gives you lots of stuff for songs.

For Phil Alvin: What is your favorite Lee Allen recording, there seems to be so many? - Per Ake Persson Lund Sweden

Phil: That's almost impossible to say, but here are a few favorites. One of his very first recordings showed the way he skipped around. It's by Roe Byrd he's Professor Long Hair. It's on Mercury Records called *Hey Now Baby.* from 1949. He is really young and it is real melodic. I'm not going to mention the Little Richard and Fats Domino things that everyone knows. They are masterpieces. A very influential song and one of the greatest party songs ever made was by Amos Milburn called *Chicken Shake*. Lee Allen is just hilarious on that. That is where they got the 'American Bandstand' theme. There are some that are hard to find and not on CD yet. His first instrumental song was on Aladdin Records called *The Shimmy* - A big hit with the Strippers. I got a 78 of it when I was 16 and I took it over to Lee's and he was so surprised to see it, he took it. Later he said someone broke into his house and stole it, but believe me, he gave it to some girl (laughs). The way I caught him is I found this Teen Kings single on Specialty. It sounded just like the Blasters. It's just Lee Allen and Roy Montrell on guitar and man that guitarist is rockin'. So I gave it to Lee, Lee gave it to Lois, and he broke up with her (laughs)! I saw her at the funeral and I even thought about it, but I couldn't ask. Then there is a song I have never heard. The first time I drove down south just before the Rockin' Ronnie record was with Clint Bazz, Johnny's little brother. I had like \$15 and he had his Dad's credit card. In Oklahoma in this thrift store there is a pile of records sitting on a mud floor and on the bottom is a record called *Batman Vs. Mr. Lee* on Mercury by Roe Byrds band (Professor Long Hair). Batman was the baritone player that takes all the solos, killer solos. I had a bunch of country blues records and this one I found in a different pile and I only had \$15 so I wanted to get this guy down. So, I forgot to go back to get it. Lee didn't even remember it. But I never got to hear it.

For Dave Alvin: Tell everyone the history behind that beat up yellow strat on all of the albums. - Lips

Dave: It's a 1964 Strat - all original except for the bridge. I bought it in 1983 right after we recorded 'Non Fiction.' The reason I bought it was because it was the exact same yellow with red pick guard as my Mustang and it has been my main guitar ever since. That's my baby.

For John Bazz: Tell me what it is like playing with Bruce Willis and have you ever recorded with him. Per Ake Persson - Sweden

John: He is a lot of fun. He's always had a burning desire to have a blues band and that's how he started out. He gave up on that, went to acting school and the rest is history. This Planet Hollywood is the perfect opportunity for him and being part owner his band performs at the grand openings. I do a lot of things with him. He has a club where he lives in Idaho and he will have the band come out there to play. He really knows music well and I have a lot of respect for him in that regard. He has a lot of money, a famous wife and Jet airplanes, but last time we flew into Idaho he was there waiting at the airport in his pick up truck. We did record two years ago up in Idaho. We went up for two weeks and recorded about 12 songs that are not quite finished. He has gotten too busy and side tracked to complete the project. It might see the light of day. We do record every Planet Hollywood opening on 8 track digital. We're talking about putting out a collection of the openings. I think it would be really cool. I don't know how it would be marketed, maybe just sold at the gift shops of the Planet Hollywoods, who knows. Bruce originally hired the Red Devils to back him up then the Planet Hollywood thing happened and some of the guys in the Red Devils quit. So Lester and Paul Size got Smokey (Hormel), Steve Hodges, and myself. Eventually Lester and Paul left. But the band keeps getting bigger with back up singers and horn sections.

For Dave Alvin: I have been listening to X's 'See How We Are' album (excellent writing on *4th of July*, by the way) and was wondering whether that was your lead guitar on *Anyone Can Fill Your Shoes*? If it was, what kind of effect did you use? I hear it a few other places in the album too. It sounds menacingly cool! - Randy Jacoby

Dave: Thanks. Yeah, It probably was a chorus box on that. Back in those days I did use effects pedals which I don't use now.

