

to dress them up. There's some banal moments and "Shot With His Own Gun" is melodramatic, but overall the album stands up quite well.

*Almost Blue* - His only turkey in fifteen years. Shockingly bland, the exact opposite of everything he champions. Note: Does not contain the song "Almost Blue," otherwise it wouldn't have been a *total* turkey.

*Imperial Bedroom* - Not quite the masterpiece it was touted as: it's occasionally bloated and some of the songs simply aren't that good. It also marks the beginning of a slickness in Costello's sound. However, it's still quite good and contains one of Elvis' most beautiful ballads, "Almost Blue."

*Punch the Clock* - A brassy entry that has some wonderful moments, like "The Greatest Thing," "Everyday I Write the Book" and "Shipbuilding." The slickness furthers and undercuts some fine material.

*Goodbye Cruel World* - Costello's most sterile album and his second worst, which means it's still fairly good. Some songs, like "I Wanna Be Loved" and "The Deportees Club," (arguably) rise above the stifling production.

*King of America* - *Almost Blue* done the right way. A mainly acoustic outing that returns Elvis to human music. This one really flies on the gorgeous, soulful "Poisoned Rose," "Suit of Lights," the undeniable, retro "Lovable" and "American Without Tears."

*Blood and Chocolate* - Released in the same year, *Blood* once again finds Costello going backwards, this time to the classic Attractions sound. The songs are fantastic; from the tortured "Battered Old Bird"

to the dribbling rhythms of "Tokyo Storm Warning"; from the abrasive stomp of "Uncomplicated" to the obsessive "I Want You." A fine argument that the Attractions was all Costello ever did right.

*Out of Our Idiot* (Import) - His second collection of unreleased material just doesn't stack up. Nonetheless, he manages to spice up some fairly inconsequential compositions with his usual pop touches. Contains nothing that even a fanatic (like me) can't live without.

*Girls Girls Girls* - A compilation that is undeniably well chosen; it speaks, it flows, the music's great, yet it's completely illogical. It doesn't have "I Can't Stand Up For Falling Down," "Radio Radio" or "Peace, Love and Understanding." Regardless of whether he wrote these songs or not, a collection should present an artist's biggest and best material (a Reader's Digest version of a career), and this one doesn't. Besides, an Elvis Costello collection is impossible, the man flirts with perfection almost every time out.

*Spike* - By this time Costello may have looked like a failed experimentalist, as demonstrated in the retreats of *King* and *Blood*. But for me, this one brings it all together and makes his career make sense. With amazing dexterity Elvis presents some of his most soulful singing and beautiful songs. For me (and I stress this), this is his finest moment.

*Mighty Like a Rose* - His worst since *Goodbye Cruel World*, so it's actually quite good. The material is occasionally vapid and the baroque arrangements sometimes freeze over. Also, his nonstop misanthropy has become somewhat tiresome. Nonetheless, "So Like Candy" and "The Other Side of Summer" stand up with his best material.

# Costello

