

American Music

The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

Nov. 2019

Phil Alvin Recovering

Latest News: Phil Alvin was hospitalized recently with a case of walking pneumonia. He had to leave the stage at a show in Morro Bay, CA, on 8/30/19 and go directly to the hospital. He was released a few days later, but then was readmitted when his condition wasn't improving. Phil is now home and resting.

A message from The Blasters (November 6, 2019)

We're very sorry to inform everyone, but we have to cancel all of our shows for the remainder of 2019. As some of you know, at the end of August, Phil Alvin came down with a serious case of walking pneumonia and is still recuperating. Hopefully with lengthy time to rest, he will be able to resume touring again beginning in 2020. We are sorry to disappoint our fans during this usually enjoyable holiday touring period, but it's for a good reason, so Phil can come back rested and strong!

We also apologize to all the musicians we were planning to play with during the end of 2019. Especially one of our comrades-in-arms, 'X,' who we were looking forward to supporting during their 2019 holiday show tour. Happy Holidays and see you in 2020! -- The Blasters

Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore have released a single called GOODBYE BABY to coincide with their European tour. It is available now for downloading and streaming at your favorite music service. In a 2018 interview with Lone Star Music magazine, Dave talked about the song: "There's an Elmore James song called GOODBYE BABY that Jimmie sings the hell out of," he raves. "We were like, 'it's that one, or 'LAWDY MISS CLAWDY on the record. I just went with LAWDY because it was really rocking. But it's as good as anything else on the record.'" - Dave Alvin played guitar on actress/singer Ronee Blakley's version of Bob Dylan's HURRICANE. The song will be included on her next album. -- (((continued on page 2)))



In This Issue: Steve Berlin Interview, Dave Alvin's King of California 25th Anniversary Tour, The Center of Nowhere movie, and a Chris Gaffney memorial concert.

Latest News ((continued from page 1)) — Phil and Dave Alvin have recorded WILD MAN ON THE LOOSE for If You're Going to the City: A Tribute to Mose Allison that will be released Nov. 29 on CD, LP and in digital formats on Fat Possum Records. The CD and LP will include a DVD copy of Ever Since I Stole the Blues, filmmaker Paul Bernays' documentary on Allison that was originally produced for the BBC in 2005. Allison was a songwriter and jazz/blues pianist whose recording career spanned seven decades before he died at 89 in November, 2016. Allison recorded WILD MAN ON THE LOOSE as the title track of a 1966 album. "It's an American phenomenon – what happens on Saturday night all over America," he once said in describing his song. Other artists on the tribute album include Taj Mahal, Peter Case, Bonnie Raitt, Robbie Fulks, Chrissie Hynde, Elvis Costello and Amy Allison. The album will benefit The Sweet Relief Musicians Fund, which provides assistance to musicians facing illness, disability, or age-related problems. -- Dave Alvin has been announced as a special guest on Reverend Horton Heat's 2019 Christmas tour. The Blasters did it in 2017 and 2018. Dave says: "I'll do like a guest appearance with a bunch of songs that will be definitely more rock n roll - some Blasters songs, some Dave Alvin songs." -- Dave Alvin visited and performed in Alaska in September 2019 as part of his Downey to Denali trip for Roots on the Rails. He noted in a Facebook post that he has now performed in all 50 states. -- Dave Alvin read two poems at a 99th birthday party celebration for Charles Bukowski. The event was held at the Ruskin Group Theatre in Santa Monica, CA, on Aug. 11. Dave read A POEM FOR CHARLES BUKOWSKI, which was included in Any Rough Times Are Now Behind You, his 1995 collection of poetry. Dave also read BUKOWSKI POEM, a new work. Both readings are available on YouTube. – On the last 3 dates of the Blasters August, 2019 tour, guitarist Keith Wyatt had pre-existing schedule conflicts and couldn't play the shows in Reno, Santa Cruz, and Morro Bay. Mike Eldred filled in and did a great job. – Dave Alvin and his studio drummer Don Heffington appeared on a podcast called Radio8Ball hosted by Andras Jones in May 2018. Dave and Don recorded a version of Bob Dylan's BLOWIN' IN THE WIND for the show with Don on the lead vocal. Radio8Ball.com -- Dave Alvin has hinted at his shows that he is writing a book. On 9/30, Dave Alvin posted on facebook about meeting Nick Lowe at a concert in Missouri. Dave used the phrase "when I write a damn book" saying that the anecdote about Nick telling him to sing FOURTH OF JULY will be included. – Dave Alvin has co-written a song on the new album Just Like Moby Dick by Terry Allen. The song is called DEATH OF THE LAST STRIPPER. The album will be released on January 24 on the Paradise of Bachelors label. Dave and Terry have performed together over the years and in 2016 Dave wrote an essay for the reissue of Terry's Juarez album. — **AM**



THE THIRD MIND

Dave Alvin has been talking this year about a 'psychedelic music project' he has been involved in with musician Victor Krummenacher from the alt rock band Camper Van Beethoven. The self-titled The Third Mind will be released in February. "I thought when we recorded it, that no one would get it - but people who have listened to it, loved it." Dave says. "There are 6 to 8 songs on the CD and on the vinyl there will be different versions. We have a remixed song that's even more psychedelic by Tchad Blake on there. It's like 17 minutes long." Looking ahead to a U.S. tour in the spring Dave hesitates to think and says: "We might play some Dave Alvin songs, but they will be very different. There's another singer on the album called Jesse Sykes. If she can do the tour, she has songs that we will also play."



Steve Berlin

Steve Berlin is a saxophonist, keyboardist and highly sought-after record producer. He is best known as a member of Los Lobos and in the early 1980s, the Blasters. Steve is a longtime mainstay of the Los Angeles music scene playing and producing countless sessions. He has won multiple Grammy Awards working with Los Lobos, Buckwheat Zydeco, Ozomatli, John Lee Hooker and Los Super Seven. His connection to the Blasters continues today as a member of the Flesh Eaters.

Steve sat down with American Music: The Blasters Newsletter to talk about his musical history and association with the Blasters and its members.

I grew up in the late 1960s into Cream, Fleetwood Mac and the like. They were all early touchstones. I really wanted to be a drummer, but I'm a terrible drummer (laughs). Me and a friend, who is still my best friend, were both playing drums and auditioned for a neighborhood band, they picked him. I didn't want to be left out, so I started playing flute.

