

ISSUE #88

# American Music

## The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

OCT. 2020

## Dave Alvin's new CD 'From an Old Guitar: Rare & Unreleased' due 11/20

**Latest News:** Rick Shea is releasing Love & Desperation, a new studio album with 12 songs on Tres Pescadores Records on Oct. 23. He describes the album as "a product of these times we're living in" as it was recorded before and during the pandemic. Musicians on the album include Skip Edwards, David Jackson, and Shawn Nourse. Song titles include JUANITA, A TENDERHEARTED LOVE, BLUES STOP KNOCKIN' AT MY DOOR and THE WORLD'S GONE CRAZY. |||||

Pay Up, Cheaters! The Story of the Beat Farmers, is a documentary directed by Jamie Dawson which can be viewed on YouTube. It is the story of the Southern California band, The Beat Farmers. The film features interviews with Dave Alvin, Steve Berlin, Dwight Yoakam, Mojo Nixon, and Peter Case. Dave toured with Country Dick Montana, the lead singer of the Beat Farmers, as the Pleasure Barons in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The band released the Live in Las Vegas album on HighTone in 1993. |||||

The Center of Nowhere: The Spirit and Sounds of Springfield, Missouri documentary film is now available to stream and purchase on Amazon, Amazon UK, Vimeo, and on demand on the cable networks Comcast, Charter/Spectrum and Cox. A DVD release is planned for around Dec. 1 and will include more than 70 minutes of bonus footage and detailed liner notes. (((Latest News cont. on page 2 )))

### The Blasters Newsletter is now on Facebook

American Music: The Blasters/ Dave Alvin Newsletter launched a page on the social media platform Facebook on April 11, 2020. The page is a place for fans to post things and converse about the Blasters/Dave Alvin and their related musicians. More importantly, it's a place to find the latest Blasters newsletter release and back issues in free downloadable PDF files. Since the group page was created, over 1100 members have signed on and the membership is still growing. This group is strictly moderated by the Blasters Newsletter team. There is no selling of merchandise, no ads, and no sharing of your personal information. It's all for the love of our American Music. Check it out.

*In This Issue: Dave Alvin's 'From an Old Guitar' CD, The Blasters and band updates, and behind the scenes of Dave Alvin's L.A. Times 2000 cover story.*

((Latest News cont. from page 1 ))) The film, written by Dave Hoekstra and directed by Tom Vlodok features interviews with Dave Alvin, Bobby Lloyd Hicks, Joe Terry, Syd Straw, and Merle Haggard. For more information, visit [Thecenterofnowhere.com](http://Thecenterofnowhere.com). |||||

Dave Alvin plays guitar on a version of Bob Dylan's HURRICANE that will be featured on the next album by singer/actress Ronee Blakley. Speaking of Dave with writer Chris Willman in 2019, she said, "I just have a growing friendship with (him) that is not old but feels old." |||||

The May 15, 2020 episode of The Burning Ambulance podcast, features an interview with Dave Alvin. Phil Freeman talks to Dave about The Blasters, The Flesh Eaters, and his new band The Third Mind. He also talks about Bob Dylan, Dick Dale, Sun Records, and much, much more. |||||

Dave Alvin produced an album for singer/songwriter/guitarist Carolyn Wonderland in Austin TX in January. Guests on the as yet untitled album, include Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Cindy Cashdollar and Marcia Ball. Dave plays rhythm guitar on half the tracks. The last song is LOSER, which Dave recorded for the first time on his West of the West 2006 album. For the version on Carolyn's album Dave recalls: "I told her we have to do it Third Mind style - We just go for it live in only a few takes. It came out great and she sang the hell out of it. Carolyn and her band can really play that way. It's a big guitar-a-rama." |||||

Dave Alvin plays on the song THREE ALLEY CATS on Robert Gordon's new album Rockabilly For Life on Cleopatra records. ||||| — Am

## The Third Mind update by Dave Alvin

This was supposed to be the year of the Third Mind. We had a tour scheduled for April / May then we moved it to August and it got cancelled. We have dates held now in May 2021, I hope that's gonna happen.

I think we will have something new recorded to have out for the time when we tour. But were trying to figure that out cause now the members live in New York, Portland OR and California. So scheduling is really difficult. I'd like to see Jesse Sykes more involved. I really want her vocal to be a focal point of this band.



# What's Up with The Blasters?

By Keith Wyatt

Things have been very, very quiet in Blaster-land this year, a sharp contrast with 2019. After the West Coast tour last August, Phil needed some time off to stabilize his health so we canceled all remaining shows through early 2020. Sure enough, just as plans were under way to get back into action this summer, Covid hit. Due to all of the obvious medical concerns along with the sudden and complete shutdown of the music business, we had to put it all on hold and wait it out like everybody else.

A couple of times over the summer Johnny sent out feelers about getting together to play, but it wasn't until mid-September that we finally met up, properly masked and socially-distanced, at our old friend Don Lamkin's house in Downey. The gear was still set up right where we had left it, and after more than six months without playing a note Bill kicked off LONG WHITE CADILLAC. Sure enough, it was like riding the proverbial bicycle - a little wobbly at first, but as the reflexes kicked in it began to sound just like the Blasters. Earlier this year Phil had a tough time making it through the set without taking a break, but this time we ran the whole thing down non-stop, from LONG WHITE to ONE BAD STUD, and there was still gas left in the tank. Going forward we're taking it week-by-week, but at least we know that there's still a "there" there if and when the world gets back on its axis.

Thanks to all of the folks who continue to express their concern and offer



their support on Facebook and elsewhere. This will undoubtedly go down as the overall weirdest and most stressful year most of us have ever experienced, but the current upheaval is also an opportunity for renewal if we take the steps to harness it. Mask up, vote, and we'll see you all again in brighter times.



# Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore Update

Dave Alvin: "Jimmie is doing great through all of this. He and his wife have a nice house up in the Hill Country of Texas with 3 or 4 acres and a swimming pool. Originally I talked about spending some time in Austin to work on music with him but then Covid hit. We want to do another record together but there's nothing concrete. We will be playing together in June 2021 at the Kate Wolf Festival with the Guilty Ones."



## Dave Alvin releases music online at Bandcamp.com

*Dave Alvin has been releasing new content via Bandcamp (Bandcamp.com) which is an online music company.*



*You can purchase music digitally which includes unlimited streaming via the free Bandcamp app, high-quality downloads in MP3, FLAC and more.*

Dave: "For years I've been trying to put out digital downloads and unreleased songs. The record company was all for it, and we did it for a while through Yep Roc Records website, but my legal advisors always pushed me to wait for the right time."

*Editors Note: In American Music #62 June 2010 it was reported that Yep Roc Records was releasing a collection called Dave Alvin – Downey Boy: A Decade of rare and Unreleased 2000-2010. It was never released.*

The Bandcamp site has become very popular, so as an experiment they released Live at Yep Roc 15: Dave Alvin on May 1, 2020. This was a live show from October 11, 2012 at The Cat's Cradle in Carrboro NC. It was a Yep Roc Records 15th Anniversary festival called YR15. Dave Alvin's performance is acoustic with



## LIVE AT YEP ROC 15



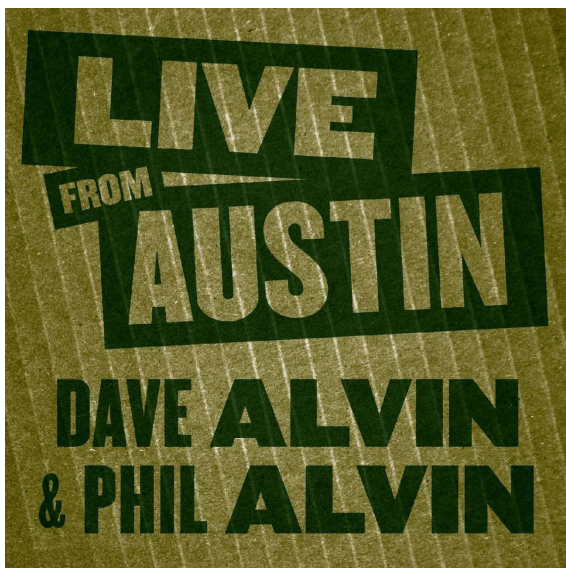
## DAVE ALVIN

1. Harlan County Line - 5:16
2. Johnny Ace is Dead (w/ Christy McWilson) - 5:13
3. Dry River (w/ Christy McWilson) - 4:16
4. Who's Been Here? (w/ Christy McWilson and John Teer) 5:16
5. Fourth of July (w/ Christy McWilson & John Teer) - 5:12
6. California Sun (w/ Los Straitjackets & Christy McWilson) - 4:35
7. Marie, Marie (w/ Los Straitjackets & Christy McWilson) - 4:24

Christy McWilson, John Teer from Chatham County Line and Los Straitjackets on two songs. Dave: "When we released that, we were surprised it really sold well. It has mistakes all over it, but it was a fun show. It actually hit #1 on the blues charts. So with that success, I thought the time is right to release a collection of my unreleased songs."

