

Almost Blue

Written by bluesever

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Chesney Henry "Chet" Baker, Jr. (December 23, 1929 – May 13, 1988) was an American jazz trumpeter, flugelhornist and vocalist. Baker earned much attention and critical praise through the 1950s, particularly for albums featuring his vocals ('Chet Baker Sings', 'It Could Happen to You'). Jazz historian David Gelly described the promise of Baker's early career as "James Dean, Sinatra, and Bix, rolled into one."

"Almost Blue" is a song by Elvis Costello that appears on his 1982 album *Imperial Bedroom*. It is said to be inspired by Chet Baker's version of the song "The Thrill Is Gone". Baker closed the circle by recording the song for 'Let's Get Lost,' a documentary film about Baker's life. Baker also performed the song at concerts and it was recorded for his live album *Chet Baker in Tokyo* (recorded 1987, released posthumously 1988).

Elvis Costello took the literacy of folk music and broke it wide open against the ragged edges of punk. He was one of the best and most consistent songwriters of his generation, but he never used that as an excuse to get repetitive—Elvis Costello has experimented with everything from punk to opera.



Elvis Costello

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Elvis Costello's remarkable career spontaneously kicked into gear in 1976. According to a record-company bio, *"An unknown and unannounced Elvis Costello walks into the offices of Stiff Records, strikes up an instant rapport with Stiff's then-supremo Jake Riviera, and is signed immediately."*

Thus began a career in song that has been almost unmatched in its reach—from furious, biting punk-era nuggets to art-minded collaborations with an opera singer and string quartet—and consistency. Costello has been called "the finest songwriter of his generation," and he ranks among the most prolific, too.



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Born **Declan Patrick McManus**, Costello had the audacity to adopt "Elvis" as a stage name (at manager Riviera's suggestion) and the talent to live up to such a scandalous appropriation.

Greil Marcus profiled him in 1982:

"He combined the brains of Randy Newman and the implacability of Bob Dylan, the everyman pathos of Buddy Holly and the uniqueness of John Lennon."

Indeed, every one of those figures exerted some degree of influence upon the broad-minded Costello.



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Elvis Costello

In 1981 Costello released 'Almost Blue,' an album of favorite country tunes cut with legendary Nashville producer Billy Sherrill. After this labor of love for a form of music one might not immediately associate with Costello, he embarked on the hugely ambitious Imperial Bedroom (1982). Produced by former Beatles engineer Geoff Emerick during a three-month period, it has been described by Costello as *"the album on which the Attractions and I granted ourselves the sort of scope that we imagined the Beatles had enjoyed in the mid-'60s."*



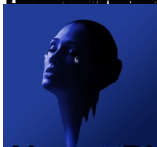
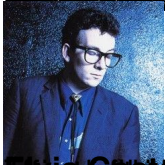
'Imperial Bedroom', 1982

To the hype-wary Costello's consternation, the word "masterpiece" appeared in the ad campaign for and many reviews of **'Imperial Bedroom'**. Yet it was a masterpiece. Costello's switch from guitar to piano as his main composing instrument could be detected in the more ornate arrangements of "Man Out of Time," "Town Cryer," "Shabby Doll" and "The Long Honeymoon." The song "Almost Blue"—an 'Imperial Bedroom' original unrelated to Costello's previous country album—was later covered by jazz trumpeter and vocalist Chet Baker, who had inspired its composition.

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