

ISSUE #91

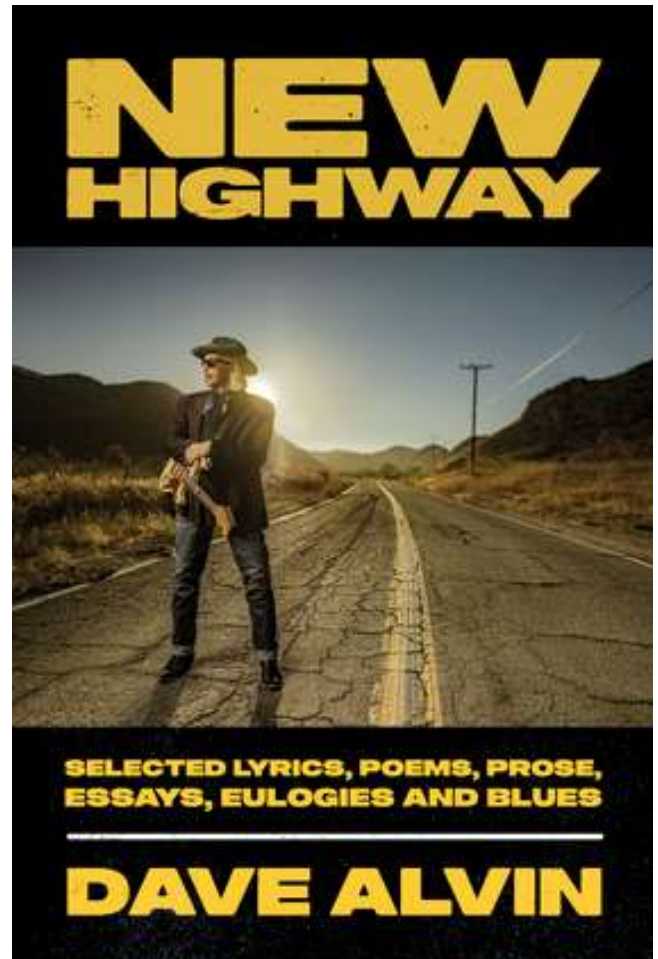
# American Music

## The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

DEC. 2021

## Dave Alvin book to be Released

**Latest News:** Dave Alvin reported on facebook: "I have to admit that I'm very nervous about announcing this, but in May 2022, BMG Books will be releasing my book, New Highway. It's a collection of my selected lyrics, poems, prose, essays, eulogies and blues. It's not a memoir (that'll be coming along next), but there are certainly pieces that could be in a memoir. Besides a large batch of song lyrics from throughout my songwriting career, most of the pieces are focused on music, musicians and our complicated lives and passions. Like I said, I'm nervous about releasing my first anthology of writings since 1996, but that doesn't mean that I'm not happy and excited about this book coming out. If you're a person who enjoys music, books and reading about some giants (like Big Joe Turner, Sam Phillips, Buck Owens, Bo Diddley, Gene Vincent, Johnny Otis, Doc Pomus and Frank Zappa) or some not-quite giants that I've crossed paths with, I sincerely hope you consider checking it out." The book is available for pre-order on Amazon. The Publisher's description says this: "Celebrated singer-songwriter and guitarist Dave Alvin is, first and foremost, a storyteller. The Grammy winning artist's disarmingly well-crafted lyrics represent just one of the many expressions of his unique ability to capture the gritty and beautiful moments of life with the written word. This anthology of his writing is a companion piece to Dave's considerable musical output and presents a staggering cross section of his work. New Highway includes a generous selection of his celebrated poetry; excerpts of his moving prose; newspaper articles and essays on artists including Frank Zappa, Bo Diddley, and Ray Charles. . . (((Latest News continued next page ))))



***In This Issue: Delta Pacific: a pre-Blasters band interview with Doug Allgood and Kevin Fahy. Also The Blasters / Los Lobos / X family reunion show, and the Dave Alvin/CCR/X connection***

((Latest News cont. from page 1 ))) (which earned Dave a Grammy nomination); tributes to influences such as Merle Haggard; a long-lost interview with Buck Owens; and, of course, a carefully curated representation of his inimitable lyrics. Packed with rich imagery and poignant observations, *New Highway* follows Dave's previous collections *Nana*, *Big Joe & the Fourth of July*, and *Any Rough Times Are Now Behind You: Selected Poems & Writings: 1979-1995*. If you know Dave Alvin for his music, this collection will give you deeper insight into the heart of an artist whose pen knows no boundaries. || ||| On December 1, 2021 Dave Alvin contributed to a live stream show called *Home Cookin' for the Holidays*. It's a nonprofit to help aging Austin-area musicians cover their housing expenses. Dave Alvin did an acoustic performance of FLATTOP JOINT. The lineup also included Marcia Ball, Los Lobos, Shawn Colvin, Susan Tedeschi & Derek Trucks, Carolyn Wonderland, Ruthie Foster, James McMurtry, Gloria Gaynor, Jimmie Dale Gilmore & Butch Hancock, Los Texmaniacs, Shinyribs, Terry Allen and more. || ||| Dave recorded an original song called SOUTHWEST CHIEF that was included on the various artists album *Americana Railroad* which was released on November 26. It's a double LP released for Black Friday record store day. Other artists include James Intveld on MYSTERY TRAIN, Peter Case on THIS TRAIN and John Fogerty on CITY OF NEW ORLEANS. || ||| Carolyn Wonderland's CD *Tempting Fate* was released in October. Dave Alvin produced it and played on several tracks. Dave: "I'm really proud of it and it's getting great press and airplay. I'm going to produce a follow-up for her next year." || ||| Dave Alvin played guitar on a few songs on Jon Langford's upcoming album. Guilty Ones Lisa Pankratz and Brad Fordham also played on the album. Dave sings a verse on a song as does Jimmie Dale Gilmore. || ||| Dave Alvin has a few gigs coming up in 2022. He'll be participating in the January annual Beat Farmers tribute at the Belly Up tavern, and he'll be jamming with the Jack Shit band at some of their gigs. In the spring he's planning some L.A. area acoustic gigs. || ||| The Blasters have booked a bunch of Southern CA gigs in January 2022 and have been announced for April at the Viva Las Vegas rockabilly festival. || ||| Dave Alvin is taking part in a musical cruise from Los Angeles to Mexico on Nov. 3-8, 2022. Other artists on the cruise include Los Lobos, X, Lucinda Williams, Rosie Flores, and James Intveld. More artists will be added. Check out [OutlawCountryWest.com](http://OutlawCountryWest.com)



