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ALVIN LEE

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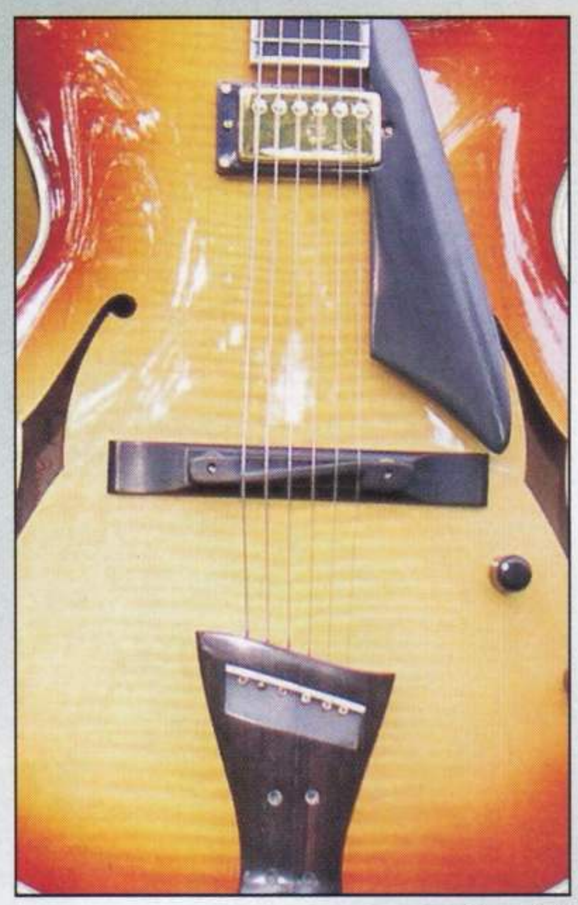

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On the cover: Scotty Moore and Alvin Lee

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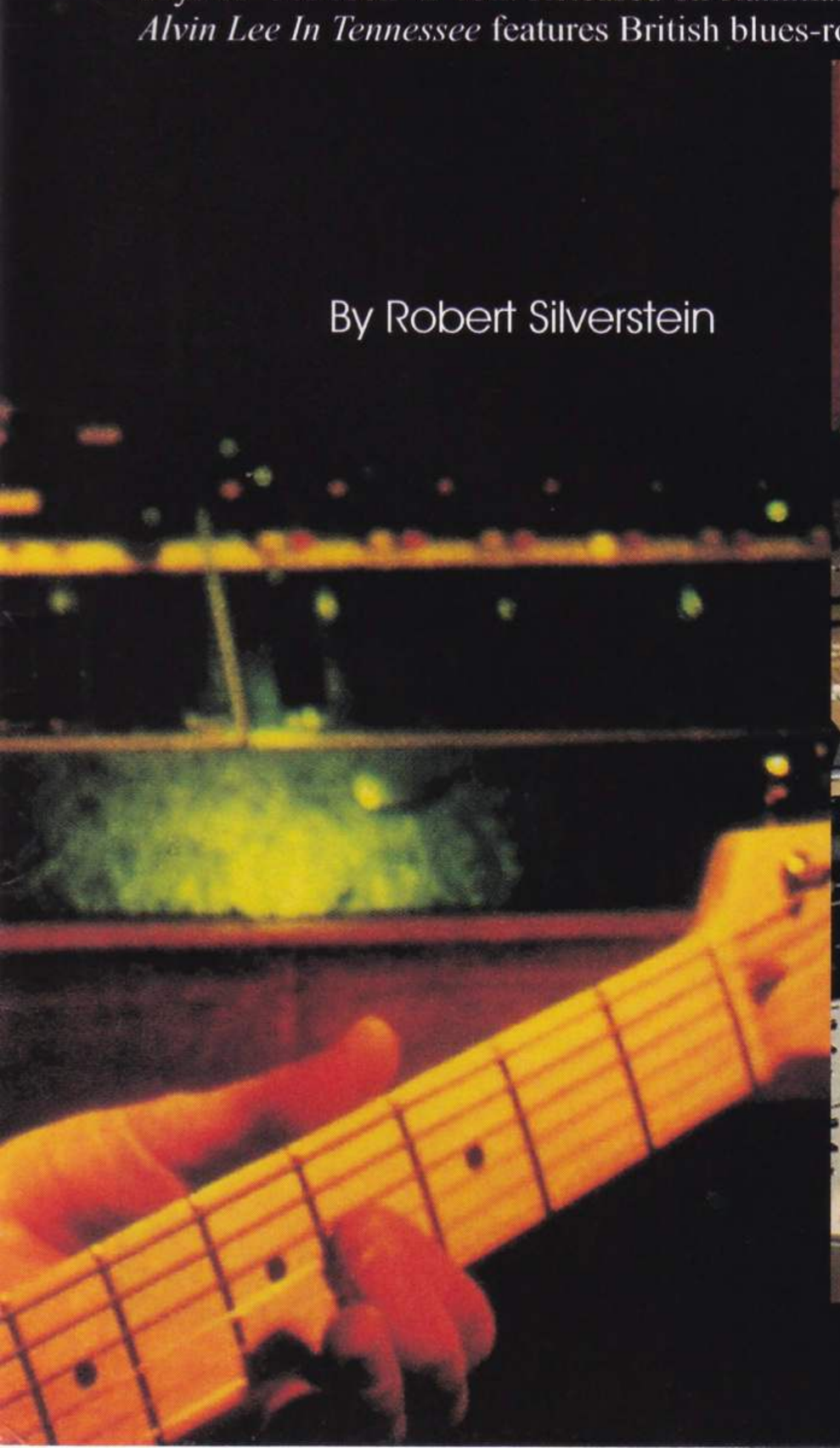
That's All Right!

