

ISSUE #58

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

DECEMBER 2008

Blasters shows

(Phil, John, Bill, Keith)

12/10 Anaheim CA at House of Blues

12/11 San Diego CA at House of Blues

12/12 W. Hollywood CA at House of Blues

Dave Alvin & Guilty Men shows

12/31 Crystal Bay NV Crystal Bay Casino

3/21 Chicago IL at Old Town School of

Folk Music W/ The Guilty Women

4/24 Kalamazoo MI at Kalamazoo Valley

Community College (Dave solo)

The Knitters

1/15 Solana Beach, CA at Belly Up Tavern

1/16 San Juan Cap, CA at Coach House

1/17 Winters, CA at The Palms

1/19 Seattle, WA at Tractor Tavern

1/21 Portland, OR at Dante's

1/23 San Francisco, CA at Slim's

1/24 Petaluma, CA at Mystic Theatre

Dave Alvin releases Best of HighTone Years CD

Latest news: Dave Alvin will go into the studio in December 2008 to record a new CD backed by the Guilty Women. -- The Blasters have been approached to do a few tracks for the next Starcraft 2 video game. -- Dave Alvin's XM radio show "9-Volt" has come to an end. The Cross Country channel on XM was eliminated when XM merged with Sirius Radio -- The Gene Taylor Blues Band CD titled "Live!!! 805 Boogie!!!" will see an advance release in December. It will be available at shows, via mail-order thru yeproc.com and DaveAlvin.net. -- The January 2009 issue of Hot Rod Deluxe magazine opens up with a cool Blasters photo at the Midnight Mass festival. - **AM**

Countdown to the release of The Chris Gaffney Tribute CD

Dave Alvin is done compiling the Chris Gaffney Tribute album titled Man of Somebody's Dreams due out on Yep Roc Records on 3/31/09. The CD features 18 songs including the unreleased last song that Chris Gaffney ever recorded.

Dave Alvin: "You get your Gaffney's worth on one CD. This tribute is unique in that it's not artists doing songs of 'The Carpenters' or 'Johnny Cash' that you've already heard. There are songs from a guy, Chris Gaffney, that most people have not heard. Fans basically get unheard songs done by your favorite acts. For instance, the Calxico version of FRANK'S TAVERN is one that always makes me tear up. Their version bears no resemblance to the original but it captures the side of Chris that no one knew. Every time I hear their song I get a little misty. I'm going to play a special Gaffney Tribute show presented by Yep Roc at the SXSW festival in Austin Texas in March 2009 and I'll try to get as many guests as I can who played on this record. This is a really good record and Yep Roc is very excited about it."

This Issue: Dave Alvin's HighTone Years CD, The 1st Annual Dog and Pony Show, and the first Dave Alvin and the Guilty Women show is reviewed.

Man of Somebody's Dreams CD Track Listing

Joe Ely – Lift Your Leg
Boz Scaggs – Midnight Dream
Los Lobos – Man of Somebody's Dreams
Dave Alvin – Artesia
Peter Case – Six Nights A Week
Tom Russell – If Daddy Don't Sing Danny Boy
Calexico – Frank's Tavern
James McMurtry – Fight (Tonight's the Night)
Freddie Fender – The Gardens

Jim Lauderdale – Glasshouse
Iguanas – Get Off My Back Lucie
Alejandro Escovedo – 1968
Robbie Fulks – King of the Blues
John Doe – Quiet Desperation
Dave Gonzalez – Tired of Being Me
Big Sandy and Los Straitjackets – Silent Partner
Dan Penn – I'm So Proud
Chris Gaffney – The Guitars of My Dead Friends

