

ISSUE #95

American Music

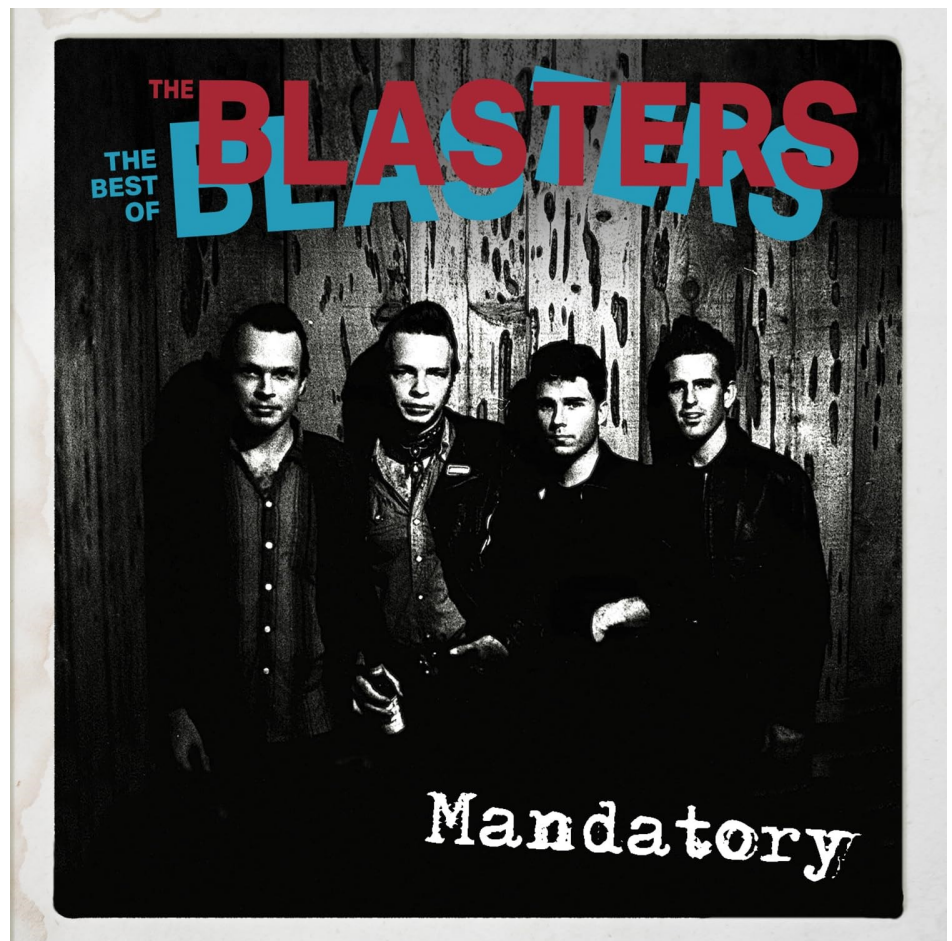
The Blasters/Dave Alvin newsletter

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS 1994 - 2024

FEBRUARY 2024

The Blasters and Third Mind new CDs

Latest News: The Blasters have signed a deal with Liberation Hall Records to release their music on CD, vinyl and digital. The first Issue is Mandatory: The Best of the Blasters which has been released on CD but not vinyl on August 31, 2023. The studio albums will follow soon after. They also released Phil Alvin's Unsung Stories 1986 solo album on CD and vinyl. II III On October 3, The Original Four Blasters minus Phil Alvin reunited for a Facebook live video interview to discuss the 'Best of' release. II III The Third Mind's new album called The Third Mind 2 was released October 27, 2023. II III Dave's memoir is planned for 2025 with what maybe a joint publishing deal between the Country Music Hall of Fame and the University of Illinois Press. BMG which published New Highway has moved away from the book publishing business. It's unknown how long their current titles will stay in print. (((cont. page 2)))



In This Issue: Shelly Heber Interview Part 2 of 3, The Third Mind 2, Dave Alvin as a voice for other artists.

Latest News (Continued from page 1) — A New Highway softcover with additional content and a History of Slash Records (with interviews of Phil and Dave) has been shelved.

II III Dave recorded a new song called BLIND OWL with Canned Heat for their new album. II III It's rumored The Knitters will reunite for a show at the SXSW music festival in Austin, Texas in March. II III Dave Alvin will be going into the studio in Austin, Texas in late March to produce blueswoman Carolyn Wonderland's second album. II III In June 2024 Dave Alvin and Jimmie Dale Gilmore will release their second album called TexiCali. II III Dave Alvin will be one of the featured artists on Long Distance Love, a tribute album to Little Feat founder Lowell George. The album is scheduled for release in May. Dave plays on and sings A APOLITICAL BLUES, a song which appeared on Sailin' Shoes, the 1972 album by Little Feat. Proceeds from the album will go to the Sweet Relief, Musicians Fund. A nonprofit charity, the fund provides financial assistance to all types of career musicians and music industry workers who are struggling to make ends meet while facing physical or mental health issues, disability or age-related problems. II III In another Sweet Relief fundraiser, Dave also will appear on a tribute album to drummer Don Heffington, who backed him on several albums. Dave will perform AVENUE C and the album is tentatively titled Tonight, I'll Go Down Swinging. The release date has not been determined but it will be out later in 2024. II III Dave was one of the featured performers on a Tribute to Ramblin' Jack Elliot held on Jan. 28 at the Masonic Auditorium in San Francisco. He sang KING OF CALIFORNIA and Tim Hardin's IF I WERE A CARPENTER. The show was a benefit for Sweet Relief. Others on the bill included Jackson Browne, Steve Earle and Rickie Lee Jones. Dave and Ramblin' Jack toured together with Tom Russell and Chris Smither as part of the Monsters of Folk in 1998. Dave was a guest artist on and wrote liner notes for The Long Ride, a Ramblin' Jack album released in 1999. II III Dave Alvin and the Guilty Ones opened a show for Los Lobos at the Fillmore in San Francisco on Nov. 18. The concert was part of the band's celebration of its 50th anniversary. Dave joined Los Lobos and played guitar on MARIE MARIE. The clip can be seen on YouTube. II III Work is continuing on Palomania, a documentary on the famed Los Angeles club that presented concerts between 1949 and 1995. Dave was interviewed about his memories of the club for the film. Others interviewed for the film include James Intveld, Emmylou Harris and Lucinda Williams. No release date for the film has been announced. II III Los Lobos, which includes former Blasters saxophonist Steve Berlin, was named to the California Hall of Fame on Jan. 11. The band is part of the 17th class chosen for the hall. Others in this year's class include the Go-Gos and filmmaker Anna DuVernay. The induction ceremony will be held in February. II III —~~AM~~

The Blasters 1980s Manager

Shelly Heber Exclusive Interview Part 2

Shelly Heber was the Blasters' manager in the 1980s, guiding them through their most successful years, and managed Dave Alvin during his CBS Records major label solo period. Shelly, died from Cancer on August 5, 2023. As a Blasters historian, for years I had her on top of my list to interview. She finally granted me an interview by phone which spanned weekly phone calls between April and July 2023. Shelly's conversations with me were filled with laughter and so much joy. It's hard to believe she was in the last few weeks of her life.

by Billy Davis

AM: How did you handle the Alvins as “battling brothers” as the press dubbed them?

