


American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

MAR. 2018

Dave Alvin & Jimmie Dale Gilmore to Release a new Album June 1

Latest News: The Flesh Eaters (Chris D., Dave Alvin, John Doe, Steve Berlin, Bill Bateman, and D.J. Bonebrake) are going into the studio to record an album in April. Half of their songs performed on the recent tour have never been recorded. All the songs are written by singer Chris D., except one by Peter Green called THE GREEN MANALISHI. -- Dave Alvin's next 'West of the West' train trip will be held Oct. 7-18. Organized by Roots on the Rails, the journey begins in Los Angeles and includes stops in Oakland, Denver, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul and Portland. Other musical guests on the trip are Rick Shea and Christy McWilson with additional artists to be announced. For more details visit, www.rootsontherails.com. -- Dave Alvin contributed an essay for The Roxy Performances by Frank Zappa. The 7-CD box set released by Zappa Records/UME collects all four public shows that Zappa and his band gave at the Los Angeles club on Dec. 9-10, 1973, including a film shoot and soundtrack from Dec. 8. In a press release announcing the box set, Dave tells of meeting Zappa on the Isle of Capri in 1982 while on tour with the Blasters and how Zappa's eyes lit up when he told him he saw him at the Roxy. "You were at a Roxy show?" he beamed. In his essay, Dave writes that "The Roxy Mothers were a grand combination of high art, low art, masterful technique and razor sharp humor with a touch of wild abandon." -- Chris Smither, who toured with Dave as part of the Monsters of Folk and was interviewed for the story in this issue, has released his first CD of new original songs in six years. Call Me Lucky (Signature Sounds) mixes eight Smither originals that offer his insights into the human condition with his dry wit - alongside imaginative interpretations of songs by Chuck Berry ("Maybellene") and the Beatles ("She Said She Said"). -- Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore will perform on "Mountain Stage" in West Virginia on June 24. Their performance will later be broadcast on the nationwide radio program. - Dave Alvin cut a song with Carolyn Wonderland for a soon-to-be-released tribute album to Texas legend Powell St John. — 



This Issue: Blasters Holiday Hayride Tour, 20th Anniversary of the Monsters of Folk, and a preview of 'Downey To Lubbock.'

"Downey To Lubbock"

with Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore

- Yep Roc Records - Release date: June 1, 2018

Dave Alvin update: Jimmie Dale and I have been doing some acoustic duo gigs together the past few years. It was early on, that we thought: "This is really good and we should record this." I thought originally an album would be just acoustic recordings, then I decided that it has to have bass and drums. It built up from there and now there's electric guitar on the songs. We did three separate sessions in L.A. Lisa and Brad (from the Guilty Ones) are on four songs. Also, Don Heffington played drums with David Carpenter on bass, who's from Dead Rock West. Van Dyke Parks played accordion on 4 songs and Nick Forster who hosts the eTown radio show in Boulder, CO, played some mandolin. Cindy Wasserman, also from Dead Rock West, sings harmonies on some songs. I called Skip Edwards, who played some blues and gospel piano. All three sessions were so much fun.

I hate to use the word, but the record happened all very 'organically.' It's very much folk / blues - which is the style that Jimmie Dale started with. It's not that different a record to me, but it is to Jimmie. I got him to play harmonica, which he hasn't done in years. There are more Jimmie Dale songs on here than mine - I kind of enjoyed just being the guitar player. If I can pat myself on the back, I think there's some really good guitar playing on there. All the guitars are me, except for some Jimmie Dale acoustic.

