

ISSUE #28

# American Music

## The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

AUG 2000

### DAVE ALVIN TOUR DATES

Dave Alvin & The Guilty Men

8/23 San Juan CA at Coach House

8/25 L.A. CA at Roxy

8/26 San Francisco at Slims

9/20 Austin TX at Continental with  
Christy McWilson

9/21 Houston TX at Satellite Lounge  
with Christy McWilson

9/22 New Orleans at Howlin Wolf

9/23 Cleveland at RnR Hall of Fame

9/24 Huntsville AL at Big Spring Jam

Acoustic w/ Rick Shea, Brantley  
Kearns, and Joe Terry

10/5 Kansas City at Grand Emporium

10/6 St Louis MO at Blueberry Hill

10/7 Newport KY at Southgate House

10/8 Lafayette IN at Buona Appetito

10/10 Aimes IO at Maintenance Shop

10/11 Lacross WI at Pump House

10/12 Minn. MN at Cedar Center

10/13 Madison WI at Pres House

10/14 Chicago IL Old School of Folk

10/15 Columbus OH at Col. Music Hall

10/16 Ann Arbor MI at The Ark

10/18 Pittsburgh PA at Rosebud

10/19 (tentative) Piermont NY

10/20 Alexandria VA at Birchmere

10/21 Annapolis MD at Rams Head

10/22 Philadelphia PA at Tin Angel

10/24 Brattleboro VT at Hooker The.

10/25 Somerville MA at Johnny D.'s

10/27 N.Y.C. at Mercury Lounge

10/28 (tentative) Hoboken NJ

11/4 Denver CO at Swallow Hill

11/8 Spokane WA at The Met

11/11 Berkeley CA Freight & Salvage

### KNITTERS DATES

9/15 Solana Beach at Belly Up Tavern

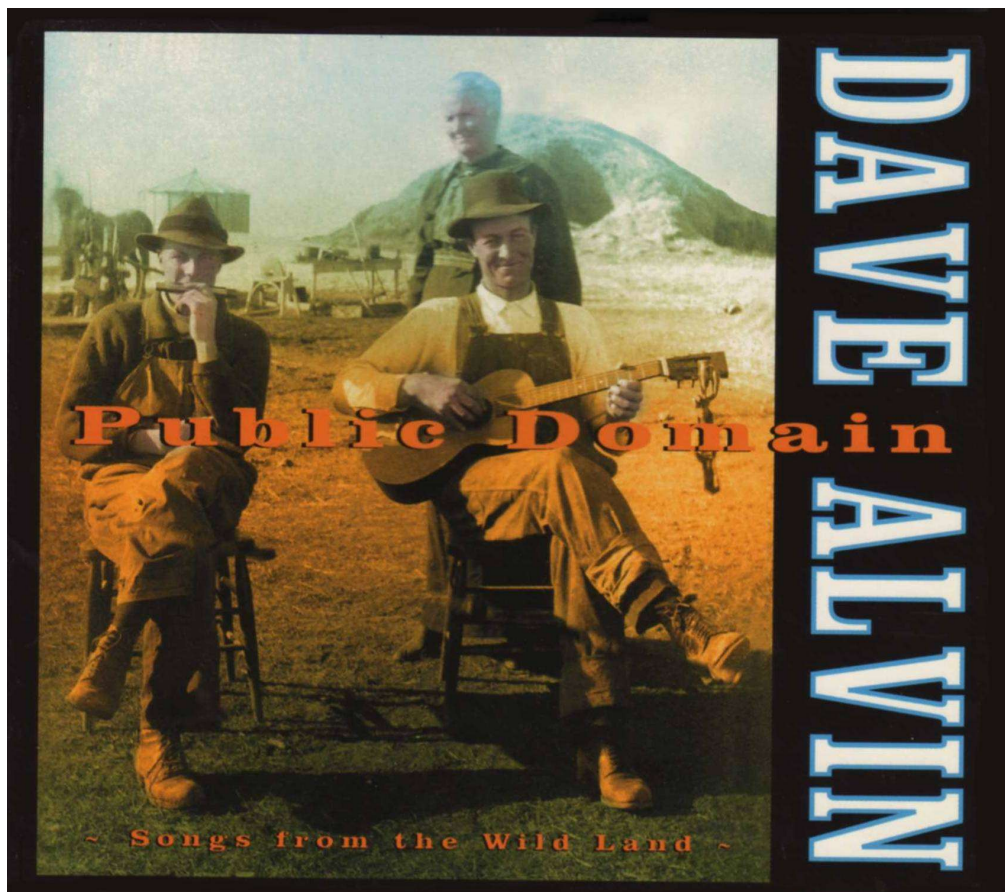
9/16 Santa Ana at Galaxy Theatre

9/17 Los Angeles CA at El Rey The.

### Blasters TOUR DATES

8/19 Long Beach CA at Blue Cafe

## Dave Alvin's "Public Domain" Album Due Out on August 15



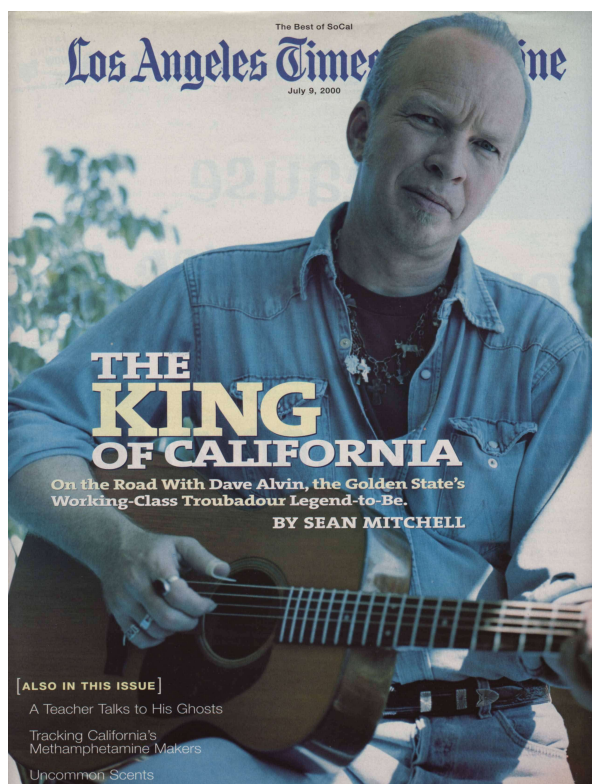
**Latest news:** On July 9, 2000 Dave was featured on the cover of the L.A. Times Magazine. The article is titled "The King Of California: On the Road With Dave Alvin, the Golden State's Working-Class Troubadour Legend-To-Be." – Dave Alvin will be doing the KPFK Southern California radio show FOLKSCENE on August 20, 2000. June 29 L.A. Weekly Music Awards Los Angeles, CA, Dave Alvin won "Best Country