Shelly: Why has no one written a book about these guys? The dynamic between the brothers is so intense, but so interesting. In 1984, I was managing Dave Davies [of the Kinks] and I got to see some of the interaction with his brother Ray. I walked backstage at a N.J. concert and a bottle of champagne came flying at my head. Ray said, “Oh, I thought you were Dave.” [laughs]. Dave and Ray Davies were so combative but in a different way than the Alvins. I was seeing both sets of “battling brothers” at the time and I remember saying to Musician Magazine that I’d pick the Alvin brothers over the Davies brothers to win a fight any day of the week. [laughs] There so much love, but then so much brother stuff that came between Phil and Dave.

AM: Do you recall the Blasters being offered to back up Chuck Berry on the Grammys?

Shelly: I don’t remember a negotiation of The Blasters possibly backing Chuck Berry at the Grammys. But it makes sense that it would have been proposed because Ken Ehrlich who did Soundstage was also the Grammy producer for many years and was a big Blasters fan. So, I could see him trying to plan that. [Ed note: Stevie Ray Vaughan and Keith Richards wound up backing Chuck Berry.]

I got the Blasters on American Bandstand because I had become friends with American Bandstand’s producer Larry Klein. The year before The Blasters appeared, I booked the previous band I managed, 20/20. Dick Clark thought 20/20 were great and pulled me aside



and told me that the band was going to be huge. When I got the Blasters on the show, he told me he thought they were very good, but that 20/20 were my real stars. I never told him that 20/20 broke up.

Dick was so wonderful and charming – exactly the way you wanted him to be. But the three American Bandstand Blasters appearances almost didn't happen. Phil said: "Is that show still around?"

I remember it when I was a kid. I don't know if going on Bandstand will be good for our career?" I couldn't believe he said that! [laughs] But they did it.

For me to meet Dick Clark was huge because I grew up on watching his show. When I was 13 all I wanted to do was to go to Philadelphia and be on the show. It moved later to L.A.

In the 1980s there was a lot of television that was looking for musical talent, so non-mainstream acts like the Blasters could get things like New Wave Theater and Cassandra Peterson's New Wave A Go-Go. It was all just added exposure for the band.

The Blasters did a Budweiser commercial with the comedian Gallagher. We had to cancel gigs for the scheduled filming dates. We really didn't want to do it, but we wanted the money. The band was driving down there to do the filming and we found out the bowling alley that they were to film in, burned down. It got rescheduled for later.

Then we got invited to the Budweiser national convention at the Moscone Center in San Francisco for three days in January 1985. I thought those guys would be in heaven drinking Budweiser all the time, but instead they were drinking Dom Perignon [laughs] – and caviar. I asked, "How did you boys know about this?" "We heard about it. It's good!" [laughs]. It was insane. Every star in Hollywood was there. I walked up to George Burns and Gary Leonard [Blasters official photographer] was taking photos for me. George said: "How old are you?" I think I was 30 at the time. He said: "I only date 20-year-olds so you're a little old for



me [laughs]”. It was so funny. He was really adorable.

AM: Gary Leonard seemed to be there to capture every important moment on film.

Shelly: Gary Leonard took that photo. Gary Leonard loved the history of the band. He was making a lot of money at an advertising agency and quit to go take pictures of bands on the Sunset Strip. I said, Gary are you insane? Gary said: “Somebody’s got to do it.” He never did it for the money, he believed he was documenting an important moment in music history. I loved Gary very much.

AM: Recently, the Blasters did a 40th anniversary concert at the Lobero Theater in Santa Barbara where in 1982 there was a riot at the concert and they were banned. What do you remember?

Shelly: Ah Yes, [laughs] this is my riot. Yes, it was insane! The kid promoting the concert, it was his first promotion. He was from Beverly Hills and wanted to get into the music business. The Lobero Theater is a gorgeous theater. So, the riot happened, people jumping on stage and throwing things. And after the show he tried to not pay me. I said: “That’s not gonna happen! This is your first concert and I guarantee this is gonna be your last concert.” He should have had proper security. He said: “You didn’t tell me the Blasters cause riots.” I said: “Because they’ve never caused riots before” [laughs]. It was so funny. But I did get my money. The Lobero did not have rock ‘n roll for decades after that. That riot was legendary in Santa Barbara as if it was like Elvis or the Beatles. It’s an absolutely wonderful memory. It’s horrible to say how much I enjoyed that experience [laughs].

There was one time that one of our roadies threw a 16-year-old girl off the stage onto the floor and she broke her ankle. I thought, Oh my god, we’re gonna get sued, but she said: “Please, please don’t tell my parents I was here.” So, we dodged that one, but I yelled at the roadie that you can’t throw down a 16-year-old girl like you do a 6’ 4” burly guy - they break [laughs]. So, we took her to the hospital and didn’t hear anything after that. That was one of the bouncers – not our road manager Wally Hanley.

I got to know Wally in the 20/20 band days. He was an assistant road manager then and I thought he would be perfect for the Blasters. Wally was really cool-headed. I remember we were in San Francisco doing a show with X and maybe Los Lobos. We had all of the bands in the van and we got stopped by the police. Wally leans over to me and says: “I don’t have



Budweiser convention Moscone Center

a license.” I said: “Oh my god, we’re gonna go to jail.” He said to the police “I’m driving these bands who just did a gig, they’re stoned, I’m stoned. If you just follow us to the hotel, we’ll be fine.” And they did. [laughs] I couldn’t believe it. If Wally would have fought it, it would have been worse, but he had the wherewithal to tell it like it is. That would never happen today.

AM: What did you think of the side projects like the Flesheaters and The Knitters?

Shelly: Anything the boys did as side projects helped to build the musicians’ legacy, as long as it’s credible. The press loved those bands and it made everyone happy especially the musicians. It helped build the mystique. Years later, I supported Dave when he went to play in X. I thought that would give him a leg up on his credibility. It would raise his profile and it would give him a chance to think a little away from the Blasters and try something different. Plus, Dave and John Doe were such good friends, so it was good for them.

AM: What do you remember about the Blasters in England in 1982?

Shelly: The 1982 Blasters tour of England was very well received. MARIE MARIE had been such a huge hit by Shakin’ Stevens over there and we thought we could capitalize on that. We opened for Nick Lowe and Nick loved the Blasters. I remember Nick gave Dave his gold

record for CRUEL TO BE KIND. Dave took it [laughs] and had it for like 15 years until he finally gave it back. It was a poker game and Nick had run out of money and said: “I’ll bet my gold record.” Then Dave won it [laughs]. It was so strange that he would let that go and that Dave would take it [laughs].

We recorded the London Venue show to have a special EP release for England. It turned out so well it was released here in the U.S. as an interim between LPs. I had a big fight with the head of Warner Bros. in England named Rob Dickens, who said: “No one wants real instruments anymore, all they want is synthesizers. This is absolutely never gonna fly again and I’m not gonna spend one more red cent on bands like this.” That was pretty off-putting. I was able to get another department to commit enough money to finance the EP hoping that that they could get the MARIE MARIE live version on the radio and that the public would make that connection.

