

ISSUE #90

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

JULY 2021

The Return of the Blasters

Latest News: The Blasters have been rehearsing and have three shows booked. On 8/1/21 they play with 'X' and Los Lobos at the Pacific Amphitheater in Costa Mesa CA. They also have gigs on 10/2/21 in Alameda CA at the IVY Room and 1/15/22 at the Coach House in San Juan Capistrano CA. || || Native Sons, the forthcoming album from Los Lobos, will feature versions of songs written by Los Angeles bands and artists. Included on the collection is Dave Alvin's FLAT TOP JOINT that was featured on the American Music album by the Blasters. Other artists represented are Jackson Browne [JAMAICA SAY YOU WILL], the Beach Boys [SAIL ON SAILOR], and Percy Mayfield [NEVER NO MORE]. Native Sons will be released July 30 on New West Records. || || Victor Krummenacher, bassist for The Third Mind, broke his leg on May 2 while rock climbing in Joshua Tree, CA. A 'Go Fund Me' page to help him was launched on June 3 with a goal of raising \$20,000. "One month later Victor cannot put his full body weight on his leg. He is having a difficult time concentrating and he is still in a lot of pain. He is facing mounting medical bills, a huge mortgage, and no sign of work in the near future," according to a statement on the page. As of July 1, nearly \$17,800 has been raised. To contribute, go to [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com) and search for Victor's Broken Leg. || || Dave Alvin has contributed a blurb to Music in My Life: Notes from a Longtime Fan, a new book by Alec Wightman. Dave calls the book, "a great, funny, smart, and passionate piece of writing." Wightman, is a concert promoter, member of the board of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and corporate lawyer. He has presented Dave in concert with various lineups numerous times in the Columbus, Ohio area since the late 1990s. The book recounts several anecdotes about his working relationship and friendship with Dave. The book can be previewed at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). || || Blues guitarist and singer/songwriter Carolyn Wonderland has signed with Alligator Records. Her latest album, which was produced by Dave Alvin, will be released in the fall. || || Soulsuckers on Parade, a previously unreleased Jeffrey Lee Pierce album from 1984, has been issued on vinyl and CD by Minky Records. Dave Alvin, Bill Bateman, and Gene Taylor are among the backing musicians. The release includes covers of SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL and Creedence Clearwater Revival's BAD MOON RISING. || || The Cruzados are releasing their a new album called She's Automatic. It's their first in more than 30 years. Guests include Dave Alvin on guitar, Steve Berlin, David Hidalgo and John Doe. || || Dave Alvin is assembling a book of essays, song lyrics, poetry related to music, and writings he did for the Los Angeles Times and various magazines. The book tentatively titled New Highway will be published by BMG || ||

In This Issue: Rick Shea's new CD Love & Desperation, Gene Taylor's six solo albums, remembering bluesman James Harman, and 25 years of Dave Alvin's 'Interstate City.'

(((Latest News cont. from page 1))) II III Dave: “One of things I’m most proud of is a recording session I did in honor of my friend Don Heffington who passed away. He has been my guy – the drummer in L.A. who plays on all my albums. His songs can be very folky and sometimes just wacky. He was a trip. Before he died he was organizing a tribute album to himself (laughs). If you knew Don, you’d understand. He made a list of the songs he wanted on there and who he wanted. He called me a few times from the hospital and told me the song he wanted me to do. So, I cut a song called AVENUE C with Greg Leisz, Michael Jerome, Bob Glaub, and Dave Witham [who played on the track Dave and Phil Alvin’s “Wild Man on the Loose” for the Mose Allison tribute album]. We did an abstract version like the Third Mind would do - but bluesier.” It’s being produced by Sheldon Gomberg. Other artists doing songs are Jackson Browne, Fiona Apple, Emmylou Harris, and Buddy Miller. Dave says it should be released in late 2022. II III — Am



Rick Shea has had a successful solo career since leaving Dave Alvin’s band the Guilty Men, in which he was a member from 1998 to 2004. His 12th solo album was released October 23, 2020 called Love & Desperation on Tres Pescadores Records

He began sessions for a new record in the spring of 2019 at his home studio, Casa de Calora, in Covina, CA employing top-flight talent such as drummer Shawn Nourse [Dwight Yoakam, I See Hawks in L.A.] bassist Jeff Turmes [Mavis Staples], and his longtime collaborator Dave Hall. Assembling the recordings changed when the pandemic hit, so Shea and his collaborators went the digital route, in their own backyards. “It’s not a good time to be in a room all together these days,” Shea says. “And everybody’s trying to be as careful as they can. So, I worked with guys who

were set up to record remotely.”

Thus, Nourse ended up cutting new drum parts at his own home studio, Nourse by Northwest; accordionist/organist Phil Parlapiano of Dead Rock West tracked at his Electric Dog Studio; Skip Edwards, best known as Dwight Yoakam’s longtime keyboardist, worked at his Studio 401; and accordionist David Jackson laid down his parts at (where else) Studio Dave.

Shea says, “The natural sound of this record is a testament to how good these guys are. I think they did just a wonderful job.” But he admits that the old ways are still preferable: “More and more, it’s easier to move in this direction. But it’s hard to beat getting a group of guys into a room together.”

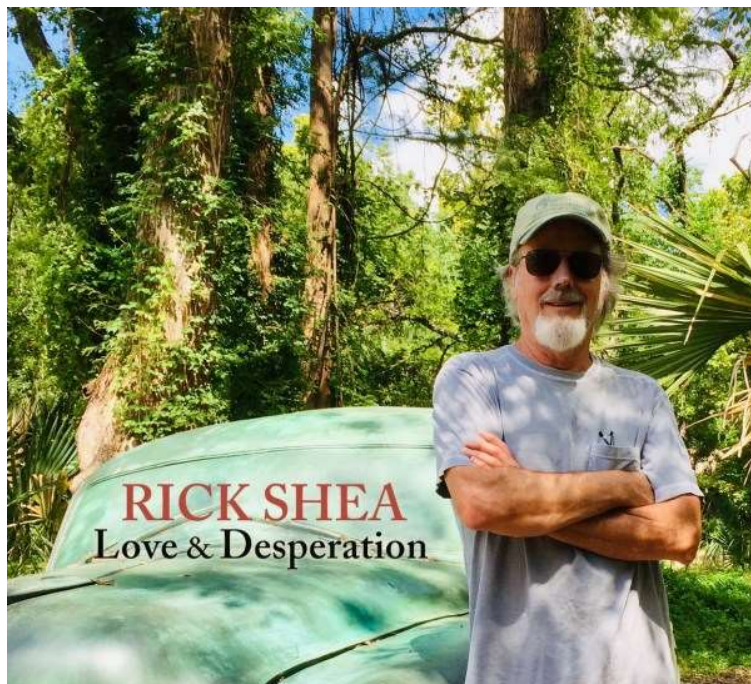
Kicking off with BLUES STOP KNOCKIN’ AT MY DOOR, a rockabilly number by swamp rocker Al Ferrier that was covered by bluesman Lazy

Lester, Love & Desperation deploys every imaginable roots style, ranging from country and folk to norteño and Cajun two-steps. But the blues dominates much of the proceedings this time around.

“I got a lot of my musical education, for better or worse, in the bars and honky tonks in San Bernardino where I grew up, and BLUES AT MIDNIGHT is a pretty good reflection of that. (DOWN AT THE BAR AT) GYPSY SALLY’S borrows its title from Townes Van Zandt’s song TECUMSEH VALLEY. The scene is what I imagined some nights in some of the places I played and having some fun with it. It’s about the characters I looked at in those joints for years. That was their life – hanging out in bars, and having their little scene, their little hustle going.

“That’s kind of the way the album progressed,” Shea says, “and it’s also the product of these times that we’re living in. To me, blues is what most popular music is based. In the words of the great Townes Van Zandt, ‘There’s two kinds of music, the blues and everything else is just Zippity Do Dah.’”

Some of the songs have a definite autobiographical bent, the musician says: Love & Desperation is a bit of family history, dramatized for folk song effect --my folks were not great at being parents, but I was kind of a wild kid, so I never held it



against them. JUANITA takes its title from the name of my wife Susie's mom; the song is how I imagined it might have been between her and her husband, Johnny, Susie's dad, when they were just dating."

Regarding the sweetly romantic A TENDERHEARTED LOVE, Shea says, "I owed my wife a love song. Being married to a musician is not always easy."

Recorded as it was amid the tumult of an extraordinary year, Love & Desperation features a pair of songs with suitably apocalyptic lyrics. Shea describes BIG RAIN IS COMIN' MAMA as "a nice country two-step about impending doom." He says of THE WORLD'S GONE CRAZY, "Things have been upside down for a while now. I wrote this after watching a particularly harrowing episode of The Rachel Maddow Show."

The collection also includes SHE SANG OF THE EARTH, a ballad collaboration with Kim Ringer, daughter of the late, respected singer-songwriter Jim Ringer; the cautionary tale NASHVILLE BLUES; the instrumental MYSTIC CANYON, which shows off Shea's guitar chops; and the album-closing noir narrative TEXAS LAWYER.

Shea says of the latter number, which was inspired by the work of hardboiled novelist Elmore Leonard, "This is the third time the song has appeared on a record. It was on my very first CD, and I released a live solo version as well. I'm overly attached to the first version because Chris Gaffney sings and plays accordion on it, but I didn't feel the rest of it did the song justice."

