

# Elvis Costello - his aim is true

ELVIS COSTELLO—His Aim Is Still True.

Record review—Elvis Costello and the Attractions—Get Happy!

by Greig Dymond

It's finally happening. The sign outside the SUB reads "Disco Cancelled". Records by groups such as The Clash, XTC, The Ramones and the Jam are making the charts in North America and receiving the widespread attention they deserve. Rock 'n roll's staple, the three-minute song, is back in demand.

A central figure in this movement has been Elvis Costello, whose LP's *My Aim is True*, *This Year's Model*, and *Armed Forces* stand head and shoulders above the majority of vapid music produced in the last three years. With the release of his latest album, *GET HAPPY!*, Costello remains faithful to the tradition of pop music. Elvis' new album can be considered a companion piece to another recent landmark, The Clash's *London Calling*. Both records are tremendously varied, indicate maturity on the part of the artist, and include approximately twenty songs. The impressive amount of songs on these two albums indicates an almost defiant creative output that has not been witnessed in pop music since the days of the Beatles. Elvis and the Clash are certainly ready to lead rock 'n roll into the eighties.

The musical influences on *GET HAPPY!* range from ska (*Human Touch*) to country and western (*Motel Matches*) to rhythm and blues (*Temptation*). The common denominator with all of the songs on the LP is that they are short

and danceable, and that's the ultimate test for rock 'n roll. Of course, the major influence for Elvis is straight-ahead rock, and his voice is harder than ever on tunes such as *Beaten to the Punch*, *Can't Stand Up For Falling Down* and *I Stand Accused*. John Lennon must be smiling somewhere. Elvis' back-up group "The Attractions" are still the tightest band around, with the sharp Farfisa organ riffs adding to the distinctive sound. Producer Nick Lowe reveals a few new tricks, notably the rhythmic climax in *King Horse* and the organ counterpoint to the haunting melody in *New Amsterdam*, Costello's most mature song to date.

Elvis' ingenious lyrical touch is in fine form on *GET HAPPY!*; he is still rock's master of the biting pun and unlikely rhyme. This is especially evident on the haunting *Opportunity*:

*You can make a matter-of-fact  
or a villain in a million  
A slip of the tongue  
Is gonna keep me civilian  
Why do you talk such stupid nonsense  
When my mind could rest  
much easier?*

On *GET HAPPY!* Elvis' previous dominant theme of revenge is subservient to the realization he has made—life is too short to hold grudges, and "getting happy" is the only alternative. On *Riot Act* (about a controversial statement Costello made and was criticized for), he sings:

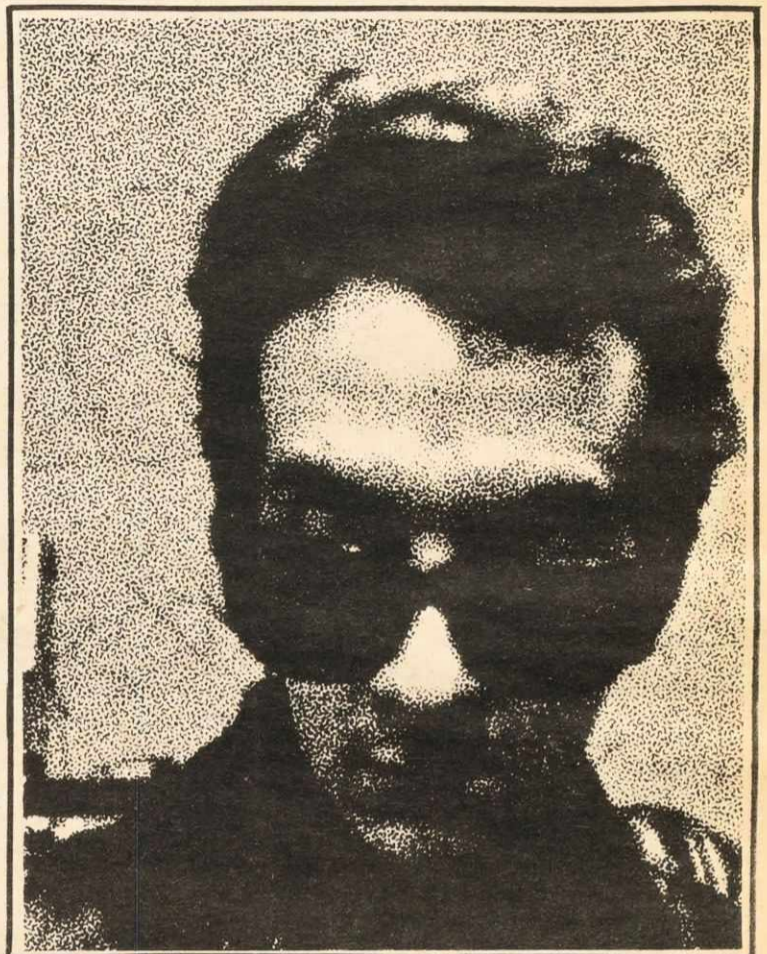
*Born in the middle of the  
second big baby boom. . .  
I'm in the foxhole  
I'm down in the trench  
I'd be a hero  
But I can't stand the  
stench. . .*

The album ends with the anthemic *High Fidelity*, which deals with integrity in the music business; a similar theme to the Clash's *Death or Glory*, yet more subtly expressed. *High Fidelity* is one of Elvis' finest single achievements, ranking with *Pump it Up* and *Alison*.