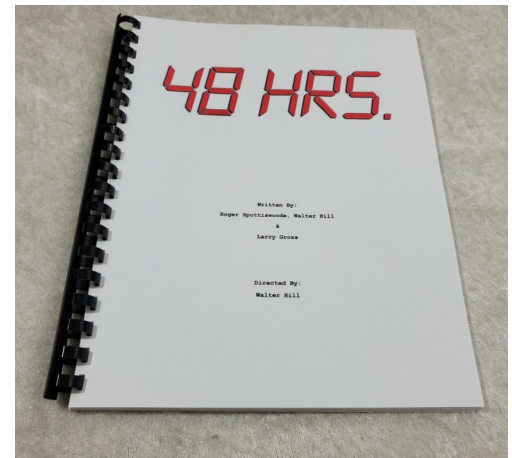


Somehow the live MARIE MARIE didn't get released because someone said they didn't want to exploit Shakin' Stevens. Who the hell is he? [laughs] He had one hit and that was MARIE MARIE. He was the least authentic rockabilly artist ever – but whatever. Things are very different in England than the U.S. If you have success over there, you stay successful for a long time. I had this phrase that I said all the time: "Nothing fails as quickly in America, as success." It's so true. The public here says, we made you successful, we can tear you down. It's psychologically interesting though.

AM: Some have said that a major misstep in the Blasters career was turning down doing the soundtrack for Eddie Murphy's 48 Hours movie. What do you remember about that?

Shelly: It was actually Phil turning down the 48 Hours movie and a headlining gig at the Universal Amphitheater that I quit managing them for over a year.

My vision for the Blasters was this: I knew from the day I saw them that it would be incredibly difficult to market via the usual route. But they were so compelling and had already had a huge batch of press clippings. My philosophy has always been: "Never say that you're great, let somebody else say it." I said let's steamroll with that and we used television to boost their forte.



We were in England on the Nick Lowe tour in May, 1982 and we got the script for Eddie Murphy's 48 Hours movie. The director, Walter Hill, wanted the Blasters really badly to do the whole soundtrack. Phil Alvin came to my room with the script and said we can't do this movie, it's racist. I said: "Whaaat??" He said Eddie Murphy should be the cop and Nick Nolte the con. I said: "Did you read the script? Eddie Murphy is the smart one!" Phil said: "No, we just can't do it." That same week I had booked the Blasters playing the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles, which is huge! It's 5000 seats and a very important gig and a lot of money. Phil said: "We can't play there." I said: "What?? You can't play there? WHY?????" He said: "People can't get wild there, it's too clean." By this time, I lost my mind. Even though everyone agreed with me, they would not disagree with Phil. So, I quit. I was trying hard to advance their career, but was tired of fighting.

Alex Oakley took over managing but the people at Warner Bros. didn't like him and called him "the Ghost." I was told he would walk into the offices at Warners and check in with everyone saying: "What have you done for the Blasters today?" But in an off-putting, not friendly way. If he didn't get the results he wanted, he let everyone know he wasn't happy. Now, someone with clout can get away with that. Without clout, you just alienate all the people you need on your side.

AM: Let's take a short intermission and let Dave Alvin fill in the story.

Dave Alvin: When Shelly left, three guys took over as manager – Phil, Alex Oakley, and Art Fein. Alex was a great guy, but not qualified as a manager. But he would do anything that Phil told him to do. He was smart and would tell Phil when he was messing up. Phil wanted the band to manage ourselves in the same way that we produced our own records. It worked out on the first Slash record, but it didn't work out well sonically on Non Fiction. As much as we still got good press and TV appearances, we did lose out big time. The Blasters were known as a great live act, so people still came out and we generated press without needing a publicist because we were well liked. We did shows and didn't need tour support because we were always selling out. And this continued into when Shelly returned as our manager and on to when I left the band.

When Phil was managing, he was smart about many things, but some he was wrong on. In recent years, Phil and I have talked and he admitted he was wrong in those days. The record label did not like Art or Alex, even though dealing with Warner Bros. was part of the manager's job - they were the interface with the record label. Where Shelly could talk their language, Art and Alex didn't. If you're selling millions of records, the label doesn't have to like your manager, but in our case, Art would go in with a list of demands and they would say, screw you. So, for the Non Fiction album, Warner Bros. records did nothing for us.

Everything good around that time, we had generated ourselves. The tour with Eric Clapton happened because their manager liked us and thought we were a great band who brings people. It wasn't Warner Bros. pulling strings. We could just as well have been dead to Warners at that time.

So, our management team rented a four-room office in Hollywood. One for the receptionist and one each for Phil, Alex and Art. Every day, they would all be there at 8 am except Phil, who got up at 4 pm, so nothing could get finalized without Phil's approval [laughs]. We'd be getting gig offers at 9 am, three hours difference from the East Coast and no one could get ahold of Phil until the end of the day. We lost a lot of work that way.

So, I led a mutiny against Alex, Art and Phil. Bateman, Bazz and I had a band meeting and told Phil we were firing him as manager. We added in that his dress on stage was not performance quality. So, the next gig, Phil started wearing a tuxedo to protest what we said [laughs]. Phil's solo album was also his way of saying "I don't need you guys." But I still believe that his solo album Unsung Stories is Phil's greatest achievement. I'm so proud of that record. It's really great.

Once we got Phil to agree that he wasn't gonna manage the band, we met with some big-time managers. We met with the Cars manager in Boston and Ric Okasek almost produced us. We met with the Ramones manager. I was thinking, "This is great. This guy gets us, we're gonna go places!" Then Phil talked about "gross vs. net" when negotiating their fee. Your average manager gets 20% of the gross – 20% of everything off the top. Their job is to quadruple what you make. It's always a gamble on a deal and sometimes it pays off

Phil asked them if they were willing to work off the net. They would say “no” and I would think: “Fuck we missed a great chance.” So, you’re not gonna make big money unless you have a big manager. It’s rare. Dwight Yoakam’s manager was connected to the biggest country booking agency, which helped him a lot. The Go-Go’s played things really smart with a good record producer, a supportive record company and a manager with some particular inroads to things. So those things really count. Finally, it got worked out with Shelly the second time around that she would work for 15% of the gross not 20%. So once again Shelly returned to having meetings with the record label, and Warner Bros. started doing stuff for us again.

Shelly: Phil held sway over the rest of the band. Dave hadn’t yet found his voice to weigh in on decisions at that time. The relationship between these guys hadn’t changed from when they were 10 years old. It was the same dynamic.