It's mainly covers. We co-wrote the title track DOWNEY TO LUBBOCK. I brought in an original song of mine called BILLY THE KID AND GERONIMO, because Jimmie has some Native-American in him. I thought it would be perfect for us. There are blues covers of Lightnin' Hopkins, The Memphis Jug Band, and a Brownie McGhee song that we re-wrote the verses to make them more applicable to us. We did Gaffney's THE GARDENS and then a Steve Young song that Jimmie and I both loved. It's a song that Steve told Jimmie 20 years ago that he should sing. Steve also told me it was a song he wrote for me (laughs). I did a John Stewart song and a cover of the Youngblood's song GET TOGETHER. It'll be out June 1 and we'll be touring all year backed by the Guilty Ones. —~~Jim~~

The Blasters' Holiday Hayride **with** **Rev. Horton Heat,** **Junior Brown,** **and Big Sandy**

By Keith Wyatt

Photos by
John Bazz



In the early fall of 2017, the Blasters received an invitation to join Reverend Horton Heat's December tour of the East coast, dubbed 'The Holiday Hayride.' We had played shows with the Rev (aka Jim Heath) before, most recently at Pershing Square in downtown L.A., and he counted the Blasters among his major early influences, so it was a natural match-up. As an extra draw, the bill was co-headlined by country guitar legend Junior Brown and featured SoCal rockabilly favorite Big Sandy, the latter backed by the Rev himself.

The tour kicked off on December 1 at the Masquerade, a large club in downtown Atlanta, GA. The format set the pattern for the rest of the tour, with the Blasters doing a 45-minute opening set followed by an hour from Junior and the Rev closing, incorporating a 30-minute set by Big Sandy into his two-hour show. At half the usual length, our set felt like a sprint. We all came off stage wet and winded, but it was a refreshing change and an opportunity to play in front of an expanded crowd.

Another plus was the opportunity to watch Junior Brown and the Rev up close. Junior is one of the most accomplished and eclectic musicians in American music; his unique "Guit-Steel" - a double-neck instrument combining a six-string guitar and lap steel - lends a distinctive flavor to everything he plays. After starting his set with his classic country laments *BROKE DOWN SOUTH OF DALLAS* and *MY WIFE THINKS YOU'RE DEAD*, anything could happen: and he would take off in directions ranging from up-tempo country swing to Albert King-inspired



**Big Sandy, Bill Bateman and
Rev. Horton Heat**

Sandy took over the frontman role for a half-dozen numbers that showcased his vocal and entertainer skills, notably the Chuck Berry B-side HAVANA MOON. The Rev closed the set with his take on Motorhead's ACE OF SPADES and en-cored with Big Sandy on ROCK THIS HOUSE and SCHOOL OF ROCK. On some nights the Rev brought up guests for the encore, including Bill Bateman and Junior Brown on drums, and on the final night of the tour, yours truly on guitar.

On a package tour, each band typically takes care of its own logistics. The Rev's band and crew, this time including Big Sandy, basically lived on their big tour bus, loading out after each show and leaving immediately to drive through the night to the next venue, while Junior and the Blasters stayed in hotels and traveled during the day. Our usual routine was to leave the hotel at checkout time, immediately locate coffee (always and only Starbucks), drive to the next town, check in, load into the venue, get something to eat when possible, play, load out, get some sleep, and repeat. On tour, days blur together. You rarely experience the uniqueness of any particular location - it's a series of highways, gas stations, hotels, dressing rooms and stages that has little relationship to geographical surroundings. People often think that touring

slow blues to Hawaiian to Mexican waltz (sung in Spanish) to surf. His band, consisting of upright bass, snare drum, and acoustic rhythm (played by his wife, Tanya Rae), has learned over the years to anticipate his twists and turns, so despite the wide stylistic range, it all flowed very naturally.

The Rev built his set around the Holiday Hayride theme, kicking off with a sophisticated instrumental arrangement of WE THREE KINGS, followed by the holiday staples RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER and RUN RUN RUDOLPH (with the Rev switching to upright and bassist Jimbo showing solid skills on Chuck Berry-style guitar). Interspersed were favorites of his own repertoire, PSYCHOBILLY FREAK-OUT and THE JIMBO SONG, broken up by monologues about his influences (including the Blasters) and various members of the band (including drummer RJ Contreras and piano player Matt Jordan). Midway through the set, Big



**Bill Bateman jamming with Jimbo and
the Rev. Horton Heat band.**

must be a great way to see new places, but most days it actually feels like you drove a couple of hundred miles and wound up right back where you started.