***This issue: Dave and the Guilty Men take us into the studio for the making of Public Domain. Kelly Joe Phelps is interviewed. Plus, an insider's diary of the Blasters historic 1982 London Venue concert.***

**Latest News:** (((continued from pg. 1))) Act." Chris Gaffney and Rick Shea & Brantley Kearns were also nominated. Dave performed a song with Rick & Brantley. — Dave played 4 songs on guitar on Jeff Muldaur's album in early June. "I'm doing finger picking stuff. Geoff was in the Jim Kweskin's Jug band and then the Butterfield band. He's a great guitar player and an arranger. So it's an honor for me because he is so strict. He reminds me of Phil. It's coming out great. This is the big leagues." The album due out 10/3 called Password on Rhino records. — Dave just finished in July producing the new Red Meat album. He played some acoustic guitar. -- The Mike Eldred Trio officially released their debut album in France on Virgin records. They are in the process of negotiating a US release. Check out the official web site at [www.mikeeldredtrio.com](http://www.mikeeldredtrio.com). — Dave Alvin and the Guilty Men had a live webcast of their concert in Seattle in June at the Experience Music Project weekend. Dave also participated in an album production workshop where he sat in on a panel with Christy McWilson discussing the process of recording her album. They played demos and early mixes. -- Rhino Records will release a 4 CD box set on doo-wop music. They asked musicians to pick songs. Dave and Phil apparently gave them three titles which will be on the set. One of them is ONE BAD STUD by the Honey Bears, SHEIK OF ARABY by The Colts, and WIGGIE WAGGIE WOO by The Cadets. Dave said, "I gave them a long list from which to choose. Everything from Richard Berry and The Flairs to Little Julian Hererra and The Medallions. Pretty obscure west coast stuff mainly." -- In September Dave Alvin will be a featured artist on Northwest Airlines in-flight-music audio featuring his Public Domain songs. United Airlines plans the same thing but will feature Dave Alvin: The Songwriter including a taped interview with Dave. The 40-minute segment will run from November to December. — Dave will be playing at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland for a Muddy Waters Tribute. Dave will play in an all-star band that includes Stevie Ray's Double Trouble, Charlie Musselwhite, and Johnny Winter. — On 10/17 Rhino records will re-release the Knitters Poor Little Critter album. — Rick Shea reports on his next solo album on Wagonwheel records, "We've finished the new album, its called Sawbones. It will be out in September. We're just waiting on artwork. I'm real happy with how it's coming out. 13 songs, guest appearances from Dave Alvin on 2 songs and Katy Moffat sings with me on one song." The CD will be available in record stores. You can mail-order it by sending \$16 payable to Rick Shea, PO Box 294, Covina, CA 91723 — Dave just recorded a Merle Haggard song called LONESOME FUGITIVE for a Virgin records compilation called I-10 Chronicles Vol. 2. His session included a full band of session musicians. The CD is due out in 2001 -- I am sad to report that a long illness finally caught up with Phil and Dave Alvin's father, Cass Alvin. He passed away on May, 15 at age 84. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Alvin family. If you would like, donations may be sent "**In Memory Of Cass Alvin**" to: Parkinson's Action Network, 840 Third St., Santa Rosa, CA 95404 1 (800) 850-4726 ~~*AM*

## DAVE ALVIN: KING OF THE L.A. TIMES

On July 9, 2000 Dave was featured in full color on the cover of the L.A. Times Magazine. The article is titled "The King OF California: On the Road With Dave Alvin, the Golden State's Working-Class Troubadour Legend-To-Be." The story tracks Dave and the Guilty Men on the road in northern California, showing the rigors of life on the road. Dave comments on the magazine's release, "I was just blown away. It was nice hometown validation. Things are rough out here. More clubs are closing lately, so it's just real important coming at a time like now. The way I have looked at my career is, it's like slow building blocks. By the time we're dead, we might be famous. ~~*AM*





# PUBLIC DOMAIN

## SONGS FROM THE WILD LAND

Dave Alvin's new album is, as he calls it, is a "traditional" or folk record. All the songs were originally recorded by artists in the nineteen twenties and early thirties. "Traditional" more accurately describes the music. Other than folk, there is a Chicago blues song, a rockabilly song, a Cajun styled song, hokum blues, and country. Dave selected favorite tracks from his record collection, but used different arrangements and some alternate lyrics. Dave: "I was just trying to make them sound like Dave Alvin songs. I went for things that weren't recorded much." By the time Dave booked his studio time, his plan was to do mostly acoustic solo songs. Slowly, the idea came up to bring the Guilty Men in on it. Dave: "This record gets real loud at times. It was a lot of fun for all of us. I've worked with Rick (Shea) on record projects, but this is the first time the full band has actually gotten into the studio. I can't wait for us to do another one."



