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American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

FEBRUARY 99

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ **5th Anniversary Issue** ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES

With the Guilty Men

2/18 Columbus OH at Little Brothers
2/19 Detroit MI at Magic Stick
2/20 Chicago IL at Fitzgerald's
2/21 Madison WI at The Harmony Bar
2/23 Cleveland OH at Wilbert's
2/24 Pittsburgh PA at Rosebud
2/25 Phil PA at Tin Angel (2 shows)
2/26 Arlington VA at Iota Café
2/27 NYC at Bowery Ballroom
2/28 Baltimore MD at Fletcher's
3/2 Charlotte NC at Double Door
3/3 Greenville SC at Handlebar
3/5 Orlando FL at Sapphire Club
3/6 Tampa FL at Skipper's
3/9 Birmingham AL at Zydeco
3/10 New Orleans at Howlin Wolf
3/11 Houston TX at Satellite Lounge
3/12 Dallas TX at Gypsy Tea Room
3/13 Austin TX at Antone's

BLASTERS TOUR DATES

3/5 W.Hollywood CA at HOB

RICK SHEA TOUR DATES

3/17 Burbank CA at Viva Fresh

Dave Alvin tapes TV's Austin City Limits



The NY Times cover photo, by Aldo Mauro

LATEST NEWS: : Dave taped an episode of the PBS TV concert show called Austin City Limits on 1/29/99. American Music members were offered the chance to participate in a lottery to win free tickets to attend the taping in Austin.

Eight lucky winners traveled across the Country to see Dave and the boys tape the show. -- Dave Alvin got great press on January 10, 1999, when the New York Times pictured him on the cover of their Arts & Leisure section. Gracing the center of the page is a 7-inch square color picture of Dave posing on his DRY RIVER; also known as the San Gabriel river bed. American Music correspondent Anita Bunter reports: "The color photo really fits the title: "Evoking in Song a Mellow City's Hard Edges," with Dave's arms wrapped around his Martin guitar; and the last moments of a sunset back lighting Dave and a long string of high-tension power lines fading off (((cont. page 2))) into the distance. It's a powerful photo. The article features an accompanying

Inside: Austin City Limits taping, Gregory Boaz interview, Dave and Friends concert, Phil Alvin remembers Spain, Q & A's, Dave's stories from the road, and a Dave Alvin contest.

sidebar titled "Melancholy Dreams" that quotes lyrics from DRY RIVER. -- Dave Alvin has finished producing the Derailers' new album which is due out in April; Dave will be playing lead guitar on one track. — In April, Dave will do a song for a tribute album to blues legend Little Milton. He will also be playing with Ramblin' Jack Elliot on his new CD. -- Dave's Blackjack David album is breaking new ground; It has been added to the Columbia House CD club. Mainstream bound! -- Dave recently was interviewed in StereoPhile Magazine in January, Pollstar Magazine on the February cover, Blue Suede News (future), and he was mentioned in admiration by Bruce Springsteen in Mojo magazine. — Dave turned the tables recently by interviewing Poet and mentor Gerald Locklin for a poetry magazine. — Smokey Hormel is still playing with Beck, dispelling rumors he had left. — Dave taped an interview on 1/18 for an NPR program called American Routes; Watch for it on your NPR stations. — Dave wrote some phenomenal liner notes for Jack Smith's new CD due out in the spring on Run Wild Records. – Dave will tape the E-Town radio show in Colorado in May. Dave cancelled his last taping with E-Town when the Dylan tour came up. – Dave will produce a new Katy Moffatt CD in May. – On Dave's 1999 BJD tour, Robbie Fulks will be the opening act starting 2/27. — Bill Bateman has been living in Anchorage, Alaska, working as a studio drummer doing session work, commercials, and live gigs. -- Rick Shea has been playing solo recently; on 11/19/98 he performed live on The Happy Trails Radio Program on KXLU-88.9 FM Los Angeles. Rick has a web site at: www.acousticmusic.net/artists/rickshea/ — The Mike Eldred Trio (formerly known as Uncle Daddy) is recording and shopping to labels. Mike Eldred on vocals and guitar, John Bazz on bass, and Jerry Angel on drums. — Drummer Donald Linley passed away on 2/3/99. As a friend of Dave Alvin's, he was a popular session drummer in L.A. He played on Dave's first three HighTone albums, and with Chris Gaffney and Lucinda Williams. – Blaster fan, friend, and American Music reader Leon Frynes passed away in late '98. Good-bye friend. -- 5TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE – Yes it's been 5 years and 22 newsletters. This thing will keep going as long as everybody continues enjoying our great American Music. Thanks to Craig Frischkorn for editing my New York grammar, Scot Kleinman for bridging the gap to the internet, the band members for everything, the writers and contributors to the newsletter, and all my friends, (which I'm happy to say, includes all of the aforementioned people). Thanks to all you who read the newsletter and enjoy it. Let's keep it going!! ~~*AM*

Gregory Boaz, G-Man, Bass Player. –The Interview

Gregory has been the only bass player in the 5-year history of The Guilty Men, Dave Alvin's backing band. He was interviewed at the Austin City Limits KLRU studios In Austin, Texas, on 1/29/99.

Photo: Josh Lewis



American Music: How do you feel about playing Austin City Limits tonight?

Gregory Boaz: When we heard we were going to do ACL, we were very excited and happy. It makes sense that they would pick Dave. I'm glad to see he's getting the recognition he deserves.

AM: Take us back to the beginning of your musical career.

GB: I grew up in San Diego with surf music. But one of the first bands I started playing with in '79 or '80 was a punk band called "The Stupid Losers." I love that name! (laughs) We used to play in Tijuana with the Palladins. We were the first two American bands that regularly played in TJ. It was really rowdy - breaking bottles and stuff.

AM: What type of songs were you playing?

GB: We were playing like Johnny Thunders, The Dolls, and Iggy Pop. Kind of what I call roots-punk, which was based in American Music and not New Wave. I didn't like the Techno and New Wavy stuff of that period.