For Phil Alvin: A long time ago you played some solo acoustic shows here in N.Y.C. I'd like to see that again. Any chance of it? - Marc Weiman N.Y.C.

Phil: Sure. It would be probably after releasing this Blaster record. I love to play solo shows. It's a different mode. I usually operate in one or the other. I love to play alone though. There is a possibility that I may make an album where just I play guitar on it.

For Dave Alvin: Tell me what do you think about the Stray Cats and Brian Setzer himself. - Manny the Gnoom

Dave: Brian is really good and Lee Rocker's band is pretty good. The feuding was blown out of proportion. I think it was more real for them because we said some pretty nasty things. But we said them in a Downey kind of way, kidding, but you can't do that with strangers. Even back then I admired the Stray Cats and Dave Edmunds' production.

For Phil Alvin: Have you ever taken singing lessons, how do you take care of your voice? - Per Ake Persson Lund Sweden

Phil: I was trained to sing in the choir by nuns in the second grade. In terms of breathing, I was trained young. They didn't teach me how to sing. I was singing solos immediately. I don't go on stage drunk anymore, not because I can't, but because I don't. The most important thing I do for my voice at a gig is I come 10 minutes before I have to go on stage. If I come any earlier, I'll talk my voice out. Because my voice will get all used up, because I can't shut up. (laughs)

For Dave Alvin: What are your comments on the internet in general and what feelings do you have about your song lyrics being duplicated on the net? - Linda Beerstecher

Dave: I have never been on it. The Skeletons did it while we were over some guys house in St. Louis and they were having a ball. My brother probably knows more about that stuff. I have a computer that my publisher gave me to type up my poems and that's about as computer literate as I get. If I wasn't so busy, I actually would like to get to take a computer class to figure all that stuff out. As far as posting my lyrics, that's great. Stuff like that really touches me. (*ed note. Dave has since checked out the internet in a club in AZ that has internet access and he thought it was cool.*)

For Phil Alvin: What was it like having Hollywood Fats in the band on and off the stage? Per Ake Persson Lund Sweden

Phil: Hollywood Fats was an extremely funny guy and a very competent guy on and off stage. He had a black view of life. You could, and I did discuss his imminent death with him, more than 4 or 5 times. In all depths of seriousness of death, he would have you laughing and he would too. He was a great joy. —Am

Collecting Blasters - A reliable source says that in the 80s they had heard of a Blasters bootleg 45 possibly put out in Germany that had one side as a released song like *So Long Baby Goodbye* and the other side had a segment recorded from a Blasters sound check that the printer called *Memphis Soul Jam*. Has anybody seen this?

-- A James Intveld fan club is being started by Jude Calkins. Details are still being worked out. You can write to: James Intveld Int. Fan club, PO box 291775, Los Angeles, Ca. 90029. Watch American Music for more on this.

FROM THE EDITOR: Everybody is talking about this internet stuff and the attention is well deserved. It's great! The amount of interests and uses are endless, but specifically for The Blasters and Dave Alvin, here is what there is.

-- Scot Kleinman has set up the only Blasters and Dave Alvin Web site where you can find bios, tour dates, reviews, full color live pictures, album covers, and much more. Recently added is a buy/sell/trade marketplace for collectibles. Everything in the Blaster/Dave Alvin world can be found here. Here is the internet address: <http://bullwinkle.as.utexas.edu/scot/blasters.html>

--- Then there is America Online. Now, I know they have been getting a bad rap, but they are just like Budweiser. They are the top dog and have the largest community of people connected to the service. They will eventually iron out their problems, so don't shy away. Anyway, on AOL there are music message boards where you can post questions, comment, or have discussions for everyone to see. Others respond and it quickly develops into a community of people conversing on a specific favorite subject. In AOL's Music Space section there is a folder (Message board category) on Dave Alvin in Country/Folk/Acoustic. The Blasters have a folder in Blues/General.