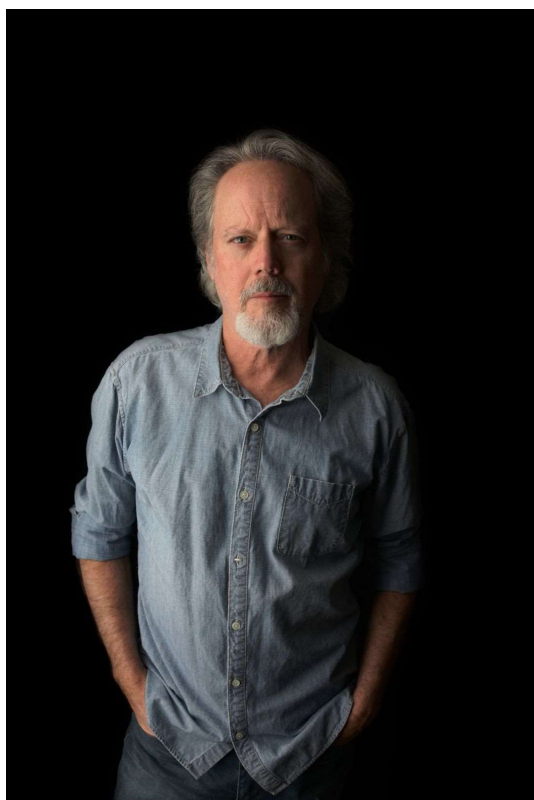
Looking back on the challenging experience of making Love & Desperation and the long road of his career, Shea says, "Every album feels like sort of a milestone or

a marker for where you are at that time, musically and in life in general. I feel very fortunate to have been able to play music for most of my life, I am beginning to think of things I'd like to be remembered for, and this album would be one of them."

The Songs

BLUES STOP KNOCKIN' AT MY DOOR (A Ferrier)
Country Rock Music

I first heard this song from Lazy Lester and I think I love his version maybe as much as the original by Al Ferrier, both great artists from the southern Louisiana area. I've been to New Orleans a number of times, one of my absolute favorite musical cities, but my trips the last few years have been my favorites. I've been able to stay a few days, playing some



shows of my own and sitting in with my friends The Iguanas. I'm still trying to get a grasp on the deep rich musical history there; it feels like it might take another lifetime.

Guitars & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion - Phil Parlapiano Bass - Jeff Turmes Drums - Shawn Nourse

BLUES AT MIDNIGHT (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG

I got a lot of my musical education, for better or worse, in the bars and honky tonks of San Bernardino where I grew up. This song is a pretty good reflection of that. I kind of fell into playing the country bars early on, when I figured out I could make sort of a living at it. I'd been playing solo acoustic shows at coffeehouses and places like that, and weekend gigs with my band. The country bars were steady five-night-a-week gigs, sometimes more, and I learned a lot of the old songs in those places, met guys who'd been playing since the '50s and I got to play my guitar five hours a night and get paid for it, not bad for a kid who just wanted to play his guitar.

Guitars & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion - Phil Parlapiano Bass - Jeff Turmes Drums - Shawn Nourse

(DOWN AT THE BAR AT) GYPSY SALLY'S (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, BMG

The name Gypsy Sally comes from the Townes Van Zandt song, Tecumseh Valley. The song depicts a scene I kind of imagined some nights in some of the places I played. Some of the places I started out in were pretty rough, truck stop bars, honky tonks. There was some trouble sometimes, but I never really got caught up in it. It seemed to me that if you were looking for it, trouble would not be hard to find in these places. Outside of that, though there would be married couples out to have a couple of beers and dance a little on a Friday night, a few of the local characters workin' their scene or their little hustle and the working girls who were always very nice to me.

Guitars & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion - Phil Parlapiano Bass & Sax - Jeff Turmes
Drums & Tambourine - Shawn Nourse

LOVE & DESPERATION (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG

This song has a bit of family history, dramatized for folk song effect. My folks were not great at being parents, they were both pretty involved with their own lives, but I was kind of a wild kid, so I never held it against them. I was never a good student, I had trouble with authority, but I always read a lot and was wild for adventure. I hitchhiked all over California and the West Coast and back across the country three different times, always imagining some hippie Xanadu around the next bend. I'd read Kerouac, Jack London and Mark Twain and thought that's what I might find. In the end I realized that most of what I was searching for was inside

of me and that I just needed to spend the time with my guitar to find it. I imagined this song as the kind of old folk blues that Dave Van Ronk was such a master of.

Guitars & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion -
Phil Parlapiano Bass - Steve Nelson
Drums & Tambourine - Shawn Nourse

SHE SANG OF THE EARTH

(K Ringer, R Shea) Ric O Shea

Music BMI, admin BMG

Kim Ringer, daughter of the late

great California folk singer/songwriter Jim Ringer, sent me this lyric. I thought it was beautiful and haunting and I came up with the tune and the arrangement and the second part of the chorus. I didn't know Jim, but he and his partner Mary McCaslin were kind of heroes to a lot of us that grew up in San Bernardino. Jim and Mary lived there for a while and played weekend shows at The Penny University, the local acoustic coffeehouse gig, we played the open mic night. They had albums out on Philo Records, they toured and their songs were played on the local folk music program at the college. I got to know Mary years later, Jim had passed away, and she and I played and toured together some, playing our own songs and some of the songs she'd sang with Jim. That's how I met Kim, at a show we played in Fresno where Kim lives. Jim and Mary set a pretty high standard for folk song duets in their time and were pretty popular, till things spun out on them a bit. I'm really glad I've been able to get to know Mary and sing with her, and get to know a little more about her and Jim and that early era of California folk music and artists, Jim and Mary, Kate Wolf, Utah Phillips, that kind of paved the way for a lot of the rest of us.

Guitars, Pedal Steel, Mandolin & Vocals - Rick Shea Fiddle - Jim Shirey Bass - Dave Hall
Drums - Shawn Nourse



BIG RAIN IS COMIN' MAMA (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG

This is kind of a nice country two-step about a big storm and impending doom, maybe set somewhere along the south coast of Texas - Louisiana. A friend of mine said he thought of Buck Owens music as sad songs you could dance to. This one is maybe not as sad as it is a bit of a warning. Most of the songs on this album were at least started in one way or another when I began recording, some from a few

years back, but this song came to me during the recording and pretty quickly, another reflection on these turbulent times we're living in.

Guitars, Pedal Steel & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion - David Jackson Bass - Steve Nelson
Drums - Shawn Nourse

A TENDERHEARTED LOVE (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG

I owed my wife a love song, and probably a lot more. Being married to a musician is not always easy and she's been kind and supportive to me for a long time. I was trying to capture a bit of the simple and direct feeling of songs like Van Morrison's TUPELO HONEY or JJ Cale's MAGNOLIA, kind of a tall order I know.

Guitars, Pedal Steel & Vocals - Rick Shea Hammond B3 - Phil Parlapiano Bass - Dave Hall
Drums - Shawn Nourse

JUANITA (WHY ARE YOU SO MEAN?) (R Shea, T Zamora, J Adame) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG, PerroFlaco Music ASCAP

Juanita is my wife Susie's mom's name, this song is how I imagined it might have been between her and her husband, Johnny, Susie's dad, when they were just dating. When he first approached her she played a little hard to get and wouldn't tell him her real name; told him her name was Rosie. They were together for 39 years when he died 27 years ago, and there is still a giant hole in the family, a hole that might never be filled. My friend Tony Zamora wrote the Spanish lyric to this that talks about Toloache, also known as the "lily of the devil" and "the fright of the wolf." It's a psychoactive plant that's also considered a back alley love potion, if you know the right curandera.

Guitars & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion & Vox Organ - Skip Edwards Bass - Dave Hall
Drums - Shawn Nourse

THE WORLD'S GONE CRAZY (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG

Things have been upside down in the world for a while now; I wrote this song after watching a particularly harrowing episode of "The Rachel Maddow Show." Even though this song was inspired by current events I wanted it to sound more like an older song, like a gospel song, like The Staple Singers, and not be tied so directly to what is happening today. I'm certain we'll get past the events of these last few years and we'll all be stronger and better for it, but we still have a ways to go, "hold on to the ones that you love."

Guitars & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion - Phil Parlapiano Bass - Steve Nelson
Drums & Tambourine - Shawn Nourse

NASHVILLE BLUES (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG

This song is kind of a peek behind the show biz curtain maybe, maybe a little too

much, a cautionary tale as my friend Chris Morris puts it. Show business can be a rough business, and those of us who spend our lives in it sometimes understand it the least. I pictured this as a song Bobby Bare or Jerry Jeff Walker might sing, both masters at singing songs where you're not quite sure if they're in on the joke or not, but of course they are, kind of a sly tongue in cheek, I'm just not completely sure I'm in on the joke on this one.

Nashville Blues Guitar, Dobro & Vocals - Rick Shea Bass - Dave Hall Drums - Shawn Nourse

MYSTIC CANYON (R Shea) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG

Mystic Canyon is one of my favorite hiking spots; I don't get up there often enough. It's actually called Indian Truck Trail on a couple of maps I've seen, a name I like almost as much. I have a beautiful Red Healer named Katy, an Australian cattle dog, and she and I will head up there when I think it's not too crowded, and I can let her off the leash for a little while.

Guitar & Steel - Rick Shea Hammond B3 - Phil Parlapiano Bass - Dave Hall Drums & Shaker - Shawn Nourse

TEXAS LAWYER (R Shea, W Reese, J Moyeda) Ric O Shea Music BMI, admin BMG, Amigo A Go Go BMI

This is a song of treachery and deceit that takes place in the badlands of Tamaulipas, the borderlands between Brownsville, Texas and Ciudad Victoria in Mexico. I liked the idea that the antagonist in this story is an American and a lawyer, usually thought of as a respectable profession, and that everyone in the song is guilty of something. I was pretty deep into Elmore Leonard when I wrote the lyric to this song, with help from my friend Wyman Reese, and Spanish refrain from my father-in-law Johnny Moyeda. Johnny's gone now, so singing this is a chance for me to think about him and remember him. The original recording of this song featured my friend the late great Chris Gaffney and is still very close to my heart for that reason, but I felt like I wanted to update it.