On July 3, 2020 Dave released a 13-song collection of recordings called From an Old Guitar: Rare and Unreleased Recordings. The tracks include songs that have been only available as a download on Yep Roc Records website, songs from tribute albums to artists, and some previously unreleased tracks. The album was available for a limited time on Bandcamp, and did very well. Yep Roc records decided to take it down, add 3 bonus tracks and relaunch it on November 20, 2020 for release digitally on Bandcamp, and on CD and LP through Yep Roc Records. -

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Another Bandcamp release was:

### Dave and Phil Alvin: Live From Austin

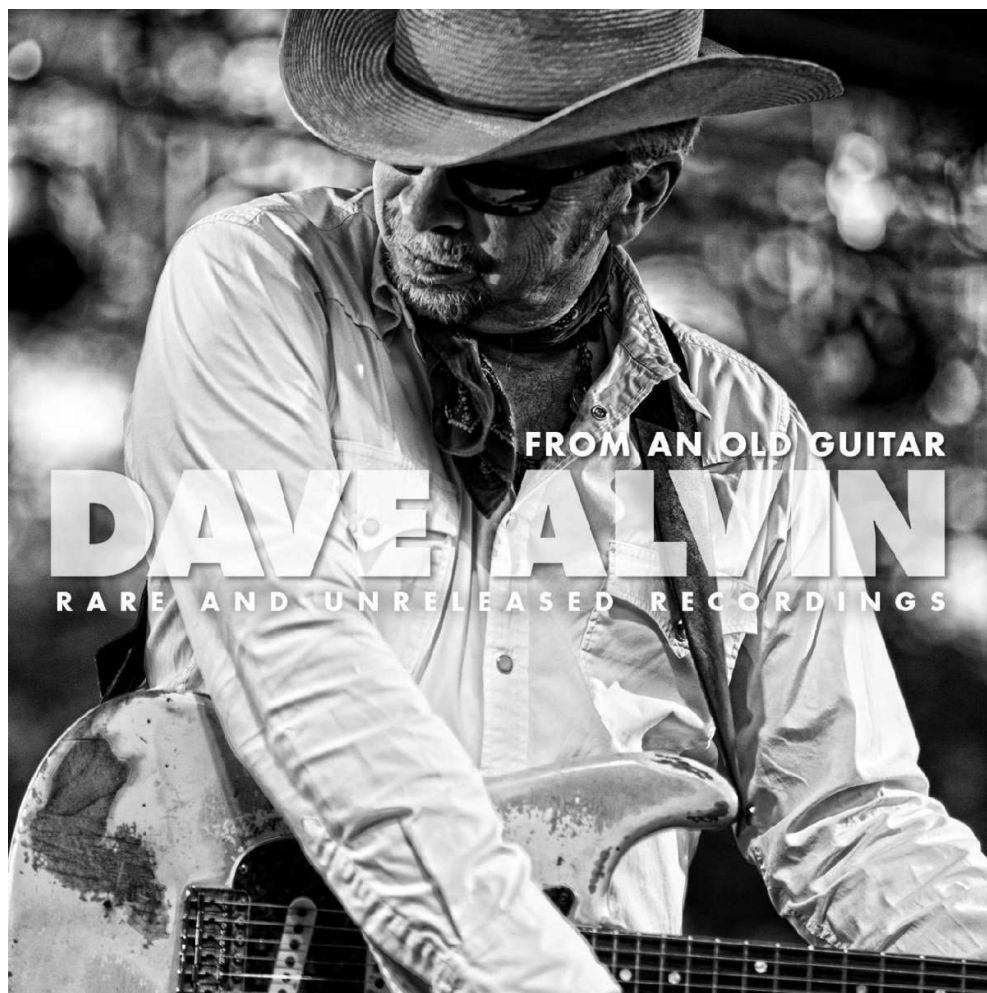
This is a live set of 4 tracks from 2014 at the SXSW festival. *The Songs: 1. All By Myself, 2. Key To The Highway, 3. How You Want It Done, 4. Saturday Night Rub.* Dave: "It's very confusing – but that went out without our permission. If I had some input, I would have added tracks from the Continental Club in Austin which we played at the same weekend. That was a great show."

# Dave Alvin From an Old Guitar: Rare and Unreleased Recordings

On November 20, 2020 Dave Alvin releases From An Old Guitar: Rare and Unreleased Recordings on Yep Roc Records. This 16-song collection features studio performances that Dave recorded over the years for his own albums, for tribute albums, or just for fun. Dave says: “The majority were recorded for no other reason at all than the sheer kicks of going into a recording studio to make some joyous noise with musicians and singers that I love and admire.”

The songs range from some originals to interpretations of compositions by dear friends like Peter Case, Chris Smither and the late Bill Morrissey, to tunes written by heroes like Willie Dixon, Bob Dylan, Lil Hardin Armstrong, Earl Hooker, Bo Carter, Doug Sahm,

and Marty Robbins. There are contributions from dearly departed comrades like Chris Gaffney, Amy Farris and Bobby Lloyd Hicks as well as from old Blasters pals like Gene Taylor and John Bazz along with various members of The Guilty Men/Women/Ones, plus help from brilliant accompanists like Greg Leisz, Cindy Cashdollar, Bob Glaub, Don Heffington, Danny Ott, Skip Edwards, Rick Shea, Chris Miller, Wyman Reese, Dale Spalding, David J. Carpenter, Christy McWilson and Cindy Wasserman.



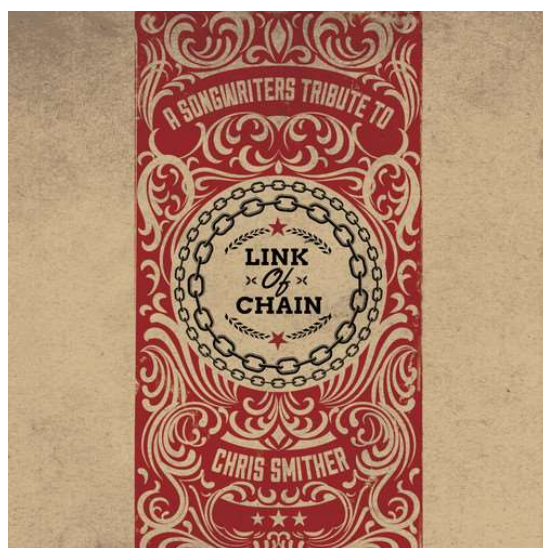


Over the years my friend Craig Parker Adams had this great studio called Winslow Court in which he allowed me to come in anytime and record a song or two as well as my whole albums (Ashgrove, West of the West, Eleven Eleven, Downey To Lubbock, and the two Dave & Phil Alvin albums.). He made it very easy to invite fellow musicians down to cut a song just for the fun of it. I've gathered a lot of great tracks from there and with his recent loss of his lease on the space his studio was in, the time was right to release a collection of those songs from 2003-2016.

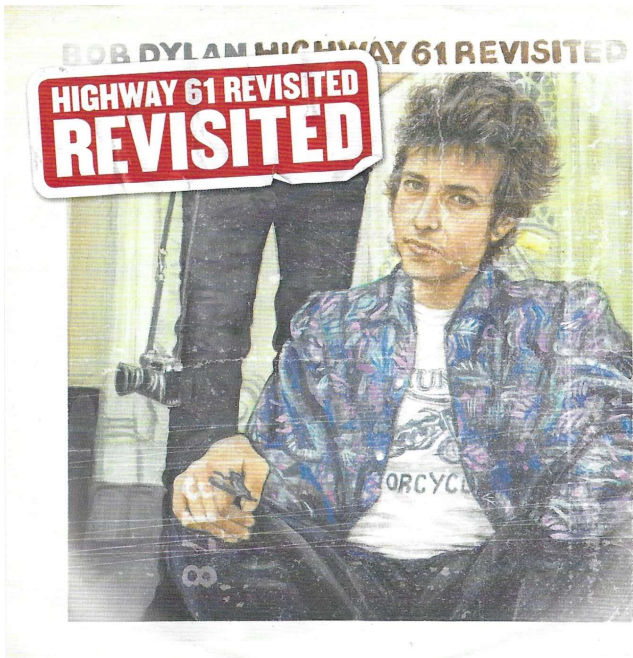
**Dave Alvin: "I consider myself extremely lucky to have had such a stellar collection of musicians to make some noise with and to say that I'm proud of the performances on this release would be a gigantic understatement," adds Alvin. "And, yeah, of course I played beat up, old guitars on all the songs. I sincerely hope you enjoy these songs (and the musicians/singers bringing them to life). These recordings may be rare, unreleased or little heard but I'm very proud of them and they hold a very special, warm place in my heart. Just like my old guitars."**

## The Songs

1. **LINK OF CHAIN** (from Link of Chain: A Chris Smither Tribute, 2014) - They asked me to do that song. Danny Ott from Chris Gaffney's band played guitar and David Carpenter from Dead Rock West played bass. Don Heffington is on the drums. Smither told me I topped his version, so that was nice to hear. Chris does his one-man band down so perfectly so we never played the song together, even though we sat on stage together in the Monsters of Folk tour.



