

Victor

RCA

RCA | Records
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ELVIS PRESLEY

On July 31, 1969, a tall, rangy, handsome, and gifted singer-actor-performer will make his first appearance before a live audience in more than a decade when he steps on to the stage of the new International Hotel in Las Vegas.

His name is Elvis Presley, and because of the evocative magic of those four simple syllables, his appearances at the International take on a special emotional as well as astonishing statistical meaning for millions of Americans, both teenagers and adults. The emotions will include nostalgia among those who were barely in their teens when the Presley career began, amazement among those who have observed the career with a good deal of wide-eyed pleasure from their vantage point as young adults, and not a little rue, mixed with humor, from those who were most aghast at the Presley performance at first, only to succumb to it, eventually. One of them, the late Hedda Hopper, who was among the most vociferous anti-Presley columnists in the beginning, was heard breaking into wild laughter the first time she did the Twist on the dance floor. Miss Hopper, it turned out, had the good sense to realize -- suddenly and in public--that the gyrations she was mastering would never have become an accepted part of Americana if Elvis Presley had not prepared the world for them.

And what of the astonishing statistics? Well, hold on:

More than 250,000,000 copies of Elvis Presley records have been sold all over the world in the not quite 15 years that he has recorded exclusively for RCA.

Elvis Presley's second recording for RCA, "Hound Dog," alone sold more than seven million copies since it was released in 1956.

Thirty-two motion pictures starring Elvis Presley have been released to date

The highest fee ever paid for a single guest appearance on television,

\$125,000, went to Elvis Presley in 1960 on the Frank Sinatra Show.

Forty-seven RCA single recordings of Elvis Presley have sold more than

1 million copies each world-wide, including his recent recording of "In the

Ghetto," which was certified as a million-selling single only a month ago.

The Elvis TV Special, which is to be re-telecast on the NBC-TV network on

Sunday, Aug. 17, was one of the most widely watched specials of recent years when

it was initially telecast last December.

Elvis will be one of the highest paid performers in the history of Las Vegas

when he appears at the International Hotel.

In addition to his 47 single gold records, Elvis has had 10 albums certified

as Gold Records by the R.I.A.A., among them, "Blue Hawaii," sales of which are

approaching 3,000,000 copies, and "G. I. Blues," which is approaching the

2,000,000-copy mark.

It is acknowledged further that the recorded voice of Elvis Presley has been

heard by more people in the world than that of any other performing artist in the

history of the recording industry.

Still, astonishing statistics are only a part of the Presley story. In the

almost 15 years during which he has continued to be one of the all-time great

stars, he has done more than set records. He changed the shape of American pop

music, influenced the personal and entertainment tastes of teenagers in this

country, and opened the way for almost every new teenage craze that has zoomed to

popularity since 1955.

He proved all his early critics wrong, moreover, not only by acting as a positive force in the entertainment world but as a strong and highly dignified influence on his audience over the years. Few Hollywood stars, in the history of that frenzied city, have behaved with as much quiet and sincere poise as has Elvis. And he has continued one of the earliest traditions he established as a performer, that of offering his services and/or his own money to a long list of charities, most of which operate in his own home town of Memphis; it is done without much publicity, but there has never been a break in either his interest or participation in these organizations' activities.

The story of the Presley Era is a high-powered one, filled with the fireworks of sudden, startling success, the shock of an ever-increasing and almost incredible amount of money, and the noise and tumult of public controversy which surrounded Presley, at least for a while, like a hurricane. Almost everything about him was out of the ordinary, including the fact that at birth he was the surviving member of a set of twins named Jesse Garon and Elvis Aron. As a young boy in Tupelo, Miss., Presley often sang in church and later became known as the third member of a trio, which also included his mother and father, that sang at camp meetings, revivals, and church conventions. When the boy won a music contest at a local fair by singing "Old Shep," his parents bought him his first guitar. It cost \$12.98 and it was put to good use in front of the radio or the phonograph as day by day the young Elvis picked out tunes he heard coming over either of the two machines.

In 1953, a recent high school graduate and a \$35-a-week truck driver for the Crown Electric Company in Memphis, Presley wandered into the Sun Record Company to make a solo recording for himself. One year later, he was asked to make a

record for Sun as a professional. On the basis of that record, called "That's Alright, Mama," he was taken under the direction of Colonel Tom Parker, who has remained his manager to this day, and on his own, also remains one of the great originals in American show-business history.

In the fall of 1955, RCA bid for the young performer's contract and got it for \$35,000, a then unheard-of price for a virtually untried artist.

RCA produced its first Presley recording in January, 1956. It was called "Heartbreak Hotel," and, within a few short months, the Presley performance of it was to shake up the record business as well as the entire entertainment industry as they hadn't been shaken in years. First, Elvis made an appearance on the Jackie Gleason TV "Stage Show," singing "Heartbreak Hotel" with Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey. Then he returned to the Gleason show five times more, singing "Heartbreak Hotel" at two of those appearances. By then, the recording--and other early Presley recordings--were smash hits, and the dynamic, easy-smiling young man was the overnight sensation of show business. At that point, he was booked for "The Milton Berle Show" and for three appearances on "The Ed Sullivan Show"; simultaneously, he signed a seven-year movie contract with Hal Wallis.