Guitar, Mandolin & Vocals - Rick Shea Accordion - Phil Parlapiano Bass - Dave Hall Drums - Shawn Nourse All songs mixed by Walter Clevenger, Mastered by Paul du Gré

Look for Love & Desperation on TresPescadores.com to purchase a CD or digital download. You can also view videos for the new album for free.

Gene Taylor Discography

6 Solo albums

The Producers

By Billy Davis



photo by Matt York

Gene Taylor played on hundreds of recordings throughout his career. More often he backed up other bands playing piano, but frequently he did a guest vocal or two from his vast repertoire. There are just too many of those to list. Gene himself has said that he would record tracks and sometimes not even hear if they got released. Let's take a close look at the six solo albums he released in his lifetime and recollections by the producers of the albums.

In 1986, Gene Taylor had just left the Blasters and recorded his first solo album for Spindletop Records called Handmade. Producer Bill Bentley came up with the idea of the album. So, with limited studio time, Gene and Blasters drummer Bill Bateman ran through many songs from their bar-gig repertoire. Then they had other musicians overdub parts. Four songs are covers and Gene sings on six songs. Gene recalled in a 1996 interview: "If I had it to do over again, I would have gotten some musicians and rehearsed. Bentley had us go over about a hundred tunes. All kinds of stuff. Songs like even LOVER'S QUESTION which I could barely remember the changes." The album was released only on vinyl in the US and Canada. It didn't get much attention, but it is an important document of that period in Gene's career. The highlight in my opinion is Gene's original song PUT MY BOTTLE DOWN. Not enough credit is given to Gene's vocal ability, but on this track he shows he had studied some of the great 1920-30s blues vocalists' delivery.

Bill Bentley (producer of Handmade)

I was working at Slash Records in 1985. I was in New York in 1985 doing press for the Blasters. We were backstage and drinking a lot. The Blasters didn't mind drinking and Gene didn't, either. I mentioned that a friend of mine named Barry Wilson, a Texas buddy of mine, had just bought a recording studio in North Hollywood and I wanted to produce some records there. I told Gene, "When we get back to Hollywood, let's make a solo record with you." He was happy about that. When we got back to L.A. a few weeks later, Gene calls me and says, "I'm ready." I said, "Ready for what?" He reminded me that I said

we were gonna make a record. I said, “I did?” I was loaded and didn’t remember (laughs). I felt so sheepish and it was stupid of me, but I said, “Ok, let’s make a record.”

Gene wanted Bill Bateman to play with him. The instrumentals were probably written on the run, but two originals he came in with lyrics prepared. We had an engineer named Steve Strassman and we weren’t paying for time, so we could go all night. We’d walk out in the halls of Amigo Studio and there’d be Eddie Van Halen recording there. – it was the old Warner Bros. studio so everyone recorded there. Such a cool place. We recorded until dawn and we were drinking a little, but in the last hour Gene had taken off his shirt and was down to his boxer shorts and boots [laughs] – so that’s the last visual I have in my mind from that night.

I did recall about 25 songs recorded and almost everything was on the first take. Gene didn’t make any mistakes.



Bill Bentley

-- 1986 -- Producer Bill Bentley on the Songs --

TEXAS STOMP (instrumental) – A Gene original song that he wanted to title from the state where he grew up in Fort Worth. The song had such a force to it that I knew I wanted the record to start off with it.

SOMEBODY’S FOOTPRINTS – He brought in the lyrics for that. It’s a haunting song that I wanted to get Stevie Ray Vaughan to record. I played it for Stevie and he liked it a lot, but his career had gone through the roof, never had time and then he only lasted a few more years. That’s my favorite song on this record.

TWO AMIGOS (instrumental) – He named this because he and Bill were the two amigos, we were recording in Amigo Studios, and in another room there was soundtrack recording going on for The Three Amigos movie. Larry Taylor, who played with Gene in Canned Heat, played bass on this track. I remember he pulled up in his van, got the upright bass out, came in played on the track and he took off. I gave him \$100 cash and he was gone [laughs].

PUT MY BOTTLE DOWN – Gene wrote that song for me because he said I had to quit drinkin’ [laughs], which I did the following year. This is another original he brought in. We brought in a friend of ours named Louie Lista from a band called the Sheiks of Shake to play harmonica. He actually wrote out harp parts for the song, when most harp players just improvise. Louie was one of the great characters in L.A.

NEW ORLEANS SATURDAY NIGHT (instrumental) – He changed this song, but gave a co-write to Professor Longhair, who he wanted to pay homage to. Gene was a huge fan.

BEARFOOT BOOGIE (instrumental) – He did that for Bob “The Bear” Hite from Canned Heat, who he was good friends with. Bob Hite had the biggest collection of blues records in the world. Gene told me an interesting story: Canned Heat did a gig [April 5, 1981] at the Palomino club in North Hollywood where Hite overdosed and died after the show. His friends didn’t report his death until they went over to his house to clear all the 78s out. It was such a valuable collection and they knew that scavengers would go to his house and steal all his 78s. I think his brother Richard Hite got the collection. Gene said his collection was phenomenal.

JESUS IS A MIGHTY GOOD LEADER – Skip James originally did this song. Skip was really rascally and some people said he was the most devil-blues of all time. So, for him to write a spiritual it must have been out of guilt. Skip was a guitar player so I was surprised to see Gene pick that one. It’s a beautiful song.

Spirituals, no matter what your beliefs are, always hit you hard. Gene heard a bass pattern that he thought Freebo would be good on. So, I brought him in. I think all the overdubs on the album worked. Freebo (Daniel Friedberg) played with Bonnie Raitt, John Mayall and Dr. John so he was perfect for this to play bass tuba.

HOUSTON SHAKEDOWN (instrumental) – Gene again gave writing credit to someone he admired. In Houston, a piano player named Robert Shaw was known as the best piano player in Texas. He started in the 1930s. I haven't met many people who knew about Robert Shaw. Gene named the song and gave a tip of the hat to someone who inspired him.

IT'S ALL OVER NOW – Gene aimed this at the Valentinos' version, which was the original that Bobby Womack wrote. The Rolling Stones had a bigger hit with the song. Gene was a big Bobbie Womack fan.

SKID ROW (instrumental) – Another Gene and Bill song. Bill Bateman was credited with half of all the songwriting on the album. Gene was adamant that Bill get credit because they were creating this album together on the spot. He loved Bill Bateman – they had been friends forever. Their publishing company was called Pidgeon Boy Music, which Gene told me was a nickname his grandfather used to call him.

A LOVER'S QUESTION – It was written by Brook Benton [and Jimmy T. Williams] for Clyde McPhatter. It's such a beautiful song and Gene's vocal is so effective.

LAST NIGHT BOOGIE (instrumental) – The boogies were flowing out of Gene and Bill that night.

WHEN I GROW TOO OLD TO DREAM – It was a standard that Oscar Hammerstein [and Sigmund Romberg] wrote. I don't know where Gene came up with it and never heard him play it or talk about it again. But it just goes to show the wide range of influences and musical loves he had. Great piano players can play anything with their two hands. Gene's piano was almost like an orchestra

SAXOPHONE AFTER HOURS (instrumental) – Madonna was doing a session next door and Barry Wilson said there's this great saxophone player in there. Let's get him on a track. That was Andrew Woolfolk. So we brought him in and they did a totally off the cuff jam in a few takes. Andrew also played in Earth Wind and Fire at that time.



Barry Wilson also owned Spindletop Records, so we knew that label was going to release the album. This was the only record I ever produced and I stayed being a publicist because I wasn't cut out to be in a studio getting sounds for endless hours. It has never been released on CD. I don't know what happened to the master tapes. They could have stayed at Amigo Studio which was demolished and now is a parking lot. Or Spindletop Records, who went on to record many artists, might have had them - but the label ended in a mystery. I'm so proud of this album and it really captured Gene at that moment in his life.

A few years ago, I saw Gene at the Redwood Bar in downtown L.A. and he couldn't have been nicer. He was a good-hearted human who loved music more than anyone I've ever known. I feel fortunate to have known him, have him as a friend, and I hope I helped shine a little light on Gene for his first record. Hopefully we can get it re-released somehow, because it's a great record.

----- **-- 1987 --** -----

In 1987 Gene formed a trio with Doug Sahm and Amos Garrett called The Formerly Brothers. They put out a studio album [Return of the Formerly Brothers] and live album [Live in Japan]. While not really

qualifying as a Gene solo, he did have four songs with him as lead vocalist on each album.

----- -- 2003 -- -----

In November, 2003 after the Original Blasters completed their reunion tour, Gene Taylor released his second solo album, called Gene Taylor, on the Pacific Blues label. Gene once again used the formula that had been working for years. He and Bill Bateman cut the basic tracks playing most of Gene's favorite blues cover songs. There is no bass guitar on the album just like his first album. Gene overdubbed some Hammond organ – an instrument we rarely hear Gene dabble in. James Harman plays harmonica and sings on one track, THE LOSER AND THE WHEEL. The opening song, PINE-TOP'S BOOGIE WOOGIE, is one Gene has taken on from Pinetop Perkins as his own signature song - just a great boogie-woogie. Another favorite of mine from this album is the Baby Boy Warren song SANTA FE which shows off the great Gene and Bill interaction of piano and drums. And then there's Gene's interpretation of Peetie Wheatstraw's SIX WEEKS OLD. Gene always loved to talk about Peetie Wheatstraw – the Devil's son-in-law.