AM: How did you get connected to the L.A. scene?

GB: We used to drive up to L.A. and a lot and the L.A. bands would come down to San Diego. I remember seeing the Blasters and X a lot. I

moved to L.A. and soon got involved in the “Tex and the Horseheads” band. They were started by Jeffery Lee Pierce from the Gunn Club. It was a side project he had.

AM: How did you get in that band?

GB: My best friend, Rock Vodka, was the drummer and my other friend, Mike Martt was the one who replaced Jeffery when he left. Rock’s brother was playing bass and when he left, I was asked. It was a fun band.

AM: How did you get the nick name?

GB: Oh, Smog Vomit! (laughs) Rock started calling me Smog. Then one day we were driving to L.A. to see a show at The Whiskey. I’m sure we were drinking heavily and Rock just announced Smog Vomit (laughs). So it kind of stuck. I always regretted putting that on the first Horseheads record because then I was stuck with it.

AM: What style would you call the Horseheads’ stuff?

GB: At that time, they called it Cow Punk. Bands like “Blood on the Saddle” and “Screamin Sirens” were similar. “Rank & File” was kind of branded that. We were a real roots-based punk band, but we weren’t trying to sound like anybody. We did weird versions of like AIN’T THAT PECULIAR and BIG BOSS MAN

AM: Any high points of the Horseheads years?

GB: I have very blurred memories of those years. Ha! Ha! Well, we played New York a lot of times, the Paradiso in Holland, and a big festival in Rotterdam. We were out of our minds. It was just one big party. I left the band in 1987. Let’s just say I made a major lifestyle change. I then played in a few bands with The Horseheads guitarist Mike Martt and then started playing with Rosie Flores in ‘88 or ‘89. (This was after James Intveld left Rosie’s band.) We did a tour of Ireland and some gigs in Texas. Junior Brown sat in with us for Rosie for a few gigs on lap steel. Then towards the end of that, I started playing with James Intveld. It’s funny how these gigs lead to different things. I started playing with “Hook and the Hitch Hikers.” That’s where I started playing with Dave (Alvin) a lot. Hook was a blues player who played with me, Dave, and Steve Hodges. That lasted for about 9 months, so I got to know Dave. We had bumped into each other through the years once in a while, but that’s where I got to know him.

AM: How did you join The Guilty Men?

GB: Dave just called one day. I joined the band for the tour for Museum of Heart in 1992. I had worked quite a bit with Rick Solem, the piano player at the time, because Rick played in James Intveld’s band when we were together.

AM: I’ve noticed a few different bass arrangements lately in songs played live as opposed to the album version. For instance, MARY BROWN.

GB: When we got together with Rick (Shea) for the first time rehearsing the Blackjack David songs, Dave said he wanted a different feel. Songs tend to evolve on the road, too. You don’t even realize that it changes. But MARY BROWN gelled like that.

A good example is when we did that live album here in Austin (Interstate City, HighTone, 1996). Me and the guys thought this was going to be a piece of cake; we had been on the road a long time together. We got down here to rehearse and Dave started trying all the songs with all different feels, so it ended up being a lot



Photo: Billy Davis

TEX AND THE HORSEHEADS **DISCOGRAPHY**

1983 Hell Comes to your House part 2 - compilation w/ Enigma with The Jones’s, Screaming Sirens and 45 Grave.

1983 Tex and the Horse Heads EP
Enigma records.

1985 Life’s So Cool (produced by John Doe) Enigma records

1986 Live in Holland Enigma records

of work. Long days!

AM: I heard you played with Tom Waits at some point. How did that happen?

GB: I subbed for Larry Taylor, who is Tom Waits' bass player, to do the Arsenio Hall TV show. That was after his Bone Machine record came out. So we did some promotional stuff for the album, but not a tour. That was pretty cool.

AM: What other bands have you played with?

GB: Hmmm. I played with Dale Watson in Texas for 5 weeks. He was living in L.A. at the time right before he moved back to Texas. Also I played with Juke Logan and my wife Brenda Burns, before joining Dave.

AM: Tell me about your wife Brenda Burns.

GB: Brenda is a fantastic singer and multi-talented musician / songwriter. She sang with Asleep at the Wheel, Art Pepper, Tanya Tucker, and Dottie West. She grew up in a musical family. Her dad was a country swing fiddle player in Spade Cooley's band, so she and her sister learned to sing harmony when they were little kids.

AM: How did you meet her?

GB: Juke Logan put together a band. I was the bass player, and she was the singer. So we met and clicked. We've developed a great partnership over the years. We now have a studio, and I enjoy engineering and recording songs. We put out a CD called A Song Away From You. (1996, Big Boss Records, PO BOX 481153 Los Angeles, CA, 90048) She has had some songs covered by Francine Reed, C.J. Chenier, and Pop Staples. We had a song in a movie called Clock Watchers. One of the most gratifying things in my career has been seeing some of these other artists recording songs I have co-written, or helped Brenda arrange and record.

AM: So how did you like opening for Bob Dylan on his East Coast arena tour?

GB: They hauled our gear, so we didn't have to lift anything. (laughs) Actually, it was an honor being on stage with Bob and Joni. We were happy at how the crowd reacted so well to Dave and the band. It's so different from playing a club. There was such a distance from the audience. It's almost like being in the studio where you can't see the audience that well.

AM: Were you able to meet Joni Mitchel and Bob Dylan?

GB: Yeah, I passed Joni in the hall one time and I complimented her. She stopped and talked for a minute. She didn't see us play but she said, 'I hear you guys every night and I've been dancing to it.' I never got to meet Bob. He just had this "Don't touch me" vibe around him. ~~~*AM*

PHIL-ISM OF THE MONTH

From the stage of the Blue Café (for our amusement).

Phil: I bought this suit at a thrift store today and it had no belt loops. I just reached my hand in my pocket and I felt something squishy. It was my belt loops.

Being the Androgynous soul that I am...

