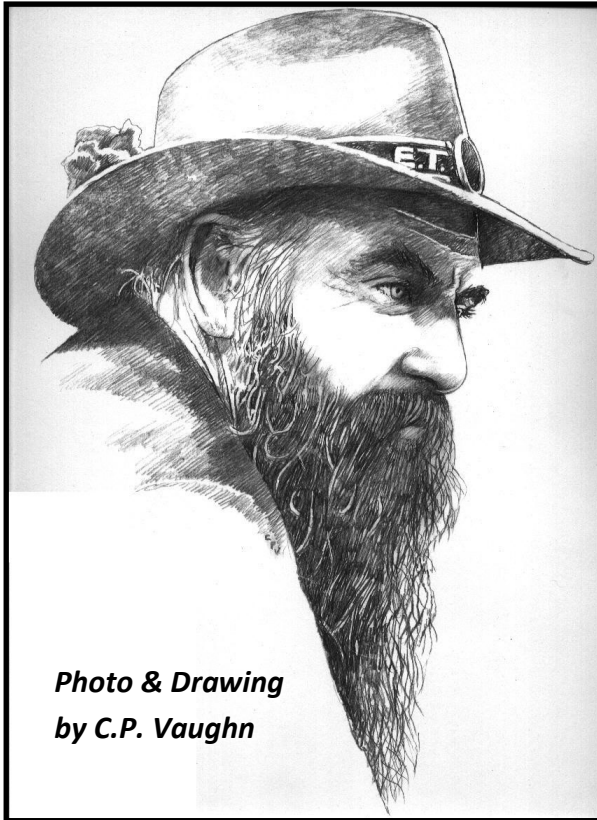


The Outhouse CDs: “Live at the Austin Outhouse” and “Oval Room”

By Lost John Casner

After the “Live at the Austin Outhouse... and not there” cassettes were gone, the Outhouse recordings lay in waiting. For several years. Partly due to lack of contact with the family and partly uncertainty about resources and how to proceed in Blaze’s absence.



*Photo & Drawing
by C.P. Vaughn*

As Ryan Rader and Jon Smith began recording and releasing their tribute albums with Deep South Productions, Blaze’s mother Louise and sister Marsha began traveling to Austin to meet his friends and fellow musicians. In a review of one of the tribute recordings, John Conquest, publisher of Third Coast Music, praised the tributes for sharing Blaze’s music with those who hadn’t had the chance to hear his songs, but lamented the lack of available recordings of Blaze singing his own songs. The Outhouse cassettes were out of print, the Muscle Shoals’ album was never distributed or promoted, the Loma Ranch Studio masters, recorded in 1980, were stolen out of a car Blaze had borrowed, the Zephyr Records 45 RPM single with “If I Could Only Fly” and “Big Cadillac” was out of print and the record company was out of business. A recording from Houston in the late ‘70’s with Gurf Morlix was missing, the studio was shuttered, and the whereabouts of the master tapes were unknown. Gurf would later resurrect the Loma Ranch and Houston recordings from preview copies to create the Cold, Cold World CD. At the time of his murder, Blaze had been working on a studio album at Cedar Creek Studios with producer Spencer Starnes, including Kimmie Rhodes, Joe Gracey, Charlie Day, and the Waddell Brothers. Those recordings eventually resurfaced in 2005, again resurrected from an old preview recording, but in 1999, 10 years after his death, no recordings of Blaze’s music were commercially available. Tom Tobin and Craig McDonald, both social workers by training and experience, read the Conquest review and began their journey to make Blaze Foley recordings available to the world.

Live at the Austin Outhouse (Lost Art Records):

Tom and Craig approached me in 1999 and we began exploring the feasibility of releasing a CD of the Outhouse recordings. They established a label for the project, Lost Art Records, and met with Blaze’s attorney, Peggy Underwood, who also represented Blaze’s mom. An agreement was reached that would honor Blaze’s wish for the original cassette to donate \$1 to the local homeless shelter for each cassette. Proceeds from the proposed CD would be split between the family, Lost Art Records, and myself with a percentage of any profit donated to the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH). Ten years after his death, Blaze Foley had a new record deal.

The original 4 track cassette recordings were transcribed to an Alesis, 8 track digital recorder (ADAT). The original Outhouse cassette was 115 minutes long and the first order of business was to wean the 20 songs on the cassette to 12 songs to fit on an audio CD (74 minutes). We did our best to include some of the between song banter and preserve the general mood and feel of the cassette release. Frank Campbell and I remixed the 12 songs at Frank’s Phoenix Recording & Mastering, but no additional recording or overdubbing was performed. Frank mastered the finished project with digital editing by Allen Crider. Blaze Foley: Live at the Austin Outhouse was released on CD by Lost Art Records in December of 1999.

