



The Bluegrass Elvises, Volume 1
Shawn Camp & Billy Burnette

These days, album-length bluegrass spins on pop-rock music are seemingly ground out on an assembly line, and too often gimmickry trumps substance. That doesn't necessarily invalidate the idea, however. In Elvis Presley's case, it's perfectly valid, given that the B-side of his first Sun single was a driving recasting of Bill Monroe's waltz-tempo "Blue Moon of Kentucky." Driving bluegrass rhythms became a major component of many of Elvis's Sun recordings and of early rockabilly in general. Now, the wrong performers tackling a bluegrass treatment of Elvis could make a hash of it, but that didn't happen this time--Shawn Camp and Billy Burnette know the score. Billy's dad, Dorsey, and uncle, Johnny Burnette, were Memphis rockabilly pioneers. Camp and Burnette approach the material with a fetching blend of passion, humor, and respect for both Presley and no-frills, unadulterated traditional bluegrass, beginning with a smart tongue-in-cheek instrumental reprise of Elvis's introductory theme "Also Sprach Zarathustra." Romping through the seminal '50s standards "That's All Right Mama," "Blue Suede Shoes," "Good Rockin' Tonight," and "Jailhouse Rock," each performance reflects the same energetic intensity--even the latest hit covered, "Burnin' Love." When a then-unknown Elvis met Monroe in 1954, the Father of Bluegrass gave his blessing to Elvis's spin on "Blue Moon of Kentucky" (and incorporated it into his own version). One suspects both legends would feel likewise about this brilliant, exhilarating effort.

--Rich Kienzle