

ISSUE #76

# American Music

## The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

DEC. 2015

# Dave & Phil Alvin Lost Time Interview Issue

**Latest News:** -- Dave Alvin has written a chapter for Under the Big Black Sun: A Personal History of L.A. Punk by 'X' bassist/singer John Doe and Tom DeSavia. The book will be published by Da Capo Press on April 26, 2016. Other musicians contributing to the book are Exene Cervenka, Mike Watt and Henry Rollins. -- The California Feetwarmers have released their self-titled debut album on vinyl. Phil Alvin sings lead vocals on FRANCE BLUES, GOLDEN GATE and MICHIGAN WATER BLUES. For details, visit <http://cdbaby.com/cd/californiafeetwarmers>. - - Dave Alvin's next Roots on the Rails train trip along the West Coast from Aug. 19-28 has sold out. Names are being accepted for the waiting list. Other performers scheduled for the trip are Rick Shea and Christy McWilson, with more to be added. [Rootsontherails.com](http://Rootsontherails.com). -- Dave and Phil have been nominated for "Best Traditional Blues Artist" by the Blues Foundation of Memphis Tennessee. -- Hear My Sad Story (Cornell University Press) by Richard Polenberg looks at the true stories that inspired STAGOLEE, JOHN HENRY and other traditional American folk songs. Polenberg includes a section on RAILROAD BILL, a song that Dave Alvin recorded for his Grammy-winning Public Domain album and the Monsters of Folk promotional CD for HighTone Records in 1998. -- In an interview with the Houston Press in November, Dave Alvin discussed why he isn't producing albums for other artists any more: "Other than maybe the Derailers and Big Sandy, none of the artists I was producing (((continued page 2)))"



Photo by Jeff Fasano

***In This Issue: Dave & Phil on Lost Time, Blasters tour report by Keith Wyatt, Big Joe Turner, and the Blasters 1986 Palace Show.***



seemed to be able to tour, to get a booking agent or a manager and make a tour happen or make a tour viable as far as money went. So we'd make these nice records, but nothing would ever develop. I see so many artists today that deserve to be recorded and deserve a wider audience, but in the roots or roadhouse world, that's just getting tougher and tougher to do," he told writer William Michael Smith. -- Dave and Phil Alvin played an unplugged set for Acoustic Guitar magazine. They performed KEY TO THE HIGHWAY, WORLD'S IN A BAD CONDITION and IF YOU SEE MY

SAVIOR. The performances can be seen at [www.acousticguitar.com](http://www.acousticguitar.com). — In December 2015, Dave Alvin did a poetry reading in Santa Monica, CA at a weekly program called Library Girl. Charles Andres of The Santa Monica Daily Press reported: "Dave's first poem was titled, Chris Gaffney Hates Poetry, about a telling conversation they had during a long car trip. It was funny, and a great character sketch of Alvin and his close friend and musical collaborator, who died too soon, of cancer at 57. Alvin's final poem was about a visit to his father in the hospital, and he choked up right at the end. How often do you get such real emotion from a stage?" It's been about 10 years since Dave has done a poetry reading. Dave said: "The real reason I did that reading was that the girl that does that series of readings had lined up my old professor from college, Gerald Locklin, to do a reading. So I wanted to do it with him and it was a chance to see him again."

"I may put a book out or two soon. It'll be new stuff and I may re-release the old material. I've been threatening it for awhile now." -- Gene Taylor reports that he'll be spending more time in USA gigging. He is working on a CD of 14 original blues & boogie-woogie piano solos. -- **AM**

## Lost Time The Interview

*Dave Alvin and Phil Alvin continue their reunion with a second album called Lost Time. Their first album, Common Ground, was a tribute to bluesman Big Bill Broonzy.*

*The concept of Lost Time is about songs that Dave and Phil always wished they had recorded in the early days. In selecting favorite songs by favorite singers, the overwhelming influence of Big Joe Turner led to the recording of four of his songs. In this American Music interview, Dave and Phil guide us through the making of Lost Time.*



**Dave Alvin:** I had so much fun doing the Common Ground album with Phil, but there were other songs I wanted to record with Phil. Many of the songs on Lost Time, no one else but Phil can sing, so I thought it was important to get them on a record. This album is electric and more rockin' and in your face than Common Ground. It's all about the band and a certain sound we have. I think we really captured what we are. It's kind of a Blaster-ish record.

### **Mister Kicks**

**Dave:** The original was by Oscar Brown Jr. from like 1959. It wasn't a hit. The lyrics are just so good, but so few people have covered the song.