2. **HIGHWAY 61 REVISTED** (from Uncut Magazine Bonus CD, 2005) - Uncut asked me to do the title track for a tribute to the Dylan album Highway 61 Re-

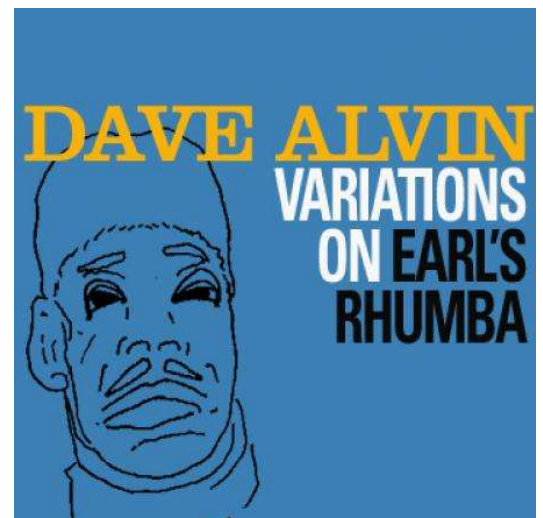


visited. Other artists would cover each track from the album. The CD was included with the magazine release. It's difficult to cover a song Dylan did so great but I thought mine was a pretty good version. For this release I thought about including an extended jam that we did at the end of the track. That was me, Greg Leisz, Greg Boaz and Don Hefington. We just keep going on the original recording. I decided not to include it because it would have involved going back to the masters and remixing it.

*In the Blasters Newsletter #54 September 2007* – Dave Alvin talked about this recording: “Over the years I've crossed paths a few times with perhaps our greatest living songwriter, Bob Dylan. I've even had the great fortune to play music with Dylan a couple of times. I've always felt that he picked up where Woody Guthrie, Robert Johnson, Hank Williams, and Jack Kerouac left off and moved American Music and culture into the future. He's still doing that. When Uncut Magazine asked me to record HIGHWAY 61 for their Bob Dylan tribute CD insert, I was scared to death...”

**3. VARIATIONS ON EARL HOOKER'S GUITAR RUMBA** (released only on Yep Roc's web store, 2010) This was a day when everyone was free – Chris Gaffney, Chris Miller and Joe Terry. Dale Spalding was a childhood hero of mine who just happened to call and say he was in town, so I invited him to the studio to play harmonica.

*In the Blasters Newsletter #61 January 2010* -- Dave Alvin talked about the influence: “Variations on Earl's Rumba” is The Guilty Men's tribute to one of our favorite guitarists, Earl Hooker. He's a legend among blues musicians, for peerless technique, his clean slide guitar style as well as his fluid single string picking. His playing is also respected outside the blues community - master Celtic/Folk/



The title of the Yep Roc single

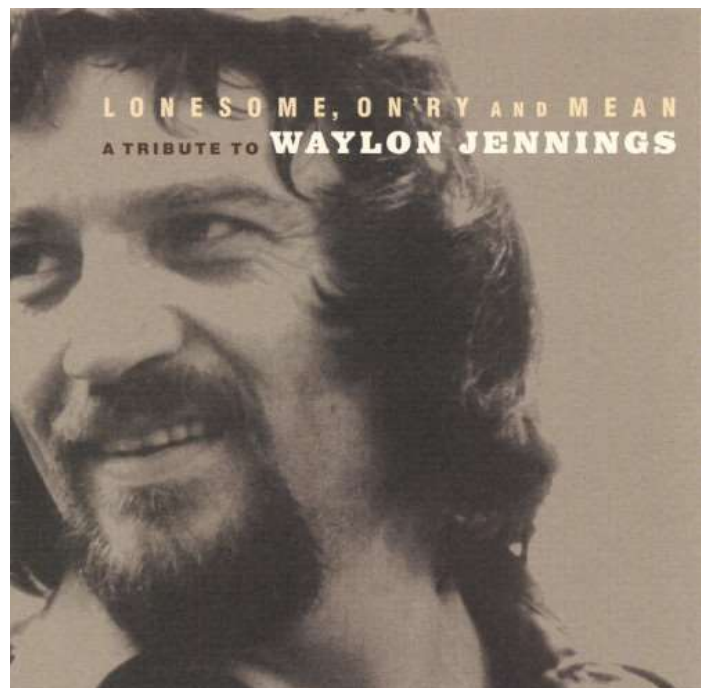


Rock guitarist Richard Thompson told me that Earl Hooker was one of his favorite guitarists - Now, that's high praise! From his earliest recordings at Sun Records, through the many tracks he cut for King, Chess, Argo, Checker, Chief, Arhoolie, Blue Thumb, both as a solo artist and as sideman (for Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Junior Wells, Charles Brown and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee to name a few), Earl Hooker displayed how he was, in writer Bill Dahl's words, "an endlessly inventive fountain of ideas that other guitarists drank from regularly." He could also bring his hard blues chops to jazz, country and, as his original version of the instrumental (guitar rumba) shows, Latin music. Unfortunately, Earl Hooker died too young and never got the kind of "guitar God" acknowledgement he rightly deserved."

4. **AMANDA** (from Lonesome, On'ry and Mean: A Tribute to Waylon Jennings, 2003)

*In the Blasters Newsletter #69 December of 2013* -- Dave Alvin talked about the recording: "A few years back, knowing full well that I couldn't come anywhere near Waylon Jennings classic original, I agreed to record a version of AMANDA for a Waylon tribute CD. Maybe for private sentimental reasons or maybe because the bittersweet, middle-aged angst lyrics of the song have always appealed to me, I went into the studio and gave it a shot. AMANDA was written by Bob McDill, a successful, transplanted Texas songwriter in Nashville. Throughout his long songwriting career, many of Bob McDill's songs have been covered by such stars as Don Williams, Jerry Lee Lewis, Pam Tillis, Alan Jackson, Mickey Gilley, Crystal Gayle and even Sam The Sham And The Pharaohs, but AMANDA is perhaps his most famous composition due to the huge hit recording by Waylon. I don't know that much about Mr. McDill's other songs, but if I had written AMANDA, I might just quit songwriting because I may not be able to write anything as good again.

On this recording I played acoustic guitar and sang as best as I could as some old friends joined me for the ses-





sion; Chris Gaffney (accordion and harmony vocals), Greg Leisz (electric guitar) and Don Heffington (drums), while Mark Linett recorded the basic track at his 'Your Place Or Mine' Studio in Glendale, California. In an odd twist to the recording, Paul Gannon later recorded some overdubs in Nashville at Big Ears Studio that featured Dave Roe on bass, Mike Daly on steel guitar and Chuck Mead on guitar. This impersonal, transcontinental approach was an unorthodox way of recording a song, and I don't normally recommend it,

but I think it came out all right in the end.

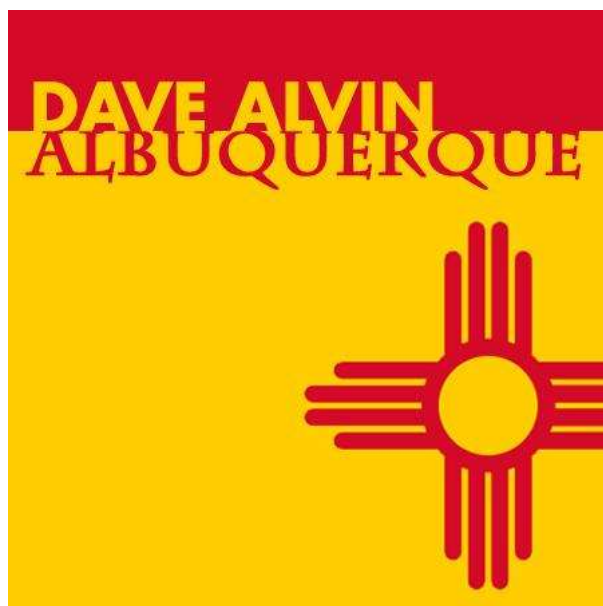
Even though his songs are more famous than he is, maybe someday someone will do tribute record to Bob McDill. If they ever do, tell them to give me a call."

