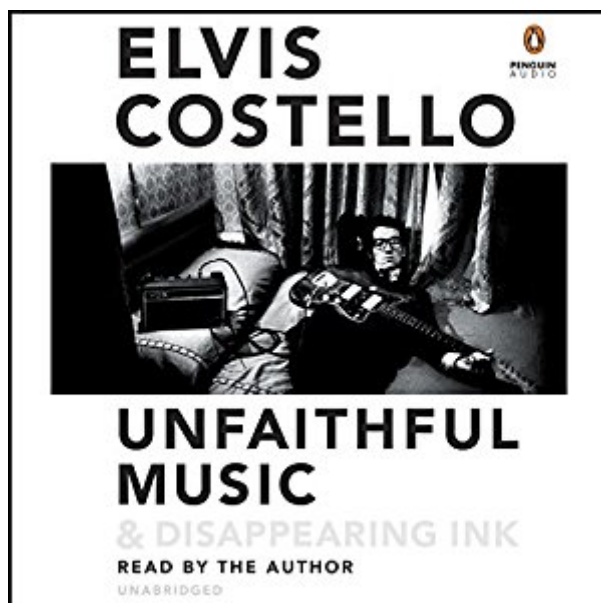


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Unfaithful Music & Disappearing Ink



Synopsis

Born Declan Patrick MacManus, Elvis Costello was raised in London and Liverpool, grandson of a trumpet player on the White Star Line and son of a jazz musician who became a successful radio dance band vocalist. Costello went into the family business and had taken the popular music world by storm before he was 24. Costello continues to add to one of the most intriguing and extensive songbooks of the day. His performances have taken him from a cardboard guitar in his front room to fronting a rock and roll band on your television screen and performing in the world's greatest concert halls in a wild variety of company. *Unfaithful Music* describes how Costello's career has somehow endured for almost four decades through a combination of dumb luck and animal cunning, even managing the occasional absurd episode of pop stardom. The memoir, written entirely by Costello himself, offers his unique view of his unlikely and sometimes comical rise to international success, with diversions through the previously undocumented emotional foundations of some of his best known songs and the hits of tomorrow. The book contains many stories and observations about his renowned cowriters and coconspirators, though Costello also pauses along the way for considerations on the less appealing side of infamy. *Unfaithful Music & Disappearing Ink* is destined to be a classic, idiosyncratic memoir of a singular man.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Whew!!!! Listening to Elvis C. over the course of 15 CDs was a profoundly moving, entertaining, and informing listening experience. I wanted to read the book, and when I discovered that Elvis narrates the audio, I decided to listen. His voice, as reader of his material, is superb. His imitations of other

figures are hysterical! (I'm smiling as I write this remembering his Bob Dylan and George Jones imitations). I've learned so much from this book, about Elvis's life, about his writing craft, and about all the tremendous (and varying) musicians that have inspired him. I enjoyed all the lyrics he stated throughout the text. The book has re-introduced the entire Elvis canon to me, and then some. Elvis albums I've previously dismissed I now look forward to listen to with a newly-learned appreciation. I now want to buy the book to read it again. This book is guaranteed to expand your record collection - among the new records I have purchased (thanks to Unfaithful Music), is Billie Holiday's All or Nothing at All, which EC raves about as one of his necessary recordings (or which there are so many). If you are passionate at all about music, read - better yet listen to - this book!

I still remember my first encounter with Elvis Costello's music. It was the John Peel show on the radio of course, the song was Less than Zero, and I found it captivating: distinctive voice, catchy melody, and above all words that were evocative, mysterious and vaguely menacing even though I didn't fully understand them. I snapped up the album My Aim is True when it was released a few months later and have been a fan ever since, following the twists and turns of his career from punk rock to R&B to country to collaborations with jazz, classical and hip-hop musicians. Costello is an amazing wordsmith and songs pour out of him, such that many of his B sides and outtakes are more than equal to the best work of many others, a characteristic he shares only I think with Bob Dylan who makes a regular appearance here as they encounter each other and end up performing together on a number of occasions. Now this is his book, 36 chapters (plus postscript) and approaching 700 pages. It is an excellent read, presuming you have some time for the man or an interest in the music scene of the last forty or so years. Writing in short pithy paragraphs (just as you would expect) Costello tells the story of his life, his bands, his writing, his father Ross MacManus who was also a singer, girls girls girls, and along the way recounts many entertaining and often alcoholic incidents of life on the road. The rhythm of the book is somewhat staccato and the sequence of events is only loosely chronological - that is, there is more about his earlier years in the first half of the book, and more about his later years in the second, but he constantly jumps back in forth in time making literary counterpoints. His habit of ending an anecdote just when you thought it was getting going can be annoying; but he is never dull. It would be an interesting exercise to rearrange, or attempt to rearrange, the book into chronological order, but I don't fancy doing it with my printed copy. There are black and white photos interspersed throughout the book; they don't look great partly because they are printed on paper designed for text. In

