

Elvis Costello

Rhino

Deluxe reissues of three lesser Costello records - including a covers album that has aged incredibly well



Almost Blue

★★★



Goodbye Cruel World

★★



Kojak Variety

★★★★

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, Elvis Costello has been giving his most acclaimed albums the regal Rhino-reissue treatment. Now, he does it for three of his least-acclaimed albums - his botched 1981 country homage, *Almost Blue*; his 1984 pop production *Goodbye Cruel World*; and his completely ignored 1995 covers set, *Kojak Variety*. Each gets a bonus disc of rarities and witty liner notes by the maestro himself. In fact, with *Goodbye Cruel World*, his liner notes are the highlight, since the album is every bit as boring as he admits it is, although Scritti Politti's Green Gartside still sounds great on "I Wanna Be Loved."

Costello's voice was too fragile to hack *Almost Blue*, but the bonus disc sums up his country obsessions, especially in scary versions of Leon Payne's "Psycho" and Janis Martin's "Blues Keep Calling." That leaves *Kojak Variety*, a first-rate oddity nobody no-

ticed at the time, featuring a soulful version of Randy Newman's "I've Been Wrong Before." Costello outdoes himself with the twenty bonus covers, especially on the Bob Dylan and Hoagy Carmichael classics he cut as a weird demo tape for George Jones in 1993. He breathes new life into the Lennon-McCartney obscurity "Step Inside Love" and the Gershwin standard "How Long Has This Been Going On?" For any Costello freak, the revamped *Kojak Variety* is a totally fascinating and essential spin. **ROB SHEFFIELD**

Van Halen ★★★½



The Best of Both Worlds

Rhino

Finally, all you feuding David Lee Roth and Sammy Hagar fans have an album you can agree on: Two greatest-hits discs featuring both singers

SIXTEEN OF THE THIRTY-SIX TUNES HERE ARE powerful examples of the greatest party band of the past twenty-five years. From 1978 to 1985, Van Halen were a showcase for impish, groundbreaking guitarist Eddie Van Halen as well as for David Lee Roth, whose gifts included being a frontman nonpareil and driving Eddie bananas. The latter got Roth thrown out of the band, and in came Sammy Hagar, a technically better singer who also brought a boatload of pomposity



A fashion-forward Elvis Costello in 1983

and sentimentality to the band from 1986 onward. *The Best of Both Worlds* mixes the two eras indiscriminately - 1979's effervescent "Beautiful Girls" sits next to 1986's ponderous "Love Walks In" - and includes three forgettable new Hagar tunes, the band's first since 1998. "Runaround" and "Why Can't This Be Love" prove that Hagar isn't without charm, but one can imagine Eddie including the Roth songs grudgingly; he knows that's what the fans prefer. **ROB KEMP**

THE ROLLING STONE HALL OF FAME



Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

Damn the Torpedoes / MCA, 1979 ★★★★★



When punk rock arrived as a combative answer to the bloating and fatigue of 1970s rock, an odd thing happened: Bands that were interested only in plugging in and channeling Chuck Berry were cast in with Britain's latest rabble. It

meant that the likes of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers found themselves the unsuspecting, amused ambassadors of a "new" music that, from their vantage point, hardly seemed new. They were just doing what they'd done down in Florida when gigging with Skynyrd.

It was the Heartbreakers' third album, *Damn the Torpedoes*, that got them in the front door and into our

homes. If Bruce Springsteen was tracking down the specifics of place and a particular class experience, making little movies in song, Petty was making music that, on the surface, seemed far less ambitious. But he created modest scenes that listeners could identify with in deep, lasting ways. If you knew the feeling of requited love, you had your song in the swaggering and then joyous "Here Comes My Girl." If you were ever on the outside of things, it was "Even the Losers" that was yours and, more important, your momentary release. Songs such as these and smart sequencing (the album era's most under-recognized art) make *Torpedoes* soar: It starts with the Heartbreakers' defining track, "Refugee" - the closest thing to an anthem they'd yet recorded - and

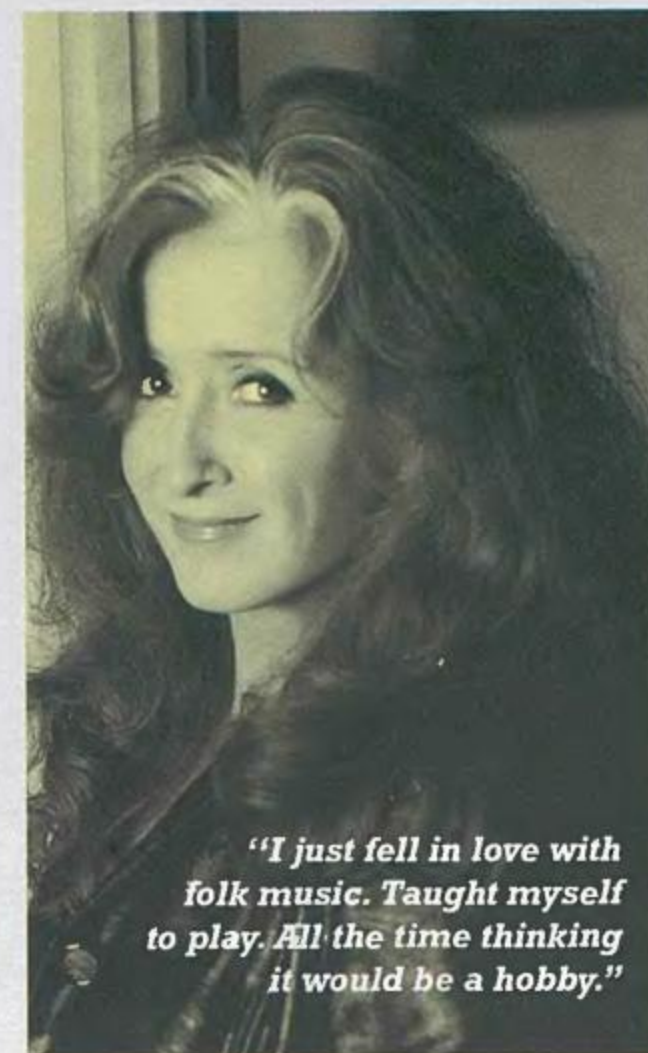
doesn't lose its stride after that.

Though Petty is alone on the cover, the album is a band project in the truest sense. Keyboard player Benmont Tench and guitarist Mike Campbell, the kind of players who can make a good song great, emerge as genuine rock & roll stylists. Drummer Stan Lynch, if not technically in Tench and Campbell's class, plays with a lazy feel that works as the instrumental analog of Petty's drawl. Produced by Petty and Jimmy Iovine, the album sounds like a live band playing - no small feat.

Since that time, the Heartbreakers have kept doing just that - without ever making the same record twice. And Petty himself has avoided the dust that settled on many among that 1970s generation; maybe he was the actual punk rocker, after all.



WARREN ZANES



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