##### 5. **ALBUQUERQUE** (released only on Yep Roc's web store, 2008) –

*In the Blasters Newsletter #63 December of 2010* -- Dave Alvin talked about the recording: "This version of ALBUQUERQUE is a tribute of sorts to my best friend and spiritual advisor, the late Chris Gaffney. For many years this old Link Davis Sr. song was a staple of Chris's bar room gigs with his great band, The Cold Hard Facts. I dug this funky, little blues song so much that Chris and I talked through the years about recording it together but, sadly for whatever reason, we never got around to it. Oh well.

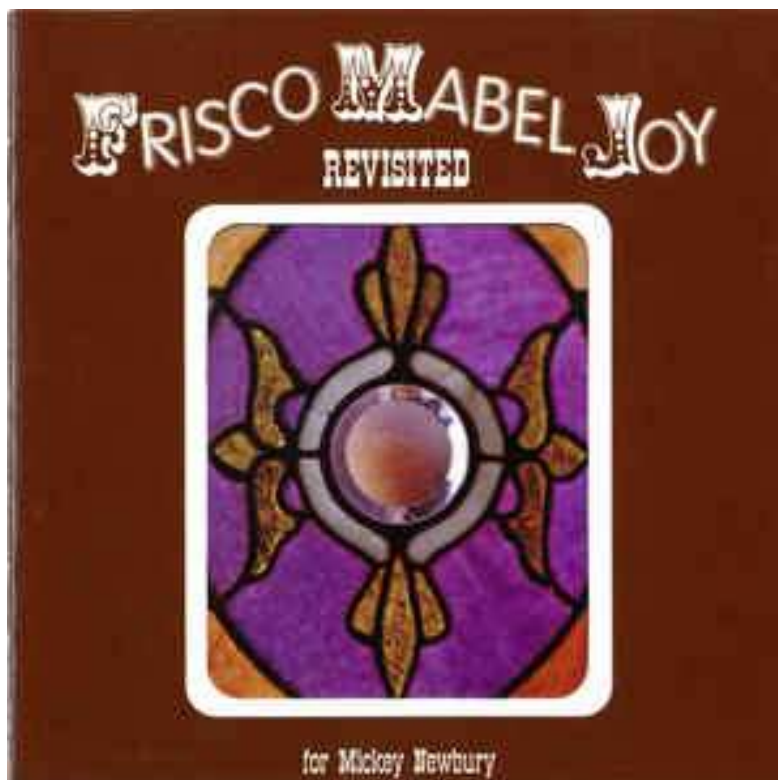
During a recent rehearsal with my band, The Guilty Men, we started reminiscing about Chris and before long we were jamming on ALBUQUERQUE just for fun. Fortunately, we were practicing at Craig Parker Adams's Winslow Court Studio and Craig recorded the whole thing. Drummer Steve Mugalian and bassist Gregory Boaz are the rock solid rhythm section and Jack Rudy is blowing the tough harmonica. Guitarist Chris Miller is playing some soulful R+B licks while I'm doing my Freddie King imitation on the wah-wah guitar. Unfortunately, Joe Terry, the keyboardist for The Guilty Men, wasn't able to be at the rehearsal. Also, sadly, Gaffney wasn't there either.

ALBUQUERQUE was written by Link Davis Sr. He was a veteran musician/singer



who started out playing western swing but, throughout his long career from the late 40's until the 60s, he cut records in just about every roots music style from Cajun (his biggest hit was the Cajun classic, BIG MAMOU), blues, rockabilly, folk and country. My kind of guy. Most of the bars mentioned in the song are long gone except for the Caravan East on Central Avenue (the old Route 66) on the East side of Albuquerque. Maybe some night, I'll run into you at the Caravan East and we can have a beer or two and raise a toast to Link Davis Sr. and Chris Gaffney."

6. **MOBILE BLUE** (from Frisco Mabel Joy Revisited: Mickey Newbury Tribute, 2000. Yep Roc Web store, 2007) -

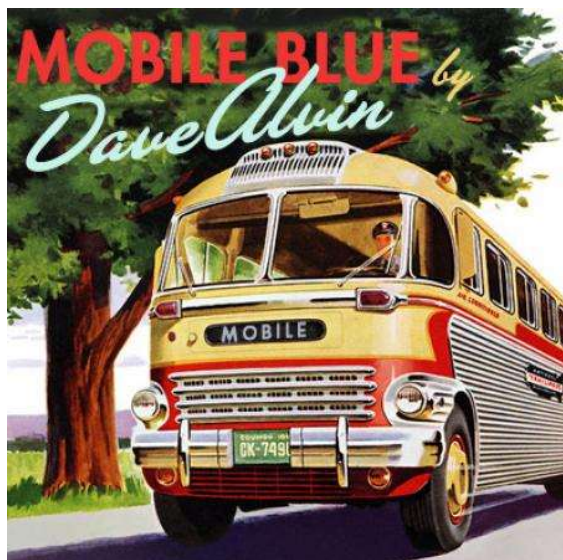


*In the Blasters Newsletter #61 January 2010 --* Dave Alvin talked about the recording: "Sometimes people argue over who is the greatest living songwriter or who is the greatest male or female songwriter or who is the greatest songwriter in Texas, Nashville, New York, California or wherever. Usually the songwriters that these people bestow the "greatest" title on is whomever is the current critical darling songwriter of the week. And they may very be right, I don't know. I always abstain from these kinds of discussions because song-

writing ain't baseball or football. Songwriting can't be discussed in those black and white terms for many reasons. One of the reasons is that there are too many fantastic unknown or little appreciated songwriters throughout music history who I think are as good or even better than many of the names I often hear mentioned.

For example: Mickey Newbury. A case could easily be made that he was as responsible as anyone for the golden era of country songwriting in the 1960's and 70's. Some of his songs were quasi-autobiographical heartbreakers while others



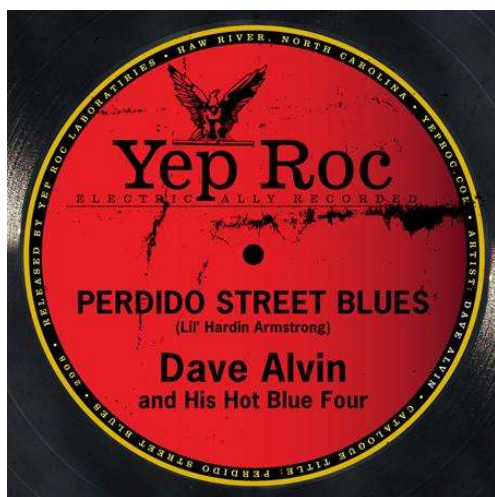


were beautifully sketched narrative ballads but almost all are as good as anything written by anyone anywhere anytime.

John Prine said that "Mickey Newbury is probably the best songwriter ever." Kris Kristofferson said, "God, I learned more about songwriting from Mickey than I did from any other single human being." You can't argue with those guys. You may have never heard of Mickey Newbury but you certainly heard his songs. They've been covered by (a very short list): Elvis, Willie Nelson, B.B. King, Tom Jones, Dottie West, Jerry

Garcia, Etta James, Jerry Lee Lewis, Ray Charles, Roy Orbison, Phish, Joan Baez, Buddy Rich, Keith Richards and, even, Engelbert Humperdinck. An extremely impressive list of admirers. I highly recommend any of his albums if you want to hear a master at work.

The Newbury song I recorded, MOBILE BLUE, is from his classic concept album, Frisco Mabel Joy. It was cut as part of a tribute CD to Frisco Mabel Joy and Newbury that was put together by No Depression Magazine's Peter Blackstock a few years back that deserved more attention than it received. The track was recorded in 2000 at the sessions for my Public Domain CD and features Rick Shea on the biting electric guitar, Joe Terry on the pumping piano, Bobby Lloyd Hicks slapping the skins, Brantley Kearns on the swinging fiddle and former Roger Miller/Hoyt Axton/Dillard and Clark/Jackson Browne bassist, David Jackson thumping the stand-up bass. The backwards guitar intro is by jazz guitar innovator Bill Frisell."



