

ISSUE #48

# American Music

## The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

FEB 2006

### The Blasters

2/18 Pioneertown CA at Pappy & Harriets  
3/18 Hollywood CA at Safari Sam's  
3/31 Houston TX at Meriden  
4/1 Austin TX at Lone Star Round-Up  
4/7 Lillehammer Norway at Blues Fest  
more European dates to follow

### Dave Alvin solo acoustic

3/9 Cleveland OH at Beachland Ballroom  
3/10 Pittsburgh PA at Club Café  
3/11 Columbus OH at Maennerchor  
3/12 Ann Arbor MI at The Ark  
3/22 Buellton CA at Firestone Walker  
3/24 Sebastopol CA at ? W. Chris Gaffney

### Flesheaters w/ Dave Alvin

4/5 San Francisco CA at Slims  
4/6 Los Angeles CA at The Echo  
4/7 San Diego CA at The Casbah  
5/12 East Sussex England at  
All Tomorrow's Parties Festival

## Dave Alvin's West Of The West New CD Out May 30

**Latest News:** Dave Alvin's new studio recorded CD West Of the West is due out May 30, 2006 on Yep Roc Records. It is a collection of songs by California Songwriters done Dave Alvin style. -- Dave Alvin has released a limited edition live CD to sell at shows called The Great American Music Galaxy. The CD is now available by mail order thru yep Roc Records website. — On the new SIN CITY deluxe DVD there's a clip of Bruce Willis and the Accelerators (featuring Johnny Bazz on bass). They play The Red Devils song DEVIL WOMAN. --- The Flesheaters (Dave Alvin, John Doe, Chris D., Bill Bateman, DJ Bonebrake, and Steve Berlin) have confirmed

they will reunite to play in East Sussex, England at the 'All Tomorrow's Parties' festival on May 12th 2006. The show may be recorded for a live CD. They will do 3 warm up gigs in Southern California. Dave: "It should be pretty funny playing noisy punk rock again after all this time." – Kurt Mahoney and the Blue Rose Band have a new CD called Phantom Train. Joe Terry, Rick Shea, and Greg Leisz guest on it. Order the CD at [www.cherokeeaudio.org](http://www.cherokeeaudio.org). -- Dave Alvin wrote the liner notes for this Freddie King reissue: Live At the Electric Ballroom 1974. It includes a classic interview and King's only known acoustic recordings. This previously out-of-print CD arrives February 14, 2006. -- Legendary tap dancer Fayard Nicholas, who performed on Phil Alvin's County Fair 2000 CD, died at age 91 in Los Angeles on Jan. 24, 2005. Phil spoke of him in American Music #7, June 1995. Phil wanted to tap dance himself on a 'Lloyd Keating and His Music' song called LOW DOWN RHYTHM. He called up Eddie Baytos of the 'Nervous Brothers' who won a Cable Ace award for choreography and dancing in music videos. Phil: "I knew I was going to fail (laughing.) Eddie mentioned he was talking to Fayard (Nicholas) the other day, so I said Eddie!, Eddie!, Talk to Fayard (for me)!! Fayard is just the greatest in the world, he is a ball of joy at 80 years old - a great human being." - Dave will be an entry in a new book called The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia by Michael Gray that will be published June 1, 2006 by Continuum Publishing. The book includes entries on artists who played with and/or were influenced by Dylan. ~ *AM*

***In This Issue: The Blasters 4-11-44 US tour story, Rick Shea on his new Bound For Trouble CD, and the Mike George interview: The man that set up the Blasters first paying gig in '79.***

—BlastersNewsletter Contest —We Have a winner! Mike Moreau of Montreal, Canada won a Jerry Angel autographed Drum stick. Question: Name 2 bands that Jerry has played in, before the Blasters, with members or former members of the Blasters. Answers: Dave Alvin's All-Nighters, The Pleasure Barons (with Dave Alvin), and The Mike Eldred Trio (with John Bazz).

