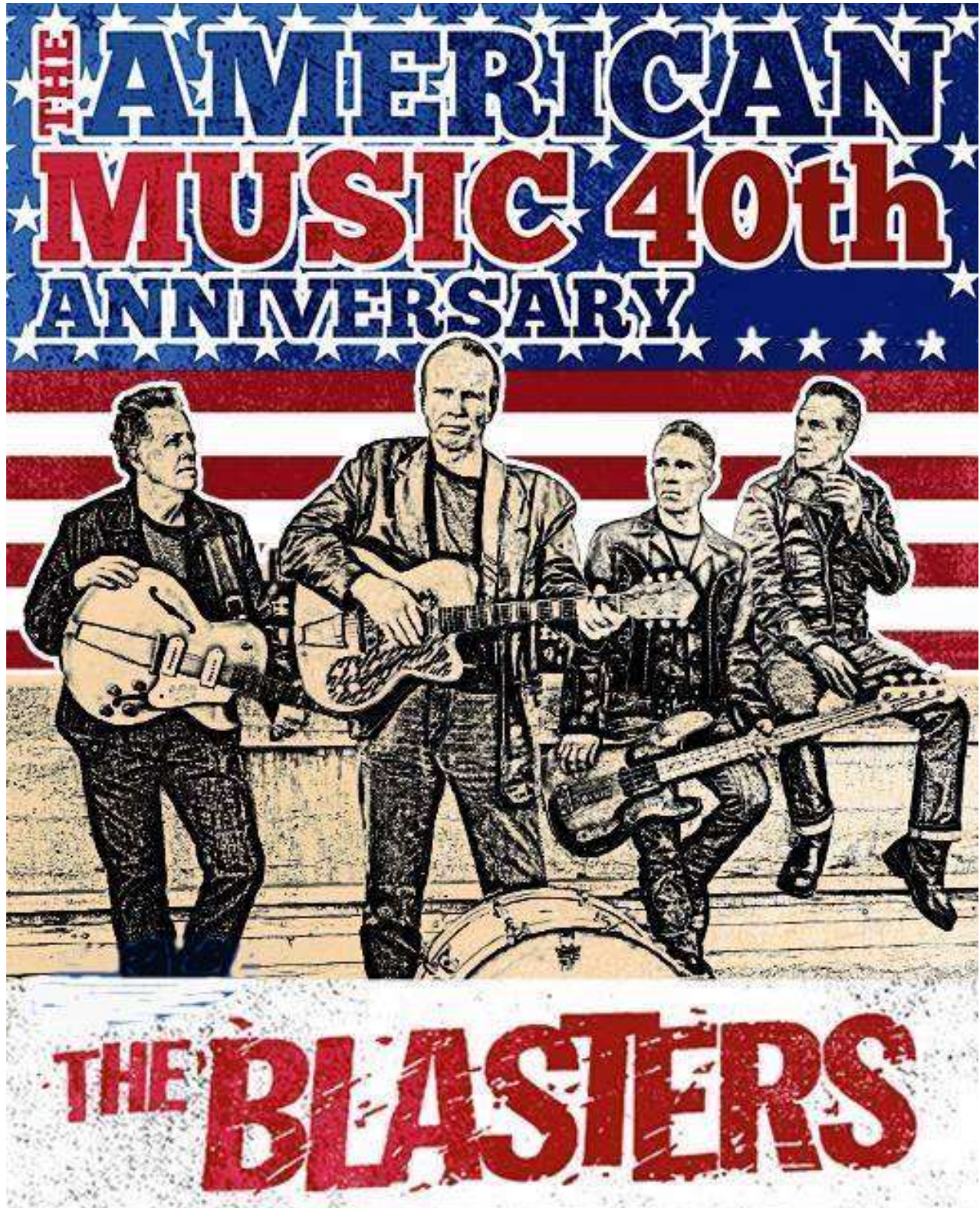


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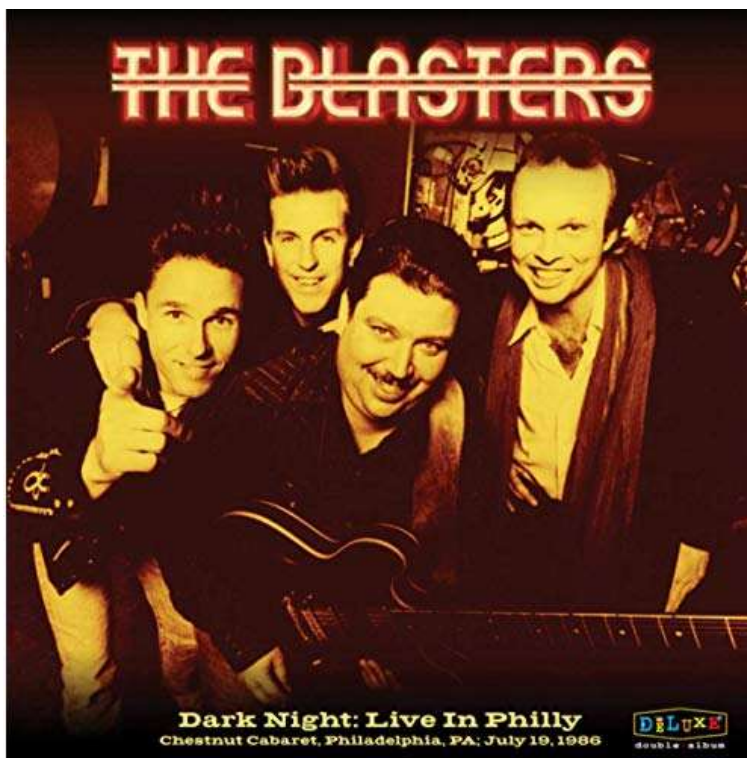
The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

JULY 2019



In This Issue: 2019 Interviews with all the original and current Blasters, Dave Alvin's 25th Anniversary re-release of King of California, Dave Alvin & Sophia Pfister's collaboration, a review of new Dave Alvin essays, and the Last Train Tour.

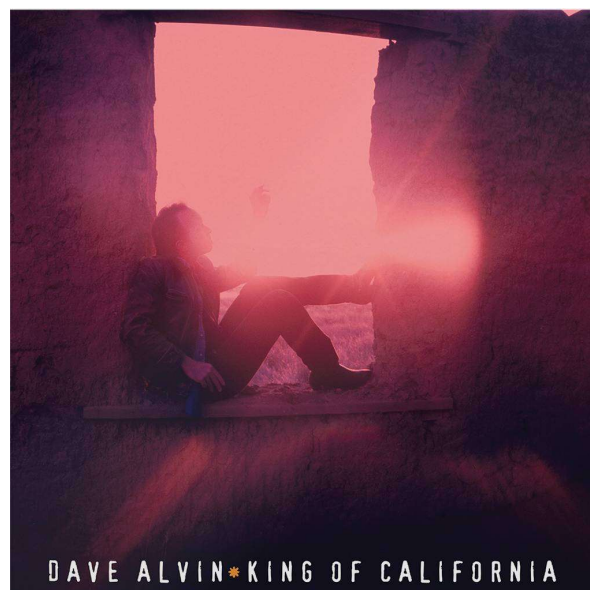
Latest News: Billboard Magazine posted a story recently that said: Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore also plan to make a follow-up to their 2018 collaboration Downey To Lubbock while Alvin is also working with the reunited Flesh Eaters. And he's recorded "this weird record" with members of Counting Crows, Camper Van Beethoven, Cracker and Richard Thompson's band that he expects to have out "fairly soon." "It's the total opposite of King of California," Alvin reports. "It's sort of folk rock, but it's like folk rock for everybody that smokes weed and took LSD -- for lack of a better term it's psychedelic. It would sound great on a co-bill with Quicksilver Messenger Service at the Avalon Ballroom in 1966. It's really fun, and I've always wanted to make a record like that." -- Dave Alvin is doing a poetry reading at the Ruskin Group Theatre in Santa Monica, CA on Aug. 11 to commemorate the 99th birthday of Charles Bukowski. Other poets and writers taking part include Gerald Locklin, Chris Morris, and Iris Berry. -- On record Store day April 13, The Rockbeat label released a Blasters 2-LP set called A Dark Night In Philly 1986 limited to a pressing of only 700 copies. This is a soundboard recorded concert from The Chestnut Cabaret in Philadelphia with Hollywood Fats on guitar from 7/19/86. On September 13, 2019 it will be released on CD. -- Dave Alvin appears on podcaster Marc Maron's various artist compilation (on his own 'In House' label) called In The Garage: Live Music from WTF with Marc Maron — Vol. 1 which includes Dave Alvin doing HELP YOU DREAM acoustic. This one was limited to 2000 copies only on vinyl. It was released on 4/13 at all Record Store Day participating record shops. -- Dave Alvin has been interviewed for Elvis From Hell, a documentary film about Jeffrey Lee Pierce and his punk band The Gun Club. Pierce, an influential musician on the Los Angeles music scene, died at 37 in 1996. Other musicians interviewed for the movie include Debbie Harry, Iggy Pop, Nick Cave, Moby and Jack White. Directed by Heiko Lange and Jessica Alice Andree, the film tentatively is scheduled for release in 2020. -- Dave Alvin is taking his Roots on the Rails journey to Alaska this summer. Downey to Denali is set for Sept. 8-16 and will begin in Anchorage with stops in Talkeetna, Denali National Park, Kantishna and Kenai Fjords National Park before returning to Anchorage. Musicians accompanying him on the trip are Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Christy McWilson, Rick Shea and Jon Langford. The trip is sold out, but there is a waiting list. Visit Roots on the Rails on the web for details. -- Dave Alvin has been hinting at his live shows that he is writing a book.. — **am**



Dave Alvin's 25th Anniversary of King of California

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Dave Alvin's 1994 HighTone records album King of California, Craft Recordings has remastered the album on CD and for the first time on vinyl. Release date: June 28, 2019. The Vinyl 2-LP set is beautiful with its gatefold of original album art, a 12 X 12 pullout of liner notes / credits, and pressed on heavy weight vinyl.