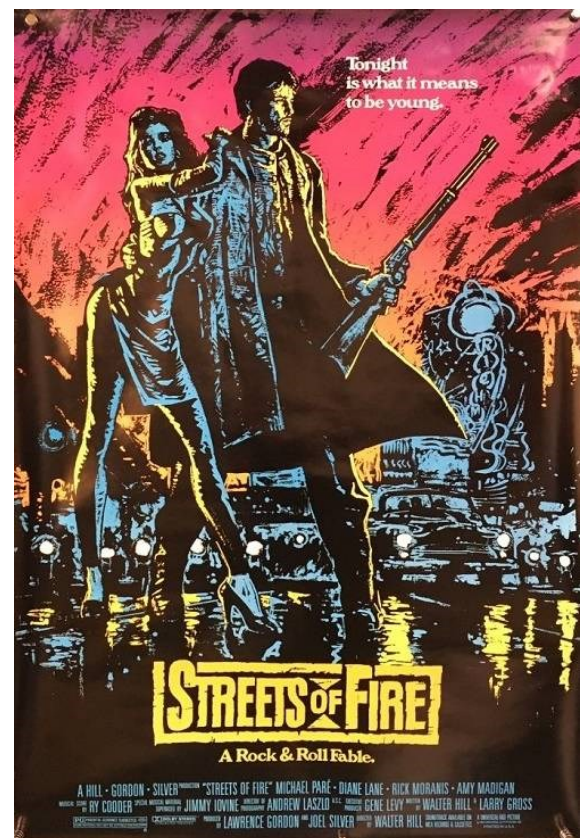
In any band there’s always a leader that comes to the top and dictates how things go. I managed another band from Sweden called the Electric Boys and there was one writer. When we came to the publishing deal, it normally is that the writer or writers gets 100% of the writing share and the band divides up in the publishing share. In this case, the writer wanted all of it and they broke up because of that.

But, after I quit the Blasters, for my own sanity, I decided to stay completely away from the Blasters in that period. I got so emotionally vested in them, their music, and their potential, I needed the break.

About a year later I got a call from Nana, the Alvin’s mom. She said, “I’m dying of cancer, they have a manager who is terrible. Please take the boys back, so I can die in peace.” Oh my god! Do you know what that was like? The last thing I wanted was to take the Blasters back. I had gotten used to normalcy. But I could just not deny Nana, and I took them back.

When I said I was back with the Blasters I was met with extreme relief from the people at Warner Bros. who couldn’t deal with the last manager.

Two days after I was back, we went to a screening of the movie *Streets of Fire*, which the Blasters filmed a few songs in while I was gone. I was surprised that even after Phil turned down Walter Hill’s 48 Hours movie, Walter got the Blasters in this, his next movie. Walter had the same stoicism as Phil when I was dealing with him in the negotiations for



the 48 Hours movie. I read the Streets of Fire script at the screening and I thought I'm not gonna like this movie. Watching, I didn't understand the movie at first but I got to like it a lot later. I was told to say to Walter that the movie was 'beautifully lit' [laughs] because every director wants good lighting in their movies. After the movie I said that to him. He cracked up and said: "You've been talking to movie business people." [laughs] I fell on the floor laughing. I said: "Oh god, I'm sorry."

When the movie was released, I persuaded MCA to put one of the two Blasters songs from the soundtrack, BLUE SHADOWS on the B side of Dan Hartman's I CAN DREAM ABOUT YOU single. That sold over a million records, so the Blasters technically had a million selling record.

I had a good relationship with many different labels because of my marketing company. I worked with artists for over 20 years like Bryan Adams, Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Journey, and many others. Our greatest influence was retail and we did it on a one-to-one basis. I had phone staff who would get in touch with store managers all around the country and provide them with promotional materials, interviews and other things. We were able to have influence that way as more personal than the way the record companies treat the record stores, which is strictly about economics. I knew that most record stores were run by guys and they like talking to girls, so our staff were almost 100% female.

So, I came back when they had already recorded the Non Fiction album and had done a video for the song BAREFOOT ROCK. I thought it was the worst thing ever and they must have been on drugs when they did it [laughs].

AM: Tell us about The Blasters' association with John Fogerty.

Shelly: John Fogerty was such a bastard. Robert Hilburn [L.A. Times music editor and critic] thought it would be a great idea for John to produce a Blasters album, so he asked John. Robert got back to me and told me that John said the Blasters were a poor imitation of him and he would never get involved with something that bad. Thanks, Robert, [laughs] isn't that special.

I was working on the marketing of John's Centerfield album, so I only met him peripherally so we knew each other. At the Farm Aid concert, I was waiting for Dave Alvin to come out of the restroom. Dave held the door for John and said: "After you." And in the meanest possible way, John said: "You'll always be after me." I wanted to bite his leg off. Fogerty was beyond bitter. I think probably because up until the later part of the '70s, it was impossible to be a part of the financial part of the music business and not be ripped off royally.

AM: Tell us about Lee Allen.

Shelly: Lee Allen was a Southern gentleman of the first order. His musicianship was inspira-



tional and I felt fortunate to bask in his presence. He also was a consummate ladies' man. He had a girl in every city and that was on a global basis.

Next Issue: Part 3 -- Shelly talks about the long process of making the Hardline album, The COLORED LIGHTS video and Dave Alvin's departure from the Blasters and into his solo career.



Dave Alvin: When I was in the hospital, I thought about all these goals for myself. I wanted to do another Third Mind album and an actual tour (the first was cancelled during the pandemic), then another album with Jimmie Dale. After that I'd like to do a Dave Alvin record and if everything aligns, another one with Phil. I'm a really lucky guy to be able to play music right now. I survived the pandemic layoff and cancer to still come back to make records and tour. I'm thankful that I have great people around me.

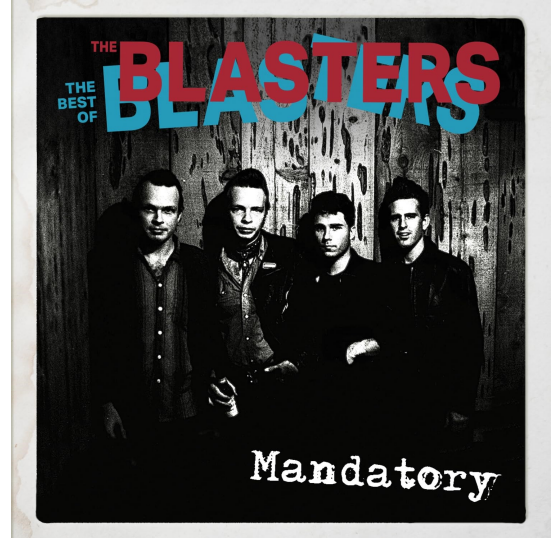
The new album with Jimmie Dale will be out in June 2024 and is called TexiCali. There will be a lot more originals on this one. You'll recognize a few songs we've been playing live like DEATH OF THE LAST STRIPPER and BLIND OWL. I recorded BLIND OWL for the Canned Heat album with lyrics relating to Canned Heat. I decided to record it again with different lyrics. Also, there's a song we were doing last tour called WE'RE STILL HERE that Jimmie and I wrote. There will be a new version of SOUTHWEST CHIEF, which I did on the train album that I thought the lyrics weren't really finished for. The song that was released a while ago as a digital single BORDERLAND, a few Jimmie Dale originals, and a Blind Willie McTell cover. There's a few things on here that could sound as if they were early Blasters tracks - we got Jimmie to rock out a few times.

