



STEVE NIEVE

PRESS

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MOJO 4 MUSIC - Elvis Costello By Steve

Nieve: "We Called Him The Reverend"

By Danny Eccleston | December 04, 2015th

<https://www.mojo4music.com/articles/22574/elvis-costello-by-steve-nieve-we-called-him-the-reverend>

Celebrating the US onsale of MOJO's Elvis Costello issue, the Attractions' keyboard maestro reflects on life with his "astonishing" bandmate. Cue: weird chords, strong cider, and beating up Sting...



ELVIS COSTELLO, WHO GRACES the cover of the MOJO magazine currently on sale in the US, once played opposite Sting in an operatic piece (*Welcome To The Voice*) penned by Attractions keyboardist Steve Nieve (pictured above, second from left) and his partner, Muriel Teodori. The part of a police chief obliged Costello to rough the Geordie singer up a tad, but Nieve grew slightly concerned that his bandmate might be enjoying the role slightly too much.

"We did the show with a 35-piece orchestra in Paris, with costumes and everything, and there was a weird rivalry between Elvis and Sting," Nieve tells MOJO. "In the story he gets to stick it to the character that Sting was playing. Beating up Sting basically. But I think occasionally he was sticking

the boot in a little too hard. We did six performances of it, and thankfully Sting didn't get his ribs broken."

Nieve cites the performance as evidence of Costello's willingness to take a risk and his talent for throwing himself wholeheartedly into his work, qualities the keyboard player has had ample opportunity to observe over five decades of regular collaboration.

"He always seems to be extraordinarily alert," says Nieve of the singer. "Something might happen that's got nothing to do with the music, maybe someone has a problem of a completely non-musical nature, and he'll get on it and get all the details of what could be a solution. Everything he tackles he does so in a very detailed way. It might be something completely frivolous, like football, but he'll know all the details of a particular player in a team that he doesn't even seem to be interested in. I know he's a Liverpool fan but he seems to know all about the other teams as well."

In the following Q&A interview, Nieve pays tribute to the MOJO cover star on the occasion of the publication of [his revealing memoir](#) and attendant [compilation album](#). It shines a fascinating light on the singer's musical universe, which can be further investigated in the in-depth Costello feature in [MOJO 265...](#)

MOJO: First things first: what do you remember of your first meeting?

Steve Nieve: I'd answered an advertisement for a keyboardist for 'a rocking pop combo on Stiff Records'. I knew a bit about Stiff Records, but that was about it. The audition was the first time I met him, and they were just there in this rehearsal room. I think he had a couple of members of The Rumour in there with him and we played through two or three songs, and I said, 'Do you mind if I hang around? I'd like to hear the other guys.' I ended up sitting in the back of the room, listening to these two or three songs over and over with different people playing them, and for some reason there was a large keg of cider at the back of the room which I managed to get through. So at the end of the

evening I was feeling rather jolly, and then I went out for dinner with them. I seem to remember that even at that point he was constantly talking about music. The whole evening was spent talking about music, which was great. I lost track of time and nearly missed the last train back to the deep dark suburbs of Dartford.

“Elvis would walk off into the audience and deliver his sermons”

In the beginning, what were your shared reference points?

My tastes in music were not really the same as his at all, but it wasn't really about that; it was more about how passionate he was about it. In those days we used to make up cassettes with our favourite bits of music for playing in the car. It's different nowadays – everyone's got those headphones on. So you would share things. It was good for that.

Then you went out on the Live Stiffs tour, with Ian Dury, Wreckless Eric, Nick Lowe, Larry Wallis. That must have been an eye-opener...

Yes, for me it was a little strange because I didn't know anything about anything. The other guys had all been in other bands, they knew what was going on. But right up until the time I met Elvis I was a choirmaster and organ-master at my local church.

You got your nickname – ‘Naive/Nieve’ – from Dury: is that true?

It's often been claimed. I can't remember who started calling me Nieve. Maybe it was him. But it's a nice name, I'm very happy to have it.

The Attractions were, if I may blow your trumpet for a minute, one of the great rock'n'roll bands. More than that, you seemed to have a way of building a completely unique mood for every song you played...

Well we did seem to click, and if a song started off in a totally different tempo and feel – which it usually did – we were able to lock onto it and make something of it. Most groups now play with a click in their heads to make sure they all play at the same speed, but quite a few of the early Attractions numbers had to accommodate a certain amount of spontaneity. In the early days Elvis would walk off into the audience and deliver his sermons – we called him ‘The Reverend’. Certain numbers like (I Don’t Want To Go To) Chelsea would have these extended middle sections. It was also fairly simple: there were just the four of us and it was complete in itself. But I noticed the other day that the keyboards I had in the early days were the same I had in a covers band aged 15. They must have sounded terrible!

|| **What are your favourite Elvis Costello songs to play?**

It’s a good question. I’ve been touring a set of his songs that I play solo on the piano. I love playing his music. He’s often cited as being a fantastic lyric writer and no-one talks about his music, but the melodies of those songs are incredible. They go to places you don’t expect them to go.

|| **What’s an example of a song that goes somewhere odd?**

There’s a song on *North*, called Still. Halfway through it, there’s a chord change that is so delightful, and so out of the ordinary. I think almost every song that he’s written has this aspect to it. He’s constantly trying to challenge his voice and put things into his songs that are challenging and interesting for him to sing.

|| **What’s the chord change? Indulge us!**

Where’s my piano? (*Has a tinkle*) It is a really unusual piece of harmony. You’re in the key of E most of the time, but you go to A and then C#minor and F#minor, then to an Fminor7. Then it’s like the F is the 3rd of C#, so it’s really doing what Schoenberg was doing, going from a very sharp key to a very flat key. That kind of change is really emotional and amazing, I think. You don’t normally encounter that in a pop song.

Has he written a lot of songs on the piano?

Yeah, quite a lot. And because he's self-taught, he'll find something that's unusual. In his song Pills And Soap it sounds like there's a kind of R&B trick to it that someone like myself who's been taught to play the piano might not think of. It's got a bass note that would normally go a semitone higher, but that's what gives it its uniqueness.

What's the strangest Attractions or Imposters song? Bedlam – from *The Delivery Man* – is pretty bananas.

That whole album was quite interesting. It was done in a town called Oxford, Mississippi. It's near Clarksdale, where Robert Johnson was meant to have met the devil. So when we finished recording in Oxford we went to Clarksdale, and we found a little 8-track studio there and just banged through some tracks in half a day. A couple of them were keepers, just because we went into a slightly less sophisticated place. When we did Bedlam, I didn't really know what to play because it sounded so good without keyboards, so I just got this whistley thing that just carried on through the second verse. That got quite out of control.

When you connect with American roots music it's always really rich.

As a unit we can still discover some new things. When we did *The River In Reverse* with Allen Toussaint it was great, because it was a real collaboration. We had a link with him previously. He produced our recording of Walking On Thin Ice for a Yoko Ono tribute album, which was an astounding moment for The Attractions. Here was a producer who could play all of our instruments, who knew exactly what we needed to do. He came around the room, took the bass and said, This is the kind of bass line we're after; went to the drums, did the same; then he came to the keyboard... So for *The River In Reverse* we went back to that. We did a bit of touring with him after that, and he brought the horn section with him, a fantastic horn section from New Orleans. On stage I had my

organ on a riser so I was right above him; I could look down on him playing the piano, and I picked up quite a few tips.

