

ISSUE #77

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

APRIL 2016

Keith Wyatt 20th Anniversary Interview Issue

Latest News: -- Dave Alvin has played guitar on the debut album by Marissa Gomez and the Ghosts of Echo Park. The band's sound is described as a mix of "jazz, bordello blues and honky tonk," according to the group's Facebook page. The album will be released in May. -- Cindy Cashdollar, guitarist in the Guilty Women, is profiled in Issue 35 of Fretboard Journal, a guitar players magazine. During an extensive interview, she talks about working and recording with Dave Alvin. www.fretboardjournal.com. -- Concord Bicycle Music has announced the purchase of the HighTone Records catalog from Shout! Factory. Dave Alvin recorded for HighTone between 1991 and 2002. HighTone, which operated between 1983 and 2008, also reissued the Blasters' American Music album in 1997 and the live Trouble Bound album in 2002, as well as Phil Alvin's County Fair 2000 CD in 1994. The deal was announced in January and could lead to additional reissues. -- Dave Alvin's West of the West train trip will take place Aug. 19-28. Musical guests for the trip will be Phil Alvin, Rick Shea, Christy McWilson, Mary Gauthier, Peter Case, Eliza Gilkyson, Cindy Cashdollar and Butch Hancock with a special guest appearance by T. Scot Wilburn and the Shutup-N-Playboys. The trip is sold out, but there is a waiting list. Visit RootsontheRails.com -- The Mike Eldred Trio, including John Bazz and Jerry Angel will release a new studio CD called Baptist Town on May 6, 2016 featuring guest spots by David Hidalgo, Robert Cray, and John Mayer. You can pre-order from iTunes on April 8th and get an immediate download of HUNDER DOLLAR BILL. THE CD is distributed worldwide by CEN/RED Distribution, a SONY owned company. -- Country legend Merle Haggard died on April 6, 2016. He was a major influence on Dave Alvin and their association goes back to Dave's organization of the 1994 Tulare Dust tribute CD (*HighTone Records*) to Merle. Dave has included Merle's KERN RIVER in many of his acoustic shows over the years. Dave said this on his facebook page: "Sad and in shock. Merle Haggard meant a lot of different things to a lot of different people but to me he was THE songwriter of California. Not the California of Malibu, Silicon Valley or Beverly Hills but the California of Highway 99, migrant workers and the struggle to survive in the promised land. All the political ambiguity and one dimensional stereotypes aside, Mr. Haggard was one of the giants of modern American Music (not just Country) along with Ray Charles, Miles Davis and Bob Dylan. Merle was a brilliant balladeer, soulful bluesman, guitar wrangler, musical trailblazer and one of our greatest songwriters/poets in the Roots tradition. In his way he was also a true, fearless rock and roll rebel. Rest easy from the long highway, Mr. Haggard. It's been a hell of a ride." -- **AM**

In This Issue: The Keith Wyatt 20th Anniversary interview and the return of the Blue Shadows.



Keith Wyatt, guitarist for the Blasters is still considered "The New guy" in the band even though he has been the Blasters lead guitarist longer than all 5 other guitar players put together. On May 16, 2016, we celebrate Keith's twenty years in the Blasters.

American Music: Keith, Tell me how you came to join the Blasters and what you were doing previously in music.

Keith Wyatt: I arrived in L.A. in 1977 after growing up in Washington, D.C., and spending a few years in San Francisco trying to scrape something together musically without a lot of results. The L.A. music scene was just starting to really take off, with bands of all different styles criss-crossing each other in clubs like Madame Wong's, the Hong Kong Cafe, Club 88, the Music Machine and a whole bunch of others. In SF I had met Jimmie Wood, an L.A.-bred harp player, and after I moved to SoCal I played with Jimmie for a while and he introduced me to some of his friends and acquaintances - like James Harman and Hollywood Fats. At the time it seemed like everybody knew everybody and punk, new wave, blues and rockabilly were all just different sides of the same coin. After bouncing around a few more bands, including a new wave band called Little Itch, I met James Intveld through Patrick Woodward, a bass player who had joined up with James and his brother Ricky after attending Musicians Institute, where I was also teaching. Patrick and Ricky soon left the band to join Rick Nelson but I kept on playing with James for several more years and we had a regular Monday gig at a club called One West in Pasadena that turned into a kind of rockabilly/roots hang where lots of people would come and sit in. I would run into Phil here and there when James would open shows for the Blasters when Smokey Hormel was still playing guitar; everybody was pretty much on the same page musically.

