



Now here's something that really brings us back to the Elvis roots, whose early music was called "rockabilly," a combination of black r&b and white country (or "hillbilly") music.

This new CD pays tribute to Elvis in a different way -- bluegrass style.

The two musicians who make up the Bluegrass Elvises are: Billy Burnette and Shawn Camp.

Burnette was formerly with Fleetwood Mac. According to the liner notes, his father Dorsey and uncle Johnny Burnette "used to kick a young Elvis out of their rehearsals in the laundry room at the Lauderdale Courts housing project." Shawn Camp grew up in Arkansas grooving on the Elvis Sun singles and by listening so closely he learned to imitate the Elvis style almost totally.

When you consider that the B side of the first Elvis record on Sun was the bluegrass classic, "Blue Moon of Kentucky," these two bluegrass boys are in fact paying homage to both Elvis Presley and Bill Monroe. But they forgot to include that song. As Alanna Nash's excellent notes relate, Burnette said: "God, we forgot to do 'Blue Moon of Kentucky!'" And Nash goes on to write: "Chances are, Elvis will haunt them until they make it right." Maybe they'll make it "right" in Volume II.

All the songs on the CD were made famous Elvis and they make for a very enjoyable listen.

The CD begins with a very short bluegrass version of the famous theme from Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film, 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. Elvis used this theme in his 1970s live shows.

Most of the songs on this CD come from the early Elvis period, from the mid-1950s to early 1960s. They include some of the biggest Elvis hits, like "Don't Be Cruel"; "All Shook Up"; "Jailhouse Rock"; and "Hound Dog." All of these are performed with great gusto and plenty of good pickin.'

Just to mention of a few tracks that were especially appealing to my ears: the very inventive arrangement of "Little Sister" with some fine singing too; the only ballad on the CD, a very touching rendition of "Are You

Lonesome Tonight?" (including the narration spoken by Elvis); and a great interpretation of "Mystery Train," probably the greatest Sun recording made by Elvis.

The attractive CD booklet has some colorful photos, though it would be nice to see more of that handsome red and white 1956 Cadillac convertible that the Bluegrass Elvises are posing with, and also more of the Bluegrass Bus too.

There are two things I wish were improved. First, the CD is kind of short at only 35 minutes. And second is the same problem I have with most commercial CDs these days. Why doesn't the engineer boost the volume on the singers more? There's too much prominence given to the instruments and not enough to the singers. It was different during the early Elvis era. Can you imagine Elvis' singing being overwhelmed by his instrumental group?

The last line of the notes by Alanna Nash nicely sums up this enjoyable CD tribute: "Thirty years after his death, Elvis is still influencing a broad spectrum of genres, even as he once borrowed from there."

And so it goes...in the world of Elvis.

This CD was released by American Roots Publishing, an outfit dedicated to celebrating American music, literature and art. Previous releases have been a celebration of Kris Kristopherson, and the excellent Grammy Award-winning CD of songs by Stephen Foster by various artists.

This latest ARP release is a wonderful tribute to Elvis and should appeal to anyone who enjoys some fine bluegrass pickin' and singin.'

It's a real hoot.

I think maybe Elvis would be pleased with it too.

--review by Roger Hall, August 2007