This summer Dave Alvin will embark on an acoustic tour performing the album in its entirety. Joining him will be multi-instrumentalist Greg Leisz, who produced the King of California album. The female vocal parts from album will be handled by Christy McWilson and on the Midwest dates, Cindy Wasserman.



2019 Press Release: Recorded in Los Angeles the day after the historic 1994 Northridge earthquake and produced by Greg Leisz, King of California had its genesis in the album's title track, a ready-made folk ballad, written for his mother, in which an aspiring suitor heads west to make his fortune in the wild, still-young Golden State. "King of California is when I decided 'this is when I let the song tell me what it sounds like,'" says Alvin. "Ever since then, that's been my rule. It sounds ridiculous, but it was something I had to learn."

Featuring acoustic interpretations of some of the finest songs in his catalog, along with new, folk-inflected compositions, and notable covers, Dave Alvin found the true measure of his own voice with King of California. "It was ironic that for a guy who was known as a loud guitar player and questionable singer, his best seller was an acoustic album," says Alvin.

Included are songs written and originally recorded during the '80s: "Barn Burning" from American Music (1980) the debut album from The Blasters, "Bus Station" and "Leaving" from the Blasters' Non Fiction (1983), "Little Honey," written with X's John Doe and featured on the Blasters' Hard Line (1985), and "Fourth of July," which appeared on both X's See How We Are (1997) and on Alvin's solo album Romeo's Escape (1987). "Every Night About This Time" also appeared on the latter album.

Like the records Alvin made as a member of the Blasters, King of California features a variety of covers, including Tom Russell's "Blue Wing," Dallas singer-pianist Whistlin' Alex Moore's "West Texas Blues" (retitled "East Texas Blues"), Memphis Slim's classic "Mother Earth," and "What Am I Worth," a George Jones song, featured here as a duet with the incomparable Syd Straw. The album also includes co-writes with Rosie Flores ("Goodbye Again").

The expanded edition includes a previously unreleased track from the recording sessions, "Riverbed Rag," an instrumental designed for a guitar-dobro duel by Alvin and Leisz, and inspired by the usually dry San Gabriel River that both musicians grew up exploring. Two additional covers, Merle Haggard's "Kern River," originally recorded for the 1994 Haggard tribute album Tulare Dust (co-produced by Alvin and Tom Russell), and Katy Moffatt's "The Cuckoo," from her 1999 Alvin-produced album Loose Diamond, round out the bonus tracks.

"I'm real proud of King of California twenty-five years later," Alvin says. "The whole process was a revelation, to record with everybody in the studio sitting roughly in a circle. Sitting there on the edge of my chair with an acoustic guitar knowing that if I blow this chord we have to start over. And I could use my voice; when I was recording electric my voice couldn't lead the band. In this situation I could. That allowed a certain openness and freedom I hadn't experienced before. And for Greg, this was his baby, his chance to produce me and get my voice right. His calmness in all of this led to the vibe of the record."



40 Years of the Blasters

Words by Phil Alvin, Dave Alvin, John Bazz,
Bill Bateman, Keith Wyatt, Gene Taylor,
and Steve Berlin.

It's been 40 years since The Blasters played their first gig on March 17, 1979 at a wedding. To celebrate, American Music: The Blasters / Dave Alvin Newsletter has brand new interviews with all of the original Blasters and the current Blasters. Each member recounts how they became a Blaster and the highlights of their time in the band, plus a special interview with a man I have been trying to track down for many years, I finally found him in Oregon. Randy Coleman hired The Blasters to play his wedding, and that gig was the catalyst for The Blasters career.

Randy Coleman: All of The Blasters and other great Los Angeles musicians used to jam at people's house parties in the mid-1970s. My friend, Dale Spalding had a little house on an island at Huntington Beach. We would all end up at his house every weekend because we all lived around there. Dale Spalding was a harmonica player and often Phil Alvin would show up as would the other Blasters, but before they called themselves The Blasters. Those parties were so much darn fun.



The Blasters first promo photo by Cass Alvin

When I was getting married in March of 1979, I needed a band for the wedding reception. It was in Newport Beach at the Balboa Pavilion on the island. At that time Phil Alvin was playing the type of songs pretty much like what The Blasters became known for. Dale Spalding and Frank Furillo played Harmonica. They didn't play any typical wedding songs. It was just like a continuation of the jam parties on Saturday nights at Dale's house. But, because I was the groom, I was kind of distracted and didn't pay as much attention to the band that night. That was 40 years ago, so things are a little fuzzy.

After the wedding, I focused on my electrical contracting business. I knew The Blasters were becoming successful, but I was too busy to stay up on the music scene.

John Bazz: Randy Coleman upgraded my house's electrical system. It's a 100-year-old house that had wiring on ceramic posts. That was the last time I saw him. Hey Randy, thanks. I haven't had any problems in 30 years (laughs).

Randy Coleman: Oh, that's neat to hear (laughs).

AM: Randy, what made you decide to leave California?

Randy Coleman: I was an electrical contractor in Southern California for 25 years. I got tired of that. On my 50th Birthday I shut down my business and office. I got my employees jobs with other contractors and I came to Oregon, bought a vineyard and started a winery.

Dave Alvin: Frank Furillo was a harmonica player friend of ours. Randy Coleman asked Frank to put a band together, but Frank had left Downey and was living in Wisconsin. Frank flew in for the wedding and asked Phil and Bill, who had been playing duo gigs, to play with him at the wedding. They needed a bass player, so they asked a guy from Downey named Mike Kennedy. He was a guy who could play any instrument but was a goofball – but a very talented goofball.



Bill Bateman and Phil Alvin

Frank Furillo (*Excerpt from American Music #49 May 2006 interview*): In 1978 I was living with a friend of mine named Danny Coleman. His brother Randy called me (needing a band for his wedding). I said: "I'll call Phil and maybe we can put some of the old people together and get a good rockin' bluesy shuffle band that people can dance to." I called Phil and said: "Let's get the usual players together."

Frank Furillo: The first question was: Who was gonna be the guitar player? He was mentioning a few names and then said: "David's been playing guitar lately." I said: "Yeah! Yeah! Let's have David (Alvin) play!!" David was one of my buddies. So, I pushed David real hard. I didn't know he had taken up guitar, because he always played flute.

Dave Alvin: I was so shy that I didn't play guitar around Phil at home or even Bill. But Frank knew I could play. For whatever reason, I wasn't shy around him. So, he suggested me. Me and Frank got together before and jammed. The short story is that they couldn't find anyone else, so they were stuck with me (laughs).

Phil Alvin: That was the first time I heard David playing guitar, but he was already pretty good. He had been playing guitar in a band called 'The Murderers.' All my other guitar players were out of town; Mike Roach was in Colorado and Gary Masi was in San Francisco. And that's why I got David. It was a pleasant surprise.

AM: You didn't hear Dave playing around the house?

Phil Alvin: No, but apparently Johnny Bazz had been giving him some lessons. John is a good guitar player. David didn't have a guitar, so he might have played Mike Kennedy's Stratocaster, although we had an Epiphone at the house.

Phil Alvin: It was at the Balboa Bay Pavilion in Newport Beach. We played inside and it was good for a first gig. We hardly rehearsed and most songs were off-the-cuff. We played FOL-SOM PRISON BLUES, HONEY DON'T, and HEAR ME CRYIN'.

Bill Bateman: I remember me and Frank Furillo wearing Hawaiian shirts and yellow pants. I had big Keith Richards type hair. Dave was wearing a t-shirt. We weren't really The Blasters because we hadn't formed a thing yet. But it was like the 2000th party gig we played. We thought of it as just another party. Dave sang two songs including BAD BOY. We did Jimmy Cliff songs 007 and SHANTY TOWN. Mostly blues and hillbilly bop.



Frank Furillo and Phil Alvin at the Blasters second gig —Mike George's wedding in Huntington Beach (4/21/79) (Photo: courtesy Mike George)

Dave Alvin: I think we might have done one rehearsal in Bateman's living room in Downey. The day of the wedding reception, I had a gig earlier. I was in this terrible band called 'The Murderers.' We were playing in Signal Hill at a mental institution in the early evening. Then I raced down to Newport Beach in my car to the wedding reception.

AM: What kind of music was the Murderers?

Dave Alvin: Just terrible music but a little bit of everything. I even tried to sing ROCK BOPPIN BABY. I tried, but I could never sing it. I had one or two songs I had written that weren't necessarily bad, but we were just noisy. The people at the institution loved us (laughs). They thought we were the greatest band ever. A year or so later The Blasters played there too.

Dave Alvin: At Randy Coleman's wedding we played THAT'S ALRIGHT MAMA, MYSTERY TRAIN, Junior Wells' MESSIN' WITH THE KID, and ROLL

'EM PETE of course. The thing I noticed right off the bat when we were playing, was that though Phil and I grew up together, our guitar styles developed independently and were very different. But when you put our guitars together, they matched perfectly. I thought wow! This is unique. In those days, Phil's guitar was loud and much more a prominent part of the sound. It was very apparent when we played Carl Perkins' HONEY DON'T, that I thought "this is the shit".

For 'The Murderers' gig, I played a Les Paul that I borrowed from a guy named Keith Freeze. For this early prototype Blasters, I played Bill Bateman's Epiphone. I wouldn't remember what kind of amps we used because everything was borrowed.