After James joined the Blasters, I started working with Juke Logan, a harp player who also hosted a popular blues show on L.A. public radio. Jerry Angel drummed with both James and Juke from time to time, and after a couple of years I joined up with him and former Top Jimmy & the Rhythm Pigs bass player Gil T to form the Dime Bags. We used to play regularly at a basement dive on Hollywood Boulevard called Raji's along with folks like Billy Bremner. After James left the Blasters around early 1996, Jerry called me up to see if I wanted to audition. He gave me a cassette of a live show that the band had recorded at the House of Blues, so I listened to that to learn a couple of

songs and then met up with Jerry, Johnny and Phil at a rehearsal studio in Atwater, a neighborhood on the L.A. river. While we were setting up, I started messing around with some kind of blues rhythm part and Phil said "If you can play that again, you've got the gig!" We went ahead and banged out a few Blaster tunes and it was all very casual - soon after that, we did our first show together in San Jose at the Ritz (May 16, 1996). We never rehearsed at all for probably the first 10

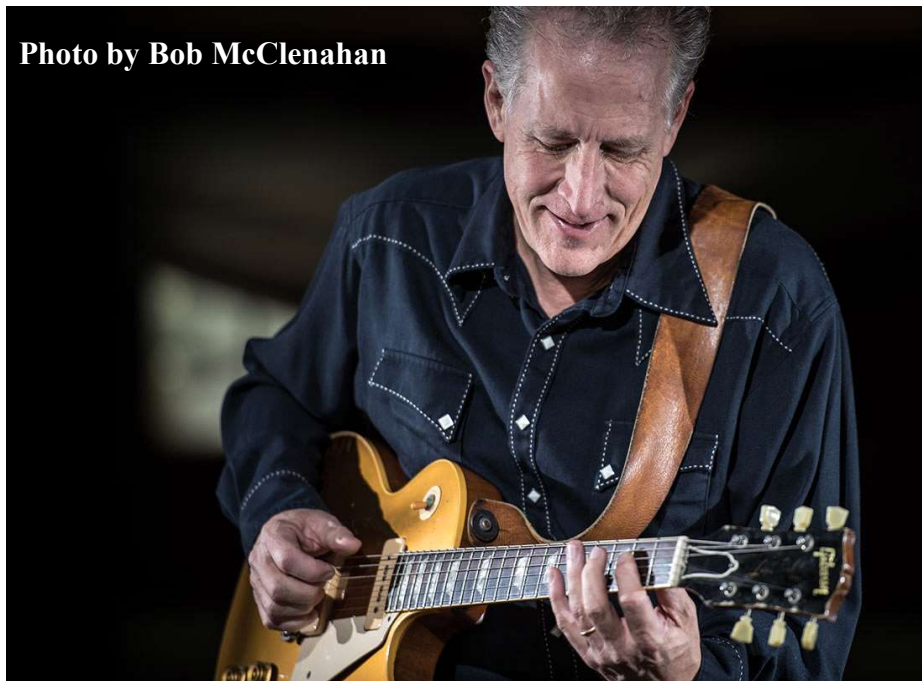
years I was in the band, so I just learned the rest of the set off the tape. After a few shows here and there, Johnny said, "Well, if you're gonna be in the band you gotta get a haircut!" (at the time it was more rock than rock & roll). That was about it - in typical Blaster fashion, it just sort of happened.

AM: You were employed at the Musicians Institute at the time. Did the band give you an idea of what their touring and recording plans were?

KW: In typical Blaster fashion, for probably the first ten years I was in the band, we never had a meeting to plan a tour strategy. When I joined, it had been more than ten years since the last Blasters record and a few years since Phil's last solo album; and there was no label or booking agency working with the band at the time. My schedule at MI was flexible enough to allow me to take time off when necessary, but at first we just did whatever random gigs came to us rather than organizing tours. The live recording that was under discussion when James left the band was shelved and it was

several years before we came up with enough new material for a studio record. Songs like REBOUND and WINDOW UP ABOVE and several others that the band was performing before I joined had not yet been recorded; other stuff just sort of evolved along the way. We never sat down to select songs or write; it was all pretty haphazard. The late '90s was also a period when the traditional album & record label concept was disappearing and there was no clear model to replace it, so the general sense of confusion in the industry contributed to the lack of momentum.

Photo by Bob McClenahan



AM: Your soloing style was very different from previous lead guitarist James Intveld. Did you play his solos or change them right away?