It was really nice to use the Guilty Ones on these sessions. The record has a great vibe and it really shows off how great they are. In the past it was geographically difficult to get us all together to record. I normally record with L.A. based musicians in L.A. at Craig Parker Adams or the new one that the Third Mind recorded at with Will Golden at Sir Tiger studio but now that got shut down. Craig Parker Adams studio is still here, but we're limited to overdubs and mixing, but no live loud tracking. So, we did TexiCali in Dripping Springs, TX. Jimmie, Brad and Lisa all live in Texas and Chris Miller just moved back to Lockhart, Texas. It's a town that reminds me of Austin in 1980. We're all on this new album.

We will try to tour in support of this in the summer. Of course everything is contingent on my cancer. I'm fine right now but they are checking me every 2 ½ months. —~~AM~~

Mandatory: The Best of the Blasters CD collection

Released on August 31, 2023 by Liberation Hall Records, the digipack CD contains 21 songs spanning the recording career of the Blasters. Most of the songs are in chronological order starting with three songs from the Rollin Rock album. The best hits from each album are all here, finishing with an outtake that Dave Alvin long has proclaimed to be the best Blasters song, called KATHLEEN. Nothing from Over There: Live at the Venue EP is included, but we must expect that the complete London 1982 concert will see its own release in Liberation Hall's promised series of Blasters releases.



The packaging includes liner notes by writer Chris Morris and a collection of rare old concert posters on the inner fold-out. Dave Alvin: "I think this best of collection is to whet the appetite for releasing the full albums. The rest should all come out as vinyl and CD. The Face album is most likely to be released next." Liberation Hall recently purchased an archive of early 1980s live shows recorded by Terry Hammer for San Francisco radio Stations. One of those shows is the Original Four Blasters show from 4/26/80 at San Francisco's Mabuhay Gardens. If that is released, it would be the earliest known recording of a Blasters show.

Liberation Hall also released Phil Alvin's Unsung Stories solo album from 1986 on vinyl and CD. The CD version was issued in the standard jewel case with liner notes by Chris Morris. The vinyl LP has been beautifully reproduced with a pullout black and white print of the front cover and the liner notes printed on the reverse. Dave Alvin: "Hats off to Liberation Hall for putting out Unsung Stories because I think that is Phil's masterpiece. Somewhere there is a recording of Phil singing with Sun Ra and the Arkestra on SPACE IS THE PLACE. They played it for me years ago and it was great. You think the Third Mind is psychedelic, you have to hear this. Part of the deal for Sun Ra to play on Phil's album was that Sun Ra required that Phil cut SPACE IS THE PLACE with Sun Ra and he did. That would have been a great bonus track. I'm sure it's somewhere in Sun Ra's vaults in Philadelphia. The band still lives in his house there. Maybe someday it will come out."—Am



JESSE SYKES DAVE ALVIN DAVID IMMERGLÜCK
MICHAEL JEROME VICTOR KRUMMENACHER

THE THIRD MIND/2

AVAILABLE NOW

Yep Roc
Records

The Third Mind is Dave Alvin's improvisational music collective dedicated to experimenting with new, unorthodox, and unrehearsed sounds while paying tribute to groundbreaking artists from '60s psychedelic music. The band released its first album in 2019 just as the pandemic canceled the entire tour. 2023 brought about the recording of this second album and the band's first live concert in San Francisco at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass festival on 9/30/23. The album was released on 10/27/23. Dave Alvin talks about the album and the San Francisco concert.

Dave Alvin: On the first Third Mind album, Victor was adamant that he wanted me to sing on THE DOLPHINS so I did because I'm a big Fred Neil fan. I do sing a bit like him. We started with that, but when Jesse Sykes came in to sing MORNING DEW, it just changed the whole band to be not "a Dave Alvin band" but a new band. I like to just play guitar sometimes.

She works well with me because she likes guitar solos and doesn't mind not singing. She's not one of those singers who gives you a look when you go into a two-minute guitar solo, and I know a few of those type of singers [laughs]. She very much leads this band – you'll hear all the songs start with her. It's a much more cohesive band and doesn't sound like just a session. She has a very unique voice that is other-worldly. What her voice brings to the sound is very special.

— The Songs —

GROOVIN IS EASY – That was originally done by The Electric Flag, which was Michael Bloomfield's band with Buddy Miles. I heard it when I was 12 and always wanted to cut it in some form. The way we work is that Jesse and I pick the songs and work out basic structures. We brought it to the rest of the band and said the only thing that is similar is the melody and the lyrics. All the musicians knew the original somewhat. Originally, I might have sung it with her as a duet, but when I heard her do it, I said forget me. She brings a whole other vibe to the song. The solos are very different where I came up with this modulation part.

**Hardly Strictly Bluegrass
Festival 9/30/23
San Francisco California
– The Third Mind –**

1. Groovin Is Easy
2. In My Own Dream
3. Tall Grass
4. Sally Go Round The Roses
5. Morning Dew
6. East West

AM: I think your guitar sound is so identifiable that it is you even if this is supposed to be a step away from what you normally do.

Dave: Yes. A lot of people are afraid of The Third Mind because they think it's not really me, but it's totally my guitar. I have a style that you can hear me coming from miles away. I've described in interviews that I sound like Magic Sam sitting in with Quicksilver Messenger Service – who are one of the great psychedelic bands in San Francisco of that era.



The Third Mind recording band

It's a blues guitar player in a more abstract situation. I think people are warming up to The Third Mind. People had to warm up to the 'acoustic me' on the King of California album. To me, it's no different.

WHY NOT YOUR BABY – Gene Clark from the Byrds wrote it. It was on his second solo album, The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard & Clark. I heard it on local radio when I was a kid and have often considered it over the years, but it doesn't fit my voice. I suggested it to Jesse and it was perfect for her. She sang it to me over the phone and I was sold.

There is another version in the can of this song that is completely different than the album. We did a country rock version, but I didn't think that sounded right for this band. It's great but doesn't sound like us. Jesse layed out a loose structure and it fell into a country rock version with slide guitar. We went out and re-thought it to the version that made the album. Gene Clark was a pioneer in psychedelic as well as country rock music. But his version of this song was more '60s pop. We changed it by staying away from country rock riffs and we added a solo with feedback guitar. The feedback captures the lyrics perfectly – the confusion.

IN MY OWN DREAM – It's a song by the Paul Butterfield band that Jesse brought to us. Those are the type of bands Jesse grew up listening to in the 1980's, though her musical taste was the '60s.

We discussed cutting a full-on blues number, but the few I suggested didn't click, so she suggested this. The original is completely different. It was a period when Bloomfield left and Butterfield shifted the band into being a horn band. I'd call it pretty close to jazz. We re-arranged it to be a blues and it just happened.

AM: You've often mentioned in interviews that Miles Davis' way of improv recording is your model for The Third Mind recording. How do you compare that process on your second album and did Miles do primarily cover songs like the Third Mind?

Dave: He did some covers and standards. The closest we were able to get

to the Miles Davis way of recording was on EAST WEST on the first album. We don't have the budgets or the time that he had. He would record for weeks and then edit the tape to alter arrangements. We haven't done any tape editing. Also, all the musicians involved have such busy schedules we were lucky to find time when all of us are available at the same time. We basically made each album in just three days.