I eventually migrated to soprano sax after hearing John Coltrane and Roland Kirk. So, I went sideways into Jazz. The Jazz band I was playing in became a band that was more like 'white R&B' - if I had to label it. A vague parallel could be like Boz Scaggs' Silk Degrees album - but a little jazzier. I was the youngest and the worst musician, some of those guys were pros who played on Philly International Records. One guy went on to play with Frank Zappa for many

years, another went to, and is still playing with Todd Rundgren. They were highly respected dudes in the Philadelphia music community. It was a great learning experience for me. That band got a gig in Somers Point, N.J., which is a small town with eight blocks of bars that stayed open until 7:00 in the morning. Our band played from 1 to 7 am, thirteen nights on and 1 night off.

I was all of 15 years old and thought this was the pinnacle of my life. How could it get any better than this? In many ways I was right (laughs). I had my own place, making plenty of money. I could sleep until 3 or 4 in the afternoon. It was pretty cool for a high school kid.

These guys trained me to always be open, whether its jazz, blues, rock or whatever. In our world to hang with us, a musician had better be ready to play anything, do it with confidence, enjoy it, and put their own stamp on it. That training opened me up to a lot of styles.

Prior to me coming to Southern California in 1975, I was a dilettante in many things. I knew more about rock of that era and not much about jazz or blues. That band moved to the west coast without me and got gigs out there backing up both Gregg Allman and Billy Preston - if you can believe that. They implored me to join them. The gigs sounded really cool, so at 19 years old, I left the East Coast. Within a week of me arriving in California, they lost both those gigs. I didn't get to meet Billy Preston, but I did one rehearsal with Gregg Allman. That was the period when he was with Cher. After that rehearsal, Gregg went on a two-week bender and disappeared off the face of the earth. They finally found him, put him in the bin, and that was it for his career for the next few years.

We reformulated that band and started playing around L.A. in '76 and '77. We got a gig playing every Monday night across from the Scientology Center. All the impressionable Scientology actors and actresses came in to see us (laughs) - which was fun. That band called The Beckmeier Brothers, got signed to Casablanca Records which was a label that became notorious as – and there's no easier way to put this - a drug running, money laundering operation disguised as a record label. All the transactions I saw were made in cocaine instead of money.

That was the only record we did for Casablanca. As that band was devolving, I became aware of the L.A. Punk Rock scene in Hollywood.

I was entering the consciousness of the Blasters by hanging out with people. A very important part of that story is a guy named Phast Phreddie who was very close to the Alvin brothers, and a fellow record collector. He was the linchpin of a lot of what happened to me in that era. He introduced me to the Alvin brothers and other people that became very important in my life. He showed me a lot of great





Photo: Gary Leonard

music that I was unaware of. He remains an unparalleled record collector with taste in everything. I played in Phast Phreddie's bands, I played with The Plugz, who were one of the best bands in L.A. at that time and got invited to the Alvins' record parties. Those parties really amounted to a bunch of dudes with 12-packs of beer arguing about records (laughs). It was an amazing exciting time. The Blasters had just formed, and all these great bands were brand new. Los Lobos had

already been together for 7 years while everyone else was trying to figure out how to walk. Then I got invited to join Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs, which was another very important band in L.A. Top Jimmy was a colorful character who pretty much lived an authentic blues life-style – all day drinkin' – all day druggin'. He got his name from working at a Taco stand called 'Top Taco.'

We had a Monday night gig at the Cathay de Grande club and that was really notorious. Everyone would hang out in this place which was downstairs in a Chinese restaurant. The toilets would routinely flood so it always smelled like shit. But it was a perfect growth environment for a lot of things.

In 1981, I was still playing in so many different bands like Phast Phreddie and Top Jimmy. I often had 3 or 4 gigs a night. I lived in Venice, CA, in an apartment paying only \$170 rent, so life was free and easy. There were only two sax players on the scene - me and Spider Middleman. We were the only ones to call when bands needed a sax.

I joined the Flesh Eaters in early 1981. I can't remember how I got into the band. It must have been Dave (Alvin) who asked me. I had come to know Dave and Bill (Bateman) as friends. I was star-struck playing with John Doe and Don (DJ) Bonebrake because I was a huge 'X' fan. I thought they were the coolest people in the world at that time. The first day I rehearsed with them I was scared thinking that I didn't belong. They were such titans to me. The Flesh Eaters record, A Minute To Pray A Second to Die, was a lot





of fun to make. The record took about 2 to 3 days to record and pretty much Dave, John, and Chris led the sessions. The music style is clearly Chris D.'s but was a project in 1981 by a bunch of friends who said: "Wouldn't this be fun."

This all factors into the narrowing circles of Blaster-dom for me. The outer ring was me in a band with Phast Freddie and Top Jimmy, then the middle ring with Dave and Bill in the Flesh Eaters, and then the inner ring was complete

when I got a call when I was working at a music store called Bettman's Music. Dave Alvin said: "We have a recording session tonight for a song called I'M SHAKIN.' Do you wanna play baritone sax on it?" I didn't own a baritone, but as I was on the phone, I looked at one in the store and told him, "Yes. I have one right here." It was in a case and I hadn't even looked to see if it was in there (laughs) – much less ever played one before. But that's the one I played at the session, then at live shows with the Blasters. I still own that baritone. It's a very special horn that was built in the 1930s, then retrofitted in the 1950s with extra bracing for traveling. There's no other horn that plays like that one.

I went down to United Western Studio in Hollywood, where The Blasters were recording and got to meet Lee Allen, who was sort of a hero of mine. My education was so instant and expansive that I hadn't really focused on what a genius Lee really was. I heard all the hits he was on, but the Clovers and the Clowns and the deeper cuts I later was made aware of. Then when I actually joined the Blasters he became my best friend and my roommate for the better part of two years.

I don't remember a whole lot about the sessions. My studio experience at that time was extremely limited, so I was just overwhelmed being there. It was something I had been dreaming about my whole life. We cut I'M SHAKIN', SO LONG BABY GOODBYE and HOLLYWOOD BED. They were pretty much live. The sound of that band was pretty amazing. Phil, Dave, Bill and Gene would be arguing about, what effectively is, minutiae while engineer Pat Burnette was calling the shots on the session. I kept my mouth shut. I kept quiet even in my time in the band. I didn't need to share my opinion, the rest of the band were well versed in what the Blasters were.

