Armed Forces: Costello's aim is true

By Claudia Perry


Costello's third album, Armed Forces, will probably rank as one of the best rock 'n' roll records released this year. It is less offensive, more reasonable, and more mature than the first two. It is not as revolutionary now as it was then, but it is part of the Work in Progress. It is scored as a whole. It is bright, it is cheerful, and it is filled with songs that were on their previous outings.

With all of these benefits, it would be difficult to forgive it for anything less than three. It's quite a bit more. Opening with "Accidents Will Happen" and closing with Nick Lowe's "What's So Funny Bout Peace, Love, and Understanding," the album never lets up. "Accidents Will Happen," the record's cornerstone, thankfully stands up to repeated playings. The song is a lot of airplay for good reason. The arrangement is quickly but not conclusively so. Costello's treatment of the song is more personal than, say, "Alison" from My Aim Is True. You can't imagine Linda Ronstadt singing this song.

The first side concludes with "Senior Service," Nick Lowe's production does a lot to make more effective. Costello's unique delivery is mirrored by the instruments.

With "Senior Service" and "Oliver's Army," the presence of the Attractions becomes apparent. Even though they performed with Costello on This Year's Model their instrumental attack was lost in translation. The Attractions have done together. Unlike the studio cut, the live "Alison" is more of a hand song than an Elvis Costello song. "Watching the Detectives" appears on the flip side of this tour disc. Checking it at 6:00, it is more relaxed than the studio version which is half as long. The Fartins organ and guitar fluctuates are chalked up to their remembrances of early sixties British rock 'n' roll.

Although his rise to competence took more time than his rise to prominence, Elvis Costello has proven that his music should be taken seriously. He and Nick Lowe know a lot about pop styles and use them to their advantage. In a decade crowded with musical posturing, it is refreshing to see that the future of rock 'n' roll is in good hands.