

ISSUE #60

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

OCTOBER 2009

Blasters shows

(Phil, John, Bill, Keith)

11/13-14 Berwyn IL at Fitzgerald's

12/31 Reno NV at Ascuaga's Casino

Dave Alvin & Guilty Women

10/16 Tucson AZ at Old Town Artisans

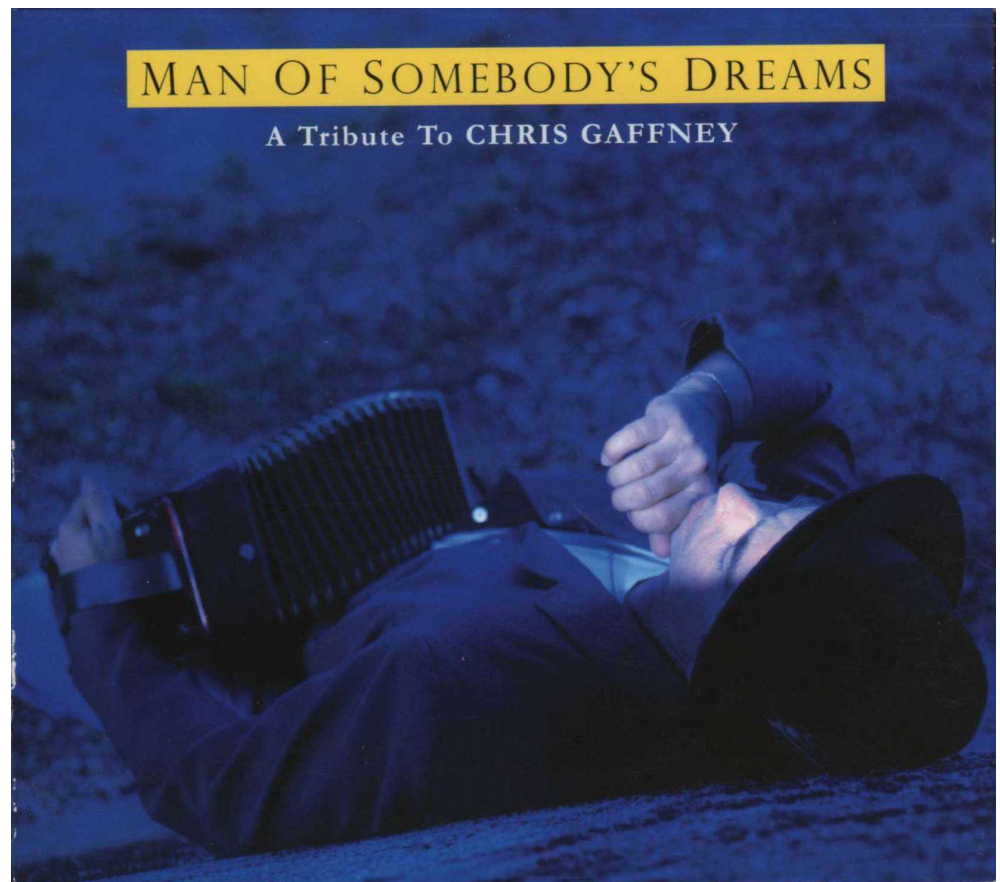
10/17 San Diego CA at Smokin' In The
Park BBQ Festival

10/21 Austin TX at Continental club
(Amy Farris memorial)

10/28 Knoxville TN at Bijoux Theatre

12/6 Los Angeles CA at Walt Disney
Concert Hall (Dave acoustic appearance)

The Chris Gaffney Tribute CD Newsletter



Latest news: -- Dave Alvin is a contributing writer to Waiting for a Train: Jimmie Rodgers's America edited by Mary E. Davis and Warren Zanes published by Rounder Books. Other contributors include: Bob Dylan, Steve Forbert, Tom Russell, and Marty Stuart. -- Phil Alvin joined Los Lobos and former Blaster Steve Berlin on stage for three songs at Hootenanny 2009 in Orange County, CA., on July 4. Phil sang BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ, I WISH YOU WOULD and MARIE MARIE. -- Downey California's landmark Johnie's Broiler restaurant, which was slated for demolition, is set to re-open as 'Bob's Big Boy Broiler.' The 50's style decor and interior of a drive-in/car-hop/coffee shop is still there; it's just a different name. The 8-year battle to keep the historic structure from being demolished has been won by 'The Friends of Johnie's.' Congratulations! A "Cruise In" celebration was held on 9/26/09 at the location which included a special performance by the Blasters. -- Village Records.com is handling on-line orders for the Dave Alvin & The Guilty Men DVD Live at the Great American Music Hall and the Gene Taylor CD Live!!! 608 Boogie!!! - AM