Dave said the sessions went well. He called me later on and said: "The Blasters are doing a run of shows in Texas starting in Dallas. Can you go?" I quit my job right away. I was gonna make \$100 a week, which is what I was making at the music store anyway. So, I dropped everything to officially become a Blaster. I remember arriving in Dallas. I had never been on the road before. Lee and I got picked up in this convertible by some friends of his. There were



like seven of us including some girls, just drinkin' beer and driving around. It was cool.

The touring was fun, but the constant fighting amongst the brothers and everybody went on and on. I never knew what tours were like so I assumed that arguing in a band is just what happened. But I was experiencing life on the road with one of my favorite bands – they are still one of my favorite

bands. All through this, I was learning life on the road, but I was still aspiring to be a producer.

I was still in the Blasters when I produced the Lobos album And a Time To Dance in 1983. I was actively trying to get producer gigs, meanwhile still playing in the Blasters but starting to grow unfulfilled in many regards. The fighting was one and the inability to say anything became an issue because I was the lowest guy on the band totem pole. I didn't know then, but I could sort of see Dave moving away from the band. I thought Dave's songs were being aimed more at his development as a songwriter and the horns were being phased out. I loved Dave's songs, he was growing into what is without a doubt one of America's best songwriters.

I was around for the beginning of the recording of the Hard line album in 1984. I will always love the Blasters and they made me who I am. I'm not sure if I made the decision to join Los Lobos, but as I got to know them and be in their world, I noticed they didn't fight about the weather. They treated each other with civility and were gentlemanly in a way that quite frankly, the Blasters never were from the beginning. It opened my eyes to a certain extent. The Los Lobos guys treated me with an enormous amount of respect and I can't say that I deserved any of it (laughs).

There were a number of times with Los Lobos, that I found myself yelling, because that's all I knew. They would look at me quizzically and say; "Who are you yelling at? Why?"

The first thing I did with Los Lobos was a compilation record that was executive produced by Art Fein called L.A. Rockabilly (1982, Rhino Records). I produced a song called WE'RE GONNA ROCK. I also produced another song for them for a movie. Then they got signed to Slash Records and asked me to produce their album with T Bone Bur-



nett - who I only know from being in the Bob Dylan world. He hadn't accumulated that much more than me of a production resume and wasn't the cult figure that he is now. That album was a big success. Then soon after, the Blasters and Lobos were both leaving on tour the same day. I just made a last-minute decision and called Dave and told him I was going to Lobos. He said: "Okay, cool! He didn't even try to talk me out of it. That was the end of my Blasters days and the start of my Lobos days (October, 1984).

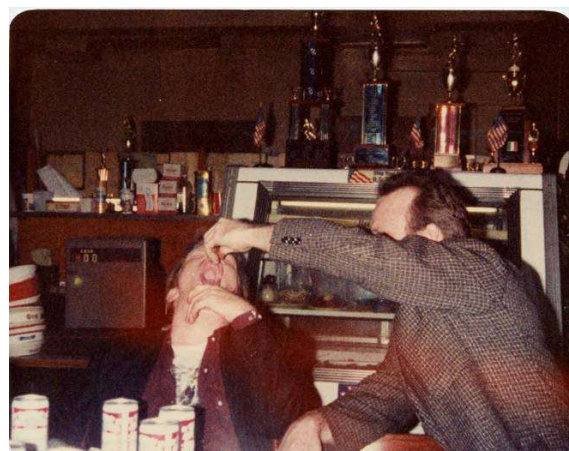


AM: Favorite moments of your time in The Blasters?

SB: Certainly when we headlined The Whiskey and I got to meet the Lobos guys who opened for us. That was a big one. Then playing the London Venue in 1982 and recording the live EP. It was super exciting playing American Music for Brits and making that record. I remember we blew them away on that tour. I also loved going to New York City the first time. We were on MTV and that Soundstage PBS Special and American Bandstand. We were on fire for a few years. But my favorite thing was playing with Lee Allen. What a guy! Such a gentleman! We were instantly team mates even though it was really a master / student relationship. He shared everything with me. He enjoyed drinking as we all did. He loved his scotch. I'd have to hold him up some nights, but he could still play beautifully and engage the audience. He was a showman – a star from the day he was born. When he was on a stage you could not help but watch him, even when sharing the stage with guys as dynamic as the Alvin brothers who were pretty damn compelling performers themselves. Lee owned it and embraced it.

Am: Any funny moments in the Blasters.

SB: So many. I remember in New Orleans we played Jimmy's and then went to an oyster bar in the 9th ward. We were all eating oysters and having a good time while Dave, whose diet consists of just cheeseburgers, said loudly: "I wouldn't touch the food with a ten-foot pole!" The whole bar heard him and turned against him (laughs). I remember Phil taunting him saying: "David, I'll give you twenty bucks if you eat an oyster." Another guy yelled: "I'll give him Fifty," and another said: "I'll give him \$100 (laughs)." Dave was sinking into his seat and said: "I'm not gonna eat an oyster no matter how much



money you throw at me!” (laughs).

AM: Your next association with the Blasters guys was in 1987 when you, Dave Alvin, and Mark Linett co-produced the Border Radio Soundtrack for Enigma records.

SB: The director Allison Anders was a huge Blasters fan, so she asked us to score it. We had no idea what that meant, so we just went for it. We watched a scene, talked about it and noodled around.

AM: Then you produced Dave Alvin’s first solo album Romeo’s Escape (1987 Epic/CBS Records).

SB: I had already produced the first two Lobos albums, so I had achieved somewhat of a profile. This one on Epic was one of my first major label projects. We used the same team as on Border Radio – Me, Dave and Mark Linnet. Greg Leisz was in there, though he didn’t get production credit. He certainly was the best musician involved and had a huge part in it. I could see in the studio that it was the first time that Dave was completely free. He wasn’t really totally under the thumb of Phil in the Blasters, but he now didn’t have worry about having anyone else’s approval on songs. He was now figuring out who he was and what he wanted to do.