After Atlanta, we traveled steadily northward, first to Charlotte, North Carolina, Washington, D.C., where Dale Watson filled in for Junior, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Buffalo. Between Cleveland and Buffalo we had the pleasure of experiencing the first “lake effect” snow of the year - the wet, heavy snowfall coming off Lake Erie that is notorious for stranding travelers. With visibility near zero, we had to slow to a crawl and follow the tail lights of the truck in front of us, but after passing a dozen spun-out vehicles, we finally made it through unscathed.

Conditions improved as we moved on to Woodstock, NY, Asbury Park, NJ (at the legendary Stone Pony club), Cambridge MA, and Harrisburg, PA. Junior temporarily left the tour again to cover shows in California while we and the Rev pressed on to Philadelphia, Collinsville, CT, and Irving Plaza in NYC.

With winter weather quickly settling in, we were glad to turn south again. Junior rejoined the tour in Richmond and then we all moved on to Carrboro, North Carolina, where the crowd at the Cat’s Cradle lived up to its reputation for enthusiasm. The next day was devoted to a marathon 500-mile drive down to Jacksonville, Florida, but the pleasure of stepping out of the van into the warm, tropical air made it worthwhile. The next show, at the Ponte Vedra Music Hall, was very well received and the following night in St. Petersburg we played on an outdoor stage that belied the onset of winter with more balmy, beautiful weather. After Fort Lauderdale, came the final show of the package at the House of Blues in Orlando. It’s a big, fake simulation of a down-home roadhouse set amid the antiseptic surroundings of Disney World, but the crowd was authentic and gave us all a strong send-off.

The next day the Rev hit the road to New Orleans for one more show while Junior and the Blasters all prepared to head home for the holidays. After nineteen shows in twenty-three days and several thousand more miles on the Blaster van, we were all feeling pretty beat up, but happy with the experience and thankful to the Rev for the opportunity. It was a positive way to wrap up what was a very strange and stressful year in these United States. —~~Jim~~



Keith Wyatt joins Big Sandy and the Rev. Horton Heat band on stage

The Blasters' Holiday Hayride

**with Reverend Horton Heat
and Big Sandy**

Irving Plaza New York City

December 9, 2017

by Billy Davis photos: Lesah Smith



The Blasters came into New York City with the Horton's Holiday Hayride package to play Irving Plaza, a venue with over 1000 capacity, which is larger than the Blasters usually play in NYC. But they really stepped up the level--as if they were playing the Ritz, which was the big venue of their legendary visits to NYC back in the 80s.

As the opening act for Reverend Horton Heat, they hit the audience hard, starting with LONG WHITE CADILLAC and then the rockabilly favorite CRAZY BABY. The audience couldn't help moving and dancing to that one. ROCK N ROLL WILL STAND was next--one of my long time requests for the band to revive; they had not played it regularly since 1989.

Over the last few years, they have inserted it in here or there, but more recently it seems to have stuck as a regular in the set list. I remember lobbying hard for them to bring that song back in the mid-2000s. On a European tour of 2003 with the Original Blasters, I asked Dave Alvin to do it. He said if you can convince Phil, you got it. Phil told me; "I can't re-

member the words because it has 4 verses." I went so far as to write down the lyrics on a piece of paper; then on a flight between Spain and Scotland, I sat next to Phil to try and get him to memorize it. I waited to see if they would surprise me with the song, but it never happened. What a pain in the ass I was, but I love that song.

The Blasters continued a rockin' set at Irving Plaza and brought out another favorite from 1985's Hard Line album, COMMON MAN. That's one that the band has not done with Keith Wyatt in the band. Interesting to see them bring back more songs from the 1985 Blasters album.

After a few songs, the band hit another high point when Phil sang GIVE ME A BIG F-CHORD. Phil always sings the hell out of that song, it has to go down in Blasters history as a Phil Alvin signature.