John Bazz: I was Randy's friend and in the Frank Furillo group of musicians and of course played all the time with Phil. As a Blaster, I eventually replaced Mike Kennedy who was a very good bass player. The guy who really should have been playing bass for that first gig and should have been in The Blasters was Doug Allgood. He was the bass player in our house party bands when it was me on drums, Phil on vocals and Gary Masi on guitar. Doug was perfect for The Blasters. I'm not sure why he was out of the loop at the time, maybe he was a little too conservative for The Blasters. But Mike, on the other hand, was a good friend of ours and liked to hang out and jam. Mike was too good. He was a jazz guy not a rock 'n roller.

A bunch of my friends went to the wedding and were playing so I was very curious how it went. Because it was a unique grouping of guys - a new band configuration. So, the week after, I called Phil or Dave to ask how it went. They said it was great and too good to not continue past just one gig. We all knew it couldn't continue with Mike Kennedy on bass. He wouldn't play by the blues rules. If it was a dumbbell bass line in a Warren Smith rockabilly tune, it had to be that way. Mike might play that way for a minute, but then run off on a jazz tangent and ruin the song. In Mike's mind he thought he was improving the song. The Blasters play in context and that's the way it is.

Dave Alvin: I kind of got all hyped up about this band after that first gig, so I kind of volunteered as the booking agent to find us gigs. I think we did a second gig with Mike Kennedy on bass as an audition to get more gigs. Mike quit because he thought we wouldn't go anywhere with this type of music. Johnny Bazz who played drums and was a good guitarist said: "I'll play bass." We went over Bateman's house to rehearse and that was The Blasters right there.

John Bazz: Bateman suggested to Phil and Dave: "Johnny Bazz can do it because he doesn't know any better." I wasn't a bass player, so they knew I would play the simple bass lines that work. And I really had an appreciation for the music, that Mike didn't. But at that time, we weren't The Blasters yet, we were just a bunch of guys meeting in Bateman's front room once or twice a week. We would listen to a record and learn a song every rehearsal. We were all learning. Phil and Bill were the most accomplished at this point. I didn't even have a bass yet, I just played bass lines on a guitar. By the time we did what is called The Blasters second gig at Mike George's wedding, I had to go rent a bass. I was playing with a pick, and I remember buying a felt pick to make it sound like I wasn't picking. About a week after that gig, I bought a Kay bass and started playing with my fingers.

Dave Alvin: There was even talk for a few days after the first gig that Frank might be a regular member of the band. Frank is a great harmonica player and a show-off performer type player. But he didn't want to move back to L.A. with us.

John Bazz: There was an article in the L.A. Weekly (music newspaper) about Rockin' Ronnie Weiser and his Rollin' Rock record label. To be on Ronnie's label you had to play Rockabilly, so we were calling ourselves a Rockabilly band, even though we weren't. We wanted to make a record, so Phil called Ronnie and said: "The Blasters are as good as anyone on your label." Ronnie was in a rush ready to fly out on trip with his wife, so he said: "Come over and make it quick." Phil ran over and played the tape for Ronnie. A delivery guy just happened to be picking up records, and listened for a minute and said, "I like that. I'd buy that." So, the delivery guy totally validated The Blasters (laughs). I'm sure Ronnie liked it too (laughs). Ronnie came back after his trip and saw us play at Sweetwater, He brought Ray Campi, who was already on Rollin' Rock Records. After the gig Ronnie said, "You guys are great. I think we should make a record - but I noticed there were no originals." David told him that we have originals, but we didn't play them tonight. In reality, we didn't have originals yet. On the ride home, David said: "Tonight's homework is that everyone needs to write two songs." Phil wrote two, Dave wrote 5 and that was enough with covers to make our first record American Music for Rollin' Rock Records.

Early Highlights for the Young Blasters

Dave Alvin: It was a big day when I was able to quit my job as a fry cook. That was not quite a year after we started. It was a long process that took until December of 1979 to get gigs on the west side of L.A. We made a demo with James Harman to use to shop for gigs - that's the one we took to Ronnie Weiser for the Rollin' Rock deal. I would drive around to any clubs some new wave, country, punk – anything to try and get gigs. We got in a place called The Club 88 in West Los Angeles - it was a punk rock club. This little old lady named Max, who ran the place, gave us a gig, but we had to turn in cards (selling our own tickets). We played there a few times and one night a guy saw and offered us the chance to open for Levi and the Rockats in Santa Monica. It was a really important gig for us because it brought us into the scene where the Go-Gos played and the news started spreading about us. We had been playing for free beer down in a place in Redondo Beach



opening for The Twisters every Thursday night, They did top 40. Real nice guys. They saw us audition and liked us and asked us to open. They brought in a lot of people, so we got seen by a large crowd every week. In January 1980, we had a bunch of gigs lined up that were decent paying gigs - like for \$75 – which was good money. One day I realized I was making the same money on gigs as working as a fry cook, so I said: “Fuck it! I’m quitting.” That was a big moment that I said: “I’m a professional musician now.” We’re diving into the deep end here. I also quit college, so that day, I officially became a Blaster.

John Bazz: An early highlight for me was when we headlined the Whiskey A Go Go, I thought of this as the ultimate, because I would hang out at the Whiskey and every band that was worth anything played there. I thought The Blasters didn’t need to go any further, then we would do two nights in a row and sell it out—which was mind blowing. Playing the Ritz in New York City was pretty big for us too. Others were Farm Aid and touring with Clapton, but they weren’t our gigs.

The 1980 Queen Tour

Phil Alvin: A few of the Queen guys saw us play at Flippers Roller Rink in Hollywood. Alex Oakley, who had booked us in a show in Santa Monica got into Queen’s private booth at the Roller Rink and talked to them and they invited us to open a month-long tour. Alex became our first manager and was very important for The Blasters. We had an office with him. He was sort of an accountant, he made David pay his taxes for writing MARIE MARIE but that’s another story (laughs).

Bill Bateman: We started off opening for other bands on Tuesdays at the Starwood in Hollywood. We would play the Fleetwood or bars out in The Valley – really nothing gigs. One night we played Flippers Roller Rink. I remember I was on crutches because I twisted my ankle at work, but I came to the show. I got some buddies a case of beer to help drive my drum set to the gig in my 1964 Volkswagen bus. We set up on the oval stage inside the middle of the rink and played our show. The following day, I heard Queen was there. They saw our set and invited us to personally open up for them on their arena tour that would be starting next week. - That’s a wakeup call!

We played San Diego first. The fans were waving their union jacks at us and booing as hard as they could. Here’s the scenario: The lights go out. The announcer shouts, “Is everyone ready to rock and roll?” The crowd goes ape shit. Then one spotlight comes on illuminating a 4-piece band huddled around a little drum set inside a 9-foot square area. As soon as they realized it wasn’t Queen, the booing started.

Phil Alvin: They were 100% against us (laughs). Someone even threw a cherry bomb at us.

Bill Bateman: That was the first of a month of gigs with them. The second gig was in Phoenix, out-doors, in July and it was hot!

John Bazz: At the Arizona show it was general admission in front, and the earlier you got there

the better spot you had. So, we had Queen fans who were there all day in the sun and heat and in no mood for anything but Queen.

Bill Bateman: The Blasters were not listed on the marquee, so there were 40-60,000 people out there in the heat, anxious to see Queen. They sold bottles of beer there, which was really dangerous. It wasn't until we started playing that it started raining bottles. Me and Phil got hit, I was bleeding after a bottle deflected off my tom tom. I gathered up 6 bottles and sat on the front of the stage throwing them back, I was pissed. Brian May had to come out and tell the audience that Queen wouldn't play if they didn't calm down. Finally, on the third gig they put our name on the marquee, so people had some kind of warning.

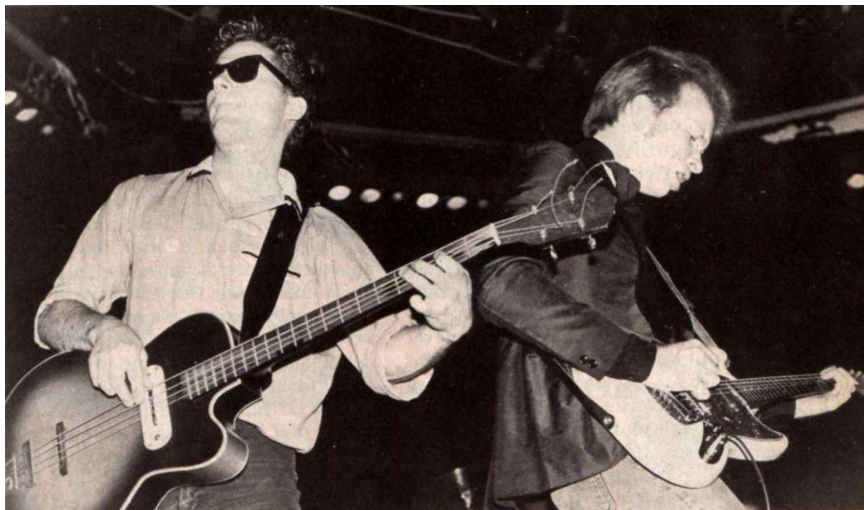
John Bazz: We were just worlds apart musically and I can understand the fans not liking us. It was really an impulse thought on their part to add us to the tour. We did have a pretty good local name around town opening for the Go-Gos and 'X'. Phil originally turned the Queen tour down because we had weekend gigs (July 8, 9, 1980) at The Starwood opening for the Go-Gos. Dave figured out that we could do both gigs by having our gear already at the Starwood waiting for us. Dave's nickname, in the pre Map Quest or GPS days, was Dave 'Directions' Alvin. He figured out how to get from The Forum in Inglewood to the Starwood in Hollywood using local streets and short cuts.