Certainly *GET HAPPY!* is Costello's best LP to date. The sheer range, intensity and intelligence of the songs far surpasses anything else on the pop music scene today. Costello continues to expand, setting new standards with each new album. Paul McGrath of *The Globe and Mail* writes:

*There is hope for this idiom as a transmitter of genuine human emotion and that hope is wrapped up in only a handful of bands and individuals. Costello is one.*

Finally, the blank generation (that's us) has a spokesman or two. Are you going to get happy?

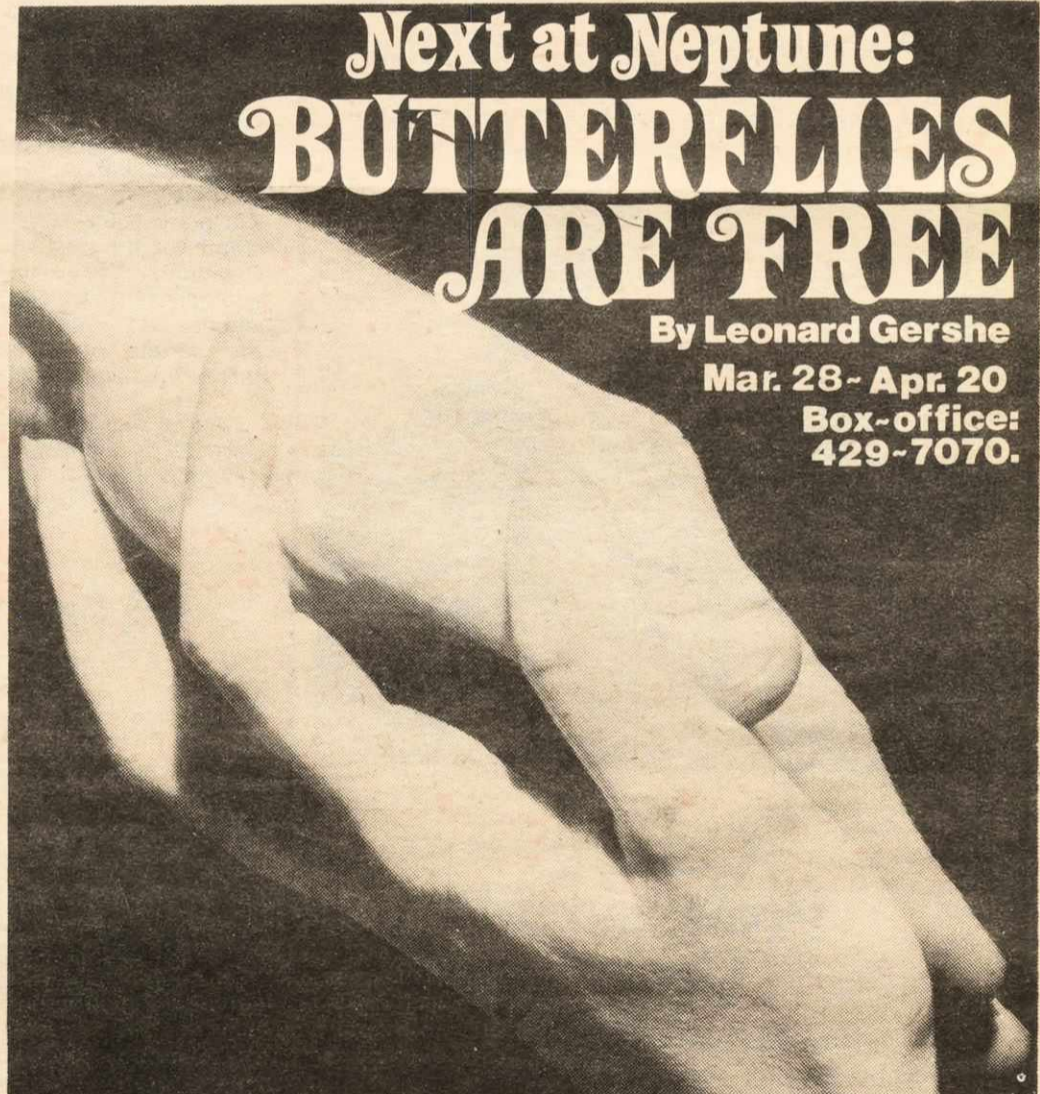


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