This Issue: Dave Alvin song by song on The Chris Gaffney Tribute CD, Musicians tribute to Gaff, & the songwriters of GUITARS OF MY DEAD FRIENDS.

~~~~~The Chris Gaffney Tribute CD: ~~~~~

~~~~~Man of Somebody's Dreams ~~~~~



On May 26, 2009, Yep Roc Records released Man Of Somebody's Dreams: A Tribute to Chris Gaffney. Chris Gaffney was a country and soul singer from southern California who mixed elements of so many styles of music that he invented his OWN brand of American Music. He released 5 solo albums from 1989 – 2000 and then 4 albums with the Hacienda Brothers band from 2004 - 2008. He passed away in April 2008 at the age of 57 from liver cancer. As great as his music was, it was his humor and infectious personality that touched so many people all over the world. He was loved by so many. His best friend Dave Alvin produced this tribute CD to his departed friend.

Dave Alvin: The first time I remember meeting Chris Gaffney was in a bar called Raji's, and Chris was on stage with his

band The Cold Hard Facts. He was doing a couple of Ray Price songs, and he said, "We're going to do a song for Hawaiian Gardens," which was a little town next to a little town that I grew up in. I thought: 'Nobody does songs for Hawaiian Gardens. I really like this guy.' So I started yelling at the stage in between songs and during the songs. When he was done playing, he walked off stage and right over to me. It was just like two old guys who have known each other their entire lives meeting for the first time.

What I liked about him was that he was a complicated guy – a soulful guy. He was a funny guy – he was really like my other brother. I have one older brother – this was my other older brother. That's the way I look at it.

He had a way of figuring out what made you laugh, what made you perk up when you were sad, and how to reach in and grab your heart a little bit. Normally when someone met Chris, it was love at first joke or first song.

When I first approached people about doing the tribute, they were sad about Chris's death. Everybody thought that Chris was the guy that didn't get the breaks while he was alive. So this was a way of helping him get a break even after he passed away. I didn't have to even twist one arm. So that was a really sweet testament to the powers of Gaffney.

Dave Alvin Song By Song

LIFT YOUR LEG (Joe Ely) – This was a song that Chris wrote about Joe Ely. He got drunk with Joe one night – which was never advisable in the old days. Joe could drink – and it kinda kicked Chris's ass. So it made sense for Joe to do that song. Joe came in and knocked it out of the ballpark. Ponty Bone plays accordion and used to be in Joe Ely's band back in the 80's. I don't think they had recorded together in a long time, so that was kind of neat.

Ponty and Chris were long time friends. I wanted to get as many of Chris's pals on there as I could, but we only had so many tracks on the record. It would have been great to have them all do their own songs - but I had space limitations.

MIDNIGHT DREAM (Boz Scaggs) – Maybe my favorite Hacienda Brothers song. Boz owns Slim's and the Great American Music Hall (two San Francisco clubs where Dave and Chris often play). He volunteered and said he'd love to do a track. He always came to my gigs and the Hacienda Brothers and is a big Gaffney fan. Boz chose the musicians for this track, including Dale and Hank from the Hacienda Brothers. I think it's one of the best things he ever did. It's his kind of song.

MAN OF SOMEBODY'S DREAMS (Los Lobos) – Lobos were strapped for time, and it looked like they weren't gonna be able to do it. They did get into the studio to record a few things for different projects finally. Then David (Higaldo) got a call to play on the new Bob Dylan record. So it got put off for another few weeks. I was sweating out that one.

They sent me a list of the songs they thought they could do, but I always thought they could do this one, so I pushed them in that direction. I also wanted someone like them do the title track.

ARTESIA (Dave Alvin) – That was the song about where Chris and I grew up. I knew that was the one I had to do. Stuff like that is what Chris and I talked about whenever we were driving cross country. I wanted to have Danny Ott and Wyman Reese (from Chris's 'Cold Hard Facts' band) on here because without them, it's not a Gaffney record. Chris was only close to a few people – Wyman was one, Danny, me, and Stanley Wycoff was another.

SIX NIGHTS A WEEK (Peter Case) – Peter wanted to do a rocker, so I knew he could relate to SIX NIGHTS A WEEK. Peter sang the hell out of it. Rick Shea played on that – he was the steel player in Chris's band when I first met him.

IF DADDY DON'T SING DANNY BOY (Tom Russell) – Chris was singing that song to me in the van when he was writing it years ago. When I heard the Hacienda Brothers do it, I thought it was fine, but I thought the lyrics might have gotten lost a little. It's really an Irish ballad that got lost in the shuffle. I thought it could have been a song that Tom (Russell) would have written.