--- The most direct interaction among fans is on AOL. It's called "Chats," where unlimited amount of people can sign on and type in messages in real time (where everyone sees them as they are typed) and talk in a group conversation. In other words, it is like a conference phone call but everybody uses text to speak in the group and you see it as it really happens.

We have a group of people who meet every Monday night at 11PM E.S.T. and just talk about our favorite bands. Last week, we had a representative from HighTone records speaking and it was great to ask him all those questions we always wanted to know. Anyone who needs directions into these chats can contact me for help.

--A system of sending mail over the internet is called e-mailing and you can use any service (like AOL, Prodigy, Compuserve) to interconnect with any other. Who would believe we would reach a point where you can send mail anywhere in the world for free and it arrives in minutes to its destination? This newsletter has already taken advantage of e-mail by compiling a list of members who now get up to the minute tour dates and breaking news updates as they happen. If you're not into it already get into it and send your e-mail address to me at davistb@aol.com

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BACK ISSUE COPIES: \$1.50 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 Ronnie Weiser interview, Bobby Mizzel & James Intveld Cd review, State of the Blasters today 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 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.

performance past

by Dave Alvin

I judge everything in my life by one standard: Big Joe Turner with the Johnny Otis All Stars at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles in June 1970. Any live shows I see or gigs I play, any records or CDs I hear, any songs, singers, poems, paintings, movies, hikes in the mountains, any breakfast, lunch or dinner—everything, even sex, is stacked up against that show. “Man, that was really great. It was almost Big Joe.”

I was 14 years old and incredibly excited when my big brother, Phil, let me tag along with him and his friends for the 20-mile drive up to the Ash Grove. Young as I was, I had already seen Jimi Hendrix twice, as well as

bartender in the town’s wild, Prohibition-era speakeasies. He recorded groundbreaking boogie-woogie in the late ’30s and early ’40s with his longtime partner, pianist Pete Johnson. He also cut sides with Art Tatum, “Hot Lips” Page and Willie “The Lion” Smith. In the early ’50s, Big Joe was signed by the new Atlantic label, where he made several hit records that defined what would later in the decade be called rock ’n’ roll. Everyone from Elvis and Bill Haley to bad bar bands everywhere did a version of Joe’s “Shake, Rattle and Roll.” The hits stopped, but he kept making records in the ’60s for small labels and kept singing, whether in a half-empty dive in Watts, a European concert hall or a rhythm-and-blues revue at a club like the Ash Grove.

The show that night started with some songs by the Johnny Otis orchestra. Otis, an R&B singer, songwriter, producer and legend himself, played piano and vibes and acted as the master of ceremonies. His prodigy son, Shuggie, was on guitar. Jim “Supe” Bradshaw, a lanky white guy with greased-back hair, was on bass. The horn section was as tight and soulful as the horns on any of my old records, mainly because these guys were the same guys on a lot of those old records: Big Jim Wynn on baritone sax, Gene Connors, “the Mighty Flea,” on trombone and

How Big Joe Turner sang his heart out and changed a kid’s life at the Ash Grove in 1970.

Cream, the Mothers, Mike Bloomfield, Booker T. & the MG’s, Johnny Winter and Creedence, but this was my first real blues show. Phil and I had also amassed a decent collection of old blues and country 78s, 45s and LPs by haunting thrift stores and junkyards, and I thought I was pretty cool for a little white kid from Downey, California. But that night, Big Joe Turner was so far beyond any concept of cool I might have imagined that I’ve spent the rest of my life knowing this sad truth: There’s little I, or most anyone, could possibly do to be cool enough to even walk his dog.