The Rev. Horton Heat band on stage



Near the end of the show, the Blasters really blew me away with another song I've been waiting a long time for. It was NO OTHER GIRL from the first Blasters album on Slash Records. It's one that only Bill Bateman on drums can make sound like his original recording. Phil sounded amazing. Keith nailed the solo.

They finished the show with AMERICAN MUSIC, MARIE MARIE, and ONE BAD STUD. It was an extremely

Irving Plaza Set List

Long White Cadillac
Crazy Baby
Rock 'n Roll Will Stand
Border Radio
Precious Memories
Dark Night
Trouble Bound
Common Man
Rebound
Big F Chord
So Long Baby Goodbye
No Other Girl
American Music
Marie Marie
One Bad Stud

tight show for the Blasters. No songs felt like filler - just high energy all the way.

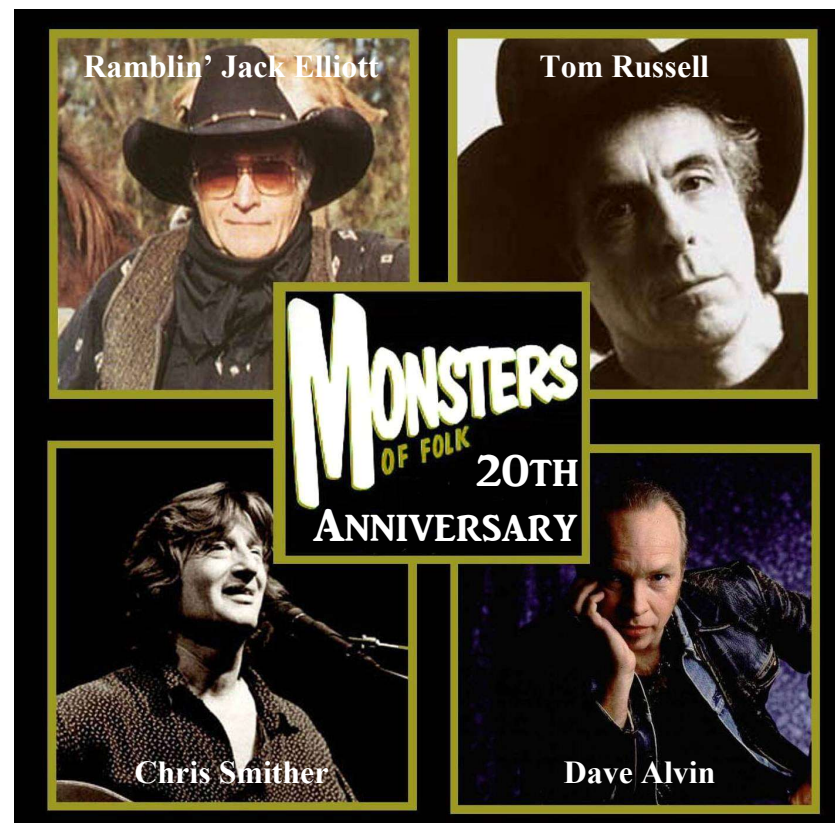
I go to all the New York Blasters shows and often see a lot of the same attendees. This time I saw many different people, some that I recall from the old NYC rockabilly scene. Most were there

for Rev. Horton Heat, but had last seen the Blasters in the 80's and 90s. I talked to some of them and was happy to hear them say they thought the Blasters sounded as good as ever. I totally agree.

The Reverend Horton Heat band finished the night with a few of their known hits but added in a bunch of really fun rockabilly styled Christmas songs. Big Sandy joined the band for about 8 songs and showed why he is one of the best rockabilly singers in music. What a great way to celebrate the holidays. -AM



Big Sandy with the Rev. Horton Heat band on stage



By Tom Wilk

From playing the first Farm Aid with the Blasters in 1985 to serving as Bob Dylan's opening act in 1998, Dave Alvin has run the gamut in nearly 40 years of playing concerts. One of his memorable tours took place two decades ago when he and 'The Monsters of Folk' hit the road for a series of shows across the U.S. from April 7-21, 1998. Dave, Tom Russell, Chris Smither, and Ramblin' Jack Elliott shared songs and swapped stories in an acoustic setting.