FRANK'S TAVERN (Calexico) – A few years ago, Chris and I did a show called E-Town in Boulder, Colorado, and Calexico were on the bill. A few of those guys are from Tucson (Gaffney grew up there), and they hit it off with Chris. It was their idea to do FRANK'S TAVERN. I thought Wow! That would be interesting. That song captures a side of Gaffney that most people didn't know. When I first heard Calexico's version, I started crying because I really think they 'got' Chris – they nailed it. Chris was a sweet heart; he had this sad poetic side that nobody got to see unless you knew him. Those guys captured it. They made it completely different and really captured Chris.

FIGHT (James McMurtry) – That was a pretty amazing day that we recorded that song. James's band played in Tucson the night before, packed up their gear and drove 8 hours over night to make it to the studio by 10 AM in L.A. to record that track with no sleep. Me and James's band recorded for about 2 and a half hours. Then they packed up their gear, checked into a hotel, and then played the Troubadour (Hollywood club) that night.

They went way out of their way to do this, and they won the 'extra effort award.'

THE GARDENS (Freddy Fender and the Texas Tornados) – This recording originally appeared on a Texas Tornados record called Four Aces (Reprise Records 1996). I remember when Chris got the call from Freddy Fender to go over the lyrics in 1995. That was one of the biggest things in Chris's life. I knew that original recording had to be on here. I called James Austin at Rhino about getting a hold of the recording, and he pulled some favors to get it from Warner Bros. We didn't have to pay anything to get to use the track.

GLASS HOUSE (Jim Lauderdale and Ollabelle) – Lauderdale has known Chris possibly longer than me. Jim sang on a few of Chris's solo records doing harmony vocals. Ollabelle is a New York folk roots group managed by the same people as Los Straitjackets. Levon Helm's daughter is in the band.

GET OFF MY BACK LUCY (The Iguanas) – Chris and the Iguanas were good friends, especially with Rod Hodges. Musically, they do what Chris did. They have similar styles.

1968 (Alejandro Escovedo) – That is an amazing track. He took the verses from my version of the song and the bridge from Chris's version of the song. He put some time into it, figuring out how to make it work well. I really like what he did with it. Alejandro had the same liver issues as Chris, so he is very sensitive to that and

understands what he went through. Fortunately, Alejandro survived.

KING OF THE BLUES (Robbie Fulks) – We cut the track with the guys – the L.A. house band. Then Robbie came in a few days later and sang the song. Robbie told me that was always his favorite Gaffney song.

QUIET DESPERATION (John Doe) – When I was picking out songs, I thought that would be a perfect one for John – the way he sings and what it's about. I think he did a terrific vocal on it -- very understated and soulful. I think Gaffney would have been very happy with that version.

TIRED OF BEING ME (Dave Gonzales) – Dave picked that song and said he wanted to do a swamp pop version – a mixture of Cajun and blues. The guys on there are members of Dave's new band The Stone River Boys. Teddy Roddy plays harmonica.

SILENT PARTNER (Big Sandy and Los Straitjackets with Bill Kirchen) – Because the chorus modulates to a different key, it's a real singer's song - I called Robert (Big Sandy). Chris and Robert were drinking buddies, and Chris and the Straitjackets knew each other from our Guilty Men tours. Chris used to tour with Bill (Kirchen), so we were able to send the track to him and he put a lead guitar on it.

I'M SO PROUD (Dan Penn) – Chris and Dan really hit it off from the moment they met when recording the first Hacienda Brothers album. Dan is one of the great white soul singers as well as a producer and writer. Dan had to be on here.

GUITARS OF MY DEAD FRIENDS (Chris Gaffney) – Stanley Wycoff recorded Chris with vocal and acoustic guitar doing this song about 3 weeks before he died. It was the last thing he ever recorded. Stanley is a songwriter who has had Chris and I play on his solo records over the years. When Stanley told me he recorded the song, I said: "I gotta have that." We had an acoustic guitar and vocal to work with. The most emotional point was when we overdubbed the backing track to Chris's vocal with Greg, Wyman, and Danny. It was very emotional. That was rough for all of us.

Some people were complaining to me about the song being on the CD that it might be in bad taste. But I knew Chris – he would have wanted it on there. If it would have been a different song, like "I love you, Baby" or something, I might not have included it, but the nature of what the song is about just wrapped it all up perfectly.

Stanley writes these great little strange songs. He's a good songwriter. Chris really brought the song to life.