### WEST OF THE WEST UPDATE from Dave Alvin

As for the CD, we just mastered it in January and I think it sounds great. Not quite as rocking as Ashgrove but certainly not as laid back as King Of California or Blackjack David. I tear off a few good guitar solos and the vocals may be my best. I just hope the various California songwriters like what Greg Leisz

*The Blasters' First Year: 1979*

*The first in a series of interviews*

## Mike George Interview February 8, 2006 by Billy Davis

*It was musician and friend Mike George who set up the Blasters' first paying gig. It was his wedding on April 21, 1979. The Blasters played their first gig as the Blasters only 4 weeks earlier on St. Patrick's Day for a friend of theirs named Randy Coleman. In this historic interview, Downey musician Mike George recalls how this circle of friends--who were all musicians--witnessed the formation of the Blasters.*

Dale and Larry Spalding are a couple of harmonica players from Downey California that I grew up with and that I've remained best of friends with over the years. Dale and I played together in a band called the Thunderhoof Ranch Band back in 1976 with other Downey-ites that had relocated to Whidbey Island, Washington. Dale, Larry, and I have played music together for years in one assemblage or another of musicians. Dale in fact just sat in with Dave Alvin at his recent gigs in Texas, as did Larry a few months back in Hawaii.

I met Phil when Larry Spalding and I were roommates back in Sunset Beach, CA in 1972 or 73. There were a lot of musicians who grew up in Downey like Larry and Dale, myself, Casey Simpson, Mark Simonian, Mike Roach and others, who would jam at these parties. Everyone who played an instrument would bring their stuff and set up in the living room. We would invite as many people as we could to cram inside (outside and well into the street at times) the house to party and hear the music.

One of these parties was on the Island in Sunset Beach. I remember meeting Phil sometime before then, and thought it was unbelievable that he could sing without a mic and basically drown out the electric instruments. His voice was so loud. He had such projection, which was just truly amazing!



I remember a year or two later meeting Dave at one of these parties. He brought his flute. He was a flute player originally, just a kid. Bill Bateman was there too. Bill is such a great drummer, one of the best. In those days Mike Roach played guitar with James Harman in his 'Icehouse Blues Band,' at a place called the Gas Company in Costa Mesa, California. Here is a strange fact: Mike Roach and Phil Alvin have the same birthday and the same year. Even stranger is that both of their Dads have that same birthday. Bill Bateman and I have the same birthday: December 16, but I'm a few years older than him.

I knew Bill from those jams, and just hanging out at the beach house. He used to come over quite a lot, as did Gary Masi, Dave Carroll and others. Bill and I became good buddies.

Fast-forward to my wedding with Mary Aseltine (which wouldn't stand the test of time). We had the reception at our house on 13th street, a couple blocks from the beach in Huntington Beach. There was an apartment above a garage on a big corner lot. The band set up on a little lanai that was enclosed with a fence.

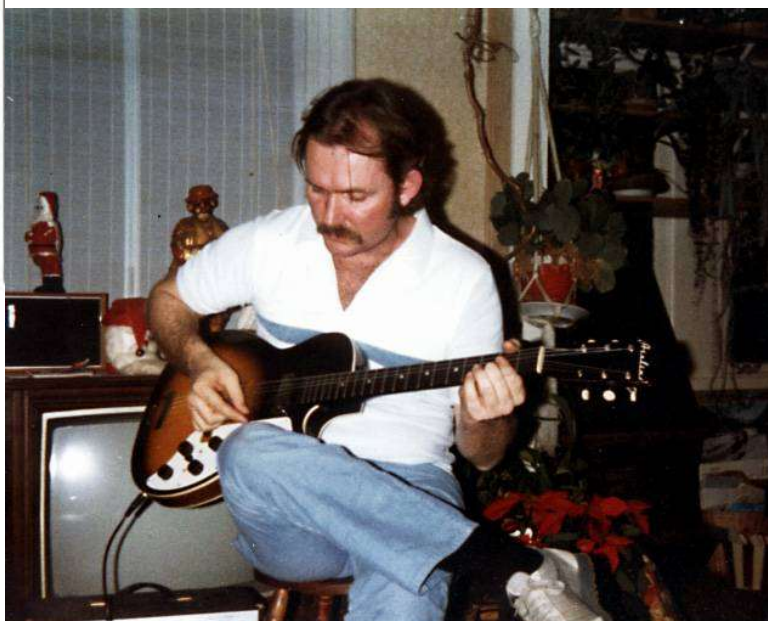
I knew these guys I jammed with were starting to put together a regular band. The Blasters started out as Frank Furillo's band, and the members were Dave and Phil, and Mike Kennedy (The Blasters original bass player now deceased) I believe was playing bass that day, but I can't be sure of that. It may very well have been John Bazz, I just don't remember. To be sure Frank Furillo was on harmonica and Bill Bateman on drums. Frank left the band shortly after and moved to Madison, Wisconsin, where he formed The Rousers, who are still playing together to this day.