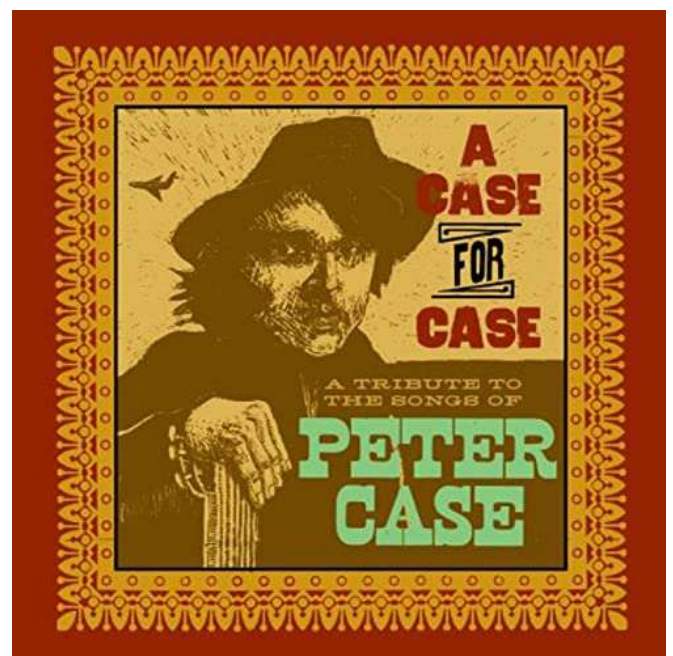
**7. PERDIDO STREET BLUES** (released only on Yep Roc's web store, 2008) -

In the Yep Roc web store in January 2008 Dave Alvin explained the history of the song: "There are many ways of playing the blues and this is one of them. Back in the early days of jazz they would have called this approach to blues, "viper music." That term always sounded pretty good to me. PERDIDO STREET BLUES was composed by the under-appreciated Lil' Hardin Armstrong (the one-time wife and pianist for

Louis Armstrong) and was originally recorded back in 1926 by clarinet master Johnny Dodds and his New Orleans Wanderers. I was 14 when I first heard his version and, besides being blown away by Dodds' clarinet virtuosity, what captivated me was the minor/major key modulations that make up the song structure. With its low down almost spooky groove and melody, PERDIDO STREET BLUES is definitely some old time, back-in-the-alley viper music. For many years I've toyed around with the idea of cutting the song as a guitar-based piece but never got around to doing it. Recently, after playing a few gigs with blues/boogie woogie piano master Gene Taylor, I thought it might be fun to finally cut the song with Gene doing what he does best on the keyboards. Besides Gene, I was thrilled to be joined by another fellow Blaster, John Bazz, thumping a mean stand-up bass. Rounding out this unique group are Greg Leisz (my longtime producer and guitar hero) on the slippery electric lap steel guitar and current Guilty Man drummer Steve Mugalian on the snazzy drums and percussion. For this track I played my beloved 1934 National steel bodied guitar while Craig Parker Adams did his usual expert job recording everything live at his Winslow Court studio in Los Angeles, California. I can't explain what a big kick it was to go back into the studio with Gene and John for the first time together since when we were in The Blasters years ago. Time and fate permitting we can hopefully do some more recording in the future. Until then I hope you enjoy our little bit of viper blues."

8. **ON THE WAY DOWNTOWN** (from A Case For Case - Peter Case tribute, 2006) – Hearing this recording is sad because it has Chris Gaffney and Amy Farris together (who have passed on). This was the only song we remixed for this collection because Greg Leisz and I weren't happy with the original mix. The rest of the mixes on 'This Old Guitar' collection by Craig Parker Adams and the three by Mark Linnett were so well mixed originally that we didn't have to do anything.

*In the Blasters Newsletter #69 December of 2013 -- Dave Alvin talked about the recording: "The first time I heard Peter Case*

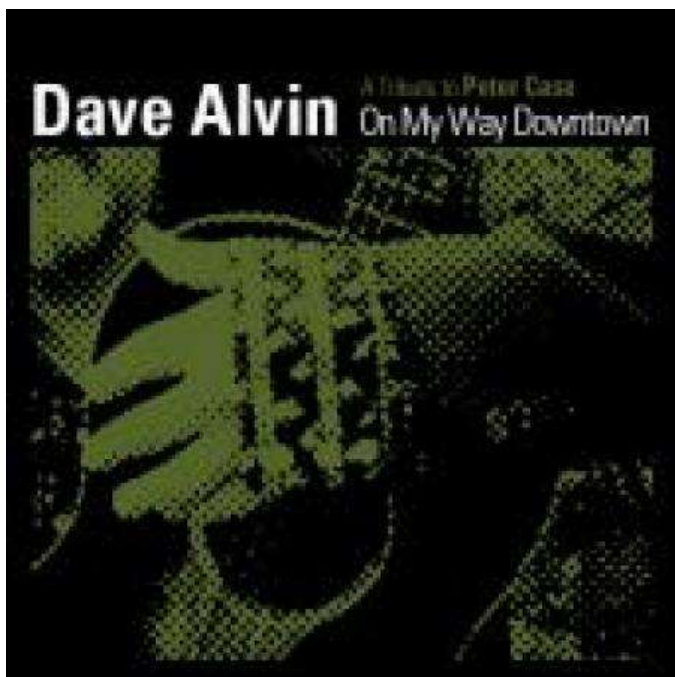


sing ON MY WAY DOWNTOWN was some years back when he'd just finished writing it. I was in the audience at a "new song" workshop featuring Peter and a few other songwriters. We've all heard of "love at first sight," well, for me this was love at first hearing. The song knocked me out then and it still does.

My version of "ON MY WAY DOWNTOWN" was originally recorded for a stunning 3-CD tribute project called A Case For Case. A variety of great singers and songwriters (from Joe Ely, James McMurtry and Todd Snyder to Tom Russell, Chris Smither and Maura O'Connell) all contributed tracks to show their love and appreciation for Peter's unique body of work.

Let me quote what I wrote about Peter for the tribute CD's liner notes: "For over two decades I've been blessed to know Peter Case and his music. I could ramble on with over two decades of stories and memories that would illuminate what a good guy and under-recognized talent Peter is but his songs do a better job at

that than I ever could. As he and I have passed through various scenes, good times and bad, Peter has always been someone I respect as a person, as a musician, as a powerful songwriter and as a bottomless well of soulfulness. Simply put, he's one of our best."



My fellow Case fans joining me on the track are my late amigo, the always excellent Chris Gaffney, on accordion and harmony vocals; the beautiful and multi-talented Amy Farris supplying the sweet violin and viola; the Guilty Men's long board surfer, Gregory Boaz, playing the

solid stand-up bass and my old pal from The Blasters, Bill Bateman, performing to his usual high standards on the drums. Besides singing the lead vocal, I'm strumming the acoustic guitars and plucking the electric baritone guitar. The consistently patient and wise Craig Parker Adams recorded the track at his Winslow Court Studio.

The Case For Case tribute set was released a couple of years ago on the Hungry For Music label and it was put together by Jeff Campbell with the proceeds going to his wonderful Hungry For Music organization that gives musical instruments to underprivileged kids. Please check out the group's website at [hungryformusic.org](http://hungryformusic.org)



for more information. If you want to hear Peter singing his own songs as only he can, listen to any of his records from his days with The Plimsouls through his various solo albums and, especially, to his most recent Grammy nominated CD, the inspirational Let Us Now Praise Sleepy John on the brave and true Yep Roc label.”

9. **INSIDE** (previously unreleased) – This is a song by Bill Morrissey. He is in my top five favorite songwriters. I knew Bill for a long time. Even though he was from New England, he became a salmon fisherman in Alaska and then in the late 70s he wound up living in a garage in Long Beach CA. He hung out at the same bar as I did so we became friends because we hated the same guy (laughs), It’s a great foundation for a friendship. Bill finally left that garage and became one of our great song writers.



**Dave and Bill 2006     Photo: Annie Provenzano**

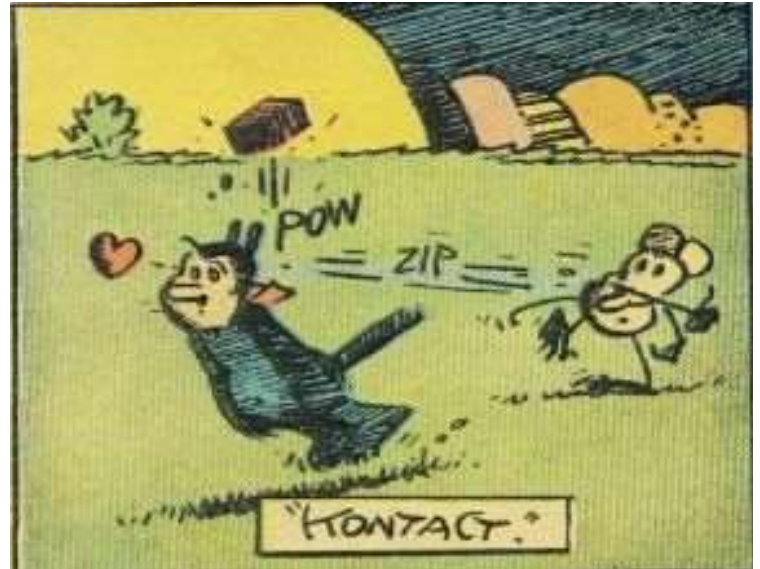
Later in 2007, I flew out to New England to another late friend Mark Sandman’s studio to record with Billy Conway and Dana Colley from Morphine. I played guitar on his last album Come Running (Turn and Spin Media). After Bill passed away in 2011, I did **INSIDE** at show in Boston which was his old stomping ground so it was memorable. It’s a pretty song but very sad. I recorded this version in 2016 at Winslow Court Studios and Cindy Wasserman sang harmonies with me.