Dave Alvin's new CD - Best of the HighTone Years

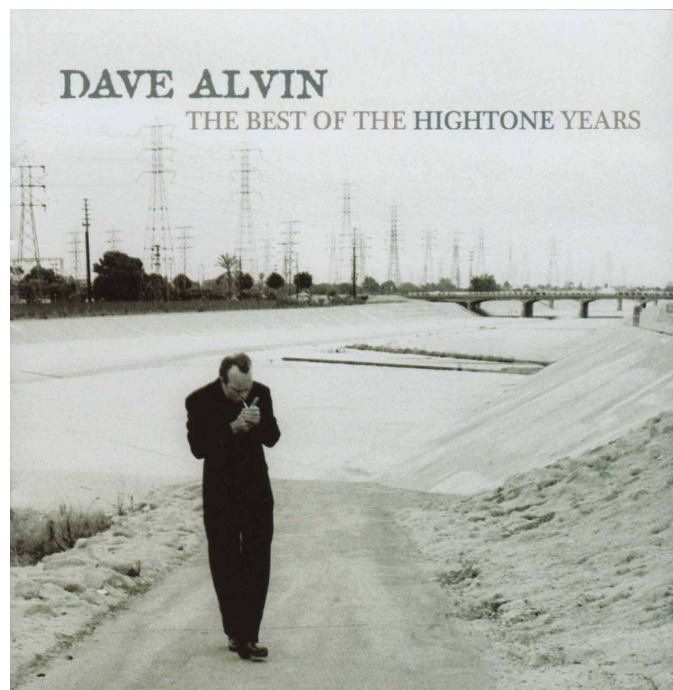
Dave Alvin recorded 7 albums for HighTone Records from 1990 – 2003. In 2006, HighTone Records went out of business and sold off its back catalog to Shout Factory Records. Now Shout Factory has released its own first 'Best Of' compilation of a HighTone artist. Dave Alvin personally chose the tracks and added a few previously unreleased songs.

AMERICAN MUSIC: I remember some of the final HighTone records releases were "Best of the HighTone Years" of artists like Dale Watson. I assumed they would release a Dave Alvin collection to make some money on one of their bigger artists before they went out of business.

DAVE ALVIN: Well, I always tried to convince them otherwise. They did some collections by Joe Ely and Rosie Flores that were just kind of thrown together. There was talk of doing a 2-disc set of my songs on HighTone. I kind of wanted to do a 2-disc set on this Shout Factory collection. One CD could have been acoustic stuff and the other being a lot of live stuff - but they wouldn't go for it.

AM: I think it's a good idea having a single CD that fits more in a CD buyer's budget and it works as a Dave Alvin sampler for the uninitiated.

DA: See, I like live records, and some people don't. In fact, they run screaming when they see live tracks. I don't understand that. This type of music is perfect for live instruments. It's how you can tell if the musicians are really playing or not. But I'm real happy with this release. It was difficult that it came at a time when Gaffney died and I got involved in the tribute record



project. So it seemed a little quick.

AM: The hardcore fans will buy this CD because it has a few unreleased tracks. Tell us about those selections – first the full band versions of DRY RIVER and OUT IN CALIFORNIA.

DA: Those two were cut when I was recording songs for a documentary with Mark Linett. We recorded them just to document them – not really intended for release at that time. It was right around the time I left HighTone records. DIXIE HIGHWAY BLUES (a self accompanied acoustic blues) was recorded during the Black Jack David sessions. The song morphed into NEW HIGHWAY, and then I decided to put out NEW HIGHWAY instead.

AM: WHY DID SHE STAY WITH HIM live comes off of your self-released 2003 Outtakes In California CD. The studio version was on the Blue BLVD release. How do those versions compare?

DA: When we made the Blue BLVD album, we cut the song a few times and had a lot of trouble with it. I thought the live version was more relaxed and I got a better vocal performance on it, so I choose that for the “Best of” collection.

Choosing songs for this CD could have gone a variety of ways. I decided to go down the middle. We had more songs listed for the release, but ran into a space limitation. If you ask me today if other songs should be on there, I’d say: “BARN BURNING from King of California.” I had to make a decision about KITCHEN TABLE, which I think is one of the best songs I’ve ever written. I didn’t include it because I thought maybe it would be too much of a downer for people.

We were gonna put one of the songs (RAILROAD BILL or HOW YOU WANT IT DONE) from the Monsters of Folk EP on there; then I decided to limit myself. I also decided there would be no Blasters songs, because you can get the first versions on Testament: the Complete Blasters recordings (Rhino Records).

AM: It’s interesting that there is only one song, SHENENDOAH, from your Grammy award winning album Public Domain: Songs From The Wild Land (2000).

DA: Well, I wanted the collection to be just Dave Alvin songs. If any of my HighTone back catalog of CDs were out of print, I may have chosen a different lineup of songs.