I heard that the Blasters had played Randy and Francine Coleman's wedding around the same time (*ed. note The Blasters have cited their first gig being a St Patrick's Day 1979 wedding. This must be it.*) in Newport Beach. So I think that Randy's was really the Blasters first gig, but mine was dubbed the first paying gig at \$400.

I don't remember what they played exactly in the way of tunes, aside from the blues standards we all loved. They didn't play any typical wedding songs that I recall. It was more just a huge party with dancing. I was the groom and wasn't paying too much attention to that



**Dave Alvin can be seen in the black shirt**



**Mike George with an Airline Guitar.**

stuff, and also we left early for Yosemite.

Looking back, what comes up for me is feeling really great about the Blasters success. The Rockabilly revival had just begun and these guys were leading the pack and not selling out, their influence on the music of the day had been set in motion. I was proud that these Downey guys, who'd been playing dive bars for a decade or more, were finally about to show the world what American music was really all about. And well that was just plain old cool. ~ *AM*

*Photos courtesy Mike George*

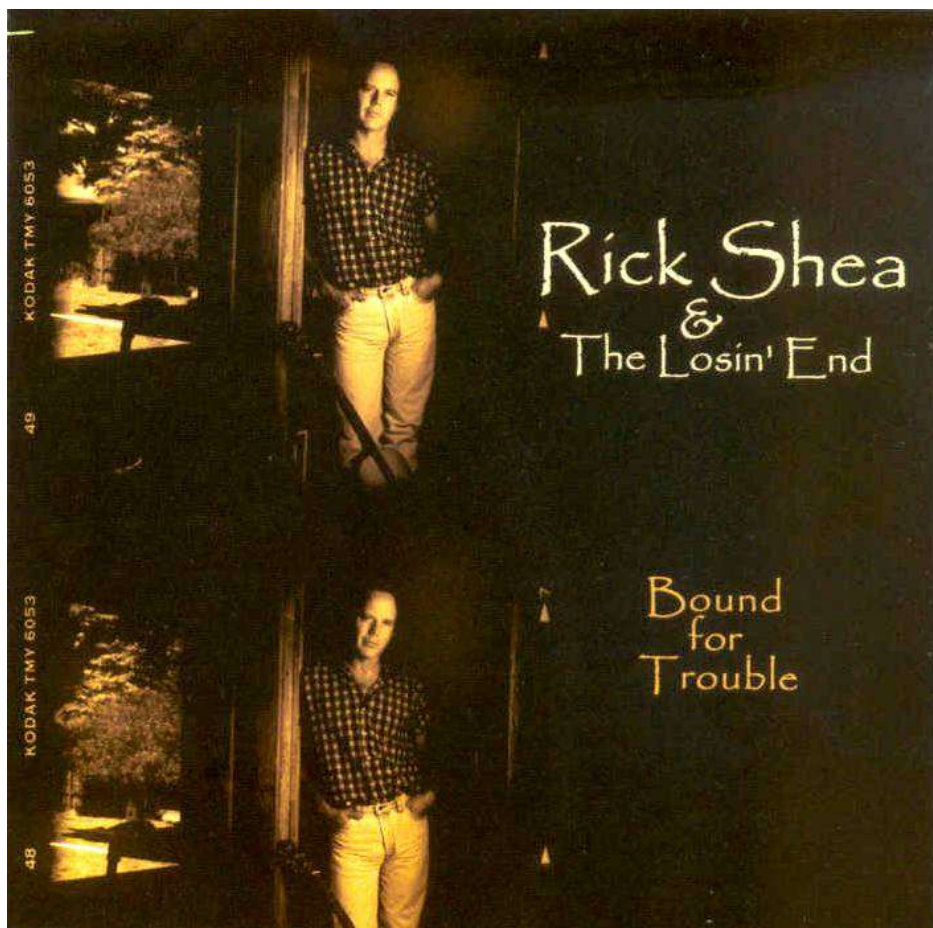
## Rick Shea's new album "Bound For Trouble"