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# *Delta Pacific*

## **A pre-Blasters Blues Band with bassist Doug Allgood**

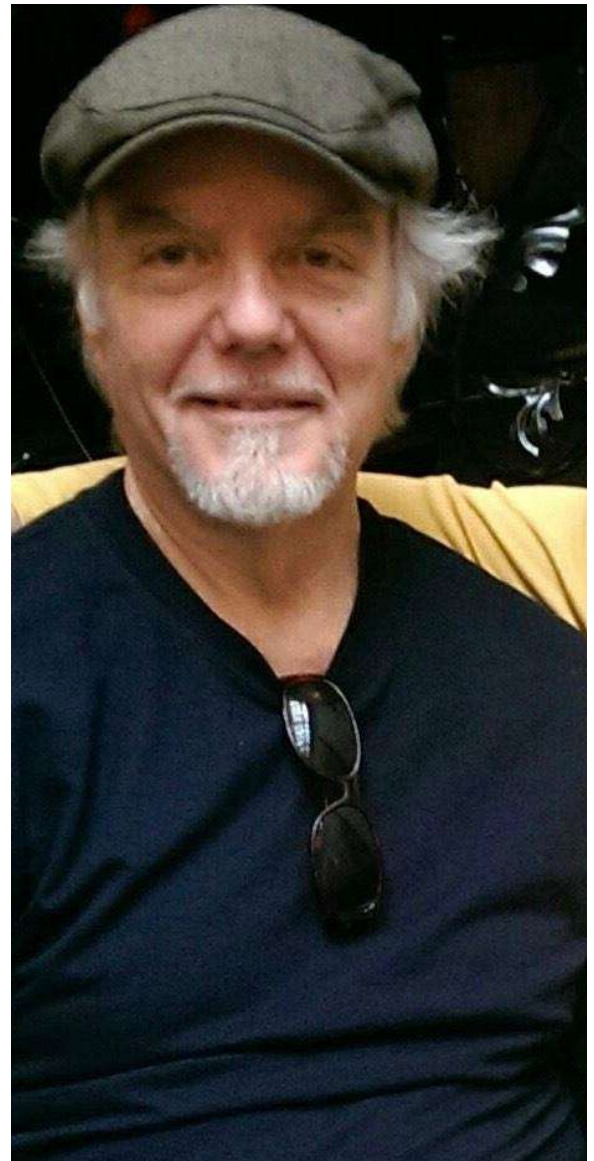
Music is the breath of life, the melody of the soul. It first spoke to a young boy of 8 years old, back when he saw Elvis Presley in "Blue Hawaii." Music heals the heart, celebrates our joys, weeps with our sorrows and can transport us back in time with as little as two notes.

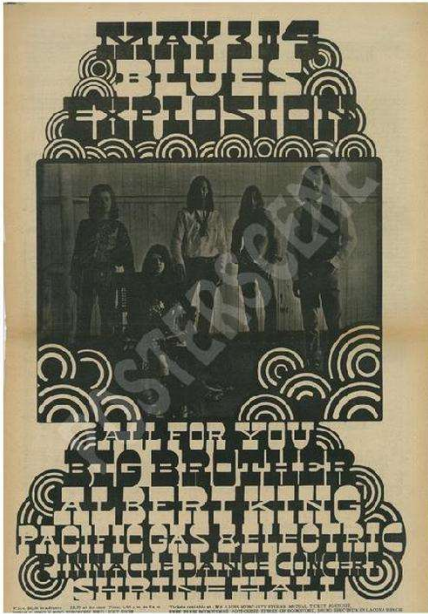
--- Prelude by Wilma Allgood ---

After seeing Albert King open for Janis Joplin at the Shrine Exhibition Hall in Los Angeles [5/31/68], I started playing bass guitar. He was doing songs from an album called Live Wire Blues Power recorded live at the Fillmore auditorium that would come out soon after. I bought the album and borrowed a bass from my good friend, Jim Cook. I thought if I could learn the 'bass-feel' for all those tunes, that would be give me a good basis for blues bass guitar.

In about 1969, I was at Downey High School. I started jamming with my friend Kevin Fahy on drums and a guy I knew named Bruce who played guitar. In January of 1970, I asked the activities director at my school if we could do a blues jam session in the school auditorium. I about fell on the floor when he said yes. So, we did it. We invited friends who were musicians from all over. Kevin knew Phil Alvin and John Bazz, so he invited them over. It was great.

Kevin introduced me to Phil and John and then we started going over Phil's house and we were full-on from there. Dave Alvin was there giving us training material [ laughs ]. He was spinning the blues records for us to learn. He wasn't playing yet, but when he eventually did after I left, he sure made an impact [ laughs ].





We had a practice place in a church I went to in Southgate and they let me have the key. They had a piano there that we could borrow. We knew a guy named Frank Charolla, who owned Downey Custom Chopper. He had a Chevy pickup that he'd loan to us to haul the piano for Gene [Taylor] to parties.

One of our first paying gigs was at Romeo's bar right around the corner from that original Downey McDonald's. Frank and his buddies hung out at that bar. They weren't outlaw bikers or anything but really nice guys. His motorcycles made it into a lot of movies.

I was just out of high school and working at a music store in Downey in late 1970 when a guy named Ernie Franklin came in. He frequented the store. I think he lived in L.A., but he worked at North American Aviation. Firestone Boulevard was how he got to work and that's where my store was. He was older than me but he was interested in learning to play the guitar.

At that time Phil, Johnny, Tony Tanner, me and Tom Demott were playing in a band we called Delta Pacific. Ernie came by the music store where I worked and one day, told me his mom had managed bands over the years and wondered if our guys wanted to come over and talk to her. I told the guys and they said yes. So we drove over to his mother's house.

An older gentleman let us in. He was sitting playing a guitar and we started talking about blues to him. We told him we were playing Muddy Waters songs and other blues legends. The fellow was Marcus Johnson, who played sax in Muddy Waters' band. I talked to him about Little Walter, who was my favorite harmonica player next to Phil. It was a really cool.



**Ernie Franklin drops by backstage at a Blasters 1981 show.  
(photo courtesy of John Bazz)**

Ernie then came in with his mother. Her name was Mary Franklin. I think her stage name was Mary McGill when she was a singer. Also, her friend Lee Allen came in. We all sat and talked about how we felt about the blues. Another friend who was just back from Europe, T-Bone Walker, came in and he had both his guitars - the Barney Kessel Gibson and the thick hol-

low-body Gibson he played. He let us play the guitars. That was the beginning of our connections with them.

I'm not sure if she wanted to manage us. I don't remember any promises, but I remember she talked about us playing some gigs and joining the musicians' union. Looking back on that, it was a time when older blues artists were hooking up with younger bands and even rock bands. They were using them as backup bands and making records with them.

From what little I knew about T- Bone, he had great success in Europe. These legendary blues artists were household names here in the U.S. but they were playing only small bars and clubs. Over in Europe, they were treated like royalty. This started a momentum to bring the blues back. Lee Allen would always say: "It's beautiful man, it's beautiful."

Almost immediately we would go to all of Lee's gigs with him playin' with other musicians. I remember one in L.A. with Lee playing with Teddy Edwards and Milt Jackson on vibes. The Che Pico was a club I remember that T-Bone played. We as a band went and he let us sit in on STORMY MONDAY.

But one of the first gigs after we met those guys was at The Golden West Ballroom in Long Beach in about spring of 1971. My friend Kevin Fahy got us a gig there because his brother booked Black Oak Arkansas and then they needed an opening band. So, Kevin suggested us. It was a Thursday night. Kevin and I drove in his grandmother's '57 Cadillac over to L.A. and picked up Big Joe Turner.

He took up the whole back seat [ laughs ]. It was beautiful and this is a wonderful memory for me. As I recall, our band that night consisted of Big Joe - vocal, Lee Allen - tenor sax, Mary Franklin - vocal, Tom Demott - guitar, John Bazz on drums, Tony Tanner (who normally played piano) - organ, Phil of course playing harp and singing with me on bass. Tony saw the Hammond organ that Black Oak Arkansas was gonna use, so he got permission to play that. It left the grand piano empty on the side of the stage.