AM: Tell us about the Katy Moffatt duet on THE CUCKOO.

DA: When I produced Katy’s record Loose Diamond in 1999 (HighTone), we were looking for a duet to do. We both loved that old folk song. Sometimes duets are best when you take a song that wasn’t a duet and turn it into one. I did that with WHAT AM I WORTH (King Of California 1994, HighTone) and HERE IN CALIFORNIA (West of the West 2006, Yep Roc).

So when I was trying to choose a duet for this collection, I was ‘flipping a coin’ to use a duet I did with Christy McWilson called 805 on her second HighTone album (Bed Of Roses, 2002) or THE CUCKOO. Katy’s record got a lot of attention when it came out, so I went with that track. I thought it was a real good vocal performance by the both of us, and Brantley Kearns and Rick Shea played great.

AM: Is there anything unreleased that didn’t make it on the collection?

DA: There was an unreleased song from the Blue BLVD sessions that was not very good, but had a great Lee Allen solo. It shall remain nameless.

AM: Was there any remastering done to any of the songs for this release?

DA: Everything was re-mastered. MUSEUM OF HEART, 30 DOLLAR ROOM, WANDA and DUANE and HALEY’S COMET were all remixed because the sound quality was so drasti-

cally different from everything else.

When we mixed Blue BLVD in 1991, the bass player got short changed - the bass was mixed very low. I don't remember it at the time, but now I listened and I said: "Where is Falzone's bass?" After the remixes for this "Best Of," I called up Don Falzone and said: "Hey, man, I have some good news for you. You're finally going to be able to hear your bass on the songs we recorded." He said: "Yeah, I wondered why I couldn't hear the bass."

You'll hear something new on HALEY'S COMET - A drum intro. We listened to the original tapes and heard it on there and we said: "Hey, that's kind of cool. Let's include that in the new mix."

AM: Tell us about the cover artwork which shows you standing in the Dry River. (*Ed. – The photo was used for a beautifully designed BLUE BLVD promotional poster in 1991*)

DA: When Shout Factory bought HighTone, they got all the files and artwork associated with the HighTone releases. I always liked that photograph. It was taken after the Blue BLVD CD was printed and we needed photos for publicity purposes. It would have been a great cover back then. Shout Factory came up with that idea as a cover, and I liked it right away. We did that photo as a joke imitation of the James Dean photo from Times Square - The San Gabriel River being my Times Square.

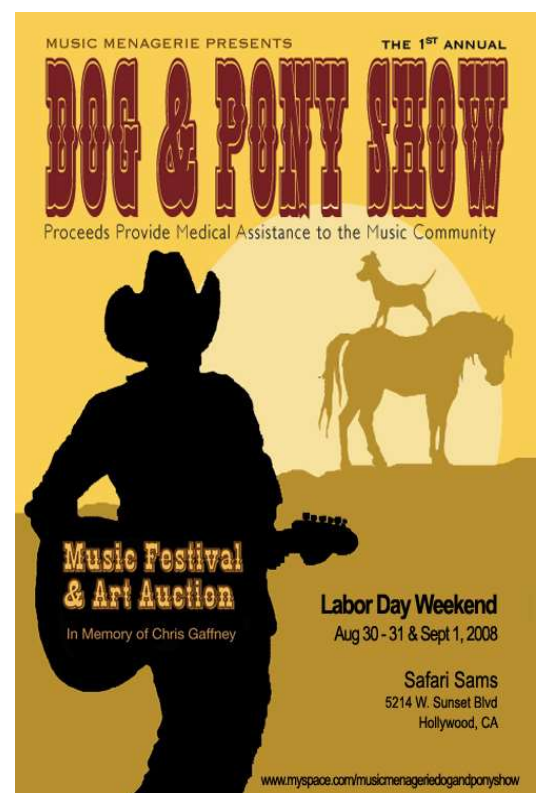
AM: How do you look back on the HighTone Years?

DA: I didn't realize how much time has passed. I divide my life into 1.) The Blasters and X and 2.) Dave Alvin solo. So to me, my solo period feels like it lasted like two years – but it was 13 with HighTone. That's the result of being on the road so much (laughs). I'm very happy with this collection.

