

ELVIS COSTELLO

BIO

Revised October 2022

Born in London and raised there and in Liverpool, D.P. MacManus later came to be known as “Elvis Costello”. He has been performing in public for over fifty years, solo, with the pianist, Steve Nieve and with the bands Rusty, the Attractions, His Confederates - including two former members of Elvis Presley’s TCB Band - The Rude Five, an acoustic ensemble, The Sugarcanes and his current ensemble, The Imposters.

Costello has also appeared with the Mingus Big Band, the Metropole Orkest, the Jazz Passengers and one occasion in 1983, for a television appearance with the Count Basie Orchestra with Tony Bennett. He has sung in many symphony halls including with the orchestras of San Francisco, Dallas, Austin, Houston, Chicago, Minneapolis, Nashville, Baltimore, Brooklyn, Sydney, Melbourne, Honolulu and Tokyo as well as the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Boston Pops and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra.

He made his Carnegie Hall debut as the guest of Spinal Tap in 2001, returning in 2006 to appear with The Chieftains on St. Patrick’s Day and to perform “The Long Journey Home”, an anthem co-written with Paddy Moloney before making his own solo concert debut in 2014 with a two-night stand shortly before his 60th birthday. As a solo performer Costello has appeared on the bill of “The Bob Dylan Show”, while he and The Imposters have, in more recent years, toured as co-headliners with Blondie and in support of both Steely Dan and The Police.

Costello is a writer and part-time musician who made a number of records in the 20th Century, some of which are still remembered today, the most notable for many being the first five releases which were all produced by his friend, Nick Lowe and with whom he is always proud to share the bill and possibly a song or two.

Elvis Costello is the composer and lyricist of over six hundred published titles, including fifteen songs co-written with Paul McCartney and renowned collaborations with Allen Toussaint, the Brodsky Quartet and T Bone Burnett.

Costello has composed songs for Roy Orbison, Georgie Fame, Chet Baker, Dusty Springfield, Solomon Burke and Johnny Cash and written songs with Loretta Lynn, Bill Frisell, Aimee Mann, Chris Difford, Rosanne Cash and Kris Kristofferson, Carole King and his wife, Diana Krall. His compositions have been recorded by George Jones, Linda Ronstadt, June Tabor, Christy Moore, Norma Waterson and Bjork.

He has written lyrics for the music of Billy Strayhorn, Oscar Peterson and for twelve Charles Mingus compositions, as well as writing music for twelve unpublished lyrics by Bob Dylan.

Costello’s most enduring songwriting collaboration has been with Burt Bacharach beginning with the song, “God Give Me Strength” in 1995 and continuing to the present day. Their co-written, award-winning album “Painted From Memory” led to the composition of a significant number of songs for musical theatre, some of which were heard first on the album, “Look Now” and the E.P., “Purse”.

He is the author of “Unfaithful Music & Disappearing Ink”, a more than six-hundred page memoir which has been translated into six languages.

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Costello is also the composer of an unfinished opera - "The Secret Songs" - a commission from the Royal Danish Opera - which considered the entwined lives of H.C. Andersen, Jenny Lind and P.T. Barnum, as well as two orchestrated and produced ballet scores; "Il Sogno" for Aterballeto of Reggio Emilia and "NIGHTSPOT" for Twyla Tharp and the Miami City Ballet.

He has written several songs for motion pictures including, "The Scarlet Tide", his Academy Award nominated collaboration with T Bone Burnett for "Cold Mountain" and "You Shouldn't Look At Me That Way" for "Film Stars Don't Die In Liverpool", as well as a number of yet-to-be-produced stage musical scores, including more than twenty songs for an adaptation of Budd Schulberg's "A Face In The Crowd".

Making his debut in 1977 with the Stiff Records release, "My Aim Is True", Costello's recording catalogue now runs to more than thirty-five titles, including "Get Happy", "Imperial Bedroom", "King Of America", "All This Useless Beauty", "North", "National Ransom" and "Wise Up Ghost" with The Roots.

Costello has worked occasionally as a record producer for other artists, producing The Specials debut album in 1980, "East Side Story" by Squeeze and "Rum Sodomy and The Lash" by The Pogues. Much later, he worked with No Doubt on his song "I Throw My Toys Around" for "The Rugrats Movie".

Among Costello's infrequent cameo appearances as an actor, he is usually cast as a barman or a butler or "Man In Hat" or "Man with glasses called "Elvis Costello"", He has only occasionally been trusted to display any ability as a thespian, as in his appearance as a nervous and incompetent magician in Alan Bleasdale's "No Surrender".

In 2000, Costello produced and performed on "For The Stars", an album with the Swedish classical mezzo-soprano, Anne Sofie von Otter, for Deutsche Grammophon, before completing, "Il Sogno" - for a dance adaptation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" which was premiered at the Teatro Comunale, Bologna and was later revised and recorded at Abbey Road by the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas.

Between 2008 and 2009, Costello hosted twenty episodes of the conversation and performance television show, "Spectacle", commissioned by the Sundance Channel in the U.S. and CTV in Canada and later aired by Channel 4 in the U.K. and around the world.