I was going to ask what you learned from Allen Toussaint...

He's one of the masters of that style. One of the songs on *River*, Ascension Day, was Allen's minor key version of Tipitina, the Professor Longhair song, and Elvis put some words to it. The thing I noticed listening to him do that was how much Gershwin's Rhapsody In Blue came from that feel. A lot of the flourishes Allen did on the piano were very similar to Gershwin, except more interesting. I tried to analyse it; it's like this tri-tone discord in there, this spice that the music was otherwise missing.

You must have a favourite Costello lyric, having worked with him for a long time?

I'm always astonished by his lyrics. Someone on Facebook the other day posted the lyrics to a song of his called **Poison Moon** [from *My Aim Is True*] which is not a song of his that I've had much to do with. It just astonished me that something he'd written could astonish me like that, even now. Almost all of his lyrics astonish me. We'd have to go through all of them if you wanted one!

"Nothing is ever the same. Elvis doesn't like doing the same set twice."

When you add a mood to a song, you must be responding to the lyrics?

Well, even though he writes interesting, amazing lyrics, sometimes you don't really understand what he's on about but they still make you think and inspire you. He did that album *North*, and it was just totally not like him. Suddenly he was writing fairly understandable romantic songs. So he's always doing something new. So far, I don't think he's written a song like Brian Eno, for example, like minimalist science fiction. But I wouldn't be surprised if at some point along the line in about 15 years, he makes an album like that, because he's always making something else.

As an Attraction or an Imposter, you've played on something like 18, 19 albums with Elvis Costello. Why does it work so well between you and him?

That's an interesting question. I genuinely love his music and love working with him. I've worked with a lot of different people, and he's one of the few who's prepared to take a bit of a risk. Nothing is ever the same, he doesn't like doing the same set twice. Quite often we go out onstage to play he'll do the first three things on the set list and then... off he goes. It's all in the wrong order and we don't know what's coming up next. I think he takes risks, and he's prepared to go searching for something, and I think if I can follow him on some of those adventures I'm very happy.

Billboard - 5 Questions with Steve Nieve, Elvis Costello's World-Class Sideman

9/29/2014 by [Chris Willman](#)

<https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6266572/5-questions-with-steve-nieve-elvis-costellos-world-class-sideman>



There's a case to be made for [Steve Nieve](#) as rock 'n' roll's greatest keyboardist, at least as an accompanist. Ebony and ivory have lived together not just in perfect harmony but frenzied excitement as Nieve has been the dominant instrumental force in [Elvis Costello's Attractions](#) and, subsequently, [Imposters](#). The [E Street Band's Roy Bittan](#) and [Heartbreakers' Benmont Tench](#) can match or beat him for band longevity and notoriety, but neither of those groups could ever count the piano as the lead instrument, the way that Costello so often handed that role over to his right-hand man.

Nieve has done his own solo albums and tours before, but this year marks the first time he's done a tour consisting primarily of instrumental versions of Costello's work, including classics like "Veronica" and "Accidents Will Happen" as well as more obscure material dating back to their first 1970s recordings. *The Hollywood Reporter* caught up with Nieve following a stop at Los Angeles's Largo; [his American tour](#) -- a must-see for Costello fans -- wraps up with City Winery shows in Chicago Sept. 30 and New York City Oct. 3.

Why get around to doing concerts of Costello material now?

It was [my wife] Muriel's idea, because I was sitting playing the piano at home, and she said, "You should make a series of albums playing the music of other artists." It seemed like a good place to start with Elvis Costello, because his music has been in my veins for 30 years. But the idea is really a series of albums. I'd like to do *Steve Nieve Plays [Brian Eno](#)*, and maybe *Steve Nieve Plays [Nina Simone](#)*. The last time I was in Australia, I recorded some songs by [Lou Reed](#) that I really love. Elvis' compositions lend themselves to this sort of adaptation in a great way. He's written in so many different genres. And he is well-known for his brilliant lyric writing, but with this, we show his other greatness: melody.

The first record you played on was "Watching the Detectives." No one had ever heard an organ sound like that on a rock record. It was ominous, but at the same time witty. It was hard to tell in 1978 if you were doing something

serious or a parody of soap opera music, which is what a lot of Americans still associated the organ with at the time.

A lot of it was searching for something a bit different, but also it was just practical. Piano has always been my main instrument since I was 4, and at the end of the day, I like to sit in front of a piano. But when I was about 16, I bought a Vox organ, so that just happened to be the keyboard that I had when I joined the Attractions, so it slipped in there naturally. "Watching the Detectives" is a genius-sounding record. It was masterminded by [Nick Lowe](#), and I love the sound that he got out of that Vox organ on that song and *This Year's Model* and subsequent albums. ... I once played on a record with [David Bowie](#) and [Mick Jagger](#) ["Dancing in the Streets"], and when we'd finished recording the take, I remember Bowie saying, "Anyone got an idea of what we could do with this?" And I said, "I'd love to put the Vox organ on that. I'll just go and get it." And apparently, when I went out of the room, Jagger said, "That's the sound I hate the most in the world." [Laughs] Needless to say, it didn't end up on the final track.

In your show, you tell a story about the making of *North*, a concept album about the end of one relationship of Elvis' and the beginning of another, his romance with Diana Krall. That's a polarizing album, because it's so different and so personal and intense, but it's the album of Costello's that showcases you most prominently.

It's very much a piano and voice album, with arrangements around that core sort of feeling. And I think it's one of Elvis's, let's say, darkest/lightest albums. [Laughs] Killer album.

[Elvis Costello and Questlove Talk 'Wise Up Ghost' and 'Dating' Relationship: Watch Here](#)

So, as an accompanist on material like that, do you think about trying to accent what is happening thematically in the lyrics, or are you just trying to serve the musical arrangement?

I'm totally thinking about that all the time. At the Largo show, I had [Joe Sumner](#) [of the band **Fiction Plane**, and Sting's son] as a guest, who sang a song called "Flutter and Wow," which is a genius song. Every time I've listened to the song and we've performed it, I've imagined -- and I'm sure I'm right -- that this was written inspired by Diana and Elvis moving to the north of Canada and going across the bay. The lyrics conjure up this picture of Vancouver Island to me and things like that.

You've been changing up your set list from night to night. That's to be expected from your background, since Costello never remotely does the same set twice, which must have drilled a spontaneity into you over the last 37 years. It's hard to imagine how many songs you have at your command...

I sometimes play alternative songs and pieces because I can't fit everything in. But when you play with Elvis, you never quite know what's going to happen. That's why doing that "wheel" show wasn't really such a challenge, because it's always like that. I've worked with other artists where it's the same show every night, and that has its good merits, in that it slowly gets better and better. I think that there's a mindset on one side and a mindset on the other, and they both have their good points. But it must be kind of weird to do a show when everybody has read exactly [online] what's going to happen. [Laughs] That must be harder to do.

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Huffington Post - Steve Nieve, One of Rock's Great Pianists, Plays for a Few Dozen Fans in a Garden

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https://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-iorio/steve-nieve-one-of-rocks-_b_7784424.html



Steve Nieve, performing on a pond in Golden Gate Park. [photo credit: Paul Iorio]

“It’s like a dream,” said the woman next to me.

And it was, except it was quite real.