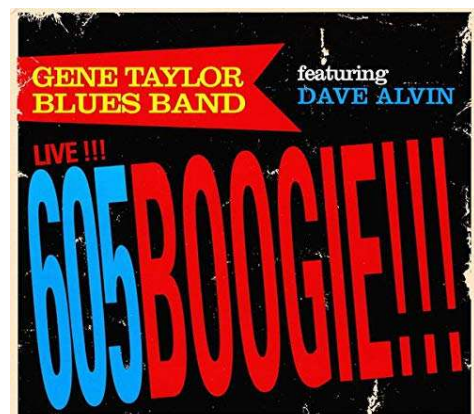
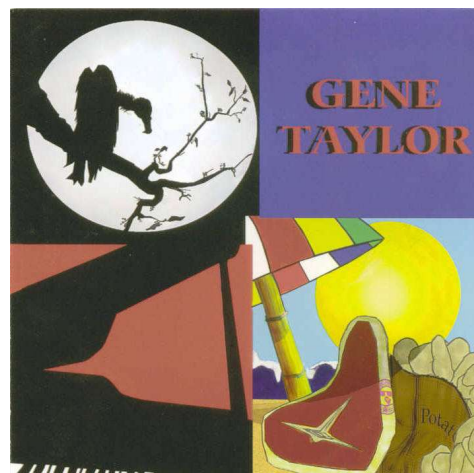
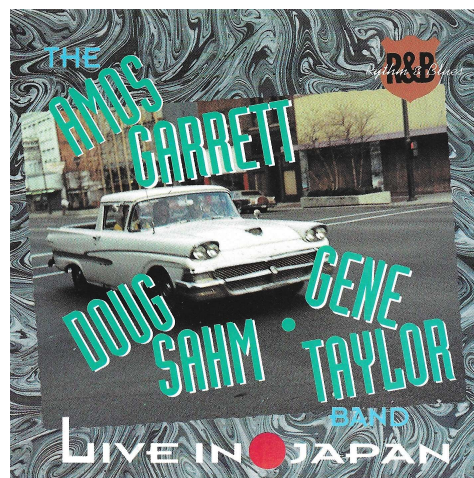
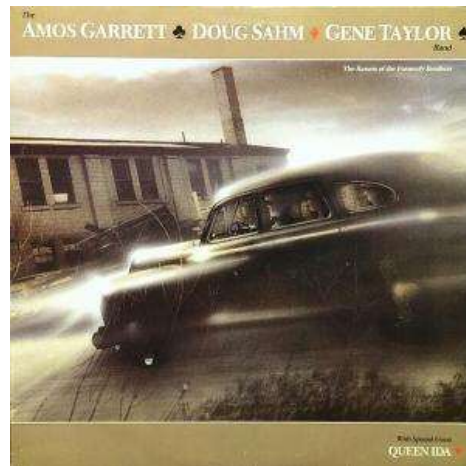
An interesting note, Phil Alvin contributed not to the music, but doing all the computer graphics designed artwork.

----- -- 2008 -- -----

In December 2007, Gene went to Southern California to play some shows and assembled some old friends named Dave, John, and Bill – The Blasters – for his Gene Taylor Blues Band. Strangely all their schedules were open, even Dave Alvin's, to do some shows together. They played a bunch of Christmas holiday shows that were recorded and released by Yep Roc records as a CD called Live!!! 605 Boogie. This CD could be described as a Gene Taylor greatest hits album. It has a selection of his best instrumentals and songs he sang in Blasters shows; WHAT AM I LIVIN FOR, DON'T LIE TO ME, and LIGHTS OUT. Also featured are Gene's interpretations of classics like BEFORE YOU ACCUSE ME and BLUE MOON OF KENTUCKY. And one of my favorites is DOWN THE ROAD APIECE with some lightning-fast Gene fingering of the 88s. You can't help tapping your foot to that one. I highly recommend Live!!! 605 Boogie if you don't have any Gene Taylor solo CDs.

Hudson Marquez (Co-Producer of Live!!! 605 Boogie)

The Gene Taylor Blues Band had a show booked at the Harvelle's Club in Santa Monica in 2007 – it was going to be the Blasters but without Phil. I was dying to go to see that. I'm from New Orleans and I'm the white boy who rediscovered Professor Longhair and got him back on the road to stardom. So, I always loved the way Gene





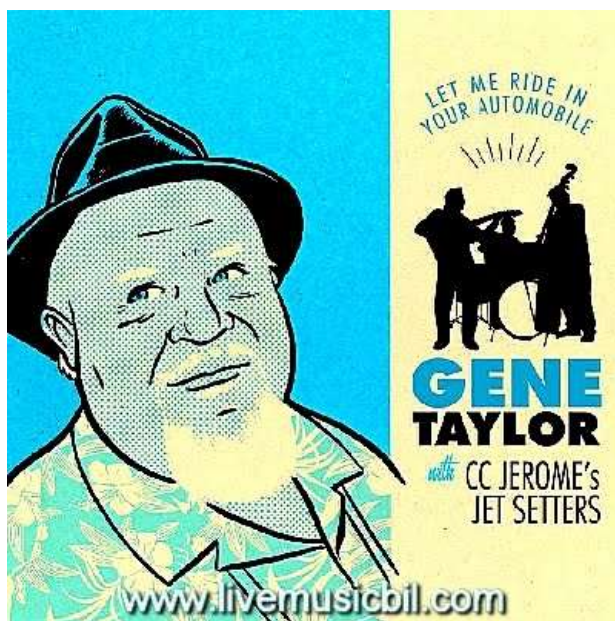
played New Orleans R&B.

But I wasn't going to be able to attend that show because I was scheduled for a surgery that day. Gene was a really good friend for a long time. I told him it would be really nice if you could record the show so I could hear it. I suggested I produce it by doing my own mix of it. I made a deal for Mark Linnet to record it. He does an outstanding job of field recordings and he doesn't overproduce. I made the deal and it was a gift to Gene. I said "If there is any money to be made, I don't care." Gene trusted me. I said all I want is 40 CDs [laughs]. I helped mix it with Dave Alvin and Mark Linnett and then Dave got Yep Roc Records to put it out.

There's a murder warrant out for Greg Abbott and Rick Perry for killing Gene. That still rankles my ass. For all of Gene's cantankerousness, he was still such a sweet guy. I really loved Gene a lot. I'm so sorry he's gone.

----- -- 2010 -- -----

In 2010 Gene released Let Me Ride In Your Automobile on El Toro Records. He was backed by CC Jerome's Jet Setters from Holland and this CD is probably his most rock 'n roll and rockabilly solo album yet. Some of Gene's originals are not just blues songs. It's interesting where Gene's songwriting was going at this time with melodic singalong choruses. JUST A MIDNIGHT GIRL should've been a hit in the 50's, THE GOLDEN RULE sounds like it could have been an Elvis movie song [the good ones] in the 1960s and NEVER TOOK THE TIME sounds like rhythm and blues pop. ROCKIN LITTLE HONEY reminds me of something the Blasters would have had Gene sing on. He does a great take on Moon Mullican's SEVEN NIGHTS TO ROCK and Johnny Guitar Watson's MOTOR-HEAD BABY. I really love this album.



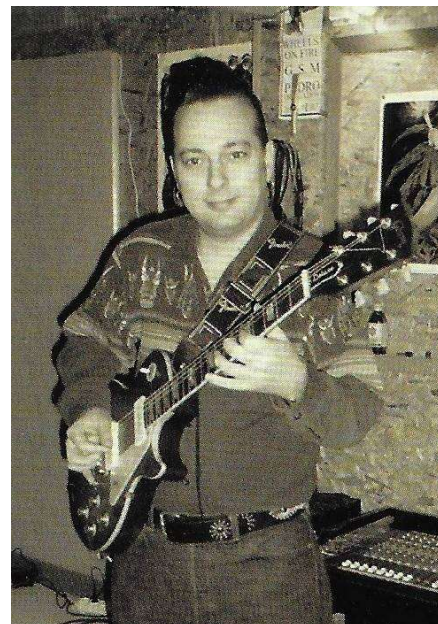
Jeroen Van Gasteren (producer and guitarist on Let Me Ride in Your Automobile)

I met Gene when I was living in L.A. because I was friends with Bill Bateman when he was in the Red Devils. I was working with Roy Gaines doing blues shows and I got a gig with rockabilly legend Billy Lee Riley. Bill Bateman was in that band. At the time, Gene was living at Bill's house, so we added him as a piano player to that band. When I moved back to the Netherlands I became friends with Gene's manager Brian Martin, who lived in Belgium. He put us together to do an album.

When we talked about doing the album, I wanted to do blues because that's what Gene is known for, but he noticed my band, The Jet Setters, was a rockabilly band, so he wanted to do a rockabilly album. He picked some great songs. He wasn't the easiest guy to work with. The album was pretty much live. We recorded the vocals as he played the piano as a guide vocal and it was so good we kept it for the final mixes. He came up with the idea of having background singers on SEVEN NIGHTS TO ROCK. We didn't

have enough people, so he found some guys in overalls who were working on the building and he taught them in English to sing "Monday! Tuesday!" and so on - so they made it on the record – and then they went back to work [laughs].

Gene didn't tour for the album with us, he had other gigs. I wish we could have, because it's a great album. I hadn't seen Gene for a while, but then we jammed with him a few years ago when he called me out of the audience. I was a great time and we partied all night. It broke my heart when I heard what happened to Gene. He is a character that is not replaceable. I'm blessed to have worked with him and known him.



----- -- 2013 -- -----

In 2013 Gene recorded his fifth solo album called Roadhouse Memories, in Finland for Bluelight Records. Only 1000 CDs were pressed and 300 vinyl records. The 12-track album was composed of all covers and one Gene original called MOONLIGHT RIDER. Gene brought back two songs from his previous albums but with full band arrangements - I USED TO LOVE HER and a favorite of his - SIX WEEKS OLD, a Peetie Wheatstraw song.