KW: When I joined up, I inherited the guitar arrangements that had been developed by Dave, Smokey and James, and at first I stuck pretty close to those. The Blaster guitar sound is more about energy than finesse. Most of the pre-existing solos were essentially worked-out parts rather than spontaneous improvisations, so it didn't make sense to vary them too much. Even today, I use those solos as a sort of default setting - if I hear something different on a given night I'll change them, but otherwise I know they're going to work. I believe that it's not about always playing new things - it's about playing everything LIKE it's new.

On the newer material of course the guitar parts are my own, but after a period of experimentation I usually settle on a certain approach for a given song that works and then stay close to that until I come up with something better. Phil believes in the idea of reflecting the vocal melody in the solo, which is a concept that I find extremely helpful. Before jazz became a whole style of music, it was a verb - "to jazz" meant to add embellishments and fills to the melody of a song, not play solos based on scales or arpeggios or whatever. I used a melody-based approach on IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT (which we don't play any more) and now use it on HEAR ME CRYIN'; it gives the solo a strong foundation on which to build something different from one night to the next - it's part structure, part improvisation.



AM: When an original member of a band is replaced, there is always a backlash from some fans. There has been much confusion in the public's eye of who the Blasters' lead guitarist is. Talk about how you handled that, and how difficult it was sitting out while the Original Blasters reunited in 2002-2003.

KW: Dave chose to leave in 1986, and during the subsequent years before I joined the band, the Blaster guitar role had already passed through the hands of Billy Zoom, Hollywood Fats, Smokey Hormel and James Intveld, so the thought never occurred to me that I was "replacing" Dave. His contribution to the band was both as a guitar player and a songwriter; I fill the guitar-playing part of that role, but his presence is still felt when we perform his material.



1997 in Pittsburgh

Photo by: Josh Lewis

The ongoing confusion over the identity of the Blasters is due largely to the failure of the band to control its own image - to paraphrase a title from the Blaster set list, "It's All Our Fault." The band was extremely slow to create its own website and Facebook pages, leaving a vacuum that has been filled by fans, but unfortunately continues to blur the image, and with no PR firm or record label acting on behalf of the band to help keep the record straight, people are left to draw their own conclusions. Longtime fans may be in-

timately aware of all of the changes that have taken place over the years, but even though it has now been 30 years since Dave left the band, hardly a show goes by when someone doesn't call me Dave or tell me "I saw you guys in 1983" - what they're responding to is the band, not the individuals. For those who think that the Blasters should have packed it in when Dave left, they will always have the records to listen to. The "Original Blasters" tour, which was organized to promote the release of the Blasters' Slash/Warner compilation CD (Testament: The Complete Slash Recordings, Shout! Factory Records 2002) and was captured on a live DVD (*The Blasters Live - Going Home*, Shout! Factory 2004), exacerbated the identity confusion by creating the impression that there were now two concurrent versions of the band, one "original" and the other, apparently, "un-original." Jerry Angel and I, who had by then been part of the band for over five years (about as long as the original lineup), both strongly objected to the tour and refused to perform any more shows until we completed a new Blasters record. Our "strike" ultimately instigated the recording of the album 4-11-44 (Rainman Records 2004), and a few years later after Bill re-joined the band, we started gaining more traction with the release of Fun on Saturday Night (Rip Cat Records 2012). However, the ambiguity has persisted due to the long stretches between recordings plus the more recent overlap between the Alvin Brothers and the Blasters. I'm certain that if I play in the band for another 20 years, someone will still come up to me and say "Hey Dave! I saw you in 'Streets of Fire!'"

AM: What were some of your highlights or favorite moments in the Blasters in the last 20 years? And for the future what would you like to see the Blasters do?

KW: There have been a lot of highlights, but as the years add up it feels more like every gig we are able to play is a highlight in its own right. Playing the Fillmore (San Francisco) during the last couple of 'X' tours was extra special because so many great live records were recorded there - I got chills standing on stage - but it's not the venue alone as much as the crowd and the vibe that make a show memorable. Sometimes it clicks and sometimes it doesn't - you can't predict it and you can't force it.

I hope to make at least one more record together, but there are a lot of different factors that have to come together in order to make that happen. Otherwise, just continue to do the best shows we can - at this point we have to play every show like it's our last because it may well be...

AM: What have you been up to musically outside of the Blasters? (Online guitar instruction, publications, writings).