All four performers were signed

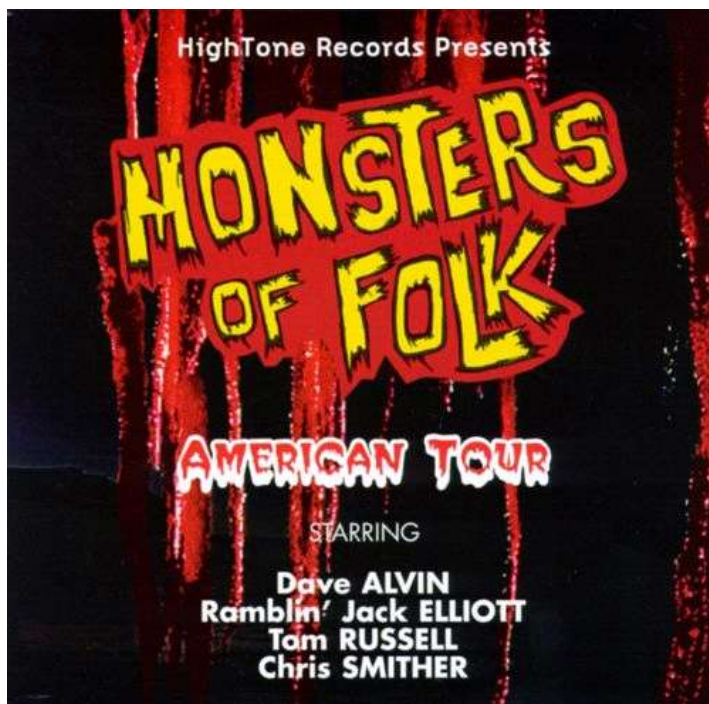
to HighTone Records and that led to the tour, according to label co-owner Larry Sloven. Ramblin' Jack had just released Friends of Mine, his first album for HighTone. "We used the concept of a package tour four different times. Monsters of Folk was the second one," Sloven recalled in an email. The first was the Roadhouse Revival Tour, which also featured Dave Alvin, in 1996.



**The Monsters of Folk with HighTone Records
publicist Mark Pucci**

"The main reasons for doing this kind of tour were: 1) a package tour was something more notable than a single artist doing a gig for publicity purposes, and 2) as a company, we got more bang for our promotional buck if several of our artists got press or attention out of one gig or tour," Sloven added. He is credited with coming up with the name of the tour.

Mark Pucci, who handled tour publicity for the label's artists, said HighTone's strategy paid off: "There was indeed a lot of momentum and interest on this tour, since each of the guys had received excellent reviews and publicity on their previous albums and tours," he related in an email.



To help radio stations publicize the tour, HighTone released an 11-song promotional CD that featured songs by all the artists. Dave recorded three previously unreleased songs solo on acoustic guitar for the album, which made it collectible: NEW HIGHWAY, RAILROAD BILL and HOW YOU WANT IT DONE. He later recorded all three songs with a band for release on other albums.

Dave Alvin: "We did the whole country in 2 weeks - we saw a lot of airports. The gigs were all great and each show was very different. Each guy has a deep pool of songs."

Instead of all four artists performing separately, they took the stage together and took turns performing their songs. Depending on

the song, they would occasionally help each other out with instrumental and vocal support.

Both Chris and Tom indicated it was easy for the quartet to work together. "I knew and had worked with all of them. Jack Elliot and I go back to the Sixties, when I would open for him at several clubs in Philly, New York, and DC," Chris said in an email.