Dave Alvin: We did the Fabulous Forum for four nights. That's 17,000 people a night that hated us (laughs). We were different in the early days - we were so tight. On stage you had to be a gang – you against the world. A lot of the world didn't want to hear shit from us (laughs). We were “all for one and one for all.”

You have 17,000 people booing you and saying “you suck”, we said, “Fuck you, we do not, We're gonna show you!” We were bonded after that. It's going to do one of two things, break you up or make you a tighter band. We went through hell together. You have to have that kind of toughness. I missed that feeling when I started my solo career.

John Bazz: I don't know if the Queen thing did much for us. When we were shopping for labels, no one took us seriously in the industry's eyes. Our record deal with Slash wasn't based on that, we were already at a certain local level.

Dave Alvin: But the great thing was that the music writers started writing about us. It was not enough to get a record deal, but enough to make us locally famous.



Hearing The Blasters on the Radio for the First Time

Dave Alvin: I first heard songs from the Rollin' Rock album on Rodney Bingenheimer's Sunday night radio show and that was a big thrill. But a bigger thrill was when we were driving from Denver to Albuquerque and we heard AMERICAN MUSIC played on FM radio. "Here's one by a band called The Blasters." We all went "Yeahhhh!!"



Bill Bateman and Belinda Carlisle

Bill Bateman: I was cruising around in my '64 bug on the 101 freeway and my girlfriend at the time, Belinda Carlisle was sitting next to me. The Go-Go's WE GOT THE BEAT song came on, so she was dancing in the car and flashing people. Right after that song, a Blasters song AMERICAN MUSIC came on. So, I was in heaven.

John Bazz: Well, more than hearing us on the radio, I remember flipping around the TV channels and I saw myself on MTV in a Blasters video. That threw me for a loop.

Becoming a Blaster

Gene Taylor: I knew the other Blasters guys since we were kids, but I actually joined The Blasters in June 1981. I was already rehearsing and had played a few shows with the band before the July 1, official announcement. I can't really remember the particulars of any of my earliest shows with the band, but I believe one of them was Club 88 and another was at The Whiskey A Go Go.

Steve Berlin: I was entering the consciousness of The Blasters by hanging out with people. A very important part of the story is a guy named Phast Phreddie, who was very close to the Alvin brothers, and a fellow record collector. He introduced me to the Alvin brothers and other people that became very important in my life. I got invited to the Alvin brothers' record parties. Those parties really amounted to a bunch of dudes with 12-packs of beer arguing about records (laughs). It was an amazing, exciting time. The Blasters had just formed, and all these great bands were brand new. In 1981, I was playing in so many



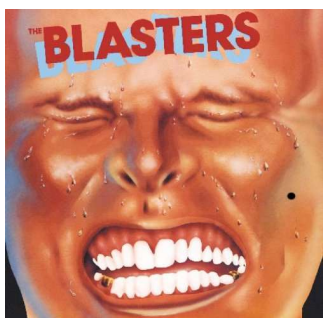
different bands, so life was free and easy. There were only two sax players on the scene - me and Spider Middleman. We were the only ones to call, when bands needed a sax.

I joined the Flesh Eaters in early 1981 and I had come to know Dave and Bill (Bateman) as friends. I got a call when I was working at a music store called Bettman's Music. Dave Alvin said: "We have a recording session tonight for a song called I'M SHAKIN' Do you wanna play baritone sax on it?" I didn't own a



baritone, but as I was on the phone, I looked at one in the store and told him, "Yes. I have one right here." It was in a case and I hadn't even looked to see if it was in there (laughs), much less ever played one before. After we did the sessions Dave called again and said: "The Blasters are doing a run of shows in Texas starting in Dallas. Can you go?" So, I dropped everything to become a Blaster.

Keith Wyatt: I had played for years in L.A. with James Intveld when he had The Rockin' Shadows band with his brother Ricky and Patrick Woodward. Pat was in the Musicians Institute which I was teaching at and he told me about The Rockin' Shadows. He said, "They pay me \$85 a night to play at The Whiskey A Go Go playing rockabilly." That was really good dough for back then. He said: "The kids are wearing white sports coats and the girls are screaming for this music. It's insane!" He introduced me to James and we played together a lot over the years. We played every Monday night for 3 years at the One West Club in Pasadena. It was a scene and a rockabilly hangout with people coming by and sitting in with our band like Dave Alvin and Brian Setzer. James joined The Blasters in 1993, so we went our separate ways. I knew Jerry Angel from playing with him in a band called The Dime Bags way before he joined The Blasters in 1994. It seemed like every musician in L.A. knew each other. We all criss-crossed in many different bands. In 1996, James left The Blasters so Jerry asked me to join. He gave me a cassette tape of the Live at The House of Blues that never got released. He said: "Learn these, we'll jam and see if Phil says okay." Things went good and the first gig was in San Jose with no rehearsals. That went well, I kept playing a few gigs and came to the conclusion, I must be in the band (laughs).



The Blasters 1981 Slash Album Recording Sessions

Phil Alvin: When I'M SHAKIN' became a national hit, Warner Bros. Records became interested and got behind us. MARIE MARIE became a big hit in England for Shakin' Stevens, that was a big thing for David as a songwriter.

Bill Bateman: I remember Lee Allen in the studio. He was a creative machine. Put a quarter in him and he'd play something no one else could ever play. That's pro. He was one of the gang. He did everything we did. He suffered through it.

Gene Taylor: We were well rehearsed and didn't have too many issues integrating the piano into the band's already established sound. Art Fein, who was one of our managers, was particularly helpful with suggestions in determining on which songs I might be a bit more upfront and those where it would be better if I laid back and integrated the piano into the existing two-guitars, bass and drums rhythm. The rhythm approach I took was to blend the left hand (LH) with John's bass and Dave's rhythm parts, while blending the right hand (RH) with Bill's snare drum and Phil's finger-strummed/finger-picked rhythm.

In the studio, if Dave wanted to keep his rhythm part going throughout, he could simply overdub his solo, depending on the song. However, when we played live and Dave was soloing, my LH would still keep a semblance of his rhythm part going on. It seemed to work well.

Steve Berlin: I went down to United Western Studio in Hollywood and got to meet Lee Allen who was sort of a hero of mine. Then when I actually joined The Blasters he became my best friend and my roommate for the better part of two years. I don't remember a whole lot about the sessions. My studio experience at that time was extremely limited so I was just overwhelmed being there. It was something I had been dreaming about my whole life. We cut I'M SHAKIN', SO LONG BABY GOOD-BYE and HOLLYWOOD BED. They were pretty much live. The sound of that band was pretty amazing.

Lee Allen

Bill Bateman: We were just a bunch of damn babies to him (laughs). He loved us. He tried to set good examples for us, cuz he was so much older. But his examples were; how to be the toughest guy at the party and that no one could drink more than you, and to be the king. He was really good at it (laughs). He would say: "Bateman. When



Lee Allen: "I used to help out the kids in the Blasters (Phil and Dave Alvin) about 13 years ago. They wanted to play Jimmy Reed and Joe Turner songs and I showed 'em how the changes went. We've stayed friends pretty much ever since. They're going into the studio to do an album (The Blasters on Slash) and Phil asked me to help out. After we cut the album, it started to take off and I started to help out on the gigs once in a while. One-nighters aren't exactly my cup of tea, but a trip back to New Orleans is like a holiday back home because I can get to talk to my old friends like Dave (Bartholomew) and Shirley (Goodman)."
From a profile of Lee Allen in I Hear You Knockin': The Sound of New Orleans Rhythm and Blues (Swallow Publications) by Jeff Hannusch. Copyright 1985.

are you gonna quit foolin' around with those little girls and get yourself a woman?" (laughs). I said: "She is a woman, Lee! That's what she told me (laughs)."

Dave Alvin: One of my favorite gigs with Lee was in Chicago at The Park West (April, 1985), which was a swanky concert venue/supper club, it was The Blasters with Lee and his old friend Marcus Johnson sat in playing sax.

Steve Berlin: My favorite thing was playing with Lee Allen. What a guy! Such a gentleman! We were instantly teammates even though it was really a master / student relationship. He shared everything with me. He enjoyed drinking as we all did, he loved his scotch. I'd have to hold him up some nights, but he could still play beautifully and engage the audience. He was a showman – a star from the day he was born. When he was on a stage, you could not help but watch him, even when sharing the stage with guys as dynamic as the Alvin brothers who were pretty damn compelling performers themselves. Lee owned it and embraced it.

Big Joe Turner

Bill Bateman: When we met him, I was the oldest of us, but only 15. Phil's band 'The Night Shift' played at bar gigs and his other called 'Delta Pacific' was used at upper scale gigs. In both bands Johnny Bazz played drums, Gary Masi on guitar with Gene Taylor on piano, and Doug Allgood on bass. Phil was on harmonica and guitar. They played blues like men. They met Mary Franklin who offered to manage the band and let them rehearse at her house in Compton. Her boyfriend was Big Joe Turner and all his musician compadres hung around. When we were there, they'd give us lessons. I was there hangin' out and was the B-team drummer, because Johnny Bazz who was Phil's regular drummer went away on a lot of ski trips. I got a few gigs in here and there, but not many. If we weren't at Mary Franklin's house, then Big Joe was over at Phil's house. Cass Alvin and Nana (Alvins' Parents) would always take care of everybody, making dinner. Lee Allen would also be there. So that's how I grew up. I was pretty lucky to have that great experience. The other guys weren't lucky, they worked hard for it (laughs).