KW: As I write this I'm in the middle of a two-and-a-half week tour throughout Japan on behalf of Jikei Group, a large music school chain that I have worked with since the early '90s. I play with a group of American and Japanese musicians for arena-sized opening ceremonies held every year at the start of their school calendar in April. The music has nothing remotely to do with the Blasters, but I approach my guitar playing with the same spirit and it seems to work - people here



The Blasters today

respond to emotion more internally than in other societies, but they appreciate it no less. I'm also teaching - it's a challenge to introduce 19-year-old Japanese guitar players to music completely outside their stylistic universe, but I show them how the threads of blues and gospel are woven into contemporary pop. It may not resonate for many, but it always does for a few. Over the years, some of the most enthusiastic and talented players and singers of American music that I have run across have been from Japan.

While I'm here, I also keep up with on-line lessons for my blues guitar program at Artistworks.com. I currently have about 650 students worldwide, so I have videos queued up for response each morning from my hotel room via laptop (I do the same

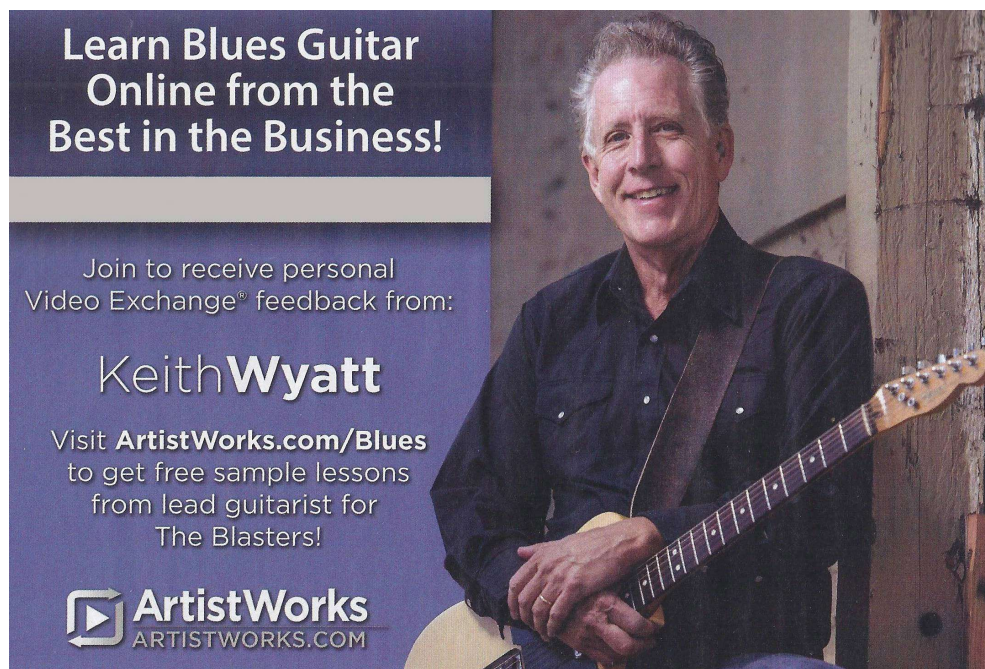
thing when the Blasters are on tour). "Blues on line" might seem like a contradiction in terms, but except for the means of delivery, it's not fundamentally different from the way music has always been taught.

AM: What music have you been listening to lately?

KW: My listening habits are fairly random these days. A lot of it is professional, such as listening for inspirations I can steal and use in Blaster tunes or helping students transcribe tunes. One of my students is currently working chorus-by-chorus through Kenny Burrell's CHITLINS CON CARNE. Other times I'll read something that inspires me to check out a related artist or song. At the moment I'm reading an extensive bio of Sam Phillips (Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock 'n Roll by Peter Guralnick) that came out recently. Online blues forums are frequented by people who often have far more extensive knowledge of blues than my own, so I scroll through the comments and links and find a lot to listen to that way - it's kind of like browsing through Phil's record collection on line.

AM: Thank you Keith for your 20 years in the Blasters - giving us great music and performances. Now on to the next 20! Do you have any final words in this interview for the Blasters fans?