Tom expressed similar feelings in an email interview. "Seems like I've known Jack forever. Later on, he was one of the best men at my wedding in Elko, Nevada. Chris, I didn't know that well before, but we became friends on that tour. I used to ride with him from gig to gig."

In addition, Tom had worked with Dave in the studio on the Tulare Dust tribute album to Merle Haggard in 1994. Dave produced Tom's The Rose of the San Joaquin CD in 1995. The two also had co-written several songs together in the 1990s.

The tour, which began in Seattle, generally opened with a group rendition of Woody Guthrie's HARD TRAVELIN', a nod to Ramblin' Jack's association with the folk legend in the 1950s.



Dave and Chris Smither at the Tin Angel.

Dave Alvin

My favorite story of the tour was when we played two sold out shows in Houston, TX. All of us, except Chris, did a bit of drinking on that tour. By the second show of the evening, Jack and I were feeling pretty good. After the show, I went to my room and started singing this song called WHAT DID THE DEEP SEA SAY that I later recorded on the Public Domain record. The TV is on and I'm folding clothes and singing when there is a knock at the door. It's Jack who says: "Was that you singin' that song?" I said: "Yeah." He said: "You know, years ago when I used to hang out with Woody Guthrie and Cisco Houston, they used to sing that song for hours and hours and hours." I said: "Wow! That's great." Then Jack goes: "I always hated that song. But don't let me stop you." and then he went back to his room (laughs)."

Each singer took a verse and Chris would improvise. At a show in Santa Monica, CA, at McCabe's, he sang about the hard traveling on Southern California's roads. "I've been driving that L.A. Freeway / I thought you knew / I've been driving that L.A. Freeway / I thought you knew / Up on 5, over to 10 / Turn around and do it again." He also localized the verse for the tour's final two shows in Boston.

"I don't even remember having done that," he admitted, "but it's the sort of thing you

do in order to add a local element to the concerts. I remember that we all tried to not be too repetitive."

All four singers sat in a row across the stage with Dave generally serving as master of ceremonies. It made for an intimate setting in such clubs as the Tin Angel in Philadelphia, which had a small stage and a capacity of just over 100 people. (The Tin Angel closed down in December of 2017)

The informal setting allowed for plenty of stories. At McCabe's, Tom sang NAVAJO RUG which begins with a line about "three eggs up on whiskey toast." He paused to ask the audience if everyone knew what whiskey toast was. He then explained that it is waitress jargon for rye bread toasted.

Dave Alvin credited Ramblin' Jack as the quartet's catalyst: "He brought a little bit of anarchy to the proceedings. He was the spark for everything. He's a folk music icon, but a rock n roller. These are all compliments. He inspired me every night."

Both Tom and Dave took the opportunity to preview new songs from their upcoming al-

bums. Dave sang NEW HIGHWAY and CALIFORNIA SNOW, which would be part of his Blackjack David album. Tom did WHEN IRISH GIRLS GROW UP and THROWIN' HORSESHOES AT THE MOON, which would be on The Man From God Knows Where, his album released in 1999.

Cover versions were interspersed throughout the set. Ramblin' Jack dipped into the Hoagy Carmichael songbook for HONG KONG BLUES, while Chris contributed a spirited medley of Tommy Tucker's HI-HEELED SNEAKERS and Jimmy Reed's BIG BOSS MAN.

Dave and Tom teamed up for HALEY'S COMET, the first song they wrote together, while Chris added some bluesy guitar to Dave's NEW HIGHWAY, and Ramblin' Jack contributed backing vocals to Tom's western epic



Photo: Billy Davis

The four Monsters at NYC's The Bottom Line

Tom Russell

Q: I think the last song that you and Dave wrote together was DOWN THE RIO GRANDE in 2003. Have you and Dave considered doing more collaborations on songwriting?

A: Yes, Dave and I keep talking about co-writing "the big one," and I hope we do one of these days. He's a great friend and inspiration. I hope to see him when we play at McCabe's on February 17. I still do CALIFORNIA SNOW and HALEY'S COMET - both of which Dave and I co-wrote. And Dave does the definitive version of my BLUE WING; while he was recording it, we dreamed up the Merle Haggard tribute - Tulare Dust.