10. **KRAZY AND IGNATZ** (released only on Yep Roc’s web store) – This was an instrumental that I wrote for Cindy Cashdollar and I, when recording the Guilty Women album in 2009 and it didn’t get used.

*In the Blasters Newsletter #63 December of 2010* -- Dave Alvin talked about the recording: “This is a wonderful country we live in and it’s given the world many beautiful, wonderful things. One of the things it’s given us besides the music and Mark Twain is comics - comic books and comic strips. One of the greatest comic writer/ artists was George Herriman, a Creole cartoonist from New Orleans who lived in L.A. on top of a mountain. He doesn’t just border on genius, he is genius. He did Krazy Kat and Ignatz in the teens, thirties, and forties. I am a huge fan of

Krazy Kat.

Ignatz for those of you who don't know, was a mouse and Krazy was a cat. It was a wonderfully surreal, borderline Shakespearean back alley world of Krazy Kat that took place out in Coconino County, Arizona, in this amazing landscape that he drew. Krazy loved Ignatz the mouse, but Ignatz had anger issues and mixed feelings towards the cat. Ignatz's standard gag



would be to pick up a brick and bean him or her, because Krazy was either gender – seriously. When she would get hit by the brick, Krazy took that as a token of love - which says something about the times that the comic was written in. But it also goes onto many other levels. So Cindy and I cut this instrumental that I wrote, as a bonus track for the Guilty Women CD called KRAZY AND IGNATZ.”

11. **PEACE** (released on Yep Roc's web store, 2007) -- *This recording was re-titled IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE (IF YOU CANT MAKE PEACE) and appeared on the 2010 Jackalope Records release Freight Train Boogie 2: A Collection of Americana Music which was a public radio fund raiser release.* – “That’s a Willie Dixon song that the Blasters jammed with Willie on the 1982 Soundstage TV special from Chicago. I was pissed that they didn’t include that song in the broadcast. There was a few songs with Willie and about 7 other songs with Carl Perkins that didn’t make the cut. I don’t know if those other songs will ever see the light of day. Ken Ehrlich who runs the Grammys probably owns that footage.



PEACE was a song back in the old days that we played at Blasters soundchecks with Bateman and Bazz when Phil wasn't around. When I recorded this in 2007, I wrote a whole new second section, a spoken word part: “If you can make money you can make time, you can make a decision, you can make up your mind.”

*In the Blasters Newsletter #54 September 2007* -- Dave Alvin talked about the influence: "I first heard Willie Dixon's PEACE back in the early 1980's, when The Blasters were booked on the PBS music show Soundstage. We had an hour to do whatever we wanted, so we invited Carl Perkins and Willie Dixon to be our special guests. With Carl, we performed various songs dating back to his time on Sun Records and with Willie we backed him up on older material he'd written for Muddy Waters and Howling Wolf. But then Willie wanted to do a new song he'd written called PEACE. It was a minor key blues driven by a typical Dixon hypnotic riff that I really dug. We gladly played the song with him and that was that.

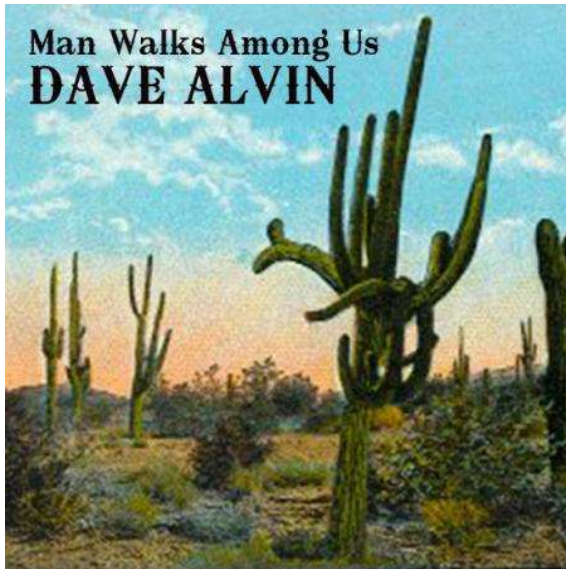


Over the next few years, after I left The Blasters and started my solo career, Willie and I did a few performances together at various events. After hearing my singing voice for the first time, Willie repeatedly told me that PEACE would be a perfect song for me. Not being comfortable at the time with singing another writer's material, I always respectfully declined. Recently, when The Guilty Men and I had a day off in Los Angeles with nothing to do, I decided to go into Craig Parker Adams' Winslow Court Studio and finally cut Willie's PEACE. For many reasons it just seemed like the right time. I also added a semi-improvised verse of my own at the end of the song just for the hell of it. I hope Willie doesn't mind too much.

Besides the current Guilty Men line-up on the track (Chris Miller on slide guitar, Joe Terry on electric piano, Gregory Boaz on bass and Steve Mugalian on drums), I was proud to be joined by Dale Spalding on harmonica. Dale grew up in Downey, Ca. with my brother Phil and I and was a big influence on our musical development. Dale, along with his brother Larry, were the guys who told us that if we wanted to see real music we had to get ourselves down to a club called the Ash Grove (Thanks guys!!!)."



12. **MAN WALKS AMONG US** (released only on Yep Roc's web store, 2008) –



*In the Blasters Newsletter #63 December 2010 -*  
- Dave Alvin talked about the recording: “The first record I ever owned was EL PASO by Marty Robbins. I was four or five years old and forced my mother to buy it for me after hearing the song on the radio. The first mechanical thing I ever learned to operate was our family record player just so I could play EL PASO over and over and over and over again. To this day if I'm in a barroom or a diner, and EL PASO is on the jukebox, it's a damn safe bet what the first

song I'm punching in will be. I often wonder whether the reason that I'm drawn to writing narrative style songs is based on the fact that EL PASO (perhaps tied with Chuck Berry's MEMPHIS) is my favorite song of all time. A perfect piece of songwriting.

Many people tend to think that EL PASO is a traditional old West folk ballad or was written by some extremely talented yet anonymous Nashville songwriter. Nope. It was written by the man who sang it, Marty Robbins. He was not only one of the greatest singers/performers in country music history but he was also one of country music's (or any kind of music's) greatest songwriters. Born and raised in Arizona, Marty had a deep emotional feeling for the West and its history, myths and landscape and that connection was expressed in the lyrics he wrote in some of his best songs. Which brings me to my second favorite song that Marty Robbins wrote, MAN WALKS AMONG US.

Originally released on his 1963 album, The Return of the Gunfighter, MAN WALKS AMONG US is a bittersweet meditation on the tragic changes mankind was bringing to his beloved desert and its non-human inhabitants. When I first heard the lyrics to it, I was completely blown away. Not only was someone expressing thoughts and emotions that I'd always felt but what really floored me, was that these very personal sentiments were coming from Marty Robbins. Marty Robbins, country music icon and... tree hugger?!?! Or cactus hugger to be perhaps more accurate. While I may be exaggerating the tree hugger thing a little bit, Marty's wise and tender lyrics predate the modern environmental

movement, and our society's slow acknowledgment of the damages to our fragile ecosystems, by several years if not decades. I'd always admired Marty Robbins not only for his songwriting prowess and stunning voice, but also because (like Ray Charles, Elvis, Sam Cooke and Bob Dylan) he was always willing to explore various musical styles and not be hemmed in by musical genres or people's artistic expectations of him. Honky tonk, rock-a-billy, cowboy songs, pop ballads, blues, spirituals, even Hawaiian and calypso songs are all part of his recorded legacy. But after hearing *MAN WALKS AMONG US*, I also admire him for composing, in my opinion, one of the best environmental songs ever written.



Joining me on this track are some fellow tree huggers of one sort or another. Former forest ranger and current musical visionary, Greg Leisz on pedal steel and electric guitar, former Guilty Man Rick Shea is doing the pretty acoustic guitar work and harmony vocals, former Roger Miller/Hoyt Axton musical co-conspirator David Jackson plays the acoustic bass while former drummer for the likes of Emmylou Harris, Lucinda Williams, Big Mama Thornton and Bob Dylan, Don Heffington is keeping everything in time with his unique and sensitive drum styling. The track was recorded and mixed by the always patient and sonically astute, Craig Parker Adams at his Winslow Court Studio."