**Phil:** MISTER KICKS always was a favorite of ours and Dave really wanted to do it. We were acquainted with Oscar Brown Jr. when we went down to see him in the early 70s when I worked at the Chinese Theater in Hollywood. We met him again on a plane to Chicago in 1984 when he was going to do the Willie Dixon Blues Heaven festival. Oscar was a jazz poet and singer. We had an album of his with great songs like HAZEL'S HIPS and this one. Our version has a Bobby Blue Bland riff on it.

**Dave:** Yeah the original was very jazzy. I knew Phil could sing the hell out of it, but I thought it would be better being more bluesy--like if Little Willie John, who did I'M SHAKIN' had recorded it.



### **World's In A Bad Condition**

**Phil:** It's an old song that the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet did. But the first time we heard it was by The Golden Gate Quartet on the flip side of a 78 Tampa Red DJ copy on RCA Records. When I heard The Golden Gate Quartet, I started collecting all of their 78s that I could find. Their version is like the Jubilee Quartet: the chords are the same but it's arranged more in a rockin' blues style.

**Dave:** The original was a capella, so we made this pretty rockin'. This was at the first session in May of 2015 with Bob Glaub on bass, Don Heffington on drums and Gene Taylor on piano. Whenever Gene's in town you have to grab him. He wasn't around for the making of the rest of the album with the Guilty Ones.

**Phil:** Dave rewrote some of the song. The only line left existing exactly is the first one "The Preacher comes to your house and asks to rest his hat." The 'politician' line and the 'Banker' line Dave rewrote.

**Dave:** The original lyrics are all about preachers, so I changed the lyrics to make it more relatable.

**Phil:** It's a fun vocal song. In recording the vocals, everyone picked their spot. Brad and Lisa sing harmonies, but me and David sing in unison.

**Dave:** In one way or another the world is always in a bad condition, so it's an appropriate song (laughs).

### **Cherry Red Blues**

**Phil:** A Joe Turner classic! When we were picking Big Joe songs, that was one that was hard to leave out. It's one of his earliest and one he was well known for. It was turned into a lot of songs that became big hits later on for other singers like SK BLUES by Saunders King and Eddie Vinson did it too. In fact, we took out one of the lines from



the Eddie Vinson version.

**Dave:** This is one I remember Phil always sang as a teenager with his band. I always loved the way he played it. In the early days of the Blasters, we couldn't do that. I think Phil is singing better than ever right now.

### **What was Big Joe Turner like as a writer?**

**Phil:** *I don't know what his style of writing would be. He never talked about it to me or David. The only song I ever heard him talk about writing was a song he wrote with Papa John Creach called GIVE ME AN HOUR IN YOUR GARDEN BABY AND I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO PLANT A ROSE. He said he wrote that because he was leaving to go to the studio and his wife Pat Turner was planting a Rose and Joe just sang that line. A lot of his songs were written by others and he would pick up spurious lines from other blues songs and add them in. That was his style.*

**Dave:** David Witham played keyboards on this. It's a old 30s style Kansas City number and David does a Count Basie thing which is perfect because he already has a jazzy feel. The most notable of many things he has done, is that he played with George Benson for a while.

### **Rattlesnakin' Daddy**

**Dave:** I couldn't find any publishing info on this, so it must be in the public domain. Blind Boy Fuller had a hit with this song in the 1930's, but he isn't listed as a writer. That was were I heard it.

**Phil:** That was David's choice. I

knew the song from Blind Boy Fuller, and a lot of people have done it. David's version is quite different. I came into the studio that day, and they were playing the song and I just added a harmonica to it.

**Dave:** I took the original lyrics from Blind Boy Fuller and added some blues lyrics from some other sort of lusty blues songs. But even just adding my lyrics doesn't make it my song. Led Zeppelin took many blues songs, changed the lyrics, then took the writing credit. Their mistake was taking songs like WHOLE LOTTA LOVE and BRING IT ON HOME that were already published. Willie Dixon made a lot of money when he eventually sued Led Zeppelin and won for those two songs. Willie got to move out of Chicago and buy a nice house in California after that.

### **Hide and Seek**

**Phil:** Big Joe used to do that in the Johnny Otis show in the 60s, so I've been singing that one since I was 15 years old in many bands. It was one of the first songs I discovered by Joe Turner - though I knew of SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL from my cousin



**The Blasters with Big Joe**



**Phil:** *The photo is mis-credited to Frank Furillo in the CD. It was actually taken by Dan Riley. I'm not sure what ever happened to Dan, but he took a lot of photos of us at the time. He was a friend, and my father became his photography mentor and teacher. On the right is Hoppy Hopkins, Lighnin' Hopkins brother. We're standing in front of his white cadillac that he used to drive us all over town in. That's was a great night at Rick's Blues Bar. Joe was in all his glory.*

**Dave:** This is fun to sing with Phil. The mutual respect factor is different now than the Blasters days. We respect each other's talents more now.

