

REVIEWS

ELVIS COSTELLO

**National Ransom**

[Hear Music]

Elvis Costello has touched on a wide variety of genres during his career, but he usually sticks with one style at a time. On *National Ransom*, he finally blends two of his distinct artistic modes into one. Last year's *Secret, Profane & Sugarcane* featured a band of Nashville acoustic-music ringers, who here are joined by Costello's longtime rock outfit, the Imposters. The combination is a versatile one, allowing Costello to switch things up in an instant. The title cut comes crashing in like a late-'70s Attractions number; moments later, on "Jimmie Standing in the Rain," the setting is starkly acoustic, augmented by strings. The album's seesawing sound suits the songs, as each lyric focuses in great detail on a different intriguing corner of the dark. Costello's colorful cast of characters attempts, with varying degrees of success, to figure out what can be salvaged of a world that seems irrevocably broken and impossible to figure. —Chris Neal

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