

Blaze Foley - Bio

Michael David Fuller [aka **Blaze Foley** aka **The Duct Tape Messiah** aka **Ezalb Yelof** - the felt tip pen artist] was born in Malvern, Arkansas, on December 18th 1949, and raised in North and West Texas and Georgia. He was shot dead in Austin, Texas, on 1st February 1989, after becoming involved in an argument with an old friend's son. Carey January subsequently stood trial for Foley's murder, but was acquitted on a count of self-defence. During his early life, Blaze, along with his mothers and siblings, was a member of the **Fuller Family**, a Gospel act. Foley arrived in Austin in the seventies and survived by sleeping on friends' couches and in the Austin clubs where he performed. Like **Van Zandt**, Foley was haunted by ghosts and regularly sought solace in alcohol. As a result he was often banned from venues but always managed to reinstate himself. Contrition and generosity of spirit go a long way in this life. He looked upon one venue, the Austin Outhouse, as his home.

Foley's songs fell into two main categories, tenderly worded love songs ["If I Could Only Fly"] and commentary – often wickedly satirical - on political and social issues ["Oval Room," "WW3" and "Officer Norris"]. Apart from his total dedication to songwriting, Foley possessed numerous personal trademarks, the principle being his unique use of duct tape with which he used to repair and adorn his clothing. He also created jewellery from guitar strings, and painted on cardboard sheets with felt tip pens. Although Foley made a number of recordings during his lifetime - Rats [Houston], Loma Ranch [Fredericksburg, Texas] and Vytal [Muscle Shoals, Alabama] none were officially released while he was alive. Bad deals and bankrupt record companies are an industry standard, and the latter half of the twentieth century is littered with instances of master tapes being "lost" or "stolen." Foley's best know recording is probably the Muscle Shoals album, a few copies of which did enter the public domain via a personal pressing he made. Post his death, rumour has it that, the master tapes for that particular recording ended up in the possession of a U.S. Government agency. At the time of his passing, Foley had almost completed an album at Austin's Bee Creek studio, for the now defunct UK label, Heartland Records. Heartland had already released albums by Texas bred acts such as Kimmie Rhodes and Katy Moffatt. In 1987 Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson included Foley's "If I Could Fly" on their "**Seashores Of Old Mexico**" album, and when it was released as a single it peaked at # 58 on the Country chart.

A few months after his death, Outhouse Records, issued a twenty-one track cassette only recording "**Live At The Austin Outhouse (.....And Not There).**" The recording had been made in December 1988. A decade later twelve of those performances surfaced on the CD, "**Live At The Austin Outhouse.**" The previous year, 1998, Austin's Deep South Productions began issuing compilations albums that featured interpretations of Foley's songs by his peers [and a few by Foley]. The first three releases "**In Tribute And Loving Memory.....**," "**BFI Too : Blaze A Blaze**" and "**Blaze Foley Inside**" followed that template, while the fourth, "**Songs For Blaze, A Friend Of Ours,**" released in late 2002 focused on songs written about Foley and performed by those peers. Foley was fascinated by dumpsters, which bore the legend BFI and could be seen in back alleys all over Austin. According to Pat MacDonald [Timbuk 3], Blaze claimed that "*BFI stood for Blaze Foley Inside.*" When he was buried, the duct tape letters BFI adorned his coffin.

A documentary about the musician, two-hours in duration and provisionally titled "**Blaze Foley,**" directed and produced by Kevin Triplett, is currently in production with completion planned for Fall 2005. Triplett, who never met or saw Foley perform, began work on the project in 1996, and is currently completing the final interviews for the project and seeking finishing funds. In addition, a film about Townes Van Zandt and Blaze Foley has been mooted. On track 10 of his 1997 album "**Documentary**" [aka "**Last Rights**"] legendary Austin dj Larry Monroe has Townes Van Zandt recall how he first meet Blaze in New York and about accompanying him to Florence, Alabama when Foley undertook recording sessions at Muscle Shoals studios. At one point on "**Documentary**" Townes comments, "*ever day with old Blaze was some sort of an adventure.*" Another classic Townes/Blaze story relates to Bob Dylan visiting Austin. Word spread that Dylan was at, Electric Ladyland/Lucy In Disguise, Jenna Radtke's dress/fancy dress store on South Congress Avenue. Van Zandt and Foley went to investigate.....the rest of the story is revealed at <http://www.larrymonroe.com/writings/writings01.html>

A CD titled "**Oval Room**" was released by Austin's Lost Art Records in the early Fall of 2004. The recording featured songs from the December 27/28th 1988 sessions that produced "**Live At The Austin Outhouse.**" In late 2005, the Austin, Texas based Waddell Hollow label released the album "**Wanted**

More Dead Than Alive.” The track list of the release resembled the reported track list of the album that Foley was recording for the now defunct Heartland label, just prior to his murder.

An eighteen-track recording titled “**Cold, Cold World**” credited to Blaze Foley and The Beaver Valley Boys appeared in late 2006 on the Lost Arts imprint. The recordings dated from the late nineteen-seventies, when Gurf Morlix was a member of Blaze’s band. Sybil Rosen’s memoir “**Living In The Woods In A Tree: Remembering Blaze Foley**” [ISBN: 978-1-57441-250-5] not only charts the period 1975/1977 when she lived with and was in love with Blaze Foley, but also traces his life up till his passing in early 1989 and beyond. The book, published in October 2008 by University of North Texas Press, was the second in their North Texas Lives of Musicians Series. A ‘work in progress’ print of Triplett’s film, titled “**Blaze Foley: The Duct Tape Messiah**” was screened at California’s Paso Robles Film Festival in late November 2008, with further screenings planned for the 2009 SXSW Film Festival in Austin.

Discography : “**Live At The Austin Outhouse (.....And Not There)**” cassette only [1989] ; “**Live At The Austin Outhouse**” [1999] ; “**Oval Room**” [2004]; “**Wanted More Dead Than Alive**” [2005] ; “**Cold, Cold World**” [2006] :

Arthur Wood

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