### **In New Orleans (Rising Sun Blues)**

**Phil:** I don't know who originally did it. I know it's sung in mountain music by Clarence Ashley on a Vocalion Record in the 30s. It's a classic folk song. The Blasters used to do it.

**Dave:** That's based off the original version by Leadbelly. This is pretty much a public domain song, but when the Lomaxes recorded Leadbelly's version, rightly or wrongly,

Donna.

**Dave:** That's another Big Joe song from the 50's. When Phil had a teenaged blues band with John Bazz and Gene Taylor, that was one of his regular songs. I wanted to capture my brother singing that on tape. We changed the song a little bit, but we always wanted the song to be respectful of Joe Turner's original.

**Phil:** I used to back up Joe Turner playing harmonica or guitar. I would sing a few to open the show and orchestrate the band, and sometimes I'd sing with Joe. This was before the Blasters existed. In fact, this is what brought about the Blasters name. I had made the mistake of thinking that Joe Turner's old backup band was called the Blues Blasters so I took the "Blues" off it and just called us the Blasters. Joe finally told me that the Blues Blasters were actually Jimmy McCracklin's backup band. But he said: "Go ahead. I give you permission to steal the name." That's how the Blasters got named (laughs).

### **Papa's On The House Top**

**Phil:** It's such a great song that you can't screw it up (laughs). That's the great Leroy Carr. An unsung hero of the blues that wrote so many great blues songs. He did it as a novelty number. Gene Taylor used to play it, and then I started playing it on guitar. It was in my solo repertoire for a long time.

**Dave:** Phil and Gene always sang that together. Gene wasn't available for this session, so I mimicked the piano on my National Steel guitar. We gave it more of a boogie-woogie feel, and that's because of the way Lisa, Brad and Wyman Reese are playing it.

they grabbed the publishing on it. Lomax helped get Leadbelly out of prison and was responsible for Leadbelly's rediscovery - so Leadbelly probably let him have some publishing.

**Dave:** We cut it with a few 6-string guitars, but when I listened back to it, I said: "It really needs to have a 12-string to get that Leadbelly sound." I added some suspended chord sections to make it sound like a Blackjack David-era Dave Alvin-ish song.

### **Please Please Please**

**Dave:** We lowered the key to make it easier to sing and added background vocals of me, Brad, Lisa, and Phil. The piano is doing the 8th notes and triplets. I know the Blasters cut it on their last album, but it's such a good song, I said: "What the hell, let's do it again."

**Phil:** I thought I sang it better on the Blasters recording. We recorded this one a half step flat because it's tough to sing, but live we still do it in standard tuning.

**Dave:** The reason Phil's vocal has been so good lately is that he doesn't have to carry the whole show like he does in the Blasters. I sing some songs, and that helps save his voice. Also with these last two albums, I got him to lower the keys, so he's not always singing at the upper end of his range—which is strenuous for any singer.

### **Sit Down Baby**

**Phil:** I had it on a 78 by Otis Rush but it was written by Willie Dixon. Years ago, David was told by Willie Dixon that the line in the song about Rosa Parks was left out when they recorded it in 1957 because the guys at Cobra records didn't want a controversial line in the song that Otis might have a hit with.

**Dave:** We originally met Willie Dixon doing the Blasters 1982 Soundstage PBS TV special, and then a few years after that, Phil and I did a benefit show in Chicago for Willie's Blues Heaven Foundation. In fact Oscar Brown Jr was on the bill. It was a great night in 1984, hangin' out with Willie and Oscar. Later, when Willie finally won his Led Zeppelin publishing case and got millions of dollars, he moved from the windy, snowy Chicago out to sunny California, and we hung out. I did a couple of gigs playing guitar for him and we tried to write songs together about 2 or 3 times. I'd go over to his house in Glendale, CA and to be honest, I was more interested in picking his brain than writing songs. He had these family scrap books with photos of all the old blues guys like Elmore James, Muddy, Howlin' Wolf, and Jimmy Reed - stuff back to the 40s: that has never been seen - playing gigs, in the studio, and hangin' out. Just great stuff! One day we were discussing songs, and I brought up that I was listening to a lot



**Dave with Willie Dixon**



of Otis Rush. He did Willie's song SIT DOWN BABY, and I really liked the riff. He told me: "Well, you know there is another verse in that song that I wrote back then, but the record company thought it was too controversial, so I had to take it out." It was: "Rosa Parks told the Montgomery judge, It's time for YOU to sit in the back of the bus." So when I decided to do the song, I thought I would put it in for Willie.