THE DOG AND PONY SHOW BY JON NOE

The Los Angeles music community came together Labor Day Weekend 2008 to once again pay tribute to Chris Gaffney and to help working musicians with medical expenses. Affordable medical care is a national problem and the music community is often hit hard with rising health care expenses. So 'The Music Menagerie' was created by Dave Alvin, Nancy Sefton and many others to help out their musician friends. Gaffney often referred to gigs as "Dog and Pony Shows"; that's how the festival got its name. Seventeen bands played. There was an art auction with some amazing pieces up for bid and an ongoing raffle for all sorts of goods and services. It was a unique and special weekend. I flew in from Seattle and was ready for some great music, to make some new friends and to reconnect with old ones.

Day One: Safari Sam's was the venue. Chris Morris was the host. Chris has a great show on INDIE 103.1 in L.A. called



Watusi Rodeo (Sunday's 9:00-11:00 AM (Pacific) www.indie1031.fm) . He specializes in Americana, but plays all kinds of roots music.

The first band up was Paging Beto. They've got a great hard-edge blues sound. Bill Bateman of The Blasters was on drums and the band also had Johnny 'Two Bags' Wickersham of Social Distortion on guitar, and Gil T of The Allnighters on bass. This great live band got the fest off to a rocking start!

Next up was L.A. favorites; The Ruby Friedman Orchestra. Ruby's got a great voice that's quite suited to the art-rock that her fairly large band produces. Joe Wood was up next doing songs from the period he spent as a mem-



Tex and the Horseheads

ber of the seminal L.A punk band TSOL (True Sounds of Liberty). Gregory Boaz of the Guilty Men was on bass and Drac Conley was on guitar. Drac was one of the musicians who was also having a hard time with mounting medical bills. He was also the stage manager for all three nights.

Next up was the incredible insanity that is Tex and the Horseheads. Lead singer Texicala Jones is a crazed rock n' roll gypsy who howls and screams her way through a show and has to be seen to be believed. The headliners for the evening were The Knitters. Dave and John opened with SILVER WINGS as usual and ended with BORN TO BE WILD. The fun thing about a Knit-



The Knitters

ters show is that they don't take themselves too seriously, but they do take the music seriously. To put it bluntly, they rock!

Day Two: OK, so tonight was Gaff's night. All of the bands that Chris Gaffney played in were here. The evening started with Slim Cessna's Auto Club. The best way to describe them is goth-americana-gospel. Their show is like some sort of demented gospel revival meeting – a great band! The Cold Hard Facts played next. This was Gaffney's bar band from the 80's and 90's. Danny Ott and Rick Shea handled the guitars and vocals on most of the songs. ARTESIA and THE SHAPE I'M IN were highlights. It was great seeing former Guilty Man Rick Shea again. I was looking forward to seeing the remaining Hacienda Brothers one last time and they didn't disappoint. Dave "DB"



Rick Shea with the Cold Hard Facts

Berzansky is just an amazing pedal steel player. Guitarist Dave Gonzalez handled the vocals of the Gaffney songs just fine. Hank Maninger sang the Gaff favorite TURN TO GREY. It was bittersweet to hear some of the newer songs from the Hacienda Brothers' last album with Gaffney called Arizona Motel. The last song they played was ORDINARY FOOL, my favorite song from that album. Thanks guys!

I was privileged to meet Gaff's sister Helen, and his widow Julie. That was very special to me. Peter Case was the next performer. He was a member of The Plimsouls back in the eighties and played their hit A MILLION MILES AWAY and other tunes from his Case's solo albums.