Steve Nieve, one of rock’s greatest pianists, the musical right-hand of Elvis Costello, playing an unamplified piano in the middle of a pastoral paradise, performed works by Costello, Bacharach and others for nearly ninety minutes for a few dozen thrilled fans last Saturday morning.

Nieve’s appearance happened at San Francisco’s Botanical Garden, in Golden Gate Park, as part of its ongoing concert series.

It was an unpublicized event, not even listed in the Garden's brochure about the series. Nobody at the admissions gate knew where he was playing, or even that he was playing. In fact, staffers didn't even recognize his name.

There were no signs and no online announcement of his appearance. And it was anyone's guess as to which of the twelve pianos in twelve separate, far-flung locations in the park he would appear at. Plus, he was playing a full hour before all other scheduled performances.

If the Botanical Garden had wanted to hide his gig from the public, they could not have done a better job. (I found out about it only because Nieve himself mentioned it on his personal Facebook page.)

Hence, the extremely low turn-out. I mean, he played Costello's "Shipbuilding," his second song (shortly after eleven in the morning), to a grand total of two people, including me and the guy from the Garden who had driven Nieve to the site on a sort of golf cart. So, I was allowed to stroll right up to the piano and shoot pictures as he played. (As the crowd gradually grew to around thirty-five, I was asked by a staffer to watch from a slightly farther distance!)

But those who made it to the Moon Viewing Garden - whose centerpiece is a small pond partly-covered by a wooden deck on which Nieve played - were in for a treat.

And he didn't just tickle the ebonies and ivories for a few minutes and leave. This was a meaty, nearly 90-minute set of two dozen works by Costello, Bacharach and probably some classical composers of whom I'm unaware.

This was a chance to see a modern-day Nicky Hopkins at work and close up.

Nieve commanded the park like a thunderbolt when he lit into a Beethovenesque version of Costello's "Shot With His Own Gun," the showstopper of the set.

His re-imagining of "Oliver's Army" sounded like a fresh early spring day in the woods.

“Alison” and “Accidents Will Happen” were reshaped as near-minuets. He brought out marvelous dissonance in “Sulky Girl” — and “Town Cryer” sometimes felt like cascading water in a mountain stream.

His performance was almost a description of the bucolic setting itself.

His piano-playing was, by turns, stately, elegant, regal, aggressively innovative and sometimes just beautiful. At times, he recalled Hopkins, Marvin Hamlisch, Dave Brubeck and Randy Newman, with echoes of Bach and George Gershwin.

At show’s end, he turned to my side of the audience for requests and I blurted out, “Watch Your Step,” which features one of the most inspired piano breaks in the Costello oeuvre. (Frankly, I wish I had been able to request two more: “Clubland” and the Rolling Stones’ “She’s a Rainbow.”)

And sure enough, Nieve was kind enough to end with that track, playing it to perfection and doing a marvelous variation on the break.

Like a dream, as the woman said.



GLIDE MAGAZINE - STEVE NIEVE OF ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE ATTRACTIONS & IMPOSTERS TALKS OLD, NEW & VOX

November 4, 2013 by [Leslie Michele Derrough](#)

<https://glidemagazine.com/41527/steve-nieve-of-elvis-costello-and-the-attractions-imposters-talks-old-new-vox/>



Ok, so here's the deal. You're already in the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame, you've played in a band with one of the most innovative singer-songwriters in the modern world, you've toured every nook and cranny on Earth, you've recorded with everyone from David Bowie to Mick Jagger and you're currently living in a beautiful part of France. What do you do now? You record an album of your own, of course, featuring guests that have been a part of your musical life in one way or another over the past thirty-plus years.

Steve Nieve, longtime keyboard player for Elvis Costello & The Attractions, adds another stellar recording to his list of credits via *Together*, an album featuring such artists as Costello, Sting, Laurie Anderson and Squeeze's Glenn Tilbrook. It is a project that Nieve holds near and dear to his heart as he collaborated with not only some of the best in the business but ones he can legitimately call his friends. The first single is a lush, illuminating ballad sung with Sting, and written by Costello, called "You Lie Sweetly." But don't let the moodiness of this song fool you: Nieve has a wide-open palette and isn't afraid to let his colors bloom, as witnessed on his energetic duet with Joe Sumner on "Up" that highlights the talent of Sting's progeny; and the popalicious "Save The World" featuring Tall Ulyss.

If you noticed the bopping Nieve in many Costello videos, then the man on the other end of the phone line may seem like an imposter. He is well-spoken, quiet, very calm in nature and answers questions with a gentleman's politeness. But don't mistake his manners for lack of enthusiasm. Nieve is very excited about his new album, which was released on October 08, and he has flown to New York to promote it on American soil. "We got into America yesterday," Nieve told me the day before *Together's* official US release. "We've come to New York because we are planning on doing a kind of private get together with some of the people that contributed so brilliantly to the record and to celebrate the beginning of the launch of the record."

What was the inspiration behind doing this record with these particular artists?

Well, there were two things. First of all, everyone that is on the record is all people that I've worked with at some time in my life before and they've all become friends. And also I wanted to work with some younger musicians. I worked with people like Tall Ulyss and Joe Sumner and Harper Simon, and I found that to be a very rewarding experience. The way they look at music is completely different from me. They see things from a different point of view and they taught me so many things. It's been great. That's been one of the aspects of the project that I've enjoyed the most, really.

Did you have list of who you wanted to work with or did the songs conjure up a name as you were writing them?

As I began to work on the project, I had begun to realize I needed to arrange the songs that I had and I needed to write songs that would work with the brilliant voices that I was planning on collaborating with. To try to arrange the songs to suit them the best it could and to make sure that everybody fitted together in a natural way and that the whole album could have a sort of cohesive feel about it. So that became like an exercise of style to achieve that and I think that was one of the things that made working on this project so interesting. And when I've listened to it recently, I think that everyone that is on it fits on the track that they ended up doing. They don't sound out of place, you know.



One of the most invigorating songs is your collaboration with Sting's son, Joe Sumner, on the song "Up." What can you tell us about that particular song and working with Joe?

He's been a real great discovery, Joe Sumner. I first met him when we worked together on a project called *Welcome To The Voice*, which we recorded originally with various people. Robert Wyatt played the part of the friend but when we came to do that live, Joe Sumner took that part and took part in the live version and he brought so much to it. Not only is he a fantastic singer but a great actor. So after that when I started working on this album, he was one of the people I really wanted to work with. He came over to Paris, he came there several times, and spent more time with me than some of the other people. So that was why he ended up singing on two tracks. Not only did he sing on them but he played bass for us. He's very generous with his time in this project and I'm very happy because he's going to come to New York and we will then see him when we go across the country to Los Angeles. He's very involved and it's great to work with him, he's a great person to work with.

Do you see a similarity between him and his father?

I do, obviously. I think that it's a rare thing that fathers are imparting their wisdom to their sons in this modern age but it must be difficult for Joe, I think, living with a father figure like that. But I would say that some of the very positive things about it are that Joe is very particular, he's very meticulous about his music and he's got an

extremely strong attitude about him. All those things, I think, are Joe. But obviously, he has his father's genes inside him.

How long did it take for you to do all the actual recording on your album, cause with that many artists, I'm sure it must have taken time to coordinate each artist to record their particular song.