### **Wee Baby Blues**

**Dave:** A Big Joe standard and a Phil standard: his band did it like a slow, slow blues. Big Joe did it many ways. But for this we thought we'd make it a nasty, old funky blues. We cut that with no rehearsal. I just started playing and by take 3 it was done. Take 3 had all the best solos (laughs).

**Phil:** Another classic Joe Turner song and one that I sang in front of Joe Turner on the night that I really met him out at the York club in L.A. when I was 15. A guy that was playing bass in Joe's band named Doug Algood worked

at a music store. One day a young black guy took a guitar off the wall and was playing some blues on it, which was rare in 1967. His name was Ernie Franklin. Doug said to him: "Wow! You don't hear many black guys playing blues anymore." Ernie told him: "My mom is in with all those guys like T-Bone and Big Joe." Doug said he had a blues band. Ernie said that his Mom was looking for a band to manage, so they set up a date for us to come down to the York club. It was Me, Johnny Bazz, Doug Algood and a few other guys. I was too young to drive, but Doug's dad drove us in a '32 Plymouth. I had been down in South Central quite a bit and though we were underage, I knew they'd probably let us in. When I got there, I met Mary Franklin. Later, she was on my County Fair 2000 album on the songs WHAT'S THE REASON and MR. SATEL-LITE MAN. Joe Turner was on stage with a full horn section including Lee Allen. That's the first time we met Lee. Joe sang two songs and came off stage and Mary introduced us. We all sat down and became friendly. Mary asked us to go up and play one, so I sang WEE BABY BLUES in front of Joe Turner. I really had balls. Joe loved it and Lee Allen really enjoyed it. That brought about the opportunity two weeks later, for us to open for Black Oak Arkansas in Norwalk, CA at the Golden West Ballroom. It held 1,000 people.

That day at the York club was when I first met Gene Taylor. I may have met him before when he was playing guitar in a band with Bill Bateman, but I didn't know he played piano. We had an organ player in the band at the time named Tony Tanner.



Photo by Joe Murray

**Dave:** Yes, that's a copy of my '64 Fender Stratocaster that I'm playing in the studio. I've been playing the copy for a few years now and have retired my original from the road. The copy looks good and plays great. I do play my original on *Lost Time* on RATTLE SNAKIN' DADDY and FEELIN' HAPPY.

Joe was onstage singing and I heard this boogie-woogie piano playing and I thought I was imagining it. After the set, Gene came up to me and said: "I hope I wasn't bothering you playing the piano backstage behind the curtain." I grabbed his arm and brought him back to the piano and said: "Play!" He started playing boogie-woogie piano and I said: "Man, you have to play in my band!" That's how I became friends with Gene Taylor. So that was a seminal night.

Two years later, Joe told me to sing in my own voice. I was a good Joe imitator. He said to me: "Quit embarrassing me and yourself and sing in your own voice." It was shocking at first instance, but was great advice. If you're a white blues guy, it's good to have close black friends to tell you when to stop doing something you shouldn't be doing.

### **Feeling Happy**

**Phil:** Joe recorded this in the 50's as DO YOU WANNA JUMP CHILDREN. But in the 40s, the version on the Freedom label is just a rockin' Kansas City number—with great drums and a trumpet solo that's fantastic. It really shows Joe in a brighter light. The Blasters in recent years have done a medley of Joe Turner songs based on this song. But even a Joe Turner song by Joe Turner was often a medley, too (laughs). I learned that from him: just keep the lyrics coming.

**Dave:** I got off a great solo, so I was happy, and Phil sounds great!

### **The 1960s Blues Scene in L.A.**

**Phil:** *There were two different arenas for blues in the late 60s for the stars like Big Joe and Lightnin'. There was the occasional European blues fests, but back home they made a living playing local bars. That's where we got a chance to play with them and get to know them. The more lucrative blues revival was happening for the Chicago guys, not the West Coast musicians. These guys lived in their communities and were stars in their community. There was Big Joe, Pee Wee Crayton, Lowell Fulson, Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson - and they would all hang around each other and play in each others bands. Joe might make \$200 on a night, then other times play big gigs. In South Central, it was mostly an older black audience. At some of the 'Oldies but Goodies' gigs or the Johnny Otis shows at the Ashgrove, there were mostly white audiences. Most people knew who Joe Turner was, and he often hit them right away with SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL, which always would catch everyone's attention. I liked South Central shows because it felt like a real blues show.*