KW: When I was a kid, listening to the Ventures and Stones, my dream was not to be a pro musician (not that I even knew what that meant) but to be in a band like those guys. I had no clue what it was really like to be in a band - it just seemed like it would be about the coolest thing I could do. Like most musicians, I wound up being in a lot of bands before I found one that lasted, and I also discovered that like life itself being in a band can be difficult, frustrating, and infuriating at times, but even now, 50 years after I first picked up a guitar, being in a band still seems pretty cool. Thanks to everyone who has kept coming out to see us. I hope we'll see you one more time...
—Am




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The advertisement features a photograph of Keith Wyatt, a man with grey hair, smiling and holding a guitar. The background is a rustic wooden wall. The text is overlaid on a dark blue background on the left side of the image.

THE BLUE SHADOWS RETURN

The Blue Shadows are a blues band formed by Blasters drummer Bill Bateman as a side project in 1988. Many great musicians have been members over the years such as Dave Alvin, Lester Butler, and John Bazz who is still in the band. In 2001, through the end of the decade, The Blue Shadows were led by singer / guitarist Javier Matos, AKA Jake Matson. The band has been less active in recent years since Javier moved from Los Angeles to Minneapolis, MN. But now the band is recording a new CD and will be touring again. Check out [American Music #30](#) for an interview with Bill Bateman about the early days of the Blue Shadows. Here's an interview with Javier Matos.

AM: So tell me how the Blue Shadows came to reunite with you living in Minnesota and Bill and John in SoCal.

Javier Matos: We always kept the embers burning. The Blue Shadows never really quit. Like a dear friend, time sometimes sweetens the relationship.

AM: But in 2009 you three had a band named The Doghouse Lords that released a CD. Why was that not called the Blue Shadows?

JM: The Doghouse Lords was born when Chopper Franklin and I were listening to some existing tracks he had recorded. Then BLAM ... this really cool set of new songs emerged. Bill and John were then employed to bring in the rhythm section artillery. And plus . . . we wanted to keep it in the family? And they're badasses!

AM: Are there any plans for the Blue Shadows to record?

JM: We have a record almost in the can right now with Rip Cat Records - recorded recently at Pacifica Studios under the skilled and watchful eyes and ears of Scott Abeyta and engineer Glen Nishida.

AM: Great. What can we expect from the kind of songs? The original Blue Shadows repertoire had a few originals and then old blues songs with your style on it.

JM: We're still staying true to form. There's some nice surprises on this record. I don't know where to start! My father and brother guest appear on this record. They are solid singers from the Bay Area scene ... it's great to have them. Dave Alvin guest appears on a song called DIAMOND NEEDLES written by a fella named Jon Dominguez that

Photos by John Bazz



lives here in Minneapolis. I knew when I heard this song that it was meant for the Blue Shadows.





solid team behind us right now working out a tour schedule. I can say more about that later - after we work some kinks out of our routing, etc.

AM: The Blue Shadows had a whole record in the can back in the mid 2000s. What happened that it didn't come out and might it ever be released?

JM: Oh man, that's a long story. I'm not sure I can talk about that right now. Let's just say that, unlike men, not all handshakes were created equal.

AM: Well, thanks Javier, Blasters fans are looking forward to hearing more from the Blue Shadows.

JM: Thanks. We're back and we're stronger than ever. You can all help us by buying the album and coming to see us on tour!

Aaron from Rumble King with Javier Bill Bateman on the skins

AM: So you're doing sessions in L.A. and some back home in Minneapolis?

JM: Yes. The project started at Bye & Bye Studios here in Minneapolis -- owned and operated by my good friend and band partner for many years now, Grant Wibben. Then it moved to Pacifica in LA for the bulk of the recording. Then back to Mols at Underwood Studios run by Mark Stockert who produced Setzer's Big Band project.

AM: Are you still playing the National guitar? Tell me about the instrumentation on the recordings.

AM: Still playing that National a lot but differently than I used to. I've fallen in love with it mic'd instead of amplified and using the flesh of my fingers to draw out sweeter and deeper tones. It's such a powerful instrument when quiet like that. The record starts out as the trio and filled in instrumentation around it, piano, horns, accordion, washboard ... and harp. I've been blowing a lot of harp the last six years. And I play lead guitar as well. I used Abeyta's Gibson hollow body for almost the whole recording. Oh, and pedal steel, too!

AM: Tell me about Bazz and Bateman playing on the record?

JM: Awe, man. Powerful, straight-forward ... what can I say about them? The thing about them is individually they're great ... together they're better than anyone else on the planet. The pressure is all on me. It always has been.

AM: When will the record come out and do you have any plans to tour?