It was half-way through the show that I looked to my right past Big Joe and I saw Gene Taylor sitting at the piano. I didn't know him and I thought who is this guy?

I had a reel-to-reel 2-track tape recorder sitting on the floor by that piano. I put one mike on top of the piano to catch the vocals and guitars and then I put a mike on the floor to catch the bass and drums low end.

It was already a great night playing with Big Joe. Big Joe knocked me out with his musicianship. I'm used to knowing in advance when playing, what key and a little bit of a clue as to the beat. He started a song before us and gave us all those indications in his first vocal line. The tempo, the key and the rhythm. I swear, we fell right in where he wanted us to be. I don't know now how that happens, but his presence just took over. We sounded better than

## Delta Pacific Set List

Boom Boom  
Out Go the Lights  
My Babe (Don't Stand No Foolin)  
Slick as the Devil (and Twice as Tough)  
Key to the Highway  
Mellow Down Easy  
I'm Ready  
I Ain't Got You  
Got My Mojo Working  
Juke  
Shake Rattle and Roll  
Roll 'em Pete

we ever had. It was awesome for all of us.

I listened to the tape in the next few days and heard the piano on there. It sounded really good and I knew it wasn't Tony. Tony was phenomenal on piano but this was old school boogie-woogie like I had never heard live before. I immediately called Phil to ask him if he got Gene's number.

None of our guys did. I saw what Gene looked like, so I knew well enough how to describe him. He was 5 foot square and all muscle. All I could get from our guys is that he lived in a certain area of Norwalk where they sold the houses for a right-of-way for the freeway to be constructed. And the build got stopped, so some houses were boarded up and some were still lived in. So I drove my dad's 1933 Plymouth through that area and asked around in the neighborhood.

One guy who was mowing his lawn told me Gene lived down the street and pointed out the house. I knocked on his door and Gene was there and invited me in. His grandmother lived there at the time, we sat down and he told me all about himself and then sat down at this old upright piano made in the early 1900s and started playing. All of us kids had piano lessons, but his playing was incredible. I could hear Albert Ammons, and Pete Johnson, Meade Lux Lewis, and Cow Cow Davenport as Gene's inspiration. He just blew me away and he was just 17 years old. The both of us were. This guy just reeked of authenticity.

After that Gene played with us all the time. Tom DeMott was our guitar player at that Golden West Ballroom. I know that for sure because after that we practiced at my house when Lee and Mary Franklin came over and I distinctly remember Tom trying to get the intro licks to a BB King-style tune that we were writing that I really wanted to play. We didn't have a lead guitarist before Tom. We went to see Lee Allen play gigs a lot. Big Joe had a recording



session and asked us to go with him just in case they had extra recording time and maybe they'd let us play. We didn't get to, though. I think Gene was there for that too.

I remember we were playing a party in one of the beach cities. It was upstairs in an apartment building with everything open. I think Gary Masi was the guitarist at this point. Phil had his harmonicas on his amplifier. There was

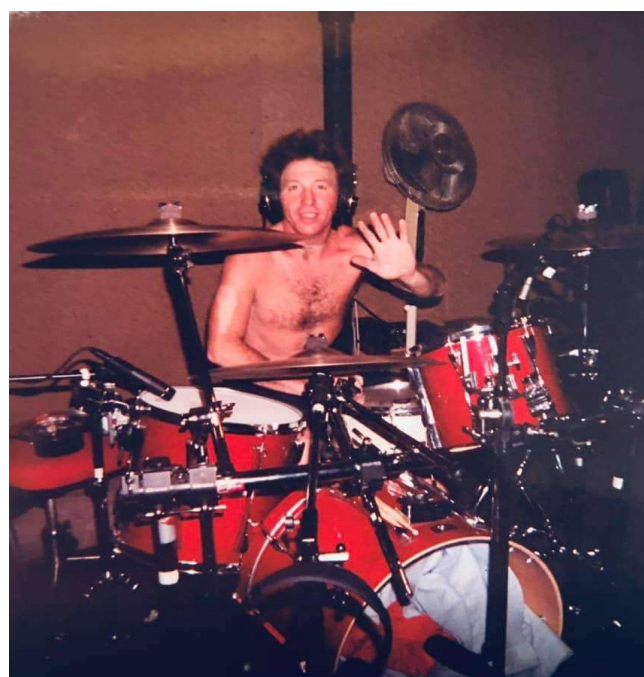
**Delta Pacific playing Doug Allgood's sister's wedding. L—R - Gene Taylor, John Bazz, Lee Allen, Doug Allgood, Kevin Fahy, and Phil Alvin**

this real big guy who was really drunk. He walked over to Phil's amp and took one of his harps and put it in his shirt pocket. And then he took another one and put it in his other pocket. Now, Phil was always joyful, jolly, happy and having a good time. I saw him walk over the guy talking, and joking and he's looking up at the guy and says, "Man. Would you look at that? Someone went and put one of my harps in your pocket." He reached up and plucked it from the guy's pocket. The big guy looked confused. Phil then said, "And look at that? Someone put another of my harmonicas in your other pocket." And he snatched that one out. The huge guy then snapped and said, "Are you saying I'm stealing?" Phil was speechless, when all of a sudden '5 X 5' Gene Taylor is standing in between them, looking up at the big guy and Gene said, "No, man. He never said you were stealin'." The guy reared back like he was gonna punch and Gene beat him to it with a punch straight up and knocked him right out [ laughs ]. I heard there might have been more trouble after I left the party. But that wasn't the first time Gene was the hero [ laughs ].

The next memorable gig was at my sister's wedding reception at the South Gate Women's Club in South Gate, CA. on June 5, 1971. My sister asked me to put the band together. My sister liked Kevin and I liked to play with him as my drummer. It was Phil Alvin on harmonica and vocals, Lee Allen on sax, Gene Taylor on piano, Kevin Fahy on drums, John Bazz on guitar, and me on the bass.

We played a lot of instrumentals and I especially remember IN THE MOOD because Gene really ripped on that one. And Lee kicked off LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART and we had to fall right in. Lee taught us so much. He would say, "Look at the other guys in the band and get your foot tapping same as them." When I played in country bands around east Texas in

**Blasters 1993 Sony / Private Music  
Recording Sessions  
Photos by Doug Allgood**





the '80s, I'd set up pretty much the same as that gig. I'd set up close to the drummer and look to be able to see his foot pedal. Even today whether I'm playing bass, guitar, harp, or singing - I don't play without thinking of those things I learned back then.

Our name changed to The Nightshift with John Bazz on drums and we even did some gigs as Lee Allen and The Nightshift at places like Rick's Blues Bar in Venice Beach. John Bazz has always been phenomenal on guitar, drums, or bass.

I left the guys way before they started in the Blasters. I met my first wife in '72, married in '73 and moved away to east Texas in '74 where she was originally from. It was great place that was affordable to have a lot of land. So, I fell in love with it, got a good job and moved. I never figured to would live off my music, but I still made some memorable music in Texas. When I was single again, I formed a blues-rock band in the early '90s called Doctor Feelgood Blues INC. We played 250 dates in 2 years on top of my full-time job. I wrote all the originals and booked the band too. We played around the Tyler Texas area, and a regular gig in Austin. I met my wife Wilma, when we booked a party for their group 'The Wednesday Wenches.' I still play occasionally.