Robban Hagnäs (Producer and bassist on Roadhouse Memories)



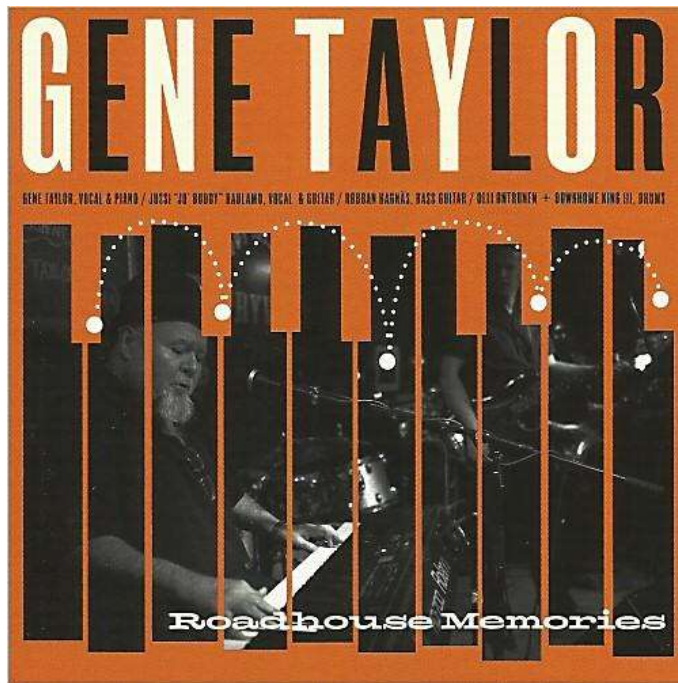
I'm the bass player in The Wentus Blues Band and have backed up a lot of American blues artists over the years. I've been booking artists in Northern Europe since the mid-90s. I first met Gene when he was in the Fabulous Thunderbirds and I was handling their bookings in Scandinavia. When he left the band, he got in touch with me and asked if I could book some shows for his solo band. I got him a show at the Scandinavian Blues Party in Kokkola for him with Bill Bateman. Last minute, Bill couldn't make it, so I ended up putting a band behind him for the show. The gig went

well, and we decided to book more dates with Finnish musicians backing him up.

After a while the lineup behind Gene was me on bass, "Jo' Buddy" Raulamo on guitar and Olli Ontronen on drums. We had found a home at the Storyville Jazz Club in Helsinki, where we usually did a few dates in a row playing four sets every night.

We all had so much experience playing blues, rock & roll and R&B, so Gene could shout out the key or name of the songs and we picked it right up. We never rehearsed. After about the third tour, I suggested that we record an album. Gene wasn't sold on the idea until the last show of the tour when he said: "We work so well together, so let's do it"

Six months later we met at Suprovox studio in Karkkila Finland. The studio was built upstairs in an old barn with a lot of junk downstairs. We stayed in a hostel that previously had been a police station / jail-house. The recording room was very small, but we all fit in there. Gene wanted to do songs that he had



came across while on the road, so that's where the name Roadhouse Memories came from. The first song we recorded was CHICKEN SHACK BOOGIE. We didn't pre-plan what songs we were gonna do. We just went from one song to the next song with no rehearsals. We did the recordings in two sessions, the second one about a year later with a different drummer.

My favorite songs on the album are FEELING SAD and DON'T TAKE IT SO HARD, where I think Gene really feels the mood - and Jo' Buddy is playing some killer guitar. We call Jo'Buddy by the name "Radio Joe" because he used to play guitar through an old radio instead of an amp to get an authentic old sound.

An odd song we recorded was Dean Martin's LITTLE OL' WINE DRINKER ME. I was singing and playing it on a guitar during a break. Gene heard me and knew the story of where Dean Martin got the idea from. There was an old commercial on TV in California made by "That Little Ol' Wine Maker Me" that Dean turned into "Wine Drinker Me." After that conversation, Gene immediately wanted to record it.

What I remember of the session is that Gene was very clear about what he wanted. He wanted that the sound and the feeling to be true to the music. He wanted the music to honor the people that wrote the songs. So, what you hear on the album is actually how we sounded live on those sweaty packed shows in Helsinki.

It was a shock for me when I heard the news about his passing. He was a fantastic piano player and great entertainer.

-- 2017 --

In 2017 Gene Taylor partnered with Chris Ruest for an album on El Toro Records called It's Too Late Now. On the 12-song album, I love the interaction between Gene's piano and Chris Ruest's amazing blues slide guitar playing. The production sounds very Sun Records which is always a good thing. Gene and Chris each take the lead on six songs while accompanying each other. I really like the song LOST AND LONELY CHILD, which had some deep meaning to Gene.

Chris Ruest (producer and guitarist on It's Too Late Now)

It's Too Late Now was a fun one to record. I spoke with Carlos Diaz of El Toro Records about releasing a record of me, Gene Taylor, and Brian Fahey [The Paladins] and he was very receiving of the idea! We recorded at Ft. Horton Studios with Billy Horton engineering.

We had never played with Brian before, but I knew it would be an easy fit. We all went to the studio and just simply played the songs. It was great. Inventive, inspiring,



and creative - all the while still being firmly seated in the blues... good times!

The album was a tribute to Preston Hubbard [Fabulous Thunderbirds bassist] as we were coping with the loss at the time. The songs were written about the times and way we live, while trying to stay positive and moving forward.

Gene was 'DEEP as deep' as anyone I've ever met and beyond. Gene knew sorrow, pain, sadness, loneliness and perseverance better than anyone I've ever known and he still delivered with an intensity and honesty rarely seen anywhere. The loss of him is unfathomable...

We had many good times on the road along with difficulties as well, but Gene was the best at rolling with whatever came our way. He set me straight several times with perspective that was needed. Gene was the guy who would do stuff you would scream "Noooooo!!", as he put a three-month old McDonald's hamburger he found under a car seat in his mouth. He'd look at you and say: "What? I've had worse. I've only been sick twice in my life."

I remember our first road trip together. I drove 27 hours straight (and straight too!). Gene told stories the whole time. I never felt like I needed to stop.

There was nobody more fun than Geno - even if you were in a bad mood or miserable, Gene would come running over, put his hands on your shoulder and yell "bro! Bro! Bro!" I'd be laughing like a high school kid in seconds [laughs].

----- -- End -- -----

JAMES HARMAN: IN HIS OWN WORDS

-As interviewed by Billy Davis

James Harman was a legendary blues singer and performer from the L.A. area who passed away from cancer on May 23, 2021. He played an important role in the Blasters' formation and success. I interviewed him on August 3, 1994 in New York while he was out on tour supporting his recent Black Top Records release called Cards On The Table. A portion of this interview that related to the Blasters appeared in American Music: The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter #4 in August 1994. Below is the complete unedited interview in which James talks about his entire career to that point.

AM: Start at the beginning of your career and tell me a little about your early influences. I'm sure you saw some of the blues legends in their prime.

James Harman: I saw them all! I love them all! Every blues guy, every R&B guy, every soul singer, every jazz cat, every hillbilly, every real genuine country music guy. Everybody that played real stuff is my idol and my hero. I came from Anniston, AL, and I was born in 1946. I sang in a church choir. My father played harmonica and my mother played piano and the organ. I started piano when I was 4 and on the end of the bench was a Hohner marine, my father's harmonica. I had to do the piano lessons every day and then I'd get to take the harps out and play on 'em.

AM: Were you into blues then?

Harman: I was into music. My great-uncle was Fate Norris, who played in Gid Tanner & the Skillet Lickers. They recorded for Columbia back in the 1920s and 30s. He also recorded under his own name Fate Norris. He was a big hillbilly star. When I was growing up, every week or two, I went to big fish fries and barbecues. Everybody played a mandolin, or a banjo, a fiddle, or a guitar, or harmonica. Everybody played music and everybody sang - so that's all I had around me.

My father was a police captain and rode a Harley Davidson, so I grew up riding Harleys, singing, and playin'. If I turned on the radio in my house in the 50s, I heard Junior Parker, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, John Lee Hooker, and Lightnin' Hopkins. I heard them all. All the gospel records like the Swan Silvertones, Mighty Clouds of Joy, Five Blind Boys, Alex 'Little Axe' Broadnax and all of 'em. So I went out and bought the blues records with my lunch money from grammar school. Every week you got a card for \$1.25 and that was for five days of lunch. I took that \$1.25 every Monday and went straight down to Topsy record store and bought a new 45 or 78. So records were my life. I collected blues, R&B, jazz, gospel, and soul music. I collected these records and they meant everything to me.

AM: Do you still have these records?

Harman: Sure. I'm a record collector first, I sing for a living to pay for records.

AM: So you keep your rare records in California even with those earthquakes?

Harman: I've never had a record broken from an earthquake, I've had more records broken from moving and ex-wives and stuff than I ever had from earthquakes.

I was 16 years old in 1962 and moved to Panama City, FL, I then started singing for a living. I had friends who would take me down to joints and say, "Listen to this kid sing the blues and play harmonica."

AM: Were you the only white blues singer in your area, I'm sure they weren't common?

Harman: I never saw another white guy do it, there was a handful of white guys around town who were older than me who played, but two or three of them sang OK, but I was the only one who had a real voice because I had been in a church choir. And I always was a story-teller, so I would get taken to these places and they would say, "Isn't that cute. A little white boy who sings like a man." So, they all liked me and I got to hang out. By the time I was 16 or 17, I was playing for money. I was painting on a mustache and going in to see B.B. King and Junior Parker. I started recording in 1964 at Kentel studio on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, GA., I cut four or five tunes and put out a 45. I put out about nine 45s in the 60s on little Southern labels mostly around Atlanta, Augusta, Panama City, and Pensacola.