I couldn't agree more with the words Dave Alvin said after the set: "This was a tough one." The moment came for Dave Alvin and the Guilty Men to be heard. Instead of just launching into the first number like



Dave Alvin and the Guilty Men

he normally does, Dave thanked everybody for coming and the volunteers for helping put on the festival. The band usually starts with a rocker but surprisingly opened with the last song Dave and Gaff recorded together, TWO LUCKY BUMS. The light-hearted number is now bittersweet with Dave handling both vocal parts on the duet. Now it was time to turn the amps up, and they launched into SO LONG BABY GOODBYE. I hadn't seen the band in over two years and it was great seeing them wind it up and crank it out again! Dave told a story about how he used to go out and see The Cold Hard Facts and looked forward to hearing Gaff sing ALBUQUERQUE. The Guilty Men recorded a studio ver-



Dave Gonzalez of the Hacienda Brothers

sion a few months back, and it was released as one of the digital download songs (www.davealvin.net). They proceeded to do a great version of it live, too. Another Gaff story Dave told was about the kak! kak! kak! song that the Guilty Men would often play. That's how Gaff would refer to it. The song is JUBILEE TRAIN and the guitar solo goes kak! kak! kak! kak! like Paul Burlison of the rockabilly band Johnny Burnette and the Rock N' Roll Trio's TRAIN KEPT A ROLLIN'. So when Dave got to that solo he said "that's the kak! kak! kak!". They ended the set with SOMEWHERE IN TIME and ASHGROVE. Those two songs have an added emotional



Joe Terry of the Guilty Men

resonance with the passing of Gaff.

The first encore was BLUE WING - I love that song, but they don't play it live too much anymore. The show ended with another intense version of FOURTH OF JULY. That one always gets the crowd going. It was a great evening of music and stories.

Day Three: Today's show started early with the first band going on about 3:00 PM. The Skip Heller Trio opened the day playing 70's influenced country. The last time I saw Skip he was fronting a jazz combo! An eclectic guy, to say the least. I'd been waiting almost 10 years to see the next band -- Red Meat. They'd never made it up to my hometown Seattle, so I was really looking forward to seeing them. Dave Alvin has produced 3 of their albums including their latest Open All Night (Ranchero Records). They featured quite a few from that one. Rick Shea sat in on pedal steel and Amy Farris played violin. If you get a chance to see them, don't miss 'em. Fantastic! Next on the bill was some authentic rockabilly from Levi Dexter. He was part of the rockabilly revival in England in the early 80's. He hasn't aged a day and has a lot of energy. Blasters Johnny Bazz and Bill Bateman were in his backing band. Great stuff! Eddie Baytos and the Nervis Bros were up next and I swear I felt like I was on Bourbon Street during Mardi Gras. They play a great mix of zydeco and New Orleans R&B - just plain fun.

Mike Stinson was up next on the bandstand. Why he's not more well known, I don't know. He can sing a "tear in the beer" country song with the best of them. He plays often in the L.A. area. See him if you can. Nice guy, too.

I've seen Big Sandy and The Fly-Rite Boys numerous times over the years and they never disappoint. Today was no different. Sandy draws out the sharp-dressed local rockabilly fans and spontaneous dancing ensued. Eddie Baytos played accordion on BAYOU BLUE - Sweet!

Now it was time for The Blasters! Everyone was wondering would Dave be playing with the band? Of course he would!

Phil, Bazz, Bill and Keith came out and rocked the joint for about an hour. A highlight of recent shows has been the James Brown song PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE. Phil outdoes himself on that one. Dave finally joined the four Blasters starting out with the guitar riff to the Bo Diddley song I LOVE YOU SO. Dave and



Keith traded solos. It was amazing! Next Dave tested them by starting up CRAZY BABY. This has always been one of my favorites. The other guys just looked at each other and went for it. It's obvious they were having a lot of fun. After a short discussion, they decide to do BLUE SHADOWS and finally, of course, MARIE MARIE. Everyone up front was singing along - including me. Encore! Encore! We cheered. We were rewarded with ROCK BOPPIN BABY followed by a blow-the-roof-off version of ONE BAD STUD. Man! What a night! What a weekend!

There were so many guests and friends of the bands. I spotted Greg Leisz and Brantley Kearns in the crowd over the weekend and Clem Burke of Blondie was there, too.

So it was three days and nights of great music for a great cause. A lot of money was raised about the serious problem of affordable health care for working musicians. Let's do it again next year!



Jon Noe hosts a radio show in the Seattle area called The Juke Joint. The best in 1940's and 50's Rhythm and Blues on KSER 90.7 FM, listen online at www.kser.org Sundays at 1:00 PM (Pacific).