AM: Was there any pressure from Epic/CBS about what they wanted recorded?

SB: I don’t recall. The record company wanted to get in on what was going on in L.A. at the time. I don’t think they had any expectations but respected Dave to write good songs.

AM: How did you handle Dave, who was singing for the first time in his career?

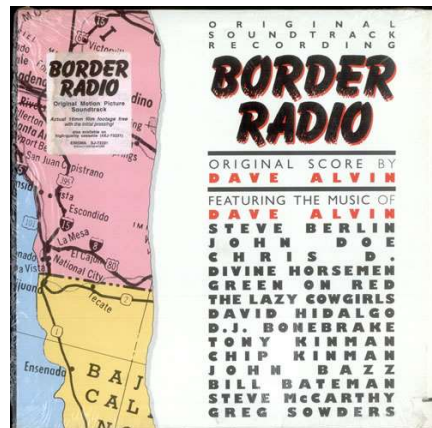
SB: I know Dave was not a confident singer. My job was to supply him with that confidence. He definitely has a unique voice and I did my best to let him know that. The important thing was that he was singing in his own voice and interpreting his songs the way he wanted. He didn’t have to live up to anything. I always found his songs super compelling and these were no different.

AM: The Flesh Eaters reunited in 2019 with a new album and tour. How did it come about?

SB: That was amazing to do the new album and tour. We’ve gotten together a few times over the years. Last time was the Mudhoney festival in England in 2006, and then we did a tour up and down the west coast a few years ago. Flesh Eaters music is timeless. It has no time stamp on it and when we play, it’s ‘religious-like.’

We got a lot of positive feedback from those shows, so we planned to do an EP of songs that we play in the live set that haven’t appeared on an album. Then suddenly new songs were coming out of Chris D. so it became an LP. The recording process was seamless. There was no one dictating. Chris generally wrote the songs and we figured out our parts.

When we made the deal with Yep Roc Records, their only stipulation was that we had to tour to support the release - so that’s how the cross-country tour (March, 2019) came about. We all had to clear our schedules a year in advance, which wasn’t easy, to make the recording and



tour happen. The tour was amazing. Every night was great - some nights got really intense. After the tour, I suggested to management that we make this an annual thing. I hope it happens.

AM: On December 28, 2018 You played with the Blasters at the Observatory in Santa Ana, CA, for the first time in a long time.

SB: Yes. It was great. I played on I'M SHAKIN' and SO LONG BABY GOOD-BYE. This is gonna sound funny, but they never asked me to play with them all these years (laughs). I'm so honored and happy that they did recently. Anytime they want to do it again, I'm all for it. It brought back memories, even though it was difficult without Lee Allen being there. I can't tell you how much and how deeply I thought of Lee Allen. It meant so much to me to play again with guys that are responsible for everything that's happened in my career. I'm happy they are still my friends and we're all still here and making music. 40 years is a long time.

AM: What are you currently working on?

SB: I'm still producing a lot of records. Most recently, a band called 'Making Movies' from Kansas City who are so good that when people see them they ask: 'Why are they not international superstars?' They are world class. Also, I worked with a band called 'Tap Water' from Portland, Oregon where I live. Los Lobos is talking about doing a Christmas record. This will be our first and hope to have it out in December. We're all signing on and committing to do it. And Lobos will be out this summer of 2019 doing shows.

I remain the luckiest guy I know. I get to do what I want to do and play with whoever I want. I owe it all to the Blasters. —**AM**



By Billy Davis

2019 marks the 25th anniversary of the release of Dave Alvin's most well-known album King of California. Craft Recordings re-released the album on CD and vinyl formats with bonus tracks. To celebrate the occasion, Dave Alvin did an acoustic tour of the U.S. playing the King of California album in its entirety.

Dave: "Some of the songs like KING, I've never stopped playing, but songs like BARN BURNING and BUS STA-

TION I haven't done in a long time. GOODBYE AGAIN is one I don't think I've ever done live, maybe once."

The 1994 album was produced by Greg Leisz and his instrumentation played a big part in the sound on 12 of the 13 songs. Dave really wanted Greg Leisz on the tour. Greg is currently an in-demand session and touring musician. In fact, Dave had to pry him away from Jackson Browne for the east and west coast legs of the tour. Greg played 8 of the 21 King of California shows. "It was great to play again with Greg." Dave smiles, "We never get the chance. It was fun to play with all the musicians because they all bring different things to the songs."

Long time Guilty Ones guitarist Chris Miller took over the guitar accompanying duties on 12 shows. Dave: "Chris played acoustic guitar with me on a bunch of songs. I really liked his electric slide guitar on LITTLE HONEY and BARN BURNING." On one show in Pawling, N.Y. at Daryl's House, Cindy Cashdollar formerly of the Guilty Women played the lead guitar role on lap slide and dobro.

Dave Alvin couldn't do the tour without a female voice for the album's two duet songs and backing vocals, so he brought in another former Guilty Women member Christy McWilson. She was able to do 13 shows. Cindy



Wasserman of the band Dead Rock West covered the other 8 shows.

Dave opened the King of California set with a quick pairing of KING OF CALIFORNIA and BARN BURNING then announced to the audience that he would be playing the whole album in sequence. That brought a big applause as Dave interrupted: "But there is a problem with that. When you sequence an album, you put all



the hits at the beginning. For a live show the hits, so to speak, go at the end. The rest of the songs are pretty good and I wrote most of them, but...," as the audience chuckled, Dave continued: "If you came for the hits. . .you can leave after this next one." The audience laughed as he started FOURTH OF JULY.

Next was the rarely played GOODBYE AGAIN. "I was always fascinated by the duets of Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn," Dave remembers, "It's the first song I wrote as a duet. My dear friend Rosie Flores sang it with me on the record."

Throughout the tour as Dave would kill time while tuning his guitar, he would hint at this funny story that influenced the lyric writing of GOODBYE AGAIN. In Pawling, NY, he got to tell the whole story. Back in the 70s, he and his dad painted his red Toyota with white house paint to try to woo a girl back to him. He wound up with a pink Toyota. She wanted Dave to have "A tripped out van" so the best he could do was add shag carpeting and paint the interior blue. He thought he could impress her with an AM radio. Christy commented that Dave's story expands each night with more detail. Dave said: "This is a tribute to the pink Toyota."

