

Shawn Camp & Billy Burnett
The Bluegrass Elvises Vol 1
American Root Publishing

My first reaction to the promo broadside about this CD was, “You’ve got to be kidding! Just what the world needs, another CD of Elvis covers.” But after only a couple of listens *The Bluegrass Elvises, Vol 1* has gone from ‘I’ll listen once and then recycle it’ to “Damn if this isn’t the greatest thing since Peanut butter and banana sandwiches!”

Both Billy Burnett and Shawn Camp have impressive credentials. Billy Burnett is the son of Rockabilly legend Dorsey Burnett. Bill recorded his first song at the ripe old age of seven. He’s gone on to do nine solo albums and one duo album with Delaney and Bonnie’s daughter, Bekka Bramlett. Burnett also played lead guitar with Fleetwood Mac between 1987 and 1995. Shawn Camp’s musical career began when he joined the Osborne Brothers on fiddle. He moved to Nashville in 1987 and after working as a sideman for the likes of Alan Jackson and Suzy Boguss, he released his first album in 1993. In 1997 Camp had his first #1 hit song when Garth Brooks recorded “Two Pina Coladas.”

In 1998 Brooks and Dunn had a #1 hit with Camp’s “How Long Gone.” He has continued to create great songs including “Ain’t No Trouble Now” which has been recorded by several bluegrass stars including Ralph Stanley. In the early ‘90’s Burnett and Camp got together to write nearly 100 songs together including Alan Jackson’s “Burning the Honkytonks Down,” and Del McCoury’s “My Love Will Not Change.”

The idea for an all-Elvis CD began in 2003 when Sun Records producer David Ferguson suggested that Burnett and Camp do some Elvis material bluegrass style at the end of recording session. “It all came together right then,” Camp remembers. “And a month later we started cutting this thing.” The masters languished for several years until Camp mentioned them to Tamara Saviano, founder of American Roots Publishing. She green-lighted the project and Burnett and Camp went into the studio to record a few more songs and put the finishing touches on the original recordings. The results are *The Bluegrass Elvises Vol 1*.

Most of the song choices on this CD are from Elvis’ early Sun Records catalog. But the two songs from his later RCA period, “Burnin’ Love,” and “Are You Lonesome Tonight,” rank as the most interesting cuts on the CD. Why? Because they aren’t basic rockabilly tunes. Dennis Linde’s “Burnin’ Love” is a rave-up

power pop anthem, while “Are You Lonely Tonight” is a histrionic Tin Pan Alley ballad. Burnett and Camp actually tone down “Burnin’ Love” by giving it a bubbling banjo hop that balances its verse and chorus. “Are You Lonesome Tonight” is converted into a honky-tonk arm-bender, complete with a recitation after the first verse. Twin fiddle melody lines behind the vocals compete with the pitiful prose for center stage.

Band personnel on *The Bluegrass Elvises, Vol 1* includes Terry Eldridge and Mike Bubb on bass, Dave Talbot and Scott Vestal on banjo, Chris Henry on mandolin, and Aubrey Haynie on fiddle. Burnett and Camp handle all the vocals and guitar parts. Engineered and co-produced by David Ferguson, the sonics on *The Bluegrass Elvises Vol 1* strive for a nice clean acoustic sound rather than trying to mimic the classic Sun Studios slap-back reverb. I think that was a good decision since this isn’t a tribute or rockabilly re-creation album, but an acoustic interpretation of Elvis’ material.

The Bluegrass Elvises Vol 1 illuminates the connections between Elvis’ music and his Appalachian string-band roots. But instead of being some kind of dry academic endeavor, this CD captures all the joy and vibrancy of his best early work. Go, cats, go.