**The Blasters backing up Big Joe in the early 80s**



### **How did your parents feel about their teenaged kids going to bars?**

**Phil:** *Yeah. I never got anything from my parents on that. They knew we were playing music. Big Joe came over for dinner a few times as did T-Bone. Joe loved my mom and dad. They were telling stories and were great dinner guests. My mom would drive me to the Tryon Auditorium, even with all the acid and hippies around. After the concert, she'd come back and pick us up. My parents were really great and very providing along those lines.*

### **If You See My Savior**

**Phil:** The Reverend Thomas Dorsey is one of the foremost gospel songwriters of the 20th century. He wrote some of the dirtiest songs ever in the hokum genre, as well as some of the greatest gospel songs. I heard this song on a Georgia Tom Dorsey album when I was 18, and I've been singing it ever since. It's a great song with great imagery

**Dave:** On the last Roots on the Rails train trip, Phil and I played together, and Phil pulled that one out of the blue, and we really liked it. We've always been fans of Thomas Dorsey. He's a fairly overlooked figure in American music history. He's considered the father of gospel music. He was the one that really started writing spirituals and blues together. He was a piano player and had a lot of hits in the 20's, really raunchy ones like IT'S TIGHT LIKE THAT. When his wife passed away young, the story goes that, he had a religious conversion and he started writing gospel songs like TAKE MY HAND PRECIOUS LORD and PEACE IN THE VALLEY. Everyone from Johnny Cash to Elvis Presley to Aretha Franklin recorded his songs. He went from Georgia Tom--the barrel-house piano player-- to Thomas A. Dorsey, the father of gospel music. This one is one of his earliest gospel songs.

### **The Future of Dave Alvin & Phil Alvin**

Photo by Joe Murray

**Dave:** I'm looking forward to doing more. We'll be touring next year, and I'm already working up plans for the next album, which will be mostly originals. I think that's kind-of the next step. We'll see if there are any fights (laughs). Actually, there were no fights on either of these records - well, one minor fight on the Big Bill record - but Phil was right on that one.



### **Outtake Recordings**

**Dave:** *There are at least 3 or 4 outtakes. I had to narrow Lost Time down to 12 songs, which was very difficult. I really like the outtake tracks - especially a version of the Arthur Crudup song MEAN OLE FRISCO that really shows off Lisa's drums. She sounds amazing on it. It sounds like a Sun blues record.*

*These songs may be released on a Record Store Day release or paired with a live album, but that may or may not happen before the next studio album. Or, it could be just for sale at the merch table at our shows.*

*A lot depends on how fast we get another studio record written and released. The next studio album probably won't happen until early 2017.*

### **Will there ever be a horn player on a Dave and Phil Record?**

**Phil:** *Well, having the guitars play the horn parts is a classic common thing to do when you just have guitars. We've never even talked about bringing in a horn player. There are a lot of great horn players, but we're kind of spoiled by the great Lee Allen. We're spoiled on piano players, too. Gene is one of the best boogie-woogie piano players alive today.*

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## ***FLASHBACK EXCERPT: GOLDMINE MAGAZINE NOVEMBER 1982*** **BIG JOE TURNER INTERVIEWED ABOUT THE BLASTERS IN 1982** **BY JAMES AUSTIN**

**James Austin:** Where did you first meet the Blasters and Lee Allen?

**Joe Turner:** Well, when I met them boys, I used to work in a nightclub so Dave Alvin and them used to come around all the time and hang out with me. Phil Alvin picked up on songs that I was singin' and he's got some records that I ain't got. He sings songs that I sang years ago that I done forgot and he got 'em down pat.

**James Austin:** Do you think you'll ever get together again with the group you appeared with at the Club Lingerie (Lee Allen, tenor sax; Steve Berlin, baritone; Gene Taylor, piano; Phil Alvin, guitar; Ike Williams, trumpet; Larry Taylor, bass)? As far as I was concerned, that was one of the best concerts I've ever seen. It was enjoyable and exciting. You were up there for about an hour and a half performing with the same kind of intensity that you did in past years. I hope you can get together with them again.