Dave Alvin: At the Hollywood Palace we did a gig with Big Joe Turner. Big Joe got driven up to the club at soundcheck at about 5:00 pm. So, between 5 and 11:00 pm when our set started, people kept giving Big Joe drinks. When he came on stage in our set, he sang like one word, his head fell back, and he passed out asleep in his chair on stage (laughs). Lee Allen looked over at me and I said: "I think we killed him." Lee nudged Big Joe and he started singing again (laughs). All I could see was the headlines "Blues Legend Dies Onstage with The Blasters."

The Blasters 1982 PBS Soundstage TV concert Special



Phil Alvin: Soundstage was great. Producer Ken Ehrlich was a big Blasters fan. I wish they could find all the interview footage that was cut out of the special. I remember Carl Perkins on camera apologizing to Lee Allen for all the racism that existed in the 50's, like making them go in the rear doors and the backs of buses. Lee accepted the apology. They really talked and it was a great interview. David and I said: 'There's no reason to talk to us, these guys are legends.'

Gene Taylor: Besides playing, hanging out with Carl Perkins and his band and Willie Dixon and his son was fun. We also had a really good sound/camera rehearsal before the show, so the performance went really well.

John Bazz: Art Fein helped the director in that. He sat up in the booth and cued them when the sax solo was coming when the guitar or piano solos happened. The camera guys were pros, but Art made it smoother for them.

American Bandstand

Bill Bateman: Dick Clark was a pal. I remember the second time we played the show I got there early. I hung around behind the scenes watching the set up. I had a 'short dog' of 'old grand dad' or 'cream of Kentucky' liquor. I was standing by this curtain just drinkin' when Dick came out and he had a 'short dog' too (laughs). He told me that cocktails were a good way to loosen up for the bright lights. You have to look like you're at the party (laughs).



Gene Taylor: We were on American Bandstand three times and got to spend time off-camera talking music with Dick Clark. I'll never forget that.

John Bazz: If you had to pick one show that we were on, American Bandstand would be it. What an iconic show. We were honored to be asked back a second and third time.

Eric Clapton Nationwide Tour with The Blasters 1983

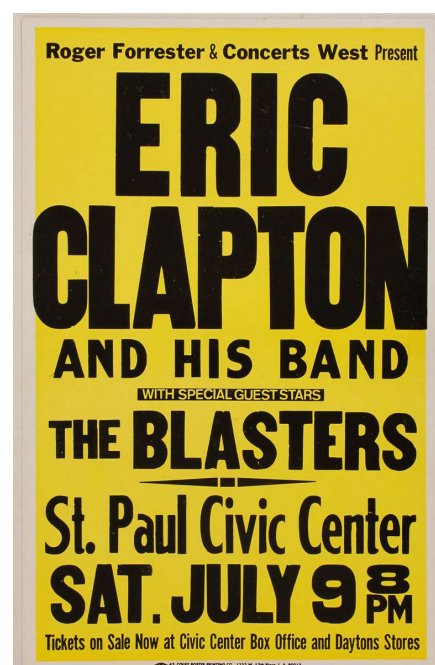
Bill Bateman: On tour, we made pals with Eric Clapton. His people had hired a guy to watch him and keep him in line so he wouldn't drink. He would sneak away and come to The Blasters tent, find me, and I'd be sitting on an ice chest loaded with, what I would call 'my beer.' I'd give him 2 beers. He'd suck one down immediately, then go out the back of the tent and drink the other one on the way back. He didn't get caught (laughs). We started showing him some music that he never heard of before, like Johnny Guitar Watson. He flipped out – absolutely loved it! He invited us to a house party with him and his wife in Denver. We showed up with a pillow case full of blues cassette tapes. We were partying all night and he was sneakin' booze and pot while we were playin' those tunes. His wife was getting madder and madder, so she kicked us out and we accidentally left our tapes there (laughs) – we never got them back.

Bill Bateman: At one show in Michigan, Clapton's drummer Jamie (Oldaker) had a drum riser made in an iron cage with an iron door. Well Jamie ran up there and hit his head on the door and was bleeding like a stuck pig. Now I didn't see any of this. I had walked out back behind the stage after our set into the Michigan woods to check out the scenery and smoke a joint. I heard way in the distance; very low "Bateman!" Bateman!" I came back and they said: "Clapton is looking for you." He showed me a set list of blues songs and said: "Can you play those?" I said: "Yeah. Can you? (laughs)" So I went up there and started playin'. Jamie came running up with a bandaged head and said: "Nobody's taking over for me!" So, I only got a few songs out of it.

Gene Taylor: It was a long tour (almost six weeks), so once everyone got used to being together, it became very relaxed backstage. Everyone connected with the tour and really worked well together. The Clapton people treated us like family. It was especially fun to hang with Duck Dunn, as he, Lee Allen and myself (along with a few of the roadies) were the hard partiers (laughs). Lee Allen and I shared a birthday (July 2), which we celebrated backstage at the Jones Beach Amphitheater/Pavilion, highlighted by Eric Clapton bringing us a birthday cake and singing an a cappella rendition of 'Happy Birthday.'

Dave Alvin: The last night of the tour in Denver at Red Rocks, Clapton invites us on stage for a song FURTHER UP THE ROAD. I had to take a solo after Clapton. That was terrible (laughs). How do you follow him in front of 10,000 people?

Bill Bateman: In that jam, I was on drums, Bazz on bass and so was Duck Dunn. Dave and Albert Lee played guitars. Eric tried to sing with Phil and got embarrassed and backed off the mike and let Phil sing all the rest. Phil was powerful that night.



The Blasters 1985-1995 — four lead guitarists

AM: Was there pressure by Warner Brothers Records for the Blasters to score a big hit with the Hard Line album in 1985?

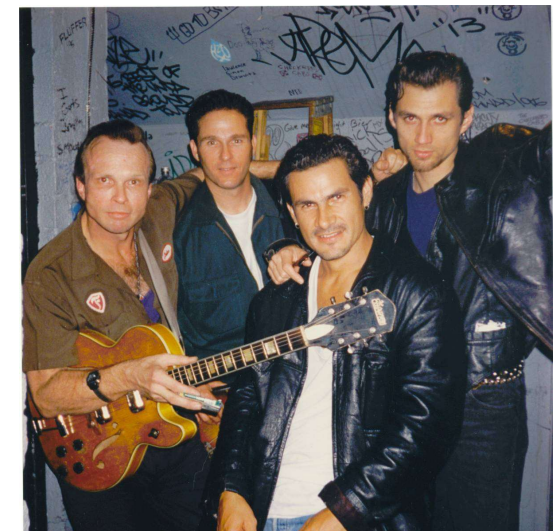
Phil Alvin: They exerted a lot of control over us. When we delivered the album to Warners, they said: 'Phil your singing with too much emotion' and 'David you're playing too much like yourself.' Those were two of the dumbest things they could have said. They pushed us. Lenny Woronker who was the president, was almost disillusioned by the label, He was always on our side.

AM: Next Hollywood Fats joined the Blasters.

Phil Alvin: We did have plans to do an album with Fats, but he was only in the band 8 months before he died. They just released that live record, 'A Dark Night In Philly' that he plays on. He was such a great player. Then David filled in for a tour and Billy Zoom on a European tour in the summer of '87. He and Lee Allen got along really well. Billy and the Blasters never thought that we were going to stay together, it was just temporary. But they were very fun shows. I remember we played on a concert TV special in Finland. That was when I found out what wild drinkers the Finns were (laughs).

AM: Smokey Hormel then became your permanent guitarist in 1988 and then James Intveld in 1993.

Phil Alvin: Yes. We did a lot of touring with Smokey. Bate-man worked hard and prepared him for the band. He has become a really great player. I remember we did one of the first high definition television shows called Route 66 for Japanese TV. We played the song ROUTE 66. When James Intveld joined the Blasters he provided a lot of excitement. He was a great musician, singer, and songwriter and the girls loved him in The Blasters. They still love him (laughs). We did the 'Phil Alvin Quartet' for a while with James on guitar and Dave Carroll on drums. Then when we got back to national touring, we called the band 'The Blasters' again. There was a great tour with The Beat Farmers in 1995. Country Dick Montana, the drummer from The Beat Farmers, died only a few days after the



(top) The Blasters 1986 with Hollywood Fats, (middle) with Smokey Hormel, and (lower) The 1993-95 Blasters with Jerry Angel and James Intveld.

tour ended. He was a great guy. Country Dick and I were hanging out a lot together on that tour and one night we realized we both had been planning the exact same idea for our solo records. I did the County Fair 2000 solo record (HighTone Records) and he was doing his solo album The Devil Lied to Me. We both used dialogue to lead in our songs to give it all a theme or story. That County Fair 2000 album in 1995 was a highlight for me. I had so many friends on there like Billy Boy Arnold, Mary Franklin, and Top Jimmy. Top Jimmy came to Austin to record his parts. He was so happy because he got to drink in Austin for free for a month.

1996 Keith Wyatt becomes a Blaster

Phil Alvin: When Keith came in, we didn't really rehearse for his first gig. I was worried, but he played fantastic - so I was happy and I've been happy ever since. He's such a hard worker. Keith is a guitar player's guitar player for sure. I've also said he is the most well-adjusted musician I've ever met.

AM: When you joined the band, how did you come up with the arrangements on Blasters songs?