Big Joe Turner was called “the Boss of the Blues,” and of all the performers ever labeled “the whatever of the blues,” he may have deserved it most. He was known as a blues shouter but could also croon sweet ballads with heartbreaking tenderness and could infuse any lyric with his fatalistic, you-only-live-once sense of humor. He started his career as a kid in Kansas City, leading blind street singers around. Later, he became a singing

The Boss of

one of the few true kings of R&B sax, Clifford Scott, on tenor.

After Otis performed his biggest hit, “Willie and the Hand Jive,” he introduced the All Stars. First was Delmar “Mighty Mouth” Evans, a young soul shouter in a gold jumpsuit who did Wilson Pickett covers, followed by Margie Evans, an incredible gospel/blues singer wearing a silver sequined dress so tight that as she belted out Memphis Minnie and Bessie Smith songs, I wished she’d take me home with her for the rest of my life. Then came Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson, a tall, dignified blues-singing alto saxophonist with a shaved head. He’d been a jump-blues star in the ’40s and that night, he was as good as or better than he was on his old records.

The crowd, a mix of middle-aged blacks, longhairs and low riders, was starting to come alive—yelling, pounding on tables and dancing in the aisles. I thought Eddie was the coolest guy I’d ever seen, but then T-Bone Walker hit the stage wearing a green sharkskin suit and playing a fat red Gibson guitar. My jaw dropped. My God, there was T-Bone Walker, the father of electric blues guitar, the man who did everything Hendrix, Buddy Guy and Eric Clapton did, except decades before any of them had even heard a guitar. The place went berserk as he played the Gibson behind his back and firmly riffed his trademark T-Bone Shuffle until, I swear, the roof started raising off the club.

Had the show ended there, it would’ve been on my lifetime top-10 list, but when Big Joe walked on the stage, the roof of the Ash Grove blew straight to Mars. The band pounded a rocking blues as Big Joe took control (continued on page 92)



the Blues

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Performance Past

(continued from page 24) like some folk hero come to life—John Henry in the flesh—dwarfing everyone on the stage and in the club. With his greased-back hair and outdated suit, he carried his nearly 300 pounds with the poise and agility of a young heavyweight. Make no mistake, he wasn't a fat man; he was a big one. He smiled like a living Buddha, like someone who had seen and done and survived everything life could throw at him. The band was sweating as Big Joe, rolling his eyes, swaying back and forth on his heels and waving his arms up and down with the beat, pushed them to rock harder and harder with just the sheer power of his voice. He was singing the same lyrics he'd sung back in his bartender days and with Count Basie and Elmore James and with countless nameless pick-up bands: "You're so beautiful but you're going to die someday/Why don't you give me a little loving before you pass away." But he sang with such intensity and immediacy that he sounded like he was exorcising his blue devils for the very first time.

My heart was pounding, my body felt like it could fly, small tears dripped down my face, and I couldn't stop smiling. I had never heard anyone sing with so much love in his voice—love for singing and the music but also, as corny as this seems, love for life and its joys, sorrows and constant absurdities. This was when I learned the true meaning of the blues. It ain't about being a hotshot guitar player or owning a Cadillac. It's about being able to take all the crap in life as well as the kisses, to see the world as beautiful and ugly as it is and then to overcome it and celebrate it all. Every time Big Joe opened his mouth to sing the blues he loved, he triumphed over the mean old world.

The show ended with all the performers onstage singing along with Big Joe, and everyone in the club standing up, dancing, singing, screaming and crying. I'd give anything to be there now. ■

Singer-songwriter Dave Alvin played his first gig at a high school dance in 1970. He went on to form the Blasters with his brother Phil and later played with the seminal L.A. band X.

Dave Alvin, who toured the world as guitarist-vocalist for the Blasters in the 1980s, is back on the road with a new band, the Guilty Men. On the group's latest album, *Interstate City*, Alvin paints a swath of Americana as seen from the back of a touring van, the inside of countless beer-soaked clubs and an eternal run of mold-riddled motel rooms.