The sad thing is that 99.9% of music fans have never heard of Chris Gaffney. The difficult issue was that I had to cram in as many people as I could on this CD. I'm selling a guy that no one has ever heard of, so I had to get as many bands that people HAVE heard of to record his songs. Not one musician got paid. There was a very small budget for this album. So many people donated their time and efforts.

Chris never got any breaks to even squander. Now he's finally getting a break.

Comments from the Musicians

Alejandro Escovedo: Chris Gaffney was a very special person and a very special songwriter. Although we didn't see each other often, his story was very similar to mine. I felt a kinship with Gaff. The song we covered, "1968," is a song that could have been written about my life. The idea to present it as a waltz was purely Stephen Bruton. Stephen produced the recording and did the arrangement. Stephen was in the midst of his own battle with cancer. Sadly, Stephen lost that battle. So this recording holds a significant place in my heart. Thank you for the opportunity to express my love and admiration for Chris through this song.

Danny Ott: I'm honored to be included in this wonderful tribute to Chris. After over 15 years standing next to Chris in The Cold Hard Facts...What can I say? I miss him. I always will. I'm so pleased with the amazing contributions from so many great artists who took the time to honor Chris and his music. Thanks Dave Alvin. Thanks Ben Gaffney. Thanks Yep Roc.

Rick Shea: The first song I worked on was KING OF THE BLUES. I played steel on the original recording and this time sang backup; Robbie Fulks sang lead, sounded great. The second song I worked on was SIX NIGHTS A WEEK: Peter Case was singing, Steve Mugallian played drums, Wyman Reese was on piano, Dave Alvin on guitar and Johnny Bazz played bass. After we all were there, Peter sat at the piano and banged out a Jerry Lee version of the song, and we started moving in that direction. I decided to play lap steel, and after a few takes we came up with a pretty rockin, a little more New Orleans version. Having played with Chris in a lot of "Six Nights" sort of joints, it was very cool to be a part of this track. I think Chris would dig it.

Peter Case: I loved Gaffney. It was always great to see him. We'd talk at the gigs, and the conversation would usually go off road to some far out and hilarious or moving places. He was a great guy that also happened to be a supremely talented songwriter and musician. It's been a rough year or so for losing friends. I know it hit Dave hard. Chris Gaffney is really missed.

Bill Kirchen: What a treat to travel with Chris. He still has a big spot in my heart.

Tom Russell: Chris Gaffney was the last great Honkytonk Hero. He lived in the trenches. He was some wierd poetic combination of Lenny Bruce and Roberto Duran, with a little Hank Williams thrown in . . . your best seat was at the end of the bar, staring right at Chris as he delivered the country soul gospel of pain and sorrow. In real time.

James McMurtry: I never knew Gaffney, but he left us a good song.

Robbie Fulks: KING OF THE BLUES was my favorite of Chris's songs, and I came to it before I knew him, via Dick Curless's beautiful, late-career read. The melody recalls Roger Miller's LOCK STOCK AND TEAR-DROPS, and the lyrics are pretty Roger-esque too. He really hit his marks on that one. Chris was a rare guy, a walking paragon of all the great mid-century R&B and country music that he loved, and I'm grateful I got to walk with him for a few miles.

Ponty Bone: Man, I sure miss Chris Gaffney. I go way back to the late '70's meeting of he and Joe Ely (who, by the way, along with yours truly, contributes a super version of LIFT YOUR LEG to the Tribute CD...) and I had the pleasure of seeing and hearing him at many, many appearances throughout his career. I must admit that I took him for granted. I thought that, if I just stayed in Austin, he'd be through every few months and I'd get to go hear him sing, forever. Listen to songs like MAN OF SOMEBODY'S DREAMS and WALKIN' ON MY DREAMS, or any one of dozens and dozens of others, to see what I mean. We lost a great one when we lost Chris Gaffney. I also lost a good friend, who'll remain in my thoughts for many years to come.

Rod Hodges and the Iguanas: Chris was a great singer, songwriter, comedian, carouser, friend, and the guy you'd want in your corner in a tough situation. We love him and miss him.

John Doe: Chris was consistently the most joyful, truly black-humored person anyone has ever known. We all enjoyed seeing his crooked smile and are honored to sing his songs.

Gary Brandin: I would say of my old friend Chris Gaffney: He was consistent, and lovable.

Dale Daniel: I know Dave put a lot of work into this labor of love for Gaff. I was honored to be in Boz Scaggs' rhythm section. It's great to be a part of something that will introduce more people to Gaff's under-appreciated body of work. My hat's off to Dave and all the excellent musicians for making it happen.