TALL GRASS – Jesse and I talked for years about writing a song together. On a drive to the studio one day, I just suggested the title and in a few weeks she called me with the idea and we worked on it for the next session. We tried to flavor it like the '60s and not make it sound too modern. It was so brand new in the studio, it was difficult to cut. I put in a modulation and used my Gibson SG standard guitar and it came out too heavy. So, we did 3 or 4 takes before we got what we wanted.

David Immergluck played the harmonium and mellotron, which are both keyboards. A harmonium is an older style keyboard – a primitive version of an organ. I used it on Blackjack David and the new Jimmie Dale album. It's an old-fashioned sound but moody and evocative. The Mellotron sounds like a string section, but really It has its own sound. I think the Beatles used it, but I first heard it on the first King Crimson album.

SALLY GO ROUND THE ROSES – It's a '60s girl group song by the Jaynetts from 1963. I wanted to do something bluesy, so I changed the 4 and 5 chords, which gives it more drama. Jesse captures it perfectly. Ab-

ner Spector, who wrote it, was a '60s girl group producer – not related to Phil Spector. I imagined it as a bluesy jazzy version. When we did this at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass fest in September, we felt we had really locked in on that song.

A LITTLE BIT OF RAIN – That's another Fred Neil song. Jesse suggested it. She can break your heart with that one. It's similar to the Fred Neil version. He does tremelo guitar on his, so I did too. But we came up with this middle section with a minor chord that is new and gives it drama. It didn't take long to get that one where we wanted it. It flowed nicely. This song is



The Third Mind Touring Band

the only one on the album that follows closely to the original.

AM: The Third Mind is out on tour in January 2024. Tell us about the touring band.

Dave: David Immergluck was not at the San Francisco show and he won't be on the tour. He's busy in the band Counting Crows. We have Mark Karan and he's a great player. I saw him 20 years ago in San Francisco in Bob Weir's band called Rat Dog. He played in that band for 13 years. I remember

watching him and he was really good. It's not easy to find a guitar player who wants to play that expansively. We had one week's notice that David couldn't do the show, so Mark had one rehearsal and he was in. He can play blues and strange stuff. He's doing all the live shows on this tour.

AM: Will the live versions of these songs be further improvised or will you stick to the album versions?

Dave: I don't have an answer because we've only done one show [laughs]. I don't know what's gonna happen. At the first show we were feeling out how it's gonna work and we just fell in. I told Mark that he doesn't have to play Immergluck's licks, just be yourself. For instance, in GROOVIN IS EASY live it isn't until the end of the song when I take my solo that we go into "I don't know what's gonna happen" land, but he went right along with us. He has his own melodic style.

The piano player Willie Aron will do a few Southern California dates.

AM: What will the set list be like on the tour?

Dave: A mix of songs from both Third Mind albums. There won't be any Dave songs, but I might sing HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED. That's the only one. We might do THE DOLPHINS, but Jesse will sing it. I really want to stick to guitar. There will be some twists and turns each night. When Jesse sings she's walking on a tightrope. —AM

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THE
THIRD MIND

Dave Alvin: A Voice For Other Artists

By Tom Wilk

After the release of the first Blasters album in 1980, Dave Alvin began getting work as a session guitarist, backing up such artists as the Beat Farmers, the Gun Club, and John Wesley Harding. With the release of his first solo album in 1987, Dave also began getting work as a guest vocalist. He's sung on albums by a dozen artists between 1990 and 2019 that have showed his range as a singer and allowed him to branch out into genres he wouldn't tackle on his solo albums. Here's a look at those performances with comments by some artists.

-- KATY MOFFATT --

Katy sang back-up on BORDER RADIO and JUBILEE TRAIN on Romeo's Escape," Dave's solo debut album. He returned the favor on SETTIN' THE WOODS ON FIRE, a rollicking duet on the Hank Williams hit that served as the closing track of Katy's Child Bride album in 1990. "I think the idea [to record the song] was Dave's and it was an excellent idea," Katy recalled in a May phone interview.

In fact, Dave added the song to his set list while on tour with the All Nighters in December 1987. Two of those renditions can be heard at the Internet Archive site. Backing musicians for the studio track include Greg Leisz, Jerry Angel, Juke Logan, and Gregg Sutton, who also appear on Romeo's Escape. Logan's harmonica work gives the song a bluesy edge. At the end, Dave playfully ad-libs: "Ah, any of you got a match?" Katy has fond memories of the session. "The entire atmosphere was just lively and fun," she recalled.

In 1999, Dave served as producer of Katy's Loose Diamond album. In addition to providing guitar on three songs, he joined her for a duet on THE CUCKOO, a traditional English folk song. "I've loved that song my whole life. I suspect it was my idea to record it," said Katy, who cites a version by Malvina Reynolds as leading her to record her own. "The Cuckoo is a metaphor," Katy notes. Cuckoos are masters of deception. When it comes to raising their young, these birds don't need to build a nest, protect their eggs or feed their offspring, according to science.com. They lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species, tricking other birds into thinking the cuckoo eggs are theirs. Sometimes, the cuckoo will push other eggs out of the nest.

The version on Loose Diamond captures the dramatic tension inherent in the lyrics and serves as a warning about the pitfalls of romance. In retrospect, the song can be heard



as a prelude to Dave's collection of traditional songs on the Grammy-winning Public Domain album released in 2000. Dave also included THE CUCKOO on his Best of the HighTone Years compilation in 2008. "I was really happy to hear it was included on Best of the HighTone Years," Katy said.

-- **TOM RUSSELL** --

Dave and Tom began their songwriting collaboration with HALEY'S COMET, a song about the last days of rock 'n' roll pioneer Bill Haley that each singer released in 1991. Dave co-produced The Rose of the San Joaquin, Tom's debut album on HighTone Records in 1995.

Dave joined Tom and Peter Case on a folk version of SOMEBODY'S HUSBAND, SOMEBODY'S SON with each man singing a verse and harmonizing on the choruses. "I don't recall what was on my mind writing this one," Tom said in an email interview. "Merle Haggard certainly was an influence on the song, as was Johnny Cash."

In 1997, Tom released The Long Way Around, a retrospective that featured some new songs and reinterpretations of older ones with a variety of guest artists, including Nanci Griffith, Iris DeMent, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. Some collaborations were in the studio; others were done live.

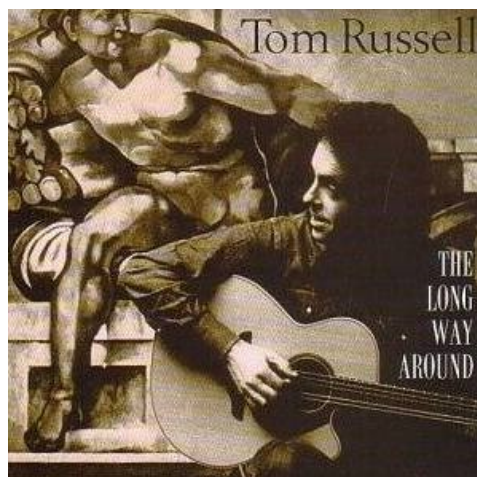
Dave and Tom teamed up in concert for duets on BLUE WING and HALEY'S COMET with Katy Moffatt joining them on the latter. Dave had released a version of BLUE WING on his King of California album and still features it in his concerts. "I wanted a live feel on both songs," Tom said. With just Tom and Andrew Hardin on acoustic guitars, HALEY'S COMET gets a more intimate feel as Tom and Dave trade verses.