Dave (interrupting): Ladies and Gentleman, my brother, the genderless Phil Alvin.

Phil: The androgynous!!!



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AUSTIN CITY LIMITS®

Taping January 29 1999

By Billy Davis

Dave Alvin and the Guilty Men were invited to tape an episode of the prestigious concert TV show, AUSTIN CITY LIMITS. The PBS broadcast series has aired for 24 years and has featured concerts by many renowned blues, country and folk artists. The taping took place before a live audience of 400 at the KLRU-TV studios in Austin, Texas. Dave's first impression of playing the ACL show was, "Fear and panic! It's like playing the Grand Ole Opry or the Apollo. It's an institution."

Dave Alvin had already been in Austin most of January and February producing the new Derailers album. With the pressure of producing and doing the ACL taping, Dave brought Chris Gaffney to town to lift their spirits. Chris is another west coast roots-rock singer on HighTone records (Dave produced his last CD). Gaffney has a reputation for providing a million laughs. Dave Alvin often introduces him to the audience as, "One of my best friends in all the world." After the taping Dave recalled, "Chris has a stand-up comedian's perfect timing."

The band arrived at the studio at 11 AM to do a sound check and full run through of the set. Equipment was provided by the studio. Joe Terry was happy to play a Hammond B3 organ with a rotating Leslie speaker cabinet. Joining Dave and the Guilty Men on a few songs would be Austin-based harmonica player Ted Roddy. Ted played on Dave's live Interstate City CD on the song JUBILEE TRAIN. Tonight he would reprise his part.

They started the rehearsal by going over the songs Roddy would play on. JUBILEE TRAIN was perfect. Next, Dave had a surprise, changing the set list by adding BARN BURNING. Ted wasn't familiar with the song, so Dave played and sang the song on an acoustic guitar off mic. In only a few minutes, they had it down.

The band played KING OF CALIFORNIA and BARN BURNING. Next, Dave announced, "Let's play the American Trilogy." Ahhh. That's JUBILEE TRAIN; Which contains DO-RE-MI and PROMISED LAND. After running through the whole song list, the last song was to be AMERICAN MUSIC. But at the last minute Dave changed to MARIE MARIE and called out to the producers, "Would it be a problem if we got another human up on the stage?" Dave then yelled, "Hey, Gaffney. You're playing accordion, get up here." So Chris played and sounded



Photo: Billy Davis

The ACL rehearsal with Ted Roddy.



Chris Gaffney at Austin City Limits

He had a big white cowboy hat with shades and a cool gray-green suit. Joe was partly responsible for Chris's choice, "I found that suit for Gaffney AND convinced him that he needed to have it, which the owner of the shop then GAVE to him, despite the \$60 price tag."

Dave kept the mood light by making jokes to the audience. He talked about having the make-up applied and how he was told that if you have to wipe your face – "Dab. Don't rub." Everybody laughed about that. Joe said sarcastically, "I'm thinking of wearing heavy make-up that gives you a creepy-looking tan all the time now."

They started with KING OF CALIFORNIA, which has become a signature song for Dave. He greeted the audience by saying, "It's an honor for a bunch of bar room guys like us to be on Austin City Limits." Next, Dave introduced Teddy Roddy: "One of the best harmon-

great. He played the song before on Dave's Italian tour, so he knew the arrangement.

After the song, I said to Gaffney, "Did you know Dave was gonna do that?" He said very sincerely with a pair of raised eyebrows, "I had no idea at all!!"

Show time came, and Monte Montgomery opened the show playing for an hour. Dave was impressed with Monte's playing and told the audience, "He may be better, but I'm louder (laughing)."

Each band member was really decked out. Gregory had a 1940's-style suit complete with hat and cigar (unlit, of course). Dave wore his traditional black jacket but was wearing a turquoise shirt. It's rare to see Dave wearing bright colors. Rick wore a jacket with Native American design accents on the back and sleeves. Chris Gaffney probably looked the best of all.



ica players in the known universe.” They played BARN BURNING. Ted left the stage and they played MARY BROWN, BORDER RADIO, DRY RIVER, and OUT IN CALIFORNIA. After 2 false starts on this song, Dave said, “I’m glad this isn’t live TV.” In between takes he said, “I hear you have free beer here...Is there any of that free beer left?” Everybody laughed and Joe Terry later joked that he wished no one had told Dave that he was allowed to restart songs like that because it was too nerve-racking.

ABILENE, JUBILEE TRAIN, and BLACK JACK DAVID flowed right along. 4TH OF JULY was next but took two takes. Dave thought he heard a defective speaker in his stage monitor. The stage hands changed the cabinet while Dave and the boys took it all back to the barroom, launching into what Dave cued them as SHUFFLE IN C. After a minute of that, they played a complete take of 4TH OF JULY. MARIE MARIE finished off the set with Ted Roddy and Chris Gaffney joining in. Dave’s recalls, “Having Ted and Chris at the end gave it a celebratory vibe.” It was a rocking finish, probably way heavier and louder than the ACL people are used to.

One of the final stories Dave told to the crowd was about Austin City Limits, “I remember being very young and sitting at the kitchen table in Downey, California, watching a show with Towns Van Zandt and Lightnin’ Hopkins. It was the first time I saw Austin City Limits. So having seen them on this stage, it’s now very intimidating to be up here.”

After the taping the band sat down and watched a rough director’s mix of the set. Dave decided on the songs for the edited 30-minute segment: KING OF CA, BORDER, DRY RIVER, OUT IN CA, BLACK JACK, and MARIE MARIE. Joe Terry watching and said, “I was surprised to see that TV actually adds about 35 to 40 pounds on to a usually fit and slender person such as me!!” Dave had a mixed view of playing ACL. He said, “It’s an institution. On the other hand, I felt we deserved to be there. So I felt cocky and totally intimidated at the same time.”