50 years of Rock 'n' Roll with Alvin Lee and Scotty Moore

It was fifty years ago—on July 4, 1954 in Memphis, Tennessee to be exact—that guitarist Scotty Moore met a budding singer named Elvis Presley. The very next day, on July 5th 1954, Scotty and Elvis—with Bill Black on bass and Sun Records founder Sam Phillips in attendance—recorded "That's All Right" and the rest is rock 'n' roll history. Celebrating 50 years since the first Sun Sessions and the birth of rock 'n' roll, RCA Records has released *Elvis At Sun*—a nineteen track 2004 CD containing some of the great tracks Elvis made with Scotty Moore and Bill Black at Sun including "That's All Right". Coinciding with *Elvis At Sun,* RCA has also released *Memphis Celebrates 50 Years Of Rock 'N' Roll,* a 21 track CD combining a range of early Sun classics from Elvis, Scotty & Bill, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison and Jerry Lee Lewis. Flash forward 50 years, from 1954 to 2004, and the release of a new recording celebrating the glory days of '50s rock 'n' roll. Released on Rainman Records, *Alvin Lee In Tennessee* features British blues-rock guitar icon Alvin Lee joined in a musical reunion with original Elvis band members Scotty Moore and drummer D.J. Fontana. Showcasing Alvin's songs and vocals—with key contributions from Scotty and D.J.—*Alvin Lee In Tennessee* merges the finest elements of '50s rockabilly with the blues-rock power Lee successfully brought to bear with his '60s band Ten Years After. Honoring the 50th anniversary of rock 'n' roll and the 2004 release of *Alvin Lee In Tennessee,* 20th Century Guitar spoke to both Scotty Moore and Alvin Lee in early June 2004 on a range of topics. Scotty spoke about recording with Elvis at Sun Records, Alvin's CD and the 2004 DVD reissue of the *Elvis '68 Comeback Special.* One of the original architects of '60s British blues-rock, Alvin Lee was eager to point out how influential Scotty and D.J. Fontana were during the making of *Alvin Lee In Tennessee* while also sharing musical memories of Ten Years After, the '69 Woodstock festival and much more.