Dave followed with his solo acoustic blues song by Whistlin' Alex Moore called EAST TEXAS BLUES. On the original recording it was the only song on the album that Dave played unaccompanied. Greg Leisz played some slide guitar in the background of the song on this tour.

Dave's songs all have stories and the next one called EVERY NIGHT ABOUT THIS TIME has always amused Dave to tell onstage: "When I wrote this song, I heard George Jones was going to record it. So, I planned a trip to Nashville to see the recording session. And just like in

one of those cliched movies, I had my bag packed and plane ticket in hand and just as I was walking out, I got a call. I'm not sure who it was - it could have been the record company, George's manager or a producer and he said 'Don't bother coming out here.' George isn't gonna record the song. It's too country for George Jones." As usual, that last line brought lots of laughter from the audience.

Dave deviated from the album song list by announcing he would play a bonus track from the new Craft Recordings release. It was a song called RIVERBED RAG that Dave explained "We all grew up along the San Gabriel river." As he referred to his bandmates, "I wrote this instrumental as a tribute to that river."

A highlight of the night came when Dave played the rarely played song called BUS STATION. The song was originally recorded by the Blasters in the 80s but the version on King of California is a more heart-felt one. "Songs are like children to me," Dave revealed, "Some are loud brats and some like this one are shy and doesn't want to come out. This one is very near and dear to my heart. When I finish a book, that I'm currently writing, there will be a full chapter about this song. It's a song that I never play live, but it's gonna come out of its shell right now."

MOTHER EARTH is a Memphis Slim song originally done on piano and Dave adapted it into a guitar song. Next Dave played BLUE WING but not without a lot of words in setting it up. Dave

Philadelphia at World Café – 7/20/19

Report by Tom Wilk

Dave put on a good show that night. He seemed in good spirits and told a fair amount of stories about the King of California songs. He and Greg Leisz were seated on chairs and Greg played a variety of guitars, mandolin, and dobro during the set. It was the first time I had seen Dave play an acoustic show since 2005 in Philadelphia. That show was at The Tin Angel.

During the show, Dave made a few light-hearted references to writing a book. It sounds like he is writing a memoir.

Christy McWilson played about half a dozen songs in the opening act. She played guitar and sang and showed a sense of humor. She walked on stage and said, "Without fanfare or introduction, I'm Christy McWilson." For her final song, she did DIFFERENT DRUM, which was written by Mike Nesmith and a hit for Linda Ronstadt. Jenny, who handles the merchandise table for Dave and Christy, came onstage to sing with her. Christy had done the song in a sound check a couple of days earlier and Jenny started singing along. Dave suggested that Christy do the song during the show and have Jenny join her onstage. I later talked to Jenny and she said it was the second time they had done the song together.



has talked much over the years how much this song that Tom Russell wrote means to him. "This another song that will have its own chapter when I write a book." Dave revealed, "It changed my life when I was in a very dark place. Tom and I have become close friends over the years and have written many songs. But if I would have written this one, I would have quit. That's how good this is."

LITTLE HONEY was another Blaster ballad that Dave re-recorded as a softer ballad. He played it often in his 1990s acoustic tours and would segues into Bo Diddley's WHO DO YOU LOVE. He did that same version again. Next Dave said, "I wrote this with my old rascal buddy John Doe." I WONT BE LEAVING – "It's a tribute to Jerry Butler. It's kind of an early 60's Chicago soul song."

WHAT AM I WORTH – Originally a duet on the album by singer Syd Straw but one that Dave has done often over the years with Christy McWilson. At the New York City Winery show Dave reminisced about the last time he and Greg Leisz played New York City together. "We played at Alan Pepper's club The Bottom Line doing 2 shows on a Monday or Tuesday night. In those days, times were tough and Greg and I had to sleep on floors. That time we slept on the floor of a friend of ours – a singer named Syd Straw.

She had a comfortable floor (laughs). When I recorded this, I thought of Syd to sing it with me."

The last song off the King of California album was BORDER RADIO. "This song has become culturally irrelevant." Dave said, "In this time of easy communication you can find anyone - just google them. When I was a kid, communication was difficult. This song is about Mexican radio stations." He



explained that these stations would broadcast a high wattage signal that could be heard across the country. People could reach their long-distance loves by dedicating songs to them.

Dave mentioned that it was the last song, which brought some audible sighs of disappointment from the crowd. Dave reassured them that if they went to the merch table and purchased the new King of California CD they could enjoy 3 more bonus songs after BORDER RADIO.

The band members left the stage before their encore at the NYC show. When Dave returned, a fan yelled "Do another album!" Dave laughed and said, "We could." But instead they finished with ABILENE and then KERN RIVER which is a song Dave recorded in the '90s for the Tulare Dust: A Tribute to Merle Haggard CD. That original recording is one of the new CD's bonus tracks.

Dave continued the river theme by adding one last song: DRY RIVER which is about the Rio San Gabriel. Christy sang the second verse and Greg played some great solos on the song to a rousing finish.

The one show in Pawling, NY, that Cindy Cashdollar played guitar in place of Greg Leisz was quite a feat. She played many shows with Dave as a member of the Guilty Women band, but had only previously played on four of the songs in this set. Dave was impressed and announced to the audience "Cindy had zero rehearsal." Cindy did an amazing job and played mostly lap slide on a dobro.

Having Cindy Cashdollar and Christy McWilson together onstage was a partial Guilty Women band reunion, so Dave took the opportunity to do a Christy McWilson lead vocal song from those days called WEIGHT OF THE WORLD.

There were so many highlights of the tour seeing the different musicians interpret the songs and seeing so many rare songs performed. Dave said: "I really enjoyed doing the unreleased instrumental RIVERBED RAG. That was neat. My only complaint about the tour was that at times I was screaming inside to play some electric guitar. (laughs). I haven't done that long an acoustic run for many years." —~~Am~~



Cindy Wasserman -- My time with Dave!

It goes without saying that I LOVE DAVE. And not only do I love Dave as a dear friend, but I truly am one of his biggest fans. He's filled with the 'Magic' that people try to chase down their whole lives, but for Dave, it's just in his blood. I am blown away by his accomplishments. And it's clear there are many more to come in his future.