Dave now had finished the Derailers recording and ACL. It was time to unwind. The following night, the legendary Continental Club was the place to be. Outside a neon sign stands out as the



Photo: Billy Davis



Photo: Billy Davis

Photo: Billy Davis



Photo: Billy Davis

Photo: Billy Davis



only light on the block. But on this special night, Austin had a full moon looking down over the neon. The small club featured a revolving mirror ball in front of the stage sending out beams of light touching every wall. A red sparkle curtain covers the back of the stage with an eye-catching raised chrome Continental Club logo in the center. What a cool place! This is where Dave recorded his Interstate City Live album.

Photo: Billy Davis



The Leroi Bros. were the headliners. Dave and Chris Gaffney were somewhere in the club. Anybody who knows Dave, can be sure that when guitars are in the house and Dave Alvin is in the house, they can't help but come together. A jam was inevitable. Around 2 AM, Dave and Chris were called to the Leroi Bros. stage. Singer Doug Sahm also appeared. The club was due to close at around 2 AM and it was going out with a bang.

Doug Sahm, Dave, Chris, & The Leroi Brothers.

They started with Bo Diddley's BEFORE YOU ACCUSE ME. Doug was taking the vocals, Chris backing, Dave on lead guitar, and the Leroi Bros. filling out the sound. Next they played Doug Sahm's GOIN

TO SAN ANTONIO. Then Sahm sang another one: YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE.

Dave launched into his favorite bar song – HONKY TONK. He took the first half on vocals, and Chris finished it up on vocals. Unbelievable! You would think these guys played together all the time. The show was over. The owner Steve Wertheimer said that Dave brings the house down every time. Good bye Austin, we thank you! ~~*AM*



Photo: Billy Davis

Dave Alvin's Austin City Limits appearance will be paired with a segment by Loudon Wainwright on April 10, 1999.

The contest winners of the Austin City Limits tickets with Dave and Shoeshine Charlie.



Continental Club owner Steve Wertheimer and Billy Davis

Photo: Billy Davis



DAVE ALVIN CONTEST

- Win a framed and autographed copy of Dave's much-talked about cover story on the NY Times Arts & Leisure section. A random drawing will decide one winner from the correct answers to the following question. Q: Name 5 bands that have released albums with Dave Alvin as a member of the band. Don't include Dave's solo albums. For example, one of the 5 is the Blasters (I think we all know that). Dave has to be a full member, not just playing on a track or two. Deadline is 3/15/99.

DAVE ALVIN AND FRIENDS IN LONG BEACH, CA AT THE BLUE CAFÉ 12/12/98

PHOTOS: DAVID FELLER

It was another ordinary night at the Blue Café in Long Beach. Dave Alvin and the Guilty Men have played many shows at this venue. The small club holds about 500 people and resembles a seedy Bourbon Street bar.

The first of the night's two sets ran through select songs from Dave's BlackJack David album as well as others from his solo repertoire. The Guilty Men by now were a well-oiled machine, and every song was no less than perfect. Dave announced, "Me and the boys have been out on tour for 6 months, and we have 2 more nights to go--then we take a break. This is the blow out for us." Dave was alluding to something special, and it might have had something to do with the buzz going on about some musician friends of Dave's that were somewhere in the club.

The 2nd set started with KING OF CALIFORNIA. An R & B instrumental followed. Dave used this instrumental earlier this year as an "R & B exit" at the end of his encore. As the band vamped through the song, Dave put on his Vegas announcer's voice, "Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome to the second show at the fabulous, swingin, truly incredible Blue Café in Downtown Long Beach. I'd like to bring up a great singer, football player, and boxer...16 and 1 was his record...from Tucson, AZ, Chris Gaffney!" Chris is a big favorite in the area. The band played 5 Gaffney songs and then JUBILEE TRAIN. Chris provided some cool embellishments with the accordion.

It was almost the end of the show when Dave announced, "I'd like to bring up some guys if they're still around. John Bazz! Gene Taylor! And Phil Alvin! The crowd started going nuts realizing they were seeing a Blaster reunion. Bazz later recalled, "We were there early, and were hoping to be called up. But David has a real sense of drama and waited for the proper time in the encore to do it."

When Phil made it to the stage, he playfully tried to kiss Dave on the face and then he announced, "I am the first person that ever missed my brother's lips when I kissed him." The band had kicked off the "Big F Chord" at the begin-



Photo: David

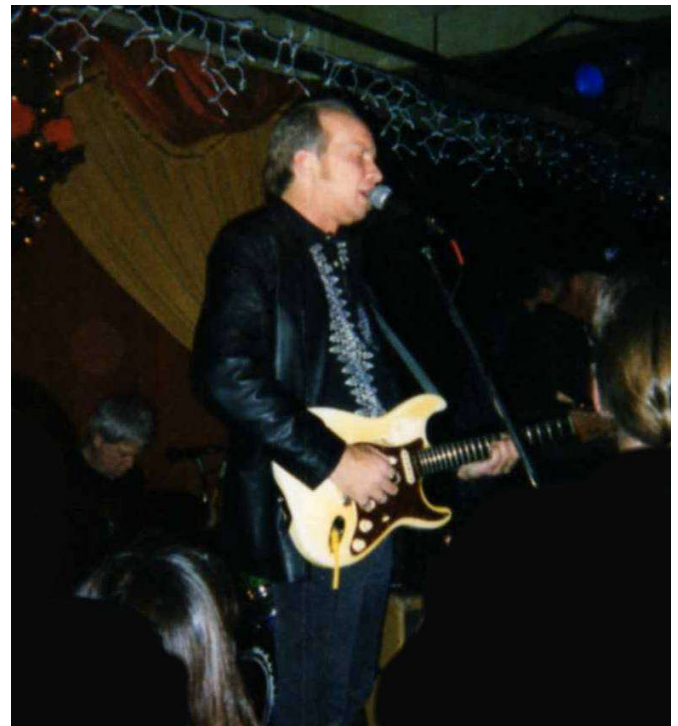


Photo: David Feller



Photo: David Feller

Photo: David Feller



Photo: David Feller



ning of HEAR ME CRYIN as Phil continued to talk to the audience. Gene Taylor had to yell to Phil that they were starting the song in order to get him off his banter. It was said that Phil was feeling no pain after an evening of partying.