I've seen Phil, John and Dave over the years. In the early 80's I came to L.A. and saw The Blasters at The Whiskey or the Starwood and they were explosive. In October 1993, my Wife, Wilma and I were in town when the Blasters were recording an album for Sony / Private Music

[ ed. note - which was never released ] with James Intveld on guitar, Dave Carroll on drums, John Bazz on bass and Phil, guitar and vocals. I also got to see Dave Alvin at Austin's SXSW festival and then in Dallas in the mid 1990s.

I'm very happy with the musical experiences I've had in my life. The truth doesn't need any embellishments and like Lee Allen said, "It's beautiful man. It's beautiful."

## Doug Allgood's Special Memories of his Friends

----- Just after meeting **Phil Alvin** in the late '60's, he would get his harps and I would bring my Lakeside acoustic guitar and we would go down to the Huntington Beach Pier and play for the fisherman to the wee hours of the morning. We were also introduced as "In part, Delta Pacific" when the rest of our band couldn't be there at the open mic night at the Troubadour in Hollywood.

----- Remembering **Dave Alvin** resting quietly on the couch in his living room, while I played his mother's electronic organ; little did I know the explosive power of the musical wheels turning in his head when I paused to see him smiling as he said, "I'm just listening." He and all the guys have and continue to inspire us all.

----- **John Bazz** and Bill Bateman have come to form one of the tightest, strongest rhythm sections in music today. Whether John was playing guitar, drums or bass, he and I always had a great time playing together. John has always elevated the musicians around him, not only with his groove, dynamics and tone but with his smile as well. A true professional.

----- When I think of **Bill Bateman**, it brings to mind the small practice room with walls of egg cartons, in a space that would not accommodate much more than his Slingerland kit and himself, which was all he needed to lay the groundwork for the major talent and great guy he is today. It was always a pleasure to get to play with Bill. Always an inspiration.

----- After we met **Gene Taylor**, he and I would ride to some of the gigs together, either in his station wagon or in Frank Charolla's pickup with the piano. It was Gene who inspired me to develop my boogie-woogie piano chops for the past 50-plus years. He was always supportive in so many ways through the years and his inspirations continue. Rest well, my brother, until we meet again.

----- **Kevin Fahy** was the force that pulled us all together. I consider Kevin to be one of my best friends to this day. We left a gig one night in Downey, California to cruise up the 605 Freeway to one of our favorite coffee shops. His 1958 Jaguar was running beautifully as always, so much so that we pulled into Salt Lake City the following afternoon. I'll never forget Kevin and the best groove he has with him wherever he goes, to this day: A true life inspiration!!

----- With heartfelt thanks to all the guys for the memories,



*Dave Alvin*

# *Delta Pacific*

## **A pre-Blasters Blues Band with drummer Kevin Fahy**



**Delta Pacific's Doug Allgood and Kevin Fahy at Doug's sister's wedding reception June 5, 1971**

**Kevin: "I think I'm playing John Bazz's drums that time. I normally played Rogers drums but sold them to buy a car. "**

In 1969 and '70, it was really just a group of guys who jammed that lived in Downey. Several drummers, several guitarists – a lot of different players. The oldest acquaintance in my life is John Bazz who lived next to my grandmother in Downey. We met when we were about 3 years old and then went to the same Catholic school. I left to go to a military school and returned in junior high school and reconnected with John. I started drums when I was about 14. We played jazz, blues and rockabilly and I remember Phil and Dave's great record collection. Phil knew so much about all the artists. He brought into focus all the artists that influenced us. Phil was playing harp and was very influenced by Sonny Terry, Little Walter and Sonny Boy Williamson. He always hung out and listened to music at Phil and Dave's house.

I remember going often to the Ashgrove in West Hollywood and so many of the blues guys we were influenced by played there. Phil became friendly with the owner of the Ashgrove, Ed Pearl, because he was a big record collector and they would trade records.

We played a lot of parties for free but we weren't a dance band, so we were limited in our opportunities. The bands that really got gigs were playing Hendrix, the Cream, or the Beatles. We played Muddy Waters and Sonny Boy Williamson songs be-

cause of Phil's ability to play harmonica. There weren't a lot of bands that wanted to do traditional authentic blues like the original artists.

We always got noise complaints from neighbors in garages, so we rehearsed on weekends

at John Bazz's father's spring factory, where we could be as loud as we wanted. John would play bass or guitar if I was on drums. Other drummers who played with us were Dave Carroll and John's brother Clint. I met Doug Allgood at high school. We became best friends more because we were influenced by the music, not because we were playing it.

My brother and friends in college were setting up parties and became bookers. Somehow they got hooked up with the Golden West Ballroom in Long Beach. I mentioned to my brother maybe my band can play. We probably weren't paid anymore than in beer. The show was booked so I think Phil came up with the idea that if we're gonna be on a stage and we were already friendly with Lee Allen and Big Joe Turner, maybe they would come and play with us? Lee was probably intrigued to play blues with a bunch of white kids. So they did.

When we played with Lee, he blew our minds. Any musician knows that when you get on stage with another musician that can up the game, it's so exhilarating. It's like going into another dimension. And having Big Joe singing, I said to myself, "Is this for real?"

At the Golden West Ballroom, because my brother was the promoter, I wasn't playing that night. He had me greeting the musicians when they came, watching the stage, and helping at soundcheck. So I was watching the show and couldn't see the piano in the back. This guy who we would learn later to be Gene Taylor was playing along. And I think Gene didn't think he was bothering anyone. But our bass player Doug Allgood was taping the show from right by the piano. We might have never known Gene was playing if Doug didn't listen to the tape later. Gene had a great boogie-woogie style.

Most of us were going to Cerritos Junior High School in Norwalk. I think Gene might have come to me in school and said he really enjoyed the music that night. But I'm not sure we put it all together that he was the same guy playing the piano.

It was a great experience. One of the conditions to get Big Joe to sing at the gig was that he said, he'd be happy to play, but he needed a ride to and from the gig. I remember driving down Florence Avenue to pick him up. Just being in his presence was amazing to have this legend with us and imagining the places he's played all over the world.

After that we played a lot of parties that Gary Masi's older brothers set up. Mike Roach played with us and he was an incredible guitar player. Someone gave him a 1958 Les Paul Gold-top in mint condition. Mike was great on that guitar. He was the only one we knew who could play Clapton's CROSSROADS perfectly.

We played a matinee show in South Central at a club and we were asked if we wanted to sit in with T Bone Walker and play a few songs. It was a privilege.

When I think of Gene Taylor I remember that he and Phil argued about music all the time. I think they loved that. Whether it was a song or a tempo or anything. They both had strong personalities.

After high school a lot of us went our separate ways. Phil and Dave took the music more to heart. I thought that there wasn't enough steady work in music to continue. Tony Tanner went to college, I took a good job and moved out of Downey. I saw the Blasters play at the Whiskey sometime after the first album came out and I was really happy for them to have such success.