Ted Roddy: Chris was larger than life. He was a very funny cat with a heart of gold. He enriched everyone he ever met, either in person or through song. We had fun together, and I will always miss him. Adios Chris!

Los Straitjackets Eddie Angel: I was really honored when Dave Alvin asked us to be a part of the tribute. I didn't know Chris that well...just the touring we did together (Los Straitjackets and Dave Alvin) and I loved his singing . . . especially his version of COWBOYS TO GIRLS.

Teddy Morgan (original Hacienda Brother): What I loved about him was that he was someone who could relate to everybody but be himself. He could be friends with the punk rocker or an old man. The ladies loved Gaffney, too. There's not many people who can be like that and still act like themselves. He had that spark.

Jeff Campbell from 'Hungry For Music': Dave called me a little while after Chris had passed. He told me that he wanted to produce a tribute to Chris with a portion of the proceeds going to benefit Hungry for Music.

From our conversations, I got a real sense of the deep love that Dave had for Chris, and how important it was for him to produce an appropriate lasting tribute to his musical brother and best friend. As you can see and hear, Dave did a masterful job producing Man of Somebody's Dreams. The love Dave has for Chris really shines through the whole project. Hungry for Music is proud to be a part of this loving tribute to the great Chris Gaffney.

For more information on the charity Hungry For Music, go to www.hungryformusic.com. The site describes how the charity helps disadvantaged children acquire musical instruments, and donors can order CDs, including the Gaffney tribute as well as a 3-disc tribute to Peter Case, featuring Dave Alvin and many more roots artists.

“The Guitars of My Dead Friends” - Chris Gaffney’s last song

When Chris Gaffney passed away, and Dave Alvin planned a tribute CD to his best friend, the gem of the project was the discovery of this recording of Chris made only weeks before his death. The song was written by two of Gaffney’s friends and long time collaborators: Michael Berberet and Stanley Wycoff. They showed the song to Chris in a demo recording session and he immediately made it his own. They captured a vocal recording that was barely usable, but through a labour of love by fellow musicians and recording engineers it posthumously became a complete Gaffney song. There is something haunting, ironic, prophetic, sad, and beautiful about this special recording. It was sadly the last thing Gaff recorded, but to hear it now, you know that his friends were always near him right until the end.

Is it morbid to hear the song being sung by a dying man who was near death? Is there any beauty in the fact that Gaff is singing quite honestly about the fact that his guitars will outlive him and be passed on to his friends in the very near future? Or is he just showing his honest and dark humor? All these elements define the depth that was Chris Gaffney.

Stanley Wycoff and Michael Berberet were there and recount their experience and memories of Chris Gaffney.

Stanley Wycoff

Micheal Berberet came up with the title and the chorus in tact. We had been working together writing songs. I loved the title and thought it would be a great song for my new album due out in the fall of 2009 called Swim In To the Whirlpool.

I thought it would be a great Gaffney song, but I wanted Chris to be able to relate to it, so I wrote verses about dead people and our guitars. A verse included one of his best friends from high school who passed away – Norm Cullum - he played a Yamaha guitar. And then about my best friend, Dennis Bollenbach – who I wrote a lot of songs with on my two previous albums – he died in Las Vegas. I have his Ovation 12-string guitar.

The day we recorded the song, everybody came over to my house to run through 10 tracks – pretty much all of the Cold Hard Facts with Chris and my bass player Joe Lamano and drummer Gary Deutch. We ran through the songs for my new album, including THE GUITARS OF MY DEAD FRIENDS. We had one mic set up to record a session as a guide on a digital 4-track. That recording was made so everyone could take a copy home and learn the songs for the studio recording sessions. It was pretty much the first time the musicians were hearing the songs.

Chris had never heard the song before, but did a heroic job singing it – he was very frail and obviously ill. It was very moving and very sad. Chris played the accordion on a few other songs and sang background harmonies, but not on mic. One song we did that I am particularly fond of is THE IRISH IN YOU AND THE IRISH IN ME. We romped though that pretty good.

After Chris died, Dave and I, and Danny Ott were at Chris’s house. Chris’s wife Julie said, “Okay, now we’re going to have to divide up Chris’s guitars.” Danny and I just looked at each other as we both remembered doing that session so recently with GUITARS OF MY DEAD FRIENDS. It was a haunting moment. We had no idea at the time that that was to have been such a special session.

I knew Dave Alvin was working on putting together the tribute album, so I said: “I think we have a song for you.” Listening back to the recording of that run-through session, it was cacophony – you could barely make out Chris’s vocal. But we had something. I took it in to Doghouse studio where I was recording my album. Mike Baumgartner and Bruce White worked hard and cleaned up the vocal. I brought in a skeleton band including Danny Ott and recorded a backing track for it.