**Joe Turner:** Well, I sure hope so 'cause they really moved me! I enjoyed that band tremendously. I was really excited. I could hardly stay in my seat, they was cookin' so good! I was amazed. I had to turn around and watch them. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. They was goin' to town so good! At first they said that they wanted to have a rehearsal, so the fella that was supposed to pick me up, he thought somebody else was gonna pick me up. So I was at home waitin' on them all day long. So we didn't have a rehearsal; they had a rehearsal, but I wasn't there. So, we didn't know how it was gonna go over. So I told 'em: "Well if they play the blues or rock 'n roll. . ." I know Phil Alvin and them came

over and said: "They know all your songs Joe, so you don't have to worry." So I said: "Well now, the songs Phil's singin', I don't sing no more." So I was wonderin' how in the devil is this gonna happen? The songs he likes to sing are the songs that I used to do, but I very seldom sing anymore. I forgot 'em. Then somebody mentioned it to me, and it all came back, ya know. So I said: "Well, Okay, we'll get together. I'll come on to work." When they called me up on the bandstand I said: "Uh oh! Here it is now, no chance in trying to squirm out of it now. It's too late." So we got up there and on the first number they played, I said "Well now, they sounded good! This ain't gonna be no trouble. If they play that good by themselves, well, they gonna play alright for me."

**James Austin:** Well, I know for myself and everyone that was there that it was an important event in rhythm and blues. The crowd was immensely appreciative of your style and what you've done for boogie-woogie and R&B. There was a real reverence and appreciation for Joe Turner, a man who has contributed so much to black music. Now, what about today's music? Is there anything about today's music that you like?

**Joe Turner:** Well, I like it all. Music is a part of me and I enjoy music period. But that long hair stuff. . . I don't understand it so good. I don't know what's happenin'. Some of it they play is so far out that you don't know what the devil they doin'. You never know what they playin' and when they get through, you don't know what the song was.

**James Austin:** I want to thank you for all the music you provided us with in the past and are going to provide us with in the future.

**Joe Turner:** Well, Thank you very much. I appreciate that and I hope to see you again.



**L to R— Steve Berlin, Lee Allen, Gene Taylor, Big Joe Turner, Larry Taylor, Pat Turner, Phil Alvin, and Bill Bateman.  
Photo by Gary Leonard**



**Phil with Big Joe Turner and some friends at an early 80's party. Photo by Gary Leonard**



# Blaster 2015 West Coast Tour

by Keith Wyatt

Photos: John Bazz

In what has become a December tradition, the Blasters hit the road again for our annual West Coast tour. The difference this year was that rather than touring with 'X', as we have for the past couple of years, we went out as headliners and hit some new venues along with those familiar from past tours. Another change was the steady, experienced presence of tour manager Danny Bland, borrowed from the Dave & Phil show to fill in for Jaime Casillas, who is still recovering from a stroke that he sustained earlier this year.

The tour kicked off in Santa Cruz at the Atrium, an adjunct of the venerable Catalyst club that for decades has been at the center of the SC music scene. Santa Cruz has a unique combination of university students, surfers, stoners, and tourists that combine to form a night life constantly teetering on the edge of chaos, but at least it guarantees a lively crowd. The opening band this night and throughout the tour was Gambler's Mark, a SoCal-based trio whose short, high-energy set provided an effective intro for the Blasters.

The next stop was just over the hill in San Jose where we returned to the Ritz, the very club where I played my first Blasters



Hopmonk Tavern, Sebastopol, CA



Road food, Seattle, WA

show nearly 20 years ago. Apparently nothing has been changed since (if it ain't broke...), but the crowd was fresh and with the SC show under our belts we played a solid set. In previous years we often worked without a set list or made one up fresh each night, but on this tour Phil opted to go with the same set throughout, comprising a combination of early favorites **CRAZY BABY**, **HEAR ME CRYIN'** (aka **BIG F CHORD**), later tunes **WELL WELL WELL**, **PRECIOUS MEMORIES**, **REBOUND** and all-time classics **AMERICAN MUSIC**, **LONG WHITE CADILLAC**, **MARIE MARIE** and others cul-



Seattle, WA



minating in the traditional high-energy encore, **ONE BAD STUD**. Phil has also gradually reduced his between-song conversation to a minimum, which keeps the pacing tight but offers little time to tune up, make adjustments, get a drink, or simply breathe between numbers - a Blaster set is now like an extended sprint, and we all need to stay in top condition to make it through intact. On the plus side, there's no need to use the hotel gym...

The third date was at another long-time music institution, the Sweetwater in Mill Valley, CA. The club had fallen on hard times for a while, but a group of investors including well-known Marin music names resurrected it in a new location and it is now a first-rate venue and community gathering point. This was another good show - a packed house (even on a Sunday night) and enthusiastic response.