The album was produced by Muriel Teodori and I without any time constraints or timetables. There was no label to answer to. We didn't know when we started exactly how we wanted it to turn out. We knew we had to collaborate slowly with each artist, and not rush anything. To find just the right moment to work on a song, we had to be patient, at the same time to react decisively and seize the moment. All the artists on the record were wonderful to work with. It was the best moment of each track when the song finally came to life. I have worked with all of them before *Together* and all of them are friends; that has given the record an extra cohesion, that strong bond between us all.



You have a surprise song at the very end of this CD. Why did you slip that on there?

I always like it when you go to see a movie and something happens in the end credits. You know, you're suddenly surprised by something, a little extra thing, so it's supposed to be like the secret track. But in this digital age, it seems to be impossible to have secret tracks (laughs). They just don't know how to do it. But the idea was that this track would surprise you if you left the CD on. So it's not mentioned on the artwork or anything. But that track is actually a text by a famous French poet who wrote it when he was in prison and the prison was the Chatelet, which is now the opera theater, which is where we performed *Welcome To The Voice*. So it's got a kind of strange link with everything.

How was it like working with Elvis on your project instead of the other way around?

Well, Elvis is an extraordinarily generous artist and I've worked on many of his projects. But he has always been very supportive of things that I'm doing. When I first made a solo record of songs it was called *Mumu*. I don't know if you heard that album but when I made a showcase for it, he came over to Paris and was my guitarist for the evening. He's a wonderful guitarist and it was great because on that record I had worked with Mark Ribot, who is a brilliant guitarist, but Elvis was definitely up to the job, I would say (laughs). So on this particular project, I love how he's interpreted "Tender Moment." Also, he wrote the lyrics to "You Lie Sweetly" that Sting sings. He's a very important part of the project and very supportive of the project and it's always a pleasure to work with him because he takes so many risks with his work. He's willing and eager to try things that take him outside of his normal sort of comfort area, shall we say.



During your early days with Elvis, what song did he bring in that made your jaw just hit the floor because it was just so amazing?

Well, I cannot think of a song by Elvis that didn't do that for me. They are all so incredibly interesting and unexpected musically and lyrically. Right up to the present time. I mean, look at "Dr. Watson" or "Song with Rose", or *Wise Up Ghost*, which has me sampled all over it! If I was sentenced to be lobotomized and could only have one of his songs left in my memory, I think it would have to be "The Birds Will Still Be Singing."

What was the music scene like in London when you were first discovering music and playing music for the first time?

I was at classical music college and at that time, I guess there were a lot of different kinds of music. Maybe there wasn't as much as there is nowadays but I think we were all a community with each other, sort of shared our happiness about albums and things like that where nowadays it seems that it's more kind of inside headphones. When I was, I don't know, eighteen or nineteen, the punk rock movement started and that kind of shook everything up, I think, because it was like a bolt of good energy and at the same time, certain people really hated it. So I got caught up for a little bit in that moment and I wanted so much to be in a rock band and I went out of my way to get out of the classical line of education and managed to find myself in the Attractions. And that was pretty incredible. I don't really know how that happened but there you go (laughs)

Early in your career, how did you incorporate your own personality into the keyboards and make this instrument so much a part of your individual sound?

Well, the instrument concerned is called a Vox organ and I didn't realize it when I was younger, but when you get older you start to become interested in all the aspects of what you're up to and the technical aspects. The strange thing about that organ is that it was manufactured in the suburb of London where I'd lived, just down the road, which is incredible. It's sort of a unique sound that certain people have used but the fact is it was the only keyboard that I could afford to buy because at the time it was quite inexpensive. It was really heavy, a nightmare to carry it about, and I was just kind of stuck with it because it sort of fits into anything, really (laughs).

One time I did a session with David Bowie and Mick Jagger on a song called "Dancing In The Street." We recorded the song and they said, "Does anyone have any idea of something extra we can do to it?" And I wanted to try and put the Vox organ on it. So I said, "I've got an idea for this Vox organ part. I'll just go and get it." And apparently when I went out of the room, Mick Jagger said, "That's the sound that I hate the most in the world." (laughs). But that's ok. People have to have their own opinions but needless to say it didn't end up on the track (laughs)

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What are your thoughts on the instrument evolution for keyboards?

Well, I guess, you can try to replace the Vox organ with things that sound almost like it but they never sound quite like it because there's something about it. The problem with it is that particular organ will only make that one sound whereas you buy a Nord and you can make thousands of different sounds and you can get a sound that is almost like a Vox organ. So you've got to really be into the whole idea of just having a Vox organ if you really wanted to go down that way. Plus now, they're so expensive. They probably cost you more to buy the Vox organ than it would to buy the Nord (laughs). They're just rare. They're no longer made so they're difficult to keep them working because they are constantly breaking down. I have a spare that's just used for parts cause they don't make the parts anymore.

As a keyboard player, what is the hardest thing about performing live and standing out?

I don't think if you're performing live, that's what you're doing. What I normally do is I accompany someone and I'm not the person who is in the front. I'm the person who is supporting the person in the front and that's really what I've been doing for most of my life and that's what I really enjoy doing. I think that is sort of an art form to accompany someone. A lot of musicians learn what they have to play and play exactly the same thing every night. I'm not a person like that. I tend to invent things as I go along. So when I'm accompanying someone live, I'm listening at what they're doing and I can go with them and I try to follow them and to support them. I think that's what I'm trying to do.

When I came to make this record, *Together*, I'm occupying a slightly different place and I'm trying some of the time to be the guy in front. And for me, that is a much more difficult proposition. My favorite thing to do is to

be the accompanist because when you're in that position in front, there're so many other things you have to deal with and that you have to be responsible for. So I do enjoy putting myself in that position but I think I have to admit to myself that what I really like to do is to be the accompanist. And maybe that's part of the reason why I decided to do this record the way I did, which is to share the front seat, if you like (laughs) because it's not natural for me to be in that position. So I think the answer to the question is that I'm enjoying trying and learning about that but there are people like Elvis and Sting and Joe who are much, much better at that job than I am.

I really love singing but I don't think I'm a singer. But there are certain artists that I like who are not really singers as well and there's something about that which can be different and interesting to listen to someone who is not really a singer but who is putting himself, putting his voice, on a record in a way where it's not trying to be a singer but just to express some thoughts that are important to me or to them, if that makes sense.

How has living in Paris inspired or changed the way that you compose and create music?

I think that we can all recognize that the French have a very beautiful music that is in many ways different from English music, or Anglo-Saxon music. They have a rich history of quite complex harmony and also the orchestration, particularly in the last century composers like Ravel and Debussy have expanded classical music language. It's very interesting and I think that a lot of modern popular French artists are part of that tradition. There's a guy on my record whose name is Alain Chamfort who sings a song called "Vous A L'Oubli" that Muriel wrote the lyrics to. It's a beautiful song and when I first went to France, I worked with him. We did a concert that was all his songs arranged for two pianos with him singing and playing a piano, and me. It was called *Songs For Four Hands* (laughs) and that was in fact how I met Muriel cause she was the director of that show. He is a brilliant composer. He writes beautiful, very French kind of music, so I'm very proud that he's on the record singing the words that Muriel wrote, which is also a superb text that she put to my music.

And that was good cause all the songs really bring relationships that are more than just people working together. You know, the record is in fact a kind of a map of my life in a way cause I've worked with all these people in different situations. Alain Chamfort, if I hadn't gone to work with him, I wouldn't have met Muriel and a lot of things in my life wouldn't have happened. And that's all part of this record.