I presented it to Dave to use on the tribute CD, but Dave thought it was too raw and that it didn’t fit in with the rest of the album. So we sent him the vocals so he could work with it to fit the Tribute album. Dave and Craig Parker Adams cleaned up the vocal further for the album release. They deleted a few repeated words and slurs. I’m proud of what Dave did to it.

I’m going to include my raw version on my new album. On my version I have Rick Shea on steel and Dave Jackson on accordion. I kept Chris’s vocals very raw. I wanted an artifact, rather than a track.

I’d like to note that Michael Berberet deserves more song-writing credit for the song – so in the list of credits, his name will come first.



Stanley: The picture of Chris (above) sitting on my couch singing into the microphone shows him singing the vocals that ended up on the recorded version of **GUITARS OF MY DEAD FRIENDS**. I know this to be true because Chris sang only one song on the mic that day. It is amazing that he had never heard the song before that evening.

Photos courtesy Stanley Wycoff

This photo shows how many musicians and different instruments were being passively recorded and bled into the vocal track. The fact that all of the instrumentation was removed from the vocal track is a result of long hours of hard work by engineers Mike Baumgartner and Bruce White of Doghouse Studios and Craig Adams of Winslow Court Studios. They worked miracles. Chris's vocal ended up sounding as heroic as it actually was.



Meeting Chris for the first time

I met him through Norm Cullum – who is mentioned in the second verse of GUITARS OF MY DEAD FRIENDS – He was a long time friend of mine and of Chris's. Norm was a songwriter who worked hard to get me and Chris together – he liked both of our songwriting styles, and he knew we would get along because we were both in the same vein. So he set us up in 1991, right around the time I was recording my L.A. RIVER album with my band 'Bierce in L.A.' Chris and Danny Ott play and sing harmonies on that album.

We hit it right off because we both like old TV, and boxing, and old country and soul music.

The first song Chris and I did live was AIDA ADIOS from that album. We did a duet and he played beautiful accordion. I re-recorded it with Chris for the 'Bierce in L.A.' album Vale of Tears (1993).

I was the first one to record Chris doing COWBOYS TO GIRLS. He had been doing it in his live shows and I always loved that song. I always thought of Chris as a soul singer. I tried to convince him to record it, and he would just say "Let's leave that to the Intruders." Finally, I said, 'I'll pay the band and take you to the studio, and you can even pick the players.' We flew in the Iguanas' horn section from New Orleans. We had Freebo on bass, Art Perez on drums, Doug Livingston on steel, and Danny Ott on guitar. The song was completely finished -- Chris and I were going to do an album together, but it never got released because Chris and I got into a big argument on a flight back from Nashville. We were almost fighting on the plane. So that fell through. We had a falling out for a while. It didn't last long. We made up, but the timing of the project was wrong.

Remembering Chris's humor

He would say funny things about people - not being mean spirited - but just funny. Like if I introduced him to my Dad, as soon as he left the room, Chris would say "I can take him." And I'd say, "What are you taking about that's my dad (laughs)." He was very sardonic. He had such a dark humor.

Chris and I shared the love for boxing. I introduced him to (famous boxer) Mondo Ramos, who is a friend of mine. We went with Mondo to the Golden State boxing luncheons, and he really liked Chris. People knew Chris at the luncheon from when he used to box. In fact, George Latka was his trainer, a very famous trainer who acted as the referee in Raging Bull. Chris sang RING OF FIRE at George's funeral in 2007. It was very touching – it was Latka's favorite song.

In Chris's last days, we couldn't have been tighter, I was there every day and at the hospital all the time. Julie and I are close, too. It's tough to talk about it. Chris had the greatest wit. You had to know where he was coming from. He was real special. I miss him.

Stanley Wycoff's new album called Swim Into the Whirlpool. Is scheduled for release in November 2009. Special guest guitar players include Dave Alvin and John Jorgenson.

Michael Berberet

The Guitars of My Dead Friends . . . *I wrote the song and played it for Stan Wycoff and recorded a demo, just me singing and on guitar . . . Stan was recording for his latest CD and we both thought it would be a good song for Chris Gaffney to sing, Chris having played on all of Stan's CDs over the years . . . So Stan had a get-together at his house, a dozen or so musicians showed up and somebody had a decent recording unit . . . I showed the song to Chris sitting side by side on a sofa and later that night he got up and sang it off the lyric sheet. He threw in a couple of verses by Stan, and slowed it way down to make it sound very forlorn . . . it ended up being the last thing Chris recorded, to our knowledge . . .*

That was the last time I saw Chris, and he looked sick, though he wasn't yet di-

agnosed . . . skinny arms, distended abdomen, a hawkish look to his face that he didn't have before . . . Chris was a guy you'd want to have with you in a bar fight, and that's how I'll remember him . . . his sense of humor was intact, but one could sense he knew something was very wrong . . .