For years, Dave played folk songs at home. He always wanted to do a traditional album and the seed was planted in 1997 when he proposed the idea to Kelly Joe Phelps. Dave was very excited with an old folk song called BLACKJACK DAVID that he had worked up to play with Kelly Joe on their tour together. (Subsequently that song became the title track on Dave's next album in 1998). Dave's folk trio album with Kelly Joe Phelps and Greg Leisz all depended on their schedules. The Trio idea never happened, but Dave kept it in mind: "The idea was originally with the three of us, but it was in my brain before that. Maybe something like that will happen in the future. It all boiled down to when my father got sick, I was sitting in the hospital and I started thinking many thoughts. But one of the lesser thoughts was that life is so short and this is something I always wanted to do."

The album of cover songs was recorded with the spirit of the original recordings – quickly, in only seven days. To prepare, Rick Shea recalls, "Dave, Brantley (Kearns), and I got together about three times to rehearse. We went over songs but things like, what instruments would be played wasn't sorted out. Things changed though as more people showed up at the sessions. A lot of it got sorted out in the studio when we were all playing." After the whole band gathered in the studio, Dave recalls, "I played the song and then we all would try it and then we rolled the tape. It was very organic. Everybody just rose to the occasion."

**SHENANDOAH** opens up the album. Dave: "I was looking for a conceptional line between all the songs and this song said to me, 'I have to move on to find greener pastures, but I am homesick for where I come from.' My hazy concept of it was: You're crossing over the great Missouri into the wild lands: Here are all the songs that take place there." This track stands out for Rick Shea, "It was nice to be playing the first thing on the album. That's my electric guitar that starts the album. I'm proud of that."

**MAGGIE CAMPBELL** is a song from blues man Tommy Johnson. This song is a lot faster than the original and Dave's arrangement really rocks it up. Dave says, "The groove is different and verses are different. Some of it is taken from another delta blues singer, Willie Brown, who was a friend of Tommy Johnson." Dave debuts his first recorded bottleneck guitar solo, "I was gonna have some other kind of solo and I decided, 'what the hell.' I used Greg's 1932 national steel for that delta blues sound." Great standup acoustic bass by Gregory Boaz, "I love the string bass. There is nothing like the sound of wood. I had to use the pick-up in the bass instead of a mic because of the amount of guys and the size of the studio."

**SHORT LIFE OF TROUBLE** features a great interaction of finger-picking from Dave's acoustic guitar and Rick's mandolin. Dave: "I also used an electric guitar that has a sitar-type of effect for the wah sound. I did it on electric guitar so it would have dynamic swells on it. Joe plays piano and organ on there."

**WHAT DID THE DEEP SEA SAY** is a song the Guilty Men have been doing live for about a year. Dave changed the arrangement for the recording, deleting Rick's pedal steel solo. Brantley Kearns fiddle instead is featured in two solos. Dave: "I wanted it to sound more traditional, like 20's or early 30's when there wasn't a pedal steel around yet." Brantley Kearns is a fiddle player who has been playing select Dave Alvin acoustic shows over the past three years. He played in Dwight Yoakam's band and he is a vital part of Rick Shea's solo band. Rick Shea: "Brantley is great on everything on this record. This captures the best stuff on Brantley that I have heard yet. I was pleased to have Brantley in his element with a little bit of fire under him."

**ENGINE 143** is Dave's first time harmonizing on a country duet. This one is very deep in the Carter Family-style. Dave: "Brantley and I had been playing around with that song for the past year and singing it back stage. It's something I've never done before. We sung that completely live together."

**DELIA** is a song that Blind Willie McTell had a hit with in the twenties. Johnny Cash recorded an old folk song called DELIA'S GONE on his American Recordings album in 1994. Dave: "I have still yet to hear the Cash version. His, I hear, is through the murderer's eyes. I see this Delia as through the eyes of someone who knew and loved her." The two songs are entirely different, but there is the possibility that the songs were written about the same person, but from different points of view. This song features Greg Leisz on mandolin following right behind Dave's acoustic guitar.

**DARK EYES** has a great country groove to it and a very catchy chorus. Dave: "I wanted something Cajun-country. We definitely will do that live." This is the only song that features accordion as Dave recalls, "I was

gonna get an accordion player but Joe (Terry) said (Dave imitates a pitiful voice) 'Awe, I wanna do that: So I said 'You got it!'" (laughs). Joe Terry adds, "Well it just so happens it worked. The funny thing is that I wrestled it away from a real accordian player who was playing bass on the track. Don't ya hate those guys?"

**WALK RIGHT IN** was made popular by a 60's folk band called the Rooftop Singers. The original classic version was by Gus Cannon's Jug Stompers. Dave: "I thought we need a song or two that were recognizable. I really wanted it to sound like the Memphis Jug band playing this at a whore house." Drummer Bobby Lloyd Hicks sings harmony vocals with Dave.

**MURDER OF THE LAWSON FAMILY** is another that sounds like a Dave Alvin original. He admits this himself, "I had this record when I was thirteen. Maybe it had an effect on my development as a songwriter." Joe Terry played the harmonium on this track as he explains: "A harmonium is a sort of hybrid of organ and accordion. The concept is; the pushing of air to produce the sound. It's a great old-fashioned, lonely sound that just felt right for the song. I also was known to say on the session, 'When do I get to play the weird instrument?'" Dave remembers, "I wanted a lighter sound while the piano was doing the heavy stuff. The fiddle was there, but I wanted something like angels singing. I like doing records where there are sounds way in the back. Christy McWilson's record is like that. (The Lucky One, HighTone, 2000)"

**DON'T LET YOUR DEAL GO DOWN** is a pure Chicago blues song. Dave, "We really needed Juke Logan's harmonica to get that full Chicago sound." Dave recalls how the song developed: "I always liked the song. A lot of my favorite pre-war blues songs have been done so much. So I was looking for a hard blues and thought about this kind of mountain-like **SHORT LIFE OF TROUBLE** song. So one day, I was playing



*Dave's great-great grandfather  
who died in the Civil war at  
Andersonville.*

around with it and I thought this might have been something Muddy would have cut. Gregory especially enjoyed playing with Juke, “It was fun playing with Juke again. We used to work a lot together and I don’t see him as much as I would like to. He played his ass off!”