They were winging the song selection. Dave later said, "We had just played a professional kind of show so we felt, 'Let's be silly.' Bobby Lloyd Hicks never played HEAR ME CRYIN before, so Dave was yelling cues to him. Bobby was right on the money. The stage was crowded with musicians and instruments, so Joe Terry and Rick Shea jumped off stage.

TIGER MAN was next. It's been awhile since the brothers played together, so they had a huddle on the approach to the song. Phil suggested starting it like MYSTERY TRAIN. After trying the wrong groove, they started again just like the old Rufus Thomas version, as Phil yelled, "That's it!!" Rick joined in on this song and provided a cool-sounding train whistle drone on the steel. A great solo by Dave rounded out the song.

Next was ROLL 'EM PETE, an old Joe Turner song that the Blasters covered on their 1982 Live At The Venue EP. Piano player Gene Taylor shines on this one. Phil gave him the ultimate compliment by saying, "Gene Taylor is the last piano player left since Roosevelt Sykes died." That was a great compliment.

It's been seven years since Phil Alvin has had a piano player in one of his bands, and the only one ever, was Gene Taylor. Gene just happened to be in town rehearsing with his band The Fabulous Thunderbirds. Also it's rumored that he is working on a solo album for Rumble Culture records.

On ROLL 'EM the vocal treatment by Phil isn't true to the original; instead he adds a medley of lyrics to the song with elements of other Joe Turner songs like JUMP CHILDREN and MY BABY'S A JOCKEY. Rick took a fantastic steel solo in the song.

Tonight there was a "Blasters first." Tonight Dave sang response back-up vocals to Phil's lead vocal on this song. Dave could be heard chanting refrains of "Hi-ho silver" and

"Yes, Yes" during the song. In the old Blaster days, Dave never sang back-up.

The last song was MARIE MARIE featuring everybody on stage except Gregory. (Where are you Gregory?) Joe and Chris played duel accordions. It was like Cajun overkill. The crowd loved it. Rick took the first solo, then Dave took his, and last was the dual accordion solo. The band walked off leaving a stunned audience. Dave announced. "Thanks, we'll be here tomorrow night. I don't know how we'll top this, but we'll try!"

What a show. Dave was right: it was "A Blow Out." Back in August of '98, Phil showed up at Dave's Long Beach Museum of Arts show and sang on MARIE MARIE in the encore. So the Alvin brothers keep coming together. Tonight was special because it was closer to the original Blasters, only Bateman was absent. Bill is currently living in Alaska. Dave later said, "It was a lot of fun. We were all real happy. It was as close as the Blasters have been together in so long. And with Bobby doing a good imitation of Bateman--It was pretty moving." ~~*AM*

PHIL ALVIN REMEMBERS THE BLASTERS IN SPAIN

I loved Spain. We were there when Billy Zoom was the guitarist in 1987 (summer). I remember going down to this one show at 3 o'clock in the morning and saw these flamenco guys. I can play, so I'm not easily impressed. The dancers were very beautiful, but what most impressed me were the voices. They were unbelievable.

When we played Barcelona, we played on the palace steps with Los Lobos. It was one of the most incredible gigs I've ever done. When you're walking up the Palace steps, they must cover at least a half a mile. From the square at the top, you can see the whole city looking north west.. We were there for what is called the 'La Noche De San Juan,' and man, there were 500,000 people all over the streets. I thought this would be an easy gig.

We had been on the plane from Madrid and I was talking to the promoter and he showed me the ticket that said 'La Noche De San Juan.' So I said to him, "Everything will be fine. I'll just tell the audience, "Viva La Noche De San Juan!" (Phil pronouncing it 'Wan.') He said: "Don't say Juan!!!! They'll throw a bomb at you. This is Cataluna! It's Juan (pronounced -'ju-an'-). Where I come from in California, if you say Juan (pronouncing -ju-an-) you'll get yourself hit for that. The snooty, kingly, Spanish people here tell the Mexicans they don't speak Spanish. They say they don't speak Ni Papa De Castellano. So when I got to Barcelona, I found out they don't speak castellano, they speak catalan. It's not the same sounds. So Jesus (pronounced -J-) is from Barcelona. Which is very surprising to me (laughs). Of course that poor boy was actually from some lousy desert town out there under Roman rule (laughs).

In Barcelona I woke that morning on the 8th floor of the hotel out of a dream of having been under mortar fire. I imagined bombs, and then I heard them while awake. Across at these tenement houses, I saw explosions going off on this roof - not little ones! You're talking to a boy that was a thrower of wax bombs. I knew what these were. There were bombs going off everywhere. By the time we got on stage at 'La Noche De San Juan', we were on a plywood stage on the top of that piazza. We went on before Lobos. It was hard to breathe because of the smoke. I could see the people in the streets throwing bombs. One of the bombs came up on the stage right next to me. I was about to kick it and I thought, "No you better think about that." And it blew a hole in the stage. When we were finished, it was raining smoke, paper, wax, and everything. When David Hidalgo started walking on stage, he looked at me and his eyes got big. He said, "This is crazy." That was one of the greatest gigs.

Norteno Music: That is the music that Los Lobos play. It means from the north. It's got the accordions from the Polish in Texas. The Mexicans derogatorily called the music that was played in North America, Norteno. Now they call it Tex Mex. It is very alive and healthy music. If you come out here, I'll show you how to set your radio station because right now the motion is definitely from the south. Another thing is Bondra music - great big horn bands. These boys are bad and count one, two, one, two. None of that lazy-ass three, four, three, four time. El Salvador is a great Bondra place. Next time, I'm gonna make a solo record with horns on it...I'm crazy for this stuff. So tell Spain, Thanks from the Blasters, it's a great place.