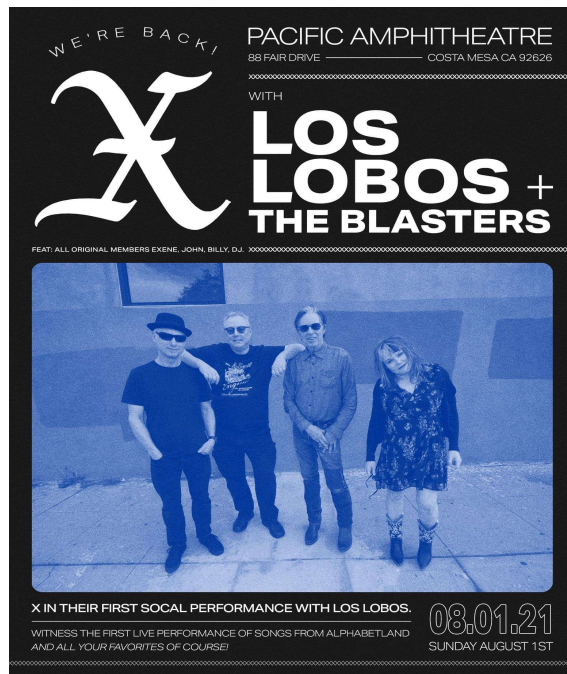
— AM

# The Blasters / Los Lobos / X Family Reunion

August 1, 2021

by Billy Davis

At the Pacific Amphitheater in Costa Mesa, CA, fans gathered to see the three legendary Los Angeles bands X, Los Lobos and the Blasters. With all 3 bands being such close friends, there was bound to be some cross-jamming through the night.



For the audience there was the challenge of wearing masks, being vaccinated and an attempt to social distance, but the fans still had a good time.

Dave Alvin said: "Because of Covid cautions we couldn't have all of our friends backstage, so there wasn't the party atmosphere we are used to when we

## Blasters Set List

American Music

Long White Cadillac

Red Rose

Border Radio

Dark Night

Trouble Bound

So Long Baby Goodbye

I'm Shakin'

Crazy Baby

Marie Marie

One Bad Stud

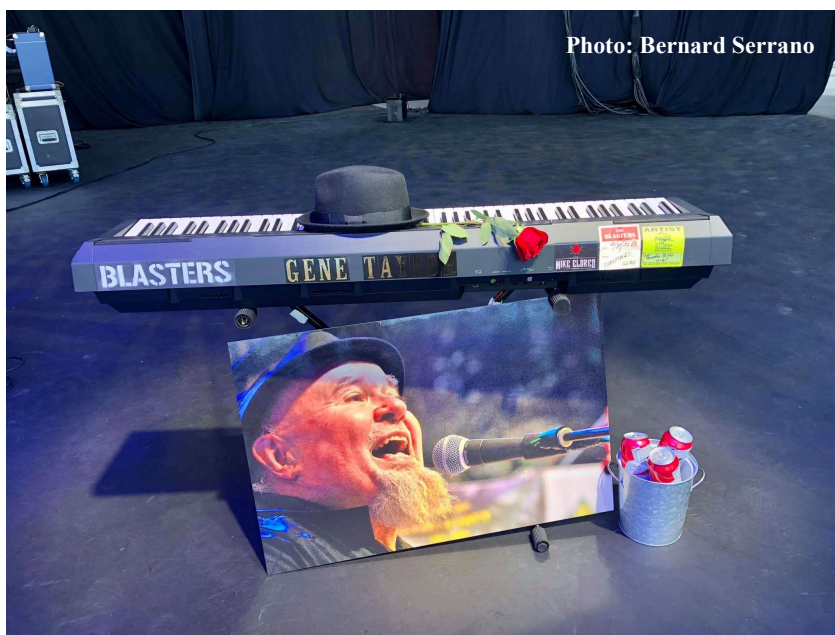




Photo: Bernard Serrano



Photo: Bernard Serrano

do these kind of things. So it was kind of strange” But they brought the party out onto the stage. The Blasters opened the show and were joined by Los Lobos sax player and former Blaster Steve Berlin. Steve played on I’M SHAKIN and SO LONG BABY GOODBYE.



Photo: Bernard Serrano



Photo: Bernard Serrano

Blasters piano player Gene Taylor’s spirit was with the Blasters family on the Blasters’ traditional stage left. His piano was there with a photo of him, his fedora and his traditional bucket of Budweiser. The Blasters played a 11-song set as Dave Alvin watched from the sidelines. Dave: “They played great and Phil was singing his ass off. I wasn’t expecting his voice to be as great as it was.”



Photo: Lisa Gilman

Los Lobos was next, bringing Dave Alvin out for a few songs. Los Lobos' played selections from their newest album, Native Sons, a tribute to L.A. songwriters that has been nominated for a Grammy for best americana album.

One of those songs is The Blasters' FLATTOP JOINT. Phil and Dave were invited out on stage to play on it. Lobos' guitarist Cesar Rosas announced to the audience: "If it wasn't for these two gentlemen, we probably wouldn't be here right now." After the song it was nice to see the once "battling brothers" walk off the stage arm in arm.



Photo: JR Lozano

Dave Alvin returned later in the set on a cover of Little Bob & The Lollipops' I GOT LOADED and then the show-ending song LA BAMBA. Dave: "I GOT LOADED was a song by a New Orleans artist that Phil wanted to do in the Blasters around the time of Non Fiction. We learned it and Phil sang the hell out of it but for some reason I was dead set against it. I don't know why because it was really stupid of me [ laughs ]. I called Phil a few

days after I played it with Lobos and told Phil "There's a lot of things we argued about. And I was wrong sometimes. This was one of them [ laughs ]. You were right." It's such a great live song.

It's now become a staple in the Lobos live set. X finished the night playing their high-energy set, leaving the audience very satisfied. The only thing missing to complete the family reunion would be to have had Dave Alvin join them on stage for a song from the era when he was a member of X. Perhaps FOURTH OF JULY, of which the first version was recorded for X's See How We Are album in 1986. — ~~AM~~ AM

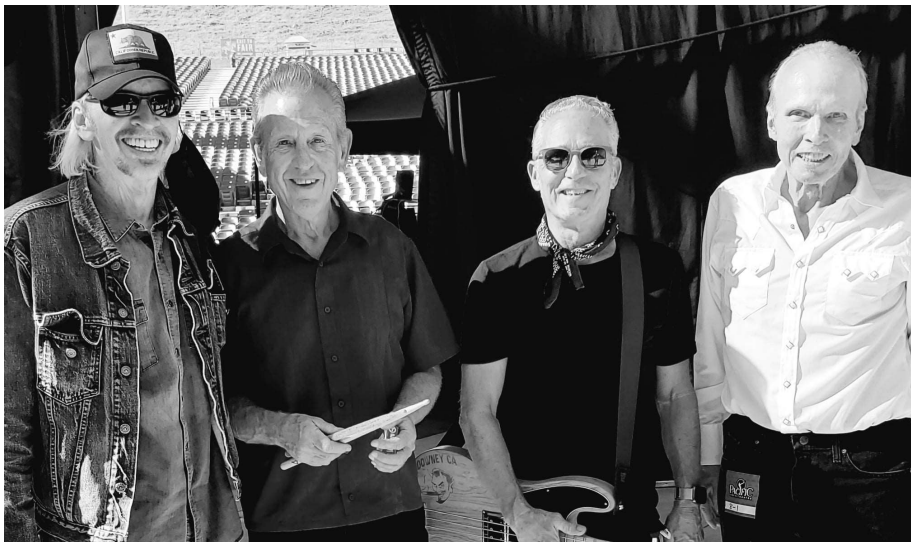
**Dave Alvin's Facebook post:** "This photo of the original four Blasters was taken backstage at last Sunday evening's gathering of the wild, old L.A. music scene tribes featuring The Blasters, Los Lobos and X.