**RAILROAD BILL** is another song the Guilty Men have been doing live for a few years. Again, Dave changed it completely. This time to a bluegrass song featuring Greg Leisz on the dobro. Greg Leisz played on only a few tracks in a one day session. On Public Domain, Dave got the chance to produce the work of his regular producer, Greg Leisz. Dave, “Greg was in New York doing a Joni Mitchel tribute. That’s why he wasn’t on there more. I would prefer on every level to have Greg produce the record, but for the idea of going in and doing this without thinking about it in a week -- it worked.. Greg will produce my next record.”

**TEXAS RANGERS** is a mood piece in the vein of ANDERSONVILLE. Dave’s vocal and acoustic guitar led the song and the band just followed in with accents. Reverb and an interesting drone sound give it a spatial sound -- a combination of fiddle, bass, and a note on Dave’s guitar that he stays on with his thumb: “It’s kind of a country-blues-meets Celtic-meets Arabic guitar figure. The melody is real Irish. It’s one chord. I got the original version from the Cartwright Brothers. In the story, the guy joins the Texas Rangers and goes down to the Rio Grande area and describes a battle with the Indians.” Dave credits his band, The Guilty Men for stepping up to the plate and coming up with original improvised parts. Joe Terry explains a good example, “This song stays on one chord for very long during the verses so when it finally goes to another chord, it feels like a big release point. I wanted a big spread out chord to augment the change. Many times the stringed instruments will play the melody along with the singer, but there are parts on the song that the piano is doing that.”

**MAMA AINT LONG FOR DAY** features Greg Leisz on the Weisenborn guitar, which is like a Hawaiian guitar from the 20’s. Dave recalls, “I knew I couldn’t do the song like Blind Willie McTell, but it’s such a great song and nobody has done it.”

**EAST VIRGINIA BLUES** is a pure rockabilly song. Dave: “I always loved the song, but the version I cut last year with Ramblin’ Jack was too low in my voice.” Dave based the song closer to a rockabilly song by Ray Harris’ called GREENBACK DOLLAR. What does Dave think about having a rockabilly song on a folk record? Dave: “Once you start getting past rockabilly and Chicago blues, then you get into areas where (you ask), is it folk music or not. It starts to become problematic. I think there is a direct line from the Carter Family to rockabilly and Chicago blues of the 50’s. It’s a direct progression.

**SIGN OF JUDGEMENT** is a spiritual. Dave: “I play two Martin acoustics on there and a high strung guitar too. A high strung guitar is a smaller guitar that sounds real high: It sounds like a harp. I use it for accents. I got into it on Christy McWilson’s (The Lucky One, HighTone, 2000) record. There is a lot of it on there. I play that on Geoff Muldaur’s record too. Its sound is somewhere between a mandolin and a guitar.

**SATURDAY NIGHT RUB** is an old Big Bill Broonzy instrumental song. There’s a lot of intricate playing on there. Rick Shea remembers pressure to finish the song: “We were running out of time getting that. It definitely was some work and Dave has the lion’s share of that. The last take settled in real nice, so we kept it. I liked playing that a lot.”

The CD artwork is exceptional. Dave believes it’s the best package he has ever put together: “We shot some pictures in central California. Lou (Beach) designed a whole album cover. To me it just didn’t look like the record sounded. It was too slick and modern. I thought, I didn’t write any of the songs, so why should my picture be on there. So, I spent three days going through junk stores for old photos. I was extremely fortunate and blessed to find what I did. When I found the picture of the guy with the guitar and the harmonica, I said, ‘I think I have an album cover!’ Also, the black cowboy was great, and then the picture of the guys in front of the train was too perfect! It says on the back of the train photo, ‘Rock Island Line 1906’ That meant it had to be on the album! The mountain photos could be the Missouri or someplace like that, I’m not sure. I wanted a shot like that. The civil war soldier photo is my great, great uncle who died at Andersonville, Essa Powell. (Dave’s song ANDERSONVILLE on the 1991 Blue Blvd album (HighTone), is about that great, great uncle.)

Joe Terry, “It was a real treat to record with Dave. He’s a hell of a singer that guy, and you tell him I said so. Everyone had a good time making the recording, with zero stress. If you take a record like that and try to play everything just like it was played on the original recording back in the twenties or thirties, then it’s gonna sound like THAT record recorded in the year 2000. Hell they can do that without musicians.” Dave made the same point, “The main thing I thought I had to do was make these sound like my songs. They don’t

belong to anybody; they are Public Domain.”

Later on through in-depth song searches, some songs were determined not to be in the public domain. Some songs have writer credits by people trying to claim a song that is no longer registered. For example, a song like WALK RIGHT IN credits three songwriters besides Gus Cannon. Those three other songwriters weren't even born when Cannon recorded the song in the twenties. For some songs, the original writer was never known. For example, when A.P. Carter of the Carter family claimed he wrote ENGINE 143. There were a few versions that came out 20 years earlier than the Carter Family recording back when the train wreck happened. Dave: “It used to be that you would have to renew your copyright every so many years, so it doesn't slip into the public domain. Now the law states any song after 1978 is yours forever. So there will be no more Public Domain songs.” ~~*AM*

### DAVE ALVIN QUIZ CONTEST:

Two winners will receive an autographed copy of Dave's recent L.A. Times Magazine Cover story. The question: Name a musician or singer other than Dave, who has played on the most Dave Alvin solo albums. You must name the musician or singer and name the albums he or she has appeared on. Send answers to Dave Quiz, PO Box 210071, Woodhaven, NY 11421. All correct answers will be entered into a random drawing. The two winners will be picked. Deadline for entries October 1, 2000