Naturally, night after night of such a routine would turn even the smallest luxury into a hefty commodity. In Alvin's case, the reward comes when he drags himself into his room after several hours of performing and postshow schmoozing and seeks out a precious, still-wrapped bar of soap. It's not for a shower, mind you—he's brought his own bar for that—but to add to his ever-growing stockpile of travel soaps. After nearly a decade of collecting, Alvin has filled an entire bathroom cabinet in his Los Angeles home with little mementos from tour stops gone by.

Alvin's collection divides easily into categories: First, there are the casino soaps, usually very glitzy, like the one with the large black-and-gold Bally's logo Alvin picked up while filming *Honeymoon in Vegas*. (He was hired to put together an Elvis-in-Vegas band.) Then we have the transportation soaps, uniformly tiny and wrapped in no-frills paper, packaged for the likes of Amtrak and American Airlines. "They don't make these anymore," Alvin explains, lamenting, "now they have liquid soap in their lavatories." The ones that might be called American standards—like the bars from the Holiday Inn or the Journey's End motel—are medium-size, with phone numbers printed on the wrapper so you can call ahead for reservations.

Getting more exotic, there are the foreign-hotel soaps—for instance, the fancy one from the plush Hotel Tre Re in Northern Italy. On the other hand, there are the tacky soaps, usually found in two-tone paper, with vapid, generic names like 1st Date, Carol baby or Fun in the Sun, (a palm-tree-emblazoned bar from

the Pittsburgh Motel). Qualifying in the great-packaging category are soaps with imaginative designs, like the one in the large, reusable, tan-and-red plastic container from the Worthington Hotel, or the cleverly recycled cardboard Scandinavian Airlines box.

Alvin's passion for travel soaps began in 1988. At that point, he'd been playing music professionally for about eight years and was on a solo tour somewhere on the East Coast, kicking back in his hotel. "I was broke and in debt and had to sell a bunch of rare guitars," Alvin says. "I thought, 'Well, I want to get *something* out of this!'" Looking around his room, he toyed with the idea of collecting such commonly swiped items as hotel keys, ashtrays or towels before finally opting for soap.

Ironically, Alvin values his soaps more for the memories they evoke than for their esoteric appeal. Pointing to a small white cardboard box with a blue insignia from the Hotel Adler Zurich, he recalls, "I was in Copenhagen and called ahead to Zurich, and it was this big celebration—the founding of the city or whatever—so there were no hotel rooms. These people I know got me a room at the beautiful Hotel Adler—and it was a prostitute hotel! I was so exhausted, I just didn't care. But because it was 'St. Somebody's Day,' there were marching bands all through the night, and I only slept after drinking a quart of NyQuil."


Suds City

The gold-and-blue box from Rome's Hotel Cisterna drums up this memory for Alvin: "The smallest hotel room I've ever been in, about the size of a couch. You go in and there's just a bed and the walls and a little window overlooking a beautiful view, but the whole room was mainly the bed. It was a monk's cell. I got food poisoning the night before, in Brussels. I was looking forward to having a day off in Rome, and I wound up staying all day vomiting in this microscopic hotel room."

His stateside memories are just as colorful. Holding up an Explore Minnesota soap from some dive motel, Alvin recalls, "There were two of these, so I grabbed one, thinking, 'Okay, great. I gotta wash my hands and brush my teeth before the show.' And I turned on the spigot, and the water was going down, and then the water started coming up. But it wasn't just water. It was water and this liquid thing. Kind of gasoline. Someone had poured gasoline down the bathroom sink!

"Those are some of the finer places," Alvin offers sarcastically. "It just reminds me of how low things can get." Then he cradles his soaps and sums it all up. "When it's all over, I can pull out these soaps and say, 'See? It was a life well lived!'" ■





Clean-cut:
Alvin's soap
collection includes
everything from
minuscule airline
soaps in thin
waxed paper to
bars in reusable
plastic from
elegant European
hotels.

***Touring is
anything but
dirty business for
musician Dave Alvin
and his travel soaps.***

photographed by Wayne Stambler