

records

# Elvis punches the clock

ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE  
ATTRICTIONS  
*Punch the Clock*  
(Columbia)

When the Elvis Costello songbook appeared, fans who had no interest in reading the music grabbed the book for the words. The British songwriter is notorious for hissing, whining, snarling—everything but enunciating lyrics that are alive with contemporary allusions, clever puns, and unexpected phrases. With *Punch the Clock* he has broken his Dylan-like injunction against standard liner-note lyrics.

Costello continues to poke imp-

ishly at the banality of modern life and romance, displaying more variety in mood than he has on earlier albums. The title itself is taken from a satire on "the greatest thing":

And it's the latest thing  
In and out of matrimony  
Never once removed the Sony  
'Cos it's a status thing . . .

Reading the lyrics could you find that less is said than appears. Costello's images, such as the "King of Thieves," are vivid, but his 'message' isn't always apparent, if there is one at all.

Despite his reputation as a lyricist, Costello proves his real strength is in

his music. The addition of back-up singers Caron Wheeler and Claudia Fontaine (Afrodiziak) and the tight, understated TKO Horns, help make this E.C. and the Attractions' most controlled and even collection of songs.

Costello is still a skillful pop melody-maker above all. A comparison of his playful lyrics with the craftsmanship of the tunes leads you to think he puts more effort into the music. It's too bad. With his intelligence, the passion involved and the catchy melodies, you wish Costello could criticize his government, peers and society with a bit more clarity. —CHRIS WARREN



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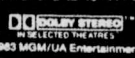
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