

6 QUESTIONS

with **ELVIS COSTELLO**
by **CORTNEY HARDING**

Elvis Costello needs no introduction. If you're unfamiliar with his body of work, put down this magazine and make a beeline to your nearest record store or download emporium. The British singer/songwriter, who swept through the London pub scene, the punk movement and the New Wave fad while retaining his signature sound continues to release great work 30-plus years in. His latest project, the country- and folk-inflected "Secret, Profane, and Sugarcane," arrived June 9 on Hear Music.

As if being a music legend wasn't enough, Costello is also determined to make his mark on TV; his show, "Spectacle," blends music and interviews with superstars and up-and-comers. A DVD of the first season was released Nov. 17, and the second season premieres Dec. 9 on the Sundance Channel.

1 How do you curate the shows and decide on the guests?

Well, of course you can make a wish list, but even though you can theorize all you want, you've got to get people into the theater. After that, I think the most important thing is contrast. You need people who are more gently spoken together with people who can really grab you by the throat. It's not a bad thing to also have people who have a broad popular appeal and don't often get to play in intimate settings.

being like a carnival barker or the MC of a big package show.

4 Are you planning on doing any other TV, given the success of "Spectacle"? Maybe visiting "Colbert Christmas" or "30 Rock"?

I think "30 Rock" is on hiatus right now, but I'd be more than happy to reprise my roll as an international art thief [laughs]. I've carried a Screen Actors Guild card for a number of years, but I don't think of myself as an actor.



2 You hold your own as an interviewer against big personalities like Bono and former President Bill Clinton. How did you prepare to interview these people?

With someone like Bono, at one time, I was on top of the bill and he was just coming up. And all of sudden he got on a rocket ship and just took off, and his music was just designed for such huge, wide spaces. But he's still a human being with anxieties and insecurities. On the show, Bono talks about being in the company of Frank Sinatra and realizing that he was in a heavyweight league.

When I talked to Clinton, we mainly talked about music, but I did ask him one very serious question, about whether he consulted music when he was faced with a difficult policy decision. And I could see the impact that question had was different than him just reminiscing about music, and I felt like I had been sparring with Muhammad Ali and just laid a glove on him.

3 Were you influenced by any particular music shows or talk shows when you started putting "Spectacle" together?

I didn't really have a model for the show in my head; I just wanted to pull together all the things that interested me. I see myself as

I wouldn't mind doing something where I am given the responsibility of being a character—usually I'm just asked to be a guitar player with glasses.

5 Are you working on any new music at the moment?

I'm always writing. I'm not recording anything right now because I just finished touring. I was in Australia four weeks ago playing shows, and then I went to Toronto to do the last show of the season [for "Spectacle"], and I've been in New York working on the edits ever since.

6 In 2004, you put a line on the back of your CD "The Delivery Man" stating that you didn't endorse the FBI anti-piracy warning on the back of albums. What did you mean when you made that statement?

My issue with having a government agency stamp on creative work is that it just goes against my nature. I won't carry an ID card, because people actually lost their lives so that we don't have to carry ID cards.

And I'm not really big on government institutions putting stamps on works of art. The problem is much more complex than all of that, and my issue is that it's just like the patient is bleeding from a number of wounds and you just put a [bandage] on this one thing—and it has a big FBI sticker on it and that's supposed to make people feel better?

It's like suing one or two people for downloading. If you really want to go after it, you go after the file-sharing institutions, because they're also the conduits for child porn. So why don't you go after them? Just go and close them down. You know, it's a half-assed thing, that's what my problem with it is. It's the wrong enemy. ...