We spent Monday driving up to Orangevale, a suburb of Sacramento. The van, which has well over 300K miles on it, was starting to wheeze, so it spent Tuesday in the shop getting a general once-over that improved things considerably. That night's show was well-received, although our late week-night starting time undoubtedly discouraged more fans from coming out. The next day we wound our way through the mountains of southern Oregon to Klamath Falls, a first-time visit for us, and played to another lively crowd. Next in line was Portland, and to avoid bad winter weather to the north we opted to take a winding mountain road west to Interstate 5. Unfortunately, no one noticed the fuel level until we were well into the mountains and the low-fuel indicator came on - with 50 miles of isolated mountain driving still to go and no cell service it was white-knuckle time, but we made it to a gas station on fumes and kept on rolling.



Mt. Shasta, CA

The next two shows were at familiar venues - Dante's in Portland and El Corazon in Seattle - with the Seattle show particularly strong. The tour routing next took us back to the Bay Area, and with no shows in between we spent a day off in Seattle (Danny's hometown), then stopped off in Ashland, Oregon before getting back to Napa, California on Tuesday. The show there was at the City Winery, located in a rehabbed opera house, and it was also attended by the staff of Artistworks, the on-line teaching company I work with that is also headquartered in Napa. They filmed the show (we haven't seen the footage yet), which was fortunately one of the best of the tour.



Everett & Jones BBQ, Berkeley, CA





Space Needle, Seattle, WA

The next stop was just up the road in Sebastopol, followed by a final NorCal show in Oakland before we headed back down the 5 and wrapped things up with shows in Orange County on Friday and Saturday.

The day after Christmas we closed out the year with a final show at the Casbah in San Diego. Opening for us at this one was Deke Dickerson, an eclectic master of American music in his own right, and with a well-primed, appreciative crowd it was a fitting end to the year. Plans for 2016 are still coming together as we book around the Dave/Phil schedule, but so far we're looking at some late-winter Southwest dates and Colorado in April followed by a series of Southeast shows in May. We have great appreciation for those who continue to come out to see us, and our theme at this point is pretty simple: leave it all on stage and keep on keepin' on.

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## **A LOOK BACK: THE BLASTERS at the PALACE in LOS ANGELES, DECEMBER 26, 1986**

**BY TOM WILK**

Since forming in 1979, the Blasters have performed hundreds of shows with an assortment of lineups. Their most memorable concerts can be appreciated not only for the Blasters' level of performance—but also for the challenging circumstances the band faced. That was the case when the Blasters took the stage at the Palace in Los Angeles on Dec. 26, 1986.

Playing in their hometown the day after Christmas, emotions ran high. It was their first show after the overdose death of lead guitarist Hollywood Fats on Dec. 8; it was also the first show with Dave Alvin in nine months. By coincidence, the band's first concert with Hollywood Fats was held only six months earlier at the Palace on June 7.

The original quartet delivered a show that exceeded expectations, helped, in part, by the support of the hometown crowd. The band played 30 songs, one of the longest shows of their career, offering up selections from all four of their studio albums, plus a few unexpected songs and surprises.

Phil Alvin opened the show with a dedication to Hollywood Fats and then the group launched into AMERICAN MUSIC, a preview of their forays



into blues, rockabilly, country, gospel, rock 'n' roll and surf music. The band was firing on all cylinders.

Phil was in a creative mood with his dedications. "This goes out to the Denny's near the county jail," he announced before NO OTHER GIRL, which featured a lively solo by Dave. BORDER RADIO and I DON'T WANT TO were dedicated to Los Lobos and Rockin' Ronny Weiser (of Rollin Rock Records), respectively.

On I DON'T WANT TO, the band failed to count off the song properly, so Phil invited the audience to do the counting which they continued to do so at other times during the concert.

The first surprise of the evening came on the fourth song, when the band played a slightly menacing version of DADDY ROLLIN' STONE, a song from Phil's Unsung Stories album released in August, 1986. Almost halfway through the show, Phil called singers Bobby King and Herman Johnson to the stage for a spirited, stripped-down version of the gospel song DEATH IN THE MORNING, another Unsung Stories song. King and Johnson sang on the studio version and were billed as the Jubilee Train Singers.

King and Johnson remained on stage for a country version of HELP YOU DREAM, replicating the vocal parts supplied by the Jordanares on the original version on Hard Line. King and Johnson left the stage, but returned to sing with Phil on SAMSON AND DELILAH, a song from Hard Line that in retrospect could have been an Unsung Stories track.

The guests continued as Phil brought saxophonists Lee Allen and Steve Berlin to the stage in the second half of the concert for a trio of songs: CRYING FOR MY BABY, ONE MORE DANCE and I'M SHAKIN'.