JM: The record will be released, snafus pending, this Summer 2016. I can't speak too soon on this, but we have a



Under The Big Black Sun by Tom Wilk

Dave Alvin and John Doe have a long history of musical collaboration. They co-wrote songs for the Blasters (JUST ANOTHER SUNDAY and LITTLE HONEY) and the Knitters (THE CALL OF THE WRECKING BALL), shared stages in the Flesh Eaters, 'X', and the Knitters; and guested on each other's solo records. That collaboration now extends to the printed page with Under the Big Black Sun: A Personal History of L.A. Punk (Da Capo Press, \$26.99) by John Doe with Tom DeSavia and friends.

The book features chapters written by 15 musicians, writers, and contributors to the punk rock scene of Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The book's other contributing authors include Exene Cervenka of X; Jane Wiedlin and Charlotte Caffey of the Go-Gos; Henry Rollins of Black Flag; Mike Watt of the Minutemen; Chris D of the Flesh Eaters; and journalists Chris Morris and Kristine McKenna.

The diversity of the authors provides an illuminating and entertaining look at the scene that could not be captured with just one voice. Doe provides a running commentary on different facets of the scene - fashion, drugs, cars - in nine chapters interspersed throughout the book.

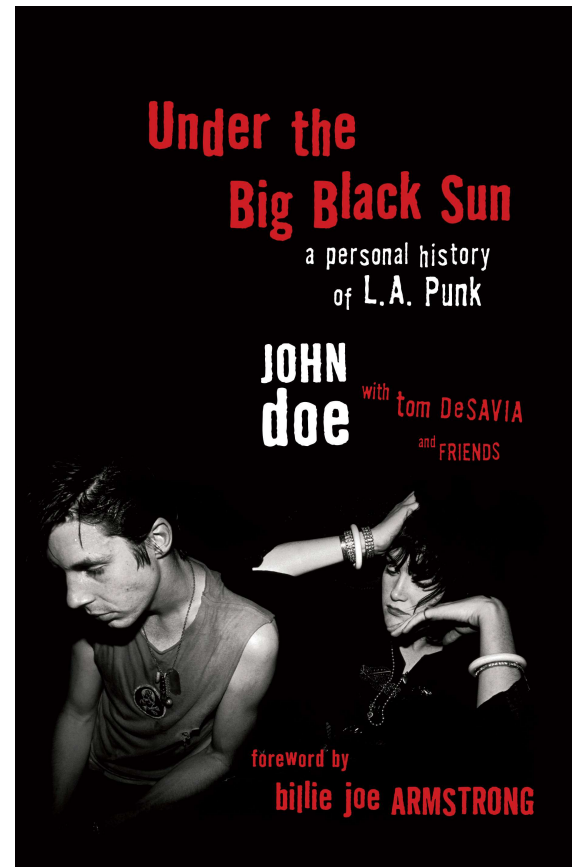
"No Slow Songs Tonight: 1979-1982," Dave Alvin's chapter, starts off at a concert on New Year's Eve 1981 at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles with about 5,000 people in attendance. Acts on the bill included the Blasters and Fear with the hardcore band Black Flag. It wasn't the standard show where the audience warmly welcomed and cheered the performers. Instead, the threat of confrontation and violence hung in the air. These were people who put the 'fan' in 'fanatics.' Dave writes: "It was more like a gathering of people alienated from consumer pop culture, who wanted to get fucked up past the point of feeling pain, ready and willing to beat each other into bloody pulps in the mosh pit or even attack the bands on stage as a primitive initiation rite into an exclusive alternative society of pain."

He uses that show as a jumping-off point to describe how the Blasters became associated with the punk scene: "The Blasters played really fast and really loud," he writes, allowing the band, "to compete sonically with most the cutting-edge groups on the LA scene."

As a result, the Blasters shared concert bills with acts across the musical spectrum, ranging from English rockers Queen and Western Swing band Asleep at the Wheel to surf rockers the Ventures and the Irish band the Boomtown Rats. That didn't mean the Blasters were universally accepted. Dave writes of several close encounters of being hit with beer bottles and was only saved by deflecting them with his prized 1964 Fender Mustang guitar. Amid the violence, a camaraderie and solidarity developed among the bands.

Dave writes of how Peter Case vowed that his band the Plimsouls wouldn't play if the Blasters were not reinstated on a bill at the Cuckoo's Nest Club in Costa Mesa, CA, in 1980. The Blasters would repay that generosity in offering opening spots to Los Lobos and Dwight Yoakam at their concerts as the Blasters' popularity grew across the country.

