

JON LANDAU

ELVIS TODAY, Elvis Presley (RCA APL 1 1039): In the brilliant new rock book "Mystery Train," cultural commentator Greil Marcus argues that Elvis Presley was the most symbolic and influential of all rock stars. He is the closest thing we have to American royalty. He made such an impact on society at large that he no longer has to take out insurance on his position—he merely has to suggest the existence of his unusual ability.

And sure enough, Presley has been issuing throwaway records for as long as anyone can remember. His audience is incapable of demanding anything from him; those of us who love to hear him sing must be content with the bits and pieces he releases that only start to fulfill the promise of his incredible talent.

* * *

ON TODAY, the King offers us one unmistakable triumph, "T-R-O-U-B-L-E," his hardest and most dazzling cut since the classic, "Burning Love." But after the album opener, he goes wandering through the usual assortment of Las Vegas-styled interpretations of country music and half-hearted rock—including a luke-warm, hack rendition of the classic, "Shake a Hand."

We hear him in good form again only on a routine arrangement of Billy Swan's great hit of last year, "I Can Help." Presley obviously gets off on this song's best line, "If your child needs a daddy, I can help." But he changes the lyric once to, "Have a laugh on me, I can help."

Presley is a great one for undercutting himself. He is also incredibly arrogant. Here we have him asking us to laugh at him, almost hoping that we could, but knowing that nobody will. He is still Elvis Presley, and nothing he ever does can change that.

* * *

QUIET STORM, Smokey Robinson (Motown 337 S1): Smokey Robinson made his mark as the driving force behind one of the greatest Motown groups of the Sixties, the Miracles. Had he never done anything but write and sing "Shop Around," "Ooh Baby, Baby" and "Tracks of My Tears," his place in the history of pop music would be secure. Since heading out on his own a few years ago, his records have not taken hold with a large audience, despite their high quality. Now comes Quiet Storm, a record so good that his solo efforts can



ELVIS PRESLEY

no longer be ignored. He already has the makings of a hit single, "Baby That's Backatcha," but the album also includes one of his greatest records ever, "Love Letters." That one is filled with the kind of controlled frenzy that made Robinson a legend in his time. And the rest of the record lives up to that standard, with Smokey showing growth on the slow material, where his grace and elegance sound like they are virtually without peer.

* * *

LOST GENERATION, Elliot Murphy (RCA APL-1-0916): Elliot Murphy's first album was overpublicized. He posed figure, and sang sophisticated and, sometimes, ethereal lyrics. But his performances were thin and unadventurous and his music too narrowly reminiscent of Bob Dylan's. Now he's switched labels and on Lost Generation he's come across with something more substantial. In this case, he was helped enormously by producer Paul Rothchild—a man who contributed mightily to the success of The Doors and Janis Joplin. Rothchild shows the admirable ability to use session men to punch up the sound without ever letting them get in the way.

The album remains Murphy's show, however, and it remains an adiosyncratic one. While he's too self-consciously arty for my taste, this time around he sounds good enough to start winning a good-sized audience for himself. And if his writing and performing continue improving, he may naturally stop sounding like he thinks too much.

ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE

THEIR BEST BUYS

Need Light?

50 year old copper library fixtures