-- **RAY CAMPI QUARTET** --

Train Rhythm Blue, the 1998 album by the Ray Campi Quartet, finds Dave in a different vocal setting. He speaks, instead of sings, on AN HONEST BAR in the voice of an ethically challenged policeman interacting with a boy who works at his father's tavern. His reading recalls some of his spoken word performances of the 1980s and early 1990s.

-- **LITTLE MILTON** --

On Welcome to Little Milton, released in 1999, Dave teamed up with the legendary bluesman on NEVER TRUST A WOMAN, a song Dave co-wrote with Rick Estrin. It's a fun performance with Dave and Little Milton trying to school each other about dealing



with the opposite sex. In 2012, Dave released his own version on the expanded edition of Eleven Eleven with Candy Kane as his duet partner.

-- **RAMBLIN' JACK ELLIOTT** --

On The Long Ride in 1999, Ramblin' Jack Elliott's second album on HighTone Records, Dave plays guitar and sings on a folk-oriented rendition of EAST VIRGINIA BLUES. Dave revisited the song with a rockabilly arrangement a year later on Public Domain.

-- **LOS STRAITJACKETS** --

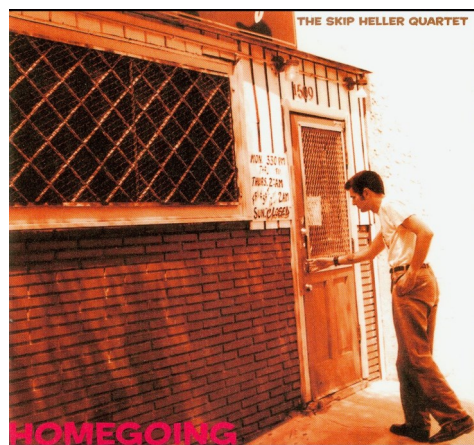
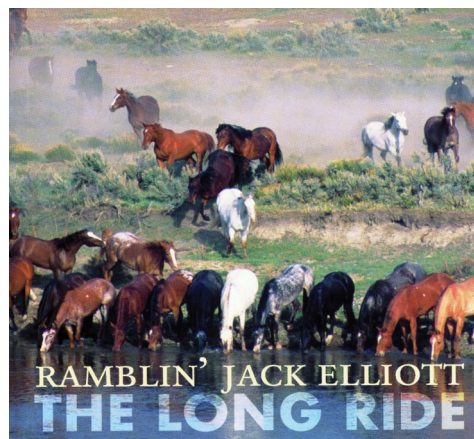
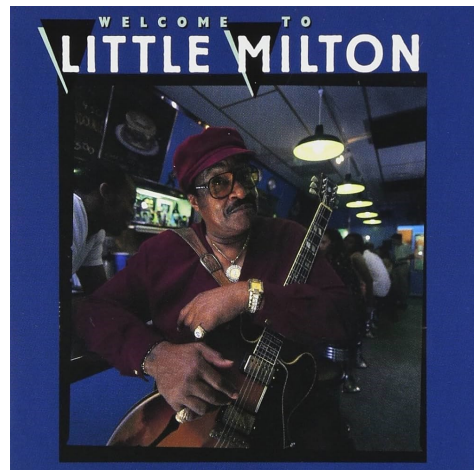
The noted instrumental band switched gears in 2001 for Sing Along with Los Straitjackets. The group recruited a wide range of singers, including Raul Malo, Exene Cervenka, and Allison Moorer, to handle vocal duties. Dave contributes a spirited vocal on CALIFORNIA SUN, a song first released by Joe Jones in 1961. The Rivas released a surf-rock version in 1963 that became a Top 5 single. It's a song the Blasters also played in concert.

Early versions of Sing Along with Los Straitjackets came with a limited edition CD single that featured Dave singing the rockabilly-flavored I THOUGHT IT OVER. It was co-written by Joel Scott Hill, who released his own version with the Strangers in 1960.

-- **SKIP HELLER QUARTET** --

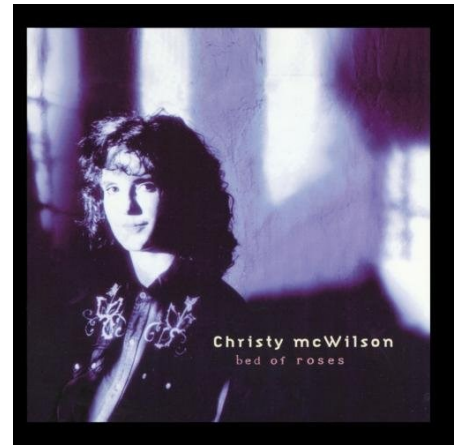
The quartet's 2002 album Homegoing is primarily instrumental. However, two of its tracks feature Dave on vocals: TIME AFTER TIME and I JUST KEEP LOVIN HER. "I wanted to get a singer on a couple of songs [on Homegoing]," Skip Heller explained. "I needed a baritone, not a guy with a pretty voice."

Skip, a native of Southern New Jersey, got to know Dave and Phil Alvin after moving to California in the 1990s. Skip's motivation in recruiting Dave was to get him to try something new. "He wouldn't have sung a love song on one of his own records." TIME AFTER TIME is a romantic jazz standard with music by Julie Styne and lyrics by Sammy Cahn, and is a song that normally wouldn't be part of Dave's repertoire, but it has a connection to one of his musical mentors. Big Joe Turner had recorded the song on Big Joe Rides Again, a 1960 album that includes his take on other standards, including PENNIES FROM HEAVEN and



UNTIL THE REAL THING COMES ALONG.

I JUST KEEP LOVIN' HER is a blues standard by harmonica player Little Walter. "I always loved Little Walter as a player and singer," Skip said. In fact, Skip played guitar on a version of I JUST KEEP LOVIN' HER by Phil Alvin. A clip of that performance can be seen on YouTube. Looking back, Skip is pleased with Dave's performances. "Dave was so well prepared for the songs," Skip said. "He had done his homework."

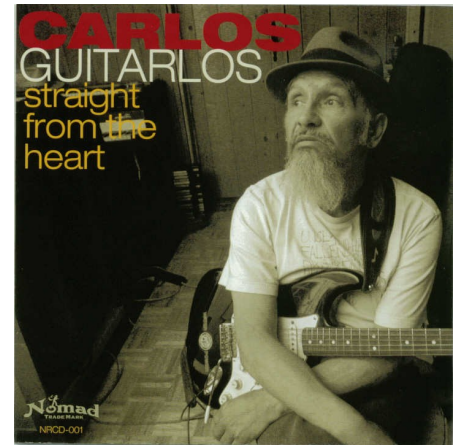


-- **CHRISTY McWILSON** --

On Bed of Roses, the 2002 album produced by Dave, he joins Christy on 805, a song that first appeared on Moby Grape's debut album in 1967. Dave's soulful baritone plays nicely off Christy's higher vocal in this tale of romantic separation.