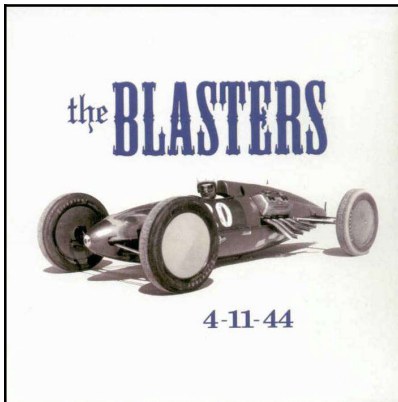
Blasters lineup 1996—2008 with Jerry Angel and Keith Wyatt

Keith Wyatt: I worked off that Live at the House of Blues cassette tape with James Intveld's riffs. I took his guitar parts as my starting point. Some of James' parts were great and I still play them today. But over the years I would say: "I wonder what Dave originally played on that?" So, I did pull out the original studio albums to compare them and sometimes made changes. But James based his parts on Dave's, so it's all part of the same lineage.

AM: You've made two records with the Blasters in your 23 years. Will there be more?

Keith Wyatt: After Dave Alvin left, it was the tail end of the band's inertia. All bands go through periods of being hip, then people saying: "Oh, it's those guys again?" When I joined the band, it was at a dip, but we still got decent gigs based on the bands' reputation. Jerry Angel and I pushed to make a record in the early 2000s because we were just playing songs over and over from the last period. We wanted our stamp on The Blasters, so we bugged Phil. He would say: "Records? There are no records anymore (laughs)." Phil was always looking into the future of the digital age, so we had a hard time getting through to him. When the Original Blasters got together in 2003, Jerry and I planned a boycott. We said, we really need to make our own record before doing any "Unoriginal Blasters" (laughs) gigs again.

There was a tour booked with Reverend Horton Heat, so Jerry and I said: "We're not gonna do it until we get a commitment to do a record. We got no answer and the tour came down to



a week before starting. We threatened again not to play and that finally got Phil's attention that we were serious. It got the ball rolling and we did the tour.

I was working at the Musicians Institute. They had a recording program and needed a band for the class to observe. I knew the quality would be



good because it was a super high-end studio and the guy running the program who was a pro engineer would record us. We recorded 6 songs which became the core of the 4-11-44 album. We finished more tracks at Bruce Witkin's studio.

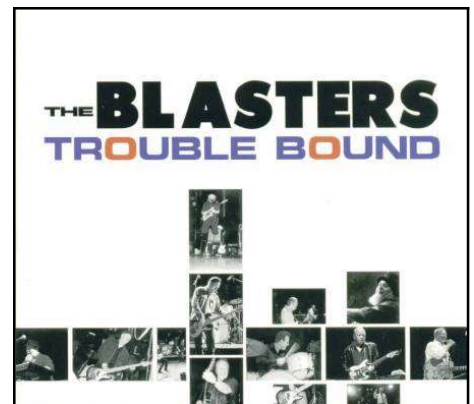
We shopped the record around, but Rainman Records was the only label interested in releasing the album. Unfortunately, we signed a 1986 type contract in 2004 that the royalty structure was based on a very old model. The second record, Fun On Saturday Night on Rip Cat Records (2012) was recorded all in one day. The album contained songs we had been playing live since 2004. Phil's health problems slowed down promoting that record.

Because of the way the recording industry has imploded and disappeared, what is an album now? It's just a collection of songs, but sometimes people don't care anymore. How about we do a single? Then we do another single? Release them periodically and then eventually you have an album. I'd like that. The CD now is just a souvenir of the show - they are artifacts. No one plays CDs. Now people are wanting vinyl again - but more as collectibles. As we all get older, I just feel lucky every day to be in this band. So, who knows what will happen.

The Original Blasters 2002-2003 Reunion Tour

Dave Alvin: The Trouble Bound live record for HighTone was one of my favorite things we ever cut. It's sad that Lee Allen wasn't around to be on it. That would have put it over the top.

Gene Taylor: Those tours (US and Europe) were fun, but my favorite part was rooming with Chris Gaffney. He was really a great guy to hang with.



Favorite Blasters Moments

Phil Alvin: It was a big deal for us the first night opening for Queen in San Diego in front of a lot of people.

Dave Alvin: There were so many. The Blasters were playing in Calgary at the University (10/10/85). Otis Rush and Dr. John were playing across town. After hours, we all wound up in the same blues bar called the Prince Eddie, which is now a museum. We got there at 2:00 am, they locked the doors and we jammed all night. One time at the Ritz in New York City we

brought up Lonnie Mack who had just been rediscovered. His manager called and offered to have him sit in.

John Bazz: The highlights for me were about performances. I felt on top of the world when we played for big crowds in big cities like The Palace in L.A. and The Ritz in New York City.



The Blasters at the University of California-Irvine on March 6, 1982. Shot by Gary Leonard, it was used for the Live at the Venue EP cover.



Bill Bateman: There are like 2000 of them. How 'bout playing American Bandstand 3 times, and then Solid Gold, and ABC's Fridays TV show? One of our first TV appearances was an underground punk rock show where they had each band set up on a floor with painted parking spot lines. Then they'd move the camera around to each band for a song. We were there with the Circle Jerks, 'X', and the Go-Gos. That was cool.

Gene Taylor: I loved getting to travel around and play music for a lot of really supportive fans- but selling out (5,000+) The Hollywood Palladium in 1982 was a big highlight.

Steve Berlin: I loved the London gig at The Venue in 1982. It was super exciting playing American Music for Brits and making that live record. I remember we blew them away on that tour. I also loved going to New York City the first time. We were on MTV and that Soundstage PBS Special and American Bandstand. We were on fire for a few years.



The Blasters today

Keith Wyatt: One of my personal highlights was playing the Fillmore in San Francisco. Growing up I had records recorded at the Fillmore West. All the bands I liked played there – Hendrix, Cream, Albert King. That was so cool to play there. I also enjoyed playing the Hootenany festivals in California. They were a favorite. The festival was a gathering of all the people playing this kind of music. We played with legends like Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard. **AM**

Coming together for "Separate Ways"

- Dave Alvin & Sophia Pfister

By Tom Wilk

Dave Alvin's most publicized collaboration in 2018 was with Jimmie Dale Gilmore. They released the Downey to Lubbock CD and toured. A lesser-known collaboration was with California-based singer/songwriter Sophia Pfister. She enlisted Dave to sing on SEPARATE WAYS, a track on her Birdcage album. It's an emotionally-charged track that was accompanied by a video that featured the two singers side by side. Dave Alvin posted the video on his Facebook page in late April 2018. To date, the video has attracted nearly 47,000 views on YouTube.

In an email interview with Tom Wilk, Sophia discussed how she connected and worked with Dave.

AM: How did you and Dave come to collaborate on SEPARATE WAYS? Was it through Greg Leisz? Were you aware of Dave's work with the Blasters and as a solo artist?

Sophia: I was looking for the male voice to my duet and I was in a diner having breakfast with my bassist friend Mark Fontana, who told me to check out Dave Alvin. I got home and first clicked on his song OUT OF CONTROL, and I was hooked immediately. His lyrics, his voice and his vibe was exactly what I was looking for. I tried to get in contact with Dave through social media, his label, manager, etc., but no one was responding. So, I bought a ticket to his next show in Sacramento, booked a Motel 6 and drove six hours to hopefully meet him and ask him to do this duet with me. Once I flirted my way backstage, I handed him my first record on vinyl, told my story and idea and then listed off some of the musicians I had worked with so he wouldn't think I was some lunatic groupie. Once I mentioned Greg Leisz, he was interested, and that's when I learned they are good friends.

AM: Did you and Dave collaborate solely on the lyrics, or did he help with the music as well? Did the two of you kick around ideas, or did you know in advance the song's direction?



Sophia: I had all the lyrics written, but on the day of recording, he showed up with his own lyrics for his verses. I first heard these new lyrics as he was singing them into the microphone, and they were much better than mine. We sang to a solo guitar track in the studio because I was struggling with the musical direction of the song. Luckily, I met producer John Shanks shortly after, and he took over the entire musical production at his studio.

AM: SEPARATE WAYS is such a powerful song. Did you sing it together in the studio, or was there overdubbing involved?

Sophia: I quickly recorded only my verses and the chorus before him so he would know where to come in and to sing along. He recorded his parts, then had to leave the studio. I took my time re-recording my parts and I sang right after he left, so his energy would still be in the room and on the mic.

AM: Did Dave's Facebook post about the video of SEPARATE WAYS increase awareness of the song? It's a dramatic video, but I like the bit of comic relief at the end.

Sophia: Yes, I think you found me through his post right? His fans are loyal misfits, and I was touched by what he said. Dave made me laugh at the end of the video because we were seriously holding our pose; then he turns and says, "Oh, that's the real shit in there." He didn't realize I was pouring us real whiskey at 10 a.m. and not apple juice or something.

AM: Have you and Dave ever performed in concert together or discussed co-writing other songs together?

Sophia: We've never performed together or written another song since. But I often send him little poems and things that he beautifully critiques. Dave Alvin is a selling, touring, legendary artist. I'm still a gal figuring out where to live, stripping for cash and mailing my records out of my grandma's house. So, I expect to be more in the 'favor' category rather than the 'opportunity' category - which is a common theme regarding all the established people I've been bizarrely fortunate enough to work with. I hope one day we can do more. Dave Alvin is a real rugged gentleman and it was a true joy to create with him.