*Rick Shea took time out of his busy schedule to give **American Music** a report on what he has been up to since leaving the Guilty Men, and his new CD on Tres Pescadores Records:*

I started thinking about remixing and re-releasing Sawbones in Oct 2004. David Orser was getting ready to scale back his operation at AIM records, and I knew a lot of stuff would be going into storage, so I talked to David. He very generously turned the master session files for Sawbones over to me to re-mix and remaster. Tim and Brian at Tres Pescadores agreed to put it out. Sawbones had done real well and gotten great reviews, locally, all over the country, and in Europe. When I was touring with Dave Alvin, I was able to open a lot of the shows and get the word out pretty well.

I spent 2002 and 2003 promoting two albums: Trouble And Me with Brantley Kearns, then Our Shangri-La, the album of duets with Patty Booker. In that time I talked to a lot of DJ and radio people who didn't know about the 2000 release of Sawbones. So this seemed like a good opportunity to get it out to some of them.

I didn't want to change the character of the album too much since it had been out a while and a lot of people liked it, but I did want to change a few of the arrangements and make it a little less bright sounding overall. It took some time finding a compatible studio to work in, but Brad Cobb finally turned up and became a huge asset in the remixing and remastering.



On most of the songs we didn't change much; we took some of the processing off of my vocal and that was it, but a few songs got a bit of reworking. On MAGDALENA we added John Zertzke playing Cherokee Flute; on LONESOME CANNONBALL we edited out some sections and made the song shorter and put in Chojo Jacques on fiddle. We made Chojo and Dave Alvin's instrumental breaks at the end stand out a little more. On WALKIN' TO JERUSALEM we took out some instrumental fills and opened up the arrangement a bit. On SAGINAW, MICHIGAN we mixed in Don Heffington playing Bongos, which had been left out of the mix on the original album. On PIEDMONT RIDGE, Jack Rudy came in and played harmonica. Wyman Reese added keyboards on two songs: SAWBONES and CAMELLIA. Lastly, I added acoustic guitar on BLACK EYED GIRL.

As for the bonus tracks on Trouble and Me, TEXAS LAWYER is from a live radio broadcast I did at KPIG in March 2005. NEVER BEEN IN LOVE, is a Nick Lowe song we recorded for Walter Clevenger's tribute to Nick Lowe, Lowe Profile. That song and a new one called BOUND FOR TROUBLE were recorded at Walter's studio in Orange County. Christy McWilson sings on NEVER BEEN IN LOVE but she recorded her duet vocal in Seattle. After all the work was done, the re-release of Sawbones came out as Bound for Trouble on November 8, 2005, on Tres Pescadores Records.

I've been calling my band "The Losin' End" for a long time and decided to rename the album and include the band name because we were adding tracks and redoing the artwork, so it just seemed like a different album in a lot of ways. We've been getting the album out to a lot of radio that didn't get it the first time around. It's doing real well and debuted at #8 on the Freeform Americana Roots Chart for December, 2005. It's #8 again this month (January 2006.) It showed up as #5 on the Euro-Americana chart for December and it's appeared on a lot of other independent play lists.