Back then it was about radio shows. Radio stations would throw dances and they would be playing your 45 on the radio - "That's the new one by King James and the Royals." You would go from town to town playing these dances for the radio stations and that's all I did. I was making more money on the weekends and it didn't seem



reasonable to go on with the school because I was making a living playing music. In 1965 I went up to Chicago and I tried to make a start there at about the time that two other white harp players by the name of Paul Butterfield and Charlie Musselwhite were starting out. Charlie and I come from the same area, he's from Mississippi maybe a hundred miles from me. He moved to Memphis, I moved to Florida and then we both tried Chicago - but it was too cold for me, I couldn't take it. I'm a Gulf Coast boy, so I went back to the South and kept making 45s. Charlie got an album deal and put out a couple of albums and then he went to California. Meanwhile I tried New York, Miami, New Orleans, and finally I ended up on the West Coast. The real reason I went west was because of Canned Heat. The guys in Canned Heat are big record collectors and they were good friends of mine. I would go see them when they played Florida and we would talk records all night. I said to Alan [Wilson of Canned Heat], "I keep bouncing from town to town trying to make a start and I keep putting out these little records and I can't get an album deal. Maybe I need to change places again." And he goes, "Man, come to California. There is a lot of work there and we'll help you." So, in the early 70s I went to California with my band and Canned Heat was very good to me. They let me open a lot of shows for them, got me around and pretty soon I was the next guy "happening." I became the house band at the Ash Grove [blues club]. I backed up everybody. There was a good scene going on there still in the 70s. Big Joe Turner, Margie Evans, Eddie Cleanhead Vinson, T-Bone Walker, Pee Wee Crayton. They were all my buddies and we all worked together. I'd do shows six nights in a row at the Ash Grove and have all those people on my show.

AM: How did you start making albums?

Harman: I made an album for ABC/Dunhill in '73 and right then the vinyl shortage hit and the economy tanked. ABC said, "I'm sorry we can't put this out, we are dropping 120 artists, if they don't have a real hit record, they're dropped." Of course my record wasn't that commercial, it was more R&B, so I got dropped. In '73 and '74 I kept working with no new record out and I got really sick. I had bleeding ulcers and I almost died. The doctor said change careers or die. So, in '75 I broke up my band, but I got all my guys good gigs elsewhere. I got Gene Taylor, my piano player, a gig in Canned Heat and I retired and went into the hospital. I went through a big divorce, quit drinking, had a big bout with ulcers and for about three years I couldn't sing. Then the disco period came and it was horrible. Then at the end of the disco period I started putting a new band together. Gene Taylor came back from Canned Heat and we started rehearsing and we got Bill Bateman on drums.

AM: Was this when Phil Alvin was in the band?

Harman: No, this was before Phil. Phil was just hanging around Downey. We had three different guitar players. Morgan Davis, he is



Phil Alvin and James Harman at a Flyin' Cat gig in Costa Mesa about 1979. Photo by John Bazz

great guitar player from Toronto. C.J. Hope was with me, Mike Foresta on bass, Bill Bateman on drums, and Gene Taylor on piano. That was the new James Harman Band. We started playing around Southern California playing all the shows and things started happening a little bit. When George Thorogood put out his first record, more people started listening to blues again. Then this punk thing happened. Every several years this thing happens where music changes. People get tired of Bobby Vinton and they go for the Rolling Stones. They get tired of E.L.O. and they go for the Ramones. There is always, "This is too overproduced, let's go to something raw. Let's go to four kids in a garage with \$30 guitars." So, when people got tired of the disco thing they looked for something real and they found rockabilly and punk. I then brought Phil Alvin in to play guitar with me.



AM: How was Phil as the only guitar player in the band? We tend to think of him as a rhythm guitarist.

Harman: Phil Alvin can play anything he wants to play. Phil Alvin is a great harmonica player, a great guitar player and a great country blues guitar player.

Phil and Bill went and started the Blasters and what a surprise to everybody, they got Phil's little brother Dave, who had never been in a band. They got him to play guitar and he couldn't play, but he was a good poet. He was a poet but he wasn't really a good

songwriter, but he started writing songs and he got pretty good, real quick. And then he got real good, real quick. So, I took them in the warehouse where they rehearsing in and I recorded them on a big machine. I mixed it down to a cassette of 22 tunes and mixed it down to 15. We took that to Rockin' Ronnie Weiser and got the first Blasters record deal.

AM: Did you play on that?

Harman: No. I engineered it and produced it.

AM: What were some of the songs?

Harman: I don't know, R&B, blues, reggae, Bob Dylan, anything. They didn't even have a band name. They had about 19 names, So they said, "What do you think?" They had the something or other Blasters, and I said, "The Blasters," and I wrote it on the tape and stuck it on the reel and that became their name. So we mixed that down and showed it to Rockin' Ronnie and they went in and cut the American Music album in his garage studio. They thanked me on the album. I still have the bottle cap seen on the cover



James Harman recording the first Blasters demo in 1979. Photo by John Bazz

that says 'music.' Steve Bartel who did the cover gave it to me. He also designed my logo for Those Dangerous Gentlemen album of mine.

So, the Blasters guys left my band and I got new guys. I got Gene Taylor back, he came back from Canada and started playing with me. I got David Zuriecky on guitar and Willie J. Campbell on bass and Steven Hodges on drums and we went on and started opening for the Blasters a lot. They started playing bigger shows and they would take us with them and then they would hear me and say, "Oh yeah. This guy's great, this James, oh everybody's doing James again." So, I became known as the legendary old fart that had always been around. We all kept on playing, but the blues will never be as popular as whatever the latest fad is. When the Blasters got a record deal with Warner Bros. they stole Gene from me. So, now I was back to a four-piece band. I added Hollywood Fats, who had just left his band because they couldn't get a gig, and he was tired of it. He called me up and I said, "Come on down. I'd rather have a piano, but I'll go with two guitarists." So, I had two great guitarists in Fats and Kid Ramos, who was only 21 years old. That band was together from about '80 all the way up to '86. Fats got into a lot of trouble and couldn't tour anymore. He was going to the shrink every week, he was going to court, and he couldn't tour. I make my living on the road, so he had to go and then it took him about six or eight months to get past all his troubles. Fats went on to the Blasters when Dave Alvin quit, but Fats hated playing that fast stuff, he came home and killed himself. So, some people do it in 15 years. Some people do it in 15 minutes - but he chose that way.

AM: Did Fats have any interest in rejoining your band in 1986 after straightening out?

Harman: He didn't have any interest in life and that's why he is dead. When your 32 years old and eat \$47 worth of Chinese food, then drink 15 scotches and then go to the dope house after the gig...I tried to keep him away from dope, I kept him alive for five years and as soon as he's out of my jurisdiction...So anyway, that's my take on it. You asked me and I told you the truth.

All that time I was making records, I put out 'This Band Just Won't Behave [EP in 1980] and then Thank You Baby in 1982 and Fats is on a lot of them. Then we made about 6 records for Bob Rivera and 2 of them got released, Extra Napkins Vol. 1, and

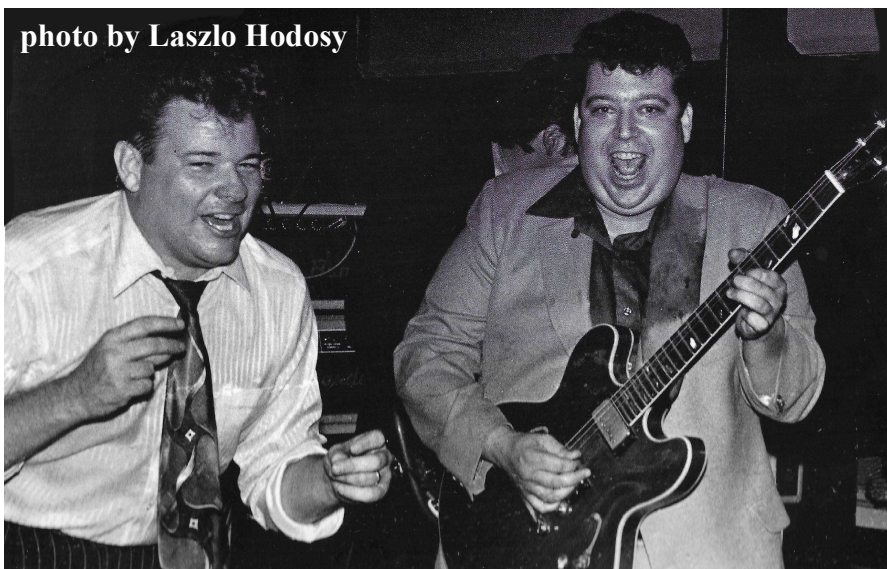


James Harman records the first Blasters demo in 1979. Photos by John Bazz

Strictly live vol. 1. [Ed-note - released as a partnership between Harman's own Ice Pick label and Rivera Records, run by Bob Rivera]. There is still two more albums of that 'Extra napkins' stuff unreleased. The Extra Napkins sessions was not just a band, it was James Harman blues singer doing whatever he wants to do kind of stuff. But on some songs, I had my two guitar players, Kid Ramos and Hollywood Fats. If a song called for one of them I would use one, if it called for both of 'em I would use both. If it called for something that they didn't play like, I'd use a different guy. Some songs have horns, some have Gene on piano, some have Fred Kaplan on piano. It's just James Harman doing what he wants. We recorded 53 blues songs, I mixed 20, and I picked out 12 and that is 'Extra Napkins.' The album was nominated for five W.C. Handy blues awards.

AM: Didn't you have a Rhino Records release of Those Dangerous Gentlemen at that time?

Harman: There were 10 or 15 songs that I didn't think were blues enough from those sessions, so I sold them to Rhino. Those Dangerous Gentlemen had a hit with the song MY BABY'S GONE - that helped a lot. A few of my songs made it into movies like KISS OF FIRE in The Accused with Jodie Foster. That's a hit that is still being played all around the world. Then JUMP MY BABY was in three different movies. So, that album did real well for me in the rock world and Extra



James Harman and Hollywood Fats

Napkins came out six months later and did real well in the blues world. 1987 and '88 was when I really came out into the world, a whole lot of people had heard of me that never heard of me before, even though I had been working all those years.

