

Marcus (the man with the Bauhaus spectacles and furrowed brow on the recent *Omnibus* Madonna programme) tends to analyse where Lester leaps in, and his writing has an intellectual density rare in the rock field.

First published in 1975, *Mystery Train* is an invigorating eye-opening journey through American music, beginning with Robert Johnson and Harmonica Frank, and moving through Randy Newman, The Band and Sly Stone. The central character, happily, is Elvis Presley. Marcus has a rare understanding of the King, and his 50-page *Presliad* essay remains in the present tense — simply because Elvis remains in the present tense.

The book is worth buying for the notes

and discographies alone, but more so for its unashamed trumpeting of the thing Americans have no difficulty calling rock 'n roll culture.

Marcus cites in his defence Walt Whitman's endearing notion that he didn't want an art that could decide elections, he wanted an art to make them irrelevant. "As good democrats," Marcus concludes, "we fight it out within the borders of his ambition."

It's a grand idea, certainly, and you can whistle it.

*Mystery Train* by Greil Marcus is published by Omnibus, price £12.95.

● Full guide to rock listings — see Page IV

● As a footnote to last week's ramblings about gonzo penpusher Lester Bangs, seekers of fine rock writing might care to note that an updated version of Greil Marcus's *Mystery Train* has recently been published.