Next came a big surprise: Dave Alvin took over as lead singer as he roared through ROMEO'S ESCAPE, still eight months away from an official release in the U.S. as the title track on his first solo album. The horns returned for an extended version of SO LONG BABY GOODBYE that lasted nearly six minutes. After MARIE MARIE, the horn section returned for a three-song encore.

A full-throttle version of BLUE SHADOWS (from the Streets of Fire soundtrack) was followed by the biggest surprise of the evening. Phil and Dave teamed up for a raucous duet on JUSTINE, a song that Phil and John Doe of 'X' had recorded during the Non Fiction sessions that would be released on The Blasters Collection in 1990. This Phil and Dave duet predates WHAT'S UP WITH YOUR BROTHER by nearly a quarter of a century.

The concert ended on a high note with an all-hands-on-deck version of CALIFORNIA SUN, featuring horns and backing singers. The song was a surf hit for the Rivas in 1964. Dave Alvin would sing lead vocals on a cover of this song by Los Straitjackets in 2001.

While the concert recording is a little rough in spots, it's a night to remember for the Blasters, as well as their fans. If the Blasters ever follow the path of the Grateful Dead and launch an archival series of concert recordings, this show should be a prime candidate for release.


***Set list: American Music/No Other Girl/I Don't Want To/Daddy Rollin' Stone/Too Tired/Border Radio/Just Another Sunday/Honey Don't/I Wish You Would/Dark Night/Long White Cadillac/Sadie Brown/Death in the Morning/Help You Dream/Crazy Baby/Jubilee Train/Cryin' for My Baby/One More Dance/I'm Shakin'/Romeo's Escape/Samson and Delilah/Trouble Bound/Stop the Clock/Red Rose/Rock and Roll Will Stand/So Long Baby Goodbye/Marie Marie/Blue Shadows/Justine/California Sun***

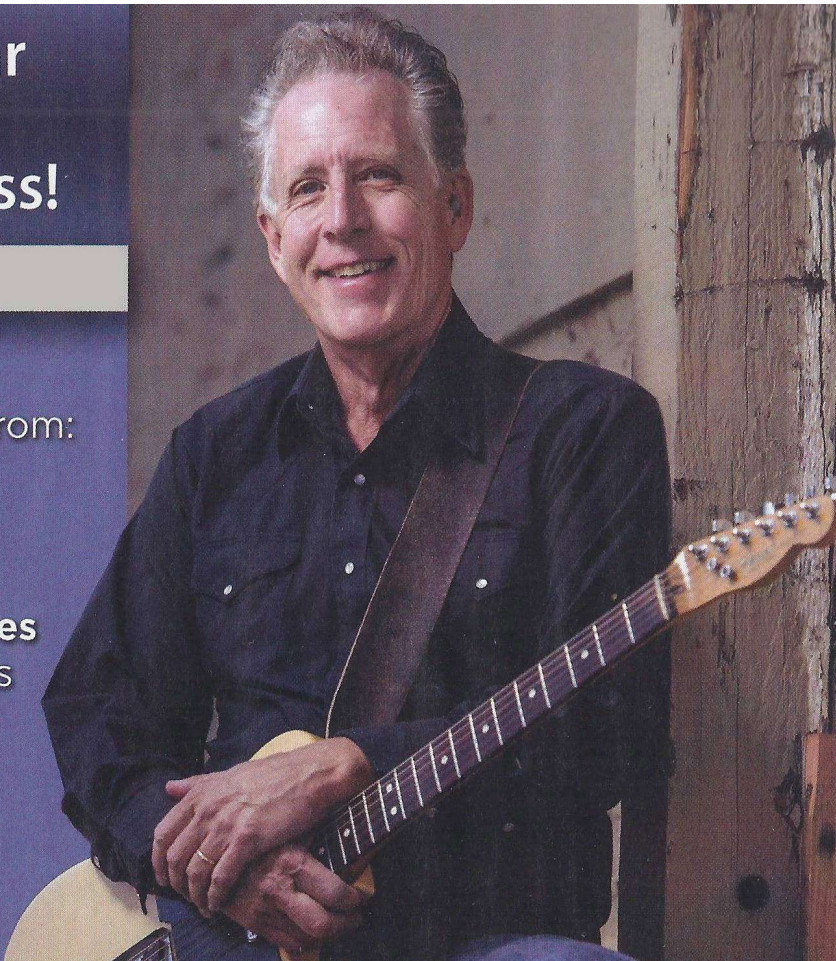
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