Our friend in Spain, Christian Gago Fernandez, tells us about 'The Night Of San Juan': "It is a great Holiday in Spain since four hundred years ago. Children ask for old things in the neighbors' houses that they can burn (like cupboards, tables, chairs, clothes). Then all the Spanish streets are full of big bonfires which people jump to scare the witches. These bonfires are burned at Midnight. The holiday continues the next day with wine, fish, roasts in small bonfires on the streets, and big artificial bombs in the sky." ~~AM



Recording with Luther Vandross...or not?

Luther Mania !!!!!

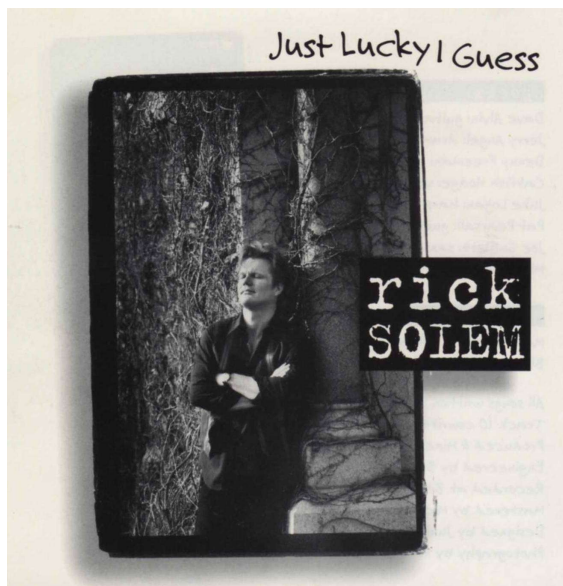
Here is a funny story Dave told at a recent show: **Dave:** Every time I think of Blue Blvd, I think of Luther Vandross. The reason for that is: I was in Canada when the record came out (1991), and I did an interview on the Canadian version of MTV, called MUCH MUSIC. I was met at the door of the studio by this guy who just stared at me and said: "You're the man! You're the one! You did it!" I said, 'What? Who?.' He said, "I don't know how you did it, but you did it."

So for the interview, I would play an acoustic song and then he would interview me. We were on live TV. He says, "People at home, this is Dave Alvin. He did it! No one else has been able to do it, but he did it! So he turns to me and says, "So tell me Dave, how did you do it?...You know....Luther Vandross, Dave?!? Tell them about Luther." I said, 'What do you want to know about him?' He goes, 'Well, you got him to sing on your record. How did you do it?' Now what he had done is, he had some how mistaken Dwight Yoakam, who sang harmonies on my record, for Luther Vandross. You can see how closely he listened to the record and how much attention he paid to the liner notes (laughs).

So he goes on, 'Luther doesn't sing on anybody's records but his own. How did you get him to sing on yours?' I thought for a minute that we're on Live TV. Do I show this guy to be... negligent, that's a nice word. Or, do I play along. So, I just nodded and said, 'I just called him and asked.!' He said, 'Oh, wow!! You just called Luther?'

Luther was playing 2 nights later in Toronto for the very first time and the city had Luther-mania going on. So he says to me, 'You know man, I have tickets and backstage passes to Luther and I'm gonna meet Luther. Is there anything you want me to tell him?' I said, 'Tell Luther Thanks!' —Am

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Q. from you & A. from the band

For Phil Alvin: I heard you played harmonica on a Steve Earle song on the Beverly Hillbillies soundtrack? – Steven Michael, Billings Montana

Phil: That has to do with Lester Butler. He couldn't make the session, and my manager called me up. Earlier on, I wasn't familiar with Steve Earle and he called me up and offered to fly me out to New York and paid me \$1500 to open for him.

At the session I was scratching my head and wondering what's going on. I could see Steve was being sucked up by the music business. He had lost his record deal, and his wife left him. This was his last kiss. I was moved by him, and saw the most explicit vision of the confusion that happens in the music business in the last half century happening right there.

Joe Walsh was also so drunk he couldn't do anything. But, I was glad he was there because I needed a drink myself. (laughs) The session became very important to me because I had a thank-you-for-this-gig relationship. When I heard a tape of the track, which was HONEY DON'T, it was terrible. I knew I had to get the right phrasing. I pulled from the bottom of my heart, a vamp - a Lee Allen saver that would give this jumble of confusion some character: A harmonica solo. I haven't heard the final mix.

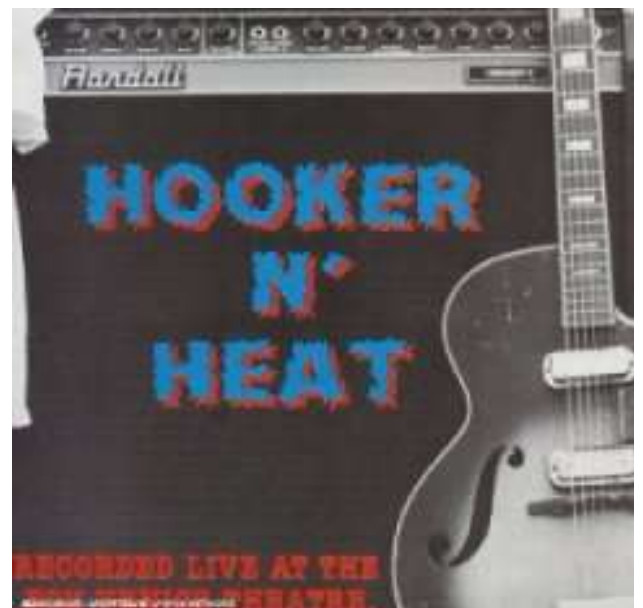


For Phil Alvin: You speak great Spanish in your shows like Buenos Noches, Musica America, Una Rosa Rosa, Muchas Gracias... Will you ever try to sing a classic Blasters song in Spanish? -- Christian Gago Fernandez, La Coruna, Spain