## **SHINE EYED MISTER ZEN is Kelly Joe Phelps**

**Letters to words to phrases to stories to songs from memories in the mind of Kelly Joe Phelps**

--By Billy Davis

*Kelly Joe Phelps has gained an international reputation as one of most unique guitar players of modern times. His technique on acoustic lap slide guitar and his “banjo” finger-picking style on regular acoustic guitar falls somewhere in the folk or blues category. He performs by sitting on stage with only his guitar and his gruff low voice. Dave Alvin fans will remember Kelly Joe from the three tours they did in 1996 – 97. Kelly Joe opening Dave's shows and accompanying Dave in an acoustic set. Much overshadowed by his virtuoso guitar technique is his brilliant lyric writing. On his SHINE EYED MISTER ZEN (Rykodisc) album, Kelly Joe has beautifully translated his lyrical vision to song. Here in this interview in May of 2000, Kelly Joe gives us an in-depth look at his songwriting, and unique interpretations of traditional songs on SHINE EYED MISTER ZEN. It's obvious that Kelly Joe writing and performing music is a spiritual release for him. Get SHINE EYED MR. ZEN and give it a good hard listen.*

**THE HOUSE CARPENTER** – “I've just returned from the salt, salt sea and it's all for the love of thee.” (lyric)

**KJP:** That's an old folk song that is two or three hundred years old. There is a debate on whether it's a traditional Irish or Scottish song. It was a tune that was carried over on the ships, and it stayed around up in the Appalachians played mostly by banjo players. It's been played as a ballad as well. I am aware that there are a lot of alternate verses depending on the source of the song. But, I used Clarence Ashley's version. He was a banjo player from West Virginia or North Carolina. The reason I got into that song was that I liked the forward motion of the lyrics. It was a story song. I was studying those kinds of songs to better my own songwriting abilities in terms of how to propel a story forward. Also, the way that Clarence Ashley plays and sings it, there is a lot of power beyond the lyrics. It pulled me in as well. That's the way it is with a lot of the traditional tunes for me. I play them for two reasons; First: The lyric has something that I can attach myself to. And second, the example of the song I have in my head is a powerful performance. I can borrow something from both of those elements to project some sort of emotional involvement.

**RIVER RAT JIMMY** - “We wrapped our bloody fingers like a shine eyed mister zen.”



**KJP:** These are my memories of a couple of my different friends I had when I was a kid. I ended up forming the song on the two characters named River Rat Jimmy and Jehoshaphat. The character River Rat Jimmy is a combination of two friends of mine. I thought about what we went through growing up and who our examples were -- people around us who we should have been able to get inspiration from and didn't. And what those people were like -- the feeling of the town and growing up next to a dirty, muddy, swollen river. I pieced together fragments of memories involving both experience and kind of a backward looking emotional standpoint. Sometimes when I look back on those things, it isn't exact situations that occurred, but an overall feel. It's like an all-encompassing feeling about what it was like to be that age.

**BD:** Was River Rat Jimmy a nickname?

**KJP:** I didn't use it then but I came up with it later. That was the way of putting a name on this person that represents the general setting. So, that's why I referred to him as a river rat, because we were always on the riverbanks. We would go down to the river almost every day, knocking around, climbing trees, or catching fish. This was the Puyallup river in Sumner, Washington.

**BD:** 'Shine eyed mister zen' seems to be a key phrase in the song.

**KJP:** That phrase enables me to paint this picture of someone building their own world, or putting up their own walls. I was thinking of being "Shine Eyed" as though being foggy-eyed, or glassy-eyed, or ignorant to everything else around. That's how I felt being a kid. Being caught up in something is like being the center

of the world. The "Mister" part is the sensation of being Genghis Khan -- or a word representing the feeling of 'all powerful' even though you're only 11 or 12 years old. The "Zen" part represents the close proximity to a religious fervor. Some of those things we approached were so serious to us; we were so intent on doing it. This might have involved things like, trying to stay out of the way of someone's Dad, because you knew they were gonna beat the hell out of you. Other times, it meant experiencing things in an otherworldly sort of way. Being with somebody you grow up with, and knowing there are these moments that come up where they will remain special your entire life is something I equate with some sort of religious experience. I thought those four words painted the picture appropriately. But knowing that it probably wasn't gonna be understood that way. I wasn't sure that the idea would translate, but at least it would apply a certain mysticism in my overall attempt.

HOBO'S SON -- "*Not today might be here tomorrow.*"

**KJP:** This is one of the more straightforward songs on the record. It is based again on experience. It has to do with meeting someone you like very much, getting together, then this other person admits what she considers to be a mistake. In this case, the guy couldn't do anything about it because essentially, 'I can't change what I

By Billy Davis



am.' She goes away, and he realizes and accepts that he has to spend the rest of his life waiting for this thing that he had and couldn't keep a hold of. That's the HOBOS SON - wanting her more than anybody in the world but knowing he couldn't possibly hold onto it.

**KATY** – *“Sharpened up my razor, picked a piece of ground. One of these dark and moonless nights, be the last around.”*

**KJP:** In the interest of wanting to be an honest writer, I wanted to explore different experiences and present them in picture form, so to speak. KATY is somewhat related to HOBOS SON, although it's an entirely different theme. The guy in the story is married with a child and has a fling with this girl. Then he decides in technical terms: 'Kill the bastard' (laughs). He realizes he shouldn't have had this fling and feels bad. The girl he had the fling with, isn't about to let him go or forget about it. She's ready to create any amount of trouble it takes to either get him back, or make him pay. Over the course of time, he ends up with two options. Now mind you, it's about building a story so there are always more options than this (laughs). He gets to the point where there are only two ways to get out of this. He can kill her, or kill himself. He wasn't about to kill her, so in the end he decides to kill himself to keep from causing his family more grief. I guess he is really the crazy one in the end.

**BD:** I thought there are slight insinuations he may kill everybody involved. The lyric says 'be the last around.'

**KJP:** I think that's all in there, and that's how it ends up a bit vague.

**WANDERING AWAY** – *“Will I shed one more tear for my broken family, and have a glass of whiskey with another friend that has nowhere to be. Get my feet on the road, they feel much better there.”*

**BD:** If anything in this song is fictional, it still seems very much like YOU.

**KJP:** Yeah, it is. It feels more direct, because I am speaking from the view of myself. There is a certain metaphorical quality in the other

songs that is not always direct, but this is simple and straightforward. This represents something I have had firsthand contact with (laughs).