Under the Big Black Sun documents a pivotal time in popular music and shows how a musical scene evolved in the days before the Internet and social media. It's a welcome chronicle of an era that continues to influence popular music. —*Am*



Dave Alvin's Album Liner Notes

by Tom Wilk

Since the release of American Music, the Blasters' debut album in 1980, Dave Alvin has written or co-written more than 100 songs. But one facet of his music-related writing has been overlooked. Since the early 1990s, he has been a frequent author of liner notes for his solo albums and the Blasters, as well as CDs for a wide range of artists from Johnny Shines to Ray Charles to Dwight Yoakam.

Dave's prose is concise, thoughtful and revealing as he shares his thoughts on contemporary and classic music and his interactions with those who shaped his development as a musician. If things had turned out differently, there can be no doubt that he could have been a music writer.

For Tennessee Border, the 1992 album he co-produced for Sun Records artist Sonny Burgess, Dave described hearing Sonny's music for the first time: "It was like standing in the middle of an alley on a hot night, between a country bar and a blues club, with both back doors open."

Dave's best known notes might be the essay he wrote for Genius & Soul: The 50th Anniversary Collection, a 5-CD box set of Ray Charles music released in 1997. Dave's essay – "A Meeting With The Man" – recounts an encounter with Ray in an elevator in the 1980s. The event took place in San Francisco during a promotional appearance for Budweiser that featured both the Blasters and Ray, among other musicians.

Dave writes eloquently of Ray's contributions: "He had bulldozed the walls separating blues, gospel, jazz, R+B, Tin Pan Alley and show tunes. And he did it without changing his unique vocal style." Adds Dave: "I based my approach to songwriting on his eclectic philosophy."

Dave, along with the box set's other contributing authors (David Ritz, Jerry Wexler, Billy Vera) were nominated for a Grammy in the album notes category. They lost to the writers for The Harry Smith Anthology of Folk.

Dave also contributed his notes for a 2006 reissue of Freddie King's Live at the Electric Ballroom, 1974. In a brief narrative, Dave tells his story of being only 14 years old when he met Freddie King. Dave nervously asked Freddie a question backstage at the Ash Grove in Los Angeles about the

Dave Alvin Liners for

"American Music: The HighTone Records Story" box set.

HighTone Records gave me the opportunity to grow as an artist that few, if any other, labels would have. For that I am eternally grateful to Bruce Bromberg and Larry Sloven. If it hadn't been for them, I never would have found my voice as a singer/songwriter and I'd probably be either flipping burgers right now or something far, far worse. No artist can ask for more.

From the moment I first signed with HighTone, I felt at home. Because HighTone started as a blues label run by guys who also knew and loved serious country – and folk, norteno, rockabilly, Western Swing, zydeco and every other indigenous American music style – I never had to explain to them what I was trying to do musically. They understood completely. That was something I'd never experienced before in the music business.

I first knew of Bruce when I was just a kid, from reading his name on reissue LPs he compiled for the old Kent and Imperial labels of artists like Elmore James, the Soul Stirrers and Howlin' Wolf. I was also thoroughly impressed that the first record he ever produced, years before his success with Robert Cray, was by Lightnin' Hopkins. Solid credentials in my book. To finally meet and work and become close friends with one of my childhood heroes meant the world to me.

Larry was always patient with me when I would call him with new ideas or requests that were sometimes kinda silly and always encouraging when my ideas weren't so far off the mark. Whether I wanted to record a rocking electric album or a bare-boned acoustic CD, Larry stuck by me and my vision. He also helped me develop as a producer by giving me the chance to produce records I'm damned proud of by great talents like Chris Gaffney, Katy Moffatt, Tom Russell, Christy McWilson and Big Sandy & His Fly-Rite Boys.

Bruce, Larry and I didn't always see eye to eye on everything, but I never doubted that their intentions for me were good and that their hearts were in the right place. I can't say that about too many people I've met in this line of work. I'm extremely proud to have been part of the HighTone family and wish them all the best in their continuing mission of keeping American music alive and well. Thanks for everything, guys.

Dave Alvin May 2006

songwriter Billy Myles, who wrote HAVE YOU EVER LOVED A WOMAN. Dave came away impressed with Freddie's treatment of a young fan.

Dave's writing describes the guitarist's talents in a few, well-chosen words. "His playing was melodic, yet propulsive, tasteful yet overwhelming, technically perfect yet emotionally pure." Also in the blues category, Dave offered an appreciation of Johnny Shines on Skull & Crossbones Blues, an album he compiled for HighTone Records in 2003.

