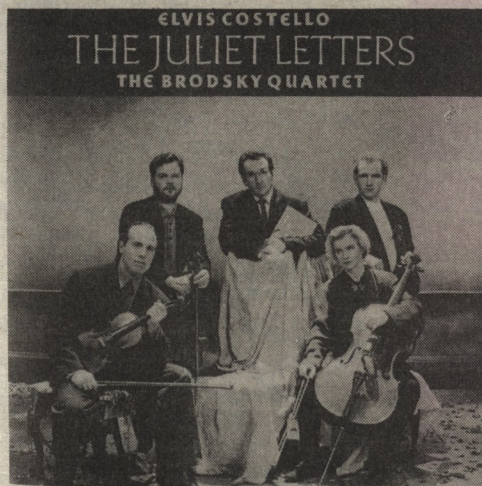


# High Fidelity

BY KIRBY FERGUSON



**The Juliet Letters**  
Elvis Costello  
and the Brodsky Quartet  
(Warner)

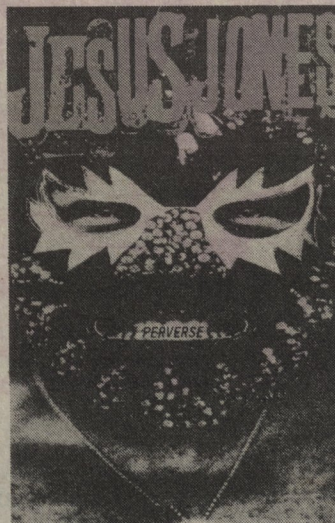
## They're murdering the classics

Stabs at a classical cross-over are often the mark of a tragically pompous pop star. Artists with any taste, however, incorporate classical into their vision without compromising either form, as Van Morrison did on *Astral Weeks* (the greatest album ever made). Not the vocalist Morrison is, Elvis Costello probably wouldn't be one's first pick to pull off a pop/classical hybrid, but he has scored a minor triumph with *The Juliet Letters*, a moving and beautiful album.

In the beginning of Costello's career, the title of his debut, *My Aim is True*, seemed

confidently prophetic. But in the eighties Costello seemed directionless, though *Imperial Bedroom*, *Blood and Chocolate*, *King of America* and *Get Happy!!* rank with the best of the decade and all but one of his albums (*Almost Blue*) contain at least a handful of great songs. Costello developed a vast stylistic repertoire over the eighties, which would eventually envelop classical in the next decade with 1991's *Mighty Like a Rose*, a bloated, largely tuneless affair which featured his most obvious classical experimentation. With *The Juliet Letters* Costello has done away with all pop conventions and backed himself only with the graceful ebb and flow of a string quartet. As mentioned, Costello's voice can't quite stand up in this atmosphere and doesn't send *The Juliet Letters* over the top. Still, this is a remarkably beautiful album, and Costello invests it with a kind of pop stylization, without getting vulgar. Though no more "the new Elvis Costello album" than it is "the new Brodsky Quartet album," *The Juliet Letters* is defined by Costello's writing style; the best tracks are also the ones with recognizable pop song structures: "For Other Eyes," "Taking My Life in Your Hands," which features a climax worthy of Roy Orbison, "Jackson, Monk and Rowe," the lovely "This Sad Burlesque" and some more.

While this will undoubtedly lead nowhere in its pure form, in the future an amalgamation more true to Costello's rock'n'roll roots may produce some of his greatest work -- which is Costello's real triumph: after sixteen years, still having the potential to create his best music... now.



**Perverse**  
Jesus Jones  
(Capitol)

## "The revolution will be computerized"

Coming from the same can't-sing-can't-write-but-we-make-neat-noises school of EMF, Nine Inch Nails and the rest, Jesus Jones originally

seemed like the best of the wave, but their latest, *Perverse*, displays a dearth of imagination. The really poor songwriting would be easier to ignore if the sounds were more exciting, but their bag of tricks is pretty shallow and can't sustain this. And Mike Edmunds should definitely leave his sampler every once in a while and invest in some singing lessons. *Perverse* is essentially a collection of bleeps, blips and jagged, dissonant guitar stuffed into banal pop formats.

Anyway, I think the time has passed for this kind of stuff, that's my prediction. Expect these bands to die out within the next year or so. ●

## Grunge

continued from last page...

Record executives are filling flights all over the continent looking for the next Nirvana. When Halifax group Sloan were recently signed for \$1 million to Geffen Records (recently absorbed into the MCA empire) -- the same label as Nirvana -- the media quickly anointed Halifax the second coming of grunge.

"What's happened is that people (the media) will see three bands in an area and they'll call it a scene," notes Sub-Pop's Silverman.

When asked about whether there has been any kind of grunge free trade happening between the Seattle scene and their northern neighbours in Vancouver, *The Daily's* Smith has some positive words.

"I don't know about Canada. Vancouver is one of the better places to open up next as a scene. It's sort of like San Francisco."

Vancouver is a likely candidate to be the next Seattle because it's like San Francisco? Hmmmm...

Ted Young-Ing, entertainment editor at the UBC's *Ubyssy*, points out, "Seattle bands are really familiar in Vancouver. The scene out here isn't grungy, though. It's more hard-core."

And what of the future for the new grungeless bands?

"A lot of bands get overlooked," says Sub-Pop Silverman.

"There are all these bands like Flop (from Portland, another potential next big scene), Pond, Hazel and Spinanes. They are all very different from each other. But it's not easy. For Sprinkler, it might have been very bad for them to be the first Portland band to have the grunge sound."

Ultimately, Silverman feels the scene is dying down.

"The label (Sub-Pop) is looking to other places to expand," he explains, "It's important not to trap yourself in one sound."

The context of this countercultural musical movement has moved from the periphery to the centre. Grunge has entered the mainstream. ●