**BD:** The line, “All these broken promises in a shoe box full of bones,” seems to relate to the central theme of the song.

**KJP:** That's another way of saying, 'skeletons in the closet,' or the 'baggage' that you carry around with you – or things I've done in the past, that may not have helped or hindered the situation that I'm in. 'All these broken promises in a shoe box full of bones' is about a person who is feeling sorry for themselves, but thinking back about all the ways they screwed up.

**BD:** Tell us how the song title came about?

**KJP:** (Laughs) That ties me in with the Dave Alvin newsletter doesn't it? Well, it was on one of the tours I was doing with Dave and it might have been in Toronto. This the way the tour worked: I opened the show, then we took a break. Dave would go on and play four or five tunes on his own, then he would call me out to back him up on slide guitar. Each night he would work through a rough set list, and decide which song would be last before I would come up, so I could get ready -- like a cue song. So this particular night, Dave walked out and I said, 'Hey what's the song cue?' and he sort of turned half back and said this thing that sounded like 'Wandering Away.' I laughed and thought, 'he doesn't have a song called Wandering Away.' I thought through it and realized he said WANDA AND DUANE. Somehow that stayed with me, and I think that night I started putting together that song. I started putting together a set of lyrics incorporating 'Wandering Away.' The first verse came rather quickly, which is rare for me. I tend to pore over songs bringing words in and out and twisting things around. So, I went home with just that verse. I was thinking of someone in particular and it kept coming back to me. I usually don't write on the road. In fact I wrote one song on the road in my entire career -- a song called GO THERE on my Roll Away The Stone album (Rykodisc). I wrote that on tour with BB King. I needed another song for my set and needed something rhythmic. I wrote it for that reason. For some reason writing on the road doesn't work for me.

**DOCK BOGGS COUNTRY BLUES** – *“Just soon as my pocketbook was empty, not a friend on earth could be found.”*

**KJP:** Dock Boggs is another banjo player from the Appalachian area. This was a song he was known for. He plays and sings with amazing force. It's very scary sounding and strong. Especially with subject matter that he has, or I'm assuming he has first hand experience with. This song was an inspiration factor in writing KATY.



Listening to him do this really got under my skin, and made me start writing without shying away from a little anger. Also, his approach to his instrument as a banjo player made me re-think things a little bit in terms of approaching the guitar. So, I'm even playing some other songs differently than I did before, especially with my right hand technique.

**BD:** At what point did this change happen?

**KJP:** This was around the time I was recording the record. This was one of the last to songs I recorded for the album. The other was CAPMAN BOOTMAN.

CAPMAN BOOTMAN – *“Lay it down, horizontal lean, slip a finger across the bar, whip the high note frantic.”*

**KJP:** That is a self-portrait. Not having to do with relationships or how I view the world, no goods or bads, just essentially painting a portrait of myself. I've kind of retired the caps; I'm going capless now (laughs).

**BD:** Explain the line “zen bazooka buddha joe.” This must be associated with ‘shine eyed mister zen’ in RIVER RAT JIMMY.

**KJP:** Yes it is. ‘Zen’ showed up again because it fit in both cases. But, if I were paying more attention, I wouldn't have used a word twice.

**BD:** Now wait a second! I love hearing it in both songs because I thought CAPMAN BOOTMAN is the adult version of you in RIVER RAT JIMMY.

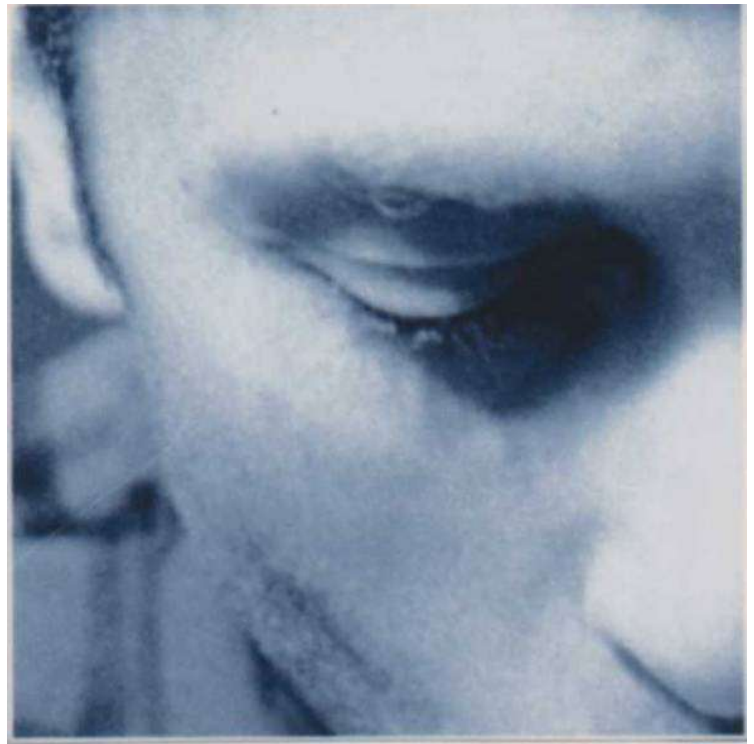
**KJP:** Yes you're right. That's great! I hadn't thought of it that way, but it is. But anyway, ‘Zen’ is used again because playing this music is a religious experience for me – trying to find those new notes every night. ‘Zen’ is the very serious approach to life looking for this creative odd thing all the time. ‘Bazooka Buddha Joe,’ refers to the bubble gum Joe, meaning that this life is very kid-like. Most people grow up, have families, and buy houses -- doing typical adult things. Slipping ‘Buddha’ in there, which in my mind's eye, occupies both spaces because the Buddha character is sort of a grown up kid, but then there is a seriousness to Buddhism too. Joe is just me, or you, or just somebody. The song is trying to say serious-adult-simple-minded-child or somewhere between the two.