THE SKY ABOVE, THE MUD BELOW.

Tom added his perspective on the camaraderie that developed as the tour progressed: "I think, as I recall, that all happened naturally. Back then, unlike now, musicians hung out a lot more and jammed and swapped songs in motel rooms. That world is sort of gone. It seemed to die with people like Guy Clark," Tom said. "We seem to be islands now. We bump into each other from time to time. (We're) troubadours on the road."

Dave Alvin recalls: "Chris Smither is so self-contained. All his guitar parts are so perfectly worked out because he is used to playing unaccompanied. It was very intimidating to follow Chris when we were all playing our own songs - just because he is just so friggin' good."

Chris recalled that the performers adjusted to each other quickly. "As I remember, there was no rehearsal at all, but things came together pretty well right from the get-go, and got better as the tour progressed," he said. "The more familiar we got with the material, the more adventurous we would get."

That adventurous spirit was demonstrated in a train medley that featured all four singers and served as the finale for each show. The medley began with THE WABASH CANNONBALL and, as the tour progressed, grew to include Chuck Berry's THE PROMISED LAND, Lead Belly's ROCK ISLAND LINE, plus WRECK OF THE OLD 97 and Woody Guthrie's GRAND COULEE DAM.

After the tour, the performers continued to collaborate. Both Dave and Tom sang on Ramblin' Jack's 1999 album The Long Ride, and contributed liner notes. Dave and Chris performed together on the Avalon Blues tour in 2003 and have done occasional shows together, as have Dave and Tom.

Aiyana Elliott, daughter of Ramblin' Jack, filmed part of the tour at the Bottom Line in New York City, and included excerpts in The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack, her 2000 documentary that won four awards at film festivals across the United States.

Mark Pucci, who saw the Bottom Line show, recalls it was a special evening. "I remember it was a wonderful night at the Bottom Line, with a packed house loving every minute of it."

Twenty years later, Chris offered a memory of the tour that still sticks in his mind: "One of my most vivid memories is Jack Elliott being surprised that we didn't want to go out partying after every show. As long as he'd been in the business, he'd never done a tour that was night after night like that one. He learned pretty quickly, though."

The Monsters of Folk has proved to be a one-time affair, but the memories remain for the performers and those who were in attendance. Changing times in the music business have prevented a sequel, according to Chris and Tom. Chris: "The subject has come up from time to time, but never progressed past that point. It's the sort of thing that requires someone outside of the group to take charge and organize."

Tom: "It's a lot harder to pull off now without the sponsorship of a record label. HighTone and Larry Sloven were very supportive of that tour, and that makes a difference. There's so many expenses it would be hard to do now. I'm heading more and more towards solo concerts." --~~Am~~

Premiere: Dave Alvin, Jimmie Dale Gilmore team on 'Billy the Kid and Geronimo'

By RANDY LEWIS

reprinted from the L.A. Times

FEB 26, 2018

Texas singer-songwriter Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Downey native Dave Alvin have teamed up for a new album, "Downey to Lubbock," due June 1, 2018.

Two Americana music veterans whose paths have crossed for nearly half a century — even before they knew one another — are teaming up for their first recording as a duo, a project that brings Southern California native Dave Alvin together with esteemed West Texas singer-songwriter Jimmie Dale Gilmore.



The pair recently joined forces to record the forthcoming

album "Downey to Lubbock," the title referring to their hometowns. One of the new collection's original songs, "Billy the Kid and Geronimo," is about an imagined meeting between the two 19th century outlaws whose lives became the stuff of legend in the American West.

"I thought Jimmie and I needed something to sing together," Alvin, 62, said in an interview shortly after getting home from a recent round of tour dates with Gilmore, who is a decade older. "I'd had the song in pieces. Usually when I write the semi-historical mythical songs, there's at least five other verses laying around — like old folks songs themselves."