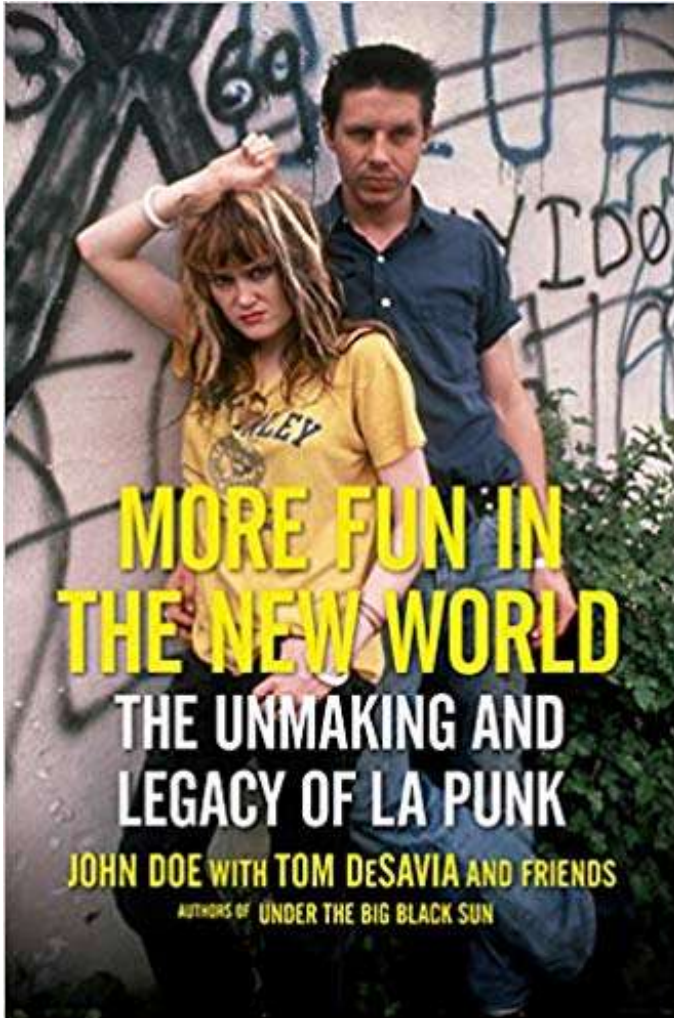


(Sophia Pfister's Birdcage album is available on vinyl and can be purchased at www.sophiapfister.com. The SEPARATE WAYS video can be seen at her site and on YouTube.)

Turn the Page

Dave Alvin contributes essays to two books

By Tom Wilk



Dave Alvin has contributed insightful essays to a pair of new books with roots in the Los Angeles music scene of the 1980s. He contributed his recollections to More Fun in the New World: The Unmaking and Legacy of LA Punk (Da Capo Press: \$28) by John Doe with Tom DeSavia and Friends; the book serves as an informative and worthy sequel to Under the Big Black Sun from 2016.

As with the first volume, one of the book's strengths is the use of more than two dozen contributors. These multiple points of view – musician, actor, film director, athlete, and writer – provide a 360-degree look at a cultural phenomenon that a reader wouldn't get from a single author.

"It Sounds Too Much Like The Blasters: 1982-85," Dave's 13-page essay, details the trials and triumphs of dealing with Warner Brothers Records in the aftermath of the band's first flush of success. In particular, he

focuses on the contentious process that surrounded the recording of the Hard Line album, the final studio LP from the original band. The essay's title comes from a clueless comment uttered by an unnamed record executive after hearing the song KATHLEEN for the first time. It's a tale of art vs. commerce as the Blasters and their label clash over the choice of a producer and the quest for a hit single to break the band nationally.

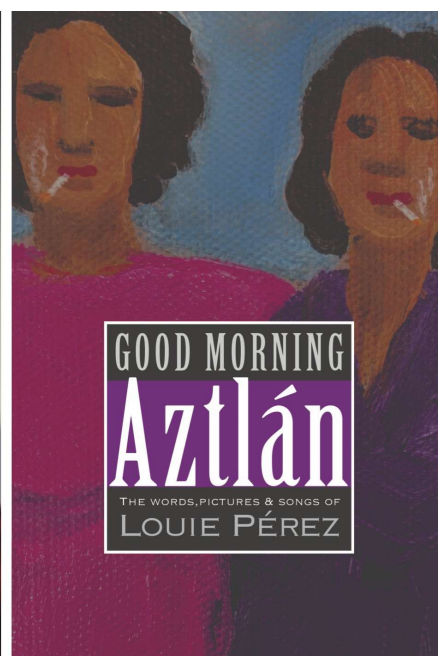
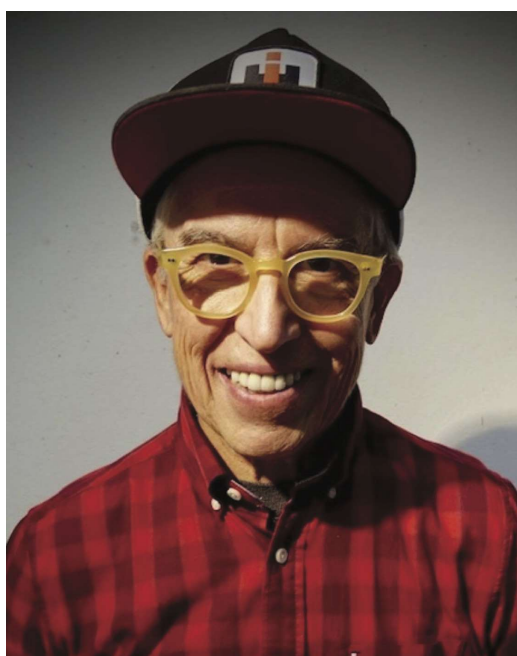
Dave offers some inside information on how Hard Line could have turned out differently. The Blasters agreed on using Booker T. Jones (of Booker T. and the MGs) as a producer after the keyboardist saw the band perform in San Francisco. He had produced Willie Nelson's Stardust album, which has sold more than 5 million copies since 1978. Warner Brothers rejected the choice of Jones, preferring someone who was "young and hip," according to Dave. "It's a frustrating, sad memory that still keeps me awake some

nights, wondering what could have been,” he writes.

Other contributors to the book include Jane Wiedlin and Charlotte Caffey of the Go-Gos, who write of the pitfalls of stardom and the toll it takes. It’s a case of getting what you want and losing what you have. Filmmaker Allison Anders discusses the journey to bring Border Radio to the big screen. Dave Alvin contributed eight songs to the film and soundtrack album. In a series of essays, John Doe looks at the career of ‘X’ and frankly analyzes the band’s successes and missteps.

Writer Chris Morris pulls singer Top Jimmy out of the historical shadows with “Our Wolf,” a reference to his work as a blues vocalist similar to Howlin’ Wolf. It’s a lively, in-depth profile that captures his outsize personality and carries a reminder that not all artists get the breaks they deserve.

Louie Perez, guitarist and songwriter for Los Lobos who wrote a chapter for More Fun in the New World, has released his first book. Good Morning Aztlán: The Words, Pictures & Songs of Louie Perez (Tia Chucha Press; \$21.95). It’s a multimedia look at his career in music, featuring a cross-section of lyrics with artwork illustrating each song.



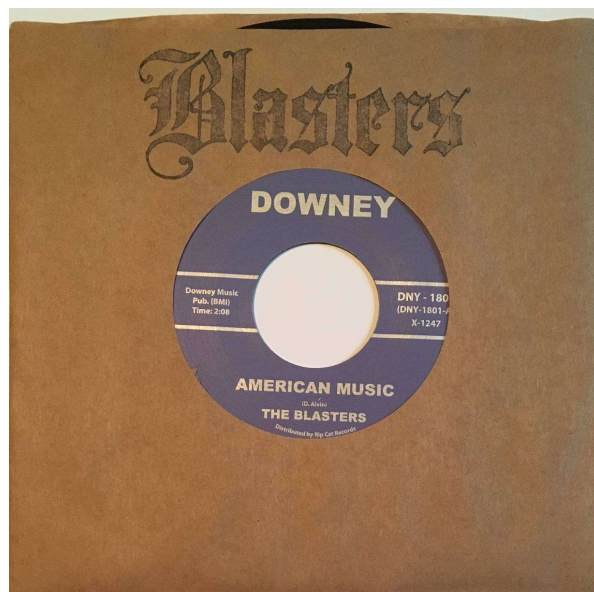
The book includes “*Louie Perez: Un Chingon Songwriter*,” a three-page essay by Dave Alvin that examines the evolution and growth of Louie’s songwriting and development as a lyricist. Dave offers a breakdown of SOMEWHERE IN TIME, the song he, Louie, and David Hidalgo co-wrote for The Ride, the 2004 Los Lobos album, and Dave’s Ashgrove CD.

“The lyrics recognized the transitory nature of life in no uncertain terms,” Dave writes. “Louie and I knew exactly what we wanted to say and guided each other across the bridge between life and death as we wrote it.”

(More Fun in the New World: The Unmaking and Legacy of LA Punk was published June 4, 2019. An audio version of the book, featuring Dave Alvin reading his essay, is also available.)

New Blasters merchandise

The Blasters never have had much for sale at the merchandise booth at their concerts, but Blasters bass player John Bazz is trying to change that by creating some new collectible items. Bazz: “I wanted something cool for the fans and it seemed like a natural to put out a 45 record of MARIE MARIE/ AMERICAN MUSIC. It’s the versions from the 1981 Slash recordings which we recently acquired the masters to.”



“I had it remastered locally. The sleeve is very retro styled in ‘paper-bag brown’ with a Blasters stamp on it. I designed the label like the famous surf record company ‘Downey Records.’ We just replaced the text with text pertinent to this release. In small print on the bottom of the label it says: ‘distributed by Rip Cat Records,’ which is not really true, but Doug from Rip Cat designed the label.”

This is a very limited release, “We printed only 500 of these and were selling them only at our shows. The next pressing will be a different label, so collectors will know which is the first or second pressing.” Also available is the Blasters California license plate patch and now a hoodie with the license plate printed on the front. Also, there is a Blasters Forty Years 45 label patch. John: “I’m always coming up with new ideas and T-shirt designs, so visit our merch table at the shows. You never know what surprises we might have.”