I'll be appearing at the SXSW Music Festival in Austin, TX in March 2006 - doing some shows and playing with James Intveld. I've been doing a lot with James the last couple of years. I'm playing steel in his band and opening a lot of the shows, we did a short tour last summer of east coast and Midwest dates. I'm doing a Thursday night residency at The Arcadia Blues Club here close to home with The Losin' End. We'll start having some guests there soon, and I'm playing a few more out of town shows as well. I was in Alberta, Canada in November 2005 with Chojo Jacques playing some of the folk clubs in Calgary and Edmonton as a headliner. I did a west coast tour earlier last year co/billed with my bud-

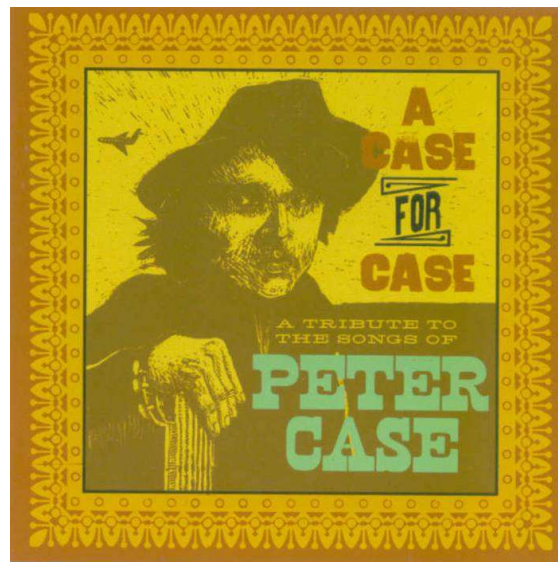
## Highly Recommended New Releases

### A Tribute To the Songs Of Peter Case

#### A Case For Case

Hungry For Music Records has released this 3-CD set of Peter case songs peformed by other artists such as Dave Alvin, Chris Gaffney, Tom Russell, Chris Smither, Joe Ely, and many others.

[www.Hungryformusic.org](http://www.Hungryformusic.org)



dies 'I See Hawks' in LA - so there's always a lot going on.

It's also time to get started on a new album. I've got 3 or 4 new songs that I'm real excited about - and a lot of ideas I've built up over the last couple years. I'd like to do some more collaborating; I get to work with so many great people that I'm always trying to think of ways to get them involved on my albums. I recorded a couple songs when I was in Hawaii last May with '11 Gallon Hat', who are some friends I've worked with there; They are wonderful musicians. We did a song of mine called THE DAY OF MY RETURN and one of theirs called PASS THE EGG NOG, PLEASE which they included on a Christmas album they put out last fall. Besides all that, a big windstorm tore part of the roof off the back of my house the other night, so that needs fixing, and my oldest son, who's away at college, says his car won't start. So, I'll be staying busy for awhile. - Rick Shea

Rick Shea web site: [www.RickShea.net](http://www.RickShea.net)

## **X: The Best - Make The Music Go Bang --**

**by Tom Wilk**

In July 2004 Rhino Records released the 2-CD collection of the best of the L.A. punk band X. Dave Alvin plays on the X version of FOURTH OF JULY, and on two Knitters songs: CALL OF THE WRECKING BALL and SOMONE LIKE YOU.

The liner notes for "X: The Best - Make The Music Go Bang" are an oral history made up of comments from people who knew and/or worked with the band. There are three separate comments from Dave Alvin.

**Dave Alvin:** I met X in 1980 when the Blasters opened for them in San Diego at an old hall called the Shark Club. They liked us, so after the show much beer was consumed and fast friendships formed. Needless to say, I loved their music. One of the great things about X's music is all the layers and contradictions built into it. The songs have a really elegant architecture and in less than three minutes all sorts of quirks and twists are built into the arrangements. At the same time that it's quirky and elegant, it's very aggressive, so you've got this aggressiveness coming at you, and then on top of that, you've got Exene's voice, which is totally personal. It's an ambiguous wonderful brew, and that's why you could go see X and the soup would always be different.