Is that how you intended or did it just end up that way the more you worked on it?

It wasn't totally fixed in my mind before I started working on it. It's developed into that because I only invited the people I had worked with. Initially when I started working on it, I was interested in the idea of duets or duos. I did just musically work with Tall Ulyss, who sings "Save The World," and he plays the drums on the entire album. For a while we wrote together as a duo, piano and drums. So we worked on all the music like that and that was almost like going back to the days of the Attractions when we used to do two or three tours before we went in the studio to record an album. I think working with Tall Ulyss, whose music is a very powerful rock music, it gave a strength to what I was doing cause my music is generally much more concentrated around the piano and by doing that work as a duo, piano and drums, it brought a new dimension to the music. So it was great. And it was quite important to the whole project.

What is your history with Laurie Anderson?

I have been a huge fan of Laurie's ever since I bought my first Moog synthesizer and became interested in electronic music. She is a genius storyteller. All her songs are like going on an adventure. She invited me to open for her at a music festival, A Century of Song, in the Ruhr Valley. We ended the evening singing a duet on Lou Reed's "Perfect Day." Later, I got to know them both much better, during summer months on Long Island, and we began to meet up whenever Laurie or Lou came through Paris.

What can you tell us about "Vertigo," the song you do with her on *Together*?

Actually, we didn't work on "Vertigo" in ideal conditions. I had rented a house out in the woods near to Laurie's and we basically recorded into my laptop using headphones. We began working on the track with her electric violin but she didn't have all her magic boxes. So it's actually her real playing and the clean direct sound of the instrument. She wanted to overdub many takes and it works because she plays in such a precise way all the takes fit perfectly together and sound like one giant instrument. It was over fairly rapidly because Lou had to get back to New York. I think we spent just an hour on the violin part.

There are some really interesting evocative sounds she created in the early part of the song, and then the violin starts soaring and I just love the extra dimension this work gave to the song. Laurie's vocal came later, again, a

small mixer hooked up to my laptop, this time in Muriel's house in a forest near Chartres, France. It was a lovely spring day and we took some photos of Laurie in the apple tree blossoms. But in the evening when we recorded, it was a little chilly, so we all wore heavy pullovers, and we lit a fire, and I think if you listen carefully you can hear the wood crackling sometimes. She spoke some of the lines so softly the microphone became a sort of microscope, when we mixed it.

What still excites you about playing music?

I think it's just always exciting to play music and to be in the situation of people listening. I think also it's exciting to be a listener and I don't think we can replace any of these kinds of activities, thankfully, with computers. So at the end of the day, we all still really enjoy being in a room listening to people play music and we all still really enjoy being the people that are playing the music. The two things go together and as long as people are enjoying and listening to concerts and people making music, we can go on doing it (laughs)



What do you think keyboard players and piano players of the future will learn from you?

That's a fun question. If, in the future they manage to locate a recording of my playing, and after listening to it feel that it's worth spending time studying, it would surely be some of the more unusual things I've managed that would merit such a work. They might wonder how the solo in Elvis's "Party Girl" was achieved, considering the key the song is in. What was wrong with the keyboard to produce the erratic synthesizer sounds on "Muriel's Window," or on Alain Bashung's album *Imprudence*, they might discover the duet I did with Marc Ribot's guitar, rolling billiard balls up and down the strings of the grand piano. Better still, I hope they might listen to several live recordings of the same song, and wonder why I'm hardly ever playing the same thing twice. Perhaps it's very conceited to answer such a question but given that rock music might be considered the least free music, I mean so square and rigid when you compare it to Jazz or to funk or to classical even, such a prison of a musical form, they might therefore see how much I have tried to escape and have struggled to be free while remaining true to my mission as a rock pianist.

Was it difficult picking up or learning things from other players you have worked with?

The only experience I've had of working very closely with a keyboard player was when we worked with Allen Toussaint. We did some stuff with Burt Bacharach but he was never very close physically on stage. I couldn't see what he was doing and when we made that record, I did quite a lot of the piano. But when we did the Allen Toussaint record, he really took care of most of the piano and I played Hammond organ. But the way I positioned my organ, I was able to be right beside him and I could watch exactly what was going on and it was great. I find it's difficult to get musicians to share their secrets, you know (laughs). If you know a specific thing you want to know from them and you ask them about it, they'll show it to you very quickly and it will go by like that and you still know that it's something you want to know but you didn't quite get it. So I think that it would probably be the same. I don't know how you can pass stuff like that on. I'll have to find a way (laughs)

What was it like working with Allen Toussaint?

The last time I was in New Orleans I wanted to go and record some demos and stuff for this album and I called up Allen Toussaint's studio. It wasn't operating anymore but they did open it for me and let me use it. It was incredible. But I had a really weird experience there, because whenever we worked there with Allen, because we had recorded there a couple of times with Elvis, at some point during the recording session these people would come in, like a sort of audience would just appear in the control room; just local people that would come in and listen, which was great. And in the afternoon when I was just playing the piano to record some demos, the same people just kind of started coming in the control room. It was really peculiar (laughs)



What are your plans for the rest of this year?

Well, there's not much of the year left but I'm very happy to be on this side of the Atlantic for a little while. I want to do a little work like this to help and make people aware of the record. Also, I'm going to go to the West Coast and I'd really like to compose music for films so I'm going to try to find somewhere to live in Los Angeles for a few months and see if I can find a film that needs some music.

Any chance of playing some shows?

We're just doing a sort of private showcase and I'm going to make an appearance at the Standard Hotel. There's one in New York and one in LA but at the moment that's the only plan I've got for doing that cause it's so difficult to imagine to have everyone who was involved with this album to be together at the same time. I don't think that's likely to happen. I'd love it to happen, it would be wonderful, so if that happens I will be certain to let you know (laughs)

Sydney Morning Herald - Finding the man (and the piano) behind the songs of Elvis Costello

By [Bernard Zuel](#)

11 July 2014 — 2:12pm

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/finding-the-man-and-the-piano-behind-the-songs-of-elvis-costello-20140716-zt4e8.html>

You can hide in plain sight if you are Steve Nieve, the long running collaborator and keyboard-playing offsideer to the more famous, more voluble Elvis Costello.

For a start that name does not appear on his passport or birth certificate: that would be Steve Nason. Nor is Nieve the only name he's been credited with on a record sleeve: that list includes Maurice Worm and Norman Brain.

Fronting up: Steve Nieve, the ultimate sidekick, will take centre stage in his own show.

And as the pianist, an Englishman in Paris for more than a decade, reveals, none of his many names is even attached to his children.

"I once changed my name to avoid getting married and I adopted the surname of my partner at the time," he says, somewhat ruefully. "As a result my children ended up with a name that doesn't refer to anybody because her name was changed on her passport."

Steve Nieve says the excitement of doing his own show is pushing him into the limelight. But there's something nonetheless to the name, given to him as a punkish pun moniker by either Costello or Costello's then manager Jake Riviera (neither of whom, of course, were using their real names either) back in 1977 when the 18-year-old Nason became the keyboard player for Costello's band, The Attractions.

"The name Nieve I really like it. I didn't like it at the time when it arrived to me but now that I'm older I can appreciate the word naive and I'm going to stick with it," says Nieve. "I think your name does colour the way you regard things. I'm drawn towards slightly naive things, definitely in the world of piano."