My other memories of Chris . . . going to Nashville with him and Wycoff to film a promo on the Nashville Network for Wycoff's first CD called L.A. River (Wycoff called the band 'Bierce in L.A.'). I shared a room with Chris, I plucked a tall Budweiser can out of his hand after he fell asleep on a cot . . . we got up at 6:30 for an 8 AM filming effort, me and Chris looked like wooden Indians while Stan talked up a storm . . . the promo termed me and Chris "veteran bandmates" and he was so right . . . same trip, Chris asks a karaoke country singer if he has anything by Ray Price, then gets up and does FOR THE GOOD TIMES and blows me and Stan away in the middle of the day . . .

Chris stepped in to play with my band The Vaccines at a Long Beach house party. They handed him a Gibson SG, and he said: "This is way too much guitar for me" and then proceeded to look at us and say: "I'm starting in E, just follow along."

We had no idea what he was going to play . . . Chris segued into some impossibly weird songs from the Cold Hard Facts, songs like COLOR HIM FATHER, and pulled it off.

When I told him we were going in cold to record a country waltz song by Wycoff, he says, "for christsakes," so me and Chris and Danny Ott smoked a joint in the parking lot on a Saturday morning, went in and bulls-eyed the song on the second take. Chris and Danny arranged heartbreaking vocals and backing on the fly. I just played straight country bass. Jay Dee Maness was brought in later to play steel. I think it was one of the best tracks Chris ever did.

Chris defied categorization, much like the culture of Southern California from which he came and that he so genuinely represented. He was vato, soul man, tex-mex, country and rock and roll all at once.

Roots Musician and Yep Roc Recording Artist Amy Farris Passes Away

– AMY FARRIS (violin, viola and harmony vocals for Dave Alvin & The Guilty Women) died in her Los Angeles home on Saturday, Sept 26, 2009. A native of Austin, Texas, Amy moved to L.A. when Dave offered to produce her first solo CD Anyway, released by Yep Roc in 2004. Along with Dave Alvin and Kelly Willis, Ms. Farris has also performed and/or recorded with Brian Wilson, John Doe, Exene Cervenka, Stan Ridgway, Greg Dulli, Peter Case, Ray Price, Alejandro Escovedo, Bruce Robison and Ray Wylie Hubbard.

In her Twitter account, Austin Country singer Kelly Willis posted: “My dear sweet friend Amy Farris died over the weekend. Together we weren’t exactly fearless. . . but we did it anyway. I’m devastated.”

Farris was a member of Dave Alvin and the Guilty Women, who were finishing the last few dates of a cross-country tour supporting their new Yep Roc CD. “Dave we’re all sad and shocked. We intended to keep the band going and wanted to make another record next year. We were booking tours and I wanted her to be there. The only thing I know how to do now is to keep playing. In any tragedy, I have to keep playing.”

“The Guilty Women and I did the last two shows right after Amy’s death in Petaluma (Mystic Theatre 10/2) and the San Francisco (Hardly Strictly Bluegrass fest 10/3). The Petaluma show might have been the best Guilty Women show ever. It was very emotional and kind of the band’s own personal memorial. We just had to get up there and play more gigs – to just keep fighting to keep going on.”

In lieu of flowers, the family encourages you to send a donation in her honor to Hungry For Music, Inc., a nonprofit effort to provide musical instruments to underprivileged children with a hunger to play. www.HungryForMusic.com Or send checks to: Hungry for Music, 6 Grant Ave. Suite 3, Takoma Park, MD 20912



“The rumor mill”. . . or “You heard it here first”

Buzzle.com reported that Stephen King and John Mellencamp have collaborated on a studio recorded ‘Rock Opera’ called Ghost Brothers of Darkland County. Mellencamp plans to infuse the rock opera with “any type of music that Americans have invented.” King has written a script of the story that reportedly will focus on two brothers who strongly dislike one another. This hatred reaches an apex when they travel with their father to a cabin that they had once frequented as children. It is later revealed that the brothers’ father also had two older brothers who despised each other in a similar fashion and whose hatred culminated with mutual murder at the very same cabin. The ghosts of the brothers sing in a variety of American music styles. They plan to release a CD/audiobook package featuring major artists performing the songs and acting as characters in the story. Rolling Stone has reported that two of those artists will be Elvis Costello and Neko Case. The music will be produced by T-Bone Burnett. Production of this project began in June of 2009 with the possibility of an early 2010 release. Rumour has it that Dave and Phil Alvin have been tapped to play the two brothers. Stay tuned for an official announcement about this exciting project.