**13. BEAUTIFUL CITY 'CROSS THE RIVER** (bonus track from *Eleven Eleven* expanded edition, 2011) -- "It was written for the FX TV show *Justified* just like *HARLAN COUNTY LINE* was. It was based on a character in the show who was the nice good guy but had a secret life of being in debt. He had the opportunity to steal money from a drug dealer and high tail it off to Mexico. The show's producers said to write about that. I used some Catholic confessional imagery. In old spiritual songs they would refer to heaven as 'the beautiful city across the river.' So in this case Juarez could be the beautiful city across the Rio Grande. Danny Ott plays electric slide, Bob Galub on bass, Don Heffington on drums and

Skip Edwards on accordion. Christy McWilson is on the harmony vocals.”

14. **DYNAMITE WOMAN** (from Keep Your Soul - Doug Sahm tribute, 2009) – “Doug was a hero of mine since I was a kid. I would have rather done some other songs that were already taken like MENDOCINO, but I said give me DYNAMITE WOMAN. Danny Ott plays electric guitar and adds harmony vocal, Greg Leisz is on steel, Bob Glaub on bass and Don Heffington on drums.

I remember jamming with Doug at the Continental club in Austin in 1999. They locked the doors and we jammed on stuff like Guitar Slim blues songs. That was one of the highlights of my life.”



15. **WHO'S BEEN HERE** (previously unreleased, 2016) A duet with Christy McWilson. Dave: “It’s a Bo Carter song from the Mississippi Sheiks. This is the most recently recorded thing for this collection. It’s the same story, Christy McWilson was in town so we recorded with Danny Ott, Bob and Don. I wanted to play electric on this to cut loose. It’s a song we were playing in the set in the tail end of the Guilty Women tours.”

Another release of this song was on the Mississippi Sheiks tribute concert DVD released in 2010 by Black Hen Music. The Vancouver concert featured many artists including a live performance of WHO’S BEEN HERE by Dave And Christy McWilson.

16. **SIGNAL HILL BLUES** (bonus track from Eleven Eleven expanded edition, 2011) – “This was an outtake from the Eleven Eleven album sessions. It’s a memory of a night in my early 20s with some gal of ill repute (laughs). That’s just me, Danny Ott, Bob Glaub and Don Hefington playing.”



***From an Old Guitar: Rare and Unreleased will be available on November 20, 2020. Preorder the CD, vinyl LP and digital version at [YepRoc.com](http://YepRoc.com), or [bandcamp.com](http://bandcamp.com)***

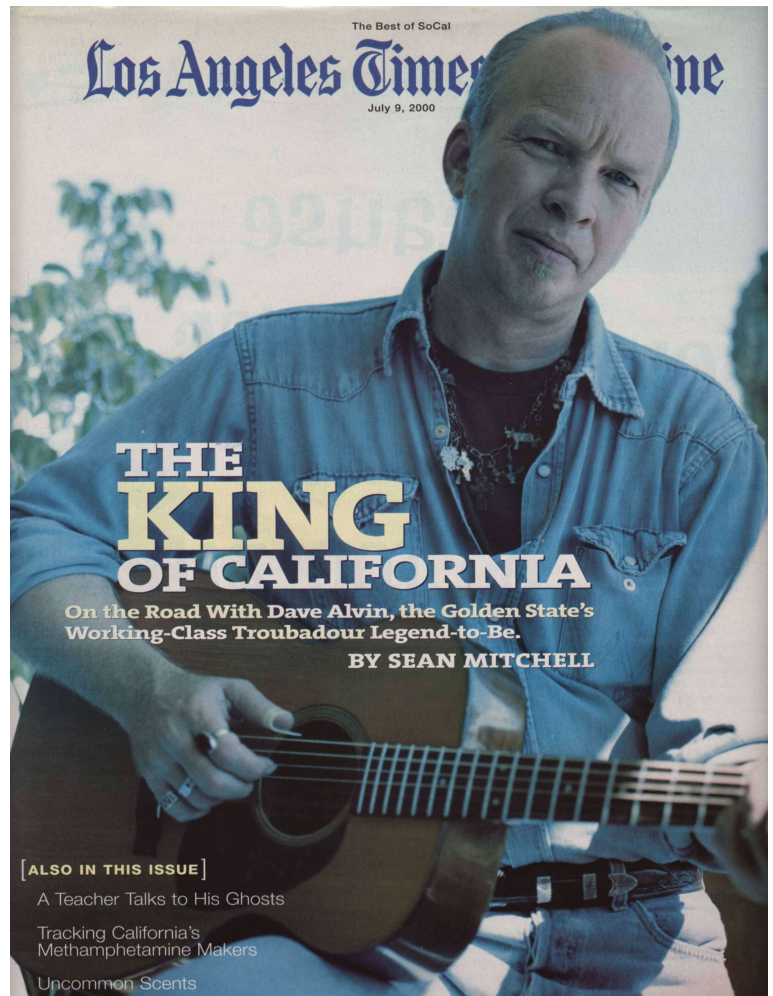


# Behind the Scenes of a Dave Alvin profile

## by Tom Wilk

Since the release of the Blasters' first album in 1980, Dave Alvin has done hundreds of interviews for stories in newspapers and magazines, on web sites, and for radio and TV shows. One story that stands out over the last 40 years is a profile by Sean Mitchell that appeared as the cover story in the Los Angeles Times Magazine on July 9, 2000 with the headline: "The King of California: On the Road with Dave Alvin, the Golden State's Working-Class Troubadour Legend-to-Be."

It's not a run-of-the-mill story about a musician. The 4,000-word in-depth and informative profile took more than a year to take shape from initial interview request to publication. "It takes time to develop a story," explained Mitchell, who has profiled a wide range of entertainers, including Jack Lemmon, Willie Nelson, and Nanci Griffith in a journalism career that has spanned six decades.



Cover photo by Hadi Salehi

***In July, 2000 Dave commented to The Blasters Newsletter about the L.A. Times cover story: "I was just blown away. It was nice hometown validation. The way I have looked at my career is that it's like slow building blocks - by the time we were dead, we might be famous."***

The profile of Dave had modest origins. "I had pitched 7-8 story ideas (to the Times magazine) and I thought the one of Dave was a long shot," Mitchell recalled in a phone interview over the summer. "After the magazine said yes to my proposal, I think I first made contact by phone with Dave and/or his reps in June of 1999 to see if he was open to the story and was willing to put up with an invasion of his privacy," Mitchell said. "Then in mid-August, I arranged to meet him for the first time, for lunch at El Conquistador, a Mexican restaurant in Silver Lake."

As part of his research, he went on the road with Dave and The Guilty Men and saw them perform at the Straw-

berry Music Festival in Northern California and at Slim's in San Francisco. "Getting to travel with him was essential to my purpose of drawing a portrait of a musician at his level – known nationally to aficionados of roots music and blues connoisseurs but not famous enough to be on mainstream radio or playing arenas," Mitchell noted.

The access he enjoyed lent depth to his profile as he rode with the band in their van, went backstage before concerts, and visited with Dave at his home in Silver Lake. Rounding out the story are comments from Guilty Men members Joe Terry and Brantley Kearns,

***In Sept. 2020 Dave Alvin commented to the Blasters Newsletter: "That cover feature certainly affected my career positively in Southern California. Sean wrote a great article. He captured what the band was at the time and what our shows were like." I've been in contact with him over the years and always enjoy seeing him."***

HighTone Records executive Larry Sloven, and Phil Alvin.

"We had already established some rapport at the El Conquistador lunch, so I was able to pick up the conversation where we left off," he said of riding with Dave in the van. "I had a notebook, but I tried not to brandish it. I wanted our dialogue to be natural – or as natural it could be under the circumstances."

Mitchell's profile captured the small details that bring a subject to life, such as Dave painting his fingers with New Skin, a viscous compound that dries into an artificial callus to pro-

tect his skin while playing the guitar. He observed Dave having a beer prior to the show. "I usually have one before I go on, just to help with stage fright," he told Mitchell.

Publication of the story was delayed, but ultimately worked out to Mitchell's benefit. "I think the story on Dave was originally scheduled to run in December of 1999, and I turned in a version to meet that deadline. But then it was slot-



Photo: Sean Mitchell

Dave Alvin Strawberry Music Fest 1999



Photo: Sean Mitchell

Dave Alvin Strawberry Music Fest 1999

ted as a cover story and had to compete with other covers that were more time-sensitive. (Whereas, Dave, you could say, is timeless),” Mitchell remembered.

“It kept getting bumped, and that was frustrating, but in the end it worked out for the best, allowing me an additional interview with Dave at his Silver Lake apartment (to bring things up to date) and including his reflection on the death of his father and his recording of another album, Public Doman. Unlike if it had been for Rolling Stone or a trade magazine, our story wasn’t pegged to an album release – and that was a saving grace. “The extra time allowed me to get to know him a little better, adding additional details perspective – a gift uncommon in newspaper work,” he added. “I was grateful that the Los Angeles Times editor saw it that way.”