By Robert Silverstein



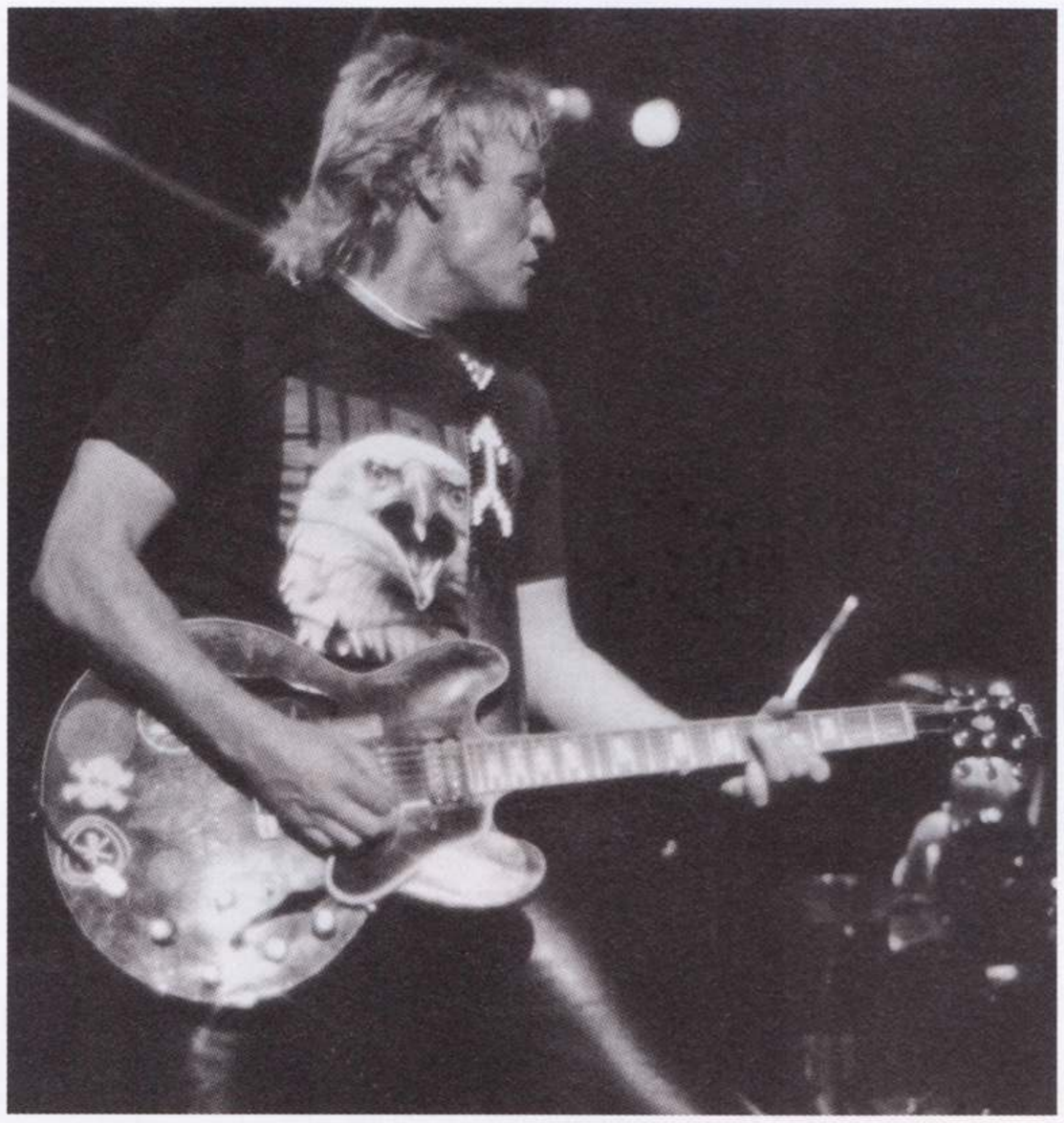
SCOTTY MOORE

The First Rock and Roll Guitar Hero

TCG: Hi Scotty, I interviewed Alvin Lee last week and I told Alvin that you guys did a great job on the *Alvin Lee In Tennessee* album which was released on CD in May 2004.
SM: Yeah, it's getting alot of play around the world. I just played on a couple things. It was real fun.
TCG: Alvin says you masterminded the sessions. (laughter) You met Alvin at the unveiling of Gibson Guitars limited production Scotty Moore signature ES-295 in London?
SM: Well I met him there and he had been over here way back. I can't remember what year at our tape shop. We had a tape duplicating company at the time and there were some pictures made with me and him made on the porch, and I had forgotten all about it, it'd been so long. So...I didn't play for like 24 years. I didn't even hit a note.
TCG: How did the album take off from there?
SM: It was just something we kind of talked about over time. He got all his songs together. Of course...and he plays so fast. Whew! (laughter)
TCG: Alvin's album pays a great tribute to '50s sound you and Elvis had back in '54.
SM: Right.
TCG: It sounds very mid to late '50s. Very warm sounding.
SM: The best way I can say it is, some of the stuff you listen to today you obviously know what they're going to play before they play it. I don't know if that makes any sense or not. You don't know what he's (Alvin) going to do (laughter) that's for sure!
TCG: There's a 50th anniversary celebration planned to honor the day you and Elvis and Bill Black recorded "That's All Right" on July 5th 1954.
SM: Sun Records is...well, the studio, Sun studio, they're going to play "That's All Right (Mama)"...it's either ten or eleven o'clock in the morning and it's going off by satellite all over, I don't know how many stations, I haven't talked to anybody lately. And I'm going to have the honor of going there and pushing the button! That'll be fun. And then there's gonna be a block party starting right after that and it'll go...hell, it may go for a week, (laughter) who knows? (laughter)
TCG: "That's All Right" is considered the first real rock and roll song and also the start of the Sun sessions.
SM: Well, I don't really consider it as being the first but it is the first one that's gotten all the attention over the years and he became such a big star too. "Rock Around The Clock" would have been before ours. And what was the other one by, another one I can't think of it...Jackie Brenston was the artist. He was on Sun also. But I can't think of the name of the song! It was kind of in the same vein. But I don't think anybody's complaining about it. It's okay...

ALVIN LEE

TCG: Hi Alvin, I'd like to start with some questions about your 2004 CD *Alvin Lee In Tennessee*. When you were 14 you joined the Elvis Presley fan club in order to get pictures of Scotty Moore and his guitars?
AL: That's right, yeah. I was just starting to pick up the guitar and fool around with it and I'd taken a few chords lessons. I'd been brought up on blues. My father was an avid blues collector and he had a 78 collection of some very ethnic chain gang songs and Big Bill Broonzy and the like so I was brought up on that music. I started off playing a clarinet when I was 12. And I heard Charlie Christian playing with Benny Goodman and thought, 'that's more what I'd like to do', so I swapped the clarinet for a guitar. And till I heard Chuck Berry I was kind of pretty much into jazz chords and things. I used to listen to Barney Kessel and Django Reinhardt and early George Benson. But I first heard Chuck Berry and I thought, 'this is the blues all rolled into rock and roll as well.' I loved the way Chuck Berry played two notes at a time when he solos. And of course, the other great guitarist was Scotty Moore. The "Heartbreak Hotel" solo was the first one I ever heard. And the second "Hound Dog" solo, which is a classic till this day. And just his talent and his style and the way he made things work. And I was just inspired by that. I never actually copied these guys. I used to copy their style but not their notes. You know what I mean? So I would play in their style...it's what kicked me off. D.J. Fontana too...who I think, still is one of the greatest drummers in the world.
TCG: Can you recall the first time you met Scotty Moore and how that evolved into the making of *Alvin Lee In Tennessee?*
AL: I first met Scotty, I was in Nashville as a fan in 1995. And somebody took me round to meet him. I got my photograph taken with him and got his autograph. All the fan stuff, y'know? Asked him all the fan questions but it wasn't until four years later, 1999 it was that Scotty was launching his guitar for Gibson, the Scotty Moore model. And it was a jam on stage at the AIR studios in London. They invited me down and I got up and did a medley of Elvis songs with Scotty and D.J. I just loved it. I mean it was great. It was magic and I thought, 'I've got to take this further.' So I asked Scotty, 'Any chance getting you guys in the studio sometime?', and he said 'sure thing.' So the idea was born there and then.
TCG: What was it about Scotty Moore's early rock and roll guitar style with Elvis that intrigued you most?