**Dave Alvin:** In those days we got lots of requests to play benefits, and Billy (Zoom) or my brother (Blasters' vocalist Phil Alvin) often wouldn't want to do the benefit. So the Knitters got started as a benefit gag, and was largely the result of sitting around with X, drinking beer and listening to old records. On a deeper level, the Knitters allowed John, Exene, DJ and I to step away from the expectations that went with being in X and the Blasters. X was very elegantly structured in their songs, but the Knitters weren't - they were a slap-dash-whoops! outfit and the music was primitive. The Knitters album was recorded with barely any overdubs, and John and I wrote the Knitters' song WRECKING BALL in about 20 minutes while we watched the Super Bowl.

**Dave Alvin:** I was invited to join X when Billy left the band in 1985, and playing with them was an amazing learning experience because their music is complicated. When I joined, I had to learn 32 songs in two weeks. I'm not sure how the parts came together when the songs were created, but when I sat down with the records and a guitar and started trying to learn them I was stunned by how complicated Billy's parts were. During the time I was in X it became like a loud version of the Knitters - the arrangements became looser - and it wasn't until Tony Gilkyson joined the band that the music became structured again.



# The Blasters 4-11-44 US Tour

—Billy Davis

The summer of 2005 saw the Blasters finally release a new studio CD for the first time since 1985's Hardline. The new album is called 4-11-44. The Blasters showed they are committed to supporting the new release by touring non-stop across the US in the last three months of 2005. Watch for them to continue their tour through 2006.

The last time the Blasters toured this extensively was

in 1986 when Hollywood Fats was the guitarist in the band. Now it's Phil Alvin, John Bazz, Jerry Angel, and Keith Wyatt.

They started off in San Francisco on October 14<sup>th</sup> with two nights at Café Du Nord. A recording of THE THEME FROM SHAFT prefaced the Blasters walking on stage.

They played a safe selection of songs



Ross D' Boss

in their first few shows of the tour— a set list that they had been using for the past year. They wanted to get their tour legs under them. Later in the tour, they added some different songs.

LONG WHITE CADILLAC opened the set and became the popular opener. Most importantly they made a habit of playing at least seven songs from the new album every night to promote sales of the new CD. I was very happy to hear that AMERICAN MUSIC was back as a regular song in the Blasters set. I thought it was being neglected for a while in 2004 and early 2005.

A few shows into the tour, they played the Viper Room in Hollywood, CA. HELP YOU DREAM came back into the set after being left out through most of 2005. James Intveld

opened up for the Blasters and then joined The Blasters on stage for the JOE TURNER MEDLEY. James and Phil traded off on the vocals. In the middle of the song, James yelled in the mic, "This is just like the old days." (James was a member of the Blasters from 1992 – 1995.) Keith adds: "Then James played the left hand of my guitar while I picked - it actually worked!"

The Blasters worked their way across the USA hitting the east coast in mid-November.

They stopped by WDVR radio in Sergentsville,



Jerry Angel

Johnny Bazz playing drums in soundcheck



Phil in Albany, NY

NJ, and played live on The Living Room show. Phil acted as guest DJ for part of the show picking some rare records to play over the air. Phil shared some interesting musical knowledge of those artists. One recent-artist pick was a Hacienda Brothers song; of which Phil said that all of their songs were very good.

The live performance part of the show by the Blasters started out a little rocky. Phil tried to sing PRECIOUS MEMORIES live without laughing. He failed a few times, but finally got it together. There must have been some funny antics going on in the studio.

The host of the show, Big Kev, pushed the band to pull out a very obscure song. Phil chose ROCK BOPPIN' BABY, a song by late 50's Sun records artist Edwin Bruce. The Blasters used to play the song on a regular basis in the early eighties, and it was released on the Over There: Live At The Venue live album. The last time the Blasters played the song was in 1995 in Alexandria, VA, at a fan's request; when James Intveld on guitar initiated it with the famous guitar riff and the band joined in. Phil started singing but couldn't remember the right lyrics. Other than that one time, it hadn't been performed in 20 years. But for this radio show, the band prepared and did a great version. The song wound up sticking in the set for the rest of the tour.