"I write in a flurry, then go back and say, 'We don't need this, we don't need that, we don't need to know what color his socks were,'" he said with a laugh. "I like it — of course, it's historically inaccurate because it never happened. ... I like dialogues about archetypes and guilt and all that."

Alvin tackles the vocals for the lines expressing the imagined views of Billy the Kid, a.k.a. William Bonney a.k.a. William Henry McCarty Jr., the young gunslinger infamous for killing 21 people and who was famously shot to death at age 21 by Sheriff Pat Garrett.

Gilmore, who is part Native American, voices the thoughts Alvin wrote for Geronimo, the Chiricahua Apache chief who was one of the last Native American leaders to abandon his resistance against white colonization of the American Southwest: Billy The Kid said, "We're just the same. We're cursed and we're damned as they whisper our names..." Geronimo said, "No, We're not the same, for the harm I have done, I feel great shame but we'll pay the same price for the blood on our hands"

Alvin sounded especially thrilled to have Gilmore sing the Geronimo part. "He's got native blood on both sides, and I guess I was a kid at one time, so there you go."

The album is due from Yep Roc Records on June 1, the same day they start a joint tour in Houston. The trek will occupy them for most of June and July — bringing them to Southern

California July, 25 at the Belly Up in Solana Beach and July, 26 at the Troubadour in West Hollywood.

"I first met Jimmie probably 27 years ago — maybe more," Alvin said. "Tom Russell [another former L.A.-based singer-songwriter] had put together a songwriter-traveling-circus kind of show with Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale" — who had played together with Joe Ely in the fabled 1970s West Texas trio the Flatlanders — "and Tom and me and Steve Young and Katy Moffatt. As we rolled along with picked up Lucinda Williams and some other folks."

"I'd heard of him, mentioned in a kind of whispered status, but when we met, I discovered he was a really nice guy and we kind of clicked," Alvin said. "There were certain complexities to him musically that took a while to figure out — like I knew he was influenced in many ways by blues stuff. A couple of years after that, I heard him pull out a Blind Lemon Jefferson number. There are not many people who do Blind Lemon."

Alvin also discovered much later that the two of them had been hanging around the venerable 1960s L.A. folk-blues club the Ash Grove during the same period and likely attended some of the same shows, unbeknownst to each other. "I probably came up to his belt buckle at that point," Alvin said, acknowledging how he and his older brother, Phil, had started seeking out celebrated folk and blues musicians when they were still passionate teenage music fans from Downey.

"There's a Lightnin' Hopkins song on the album because Jimmie had heard Lightnin' do it at the Ash Grove," he said, referencing "Buddy Brown's Blues." "He dropped that one in one night on stage, and when I picked my jaw off the floor, we started talking and figured we might have been there at the same time." That would have occurred well before the Alvins formed their high-octane roots music band, the Blasters.

They also included "Seven Bridges Road" writer Young's song "Silverlake" and found out each felt a sense of proprietary connection to the song, which Young wrote about the neighborhood adjacent to Echo Park, where Young and Alvin once lived. Young, who died in 2016, long ago told Alvin he wrote it for him but also told Gilmore that he yearned to hear him sing it.

"I cut it five years ago," Alvin said, "but I never released it. That's really worked out for the best. Steve may have written it for me, but he wrote it for Jimmie to sing, and he's right. All these old songs, shared experiences, historical and sociological things come out of that space between our two hometowns."

Alvin and Gilmore collaborated on the title track, which highlights those areas of commonality. They've also recorded "The Gardens," a song written by Alvin's best friend and former band mate, Orange County singer-songwriter Chris Gaffney, who died in 2008 of cancer.

"I had to do it," he said. "It's coming up on the 10th anniversary of Chris' death, and as we all are about some passings, I'm still mourning that one. And it's a great song. As the record was shaping up, it kinda captures the idea of 'Downey to Lubbock' and what's in between, which is where most of these songs reside in one way or another."

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