

But accidents will happen

Costello's aim remains true

Elvis Costello
Armed Forces
Record review by Gary McGowan

I don't know if Elvis Costello hates women. Perhaps no one will know for sure until his wife or children sell their stories to the *Daily Mail*. Hotel No. 2 and Child Sex Groups!!! But from whatever traumas songs on *Armed Forces* stem, they form as complete an evocation of male angst in the 1970s as anything recently recorded. Costello's third album in fifteen months (second with *The Attractions*), finds the poles apart from the dominant themes of 70s rock and roll.

Bands like Queen promise rock nirvana with one spin of their latest hit, you know, good dope, visions of submissive women... but don't look in the mirror. Costello looks and finds the reality of his situation wanting. Even cutting your hair just like Freddie Mercury won't help. It is this concept of male victim that Costello explores with such devastating effectiveness in *Armed Forces*.

On "Accidents Will Happen," one of the album's best tracks, Costello sings "You used to be a man/Now you're not the only one." He's a male defined by images of his own creation. The ladies are no longer. Now what? Falling in love won't help. "I knew right from the start/That we'd end up being," he sings in "Two Little Hitlers," a song which places romantic love to a totalitarian contest. "Two little Hitlers who'll fight it out until one little Hitler is the other one's will." Those of you eyeing the fox across the aisle are hereby warned to beware the killing outcome.

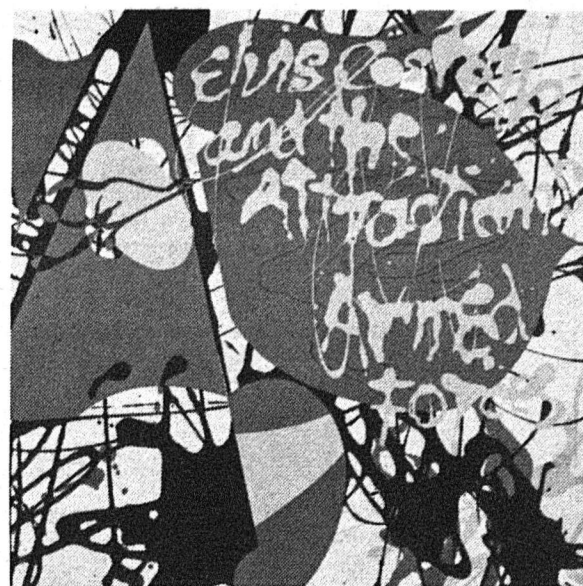
Not only is the macho facade crumbling in many of the songs, it has given way to a world of female domination in others. "You tease, you flirt, and you pull all the buttons on your green shirt," sings Costello in "Green Shirt" while the Attractions produce a

wistful, aching melody. A lady like this spells doom. "She's picking out names/I hope none of them are mine." Like Vietnam, it's a no-win situation. "Party Girl" portrays a similar individual. "Nothin' but a party girl/Just like millions all over the world. "Costello is in a "grip-like vise," he wants more from this relationship. I mean, "I don't want to lock you up girl," but all this runnin' around?

Feminists might write Costello off as the first in a long line of boors to recognize the new realities in sexual politics. But this ignores the man's genuine interest in understanding what those new realities are. "You watch her legs through seven service stations," he sings in "Busy Bodies" not brazen enough to stroll over, nor confident enough to forget her and walk away, he remains fixated at the edge of the chasm. "You want to kiss her/But she's busy with her maker."

While the bulk of the album is occupied with sexual realities, there are a couple of tunes for those like *Maclean's* editor Peter Newman, who believe that rock in the 70s has lost its "ideological undercurrent." "Oliver's Army" and "Goon Squad" detail the cruel realities of the disaffected in Britain. No jobs and no future leads to such charming outlets for the nihilistic as the National Front and a bit of "paki-bashing" before tea. It isn't put as succinctly as the Tom Robinson Band might have done but "If they want you to come out to play/Better say goodbye," gets the message across.

In case the spiritual vibes of this review have brought your karma to your knees and you've gotten the impression that *Armed Forces* is really *Highway 61 Revisited* with better organ playing, take heart. All of the above can be ignored at your leisure. With a strong echo on his voice and layered instrumental tracks you really have to work to pull the guts from the tunes. But don't ignore the album if you're put off by pretentious record reviewers. The Attractions have matured into



one of the finest rock and roll units of the decade. When these miracle men pump it up there's plenty of action for everybody. Those lucky enough to see the group live can relive a few memories with a special limited edition EP recorded live at Hollywood High (how appropriate), which features "Accidents Will Happen", "Alison" and the concert-length version of "Watching The Detectives." The studio work finds the Attractions playing with a maturity and depth which defies their short time together. None of the tunes quite reach out and grab like "Miracle Man" or "Radio Radio" from the two previous albums, but after two plays you're guaranteed to be rocking along. High or low brow, *Armed Forces* will banish those disco blues. The year's first definitive album.