The term "naive art" often is ascribed to things that look simple or childlike or innocent, without sophistication but, as Nieve says, "when we look at those we find in many, not all, more complicated issues". And as those who have followed Elvis Costello's career, and along the way inevitably followed that of his most crucial collaborator, would know the deceptively simple and the devilishly clever or wicked sit alongside each other in the piano and organ (and vocoder and Theremin) parts contributed by Nieve.

He may nominally be part of the rhythm section but from the Abba-referencing organ in *Oliver's Army* to the classically minded piano in the songs on the album *North*, in many cases he has been the lead instrument – which is handy as now he will be the only instrument.

Steve Nieve has collected pianos from all over the world.

Nieve is to tour Australia as a solo pianist playing the songs of Elvis Costello reimagined, rearranged and probably never the same way twice. That variety is no surprise for someone who says that the idea of solo piano playing is “to pile the pressure on and to try to be relaxed about all the pressure” at the same time.

“I can't see the pieces becoming fixed in stone, like a score,” Nieve says. “I think it's because they are such inspiring songs and when you start to feel what the song is about you are [moved] and sometimes in a completely different way to any time before. It's reacting to emotions.”

Here is a link to one of the complete recordings, *All Grown Up*, <https://soundcloud.com/steve-nieve-official/all-grown-up-july-13th-2014-paris>.

The Costello songs are part of a larger project recording material from other artists – “volume one of what I hope will turn into an encyclopaedia”, which will include Neil Young, Lou Reed, Brian Eno, Frank Sinatra and Damon Albarn – on piano. And only piano, though as many different pianos as he can find, wherever he can find them, in Paris, Perpignan and beyond.

While on tour in Australia earlier this year with Costello's current band, The Imposters, Nieve recorded several Elvis Presley songs in a Melbourne studio – “primarily because they have a very beautiful upright piano”.

On a recent trip from the UK back to Paris he came across a battered piano in St Pancras station and, with the portable recorder he carries with him, recorded a version of Costello's *Shot With His Own Gun*. And his Australian shows will all be recorded with the possibility of ending up on the coming record.

Of course, this chasing down different instruments is all fine when you're recording but live it's not like a regular rock star who can have his roadie pack two dozen guitars into a hard case for the tour.

“It could be,” Nieve says, ever ambitious. “I'd like to have maybe 20 pianos on stage, all with different sounds.”

With or without the 20 pianos, the bigger issue on stage may well be that history of hiding right in front of us as the quiet one up the back. In terms of testing himself, being the focal point of the show, the entertainer not the sidekick, could well be the ultimate challenge for a man who used to rarely give interviews, said even less on stage and tended to hide behind dark glasses, a hat and his bank of keyboards.

It's hard to imagine him doing banter or looking comfortable doing so.

“I would say I'm not comfortable in any situation. Even just playing the piano I don't feel comfortable,” Nieve says. “But I feel the excitement about it and that's why I am pushing myself to do it all the time. The idea of banter [he chuckles to himself] is something else altogether.”

GLIDE MAGAZINE - STEVE NIEVE REINTERPRETING ELVIS COSTELLO ON SOLO TOUR

September 15, 2014 by [Glide](#)

<https://glidemagazine.com/123712/steve-nieve-reinterpreting-elvis-costello-solo-tour/>

Steve Nieve, renowned for his keyboard work with Elvis Costello and the Attractions, is bringing a special night of music to the US for an exclusive seven city tour. **Steve Nieve Plays Elvis Costello: Piano Solo Reremixes of Elvis' Best Songs with Special Guest, Tall Ulysse**

The mini-tour will begin in Los Angeles on September 22, and weave its way through seven cities: LA, as mentioned, Portland, Napa Valley, Nashville, Chicago, Philadelphia and ending in NYC, on October 3rd, 2014 at City Winery.

The show will consist of an evening of piano music accompanied by singer, Tall Ulysse. Although they had, the same line up in the past it's the first time they will be playing a repertoire of another artist in a very interesting "exercice de style."

"I am working to record piano solos of music by artists I love, Brian Eno, Robert Wyatt, Frank Sinatra, Elvis Costello and Elvis Presley, Neil Young, Lou Reed. Sometimes, when playing their songs, I adhere strictly to their melodies and other times their music is like a launch pad.

"I have been playing with Elvis for many years, with the Attractions, with the Imposters, with Burt Bacharach with Alan Toussaint, so many projects together, it feels natural to me to begin this series with E.C." said Steve.

Elvis Costello says, "After playing 34 years with me it was almost predictable this could happen, however it's a surprise to discover these tunes revisited by my friend, never too close to the 'model' and never so far from the spirit."

Tall Ulysse, the singer who is accompanying him on this tour is Parisian composer and lead vocalist. "We have many musical 'surprises' for these shows. It promises to be fun, new, and musically interesting For me, it is an honor to be singing the words of such a lyrical master."

Steve currently records and performs with the Steve Nieve Band, along with Francois Poggio on guitar and Tall Ulysse on vocals and drums. Projects in the works include "The Idiot Boy," a chamber orchestral setting of William Wordsworth's masterpiece, "The Table", a second T odori / Nieve opera, and a flute concerto for Flute and String Orchestra composed for Andrea Grimminelli.

TOUR DATES INCLUDE:

22 September	Los Angeles, CA	Largo
23 September	Portland, OR	Mississippi Studio,
24 September	Napa Valley, CA	City Winery
27 September	Nashville, TN	City Winery
30 September	Chicago, IL	City Winery
2 October	Philadelphia, PA	World Live Cafe
3 October	New York City, NY	City Winery

Beatroute Magazine - Concert Review: Elvis Costello and the Imposters

Wednesday 05th, December 2018 / 16:58

By Jeevin Johal

<http://beatroute.ca/2018/12/05/concert-review-elvis-costello-imposters/>



No malignant cancer scares or tickles of the throat were going to prevent transplanted hometown hero, Elvis Costello, from performing a marathon show this past Tuesday evening at Downtown's Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Currently on tour in support of his latest, highly acclaimed new album, *Look Now*, Costello and his band of Imposters played a nearly three hour set that maybe went on too long for some of the fatigued and heavily perfumed baby boomers, but wowed die-hards and new fans of his dense catalogue.

New tracks like "Burnt Sugar is so Bitter," and "Don't Look Now," held their own alongside classic bangers like "This Year's Girl," and "Watching the Detectives," offering a consistent set that tested the ferocity of his voice, and also the buttons of his snug outfit. Costello, never one to be immediately heralded for his understated guitar chops, shred his signature Jazzmaster erratically, walloping the audience with grungy interludes throughout the evening. But Good Guy Costello never overshadowed his insanely tight band, specifically virtuoso keys smasher **Steve Nieve** whose focused demeanour never broke, or missed a single note.

On the surface of his tunes, Costello presents a playful persona of pop oriented punk and reggae fused hits, but beneath is a lingering misery that is bubbling up as he ages. He even called out his O.G. New Wave followers for never fully absorbing his lyrical mysticism back in the day, but understanding it more now with increasing wear and tear of their skin and bones.

Going through Elvis Costello's immense discography can be a daunting task, but Tuesday night offered an eclectic vignette of his past works, collaborations and life experiences. He's a genuinely funny and solid dude, with a likely huge arsenal of Dad jokes...but it might be time to let a few stitches out of those trousers.