AL: It was a mixture of...he played melodies for solos rather than kind of noodling. I play from the hip generally. I play kind of stuff all over the place. But I've always admired guitarists, people like George Harrison too, they can construct a solo which is singable. But Scotty would do that too whilst exploring interesting runs and he had a little bit of jazz stuff going there, which is quite unique really

TCG: What did you think of Elvis as a guitarist?

AL: Didn't think of him as a guitar player. A damn good singer. (laughter) One thing I thought when I went to play with Scotty at that jam, I said, 'well look, I don't want to be up there as Elvis for the night, y'know? 'Cause that's a tough act to follow and I can't fill his blue suede shoes.' He said, 'oh, no...just get up and have a bit of fun.' And that was basically what it was about. But for the recording, I wanted to record original songs. I went over to Nashville. I had, I think twenty seven songs and I even had a stash of about fifteen songs...all Elvis like "Shake, Rattle & Roll"...in case my songs didn't work. But fortunately I didn't have to use those. I went over to record for three weeks and in two days we got down eleven tracks. So, I had a lot of time to spare. Those guys are very good and know what they're doing in the studio. They go for the feel and the groove in the pocket. It was beautiful.

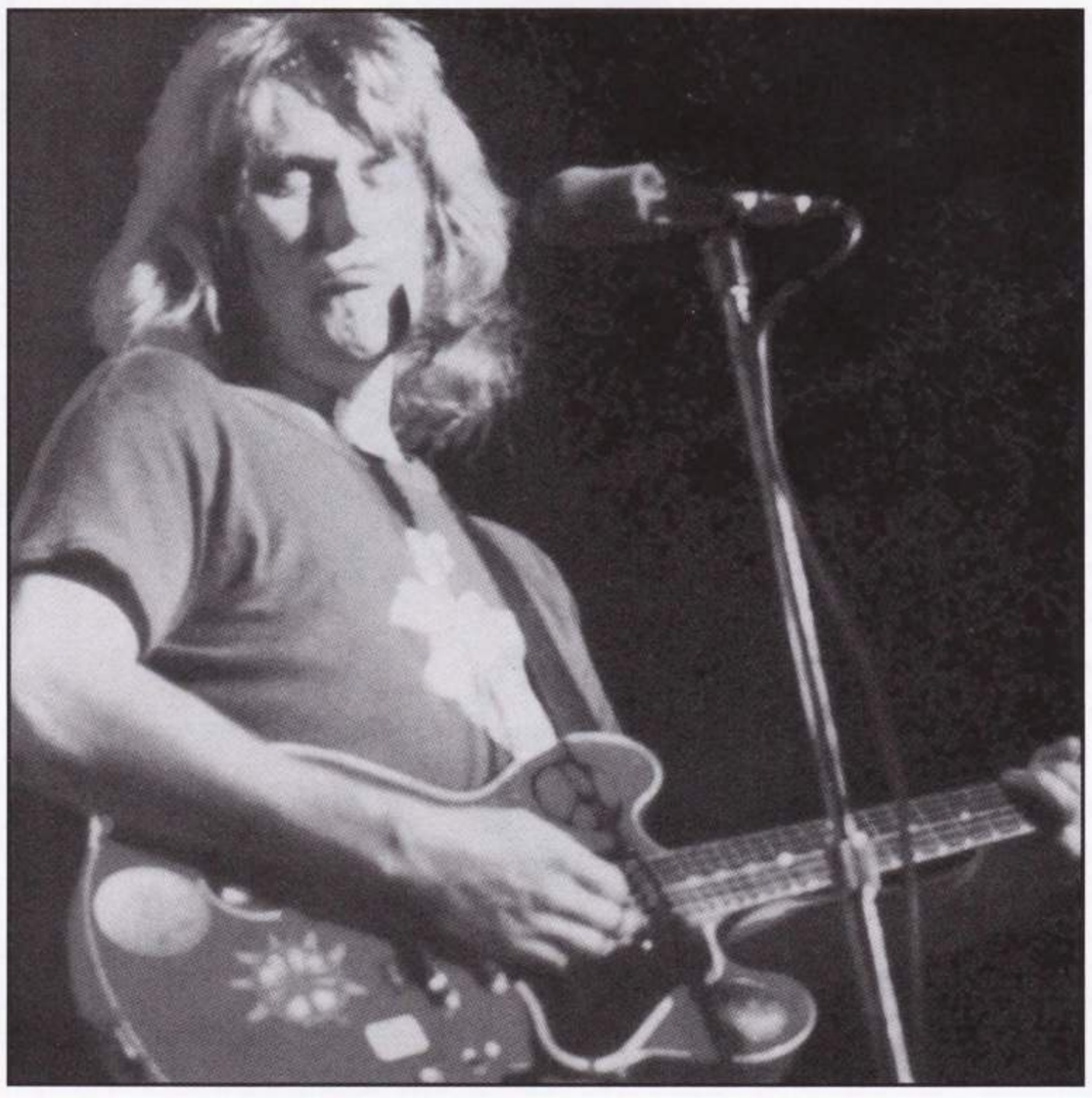
TCG: You've called D.J. Fontana the best drummer in the world. How cool is that to have two key Elvis band members backing you up on *Alvin Lee In Tennessee?*

AL: (laughter) I know. It was great. I was still like a fan when I got there. In Scotty's studio, he's got pictures of him with Elvis, trophies and gold guitars...stuff all around. I mean, like a school boys dream. It took me back to being a school boy. I felt like a young kid, but they made me feel like one of the boys, which is a great compliment.