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Department opera

Opera review by Felix Meddlesome

The department of music presented its annual opera production this past Friday and Saturday night. Included on the program were Bizet's *Doctor Miracle* and Menotti's *The Medium*. Neither of these works can be considered part of the popular or standard repertoire and I heard several complaints to this effect. It's quite likely that length rather than quality has contributed to these works being somewhat neglected. Although the Edmonton Opera Society is a well-established company, popular demand often forces them to stick to the standard repertoire. The presentation of two short and contrasting works by the university opera division was a refreshing change.

Doctor Miracle, a light and frivolous one-act comedy, served as the perfect foil for *The Medium*, a serious two-act dramatic opera. *Doctor Miracle* was based on the overworked theme of young lovers frantically attempting to obtain the consent to marriage of an overprotective father. As dictated by the plot, the singing was so as to provide and outline for the singing. On Friday night, when I attended, the singing was excellent.

The Medium presented a more serious dramatic story of plot, characterization, and music. A tale of a fake medium who is confronted and terrified by the possibility of a real psychic phenomenon, this opera provided more opportunities for acting. The cast did an admirable job both through singing and acting, creating an atmosphere of suspense. Also pleasing

Khan comes above-ground

Steve Khan
The Blue Man
Record review by Rick Dembicki

One fine 1978 jazz release has recently come to my attention; *The Blue Man* by guitarist Steve Khan. Laying low in the record racks, the album is nonetheless a requisite for any serious jazz/rock listener. Some examples of the star-studded cast are Randy & Michael Brecker, Bob James and Steve Gadd, and the list goes on — in fact, Khan performs with eight talented musicians. The result is an extremely vigorous forty minutes of fast guitar work in competition with some super talents on brass.

So who is Steve Khan? Well, he seems to be one of those jazz guitarists who has been around for a long while, but whose popularity has never reached the epidemic proportions of, say, George Benson (mind you, Benson cheated. *Anybody* can make it big these days with disco). With music like *The Blue Man* though, Khan will not stay underground for long. Reason number one: The Brecker Brothers are

and didactic for the audience was the contrast between Menotti's twentieth-century concepts of music and drama (he is a contemporary American), and Bizet's romantic ideals.

A small chamber orchestra conducted by Alfred Strombergs provided the musical accompaniment to both operas. Live music is much more satisfactory than taped music and the orchestra for the most part was a sensitive accompanist to the singers. Sets and costumes were simple and effective for Convocation Hall's small stage, although the "downright silly" award must be given to the Mayor of Padua's shoes. Acknowledgement must also be given to the departments of Art and Design and Drama for their assistance and collaboration with the Music department on this fine production.

outstanding, playing trumpet and sax like the pros they are. Reason number two: this music sounds increasingly better as the volume knob is rotated clockwise. And reason number three: Steve Khan is possibly one of the best electric guitarists in the business; a comparison to John McLaughlin being a compliment to the latter.

Right. Now that I have insulted virtually every reader of this column (by virtue of the fact that I've told them their favorite guitarist stinks), I shall proceed to deal with the less conspicuous aspects of the album. Khan admits inspiration from the artist Jean-Michel Folon. One of his paintings adorns the record jacket, depicting, not surprisingly, a likeness of the Blue Man. The idea itself is not so unique — Rolling Stones enthusiasts have already grown accustomed to Andy Warhol album covers. Other 'name' artists have been known to do likewise. But Khan's recording stands out, for the match between the visual effect and his music is remarkable. Both feature warm, friendly tones that entice the viewer/listener, to spend a little more time with the album in getting to know it better. The inner sleeve certainly helps to suggest the spirit of things — it's a nice photo of the band members "cooling off" with some Schlitz beer. And a cool off is what Khan must need after each performance. On "Some Down Time" he blazes away with out and out rock guitar. "An Eye For Autumn" involves a competitive effort by Michael Brecker for the lead billing. And yet the man knows when to ease up, and slip into some soothing acoustic guitar. The end result is an album with performances sufficiently varied to interest the most casual listener.

But enough, because I am beginning to sound like a high pressure salesman. *The Blue Man* is on the Columbia label (one that is attracting a growing number of young jazz artists) and so should be available most anywhere. Well, **should** be, anyways. I have the feeling that this album is going to be in demand.



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