Big Kev wasn't done yet. He asked Phil to sing the first song he learned to play. Phil couldn't seem to remember what that could have been, but he pulled out something equally obscure, an old blues song called OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN. Phil was on a roll of rare songs. Next he played one that I have never heard the band play. The song was a 1962 R&B hit song by the Falcons (lead singer Wilson Pickett, R.I.P.) called I FOUND A LOVE. The band did a great job.

The Blasters played the big rock clubs in the big East Coast cities: BB King in New York City, The Paradise in Boston, and the Birchmere in Alexandria (a suburb of Washington DC). All the shows were very well attended. The Original Blasters reunion tour of 2002 was billed as a one-time-only event, to bring in bigger crowds. The





Ford's, NJ in-store performance

current Blasters played the same venues on this tour and the attendance was the same. That says something for the higher visibility the current Blasters have with the new album release.

Keith: "We really had no idea until we walked in the door 15 minutes before show time whether or not there would be a crowd. Fitzgerald's in Chicago was a shock- we walked in and it was packed front to back. The crowd was very responsive in places like Albany, NY, The Iota (Arlington, VA), the Ram's Head (Annapolis, MD), Seattle and Denver.

The theater-style shows - Sellersville, Denver, and Portland - were fun alternatives to the usual bar ambience and felt more like concerts - Phil had more of a rapport with the audience, who responded appreciatively to pretty much everything."

The Blasters have a new guy named Ross D'Boss Nichols working for them. He does all the jobs: guitar tech, driver, merchandise guy, road manager, and even MC. He could be heard very loudly in the mic after the set - revving up the crowd for an encore or telling them about CDs and T-Shirts for sale.

Keith Wyatt says being on the road with the Blasters is pretty routine: "On any given day we leave the hotel at checkout time, drive to the next town, check into the hotel, go to soundcheck, grab a bite, go back to the hotel, go to the gig, go back to the hotel, grab some sleep, and do the same thing the next day. We did become intimately acquainted with Starbucks and Cracker Barrel. John would insist that wherever we went the first stop must be at Starbucks - which drove Ross nuts. On this tour there were no real disasters or near-misses. Traveling with a bunch old men ain't what most people think of as 'rock and roll'."



Ford's, NJ

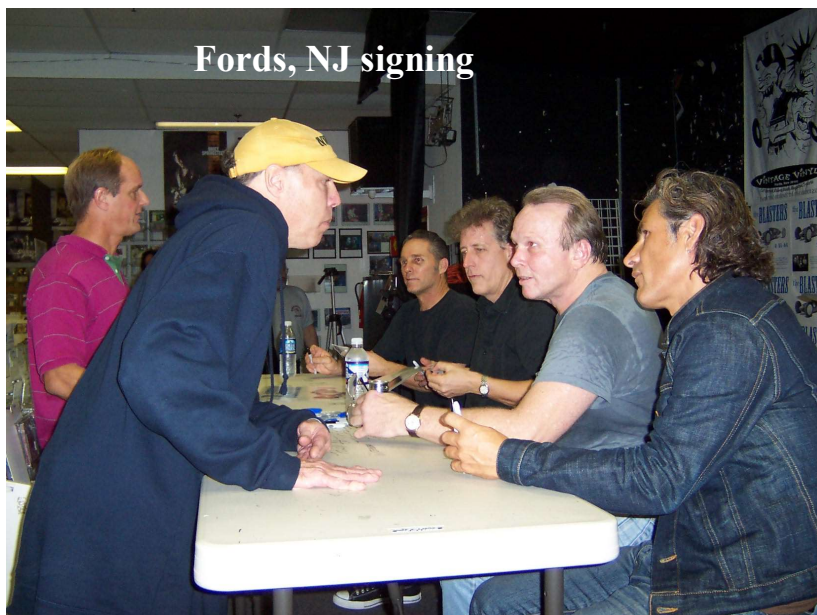


Ford's, NJ

The Blasters played the Rams Head Tavern in Annapolis, MD, and rockabilly legend Billy Hancock dropped by. At this show they played the aforementioned ROCK BOPPIN BABY. The version tonight was the best version I heard of this on the tour. It was perfectly played by the band and sung by Phil. HELP YOU DREAM made its first appearance since the Viper Room show.