-- **CARLOS GUITARLOS** --

Carlos Guitarlos, former guitarist for Top Jimmy and the Rhythm Pigs, a 1980s contemporary of the Blasters, made a comeback as a solo artist in 2003 with Straight from the Heart. Dave trades vocals and guitar licks on "POPPIN' AND BUMPIN'", a frantic rocker that would be at home on a Blasters album.



-- **LOS LOBOS** --

In May 2004, Los Lobos celebrated its 30th anniversary with The Ride, an album that featured Mavis Staples, Bobby Womack, Elvis Costello and Garth Hudson. David Hidalgo and Louie Perez of Los Lobos teamed up with Dave to co-write SOMEWHERE IN TIME, a song about missing a loved one. It was inspired by the death of Dave's father and the murder of the wife of Los Lobos guitarist Cesar Rosas. The Los Lobos version, which features the two Daves sharing vocals, has a Tex-Mex country feel with Greg Leisz on pedal-steel guitar. Dave released his own version as the concluding track to Ashgrove, in June 2004. Dave has described his version as "kind of spooky and eerie." Dave and Los Lobos performed SOMEWHERE IN TIME together on March 20, 2004, at South by Southwest in Austin, Texas.



-- **JAMES COTTON** --

Throat surgery led blues harmonica legend James Cotton to recruit guest singers for Baby, Don't You Tear My Clothes, his 2004 album. Dave is joined by Chris Gaffney on harmony vocals to provide a folkie edge to STEALIN', STEALIN', a song credited to Will Shade of the Memphis Jug Band, which recorded it in 1928. Dave would recut the song for the Downey to Lubbock album with Jimmie Dale Gilmore in 2018.

-- **AMY ALLISON** --

On Sheffield Streets, her 2009 album, Amy Allison recruited Dave to play guitar and sing

on the country-styled EVERYBODY OUGHT TO KNOW. In an email interview, Amy elaborated on the song and how she came to work with Dave. “I’ve always loved Dave from the Blasters on. I first met him at a Parlor James gig in L.A. [Parlor James was a group I was in with Ryan Hedgecock in the 90’s]. I then did a small tour opening for Christy McWilson who as you know is very close to Dave, so I know him a little through her as well,” she wrote. “But the recording of EVERYBODY OUGHT TO KNOW came about through my friend the late Don Heffington who was producing Sheffield Streets. Dave was so sweet and awesome to agree to record the song with me in Don’s little home studio. It was a total pleasure. He was so relaxed and it happened so naturally and easily. I’m very honored and grateful for his participation,” she added.

“I have to say that Don Heffington was not only a great friend and musician but a facilitator. I owe him thanks, too. I immediately loved Dave’s approach -- he played his distinctive guitar as well as singing. I always loved his vocal style -- great musician and all-around great guy, real authentic which is a rarity. One of the true originals.”

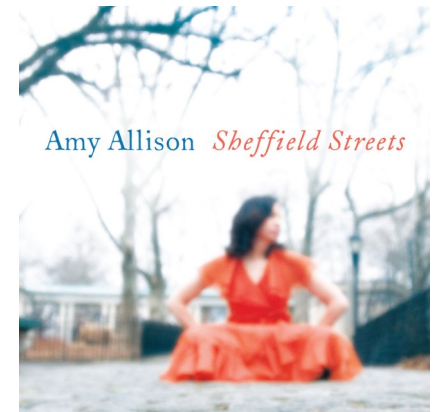
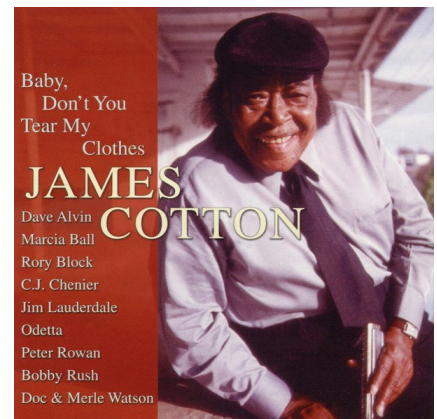
Amy first recorded EVERYBODY OUGHT TO KNOW for The Maudlin Years, her debut solo album in 1996. “I didn’t write it as a duet, but I thought it would be perfect for me and Dave.”

-- ANNE McCUE --

Blue Sky Thinkin’, Anne McCue’s 2014 album, serves up a mix of styles, including swing, jazz, and country blues. Dave contributes vocals to DEVIL IN THE MIDDLE, which she co-wrote with David Olney. The catchy song has echoes of Cab Calloway with its hi-de-hi chorus.

-- SOPHIA FISTER --

Sophia Pfister, who now goes by Sophia Phoenix, recruited Dave to sing on SEPARATE WAYS, a track on her Birdcage album. She recalled that it turned into a songwriting collaboration. “I had all the lyrics written but on the day of recording he showed up with his own lyrics for his verses. I first heard these new lyrics as he was singing them into the microphone and they were much better than mine,” Sophia recalled in a 2019 email interview. SEPARATE WAYS is an emotionally-charged track that evokes the spirit of Leonard Cohen. A video featuring the two singers side by side garnered more than 50,000 views on YouTube. —Am



American Music: The Blasters / Dave Alvin Newsletter

30th Anniversary — February 1994 - 2024

Well, here we are at 30 years of publishing American Music: The Blasters / Dave Alvin Newsletter. So, that's an average of 3 newsletters per year. There was a 25th anniversary, which was overshadowed by the 40th anniversary of the Blasters. That was a fun issue in June 2019 in which seven of the Blasters told their own history of the band.

In the past I've acknowledged the musicians, management, crew, ect. who have fully supported and respected our crazy fandom of this American Music. This time I'd like to thank the staff of the newsletter.

Tom Wilk has been the main writer of the newsletter since May of 1999, so happy 25th to you Tom. He has consistently come up with interesting angles to write about our American Music, people to interview, and he is the catalyst that keeps me on my toes to keep the newsletter coming out on a reasonable release schedule. He spends a lot of time keeping his finger on the pulse collecting the latest news.

Then to my copy editors Nick Cristiano, Craig Frischkorn, and the love of my life, Lesah Smith for corrections and support.

This newsletter would have stopped years ago if it wasn't for you, the readers who send me messages saying how much you enjoy the interviews and minutiae of American Music. So, thank you so much.

A very old website still exists that I put up the newsletters on. It has been hacked a few times, looks ancient, and costs too much. But it's for a few readers who I've known for 30 years who don't do social media. Facebook is where 98% of the readership is. I can't promise that the website is going to last much longer, but I do have an email list in which I send out PDFs of each newsletter to some of the longtime readers. You can get on that list by emailing davistb@aol.com.

There's not much more to say other than: "Let's keep rockin' and rollin'."

— Billy Davis

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