All photos from the Dog and Pony Show by John Noe

Dave Alvin comments: *The shows were great, but right now I have a bad taste in my mouth. We have a problem because Safari Sam's club went out of business and hasn't paid us the advanced ticket sales money we raised for the musicians. Every musician at least once over the years has been stiffed for money on a gig and that's one thing -- but it's another thing to stiff people with cancer.*

The actual benefit was great. It was one long three day night. It was an emotional time especially on the Gaffney night with Mrs Gaffney there.

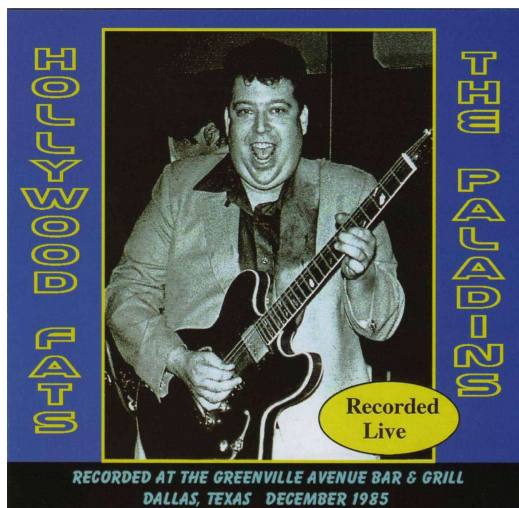
Highly Recommended New Releases

'Hollywood Fats & The Paladins Live'

Hollywood Fats of the Blasters and Dave Gonzalez's band

The Paladins join forces live in 1985.

www.topcatrecords.com



Highly Recommended New Releases

Red Meat -- 'We Never Close'

Dave Alvin produced the latest CD by this San Francisco

Honky Tonk band for Ranchero Records.

www.redmeat.net



Dave Alvin and the Guilty Women -- October 4, 2008

San Francisco, CA at The Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival

by Billy Davis

Every autumn, the “Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival” occurs in San Francisco at Golden Gate Park. Dave Alvin has played there a few times. This year the festival organizers asked Dave to do something a little different. Dave has played a few shows in Northern California in the past 2 years backed by Amy Farris, Christy McWilson, and Nina Gerber. Someone dared to call them “The Alvinettes” – a name Dave Alvin did not like. Women backing Dave Alvin? Now that’s something different that was to surely satisfy a bluegrass festival crowd.

By the time Dave’s gig at the festival came, he had 8 women lined up for the show and named them “The Guilty Women.”

Dave: “Most of those gals I’ve known over the years. A third of the band was coming from Austin; others came from San Francisco, so there was no time to rehearse. The only rehearsal we had was in the tent backstage just before we went on. The girls just hit it out of the ball park.”

The lineup featured Christy McWilson on vocals, Amy Farris on fiddle, Laurie Lewis on fiddle and mandolin, Nina Gerber on acoustic guitar, Cindy Cashdollar on slide dobro, Sarah Brown on bass, and Lisa Pankratz on drums. Suzy Thompson joined in for the last three songs in the show on accordion. Dave: “Suzy Thompson is a blues fiddle player who also plays Ca-

jun accordion. She and her husband do Ca-jun records. Laurie Lewis suggested her. Laurie Lewis is a folk / bluegrass fiddle player who did a few records for HighTone Records.

Nina Gerber has legendary status as the late Kate Wolf’s guitar player. Cashdollar is a guitar / pedal steel player from Austin has has played with just about every major artist out of Austin.

Dave did 10 songs most of which are from his recent Guilty Men set lists. Duets on **HERE IN CALIFORNIA** and **WHAT AM I WORTH** featured Christy McWilson.



Photo: Dave Wallace



Photo: Dave Wallace

She complemented Dave nicely on background vocals on SOMEWHERE IN TIME. Nina Gerber, Amy Farris and Sarah Brown had all played shows with Dave before, so they knew the songs well. The others played along and were featured more on solos where they had the opportunity to improvise. Dave was enjoying himself, and he suggested on stage: "Ladies, we should do this again sometime." WHAT DID THE DEEP SEA SAY was a song Dave rarely does, but pulls it out for Folk and bluegrass festivals. Everyone in the band played along and it got the crowd going. They finished with a Cajun version of MARIE MARIE as Dave said: "In the style of the Balfa Brothers."