TRAIN CARRIED MY GIRL FROM TOWN – *“Ashes to ashes and dust to dust. Show me a woman that I can trust.”*

**KJP:** That's one of the better-known Frank Hutchinson songs. He was a hillbilly who played lap-style guitar like me. He did an amazing amount of recording in the twenties and thirties. Doc Watson refers to him as an influence. I did that song because I liked what Frank Hutchinson did as a musician. He played with a lot of integrity, but yet he had a lot of fun with it at the same time. He didn't approach it very seriously and there is something about that I find fascinating.

PIECE BY PIECE – *“Hear the bucket hit the bottom and the rope come rolling by.”*

**KJP:** The premise for that song is that both my Mom and my Dad come from very large families. I didn't know my uncles and aunts very well, and there are cousins I've never met. So, there have been various points in my life where I've wanted nothing more than to be able to talk to these family members, so they could explain to me why things are this way and what I can do about it. Because the family was that way, we just couldn't get close to one another. So, the premise of this song is a person standing alone, looking for someone to talk to, and asking questions and those people not being there.



**BD:** What is the 'piece by piece'?

**KJP:** 'Piece by Piece by lonely piece the mountain side tumbles away,' says that each time this situation arises, where I want some help from somebody, I either can't get it or I won't allow myself to look for it. It's a very indirect piece of writing. It's supposed to represent the sensation of not knowing what to do.

**BD:** On this song you have another musician playing. You've never had anybody else on any of your albums.

**KJP:** There is a harmonica player on there who plays with me named Dave Mathis. Before I was traveling, I was just playing around Portland, OR, doing five or six gigs a week. He was one of the few musicians I've ever played with. In that context, he was someone I really gelled with. There was some magic in there. During the recording of the album, we recorded 4 or 5 tunes. *PIECE BY PIECE* was the best of the bunch. I think we might have done a version of *WANDERING AWAY* together, too. When I record my next album in the fall, I'm pretty sure it's not gonna be solo. I think I'm ready to move beyond that. But at the same time it seemed that it took me three records to get the point across. I'm looking to interact with other musicians, but certainly not the band thing, maybe one or two players. I would like to see that happen. I've done it a few times and I think there is good potential for finding music in there that I haven't found yet.

**MANY A TIME** – *"Understand better the weight of the cross. Only believe, thou gonna be saved."*

**KJP:** That is a bit of a carry-over. The *Roll Away The Stone* album (Rykodisc 1997) was pretty heavily invested in gospel music influence. What I felt wasn't represented through that was that someone could embrace the notion that the answers won't actually be found, and that studying about it-- being a rabbi, or a minister ---doesn't always provide the answers. It's not such a bad thing. Part of the magic is knowing that right around the corner there are great things to discover. *MANY A TIME* is sort of my new version of a gospel song. That's not saying, 'let's grab hands and walk through the clouds.' Maybe it would be nice to be in a cloud (laughs). But, I'm also looking for a rock to hide under, too (laughs). In the end, he is saying, 'I don't know what this means. I thought I did, but maybe I have come to a different decision about it.' Maybe the process of having the answer then finding out you don't, is

maybe the answer in and of itself. I got very tired of hearing other people say they knew the answers to these questions. So I decided that was BS, and you couldn't possibly know the answers. You may know what you feel about it, but there is no way in hell I'm gonna base something so important on what they believe. On the other hand, I don't know what the answers are. But I'm gonna accept the fact that I don't.

**BD:** Does this mean you are willing to stop looking?

**KJP:** I wouldn't say I'm willing to stop looking, but instead I'm willing to look in different ways.

**GOOD NIGHT IRENE** – *"Sometimes I have a great notion to jump in the river and drown."*

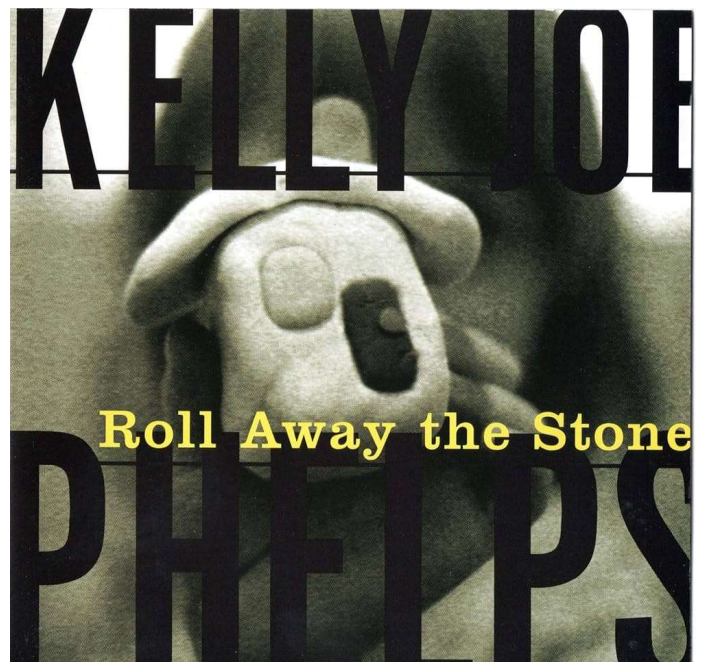
**KJP:** I started doing this song only because I liked it and I liked Leadbelly. I started playing it and the crowd response was good.

**BD:** Some people may see the song title on your album and think, why choose such a common song? But I believe you have succeeded in making this a fresh and original rendition. How did you approach it?

**KJP:** I felt I could get underneath the lyric because it meant something to me. Because of that, I could sing it with a level of conviction that felt honest -- whether or not anyone wanted to hear it. When I started recording the album, that was a song I took out. I was willing to leave it out because it was so common. But someone at the record label liked it and was bothered that I decided not to include it.