TCG: You've said about making the *Alvin Lee In Tennessee* that 'it was time to put the roll back in rock and roll'.

AL: That's right! It's been missing for a long time. The English style of rock music came from rock 'n' roll but it was always kind of done with kind of more aggression and more adrenaline. And of course the English rock music turned into the stadium rock, which became louder and even turned into heavy metal. So the *roll* in rock 'n' roll, which D.J. Fontana is the master of, kind of got lost somewhere. And I thought it was possibly the best bit, 'cause it's the swing, it's the groove, it's the finesse. And when you hear those old Elvis records, which you think are really loud and raucous...they're not so loud and raucous. In fact, they're steady. They've just got that swing groove which makes them rock...and roll.

TCG: Scotty only played guitar on a couple tracks, but you've said he



TCG: "That's All Right" is credited to "Elvis Presley, with Scotty and Bill". Was that song recorded the same day you first met Elvis?

SM: It was the day before...

TCG: You met him on July 4th, 1954?

SM: Right.

TCG: So you met Elvis Presley July 4th **a**t Sam Phillips' house?

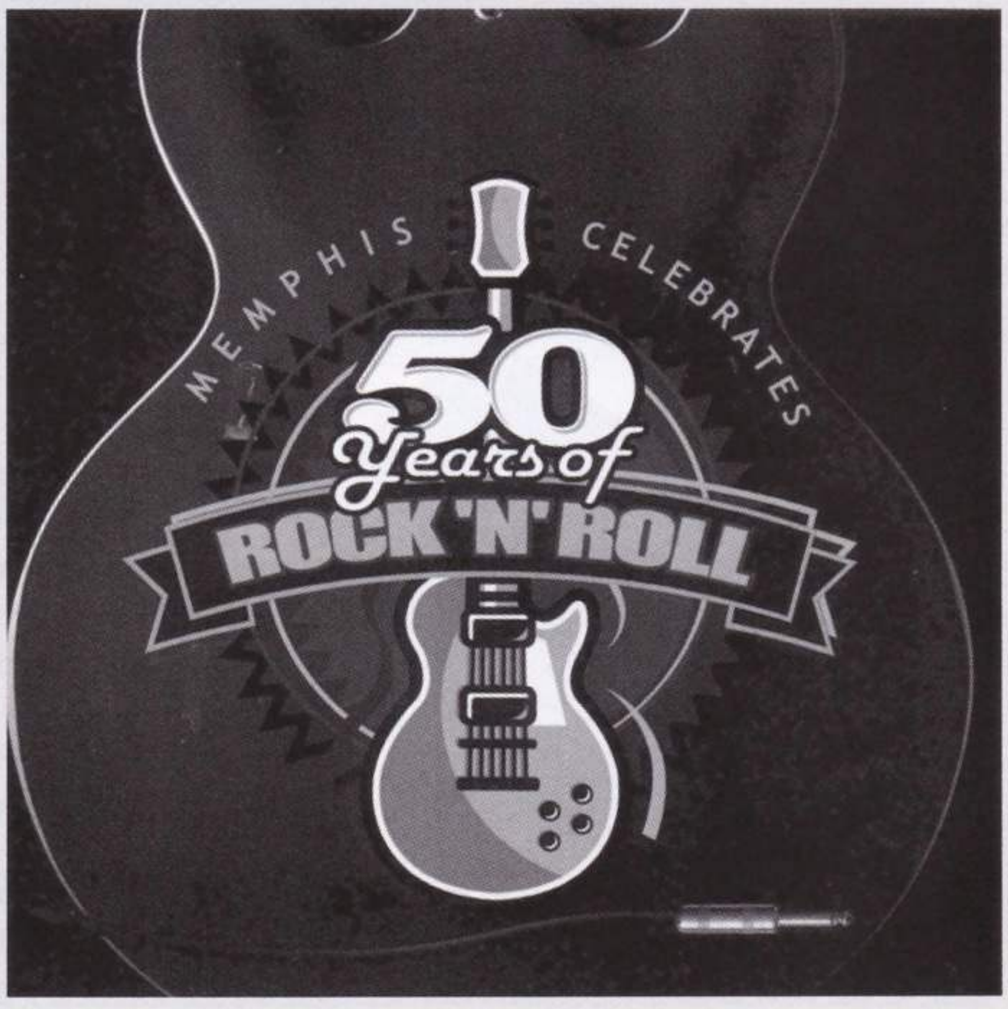
SM: No, it was at my house. Sam and I had become good friends. See, I had a group that Sam released a record on. It was country songs. But through that we became real good friends. And I would go down and we'd meet in the afternoon and talk, just talk about generalities. And one day his secretary, Marion Keisker, was having coffee with us and she brought Elvis' name up, although she didn't explain his name. She said, 'how about that boy that was in here last week or so? What'd you think about him?' Sam just nodded and said, 'oh yeah, he was so and so...' And then I bugged Sam then for a couple weeks, so he finally told Marion, 'get that boy's name and give it to Scotty.' And he turned to me and says, 'give him a call and ask him over your house and see what you think about him.' That's where it all started! He came over my house and sang a couple of songs, I mean a couple of hours. Seemed like he knew every song in the world! Country, pop, you name it! Just anything. And Bill Black lived a few doors from me at the time and he came down and listened for a while and he left. Then when Elvis left, Bill came back and we talked about it. What we really liked was the rhythm in his voice, if you understand what I'm saying. It's not just staccato type, he's not like you're reading a book or something, word by word. It flows. He had a real knack for that. The songs he didn't know all the chords to playing lead guitar...he'd just keep singing. He'd (laughter) come back singing till he come back to the right place. When he left, I called Sam (Phillips) and relayed all this to him. And he said, well he said, 'I'll call him', he said, 'come in tomorrow night. We don't need the whole band, I just need you and Bill come over to the studio. I just want to see what Elvis sounds like on tape with a little music behind it. And that's where we cut "That's All Right". It was an audition.