I am so honored, as cliché as it sounds, to have been a part of the King of California 25th anniversary tour with Dave Alvin and Chris Miller on guitar.

First, my band Dead Rock West was asked to open the shows on the mid-western leg of the tour. We excitedly said "Yes!" Frankie Lee Drennan and I prepared to open as a duo.

Dave then asked me: "Would you want to sing a few songs with me?" My excitement at being asked to sing with him is hard to describe in words. It always is. A cop out you may say? I think not... just watch a video of Dave playing or singing, and you may get the same butterflies that I do.

In my naivete, I thought I was "singing just a few songs" until I spoke with our friend and tour manager extraordinaire, Danny Bland. Danny said "No silly. You're singing ALL the girl parts on the record," and he then went on to list them all. I was suddenly in a panic.

I have sung with Dave before onstage in a group vocal context with my bandmate Frankie Lee Drennan on other tours with Dave. I have also been blessed to sing on a few of Dave's recordings, but I stupidly had no idea that he was asking me to sing all of the female parts on the King of California mid-western dates!

I was starting to feel excited, horrified, and nervous but super grateful for the opportunity and the challenge of this. Now, the way I prepare for anything like this, studio, show or tour is that I study. And I study hard. It goes back to my early days as an actress, learning the lines, the character and then infusing it with my own personality. And I do it long before I walk in the band rehearsal room.

I studied by listening over and over to the King of California record. There are such amazing voices on those recordings - Rosie Flores and Syd Straw. Wow! What hard acts to follow. I drove around the great golden state listening to King of California over and over. It

seemed fitting to drive the landscape and study. I realized even more, what a great record this is - which scared me more as it sunk in that I was going to get to sing these tunes with Dave in a live setting.

Then it was rehearsal time with Dave. We only got one in before leaving on the road. I was scared to say the least. We got through it alright, with Dave being nothing but gracious at my first attempts. We had one more practice at the soundcheck in Minneapolis. I was still feeling fairly shaky. I was sweating and my heart was racing. I hoped that I was ready for him as we tried the Rosie Flores duet GOODBYE AGAIN.

"Well here we go!" I thought as the show began that night. What an amazing experience to be onstage and singing duets and harmonies with 'the King of California!'



As each night passed, I became a bit more confident, less scared and more excited. Frankie Lee and I were having a fantastic time opening the shows, and the audiences were so welcoming. And then joining Dave every night was simply fantastic.

Dave is amazing to perform with. His energy is contagious. He's spontaneous and joyous. He is also very giving onstage and aware of what the others are doing. Not to sound over the top, but this experience has truly been one of the great joys of my lifetime.

By the end of the run I just wished there was more. Thanks to my wonderful friend Dave Alvin, Chris Miller, Danny Bland and Dave's manager Nancy Sefton for this chance of a lifetime. I will never forget it. — **AM**

1994 *King of California* press release

King of California is my 3rd solo album for HighTone, and it's a bit different from *Museum of Heart* (93) and *Blue Boulevard* (91), my previous releases on the label. For one thing, I stripped down the instrumentation. In addition to some new original songs, I've included a few covers, and some songs I previously recorded solo, or with my first band, the Blasters.

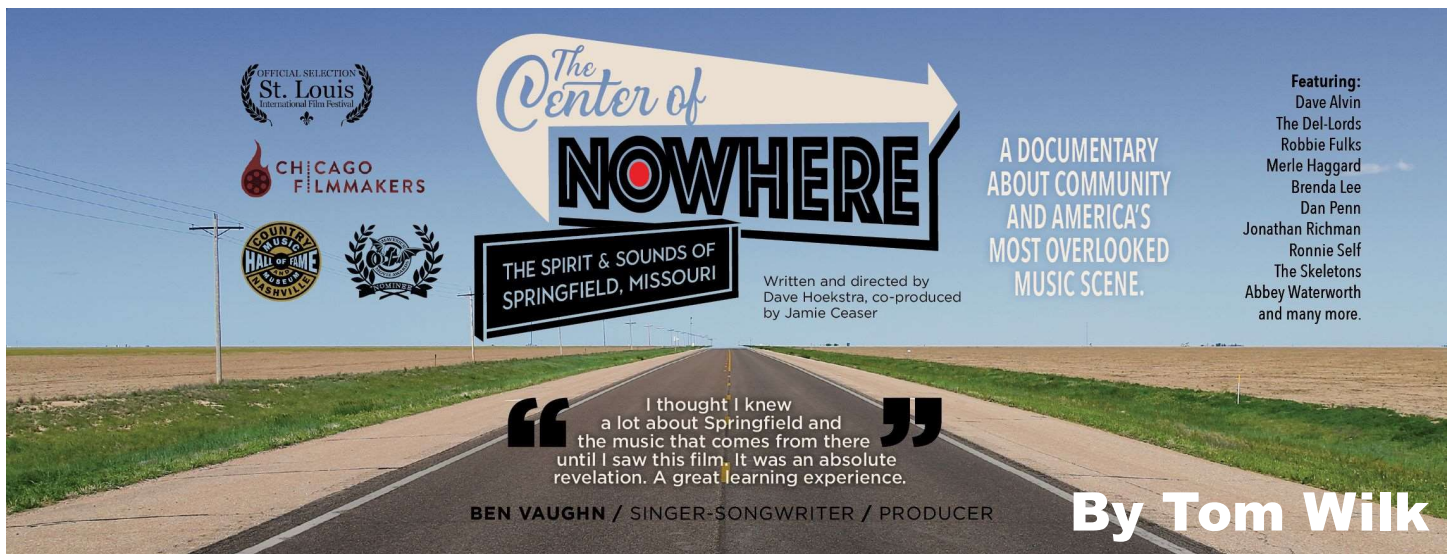
Current trends and fads aside, I've wanted to do a "quieter" collection of old, new, borrowed and blue songs for some time. It can be difficult trying to please the people who want to hear sweaty, electric rock 'n' roll, as well as the fans who are more interested in contemplating the lyrics. I think *King of California* is mainly for the latter group.