In 1990, I was getting ready to go record some new stuff and Bob Rivera came to me and said, "Man, I really want to get that live thing out, that we cut back in '85." And I said, "Well I'm not interested in live records, especially when one of the guitar players is dead." But Bob really wanted to do it and I owed him one. He paid the money and I went in and I mixed Strictly Live in '85 Vol. 1. People liked it. It did OK, but I wasn't interested, I was still trying to get my new stuff together. Then Kid and Willie wanted to quit being on the road. They both dropped out, married their girlfriends, got jobs and sold their motorcycles and hot rods.

In 1991, I got a new guitar player and bass player. Hammond Scott of Blacktop Records approached me about being on his label. I said to him, "I really respect what you do, I think you do a fine job. However, I gotta produce myself, I've got a sound of my own, I've got a look of my own, I do my own artwork. If you want to pay for it, I'll be on Blacktop." He said, "Let's do it," We went in and cut 'Do Not Disturb.' That album did really well as we toured all through 1991 and 1992.

In '93, I cut Two Sides To Every Story which outsold most everything else and did real well for me. Then we toured again. Next, I added Robby Eason on guitar, who I was watching for awhile when he was only 16 years old. I knew it was time for him to step up, and then with Buster Cherry on drums we cut Cards On The Table earlier this year.

AM: What's next for the band?

Harman: We're going to take off for the winter and then maybe do Europe. In '95 I ought to do a special album to kind of say, "Let's look back at everything." I still have a good time and it's all about being a storyteller. Music is all secondhand, there are only 12 notes, what it's really all about is storytelling. You can't be a blues guy if you don't tell stories. You got to be telling the story on an instrument, cause that's what the blues is about. Blues is telling stories about humans, about men and women and things and stuff that happens. It's telling what went wrong so you can get it out of your system. It's telling what you've got to brag about so you can feel good. It's the way you get it out of your system. It's a storytelling idiom and that's what I am, a songwriter, a storyteller, and a singer. And because of the years of doing it, I am a record producer. I don't even think about being a harmonica player, that is just an instrument that I choose to play live.

AM: Do you write your songs on an instrument?

Harman: I don't write on nothing, I write in my head and the piano if anything, but I write in my head then I go to whoever I have around me and that I trust. It might be my piano player pal or a guitar player pal and I sing..De Da De [sounds out a melody] and I tell my story and we figure it out and we bring it to the band and we go and record it.

AM: Did you recently do some work on Phil Alvin's solo album [County Fair 2000, HighTone Records]?

Harman: Yeah. We're still working on that. It's not done yet. Phil and I have been record collector buddies since I moved to California. Phil called me up and said he's doing this new CD and he's got this big long concept of what it's gonna be. It's real exciting to me the way he is planning on doing it. We both are showing our protest of

CDs. My protest is, if you look on Two Sides To Every Story, I make fun of CDs by putting side one and side two. I hate CDs, records are what it's about. Phil's protest to CDs is to say, "OK, if it has to be one groove from beginning to end, then I'm gonna make one whole recording from beginning to end."

The change to CDs is just a way of the industry raising the price of music and making everybody buy a new piece of equipment. When they've got everybody sold on that, then they'll come out with the next one. I think it's all bull, but that's the way it is and we'll have to deal with it for now.

Phil's concept is 'going to the county fair' and it starts off at a Blasters rehearsal and he [Phil] goes on to try and meet his girl at the county fair. Along the way he meets all these characters and I'm one of 'em. Me and this street singer named Scarecrow, a real crazy guy that Phil digs, and the three of us travel along, singing songs, and we run into



Photo: BILL MOREHOUSE

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BLACK TOP
"Passing the way
to your soul..."

Billy Boy Arnold and the Dirty Dozen Brass band and all these different people through the thing and we all do songs.

AM: So you will be on a couple of tracks then?

Harman: I think I'm only singing lead on one and singing backup on a few and then when you hear harmonica. It's not all figured out yet. We went to several sessions up at Cesar's [Rosas of Los Lobos] house, Phil wouldn't show up until midnight and me and James Intveld had been in there since noon. It's all confused, were all so busy with everything and we never really got anywhere. I know he's got a lot of tracks cut. He went to Chicago and cut some, he went to New Orleans and cut some, and he's got a bunch of different stuff. He's got tons of stuff he has to sort through and put into order and I'm just one little piece of it. It's a big undertaking, but Phil is my buddy and he called me up, so I'll play on it. [Ed. note -- James Harman's recordings didn't make it on Phil Alvin's County Fair 2000 CD.]

AM: How did you first meet Phil Alvin?

Harman: When I first got out to California, I was playing Rick's Blues Bar on Fridays and Saturdays. Phil Alvin and his bunch were like 17 years old and they were playing on Mondays and Tuesdays. The owner of the club told me, "Come down on and hear Phil's band The Night Shift, I think you'll dig this guy." The owner also said, "They've got this killer piano player, a little short fat baldheaded guy, he looks like he's 40 but he's 19." So, I went down there and sure enough they sounded great. Phil just singing with a big man's voice and playing harmonica. I thought all these guys are great. And Johnny Bazz was the drummer, the [current] bass player in the Blasters. We became friends and I sat in with them and I talked to Gene Taylor and we became buddies and Gene started coming over to my house, playing the piano and playing the guitar. Gene Taylor is a great guitar player. So, we started hanging out and pretty soon I stole him away from them and they couldn't keep gigs, and Gene played with me for the rest of the 70s. When that disco thing hit, it was rough. All throughout those late 70s we were playing biker parties, fraternity parties, and college campuses.

AM: When Phil Alvin was in the band, were you regularly playing out?

Harman: Yeah, that was the disco period and it was rough. Being in a blues band was awful. Nobody cared. It was a period of time when we played little joints. J. Geils Band were the only band with a harp player going. Paul Butterfield was barely working. Charlie Musselwhite was barely working. We all knew each other. It's really a small community.

AM: Gene Taylor I see is on your recent CDs.

Harman: Whenever he is in town, he is on my records. He's on Do Not Disturb, and Two Sides To Every Story a lot. This year he is busy out with the T-Birds, and the Kim Wilson Band. For my Cards On The Table album I didn't want that acoustic bass, acoustic piano thing. I wanted Fender bass, Fender guitar, a little harder sound. I like a lot of variety. If you listen to all my albums, they all go from practically nothing to a lot of extra stuff. This album varies from just me and a piano at times to songs with five horns, four back-up singers, two extra guitars, and organ. I may never play any of the songs on it live, I just record what the music calls for and make it sound the best I can.

AM: Do you cut any songs just one time, one take in the studio?

Harman: On the new album [Cards On the Table] THREE WAY PARTY and SPARKS are live just like in a juke joint. They're just like you walked in and a band was

playing. It's real raw. One or two takes and bang you're done. Other songs on here BLACK UNDER BLACK, WHERE'S MY THING, and I'LL CALL YOU are real big production numbers. They have horn charts written, organ, piano, back-up singers and extra guitar players.

AM: Well, I'd like to thank you for great music, a great show, and just keep doing what you're doing.

Harman: Well, thank you, it's all I know how to do. —AM

Dave Alvin remembers James Harman

James was a complicated guy, but he bought me my first guitar. There were always Les Pauls and other guitars around the house but I never had a guitar that was mine, so I never imagined I was a guitar player. James had faith in me and bought me my 1964 Fender Mustang for \$75 at a Santa Ana pawnshop. We used to drive down to James's place in Costa Mesa for record playing parties. James would do the same at our house. We'd just play 78s all night and drink beer.

I remember there was this place in Long Beach called the Sundance Saloon that James and Phil played as a combo with Bateman and one of James's friends on bass. They did a few months of gigs there. That was a pre-Blasters incarnation, but Phil and James spilt because Phil wanted to sing Jackie Wilson songs while James was a straight blues guy. They parted amicably. Soon after, the Blasters got together and we started playing that Sundance Saloon every Wednesday for no pay but free beer. We honed our skills before playing L.A. proper. James was the one that discovered that Sundance Saloon place.

When the Blasters needed a demo, James had his friend Mark Foresta bring his reel-to-reel recorder to our rehearsal space in John Bazz's father's factory. James was really encouraging in those early days. We recorded THESE ARMS OF MINE and a bunch of other songs that were really good like BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. I gave that tape to clubs to get gigs. Only at Club 88, a gal named Mac listened to it and booked us. Ronnie Weiser liked it enough to have us record our first record.

When we did the Rollin Rock sessions, James let me borrow a guitar that he claimed was Magic Sam's. It was a 1961 white Stratocaster. When we did our first album for Slash, James loaned me a 1958 Les Paul. He had quite a collection of guitars for a guy that couldn't play guitar. We were all really close in the early days.

There was a tour that the Blasters and James Harman did of northern California that was hilariously fun - yet terrible for me [laughs]. We did five gigs in the Bay Area with the Screamin' Sirens opening the show, then the Harman band and then the Blasters. He had his best band at the time with Hollywood Fats and Kid Ramos on guitars - both amazing guitar players. I had to follow that every night [laughs], so I decided I better just jump around a lot on stage. It was a fun tour with those guys. James was always a friend. I loved watching him play harmonica cuz he put it all out there. I never had a chance to say goodbye.