addition they have no captions. A shame. Costello writes a lot about his father, and in some ways the book is a tribute to him. He writes of his statement a couple of years ago that he would give up making records, which at the time he said was about spending more time with his children.

“The real reason was that I needed time to imagine how I could bear to write songs and not be able to play them for my father. Watching him listen to music was irreplaceable to me,” he says. Such passages are where Costello shows most emotion. One good reason to read the book is for insight into Costello’s songwriting. Some songs are described in detail, often including how they were influenced by or borrow from existing music, and how the words came together. One of my favourite passages (since I am a fan of both) is a conversation with Dylan: “One night Bob Dylan said to me: ‘U2! How could they do that to you? How could they take your song like that!’ It took me a moment to know what he was talking about, and a moment more to realize that he was putting me on. But then, ‘Get on your boots’ was probably to ‘Pump it up’ what ‘Subterranean Homesick Blues’ is to ‘Chuck Berry’s Too much monkey business’.”

Costello is a performer and the book is in a way a performance; I wish it were less so, but perhaps if so it would be less entertaining. There is a sharp side to Costello which occasionally goes too far. He writes of early days with Stiff (the independent record label responsible for his first releases) and the threat of being paired with another singer, “a horrible little git called Eric, who’d stumbled into the office with a single decent song. Did he have to say that? One thing which comes over powerfully though is his love of music and absolute belief in its importance. Of music he says, “There is no superior. There is no high and low. The beautiful thing is, you don’t have to choose, you can love it all. Those songs are there to help you when you need them most.” That in the end is the great thing about Unfaithful Music and disappearing Ink; it will inspire you to go back to the music, both from Costello and from others, and perhaps even to go beyond your comfort zone and explore some artists you may have missed or dismissed. He did. This is among the most enjoyable music books I have read; recommended

I picked up this book at an airport bookstore. It was easy enough at the start, and I had not had anything but the internet and one field guide to read in English for 10 days. I knew I had a brick in hand, but perhaps it contained some answer to mysteries. The lyrics and origins of many songs are explained. There is an accompanying two CD set you can buy if you do not know the songs. His

strength is in his lyrics. He explains collecting fragments in a notebook, phrases heard, that sort of thing. A common way for song writers. Previously I managed the Dylan autobiography and one by George Harrison. Mostly I prefer for someone else to analyze the music for me. This time, this was the only reliable source. The book plods along at times and I may have put it aside for weeks, but always picked it up again. It contains a lot of family history, scattered throughout. You could not read that all in one chapter. It's not really possible to describe all the angles and content in any short paragraph. Let's just jump to page 528. Elvis meets Brodsky quartet. They have been fans of each other. A singer that works with them is always a gift for a string quartet. Lots of concerts and also at times a way to approach a bigger audience. Crossover, but not in a bad way this time. Read the next 20 pages for a very meaningful musical awakening for Elvis. One thing that was entirely surprising is that he is in fact very musical, like McCartney, though with lesser vocal and instrumental talent. He had a gift for harmony from a child and eventually learned to write simple scores with the Brodskys. The rock band and Attractions era is well enough described as well, so whatever part of his career interests you, you can skip around and read that. The book has no index, so just go chapter by chapter. Each chapter clearly outlines what is in it on the first page. Somehow by one third of the book read, I knew I had to finish it. Many other books were started and stopped in the time between. Nick Hornby gave the book praises, that was enough to buy the book at the airport 5 months ago. CD set of the same name: It's a well balanced collection of the more energetic early years and some of the newer material without his usual side men. The co-written songs are not there much other than Veronica where he had help from McCartney. Any Costello collection is welcome, there are so few now.

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