Exclaim - Elvis Costello and the Imposters

Sony Centre, Toronto ON, July 20



By [Ian Gormely](#)

Published Jul 21, 2017

https://exclaim.ca/music/article/elvis_costello_and_the_impsters-sony_centre_toronto_on_july_20

"Masterpiece" is how *Rolling Stone* described *Imperial Bedroom* when it was first released in 1982. Yet, in the years since, critical consensus has favoured Elvis Costello's "Angry Young Man" phase of the late '70s over the genre-hopping pop classicist he became in the '80s. All of which is to say: *Imperial Bedroom* is an odd choice for the full album live treatment. But then, Costello was never one to be bound by convention.

Case in point: He and the Imposters (original Attractions [Steve Nieve](#) and Pete Thomas, along with Davey Faragher and a pair of backup singers) immediately abandoned the record's running order, opening with "The Loved Ones" and then, three songs in, momentarily ditching the album for "Accidents Will Happen" because, as Costello put it, a full night of "songs of misery and heartbreak" was just too much.

Nor would the band stick to the original arrangements they and producer Geoff Emerick famously slaved over for three months. Playing on a spartan stage with only some lights and original art for each song done in the style of the record's original cover projected overhead, "Tears Before Bedtime" was transformed into a creeping R&B number. Meanwhile, Costello and Nieve tackled "Almost Blue" on their own during an "encore" that hit double-digits.

In between, Costello peppered in selections from across his career: familiar hits ("Watching the

Detectives," in which the band found a new sense of dread and menace), select deep cuts ("Green Shirt") and even some cuts from his still-in-the-works musical *A Face in the Crowd* ("Blood and Hot Sauce").

Costello's inclination to sing off time from the phrasing presented on studio versions was a bit jarring, but his willingness to "break" songs and build something new out of them was particularly admirable, even if it sometimes took the crowd a minute to catch up. And no one could accuse the singer of phoning it in; he played for two-and-a-half hours, leaving the stage just once for a breather.

After exhausting *Imperial Bedroom's* selection of songs, the band brought the house down with more faithful renditions of "Everyday I Write the Book," "Pump it Up" and, finally. "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace Love and Understanding." With seemingly nowhere to go but down, it was the perfect ending to a show that proved complete album shows need not be predictable slogs.

The Hollywood Reporter - Elvis Costello Sideman Steve Nieve: Rock's Greatest Keyboardist?



<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/earshot/elvis-costello-sideman-steve-nieve-735873>

There's a case to be made for **Steve Nieve** as rock 'n' roll's greatest keyboardist, at least as an accompanist. Ebony and ivory have lived together not just in perfect harmony but frenzied excitement as Nieve has been the dominant instrumental force in **Elvis Costello's** Attractions and, subsequently, Imposters. The E Street Band's **Roy Bittan** and Heartbreakers' **Benmont Tench** can match or beat him for band longevity and notoriety, but neither of those groups could ever count the piano as the lead instrument, the way that Costello so often handed that role over to his right-hand man.

Nieve has done his own solo albums and tours before, but this year marks the first time he's done a tour consisting primarily of instrumental versions of Costello's work, including classics like "Veronica" and "Accidents Will Happen" as well as more obscure material dating back to their first 1970s recordings. *The Hollywood Reporter* caught up with Nieve following a stop at Los Angeles's Largo; his American tour — a must-see for Costello fans — wraps up with City Winery shows in Chicago Sept. 30 and New York City Oct. 3.

Why get around to doing concerts of Costello material now?

It was [my wife] Muriel's idea, because I was sitting playing the piano at home, and she said, "You should make a series of albums playing the music of other artists." It seemed like a good place to start with Elvis Costello, because his music has been in my veins for 30 years. But the idea is really a series of albums. I'd like to do *Steve Nieve Plays Brian Eno*, and maybe *Steve Nieve Plays Nina Simone*. The last time I was in Australia, I recorded some songs by **Lou Reed** that I really love. Elvis' compositions lend themselves to this sort of adaptation in a great way. He's written in so many different genres. And he is well-known for his brilliant lyric writing, but with this, we show his other greatness: melody.

The first record you played on was “Watching the Detectives.” No one had ever heard an organ sound like that on a rock record. It was ominous, but at the same time witty. It was hard to tell in 1978 if you were doing something serious or a parody of soap opera music, which is what a lot of Americans still associated the organ with at the time.

A lot of it was searching for something a bit different, but also it was just practical. Piano has always been my main instrument since I was 4, and at the end of the day, I like to sit in front of a piano. But when I was about 16, I bought a Vox organ, so that just happened to be the keyboard that I had when I joined the Attractions, so it slipped in there naturally. “Watching the Detectives” is a genius-sounding record. It was masterminded by **Nick Lowe**, and I love the sound that he got out of that Vox organ on that song and *This Year’s Model* and subsequent albums. ... I once played on a record with **David Bowie** and **Mick Jagger** [“Dancing in the Streets”], and when we’d finished recording the take, I remember Bowie saying, “Anyone got an idea of what we could do with this?” And I said, “I’d love to put the Vox organ on that. I’ll just go and get it.” And apparently, when I went out of the room, Jagger said, “That’s the sound I hate the most in the world.” [Laughs] Needless to say, it didn’t end up on the final track.

In your show, you tell a story about the making of *North*, a concept album about the end of one relationship of Elvis’ and the beginning of another, his romance with Diana Krall. That’s a polarizing album, because it’s so different and so personal and intense, but it’s the album of Costello’s that showcases you most prominently.

It’s very much a piano and voice album, with arrangements around that core sort of feeling. And I think it’s one of Elvis’s, let’s say, darkest/lightest albums. [Laughs] Killer album.

So, as an accompanist on material like that, do you think about trying to accent what is happening thematically in the lyrics, or are you just trying to serve the musical arrangement?

I’m totally thinking about that all the time. At the Largo show, I had **Joe Sumner** [of the band Fiction Plane, and **Sting**’s son] as a guest, who sang a song called “Flutter and Wow,” which is a genius song. Every time I’ve listened to the song and we’ve performed it, I’ve imagined — and I’m sure I’m right — that this was written inspired by Diana and Elvis moving to the north of Canada and going across the bay. The lyrics conjure up this picture of Vancouver Island to me and things like that.

You’ve been changing up your set list from night to night. That’s to be expected from your background, since Costello never remotely does the same set twice, which must have drilled a spontaneity into you over the last 37 years. It’s hard to imagine how many songs you have at your command...

I sometimes play alternative songs and pieces because I can’t fit everything in. But when you play with Elvis, you never quite know what’s going to happen. That’s why doing that “wheel” show wasn’t really such a challenge, because it’s always like that. I’ve worked with other artists where it’s the same show every night, and that has its good merits, in that it slowly gets better and better. I think that there’s a mindset on one side and a mindset on the other, and they both have their good points. But it must be kind of weird to do a show when everybody has read exactly [online] what’s going to happen. [Laughs] That must be harder to do.

Sydney Morning Herald - The lasting attraction of Elvis Costello and the Imposters

After close to 40 years behind Elvis Costello, drummer Pete Thomas and keyboard man **Steve Nieve** know - and appreciate - their man.

By [Bernard Zuel](#)

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/the-lasting-attraction-of-elvis-costello-and-the-imposters-20140328-35mby.html>

Uh oh, there's trouble in the ranks. Pete Thomas, who has drummed behind Elvis Costello for nigh on 37 years, has just been told that **Steve Nieve**, who has been playing keyboards with Costello for just as long, described the drummer as "a fully fledged Californian", and it wasn't entirely clear if that was meant as the ultimate insult or not.