A lot of the shows I've done while touring these past few years have been solo acoustic, or with Greg Leisz as fellow traveler/accompanist. I noticed my vocals changing, arrangements changing, sometimes even the meaning of songs changed. I wanted to document that change on this record. I also wanted to re-cut songs like "Fourth of July" from my first solo album *Romeo's Escape*, because, to be perfectly honest, I can sing 'em better now. I chose a couple of more obscure Blasters songs to record ("Bus Station," "Barn Burning") because these songs mean as much to me as the better-known ones.

I've always been attracted to story-songs and on the title track, "King of California," I tell the story of a gold rush era dreamer who comes west looking for the promised land. From gold rush times through the golden age of Hollywood up to today, California has been perceived as a place where dreams come true but it's also the end of the continent, the end of the road for dreamers. A lot of the songs on *King of California* have to do with people realizing their dreams may not come true and trying to figure out just where to go from there.

I rarely cover other people's material but songs like Tom Russell's "Blue Wing" and Alex Moore's "East Texas Blues" easily fit the mood and themes of my songs; losers praying to win and people trying to survive day to day while keeping their hearts intact.

Greg Leisz, who you may know from his work with k.d. lang, Matthew Sweet, Rosie Flores and countless others, applied his musical genius and, most importantly, his endless patience to producing this record. I hope you like it. — Dave Alvin, May 1994



It's more than 1,600 miles from Springfield, Mo, to Los Angeles, where Dave Alvin lives. Despite the distance, the Southwestern Missouri city has influenced his music as a solo artist. The Skeletons served as his touring band in the early 1990s and keyboardist Joe Terry and drummer Bobby Lloyd Hicks were musical cornerstones of the Guilty Men for more than a decade.

They are just one part of the city's rich musical and cultural legacy that writer/filmmaker Dave Hoekstra explores in his entertaining and educational documentary The Center of Nowhere: The Spirit and Sounds of Springfield, Mo.

"Of all the cities that size, I think it's one of the last undiscovered music scenes in America," Hoekstra said during a phone interview from his home in suburban Chicago. "It was a hotbed of music in its way," Alvin said during a film interview, pointing to such artists as Porter Wagoner and Wynn Stewart who had roots in the region. "Springfield was what American music was like before it was centralized in New York, Nashville, or Los Angeles."

Hoekstra traces Springfield's musical history with an informative look at the Ozark Jubilee, a nationally broadcast TV series hosted by Red Foley that aired from 1955 to 1960 and featured such stars as Brenda Lee, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Patsy Cline. The show brought country music to a national audience. Other segments of the film are devoted to the Skeletons and the band's bassist/producer/studio owner Lou Whitney and singer/songwriter Ronnie Self and songwriter Wayne Carson, who wrote



Dave Hoekstra and Brenda Lee

or co-wrote such hits as *THE LETTER*, *NEON RAINBOW*, and *ALWAYS ON MY MIND*.

When Carson used his songwriting royalties to open a recording studio, he did so in Springfield, not Nashville, Hoekstra noted. The facility became a magnet for young musicians in the area, giving them the chance to learn about the music business and the recording process.

"It's fair to say Wayne's studio resulted in Lou (Whitney) opening his own studio," Hoekstra said. Whitney joked that Springfield was the "Center of Nowhere" because of its location away from

major cities. At 'The Studio,' his generic name for his recording center, however, he worked with more than 1,000 local, regional and national acts before his death at 71 in 2014. Performers that Whitney and the Skeletons worked or toured with include Jonathan Richman, Steve Forbert, Wilco, and Syd Straw.

In the film, Joe Terry observed that Springfield had the feel of a 'Midwestern Muscle Shoals' as he and the Skeletons worked with a diverse range of musicians.

"It's not really near anything," Robbie Fulks said of Springfield where he recorded his South Mouth album with the Skeletons in 1997. "Isolation is a pro and con," he added but he felt a sense of fun and camaraderie with the band.

Whitney made an immediate connection with those he worked with on stage and in the studio. "Right off the bat, you felt he could have had a weird religious cult in the Ozarks," Dave Alvin said in recalling Whitney's charisma and engaging personality. "He had the gift of gab."

The Center of Nowhere features interviews with more than two dozen people including Brenda Lee, Skeletons guitarist Donnie Thompson, singer/songwriter Dan Penn, Mike 'Supe' Granda of the Ozark Mountain Daredevils and country music leg-

end Merle Haggard. "I think it's Merle's last interview before a camera," says Hoekstra, who spoke with him about his memories of the Ozark Jubilee about six months before his death in April, 2016.



Animation by Sharon Rutledge

The Center of Nowhere artfully mixes contemporary and archival footage, but also includes the unexpected – close to a dozen animated sequences done by Sharon Rutledge.

"It's a nice surprise for people," Hoekstra said. "We used animation for stuff we didn't have footage of, such as Ronnie Self." One sequence involves a Skeletons/Alvin tour and a late-night anecdote between Whitney and Alvin on the University of Delaware's mascot.

While Hoekstra, 64, has spent eight years putting the film together and has screened the documentary in several cities to positive reviews, his work isn't complete. He's conducting a fund-raising campaign with the help of Chicago Filmmakers to pay his crew, which includes former 60 Minutes cameraman Tom Vlodek, and to cover the cost of using more than two dozen songs in the film.

"We're hoping to raise \$250,000," he said with the goal of getting the movie available via Netflix, Amazon and other streaming services. Donations can be made at www.songsofanunsungamerica.com/sneakpreviews/ and excerpts of the movie can be seen there as well. —*am*

Dave Alvin: "I really liked the film. It's great to see Lou and Bobby Lloyd alive.

Springfield is a weird little town, but because of where it's located' it doesn't get the recognition it deserves. It's an important music town. Dave Hoekstra did a great job capturing it all - especially Lou Whitney who was quite a character."

Chris Gaffney's Memorial Concert Shows His Legacy is in Good Hands by Steve Donofrio (reprinted from the OC Weekly)

It's been 10 years since singer-songwriter/multi-instrumentalist, Chris Gaffney, passed away, but his personal legacy remains as strong as his musical one. Behind the mass of compelling, genre-spanning songs was a perceptive, sincere, and compassionate man. This much was apparent at the Chris Gaffney Reunion Party at the Scottish Event Center in Long Beach that almost 400 of his family members, friends, and fans attended last Saturday. **April 4, 2019**

Gaffney made a home and built a strong fanbase for himself in OC, despite being a self-described army brat, born in Austria and eventually growing up in California and Arizona. His contribution to our local music scene remained vast until his death from liver cancer in Newport Beach in 2008.