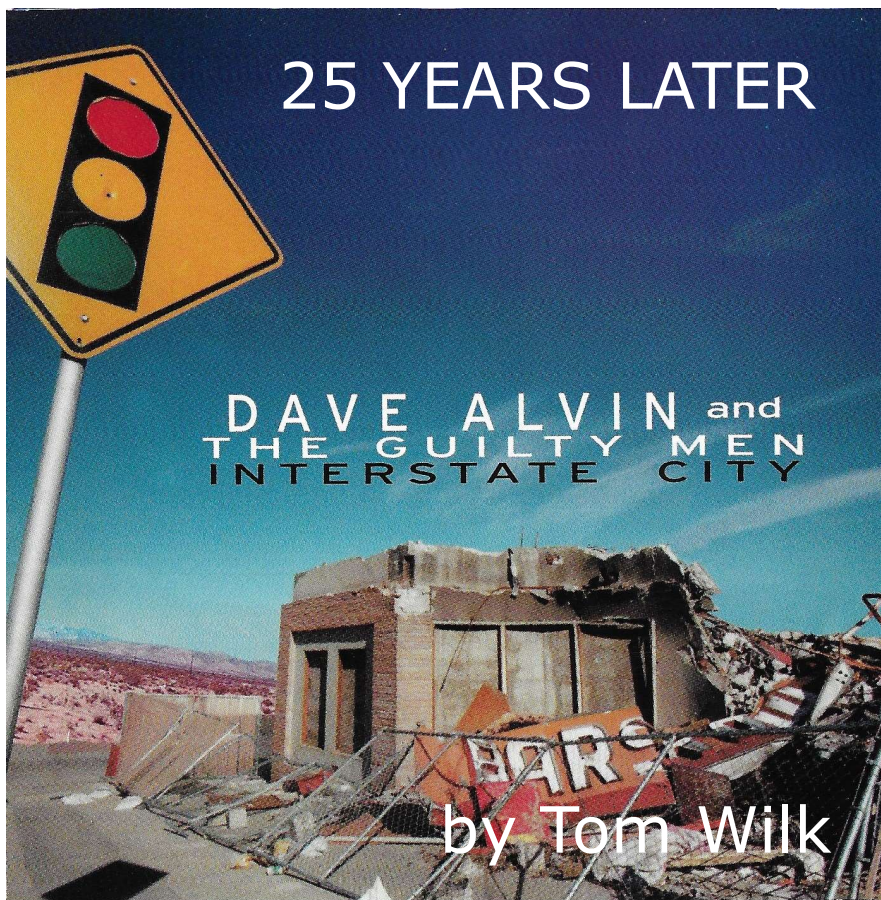
After releasing the quieter, mostly acoustic King of California album in 1994, Dave Alvin pursued a new direction for a follow-up release. "I wanted the next one to be a loud, sweaty record," Dave told me in a 1996 interview. And the resulting live album, Interstate City, fulfilled his wishes.

As the album marks its 25th anniversary in July, Interstate City recalls the wedding day advice for brides: Something old/Something new/Something borrowed/Something blue," or, in this case, blues. The album mixes four songs from his days in the Blasters and five songs from his earlier solo albums; three new original compositions; three covers of songs by Jim Bridger, Woody Guthrie, and Chuck Berry: and memorable bluesy playing on THIRTY DOLLAR ROOM and LONG WHITE CADILLAC.

The song selection allowed Dave to put his own stamp on the music while showcasing the skills of the Guilty Men (bassist Gregory Boaz, drummer Bobby Lloyd Hicks, and keyboardist Rick Solem). Greg Leisz rounded out the band with contributions on electric guitar, lap steel guitar, and mandolin. Ted Roddy, who played harmonica on four selections, holds the recording in high regard. "Hard to believe it's 25 years for that record. I had to put it on to refresh my memory. Man, still sounds good," he wrote in a May email. "It was a thrill to be on stage with Dave and those incredible players. The energy was formidable. As good as that record is, it's hard to capture the energy of the actual event," he adds.

Roddy's harmonica lends a propulsive feel to the seamless blend of JUBILEE TRAIN/DO RE MI/PROMISED LAND, the centerpiece of the album that clocks in at just over nine minutes. It's an inspired combination that suggests the songs by Dave, Guthrie, and Berry, are part of a musical spectrum. "It happened organically; it's not done as a joke or whim," Dave told me in 1996. The effect recalls Mickey Newbury's AN AMERICAN TRILOGY, with its pairing of BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC, DIXIE, and ALL MY TRIALS.

The title track has a roundabout history. It first appeared as a spoken-word track on the Side Affects:



Prose and Poetry album released on Triple X Records in 1991. The “Side Affects” version bears little resemblance beyond the title to its 1996 counterpart, relying on humor to describe an urban landscape as truckers travel from coast to coast with its rules of the road: keep your petal to the metal and your radar on and don’t get caught.

Dave also recorded an unreleased piano-and-guitar version of the song in 1990 with different lyrics set to a Chuck Berry beat. The 1996 version brought an ominous, moody feel to the song that ends the story on an unresolved note. Of Dave’s other new compositions, MISTER LEE serves as a tribute to Lee Allen, the famed saxophonist who died in 1994 and was a member of the Blasters. OUT IN CALIFORNIA, co-written with Tom Russell, is a spirited rocker that would become a staple of Dave’s concerts when playing with a band.

In retrospect, Interstate City serves as a document of the first lineup of the Guilty Men. By 1998, Solem had departed to be replaced by keyboardist/accordionist Joe Terry. Rick Shea joined as a second guitarist and multi-instrumentalist (mandolin, pedal steel guitar). Their additions expanded the sonic palette of the band.

Interstate City also would start a pattern of live albums and concert DVD releases over the next dozen years, both solo and with other bands. Dave released four more live albums: Out in California and Outtakes in California, both in 2002; The Great American Music Galaxy in 2005; Live From Austin TX on CD and DVD in 2007; and Live at the Great American Music Hall, a DVD, in 2008.

With the Blasters, he released Trouble Bound and Going Home in 2002 and 2004, respectively. The latter also was available on DVD with a different track listing. With the Gene Taylor Blues Band, he released Live!!! 605 Boogie!!! in 2008. Dave also sang on two concert recordings for Tom Russell’s The Long Way Around, a career retrospective, in 1997.

1996 Interstate City media Notes

My name is Dave Alvin and I’ve just recorded my first live solo album, Interstate City, at the fabulous Continental Club in Austin, Texas. For the past three years, since the release of my CD, Museum of Heart, I’ve been touring the bars and nightclubs along the great American interstate highway system in rented or borrowed vans and cars. Sometimes I toured with just my acoustic guitar but mainly I was with my blues/folk/rock/R&B band, The Guilty Men.

One of the reasons I chose to record a live album was because there were nights on stage when The Guilty Men blew me away with how good they are. These guys are as good as anyone I’ve ever worked with and I’ve been a member of the some pretty good bands [The Blasters, X, The Knitters] and I’ve worked and recorded with some pretty good people [Tom Waits, Bob Dylan, Syd Straw, The Iguanas, Big Joe Turner, Sonny Burgess]. The Guilty Men consistently make me proud to be on stage with them.

Steel guitarist Greg Leisz, who produced my last CD, King of California, has been playing with me since my first solo album, Romeo’s Escape, in 1987. He’s now one of the most in-demand studio musicians anywhere, recording with k.d. Lang, Gillian Welch, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Matthew Sweet, Smashing Pumpkins, Joni Mitchell, Victoria Williams, Eddie Floyd, and Rosie Flores to name a few. Drummer Bobby Lloyd Hicks is a member of the legendary Midwest band The Skeletons and has recorded and toured with Steve Forbert, Jonathan Richman, Syd Straw, Martha Reeves and Boxcar Willie. Bobby is one of the most soulful singers around. I’ve known bassist Gregory Boaz since the

old L.A. punk rock scene in the early eighties when he played with the hard-edged Tex & The Horseheads. He has since become a rock-solid blues bassman playing with Mick Taylor, Hook Herrera, Juke Logan, and blues chanteuse Brenda Burns. Pianist RICK SOLEM plays like his fingers are haunted by the ghosts of boogie-woogie powerhouse Pete Johnson, country rocker Moon Mullican, New Orleans genius Professor Longhair, and sometimes even Thelonious Monk. Rick is so good he scares the hell out of me. As you can imagine, The Guilty Men have no problem following me whether I feel like playing blues, country, rock and roll or folk ballads. (It's all the same to me anyway.) By the way, I'd like to thank Interstate City special guests: Austin harmonica wizard Ted Roddy and Fort Worth's country/soul queen Katy Moffatt.

Another reason I wanted to do a live CD is that after the release of the mainly acoustic King of California, I've noticed a split in my audience between people who want to hear my lyrics and those who want to see me sweat and bash on a loud guitar. Since my next studio recording will be in the quieter style, I wanted to do something for my rocking fans.

Some of the songs, like LONG WHITE CADILLAC, THIRTY DOLLAR ROOM, ROMEO'S ESCAPE, DRY RIVER and JUBILEE TRAIN MEDLEY, have been live favorites for a long time. Other songs like INTERSTAE CITY, OUT IN CALIFORNIA and MISTER LEE (a tribute to a man I've known since I was a kid, who taught me as much about life as he did about music, the great New Orleans saxophonist LEE ALLEN) are newer. WAITING FOR THE HARD TIMES TO GO was written by the late and under-recognized California singer/songwriter JIM RINGER. Almost all the songs are "road songs" in that they're about people in motel rooms and barrooms, on highways and interstates and street corners, a long way from whatever home they left behind, looking for something they lost or never had to begin with.

During the short breaks in the endless touring I managed to record KING OF CALIFORNIA as well as produce two CDS for BIG SANDY & HIS FLY-RITE BOYS and CDs for THE DERAILERS, TOM RUSSELL, CHRIS GAFFNEY, THE FORBIDDEN PIGS, and co-produce with TOM RUSSELL, TULARE DUST, A Songwriters' Tribute to Merle Haggard. I also put out a book of prose poems titled, ANY ROUGH TIMES ARE NOW BEHIND YOU [Incommunicado Press]. Occasionally I also managed to sleep.

It sometimes seems like a long time since my brother, Phil, and I formed THE BLASTERS in our hometown of Downey, California in 1979. We just wanted to play the music we'd grown up listening to (country blues, city blues, rhythm and blues, honky tonk, rockabilly, hillbilly, folk singers, protest singers, gospel singers, and surf guitar slingers) and hopefully be able to quit our day jobs and still be able to pay the rent. I haven't been a fry cook in a long time.

I hope you'll enjoy INTERSTATE CITY and I'll see you down the road. —Dave Alvin

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