TCG: How many takes did you guys do on that song?

SM: I don't remember exactly. It wasn't very many. Like maybe four or five. We only used three mics. There was a mic on the amp on my guitar, one on Bill's bass. There was one mic on Elvis' voice and it picked up his guitar at the same time. There was a couple times Sam had to stop and back off, play something a little lighter or if he popped the mic with his voice or something like that. Three or four cuts.

TCG: Do you remember anything else about 1954? There was so much enthusiasm...

SM: The only thing I can remember now, immediately...we got that record and the back side. Bill Black came up with that side.



kind of masterminded the *In Tennessee* sessions.

AL: Oh yeah. Well he put the band together to start with. He got Willie Rainsford on the keyboards. I didn't know Willie before then and he was perfect for the job. And the bass player, he brought in Pete Pritchard. He's actually from London. And I just used him on my last tour. He's great. He plays double bass and he plays electric bass as well. And Scotty brought him in from England so I figured he must be good, 'cause (laughter) there's a hundred bass players in Nashville!

TCG: You've said that nothing comes close to your 'Big Red' Gibson 335. Did you mostly use the 335 on the *Alvin Lee In Tennessee* CD?

AL: No, I didn't use that one. Actually (laughter), I borrowed a guitar in Nashville. (laughter) I figured taking a guitar to Nashville is like taking, what we say, coals to Newcastle. I suppose you'd say, taking sand to the desert. Also, I got fed up with carrying guitars on airplanes these days. It's great if you can pick up a guitar and play it. I mean, it's a bit risky really. When I do my touring and stuff I take my own guitar but it's great when you can pick up one. And in Nashville, the guy at Valley Arts Guitars...he's got about six hundred Gibsons and just said, 'help yourself'.

TCG: So which guitars did you use on the album?

AL: It was a 335 type of guitar. It was a sunburst version. It was a prototype of a different pick-up situation, but it was pretty much a 335. I'm playing it on the album cover, you can see it so...the brown version.

TCG: The lead off track "Let's Boogie" kicks off the CD in style.

AL: Yeah, I like that one, yeah. That was the obvious direction because, I mean to me, that jump-jive stuff is where rock 'n' roll comes from. And I think that's what D.J. and Scotty were listening to when they were learning. This is what's great about music, 'cause every time you find an innovator of music, you find out what he was listening to. And rock 'n' roll goes back to the early 40's, or even earlier but if you go to the jump-jive bands in Harlem in the '40s. They're playing rock 'n' roll. With a lot of swing.

TCG: Early Ten Years After albums like *Ssssh* and *Cricklewood Green* were way ahead of their time.

AL: I thought so too! (laughter) They were great days. It was the time for breaking barriers in those days. I mean, if you made an album without breaking a few barriers then it was passe, wasn't it? I've got this anthology album out, it's called *Alvin Lee Anthology* and I did this interview which the guy used for the liner notes. I don't know if you heard that one 'cause it's a good mixture of all the stuff I've done over thirty years. It might only be out in Europe at the moment. I think it's due to be released in America this year, come to think of it.

TCG: Another highlight on the *In Tennessee* album featuring Scotty, "Let's Get It On" was reminiscent of your work with George Harrison.

AL: I wouldn't have actually thought of that myself. George didn't do much boogie-woogie stuff. He was more of a chord man and a melodic man. When you get that anthology album, there's "The Bluest Blues" on there, which is one of George's best guitar solos ever. He plays this slide guitar solo, which just sends shivers down your spine. And he's great for that. He's just got the feel and the touch and the sensitivity. And he keeps me in line too, 'cause if I start to overplay, and then George comes in and he plays in such sweet, pure tones. And he brings me back down again to being melodic. That's one of my favorite tracks of all time, "The Bluest Blues".

TCG: In 1969 Ten Years After played Woodstock. How's your memory of the '69 Woodstock festival?

AL: I've pieced it back together! (laughter) It was a very special event but at the time nobody really was sure about that. The first realization of it being anything other than another date on the list was when we were told we couldn't drive into the festival site 'cause the roads were all blocked and it had been declared a national disaster on the radio and we had to take a helicopter in. And to me, I thought 'well, this is going to be interesting.' (laughter) And it certainly was.

TCG: It's interesting to note that the same summer of '69, before Woodstock, Ten Years After became one of the first rock bands to ever

TCG: With "Blue Moon Of Kentucky"?

SM: The same identical way, we went back in the studio...well let me back up a little bit. Sam took the demo home, of "That's All Right" down to Dewey Phillips, who was no...he wasn't kin to Sam. But he was on the radio. And he left the demo for Dewey to listen to, to give him his impression of it. Well, unbeknownst to Sam, Dewey played the thing on the radio over and over! He called Elvis down there and put him on the air! (laughter) So we had to rush back in about two nights later. And again we went through song after song. And we were trying to find something that would finally fit the way we had done "That's All Right". And Bill...again just a comedy. He was still sittin' on his bass and he started beatin' on it and singin'. "Blue Moon Of Kentucky", if you remember, was a country song, a waltz. It was done by Bill Monroe. But Bill started singing it in a high tenor and singing it fast. And Elvis knew it and he started singing along with him and that was the b-side. (laughter) It was real interesting how it all happened.