*For tour dates and info on Kelly Joe Phelps check out*

***WWW.Kellyjoephelps.com ~~~AM***



## MARK HAGEN recalls the Blasters historic 82 London live recording.



By Art Fein

### *Phil and Dave on the bus. England, 1982*

It doesn't seem like eighteen years ago, but I suppose it was. The Slash album had been released in the UK by Elvis Costello's label F-Beat, & The Blasters were making their European debut supporting Nick Lowe & His Noise To Go on a tour of England & Scotland. At the time, my friend Lindsay Hutton was running The Legion of the Cramped and also at the time Art Fein was managing both acts. So we took ourselves off to Night Moves in Glasgow to meet Art and to see this band that we'd heard of, but not really heard.

It didn't take long to get the message. The basic Alvin P/Alvin D/Bazz/Bateman/Taylor line-up absolutely scorched, to the extent that they more or less ran out of songs and had to do an unplanned "So Long Baby Goodbye" with Phil's harmonica replacing the sax part (pretty much the same arrangement that they use today in fact). It seemed a bit pointless staying to watch Nick Lowe after that, so we left, but not before I introduced myself to Dave, kicking off a friendship that's lasted to this day.

The following night, the Edinburgh show was cancelled, but we went anyway and spent the evening in an assortment of pubs and bars with the band, something of a recurring theme in my Blaster relations, I'm afraid. We promised to go to London in a couple of weeks to catch their only headlining show of the tour. That was at The Venue, a converted (and now disappeared) cinema opposite Victoria Station. It was an excellent club holding around 1000 people. It took place on May 21st 1982, not, you might notice, the date for the show given on the subsequent record sleeve! I particularly remember Art taking me for a meal at the hamburger joint next door and charging it to Warner Brothers, my first experience of record company largesse!

The show itself was a blinder, the basic Blaster line-up augmented for one night only by the sax attack of Lee Allen and Steve Berlin; it was also very very loud and my most abiding memory is of seeing Dave soaked in sweat sinking lower & lower as his solo in Roll 'Em Pete got longer & longer. This is what they did: This Is It/Crazy Baby/No Other Girl/Ain't No Telling/Border Radio/I Don't Want To/Rock Boppin' Baby/Tag Along/I Love Her So/Got Love If You Want It/Walkin' With Mr Lee/I'm Shakin'/Hollywood Bed/Go Go Go/Stop The Clock/Marie Marie/American Music/So Long Baby Goodbye//Roll 'Em Pete/High School Confidential/These Arms Of Mine/Barn Burning.



Actually my other abiding memory is of vigorously heckling Phil for dedicating a song to a group of fans who'd traveled down from Sheffield and ignoring those of us who'd come twice the distance from Scotland! Ah well. It was pouring with rain as we left the Venue to head back to the band's Nottingham hotel, The Royal Garden; I shared a cab with Steve Berlin, who was more than a little jet-lagged and a bit bemused as to what exactly was going on! The bar was shut when we got to the hotel, so we "liberated" a few drinks through the not very secure grill, Boz Boorer, then in the Polecats and now Morrissey's musical director, then organized a whipround and went out to the only all-night off-licence in West London to stock up on beer.

The band were flying out the following morning, so John, Bill, Lee and Steve did the sensible thing and went to bed, the brothers Alvin elected to stay up all night. At one point I went back to the room they shared to help with the packing which was a sight in itself. Somewhere along the way Phil had liberated a newspaper hoarding with a headline about Benny Hill. Tucked away in the wardrobe was Nick Lowe's gold disc for producing Elvis' "My Aim Is True" album which Nick had given to them during a drunken party at his house the previous day; Phil sent it back before they left the country! During the packing, Dave tossed away a film script which he said they'd been asked to do the soundtrack for, but the band decided to turn down. I wish I'd fished it out of the bin: It was Walter Hill's 48 HOURS and that refusal ultimately led to The Blasters appearing in the same director's Streets of Fire!

Never at any point was there any talk of the show they'd just done being a live album. So you can imagine my surprise when about a year later I came across a copy of Over There in an Amsterdam record shop. - I thought it was a bootleg at first! And then I just got to be pleased that you can hear me on a Blasters record. Terrible hangover though. ~~~*AM*

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### **AMERICAN MUSIC –editor: Billy Davis**

**editorial assistant: Craig Frischkorn**

**From the editor:** And thanks to the band members for their participation, and all my friends who write articles, submit photos, newspaper reviews, donate the contest prizes, and all the other stuff I'm forgetting. Let's keep on spreading the word and making friends along the way. —Billy Davis

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- #13 Drummer issue Interviews w/Angel, Bateman, Hicks.
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- #15 Dave's poetry mentor Gerald Locklin interview, Dave Alvin/Kelly Joe Phelps '97 east coast acoustic tour
- #16 John Bazz interview, Blasters visit radio station KUCI,

- Influenced by the Blasters story, Dave Alvin in N.C.
- #17 American Music Cd reissue interviews-The Alvins, Bazz, Bateman, Weiser, and Bruce Bromberg
- #18 Blasters East Coast tour, Dave Alvin in Jamestown NY, Phil Alvin's column –Musician to be remembered
- #19 Dave Alvin song by song on Black Jack David, Monsters of Folk tour report, Q & A's from Phil and Dave
- #20 Ex-Blasters guitarists James Intveld and Smokey Hormel (part 1) are interviewed. Also Bazz rates the Blaster guitarists.
- #21 Dave/Dylan tour, BJD Tour, and Blasters tribute CD
- #22 Gregory Boaz interview, Austin City Limits story, The Blasters and Dave Alvin jam In Los Angeles.
- #23 Smokey Hormel inter. (part 2), Tom Russell on songwriting with Dave, Dave Alvin's "Acoustic Band" show in Philadelphia.
- #24 The new Guilty Men interviews – Joe Terry and Rick Shea, Q & A's from the Blasters.
- #25 The Knitters reunion tour, Phil Alvin remembers is 1986 Unsung Stories solo album
- #26 Chris Gaffney interview, Dave Alvin's New Year 2000 open letter, and The Jack Daniels Lovers interview.
- #27 James Intveld interview, Dave Alvin previews his Public Domain album, SXSW festival in Austin TX reviewed.