The Last Train Tour

October 2018

Diary by Dave Alvin

Day 1 of The last train tour: I'm watching the sun slowly set in West Texas and feeling very bittersweet about the coming demise of these annual *Roots On The Rails* adventures. Already today I've been part of a impromptu Knitters reunion with John Doe and Exene as well as being a guitar noodling sideman for the brilliant Howe Gelb. Now I'm looking forward to later this evening when Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Mr. Gelb, Mr. Doe, Christy McWilson and myself will do some sort of song swap show. I can't explain how much I'll miss these train tours - so I'll just have to enjoy each precious moment while it lasts. Kind of like life itself.

Day 2 of The Last Train Tour: I Woke up this morning as the train neared San Antonio and was unexpectedly asked by Jimmie Dale to join him during his solo set. I didn't screw up too badly for being half asleep. When we got to Austin, I said 'adios' to my fellow Flesh Eater, John Doe, and to Tucson's poet laureate of song, Howe Gelb. Then as the train rolled through some beautiful Texas countryside on our way up to Fort Worth, the soulful Christy McWilson performed a very sweet and rocking impromptu set with Rick Shea and myself backing her up. The music helps relieve the bittersweet mood of our final journey as the train powers down the rails.



Howe Gelb and Dave Alvin

Day 3 of The Last Train Tour: Before we left

Fort Worth, the astounding Blind Boy Paxton (who flew in from New York) joined our traveling bohemian railroad commune for the ride up to Chicago. I've heard a lot of classic blues, old timey, early jazz and string band players in my life and Mr. Paxton is just about the best anywhere. Among the modern practitioners of these so-called archaic genres, he has very few equals. This evening Mr. Paxton, Jimmie Dale, Rick Shea and I did a song swap that went from Hank Sr. to Big Bill Broonzy and then into some of the furthest dusty corners of American Folk Music. Mr. Paxton was very kind and considerate to us and didn't kick our musical asses too badly when he certainly could have with ease. Next stop is the Windy City where I hope to cross paths with brother Jon Langford for a beverage or two. See you out on the rails!

Day 4 of The Last Train Tour: The rocking and rolling, bluseing and folking vagabound music express pulled into cold and windy Chicago for a night of rest and relaxation. This short break gives me the opportunity to plug the January 2019 release of the first new album by The Flesh Eaters in a few damn decades. It's titled, I Used To Be Pretty. The line up on The Flesh Eaters new record is same as on our 1981 A Minute To Pray album (Chris D - vocals / Steve Berlin - saxophones / Bill Bateman - drums / DJ Bonebrake - vibes and percussion / John Doe - bass / and me bashing on loud guitar). It was great to get a rare chance to make some proud noise with some old dear friends. Hope you enjoy it.



Dave Alvin and Blind Boy Paxton

Day 5 of The Last Train Tour: What sort of man is Jon Langford? We had a morning off in Chicago yesterday and I needed an emergency dental visit. Mr. Langford is sort of man who not



Christy McWilson and Jon Langford

only found a dentist near my hotel, BUT he also got up very early on a freezing morning, drove down from the Northside, picked me up at my hotel, deposited me at the dentist office on Michigan Ave, waited patiently for my operation to be finished, drove me back to my hotel and then returned home to make more art. He's also the sort of guy who can charm the great singer/songwriter, Christy McWilson, with an afternoon beverage and outlandish (but true) yarns of his homeland in Wales. That's the sort of man Jon Langford is!

Thanks for all of your generosity and kindness, Mr. Langford. I owe you big time! After the train left Chicago yesterday evening, the deeply soulful blues/gospel songbird Ruthie Foster, the amazing Blind Boy Paxton, the rock solid Rick Shea and I jammed long into the cold night as the train powered across Illinois, Iowa and Missouri to this morning's destination of Kansas City. I'm Looking forward to tonight's jam with Ms. Foster and blues guitar killer Carolyn Wonderland as the train thunders on to New Mexico.

Days 6+7 of The Last Train Tour: I woke up Saturday morning on the train which had parked for the night at Kansas City's glorious, neo-classical Union Station. After bidding farewell to Blind Boy Paxton and welcoming Carolyn Wonderland on board, Rick Shea and I headed to Kansas City Joe's BBQ (the one in an old gas station) for a fine feast of burnt ends and ribs. In

the evening, as the train rolled west out of K.C., Ruthie Foster, Carolyn, Rick and I swapped songs, licks and stories for almost two sweet hours. I woke up Sunday morning as snow was beginning to fall on the southeastern Colorado prairie and it continued to fall as the train progressed through the hills and plains of eastern New Mexico. Sunday's highlight for me was getting to simply be an accompanist for Christy McWilson on her set of her beautiful songs that ranged from wistful to hilarious to heartbreaking. As the train slowly approached Albuquerque, I couldn't help but think that I am a very, very lucky man.

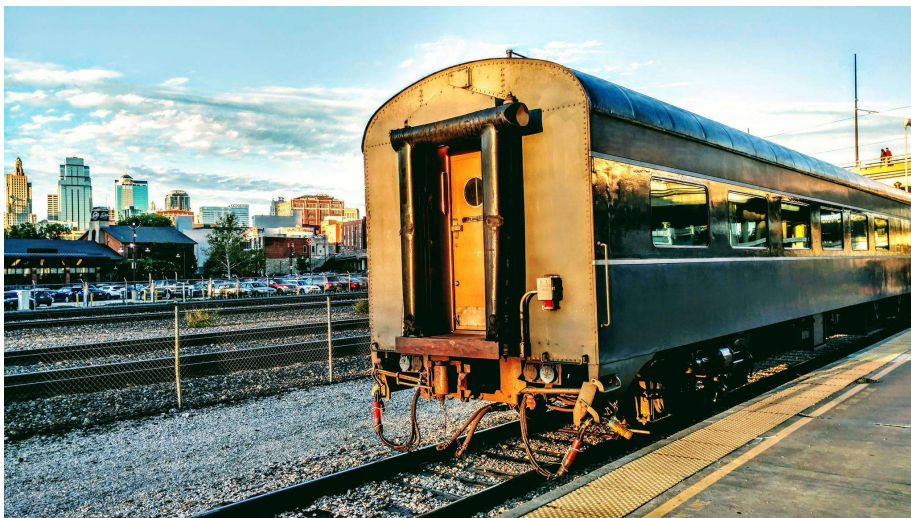


Ruthie Foster, Dave and Blind Boy Paxton

Day 8 of The Last Train Tour: Between weeks of touring with Jimmie Dale Gilmore and The Guilty Ones, followed immediately by jumping on board the train a little over a week ago, I can't remember my last day off. I mean a day off of utter nothingness, zero responsibilities and guilt free wanderings. Yesterday, after bidding fond farewells to Carolyn Wonderland and Ruthie Foster and warm welcomes to Bill Kirchen and Dead Rock West, I finally had the blessed chance to do whatever the hell struck my fancy in Albuquerque. Many years ago, a day off in Albuquerque would have meant a particular type of trouble and shenanigans but these days, for the more, er, um, mature me, it meant something more benign and peaceful. I ate lunch at South Albuquerque's beloved Barrella's Family restaurant, stopped by the always interesting Cowboys And Indians southwestern antique store/museum, eavesdropped on a gathering of old cowboys (and want-to-be cowboys) singing original cowboy songs, had a sweet, tipsy 80 some year old cowgirl propose to me in the elevator of the Best Western (I was touched but declined), watched the Dodgers get their butts handed to them by the Brewers and then finished by having a hot dog dinner on a cold New Mexican evening at the funky old Route 66 landmark, The Dog House. Now it's back on the rails for the final run home to California on the Last Train Tour. The bittersweet feelings are starting to slowly return. Damn!

Days 9 + 10 of The Last Train Tour: After departing Albuquerque Tuesday evening, I watched a great set of harmony singing by Dead Rock West (Cindy Cindy Wasserman and Frank Lee Drennen) followed by a magnificent display of melodic guitar mastery by Bill Kitchen. Then I performed my last show of the last train ride with the assistance of Christy McWilson with her beautiful, perfect harmonies and the close to exhausted, yet always patient Rick Shea. We sang all California related songs (from Merle Haggard and Kate Wolf to Brian Wilson and Christy McWilson to John Stewart, The Chantays and even some of mine) as the train thundered across the dark Mojave. Mr. Kirchen joined us for the last couple of songs and I got a kick out of leading him into an unexpected modal, neo-psychedelic zone on the last jam of

MARIE MARIE. Bill, of course, had no problem, instantly switching from Chuck Berry licks to Avalon Ballroom/Quicksilver Messenger Service territory. When the morning arrived, the last ride ended at perhaps the most beautiful train station in the world, L.A.'s art deco/Spanish revival jewel Union Station. All the dedicated crew, the loyal *Roots On The Rails* passengers



and the musicians and singers said their bittersweet goodbyes to each other before heading off in our various personal directions. I said an almost tearful goodbye to the beloved vintage train cars for the final time (whose future is now in doubt - thanks to short-sighted, dumb bell decisions by the current regime at Amtrak). Now I have a few rare days off before heading out for another run of gigs and adventures back on the highways— but I'll always cherish the memories of 12 wonderful, touching, educational, silly, serious and surreal years of these train tours. Thanks to Charlie Hunter and Sarah Ovenden of *Roots On The Rails* and the rail car owners at L.A. Rail for having me along through the years for all these blessed wild rides.—DA

From the Editor -- Hey American Music fans, some of you have written in recently with interest in contributing writings to the Blasters Newsletter. The answer is Yes! Send any reviews of shows, or stories of your experiences to me at davistb@aol.com. I'd also like to bring back the "Questions for the Band" column. If you have any questions for any of the musicians covered in these pages, send them. I'll try to get answers to print in the newsletter. Thanks --Billy Davis

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