

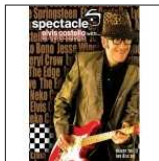


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Elvis Costello: Spectacle: Season 2
 7/10

McManus interviews the boss and jams with the imposters

The second series of Elvis Costello: Spectacle was shot in 2009 at the Apollo Theatre in Harlem and the Masonic Temple in Toronto. This is a double disc set which is a mixture of interviews and performances by Costello and his band The Imposters. Here he chats and jams with artists such as; Bono and The Edge, Sheryl Crow, Neko Case, Ron Sexsmith and Jesse Winchester play together. Levon Helm, Nick Lowe, Richard Thompson and Allen Toussaint follow. Mary-Louise Parker gets her own gig while Lyle Lovett, Ray Lamontagne and John Prine bring up the rear. The last two episodes feature Bruce Springsteen. The bonus features include a behind the scenes documentary plus four bonus songs from the Imposters and guests that were not included in the original programme.



Have you seen Elvis Costello: Spectacle: Season 2

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In episode one which starts with a performance of 'Mysterious Ways,' Bono is encouraged to talk about his various charitable initiatives and U2's collaborations over the years including an encounter with Frank Sinatra. He declares 'intimacy to be the new punk rock,' and quotes Nietzsche. Don't be put off by this, it gets better! Sexsmith, Case, Crow and Winchester provide more interesting fare. They take turns in playing their own songs and ones that inspire them. 'Secret Heart,' 'Leaving Las Vegas,' and 'Everyday I Write the Book,' are among the gems available.

Next up Costello creates a rhythm section. New Orleans R & B legend Alain Toussaint tinkles the ivories while Costello reminisces with Nick Lowe about their meeting in a Liverpool pub in 1972 and about singing while playing the bass. He plays the Johnny Cash song 'The Beast in Me.' Drummer Levon Helm defies his doctor to appear. Ex Fairport Convention member and folk legend Richard Thompson brings his guitar to the band. 'I don't want to go to Chelsea,' begins programme three in which Emmy award winning actress Mary Louise Parker turns the tables. She interviews Costello and provides the glamour in the series.

The veteran in the next piece is John Prine, an active songwriter since the early seventies. He in turn influenced Lyle Lovett. If you know him more for being the ex husband of Julia Roberts and an occasional actor you will be pleasantly surprised by his joyous vocals. Costello compares him with his contemporaries, Lucinda Williams and Nanci Griffiths. Lovett acknowledges his debt to Townes Van Zandt. The reluctant performer Ray Lamontagne represents the shock of the new and talks of the influence of Stephen Stills and Joni Mitchell. They end with Van Zandt's lovely song 'Loretta.' The double Springsteen episode is intended to be the finale. The in depth interview covers Bruce's early struggles in life before his success with 'Born to Run.' He outlines the songwriting process, his view of politics in the US and how age and family have changed him. Songs played include Springsteen's 'The River' and Costello's 'Radio Radio,' and 'Can't Stand Up for falling Down.' Nils Lofgren of The E Street Band also features as warm up man.

Generally this is a very enjoyable series featuring a wide variety of artists that are well respected but perhaps don't get much of an outing in mainstream programming (Bono and Springsteen aside). The series combines the musical collaborations with the anecdotal elements very well. Costello is an engaging host and the performances of some of his classic hits add to the entertainment value. This is a spectacle worth taking in.

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