

SHOWCASE

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Blasters' Alvin forsees dramatic changes in music

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The Los Angeles-based rock band the Blasters used to have a recording contract, but they got out of it. Lead singer Phil Alvin doesn't want another one.

"It's a bad time to make contracts, to move very fast in music at all," said Alvin, who alternates between a career in music and one in mathematics, having taught for awhile at Cal State Long Beach.

"If you do, you're going to hurt yourself in the long run, because things are going to change under you."

He's referring to dramatic changes in the music industry which are being brought about by the computer age. Alvin not only defines the image of the Blasters as purveyors of "American Music" (the band's anthem) but is also working on a master's thesis in mathematics about the foundations of relational data bases, which he expects to publish in June.

Today and tomorrow, however, Alvin and the Blasters will be concentrating on their shows scheduled for 7 and 9 p.m. on Park Center Stage at the Antelope Valley Fair.

In talking about the music industry, Alvin said the whole scheme of things is determined by what he calls "60-year-old furniture companies."

AV Fair: today

"The idea that you would make records and not try to sell record players and other furniture didn't even stop until the early '60s," said Alvin, who is also a music historian.

"When Capitol Records, who had nothing to do with furniture, started making records in the late '40s, they decided they had to make record players, too. The reason that that's true is because furniture companies were the things that distributed record players. They had trucks. They had warehouses. Records weigh a lot."

"When these guys made the record industry, they weren't worried about making the record industry — they were worried about making the record player industry."

However, with the advent of the computer industry, "the ability to distribute records is not going to be with the furniture companies," said Alvin. "In the next 15 years, it's going to be with the AT&Ts, with the information companies. That's why Sony just bought CBS and CBS allowed themselves to be bought by Sony."

"I can send you my songs over the telephone. There is no need for me to have these disks. There is no need for me to have these warehouses. I need only a com-

puter bank, you call up, put your number inside and it comes over your telephone wire into your digitalogic memory that will hold your record for you.

"We'll be sitting around the house one night and just draw something up and then the next day you'll go through the thing and there'll be a new Blasters song on there. You don't have to wait for the release. It'll just be there."

The Blasters, along with several other L.A.-area bands that include X and Los Lobos, may, in the near future, create such a system called the Los Angeles Musical Data Base, he said.

"When that happens, the means of production are in our, the musicians' hands. We can say to the record companies, 'I'm making it over here. I don't need you.'"

The Blasters have already said that.

"There are innumerable furniture companies who call and want the Blasters," said Alvin. "But we are not going to go and give them a furniture company contract until I finish my record. That way, I pay for my record. I know how much it costs and you have to buy it from me. This is to our advantage with the furniture companies in that the Blasters are well known."

The Blasters came together at the tail end of the Los Angeles punk scene in late '70s, spearheading the revival for American roots music. The band, started by Phil and his brother Dave Alvin (who has since left), put together powerful rock songs such as "American Music," "Border Radio" and "Marie Marie." The

group made five albums with Slash/Warner Brothers, plus one solo LP by Phil Alvin, before a contractual disagreement over the solo LP reared its ugly head. The current album-in-process, produced entirely by the band, should be out this fall, said Alvin.

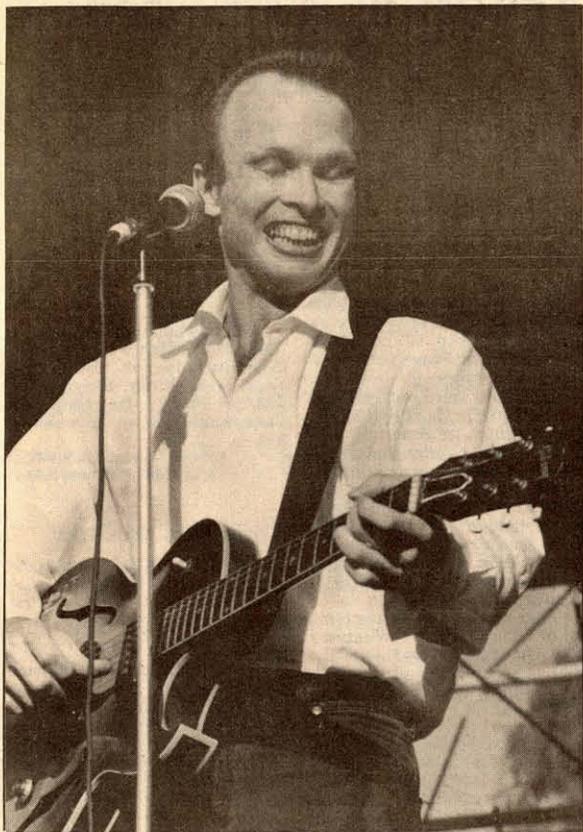
Nowadays, Alvin and the Blasters prefer to work outside the "furniture companies" as much as possible. "What it boils down to is a record is treated in a contract like a product," he said. "That ain't no product to me. As far as bootlegging is concerned, that's why Phil Alvin and the Blasters tell you, 'Please bring your tape recorders. Please take every record that I've ever made and tape it and give it to your

friends.' Because what counts to me is how many people know who I am."

Recognition and promotion are the primary purposes behind making records, said Alvin, "because I'm not getting a dime of it unless I go out and play a live gig. The reason the Rolling Stones are going on tour right now is not because they made an album. They made an album because they're going on tour. In three months, the Stones will make \$40 million when they go on tour."

"The multimillion dollar music industry has not changed things for the musician one iota," said Alvin. "In 1925 you got paid where you played, and in 1989 you get paid where you play."

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PHIL ALVIN and the Blasters bring their style of American music to Park Center Stage at 7 and 9 p.m. today at the Antelope Valley Fair.