At a show in Albany, NY, an audience

member must have been drunk because he yelled in the middle of the set for Phil to play LONG BLACK CADILLAC. He meant to say LONG WHITE CADILLAC and forgot that the Blasters had opened their set with it. But Phil responded, "I know that one, too." He proceeded to sing a song I've never heard before, called LONG BLACK CADILLAC. That was cool. In Boston, the band was making some adjustment to the equipment backline, so Phil took the opportunity to play a solo song. Phil played a Jimmy Reed song called



Fords, NJ signing



Jerry warming up backstage in Annapolis

SHAME, SHAME, SHAME. Next the Blasters pulled out the rarely played song from 4-11-44, JULIE.

The Blasters two harmonica songs were SO LONG BABY GOODBYE and I'M GLAD YOU'RE DEAD YOU RASCAL. Keith Wyatt remembers some of the crowd reaction: "Phil started dedicating it 'To President Bush from the People of New Orleans.' People would look puzzled, until they heard the first line of the lyrics, (I'll be glad when you're dead you rascal you) then either laugh or in some cases get pissed off. We heard a few remarks

from the crowd afterwards like "that sucked", but mostly they get that it isn't about committing violence against the President. Occasionally Phil would extend the intro with a rant about Tories and Monarchism etc. That seemed to go right past most people, but then again they expect that from Phil."

It's interesting to listen to Phil between songs. Sometimes he sends messages to the band through his dedications and intros. He has particular dedication to cue the band that a certain song is coming. The band always knows what song it is. Throughout the tour, Phil would intro TROUBLE BOUND by saying: "It's a song that cannot be played too slowly." That must have meant that Phil thought the rest of the band was playing it too



Photo: Jay Faler

Chicago at Fitzgeralds



The Blasters with Billy Hancock

from people by email who came out to see the Blasters shows because of the new 4-11-4 record being out. Some people didn't know the Blasters still existed, so the new CD re-awakened old fans.

It was great to see that the Blasters can still handle the rigors of the road. Phil sounded great every night, and the band was tight, so that means everything's all right. . . in Blasters Land. ~~

*AM*

fast. DRY RIVER was dedicated to Dave Alvin and Phil mentioned that Dave's birthday had just passed on November, 11. It was good to know Phil was thinking of Dave.

The Blasters stopped in Fords, NJ, for an in-store signing and performance at Vintage Vinyl. The store was lined with 4-11-44 posters as the band played a 4 song mini-set then sat down for an autograph signing.

I met a lot of people at the shows and heard



Rams Head Tavern, Annapolis, MD

## ***Tales From The Road -- The Palace Theatre, The Blasters, and Big Joe Turner. by Dave Alvin***

**Big Joe Killed By The Blasters** It was a good show. We did two nights and Ray Campi was a guest one night and Big Joe the other. Big Joe and his wife showed up to the gig around 7 PM. The Palace staff were very respectful and gave him his own dressing room. They told him what ever he needed, they would get for him. There were a few opening acts and we, The Blasters, did our 90 minute set.

Big Joe didn't get on stage until after 11 PM. I'm using the words "got on stage" loosely (laughs). Some guys went into Joe's dressing room and got him drunk. I don't mean drunk; he got PLOWED. He was drinking all night. By the time they escorted him on stage, we were ready for the encore They brought him out and sat him down (Joe would always sit on stage because of his failing health.)

He sang the first line of SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL and then passed out. We kept vamping away and I looked over to Lee and said: "Is he okay?" Lee said: "This isn't good, David." I said: "Did we kill him?" I'm laughing now, but we were dead serious. I could just see the headlines 'Big Joe Killed By The Blasters.' He eventually came out of it when Lee and Phil jostled him. He continued singing the song and then suddenly started a second song when we were supposed to go off stage.

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