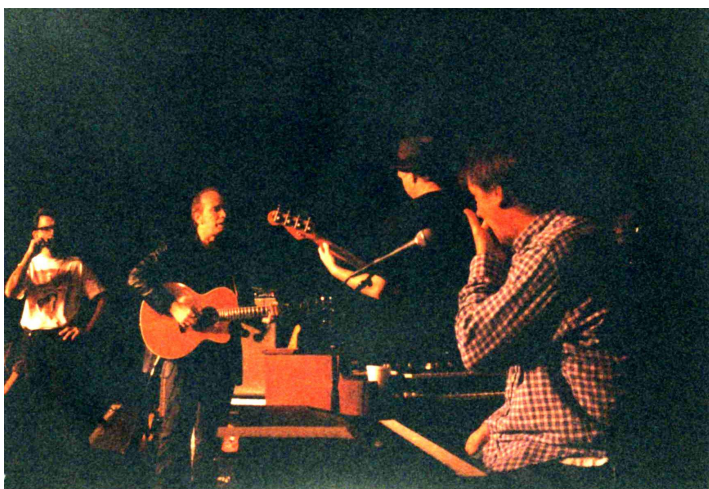
Phil: That's very interesting that you say that. I'm doing my best to improve my Spanish. I've been singing a lot of songs in Spanish and have always played Norteno. I can speak Spanish pretty good until I went to Italy and that screwed me up. Since I got good in Italian, I started going half and half. Yes I would love to sing a Blasters song in Spanish and I would love to make a totally Spanish record. I will do a song called SIN TU AMOR.

For Phil Alvin: What's the story with The Blasters being credited for the cover of the Hooker and Heat album? --Craig Frischkorn, Jamestown, N.Y.

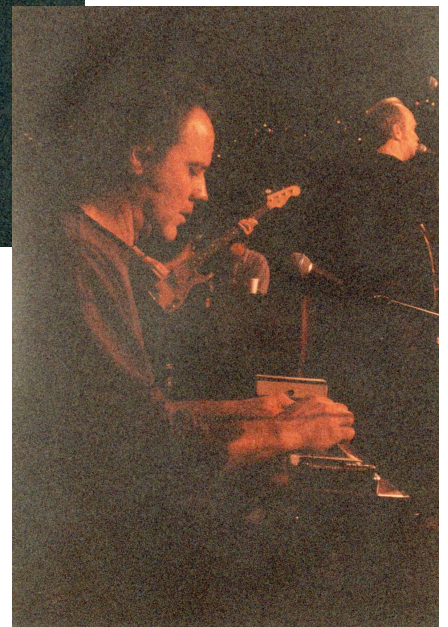
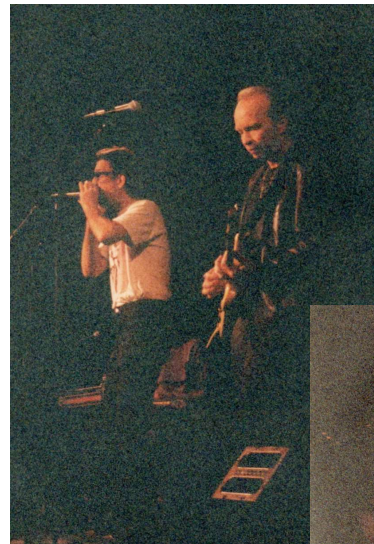
Phil: That's our Randall Amplifier on there. I took it over to Bob Hite's house to take a picture of it. Bob was a very good friend of mine. He taught me what the state of music was before 1927. He was another guy who died on that heroin deal. I don't know if he intended it originally as an album cover. —AM



AUSTIN CITY LIMITS REHEARSAL



AUSTIN CITY LIMITS REHEARSAL



AUSTIN CITY LIMITS BACKSTAGE



The New York Times

Evoking in Song a Mellow City's Hard Edges

By ARIEL SWARTLEY

LOS ANGELES
IT'S not one of the postcard views you will find in the tourist stores along Hollywood Boulevard, but as an emblem of Los Angeles, the raiks of high-tension towers plunging down the foothills, angling across avenues and puncturing canopies of residential foliage are almost as characteristic as the city's ubiquitous sky-duster palms. In fact, to an Easterner like me, tower and tree both speak to much that is mysteriously other about this city.

In my upbringing, palms are the antithesis of what a tree should be (read mighty oak, stalwart elm, dead lecturer), remaining frou-frou leafed and way too flexible well into their dotage. Similarly, the huge, multiarmed towers — testifying to power sources and power consumption on an almost incomprehensible scale — serve as constant reminders of the raw and profligate geography that has shaped my adopted megalopolis — and of the strange forms human endeavor can assume, given enough room and hardly any limits.

Emigrées are always looking for keys to their new cities — visual, aural, intellectual. (Los Angeles, the conventional wisdom goes, requires a whole set, and even then you have to expect the locks will jam and the security service will arrive, brakes squealing.) Therefore, I was not wholly surprised to discover that the singer-songwriter Dave Alvin — a stalwart of the Los Angeles music scene since he emerged as the creative force behind the Blasters and their iconic, high-energy roots-rock in 1980 — grew up in the shadow of high-tension lines. Other musicians may be more readily identified as producers of signature L.A. sounds, whether it's the balmy tequila-tinged melancholy

The Los Angeles Dave Alvin depicts is one of disparate communities and fragmented pasts.

of the Eagles or the gritty malt-liquor-laced compassion of Sublime. Since 1991, Mr. Alvin has made several solo albums for Oakland's Hightone Records, including "Blue Blvd.," "King of California" and last year's acclaimed "Blackjack David." His mostly narrative songs — which mix blues with reverberating acoustic guitars, minor-key meditations with Southwest twang, along with a healthy dose of flat-out highway boogie — have let me see Los Angeles from a wider vantage point.

Like Bruce Springsteen's New Jersey and Lou Reed's New York, Mr. Alvin's turf lies on the margins — a Los Angeles of bus stations, bars and eerily endless boulevards where, as he sings, "the streetlights are shining just like stars." It's also a place where present and past merge, where a

Ariel Swartley writes frequently about literary and popular culture from Los Angeles.



