

## Review: Costello's taking liberties

Delcan Patrick McManus has taken over the title of the "Chameleon" of Rock from fellow Briton David Bowie. Who is McManus? Elvis Costello to you. Since bursting onto the scene in 1977, Costello has dabbled in every form and style of rock.

According to the liner notes on his latest album, Costello has waxed more music than he's had space for. That is the sole reason for his new Columbia album, "Taking Liberties."

I don't know who to blame for this album, Columbia or Costello. "Taking Liberties" is about as erratic and disjointed as any album I've ever heard. The reason for this album, I feel, is in the fact that Costello's fourth album, "Get Happy," failed to sell as well as anticipated. CBS needed a product and they took whatever they could get.

In the case of "Taking Liberties" they got a mismatched hodge-podge of B-sides, unreleased masters and English imports. The 20 songs on this single album (20?! ) are thrown together without any concern for order or style.

Most of the cuts were produced by either Costello or Rockpile leader Nick Lowe. The bands backing Costello are his present group, the Attractions, the band that recorded "My Aim Is True," Clover and a series of guest artists



including Dave Edmunds and the Clash's Mick Jones. The bands really don't matter, Costello's voice is the prominent feature on every cut.

The two Costello songs that Linda Ronstadt covered on her "Mad Love" album are here, "Talking in the Dark" and "Girls Talk." As with a lot of his other material, "Girls Talk" is Costello sneering at the entire world. As a matter of fact, that can be said about "Big Tears," "Black and White World," "Night Rally," and "Getting Mighty Crowded." Costello seems to have a one-track mind, the "angry young man."

None of the songs on "Taking Liberties" are the caliber of "Alison" or "Accidents Will Happen." I find that dishearten-

ing, because when Costello isn't hating everything around him he really is a fine songwriter.

Costello and Lowe have included a group of songs that have to fall in a category with "Watching the Detectives." By that I mean that they are not his usual pop-rock fare. For lack of a better name, let's just call them "weird songs." The weird songs are "Dr. Luther's Assistant," "Hoover Factory," "Tiny Steps" and a few more whose titles escape me. These cuts are fun. If you listen to the lyrics Costello injects samplings of double-entendre, puns, inside jokes and what have you.

Sitting here staring at this typewriter made me realize just how ridiculous this album is. Ten songs on a side, none longer than three and a half minutes, all blend into one. Costello never gives himself enough time to flesh out the spare bones he has laid down.

"Get Happy" and now "Taking Liberties" show us a new side of Costello. How can he really expect someone to take an album seriously if he doesn't even take it seriously himself? Is Elvis Costello taking liberties? Damn straight and with your money, too.

— GEOFF HACKETT

## 'Ordinary People' moving

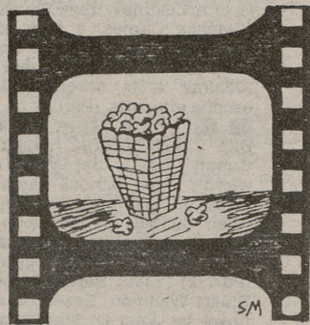
For the first 30 seconds or so, Ordinary People is a happy film.

It starts out all pastel and pristine and such, like a series of watercolor greeting cards. The kind of cards you buy to express deep emotions like love or regret or sympathy; the kind that always have ponds, trees or autumn scenes on the front, and Rod McKuen poetry on the inside.

Ordinary People begins by showing the world of the upper middle class; a pretty world of well-kept lawns and nice homes, where things don't go wrong.

The camera pans across the scenes, and into a school where

fishbowl; everyone is watching him to see whether he is sufficiently normal. Conrad has a friend who can't reach him, and Conrad has a



coach who doesn't understand him. The only person in the film who communicates effectively is Conrad's psychiatrist.

It is instructive, when trying to figure out what a film-maker is trying to say, to determine who the good guys and bad guys are. In this movie, the good guy is a psychiatrist and the bad guy is Mary Tyler Moore.

Conrad goes to the psychiatrist because he wants to be more "in control of things." The psychiatrist asked, "Why do you want to be in control? I'll be quite honest with you, I'm not big on control."

Moore's character, on the other hand, is always in control. She

doesn't cry at her son's funeral; she tends to be quiet and dignified when she gets angry.

This movie is Freudian in a sense, because it tells us that being in control, or suppressing one's feelings, is done at a cost. The battle to keep things bottled up inside will either tear a person apart; or, if one does manage to remain in control, it will rob him or her of the ability to become close to another person.

So the contrast is set up between caution, control and neatness on the one hand, and caring, communicating and occasional messiness on the other. Since life is not neat, it's a loser's game to pretend that it is.

And since this is a Freudian film, it is only fitting that it takes a psychiatrist to straighten everything out.

Setting theme aside for a moment, it should be said that the acting in this film is excellent. Timothy Hutton in particular is excellent in the role of the troubled Conrad.

The other important thing to say about this film is that it is very depressing. If you are in a manic-depressive mood, this film could have you leaping off tall buildings. If not, it may make you cry, which of course is okay, since you don't want to suppress your feelings.

— SCOT K. MEYER

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