TCG: They're still so great to listen to.

SM: Well I'll tell you what...the thing that I'm impressed by more than anything else is how well the music has held up all these years. Of all the stuff cut back in those days, that's the things that we get requests to do. After he went into Vegas and had the big band and all that...and all that was great. He sounds good. But the people seem like they want to hear the early stuff. It's amazing to me. I don't quite understand that. I'm glad, but...(laughter)

TCG: You've said for all of the Sun Sessions, with the exception of the last one, you used the ES-295.

SM: No, no...I had the ES-295 starting. What I started with on "Mystery Train"...I had bought an amp that had an echo built into it.

TCG: Do you remember which guitars you were using on "That's All Right"?

SM: Oh, that was the ES-295. I already had that before we cut the first thing. Then, on "Mystery Train" I had traded the ES-295 and I had a Gibson L-5 and a new amplifier also. I made a few bucks. Wasn't much but it was enough to buy another guitar!

TCG: Any other guitars you can remember really liking back in the '50s?

SM: I've always been partial to L-5's over the years. I've got more than I can play now. They keep giving 'em to me. I appreciate 'em and I love guitars but I want to play one at a time so...

TCG: Last December Gibson presented you with an award for playing Gibson guitars for 50 years.

SM: Right, they did it just when I was...when they had that party.

TCG: Where?

SM: In the hospital. I didn't get to go to the party! They had about 400 people there. They had a helluva time! I'll tell you. I had a couple of holes drilled in my head...but it's all coming back though, slowly but it's getting back there okay.

TCG: Also new on the Elvis front, RCA Records is making the most of the 50th anniversary celebration of "That's All Right" this July, starting off with a new CD at the end of June 2004 called *Elvis At Sun.*

SM: Haven't heard any word on that yet. I guess Jorgenson has that all sewed up. He's the official word on everything if it has to do with Elvis.

TCG: Coinciding with *Elvis At Sun*, RCA is also releasing a 3 DVD package on the *Elvis: '68 Comeback Special.*

SM: Oh, that'll be good.

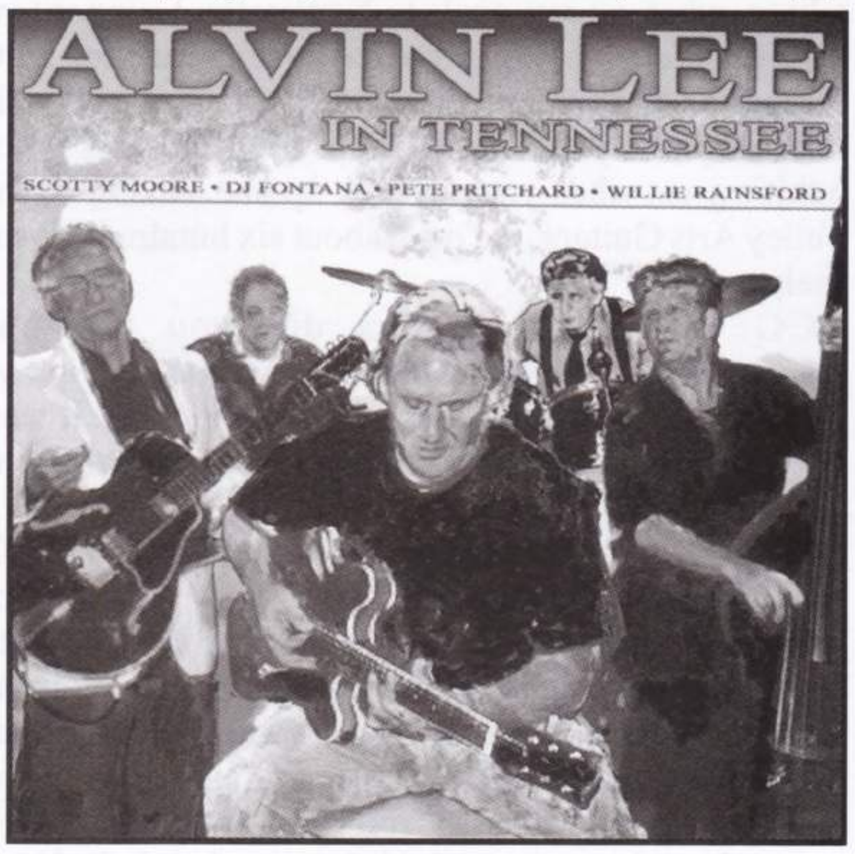
TCG: Can you share some memories how you felt reuniting with Elvis for the '68 comeback special recorded for television at the NBC studios in Burbank?

SM: We'd been playing all along with him, we were doing all of his sessions stuff. But when he did the comeback special, that was the first thing, see he'd been in the movies all this time. But that was the first thing he'd done on television or anything else. And it was fun. We had a ball going out there and doing that. What I'm trying to say is, it wasn't a comeback for us, we had been working with him on record sessions all along. I had a studio here in Nashville and D.J. and Jordanaires and the other musicians were working their butts off.