The story had a happy postscript for Mitchell. “I was grateful a year later when the story won an ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for articles about music. The ceremony was held at The Lincoln Center (in New York City) and I went. In my acceptance speech, I thanked Bob Sipchen, my editor, and Dave, of course, for making it happen and I added it was too bad Dave’s songs were licensed by BMI. Which didn’t get the laugh I was hoping for, whatever.”

Mitchell remains thankful for the assignment. “I’ve had many stories delayed and cancelled, but I can’t think of another one that stretched out for a year as this one did. Just one of those things --- and a blessing, as it turned out. It’s one of my favorite stories ever.”

***(Sean Mitchell’s profile of Dave is included in “Why the News from Hollywood Always Wears a Tan,” a collection of his writings published in 2012 by New Caronia Press. It can be purchased from \$5.95 with free shipping at [www.seanrileymitchell.com](http://www.seanrileymitchell.com))***

## **The State of the Music Industry in a Pandemic by Dave Alvin**

It’s been strange not playing. My band is holding up okay through the pandemic. I’ve had a bad year health-wise so I’m taking care of that. But I’m feeling better, and playing guitar every day.

Speaking as a freelance musician, I don’t know what awaits us in 2021. I do think by 2022 things will be fine if the clubs can survive that long being empty. As an example, Skipper’s Smokehouse in Tampa, Florida was a venue that I loved to play. They just closed their doors this week (September 2020). There will always be venues in Chicago, New York City and L.A. but it’s the smaller markets I’m most concerned about. They are the ones that pay for the hotels, gasoline and expenses of being on the road between the big cities. Me and my manager are planning out strategies of how things are gonna work for the future. I really miss playing live.

I’m releasing this new CD From an Old Guitar: Rare and Unreleased even though we know not touring hurts our record sales. Nowadays even the super star bands depend on selling their product from merch tables at their shows. All artists are now involved heavily in their record distribution. I think the presale for the album and CD have been remarkably high, so maybe things are changing and if people can’t get out to us they will buy online more. I hope so.

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# The Blasters—40 Years ago

## The Blasters: California's Rockabilly Wonders

Melodie Bryant

**DOWNEY**—It's not where you're from that counts. It's how you feel it. If you want a lesson in that axiom, catch The Blasters' act sometime.

Sporting an array of pompadours which range from the merely modest (bassist John Bazz) to the more daring approach of the electrocuting look (drummer Bill Bateman), this four-piece band literally charges the atmosphere with energy, jolting their audiences with a forceful combination of rockabilly and R&B.

To top it off, they play with all the natural abandon of a bunch of good ol' boys whooping it up on a Friday night at the local bar. To hear them, you'd swear they were born and raised in Texas. But *Downey*? It doesn't seem possible.

If they hailed from the lofty slopes of Bel Air, it wouldn't make their music any less authentic. But with their background, it would have been hard to go wrong: they listened studiously to early recordings by the likes of Luther and Percy Huff and Buddy Boy Hawkins; backed up Big Joe Turner; and studied under the guidance of Muddy Waters' arranger Marcus Johnson, the legendary T-Bone Walker, and veteran sax player Lee Allen. It was from Allen that they learned one of their most important lessons.

"We used to go to Watts twice a week and see those guys," says lead vocalist Phil Alvin. "They taught us how to play. We were a bunch of white kids, right? We were real influenced by Cream and all that shit—30-minute blues songs. Until finally one day, Lee Allen sat down with us and said, 'Lookit, what you doin', doin' these long songs? This is *dance* music. People can only dance for about three minutes and then they get tired. So do songs about three minutes.'"

"This was back in '71, '72," continues Phil, "and everybody on *earth* is doing 40-minute songs. And there's this black guy going, 'Three minute songs, that's what people like. Do the song. Get it over with. Then do another one! That was a big lesson. To put it in three minutes meant to put it the way it *always had been put*. That music made coherent sense."

"Yeah," agrees lead guitarist Dave Alvin, "Skip James did 'I'm So Glad' in 2 minutes and 50 seconds, and it's a hell of a lot more powerful than Cream doing it for 30 minutes."

But while they had done their homework and found their format, it wasn't until the advent of the Sex Pistols that they knew what to do with it. Explains Dave, "In the '70s, there was nothing and kids were just kind of lost. Then all of a sudden the Sex Pistols came along and all this energy came back into the scene that hadn't been there for years."

"We tried out punk rock, but it would be phony for us to be real punk rockers. We figured if we took the music we really loved—country, blues and rockabilly—and put all the energy into it that the Sex Pistols put into their music, it would be just as modern today as it was in 1950."

Although that sounds like a winning solution, bookings were few and far between when the band started out. They opened without pay for local acts like The Twisters, played an occasional wedding, and at one point their highest paying gig had been a gay bath house. But while club owners were hesitant to book the band, Queen spotted The Blasters at a gig at Flippers, and subsequently had the virtually unknown (outside of Los Angeles—and Downey) act open for them in San Diego, Phoenix, and finally in LA at the Forum.

The gigs weren't easy. In San Diego, their name wasn't on the marquee, and they were greeted with boos. In Phoenix, rowdies in the crowd tossed bottles at the band. Moreover, they lost money on the deal. "We had to join the union to do the gigs," says Phil. "And they paid us under scale. So now we owe the union money we never got."

Now established members of LA's local scene, The Blasters are confronting much larger ironies. Their album, recorded on the independent Rollin' Rock label, has sold up to 5,000 copies with virtually no promotion and very small distribution, but they continue to be largely overlooked by the major record companies.

Says Phil, "There was an article in *The LA Times* where they asked three



(L-R) Dave Alvin, Phil Alvin, Bill Bateman, John Bazz. Photo: Theresa Kereakes.

A&R guys what they thought of us, and they said, 'Yeah, The Blasters are great. They're fun onstage, but it still remains to be seen whether rockabilly can be on the radio.' Apparently they didn't listen to 'That Crazy Little Thing Called Love' by Queen, which was rockabilly plus or minus something."

One of their originals, a rockabilly number called "Marie, Marie," has been covered with a good deal of success by British rocker Shakin' Stevens. At last count, it hit #32 in Britain two weeks after its release and has gotten airplay throughout all of northern

Europe. If you ask The Blasters, that's one irony too many.

"There's a great appreciation of American music in England," says Phil, "and that's fine. But they don't know how to do it. They sent us a copy of the single, and it sounds like Alvin & the Chipmunks with Shakin' Stevens doing a digital approximation of my vocal."

Adds Dave, growing more frustrated with every word, "He's probably a very nice guy, but here he is on Epic Records, and the 45 comes out all over the place. And we can't get a deal because they're tellin' us we'll never make it on the radio." □

## The Imposters' Switchblade Pop

Michael Branton

**PETALUMA**—In the smokey recesses of a rowdy redneck bar called the Hideaway, a bottom-heavy rock and roll romp by The Imposters bounces off wood-paneled walls decorated with garish illuminated beer signs. "Don't

Get Mad (Just Get Even)" is the name of this monster—Number 126 on the jukebox, wedged incongruously between country crooners like Ray Price, Jim Reeves and Mel Tillis.

The tune winds to an end. A bow-legged cowboy with a multi-gallon hat saunters over to the jukebox, drops in a



(L-R) Dana Doss, John Schuster, Jimmy Campbell. Photo: Richard McCaffree.

quarter, pushes some buttons—Number 126 again, *partner*—and grins at his buddies as the first crunching drum beats blast into the room. Electric guitar powerchords, a grinding bass and insistent vocals fall into place like unruly kids at a school assembly. How should one describe this sound? Switchblade pop? AC/DC meets the Bay City Rollers at the Fab Mab? Metallic-rave on-wave?

Imposters manager Michael Cowles believes this unique hybrid is an ears-of-the-beholder phenomenon. "The hardcore fans around here think The Imposters are a new wave band," he says, sipping an amber drink. "But everyone in town likes the group—truckers, tractor drivers, cowboys, high school kids, the everyday folks. The Imposters are definitely hometown favorites."

Outside in the balmy summer night, downtown Petaluma is alive with partiers. Low-slung cars cruise down dimly lit streets, their occupants yelling out snatches of pseudo-latino, Cheech & Chong patois. Girls in spandex bodysuits and purple hair bob to transistor radios like they're on the crest of a new fashion wave. Filtered down punk aesthetics in the heart of Middle America.

A couple of blocks away, the Phoenix Theatre is a hubbub of youthful excitement. In the lobby, the snack bar advertises pizza slices and hot dogs. But nobody's buying—they're all crammed up near the stage, yelling profanities at the approaching emcee. "All right, you Petaluma rockers," he shouts back happily. "Let's get fucked up"—the crowd roars its approval—"and raise hell with The Imposters!"

CONTINUED