The folk singer and songwriter Dave Alvin in Downey, Calif., the modestly aging area of Los Angeles where he grew up.

denizen of the housing developments can chivalrously accept his lover's request to kill her wealthy husband, describe the deed in the minor modal cadences of a mountain ballad and sum up his motivation in language that would be right at home on the "Montel Williams" television show: "I know what's wrong and right; what goes

around comes around, but I would do it all again for the love of Mary Brown."

Of course, rock-and-roll has long prided itself on seeing straightest through the slantwise gaze of the outsider. The Ferris wheel lights and boardwalk poseurs of Mr. Springsteen's Asbury Park are distinctly small town, yet they offer a prescient reflection

of that really big carnival, New York. Similarly, Lou Reed's supercilious drawl in "Waiting for My Man" has always made it clear that he didn't imagine junkies were the only Manhattanites to be driven by cravings for overpriced commodities and short-lived satisfactions.

In the same manner, Mr. Alvin's Los

Angeles is present in his songs as much in what he doesn't mention as in what he does. Tourist vistas of sunlit sands and snow-capped peaks are absent; in their place is an airport motel where people "believe for a while they can promise the moon shining through the window of a \$30 room." Of course, here in the hub of the entertainment industry, moon shine and promises and sour realities are also readily available at much higher prices.

When Mr. Alvin sings about living on "the lost side of town," he's not just being poetic. Downey, where he grew up — best known as the home of the nation's oldest surviving McDonald's — is one of a chain of modestly aging flatland communities cradling the downtown core. Once, their southern and eastward march through cow pasture, industrial waste and the wandering flood channel of the San Gabriel River fueled the rise of the freeway system. Since then, the city's power centers have shifted westward toward Century City, and the eastern half has been colonized by waves of immigrants.

It's enough, as Mr. Alvin sings on his 1993 song, "Museum of the Heart," to make everyone, exotic new arrivals and blue-collar natives alike, feel like a "Stranger in Town." His sympathies, however, have a core of steel. For Mr. Alvin, the ultimate Los Angeles irony may be that rock-and-roll's comfortable iconoclasm is no match for the city's extremes. "As poor as you are, somebody's poorer," he sings on "Blue Blvd.," "when you're living in a rich man's town."

BUT enough about words. How, you may be wondering, can Los Angeles be signified by the unvarnished twang of folk music: a city whose simplest vista looks like it has been colorized; a place with a palpable electric hum born of arcing overpasses and the strobing flicker of bungalow after bungalow along streets that run straight for 20 miles? In the first place, it would be a mistake to underestimate the effect of Mr. Alvin's voice, especially in a town where the bottom line is ultimately physical. Rolling up from some place in his chest so deep it's practically Cretaceous, its creaks and murmurs register the slightest shift in the emotional breeze. Authentic? Put it this way: if Mr. Alvin decides to sell used cars, we're all in trouble.

And there's no lack of electricity in his acoustic guitar playing or, for that matter, in his hard-driving rhythm. It's interesting to hear the difference in a song he wrote for the Blasters, "Border Radio," and his later solo version of the same song on "King of California." The earlier take drives the freeway limit with its pounding "Stagger Lee" piano, though it maintains its ironic distance as carefully as an Elvis imitator maintains his forehead grazing curl. The unplugged version opts for the stop-and-go pace of a neighborhood street, leaving plenty of space for chords to reverberate or a line to yield its poignancy. And it's in those open spaces that the story gets filled out: the powerful Tijuana stations that keep immigrant workers in touch with their families back home; the popular songs that unite two cultures; the hopeful semaphores lovers make across a no-man's land. Oddly enough, it's at his most traditional — in his own ballads like

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Songs Evoke a City's Hard Edges

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"Mary Brown," his resonant reworking of the classic "Blackjack Davey" or the near-perfect lyric of "Dry River" that Mr. Alvin creates a music of here and now. "King of California" may be a 19th-century sounding ballad with mandolin accompaniment and a story set in the Sierra goldfields, but the sweep of the title phrase cuts across centuries in a place where sudden success beyond one's wildest dreams remains a perennial prospect. Like true folk

music, the songs seem indigenous, shaped by the land and its people over time, so that the essence has weathered out.

Los Angeles, as everybody knows, has a continuity problem: it's a city of self-referential islands — Malibu, Koreatown — where even the freeways have their own landscape and vocabulary. But Mr. Alvin's songs, with their narrative threads and steady rolling guitars and accumulation of melodically identical verses, have a linear quality that's nonetheless evocative. They are like the boulevards he sings about, linking

"the old park and abandoned stores" of neighborhood after neighborhood, some blankly industrial, some cozy with front porches, some just now being rebuilt with bright new mini-malls and signs in an unfamiliar alphabet.

They are like the high tension towers, too, their spare steel lines bridging aspects of the city that are otherwise difficult to connect: rich and poor, present and past, open space and cul-de-sac, post-card-perfect palms and home, the metaphors leaping in a sudden communicative flash from point to distant point. □

Melancholy Dreams

Dave Alvin's view of Los Angeles as it is depicted in his 1991 song "Dry River."

I was born by a river
but it was paved with cement
but it was paved with cement
but I'd stand in that dry river
and dream that I was soaking wet.

Someday it's gonna rain
Someday it's gonna pour

Someday that old dry river
won't be dry anymore.

I played in the orange groves
til they bulldozed all the trees
til they bulldozed all the trees
but I'd stand in the dead
stumps
and smell the blossoms on the
leaves

Someday it's gonna rain
Someday it's gonna pour
Someday all those dead trees
won't be dead anymore

I fell in love with a woman
but she did not fall for me
but she did not fall for me
Now I'm dry as that old river
and I'm as dead as those old
trees.

Someday it's gonna rain
Someday it's gonna pour
Someday this heart of mine
will fall in love once more

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