TCG: Chet Atkins also played guitar on some of the early Elvis sides like "Heartbreak Hotel".
SM: Chet played rhythm guitar on "Heartbreak Hotel" and then one other song from the same session that he played rhythm guitar on. When we were working up the song, I turned to Chet and I said, 'cause I mean everybody in the world loved Chet. He was a great guitar player. And I remember when we were working on that song, I turned to Chet and I asked him, I said, 'do you think what I'm playing is okay?' He said, 'I don't know man, I'm playing rhythm.' (laughter) He wouldn't say yes or no. (laughter)
TCG: I was eight in '62 when I bought my first Elvis single, "Return To Sender". Did you play on that song?
SM: Yeah. I can't even remember what I played to tell you the truth. Yeah, I played on that. He was in his Mario Lanza... "Now Or Never" is along the same line.
TCG: "Return To Sender" lists you, Barney Kessel and Tiny Timbrell on guitars.
SM: Tiny Timbrell. I know Tiny was on it. I don't remember if Barney was on that one or not. Maybe so.
TCG: Any other recording or concert plans or any other news you could fill us in on?
SM: Like I said, I'm getting this arm back in shape. I'm all for doing some stuff. I really am but I just want it to be right to me even. Whether it's right to somebody else or not! (laughter)
TCG: Again congratulations on the 50th anniversary of rock and roll!
SM: It's going to be a real hoot, I tell you, when we get down there...I appreciate your calling.

Thanks to Alvin Lee and Evi @ www.alvinlee.com, Scotty Moore & Gail @ www.scottymoore.net - Ron Rainy @ www.rainmanrecords.com - Arnie Goodman and Karen Usher @ www.bluestormmusic.com and Universal Music

AL play the Newport Jazz Festival.
AL: Yeah, that's right. I think were the first band to play rock music at the jazz festival. I met Miles Davis there. He was a weirdo. I liked him.
TCG: That confirms my belief that Ten Years After were one of the first bands to combine jazz influences.
AL: I think so...the *Undead* album was very jazzy all the way through actually and that was the first live album of Ten Years After. And when I'd recorded that I thought, 'well what on earth can we do now?' 'cause that's what the band does, that's what it's good at. That says it all. So that's why I decided to go into the kind of experimental mode of *Cricklewood Green.* Well, *Stonehenge* I think was the next one which was quite psychedelic and experimental and possibly drug influenced. (laughter) It was all cool then, wasn't it? ■



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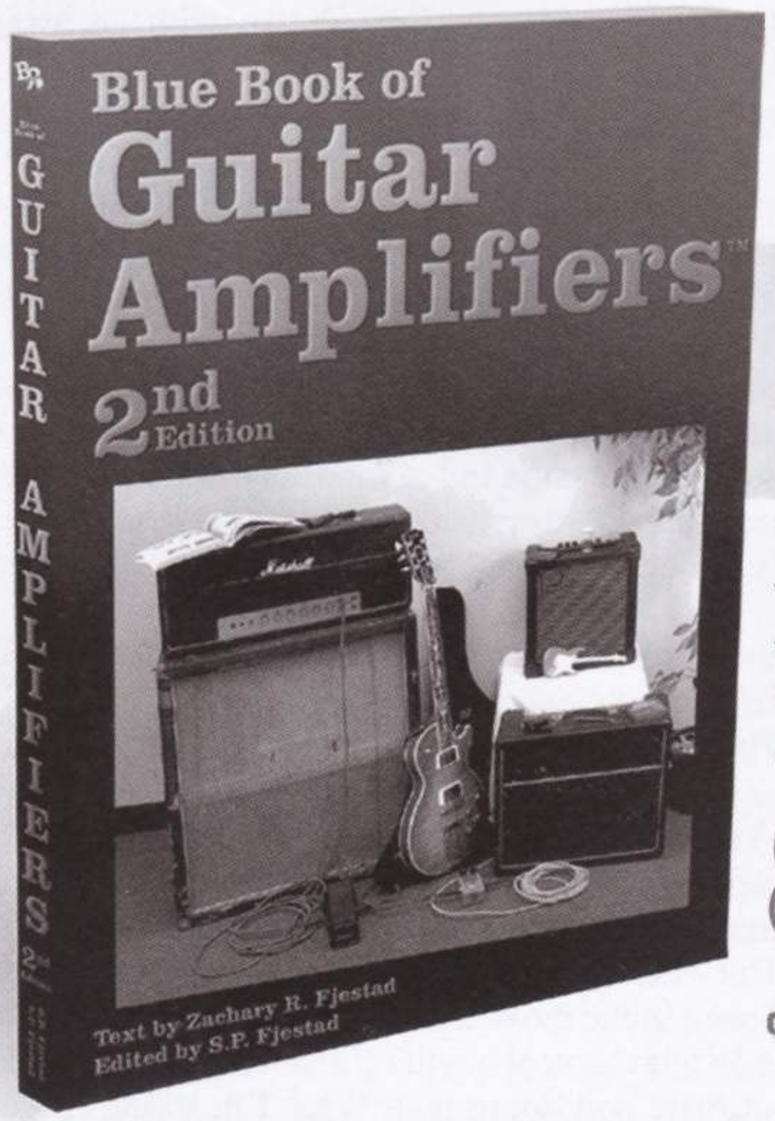

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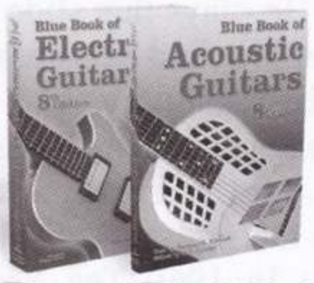

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