AMERICAN MUSIC: The Blasters / Dave Alvin newsletter

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Publishing 4 issues quarterly. www.Blastersnewsletter.com

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From The Editor: American Music: The Blasters newsletter is entering its 17th year and still going strong because so many of you readers let me know through feedback, that you enjoy it. Thank you. The newsletter continues to be fun to put together. The hardest part and most time consuming thing is handling the hardcopy newsletter mailings. Printing, folding, stapling, stamping, and mailing takes time. Now my 14 year old Canon photocopy machine is starting to fail. I've decided to phase out the print edition of the newsletter. IT WILL still appear on www.BlastersNewsletter.com in the same form to read on screen, but now you will have the option to print it out yourself for free. Anyone who currently has a paid subscription, will still receive those issues until it is filled. If there is anyone who has a special situation, like not owning a computer, etc. . . then write to me and I will try to accommodate you. Newsletter #60 will be the last print edition newsletter most of you will receive. Let me take the opportunity to thank to my staff – Craig Frischkorn and Tom Wilk for their hard work and all the contributing writers over the years. 'Special Thanks' to the band members who take the time to share their own words with us, the loyal fans. Let's get on with the AMERICAN MUSIC show. —Billy Davis

SXSW 2009: Dave Alvin's Chris Gaffney Tribute at the Continental Club

By Chris Gray

Friday, Mar. 20 2009—Before his stunning, soul-stirring tribute to late best friend and sometime bandmate Chris Gaffney (Hacienda Brothers), who passed away last April from liver cancer, roots-rock eminence Dave Alvin was out back of the Continental Club talking to a mutual friend about his flight to Austin from Dallas. The plane, he said, was full of 20-year-olds with guitars, excitedly talking about "getting deals."

"I felt like Benny Goodman at Woodstock," the 53-year-old Alvin laughed.

Alvin may have been joking as a distraction from the extremely difficult task in front of him - a set composed of all Gaffney songs (save one), many of which the thick-as-thieves duo co-wrote - but it was a salient reminder that not everybody comes to SXSW looking to get ahead. Some just want to honor a fallen friend.

The band Alvin assembled for his Gaffney tribute, billed as "Dave Alvin & the Guilty Women with special guests," couldn't have been of a higher Americana caliber: fiddler and 1-A vocalist Amy Farris; ex-Asleep at the Wheel steel guitarist Cindy Cashdollar; Austin Continental Club linchpins Sarah Brown (bass) and Lisa Pankratz (drums); ex-Joe Ely squeezer Ponty Bone on accordion; and rockabilly ringer guitarists Bill Kirchen and Chris Miller.

Obviously much more invested in this than they would be a typical SXSW performance, the one-off band honored Gaffney - who had played and recorded with many, if not all, onstage - with an hour that showed both how much he's missed and what an impressive and soulful country-rock legacy he leaves behind.

As ringleader, Alvin introduced the songs with brief anecdotes about their origins, and also who covers them on May's Yep Roc album [A Man of Somebody's Dreams: A Tribute to the Songs of Chris Gaffney](#). There were bloody-nose roadhouse rockers, sad-hearted Spanish ballads, barroom jukebox twangers and - courtesy of Alvin's entry on the album, ARTESIA - a lesson in how the smell of cow manure can trigger feelings of almost overwhelming nostalgia. Although the mood was certainly melancholy, Alvin injected enough warm humor and amusing Gaffney anecdotes to keep things from ever turning maudlin - quite an achievement, considering Gaffney's daughter was watching from about three feet away.

Other highlights were the swaggering whammy-bar workout LIFT YOUR LEG, the first song Alvin and Gaffney wrote together ("Which actually grazed the country charts in 1987," Alvin noted); aching waltz THE MAN OF SOMEBODY'S DREAMS; and elbow-bending honky-tonker SIX NIGHTS A WEEK. Closing out was the Cajun two-step of FIGHT (TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT) and MARIE MARIE, the one song not on the album but, as Alvin noted, always an "accordion showpiece" for Gaffney. Stoked by Farris' fiddle and Bone's accordion, the band built to a fever pitch of Louisiana Lightnin' that couldn't bring Gaffney back but ensured that nobody in the absolutely packed Continental would ever forget him. One of the most memorable SXSW sets in many a moon.