The night featured a stacked lineup of his colleagues, including roots rock icon Dave Alvin, bluesman Kid Ramos, and members of two of Gaffney's own bands, The Hacienda Brothers and the Cold Hard Facts. This made for a nearly five hour soundtrack as old friends reunited to celebrate the life and music of, as fellow singer-songwriter Rick Shea called him, "The deeply soulful, always unpredictable, one of a kind— Chris Gaffney."

Los Fabulocos started off the night with their mix of accordion-driven Tex Mex, cumbia, and rock. Although the room was full of warm embraces and stories about Chris, their lively performance quickly reminded the crowd that the night was a celebration. While some audience members reminisced and looked at pictures of Chris projected on one wall, others took to the dance floor. Fabulocos frontman, Jesus Cuevas, was the only one to play the accordion that night, and he delivered a performance that surely Gaffney, an accordion maestro himself, would have commended.

Next, rockabilly staple, James Intveld and his band, the Honky Tonk Palominos, took the stage. Intveld's set reached an emotional peak when he dedicated his song, "Love Calls" to Gaffney's wife, Julie, who was in attendance. "Yeah, now love is talking to me, it's a simple



melody,” he sang. “It’s the sound of sweet devotion, a lullaby to set me free.”

Couples swayed on the dance floor as Intveld crooned his Western ballad. It’s interesting to note that after his set, Intveld spent the rest of the night watching the other acts and mingling the rest of the crowd. He seemed not only approachable, but excited to reminisce about Gaffney with anyone else who was there to pay their respects.

The Cold Hard Facts, some of Gaffney’s longest-running musical collaborators, were the next to pay tribute to their late friend. Chris’ brother Greg, who was also the original bassist of the Cold Hard Facts, joined the band onstage for a few songs. Rick Shea, who has had a successful solo career since his years with the Cold Hard Facts, also stepped on stage and led the band in a rendition of Neil Young’s “Cinnamon Girl.”

“We’re gonna do a couple of songs that we used to do back in those days. And just like in those days, we are not over-rehearsed,” laughed Shea. Nevertheless, the Cold Hard Facts played a transcendent set of soul-stirring songs.

The band seemed to hit a stride when lead guitarist Danny Ott, sang “Artesia,” a song which couldn’t have been written by anyone but Chris. The lyrics show that Gaffney was just as abstract a thinker as he was experiential, as they call back teenage memories of cruising through Southern California and the nostalgic scent of nearby dairy farms. The lyrics lament, “Because now when the wind blows from out of Artesia, you can’t smell 1965.” Most would agree that very few songwriters could write such a beautiful song about cow manure.

Later on, Dave Alvin, who’s known as a founding member of The Blasters as well as for his own prolific solo career, joined the Cold Hard Facts in their musical tribute. Alvin, who considered Gaffney one of his closest friends and even recruited him to play guitar in his backing band, the Guilty Men, was quick to express his admiration for Chris. As he walked onstage, he looked into the crowd and admitted, “I miss Chris every day.”

Alvin then led the Cold Hard Facts through a series of Gaffney’s songs. He told the stories behind a few of them, including the anthemic, “Fight (Tonight’s the Night).” Apparently, Gaffney had called Alvin and asked if he’d like to meet up for a drink. Alvin, who was not in the healthiest relationship at the time, responded, “Well, tonight’s the night, Chris, that we stay home and fight. He called me like an hour later and said, I wrote a song for ya, Dave.” recalled Alvin.

Bassist Mike Barry and drummer John Senne provided a solid rhythm section for each tune, as Doug Livingston played swelling melodies on his steel guitar. Unfortunately, key-

Dave Alvin “I loved this show because the bulk of Chris’s family was there. It was a sold out show. A lot of old friends showed up. I don’t think Chris knew that many people loved him. He is so missed. It was great playing with his band. They were so good. That band is so what Chris was. I hope it’s not the last time we play together.”

boardist/producer Wyman Reese had to leave the show before playing due to a minor health issue. "We love him and we miss him," said Alvin. "He was the other guy. Danny [Ott] understood Chris, I understood Chris, Wyman understood Chris better than anybody," he reflected.

The band then invited up crowd favorite, RJ Simensen, to play the washboard on "East of Houston, West of Baton Rouge," which refreshed the party vibe has the dance floor quickly filled. As Shea, Ott, and Alvin traded guitar solos, Simensen bounced around the stage and scratched his chest plate washboard.

The Cold Hard Facts maintained this kind of energy throughout the duration of their set. It's difficult to imagine that anyone could sit still through such a soulful and eclectic mix of zydeco, Tex Mex, and rock.

Gaffney's accordion and cowboy hat rested on a pedestal for the duration of the night. The Hacienda Brothers, another one of Gaffney's groups, were set to finish up the night. This was no simple feat, but their signature honky tonk soul created the perfect feel-good atmosphere to conclude the event. Dave Gonzalez, who's also known for his work with The Paladins, breezed through one expressive guitar solo after the next while singing songs that Gaffney once sang. Between songs, Gonzalez took a moment to confess, "We miss him dearly. This is really tough, I'm gonna tell you right now."

For the last tune of the night, local blues legend Kid Ramos was invited to the stage to play a blues instrumental. Fabulocos frontman Jesus Cuevas also joined in and the show ended in a whirlwind of solos and showmanship.

Less than half a keg of Budweiser was all that remained as the crowd funneled out onto the sidewalk and into their cars. This gathering of musicians and music lovers showed that Chris Gaffney is dearly missed. However, it's equally evident that his songs remain timeless.

From the Editor -- Hey American Music fans, some of you have written in recently with interest in contributing writings to the Blastersnewsletter. The answer is Yes!

Send any reviews of shows, or stories of your experiences to me at dav-istb@aol.com.

I'd also like to bring back the "Questions for the Band" column. If you have any questions for any of the musicians covered in these pages, send them. I'll try to get answers to print in the newsletter. Thanks --Billy

AMERICAN MUSIC: The Blasters / Dave Alvin newsletter
editor/writer: Billy Davis copy editors: Craig Frischkorn / Lesah Smith
writer: Tom Wilk
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