For other CDs, Dave has paid tribute to his contemporaries – Blasters pianist Gene Taylor on Live!!! 605 Boogie!!! in 2008 and country singer Dwight Yoakam on his Reprise, Please Baby box set from 2002. Dave also contributed an essay on Chris Gaffney for the 2009 tribute album Man of Somebody's Dreams: A Tribute to Chris Gaffney.

Dave recounted his memories of the first recording by the Blasters in the 1997 reissue of American Music and described what led him to make West of the West, his tribute to California songwriters, in 2006.

One of his lesser-known essays was for the band Radio Kings for their 1998 album Money Road; Dave sums up the promise and challenges of a musician's life on the road that still rings true today: "If I had my way, radio stations would play all types of music and there would be statues of Mississippi John Hurt, Little Walter and Big Joe Turner in every city park. Every gig would be a full house and every night would be Saturday," Dave wrote. "But at least I can hope enough people get a chance to hear the Radio Kings, and other young roots bands, and give them the opportunity to grow and find their own voice in the American Music tradition. I wish I could tell them it was going to be easy traveling out on the Money Road and that everyone is going to be a millionaire at the end of the line, but all I can honestly say is that The Radio Kings are headed in the right direction and best of luck to them. They deserve it." —AM

THE NEW ALBUM



**Featuring
Special Guests**

JOHN MAYER ROBERT CRAY DAVID HIDALGO

Presale April 8 2016
(with instant download of "Hunder Dollar Bill")
Worldwide Release May 6 2016

FLASHBACK EXCERPT: ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE 1981

Chris Morris has been a longtime chronicler of the Los Angeles music scene. He is the author of Los Lobos: Dream of Blue (University of Texas Press) and a contributing writer to John Doe's Under the Big Black Sun published in April 2016 by Da Capo. His book on the music of Bob Dylan, Together Through Life, will be published in May 2016 by ROTHCO Press. Chris penned the liner notes for The Blasters Collection, a 1991 anthology, and wrote one of the first, if not the first, stories about the Blasters in a national publication. It originally appeared in the March 19, 1981 issue of Rolling Stone and is copyrighted by Straight Arrow Publishers Inc.

NEW FACES: THE BLASTERS

BY CHRIS MORRIS

You can call the Blasters L.A.'s hottest club band – which they are – but don't call them rockabilly. "We play American music," says lead guitarist Dave Alvin. "If you want to call us a blues band, you can say we're the only blues band that plays blues in all its incarnations.

Indeed, the Blasters – Dave and his older brother, lead singer-rhythm guitarist Phil Alvin, drummer Bill Bateman and bassist John Bazz – make music that cuts across the spectrum of American roots music. Their robust live performances showcase the rockabilly of Sonny Burgess and Ray Campi, the rock & roll of Bill Haley, the blue yodels of Jimmie Rodgers, the swamp sound of Slim Harpo and the R&B of Otis Redding.

The quartet's original material, crafted faithfully in the American idiom and virtually indistinguishable from their obscure covers, has won them international attention. Dave Alvin's Chuck Berry-style "Marie Marie" has been covered in Great Britain, Germany and France; Shakin' Stevens' version cracked the English Top Twenty. Their sole recorded effort, *American Music*, is a hard-to-find item done in two days in a garage and released on the Rollin' Rock label.

The band members learned their lessons firsthand as teenagers in the L.A. suburb of Downey, where they listened to and played with such renowned musicians as singer Big Joe Turner, saxophonist Lee Allen, and guitarist T-Bone Walker. They first came together as a regular performing unit in 1979, and called themselves the Blasters in emulation of Oakland bluesman Jimmy McCracklin's Blues Blasters. Their big break came last summer when the English band Queen caught their act at Flipper's, a local roller disco.

"The Blasters had a genuine feel for basic rock & roll," says Queen drummer Roger Taylor. "We decided the next day we wanted them to open for us." The Blasters thus hit the road, playing eight shows for sometimes unappreciative Anglophile audiences. At year's end though, they were named L.A.'s best band (up from forty-eighth the year before) by a musicians' poll in the local trade *Music Connection*. Today, the Blasters are weighing offers from various independent labels. If the major record companies are unsure about the Blasters' salability, the band itself is convinced of the potency and universality of their passionate American music.

"You can put me anywhere in the world," Phil Alvin says. "I don't care if they speak my language, they'll listen!"

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