The first guest was Sir Elton John, who together with his partner, David Furnish, served as executive producers. The next three episodes were devoted to President Bill Clinton, Lou Reed - with a guest appearance by the artist Julian Schnabel and Tony Bennett. Elton returned to the show to interview Diana Krall with her husband appearing only as a member of a vocal trio on "Makin' Whoopee".

The production subsequently moved from NBC Studio 8H - where Costello had made his notorious U.S. television debut on "Saturday Night Live" in 1977 - to the legendary Apollo Theatre in Harlem, where two shows per day were taped in a demanding schedule.

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Guests in the rest of Season One included; James Taylor, Herbie Hancock, a “guitar pull” panel with Rosanne Cash, Kris Kristofferson, Norah Jones and John Mellencamp, the operatic soprano, Renee Fleming, Rufus Wainwright and his mother and aunt, Kate & Anna McGarrigle, a show featuring, She & Him, Jenny Lewis and Jakob Dylan. The episodes with Smokey Robinson and the last ever television appearance by The Police were recorded on the same day.

Season Two began production in Toronto with Bono and The Edge and the actor, Mary Louise Parker interviewing Costello as the subject of an episode before returning to the Apollo for multiple artist shows with Sheryl Crow, Neko Case, Ron Sexsmith and Jesse Winchester and an episode celebrating Levon Helm in the company of Allen Toussaint, Richard Thompson and Nick Lowe and another with segments dedicated to Lyle Lovett, Ray LaMontagne and John Prine.

A conversation with Bruce Springsteen went so well that the guest agreed to stay on the stage for over three hours and the resulting interview and performances generated two full episodes.

From 2011 onwards Costello withdrew from the recording studio and stated his intention to be a traveling showman, reviving the “Spectacular Spinning Songbook” - employing a game show wheel by which invited members of the audience selected the next number in the set and “Detour” - a solo performance involving a giant television set prop, which served as both a screen to illustrate songs and anecdotes and providing another performance stage within the contraption.

Eventually, Costello was lured back into the studio, by Steven Mandel and Questlove for his collaboration with The Roots, “Wise Up Ghost” and then by T Bone Burnett as part of New Basement Tapes collective with Marcus Mumford, Jim James, Taylor Goldsmith and Rhiannon Giddens, to set and record a folio of unpublished Bob Dylan lyrics from 1967.

Between March 2020 and November 2022 Costello recorded, co-produced or released the following recorded collections:

“Hey Clockface” - an album recorded in Helsinki and Paris and completed over “electrical wire” between Vancouver, Los Angeles and New York City.

“Spanish Model” - a Spanish language adaptation of the 1978 album “This Year’s Model” with a guest cast of Latin music vocalists.

“La Face de Pendule à Coucou” - a French language E.P. of songs from “Hey Clockface” featuring Iggy Pop, Isabelle Adjani, Tshegoue and Emma Somatis et AJUQ

“The Boy Named If” - a new album by Elvis Costello and The Imposters with a guest appearance by New Jersey vocalist, Nicole Atkins recorded over “electrical wire” from Nashville, TN.

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“The Resurrection Of Rust” - the debut recording of the Liverpool-founded outfit Rusty accompanied by The Imposters, celebrating the 50th anniversary of his partnership with singer, Allan Mayes with whom Costello had last performed in 1973 at the age of 18.

Costello appeared with Fito Paez at Radio City Music Hall in early October 2022 to reprise a bilingual rendition of “Radio Radio” and Costello made his Spanish language singing debut on the Fito Paez ballad, “Yo Vengo A Ofrecer Mi Corazon”.

In 1978, Elvis Costello and the Attractions played in front of a crowd of 120,000 people at the Rock Against Racism event in Brockwell Park, South London. In 1985, Costello and the Attractions played a benefit for the families of South Wales miners just days after the year-long strike was forced to an end. Later that year, he made a solo performance at Wembley Stadium singing, “All You Need Is Love” as part of Live Aid.

In late 2005, Costello performed both solo and with Allen Toussaint at a number of benefit events in New York City following the Katrina disaster in New Orleans. He recently performed, two “Costello Sings Hunter/Garcia” concerts to benefit The Prader-Willi Homes of California and the “King Of America & Other Realms” gala performance in support of the Musicians Treatment Foundation of Austin, TX.

Costello is a two-time Grammy Award winner - firstly with Burt Bacharach for the song, “I Still Have That Other Girl” as Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals in 1998 and then in 2019 for his 30th album release, “Look Now”, in the Best Traditional Pop category. Costello has received, a BAFTA award in collaboration with the composer Richard Harvey on the music for Alan Bleasdale’s eleven-hour drama serial, “GBH”, two Ivor Novello Awards for his songwriting catalogue and two Dutch Edison Awards, firstly with the Brodsky Quartet for “The Juliet Letters” and then with Anne Sofie von Otter for their collaboration, “For The Stars” and, perhaps most surprisingly, a 1989 VMA Award for “Veronica” as “Best Male Video”.

He is a member of both The Songwriter’s Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 2020, Costello was awarded an O.B.E. for his services to music.

He holds two honorary doctorates in music, one from the University of Liverpool and another from the New England Conservatory. Despite this, he is known for playing the guitar with almost no regard for common sense.