Dave: "I'm gonna brag a little bit here: we were the hit of the festival. It was a great show. The head of Yep Roc (records) was there seeing a bunch of Yep Roc acts. When I walked off the stage he kept saying, 'Record, record, record.' So we're going into the studio in December 2008 and then we'll go play gigs next year. We have a gig already set for the Old Town School of Folk in Chicago for March 2009. We won't be able to bring all 8 women on tour – it's cost prohibitive, but some of them will be there."

The record will be a combination of co-writes with everybody – because all the girls can write – and covers. I'd like to cut a version of MARIE MARIE zydeco style. It'll be fun to do." —Am



November 2008 – San Francisco Chronicle.

Laurie Lewis, a musician who was on the HighTone label,
is co-writing with Dave Alvin.

Excerpt: On the day of our conversation, Laurie Lewis was working on lyrics for a joint songwriting venture with Dave Alvin. The two musicians had sewn the seeds of collaboration in 2007 on a "Roots on the Rails" musical train trip in Mexico from Juarez to the Copper Canyon curated by singer-songwriter Tom Russell. "The train was kind of breaking down, and the track was really, really slow, the air conditioning broke down and a bunch of people got sick, but I had a fantastic time," she recalls.

"And that's where Dave Alvin and I met up, and then he called me up to do the Guilty Women thing, and that was fun, and then he said he was thinking of doing a recording of Dave Alvin and the Guilty Women and asked me if I had any material. I told him I had all these California-centric lyrics that don't seem to be really going anywhere. He suggested we do a co-write, and I'm trying to follow through."



Songwriters: Dave Alvin and Tom Russell by Tom Wilk

Tom Russell and Dave Alvin were label-mates on HighTone Records for nearly a decade. They have also collaborated as songwriters and worked together on stage and in the studio.

Veterans Day: The Tom Russell Anthology, a two-CD, 37-song, career-spanning compilation on Shout! Factory, includes four songs co-written with Dave: "Haley's Comet," "Out in California," "California Snow" and "Down The Rio Grande."

The anthology also includes a duet of Tom and Dave on a live version of "Blue Wing," recorded at the Off Broadway club in St. Louis in 1996. "Blue Wing" was recorded by Dave on his King of California CD in 1994. This version of "Out in California" is from The Rose of the San Joaquin, Tom's first release on HighTone (1995), produced by Dave.

In the liner notes to The Long Way Around, a 1997 CD by Tom that featured Dave on two songs, Dave discussed his admiration of Tom: "Tom Russell's songs changed my life. A few years ago, I was broke and fed up with being a songwriter. I was staying at an empty apartment in Nashville, cynically dreaming of making big money writing songs that said nothing, when Gary Velletri (now a senior vice president at Bug Music in New York City) gave me a tape of a songwriter. I was floored. There was no bullshit in the songs, no lies, nobody telling you things they thought you wanted to hear just to make a buck," he wrote.

"The songwriter was Tom Russell and I was jealous of him. As I listened, I threw away my idea of writing songs that didn't mean anything, and ever since then, whenever I write a song, I ask myself if it's as good as one of Tom's. Tom Russell is one of the best, and I'm still jealous."

"Haley's Comet" is the first collaboration between the two and was released by Tom on his 1990 CD Hurricane Season. Dave followed a year later with his own version on Blue Blvd. Their versions differ considerably. In a verse where Haley remembers playing a concert in 1955, Dave sings "the screams of the children filled the hall." Tom's version substitutes "women" for children.

Tom spoke of the origins of the song in a recent e-mail interview. "Bill Haley was the first rocker I heard. I opened my parents' windows and blasted the neighbors with "Rock Around the Clock." Revolutionary. He died unknown in Harlingen, Texas. America has a short memory. Dave Alvin and I labored over this, one night in a New York City hotel room," he wrote. "We called up John Swenson in the middle of the night to check the facts. John wrote a bio of Haley. Later, Doug Sahm and the Texas Tornados recorded it. That version is on my Wounded Heart CD."

While the two have not written together recently, Tom holds out hope for future collaborations. "Dave and I always talk about writing 'the big one.' It's out there somewhere. Our "Desolation Row." —Am

AMERICAN MUSIC: The Blasters / Dave Alvin newsletter

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