Oval Room (Lost Art Records):

In 2004, following the positive response to Live at the Austin Outhouse, Tom and Craig and I met to review what we could do with the remaining songs from the Outhouse sessions. There were the eight songs from original cassette release that were not included on the Live at the Outhouse CD and there were 8 more Blaze songs from the Outhouse recordings that were not on the cassette. In those initial discussions, we all agreed that Gurf Morlix would be the perfect shepherd for the new project. Gurf played and sang with Blaze in the seventies and early eighties in Houston and Austin and recorded with Blaze on the Zephyr 45 RPM as well as the Houston and Loma Ranch recordings that eventually were released on the Cold, Cold World CD by Lost Art. Gurf played the mournful steel guitar on the iconic Zephyr recording of "If I Could Only Fly." Morlix had established himself as a highly respected producer, engineer, and side man for several singer-songwriters including Lucinda Williams, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Robert Earl Keen, Mary Gauthier, and Tom Russell, among others. Gurf and I thought several of the songs could benefit from additional instrumental and harmony accompaniment. We chose which songs we wanted to enhance, and which songs worked well with just Blaze and his guitar. We were hoping to replicate the feel and tenor of the first Outhouse CD, with a mostly acoustic feel, but with an ensemble approach for some of the songs. The additional recording was done at Gurf's Rootball Studios in May of 2004. Gurf added bass, electric and slide guitar, and backing vocals on several tracks. I added piano for the Oval Room cut, while some



Blaze & Gurf dressed as each other for Halloween

Tracks already included piano from the original cassette release. John Hill, owner/engineer from Loma Ranch Studios and Leland Waddell laid down drum tracks. Pat Mears re-recorded her harmony part on Cold Cold World and the Texana Dames (Connie Hancock, Tracie Lamar, and Charlene Hancock) added beautiful three part harmony to "Someday." The Oval Room Choir, including several of Blaze's closest friends and musical compatriots (George Ensle, Mandy Mercier, Beth Galiger, Darryl Harris, the Texana Dames, Craig McDonald, Leland Waddell, Gurf, and myself) sang along with Blaze on the rousing chorus to "Oval Room." Two songs included Champ Hood on fiddle from the original Outhouse recordings. Toni Di Roadie and Ed Bradfield each played harmonica for a song from the December 1988 recording. All of the performers who added vocal or instrumental tracks, with the exception of Craig on the chorus of "Oval Room" were friends of Blaze who had played and recorded with him during his lifetime. The Oval Room CD was released by Lost Art Records in October of 2004.

Continued on next page:



Censoring Blaze:

Something of a controversy arose following the release of the Oval Room CD. A contributor to Wikipedia, wrote that Gurf and I had censored Blaze in our remix of "Oval Room" and that Blaze would never have allowed that to happen. That text was later removed from Blaze's Wikipedia entry. On the original cassette release, at the end of the last chorus, Blaze sings "in his rockin' fuckin' chair." Gurf and I labored over how to address this, as "Oval Room" was the title track and we were hoping to receive radio airplay, both to promote the CD, but also to add Blaze's voice to the discussion about the war in Iraq and the pending election in November of 2004. We were concerned that the very prominent "f-word" would greatly reduce any chance for radio play. Blaze recorded "Oval Room" both nights. The first night, on the last line he sang, "rockin' chair." The second night he sang "rockin' fuckin' chair." We considered using the cut from the first night, but we both felt the second night's cut was the stronger of the two tracks. We did not want to edit or censor Blaze and we certainly didn't want to "bleep" him. Our solution was to adjust the timing of the Oval Room Choir's harmony on the last chorus. Rather than the chorus singing "rockin'" in time with Blaze's singing, we delayed the chorus part one beat, similar to a "call and response" arrangement, with the choir singing "rockin'" as Blaze sang "fuckin'." We left the gain on Blaze's vocal track unchanged and if you listen closely, you can hear Blaze singing "fuckin'" while the choir is singing "rockin'." It may be nothing more than semantics, but we thought we had resolved our dilemma without actually censoring or cutting his line. The title track did receive airplay around the country in the month before the 2004 election, particularly on college and public radio stations. And.... Now I can joke about the track of Oval Room from the first night as the track where Blaze censored himself.



***Blaze at the Outhouse with his
Ronald Reagan mask.***

NOTE: Originally prepared for Carmen and Kai Nees, authors of "Blaze Foley: Misfit to Legend," to provide background for their new book on Blaze.