I have to admit that I got a bit emotional watching The Blasters set (especially when ex-Blaster/current Lobo, Steve Berlin joined them for a few songs). Hearing my hometown big brothers - Bill Bateman, John Bazz and Phil Alvin - along with their excellent guitarist Keith Wyatt - rocking the blues and performing so many of the songs I wrote for the group, brought back a massive amount of tender, happy, bittersweet memories: from our earliest days of playing a West Long Beach biker bar for free beer every Wednesday night in the spring of 1979, to all the sweaty, transcendental shows we played across the US/Canada/Europe in the early 80s to the sad, disastrous October of '85 gig in Montreal where the late Gene Taylor and I officially left the band. Through all those intense times, through the following decades, occasional reunion shows and heartbreaking deaths that followed, one thing remains the same...I love these guys more than I can ever say. That bond can never break.

My mood was greatly lightened during the Los Lobos set, when the Lobos brought Phil and I onstage to perform FLATTOP JOINT with them. 'Flattop' is the second song I ever wrote for The Blasters and Los Lobos recorded a sublime version of it on their new album, Native Sons. Later in their set, the Lobos generously invited me to join them again to bash on guitar for several songs. As I was jamming with Lobos and feeling the redemptive power of the band, I started to remember how music is timeless. Music scenes, musicians, family, friends, and lovers may come and go but the music is immortal, even some of the songs played by the 3 bands Sunday night.

All in all, it was an evening full of love, ghosts, laughs, love, memories, smiles, a few tears, love, new visions, loud guitars and even more love. I sincerely wish you all could've been there."

—Dave Alvin



# The X Factor: When Dave Alvin left the Blasters

By Tom Wilk

Dave Alvin's tenure in X was brief, lasting a little more than a year and serving as a transition between his departure from the Blasters in October, 1985, and the launching of his solo career in 1987. He described the change in direction in an interview with *Musician* magazine in June, 1987. "Going from the Blasters to X was like going from Count Basie to Ornette Coleman," he said.



See How We Are, released in June 1987, would be Dave's sole studio album as a member of X. Highlights include the title track and the first released version of his FOURTH OF JULY with John Doe on lead vocals. The album was recorded in the winter of 1987 and Dave gave his notice and left X after the album was completed. Dave's version of FOURTH OF JULY would be released in June in Great Britain on his first solo album Every Night About This Time and in August in the U.S. on the retitled Romeo's Escape album and would become a staple of his solo shows for more than 30 years.

What did X sound like in concert with Dave on lead guitar? Audio and video of two concerts offer a clue. YouTube features videos of three songs X played at the second Farm Aid concert on Independence Day 1986 at Manor Downs, a racetrack near Austin, Texas. The band, which also featured Tony Gilkyson on guitar, performed NEW WORLD, SURPRISE SURPRISE and fittingly, FOURTH OF JULY. Dave was in good spirits before the large crowd, freely moving about the stage and briefly joining Exene Cervenka for backing vocals on the chorus of his song.

While Dave had toured and recorded with Doe, Cervenka, and X drummer D.J. Bonebrake in the Knitters, playing with X was something else entirely. Dave elaborated on the challenges he faced in the liner notes for The Best: Make The Music Go Bang, a

2-CD anthology of X music released in 2004.

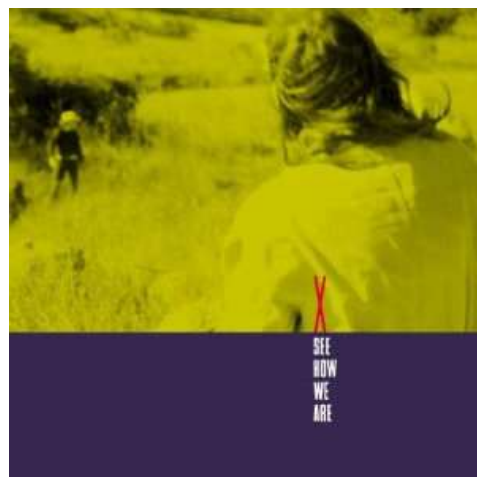
"I was invited to join X when Billy Zoom left the band in 1985, and playing with them was an amazing learning experience because their music is complicated. When I joined, I had to learn 32 songs in two weeks," he recalled. "I'm not sure how the parts came together when the songs were created, but when I sat down with the records and a guitar and started trying to learn them, I was stunned by how complicated Billy's parts were. During the time I was in X, it became like a loud version of The Knitters – the arrangements became looser – and it wasn't until Tony Gilkyson joined the band that the music became structured again."

After Farm Aid, X toured the U.S. in the summer of 1986. A concert at The Paradise in Boston on July 31 was broadcast live on WBCN-FM. In 2015, the show would receive an unauthorized release under the title of "The New World Live" as a double-CD on Keyhole Records, a Cyprus-based label.

The band was still finding its feet on the road, but felt at home in the intimate venue. "If we make a few mistakes, don't hold it against us," Doe advises the audience after the song SUGARLIGHT. The sound levels vary on the recording and the song TRUE LOVE cuts in, but the band delivers intense performances on such X staples as LOS ANGELES and BURNIN' HOUSE OF LOVE during the first half of the album.

In addition, the group road tests six songs that would appear on the See How We Are album. The crowd gives a positive response to FOURTH OF JULY and ANYONE CAN FILL YOUR SHOES.

The second half of the show is a looser affair as the band runs through energetic versions of songs associated with Jerry Lee Lewis (BREATHLESS) and the Troggs (WILD THING). The latter features Dave quoting TWIST AND



SHOUT on guitar.

EVIL DOLL includes a nod to the Blasters as the song segues into LONG WHITE CADILLAC with Doe singing a couple of verses. For the encore, the band digs into the Knitters' songbook for a frenetic reading of THE CALL OF THE WRECKING BALL and an Exene-led version of Bob Dylan's POSITVELY 4<sup>TH</sup> STREET, which would be the non-album B-side of the FOURTH OF JULY single in 1987.

Dave enjoyed his time with X, but ultimately felt the need to strike out on his own as a solo artist and do his own songs. "John (Doe) and Exene (Cervenka) are X, they developed the band and they write most of the songs," he told Len Righi of The Morning Call newspaper of Allentown, Pa., in September 1987. "And the songs I wrote don't fit into the X format. I only had one song on the last X album," he pointed out.