"Well, let's face it, I'd rather be a fully fledged Californian than a Parisian nancy boy," Thomas, originally from Sheffield but now of Los Angeles, smacks back at Nieve, originally from London but now of the city of light. Ooh, le sting. And then Thomas bursts into delighted laughter.

The two remaining members of The Attractions, Costello's band for almost 20 years (with bassist Bruce Thomas), are also two-thirds of the Imposters, Costello's band over the past decade (with bassist Davey Faragher). And they're also something more.

"**Steve really is probably my best friend**," Thomas says. "From the beginning, we roomed together and when we went on adventures and things it was always me and him. We've been arrested together, several times, and we've been together so long now that we've got a natural friendship."

Not just friends but admirers of what each brings to his work with the forever changing Costello, who is usually - and incorrectly - described as the former punk rocker who made a country album at the height of his pop fame, learnt classical scoring to work with the Brodsky Quartet and later symphony orchestras, has written for jazz ensembles and former pop stars, co-written with Burt Bacharach and Paul McCartney, and recorded Americana, folk, rock and soul.

"If you are in LA doing sessions there are various people who come in and they will play some generic blues or boogie woogie. Steve doesn't think like that," Thomas says. "He'll go and listen to some blues or some country but he'll

incorporate that into his own style, because he's classically trained and he's got this melodic library, this catalogue that he can draw on.

"Most of Elvis' songs are fairly straightforward chords and things but [Nieve] will bring in something that no one ever thought of. It's really refreshing. I mean me and Davey [Faragher] hold it down, Elvis does what he does and Nieve goes bonkers over the top."

Nieve praises Thomas for his solidity and flexibility but also for being one of those unfussy drummers in the Ringo Starr/Charlie Watts mould who don't try to be the stars but make everything possible. ("I don't like drummers that draw too much attention to themselves," is how Thomas explains himself. "They generally don't groove."). The keyboardist calls their musical relationship "fairly intuitive", but he deflects some of the praise coming his way to focus on how the work of their bandleader challenges them both.

"I think Elvis is a fantastic artist, one of the great artists of the world, who is well known for taking risks himself, for going in all sorts of directions, being curious about all sorts of things," Nieve says. "I'm extremely happy to venture along with him when those opportunities arrive."

Elvis Costello of course has no problem speaking for himself. If anything, the garrulous veteran musician, musicologist, multi-musical stylist and songwriter of no mean standard has to be hog-tied and gagged these days to stop him talking.

Nieve, on the other hand, has to be cajoled. He is helped by the fact that after solo recordings, a music-theatre project with lyrics by his wife, Muriel Teodori, and now film scoring (including David Wenham's segment of the film *The Turning*), he's got himself a new album under his name, called *Together*.

The record features 14 different vocalists - from Costello and Laurie Anderson to Sting and his bass-playing son, Joe Sumner - and as usual he's been ready to push the boat out musically, to be uncomfortable.

"I am a bit uncomfortable in general, in life," Nieve says. "I find it gives you excitement when you do that, and that's probably why I like to take that risk."

As Thomas readily agrees, risk taking is one of the attractions of being an Attraction and an Imposter.

"That's one of the great things about playing with [Costello]: he explores all these different areas so if he wants to do a bossa nova then you have to go and listen to bossa novas and try to find who is the best guy - there's this Brazilian called Milton

Banana who played on *The Girl from Ipanema*. And you find these people, you study what they do and it helps you develop as a drummer.

"But sometimes it takes a second live: he'll whip into something else and it's, whoa! Sometimes it's more a question of intensity. When we do our new-wave stuff, it's pretty flat out, it's fairly physical. You've got to be fit and you've got to whack them. But then if you suddenly switch to something with brushes, it can take a second - but not just for me, for everyone in the band," he laughs.

"Sometimes we'll look at each other and "who-oo-oo."

Elvis Costello and the Imposters play on April 23 at the State Theatre. Also, on April 21 at Bluesfest, Byron Bay; and April 19 at Deni Blues & Roots Festival, Deniliquin.

Misc Press Clips:

“You give [Steve Nieve](#) more space than you give your own guitar, by a long shot. Any guitar you’re playing on this album sounds pretty subliminal.

I wanted to ensure that the arrangements left space for the voice to live where it does, so that I didn’t have to sing with tremendous force to break through a lot of stuff. For one thing, it’s just deciding to put the guitar in the rhythm section and not in the foreground with a lot of fuzz-tone. I mean, it’s not that kind of music. Why would you play it like that? It just needs to be in the rhythm, whether it’s an acoustic guitar or an electric guitar on the backbeat or some little line just tucking in with everything. That’s as much a joy to play like that as it is any big blown-out thing.” – ***Variety Magazine, November 2018***

<https://variety.com/2018/music/news/elvis-costello-on-touring-surgery-and-opting-to-look-now-at-record-making-again-1203019464/>

“Pianist [Steve Nieve](#) is the driver here, and not even the Nieve of Vox-crazed days but a nimble, controlled accompanist...” – *Variety Magazine, Album Review, October 2018*

<https://variety.com/2018/music/news/elvis-costello-look-now-album-review-1202977011/>

“Costello calls the monstrously talented group — keyboardist [Steve Nieve](#), drummer Pete Thomas, and bassist Davey Faragher — “my best pals in music.” – *Entertainment Weekly, October 2018*

<https://ew.com/music/2018/10/15/elvis-costello-look-now-interview/>

“Performing on a simple stage the “Imposters” were long time Costello collaborator [Steve Nieve](#) at a red grand piano and multiple keyboards, drummer Pete Thomas (from the Attractions), and bassist Davey Faragher...” – *Huffington Post, June 2017*

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/elvis-costello-rocks-the-greek-theater-on-his-imperial_us_59366a04e4b033940169cda3

“He now calls his backup combo the Imposters, a group that has keyboardist [Steve Nieve](#) and drummer Pete Thomas, who’ve toured with him since the 1970s and still rock as hard as ever.” – *Washington Post, November 2016*

https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/elvis-costello-returns-to-the-warner-theatre-38-years-after-a-legendary-performance/2016/11/04/d309cf2-a2aa-11e6-8d63-3e0a660f1f04_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.35b6eb72cf49

“You’ve learned to read and write music, which is highly unusual for a rock star. How does that influence something like this album?

Well, one, I’m not a rock star. I’m not! It doesn’t say on my business card, “Rock star.” I’m just a musician. I’m a songwriter, and needed to gather the skills to communicate my ideas more clearly, and not necessarily have my ideas bent out of shape by arrangers. I’m glad I did it now, because it’s opened up the possibilities of doing something like this record, where I could sketch out all my ideas in advance for the orchestration, and then work with [pianist] [Steve Nieve](#), who could’ve filled every available space on this record, and would’ve done so gladly and wonderfully, but that would’ve been a different record.” – ***Interview with Elvis in Rolling Stone Magazine, November 2018***

<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/elvis-costello-new-album-paul-mccartney-754980/>

Steve Nieve Official:

- [Steve Nieve Official Website](#)
- [Steve Nieve Wikipedia Page](#)
- [Steve Nieve IMDB Page](#)
- [Steve Nieve Discography](#)
- [Steve Nieve Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction](#)
- [Steve Nieve Facebook](#)