"I realized the absurdity of the situation when I heard this band (The Blasters) doing all my songs. What I missed most about The Blasters was the songs. I thought, 'God I wrote all these songs and I don't get to play them anymore!' So that was the situation: I missed having control of the records, but playing with X was great." — ~~AM~~



## The CCR/Blasters Connection by Tom Wilk

When the Blasters emerged on the national music scene in the early 1980s, the group drew comparisons to Creedence Clearwater Revival. Both bands shared a common background. They were based in California (CCR in the Bay Area and the Blasters in Los Angeles), featured a lineup with two brothers (John and Tom Fogerty in CCR and Phil and Dave Alvin in the Blasters) and delivered a roots-rock sound that mixed early rock 'n' roll, blues, country, and rhythm and blues. Music writers took note of the traditions the bands shared.

In his review of the Non Fiction album by the Blasters in the Philadelphia Daily News on June 3, 1983, Rich Aregood wrote: "Sometimes it sounds as if the rock apotheosis has happened – that Creedence Clearwater Revival's John Fogerty has handed over his spirit to a new band. This is the first band since Creedence with its combination of rocking spirit and solid, basic lyrics."

After leaving the Blasters, Dave Alvin would pay tribute to John Fogerty with his version of DON'T LOOK NOW (IT AIN'T YOU OR ME) on his 2006 album West of the West. Originally released on Creedence's 1969 album Willy and the Poor Boys with a modified rockabilly beat, Dave recasts the song as a Chicago blues to put his own stamp on it.

Robert Christgau wrote that the song "manages to encapsulate the class system in two minutes eight seconds." Dave would explore similar themes in such songs as BOOMTOWN and OUT OF CONTROL.

John Fogerty and Dave would end up sharing up a concert stage on Feb. 24, 1990 in Los Angeles at a Roy Orbison tribute that benefited the homeless. Fogerty performed a blistering, joyous rendition of Orbison's OOBY DOOBY with Dave on guitar in a band that included Kenny Aronoff on drums and Don Was on bass. The performance can be watched on YouTube and Dave can be seen at several points in the video.

Dave reflected on the event in a 1991 interview with Thom Jurek for the Metro Times newspaper in Detroit. "I was playing at the Roy Orbison tribute that Don Was put together," Dave recalled. "John Fogerty was going to sing OOBY DOOBY and I was going to back him up. Well, I got chills up and down my spine when the guy came up to me and said, 'It really means a lot to me that you're backing me up, Dave, because you know what this music really means.' I think so. I hope so." — ~~AM~~

# Dave Alvin Remembers Friends Who Have Passed On

(reprinted from Dave Alvin's facebook page)

## **David Olney [ March 23, 1948 - January 18, 2020 ]**

Singer/songwriter David Olney died at 71 of a heart attack Jan. 18 while performing onstage in Santa Rosa, Florida. Dave Alvin: "I left my show at McCabe's tonight, turned on my phone and saw the shocking news that the magnificent songwriter David Olney had passed away. David was a songwriter's songwriter. A true master poet who, despite having his songs covered by a who's who of contemporary folk music, he never got the credit and accolades he so justly deserved. David was on two of my Roots On The Rails train tours and we got inebriated together a couple of times to the point of embarrassment but we never did sit down and write a song with each other. I deeply regret that. The world is a much less wise, funny, poetic and interesting place now that he's gone."

## **Little Richard [ December 5, 1932 - May 9, 2020 ]**

I woke to the very sad news of Little Richard's passing. I always felt that he was immortal and now...he truly is. Some of his more boastful and outlandish statements, about his importance and impact on rock and roll and world culture, may have been exaggerated BUT not by much. Take a look on YouTube for a short clip of Richard from 1972 featuring Lee Allen, my beloved life-long mentor/teacher/friend and fellow Blaster, who played the sax solos on most of Richard's 1950s hits. I've always remembered how he opened his eulogy to Lee at Lee's funeral, "Lee Allen was a fine, beautiful and sexy man. In fact, Lee was so fine, beautiful and sexy that he was almost as fine, beautiful and sexy as me!" Rock In Peace, Mr. Penniman and thank you for everything.

## **Bob Biggs [1946 - October 17, 2020 ] Founder of Slash Records**

I always liked him. Even when I didn't, you couldn't help but to like the guy. He was a very charming and visionary rascal. He was a great painter/artist, a high concept mover and shaker as well as a smooth, slightly shady jive talker with a brilliant and insightful ear for musicians/bands/trends on his label, Slash Records. I have to add that he gave us Blasters a chance when no other label would and even though we hadn't spoken in decades, I'm very sad that he's not in this world anymore.

But when he was wrong, he could be hilariously wrong. My favorite memory of what a seriously wrong goofball he could be was back when The Blasters were working on our album, Non Fiction, in 1982 or so. He was hanging out every night with us in the recording studio, dragging along various art world and money world folks into our Blaster world, even though we had no idea who they were or any interest in most of them.

Late one night, he cornered me in the studio and whispered to me, "Let's step outside. I've got a great idea for you guys to consider. The two of us stepped out of the studio and walked silently for a minute down a dark stretch of Sunset Blvd before he turned to me and said, "I finally figured out what you guys need to add to the band to be really f\*\*\*ing huge! I mean really blow everyone else away BIG, man!" I stopped walking and asked, "Wow. Okay. What's your idea?" "Just hear me out, man. It's so obvious to me that I'm shocked I never thought of it before."

"So, what's your idea?" He looked up and down the empty sidewalk as if making sure no one could hear him and then proudly declared, "Trombones! You guys need to add trombones! Think of it! The Blasters and trombones!!! No one has trombones these days. You already have the saxes, so all you need is trombones! We'll be huge, man! Everybody gets rich on this idea!" I nodded my head, smiled and said I'd bring it up to my brother and the other Blasters. And, of course, I never did. Maybe I should have. Rest In Peace, Bob Biggs.

## **Billy Joe Shaver [ August 16, 1939 - October 28, 2020 ]**

The first time I met Billy Joe, was in 1987 when he literally kicked in the dressing room door of the Nashville club, The Exit Inn, after I had just played a gig there. I was inside with the head of CBS Nashville [ the label both Billy Joe and I were signed with at the time ] who was gently informing me that he was ending my tour support because my band, The Allnighters, was too loud and played too much blues and not enough country.

"Goddamn it!" Billy Joe drunkenly shouted as he kicked in the door. "That's the best damn music I've heard in this town for years! You boys gotta be from Texas." "No. We're from California," I said. "California, huh? Just like Merle Haggard." Billy Joe said. "Yes sir, just like Merle. You know Roy from CBS, don't you? He just told me that he's taking away my tour support." I said: "Well, f\*\*k him. He don't know shit. He just dropped me from his goddamn label last week. " Then Billy Joe paused and looked at the man from CBS Nashville. "How you doing otherwise, Roy. Good to see you, you old f\*\*king bas-

tard." Due to the bad news from CBS Nashville, I was extremely depressed that night and I've always treasured that memory of Billy Joe barging in to rescue me from my gloom. Over the following years, he and I had several crazy, sweet and memorable experiences together. He was one of the greatest songwriters, not only in country music or Texas music but in all of American music. He was also a complicated, wild, funny, deep and sensitive man. I will miss him.

### **Gerald Locklin [ February 17, 1941 – January 17, 2021 ]**

I can't tell you how much I hate to write this. My old poetry/literature professor/drinking comrade Gerald Locklin has passed away from Covid-19. A million years ago when I was a very young and semi-literate wanna-be poet, Locklin became my writing mentor and a wild, dear friend. His influence on me, both personally and on my poetry as well as my songwriting, cannot be overstated. Locklin, who was one of the most published poets in the world of the small presses, taught me (among many of his wise lessons) the important lesson that poetry didn't have to be written in overly obscure, highly academic language. It could be written with words and images understood by people who didn't normally read or enjoy poetry. Locklin, who was a close friend of Charles Bukowski, exposed me to great, if under-appreciated, poets like Edward Field, Ron Koertge and Fred Voss as well as patiently teaching me the pleasures of reading masters like Shakespeare, John Donne, Flannery O'Connor and Hemingway.

We also shared some memorable, out-of-control, drunken nights hitting all the great old bars that existed in Long Beach back in the '70s. I won't share any stories here of those wild evenings, but I will say that when Locklin quit drinking not long afterwards, I was relieved and happy for him. His poetry became more reflective and lyrical. He seemed more at peace with our absurd, imperfect yet beautiful world as he continued teaching through the following decades at Long Beach State University, exposing young (and old) students to the magnificent powers and joys of the written word.

I have a photo from a few years back on the night I saw Gerry for the last time. It was after he and I had done a reading at one of Susan Hayden's beloved Library Girl evenings in Santa Monica. I remember chasing after his car that night because I wanted to thank him one more time for everything he had taught me about life and literature, but I couldn't catch up to him. I guess I'll always be chasing after him. Thank you for everything, Gerry.

### **Ray Campi [ April 20, 1934 – March 11, 2021 ]**

Very sad to hear of the death of the "Rockabilly Rebel," Ray Campi. The Blasters and I owe Ray Campi an awful lot for all his help in our very early days. In 1979/80, he spread the word about us among the small but passionate rockabilly/roots crowd, then Ray got us our first gig at the Whiskey Au Go Go and a month later took us out as his opening act to the San Francisco Bay area on our first tour away from Southern California. A few years later, we'd bring Ray out to join us onstage when we were headlining joints like The Palace, The Whiskey and The Starwood. My favorite time was when we were playing the Club 88 and Phil suddenly got sick on stage. Phil ran offstage leaving the rest of us Blasters trying to figure out what to do. I looked around at the audience and saw Ray standing at the bar, so I called him up. Ray ran to the stage, grabbed Phil's guitar and we did a whole set as Ray's back-up band. I loved it. Of course, the first song we did was Ray's 1957 rockabilly classic CATERPILLAR. I'll miss seeing, talking and playing with you, Ray, but I know you'll be rocking some sweaty, smokey, flat top joint somewhere on the other side."

### **Don Hefington [ December 20, 1950 – March 24, 2021 ]**

I don't know what to say. Don Hefington has passed away. Goddamn I'm gonna miss him. To say Don was a great drummer/musician just doesn't cut it. I've known Don for forty years and he was always (and I stress always) an inspiration to me. Don was always the coolest guy in the room. He had been a teenage jazz prodigy who saw John Coltrane playing on West Adams as well as hanging out at the Ash Grove soaking in the blues. A few years later, Don worked as the house drummer at Art Laboe's Oldies-But-Goodies club on Sunset, backing up every doo-wop group, one-hit wonder and rock and roll legend that stepped on its stage. Somewhere along the line he also became a rock-solid country drummer that could swing a country shuffle with the best Nashville had to offer.

He played/recorded/toured with Dylan (that's Don on Dylan's surreal opus Brownsville Girl), Emmylou Harris, Lone Justice, Chuck E. Weiss, Buddy Miller, Peter Case, Victoria Williams, Lucinda Williams, Van Dyke Parks, Rosie Flores, Ronee Blakley, Amy Allison and the list goes on and on. He also played drums on most of my solo records from Ashgrove onwards through Eleven Eleven to parts of my albums with my brother Phil, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and up to my recent From An Old Guitar release (that's Don laying down the groovin' back-beat on my version of HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED, showing why Dylan once said that Don was his favorite blues drummer).

But Don was also a songwriter/poet who wrote amazing, quirky songs that defy easy descriptions. He was always pushing ahead artistically/philosophically, whether it was producing albums or searching for the right rhythms and always reaching for something that no one had played before. Playing with Don was always exciting, educational and a flat-out gas. With his all-knowing hipster smile, he gently pushed you into performances that you didn't know you had in you.

I have so many warm, inspirational, hilarious memories of recording various albums/songs/goof-offs with Don through the years, but the Ashgrove sessions are perhaps the closest to my heart. All four of us were kids that hung out/grew up at the Ash Grove and learned so much about music/life there. Because of that fact, for the Ashgrove sessions, I called this quartet, The All-Star Ash Grove Kids Blues Orchestra. I still don't know what to say except that I will be forever grateful to have known, made music with, laughed with and learned from Don Heffington. Goddamn, I'm gonna miss him.

**Gerald Haslam [ March 18, 1937 - April 27, 2021 ]** - I Haven't been on Facebook much for a couple of weeks. It's been a tough year of personal losses and I'd gotten tired of posting mostly about the deaths of friends and mentors but now another hero/friend has passed, the perceptive and wise Bard of Bakersfield, Gerald Haslam. If you're interested in his writings about "The Other California", check out his fine book of short stories, That Constant Coyote. Gerald was a high school running buddy/lifelong pal with young Merle Haggard, a beloved writing teacher, steadfast promoter of young or neglected writers and a social observer/critic with an empathetic heart as big as the San Joaquin Valley.

**James Harman [ June 8, 1946 - May 25, 2021 ]** - Deeply sad to learn that my and Phil's old friend, James Harman, has passed away. James was a brilliant blues harmonica virtuoso who could also be a hilariously entertaining yarn spinner, a fast-talking old-school hustler, a tough yet supportive band leader/musical teacher and a generous friend. I mean a seriously generous friend. James bought me my first electric guitar [ my 1964 Fender Mustang that I played in the early years of The Blasters ]. He also let me borrow his white 1961 Fender Strat [ that he swore once belonged to blues giant Magic Sam - I have my doubts about that Harman tall tale ] for The Blasters' first recording sessions for Rollin' Rock Records back in 1979.

When I get around to banging out a book of experiences, memories and embarrassments, there'll definitely be some wild stories in it involving the young James Harman with the younger Alvin brothers back in our bad old days. Until then, I'll just say, Goodbye, old friend. Thank you for the music, laughs, lessons and, especially, the guitar.

**Nanci Griffith [ July 6, 1953 - August 13, 2021 ]** - Just heard Nanci Griffith has moved on to whatever awaits us all on the other side. Like many of you, I'm in shock and feel terribly sad. She was a very smart songwriter, a heartbreaking singer, a sweet friend and a deeply complex artist on par with the best. Nanci was also a passionate fighter for working folks and innocent victims of landmines/war crimes around the world. Nanci and I were close for a little while and shared some intense, painful experiences traveling together in Cambodia. In 2001, feeling a touch wild and overconfident, she and I attempted climbing to the top of the highest temple spire at Angkor Wat during a rainstorm. I made it, but Nanci fell. Thankfully, besides some gigantic bruises, she wasn't seriously injured, but I remember reaching my hand down to her just before she fell and how painfully powerless I felt at that moment watching her slip down the spire. I feel exactly the same way now. Rest In Peace, Nanci. See you up on the spire.

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