Today, of course, it is fun to recall the controversy that engulfed Elvis in that first year as an international star. Almost all of it was generated by the uninhibited physical gyrations he went through during each song and, secondarily, by the equally uninhibited response of his audience, which was made up almost entirely of teenagers. Girls wept at the sight of him. His home in Memphis was watched day and night by little bands of adolescent girls eager for a glimpse of their idol. It was a phenomenon that had happened before in America (and would happen again), but it had never before reached precisely the Presley point of sheer mania.

Just as he was being voted the most promising Country and Western artist of the year, the press everywhere embarked on a saturation campaign of Presley copy, most of it unfavorable. Columnists filled their daily columns with anecdotes and criticism. The late Hedda Hopper, for one, became one of the chief anti-Presleyites in the country, although she was later drastically to revise her opinion of him both as a performer and an individual and become one of his chief boosters in Hollywood. One magazine ran an editorial headed "Beware of Elvis Presley." Even the Communist press got into the act. When East German teenagers joined together to form "The Elvis Presley Band," the Communist newspaper Young World claimed that the singer was a "weapon in the American psychological war" and that his secret function was to recruit youths with "nuclear political views." (Many of the great scribes who criticized Elvis severely for his sideburns in the early fifties have now come around and are wearing them longer than Elvis ever did.)

Perhaps the Presleymania that hit the United States in 1956 was best summed by a report from the St. Petersburg, Fla., Evening Independent in the summer of that year. This is how it read, in part: "The Pied Piper of rock n' roll, a swivel-hipped, leg-lashing entertainment bomb, blasted the downtown area into chaos all day yesterday. Screaming, fainting teenagers lined the streets early to catch a glimpse of Elvis Presley, a rock-billy gyrating singer who's shattered show business with his sultry style. He hit St. Petersburg with the effect of a small H-bomb, sending fans into mass hysteria and receiving an ovation rarely seen on the Suncoast." That is how it went in city after city.

Single hit followed hit: "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You," "Hound Dog," "Love Me Tender," "Too Much," "All Shook Up," "Loving You," "Jailhouse Rock,"

"Don't," "Hard-Hearted Woman," "I Got Stung," "A Fool Such as I," "A Big Hunk of Love." The EPs had just as big a success: "Elvis, Volume I," "Elvis, Volume II," "Elvis Sings Christmas Songs," "King Creole," "Peace in the Valley," among many others. And the smash LPs: "Elvis Presley," "Elvis," "Loving You," "Elvis' Christmas Album," "His Hand in Mine" and others. At the same time, his first movies were released, and they set box office standards for Presley himself to break with each new film: "Love Me Tender," "Loving You," "Jailhouse Rock," "King Creole."

Then, in March of 1958, the comet threatened to burn out. Presley, like millions of his countrymen before him, was drafted into the U.S. Army and found himself serving with an armored division in Germany where he was eventually to reach the rank of sergeant. The country reacted to the news in various ways. A press release put out by Hal Wallis Productions said that "the high decibel shock wave which ensued was variously attributed to the wails of millions of youngsters, desolate at his departure and/or their parents' sighs of relief." From a critic: "The Elvis virus has at long last been isolated. Before Presley learns how to salute properly his public will have forgotten him."

As is common among critics of all varieties, it was simply wishful thinking. When Presley was released from the Army early in 1960, in the midst of one of the worst blizzards Fort Dix, N.J., had ever seen, he was greeted by an avalanche of newspaper, radio and TV reporters as well as wistful and loyal teenage fans who had stood for hours in deep snow and bitter cold to catch the merest sight of Sergeant Presley in uniform. By this time, there was a feeling that the press had subtly swung to Presley's side, and, if not quite ardent fans of the singer, were impressed by the dignified and quite natural way with which he had handled his Army stretch. His totally relaxed and cordial stance at the Fort Dix press

conference added to the picture of a maturing personality, and it is no exaggeration to say that Presley won a mighty victory both at Fort Dix and at his press conference on the way home to Memphis by remaining--of all peculiar things in show business--himself.

Within six months, one fact was already clear: the Presley career was bigger than ever. His first film, "G. I. Blues," broke all his own box office records, and his first post-Army recordings all because Gold Records with sales of a million or more. Once again, the Presley hit-after-hit pattern: "Stuck on You," "It's Now or Never," "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" (all released in 1960 and all Gold Records), "Surrender," "Can't Help Falling in Love," "Good Luck Charm," "Rock-a-Hula Baby," "Return to Sender." And, more smash LPs: "G. I. Blues" ('60), "Blue Hawaii" ('61), and "Girls! Girls! Girls!" ('62).

All kinds of theories, some of them fanciful, were advanced to explain the continuing Presley success. One theory had it that by disappearing into the Army at the height of his career, Presley had left his fans drooling for more; absence had only made their hearts fonder. This is a fine theory except for one thing: Presley did not disappear into the Army; he was drafted into it with about as much to say as to the direction his army life would take as had any other GI.

Another theory stressed the good will he had gained by not taking the easy out in the Army as an entertaining GI; this undoubtedly had an effect upon his public although not enough to explain thoroughly the way his career took off at his discharge. A third theory came from the teenagers themselves, and it went something like this: Elvis simply outgrew all the things parents and other adults didn't like about him and got better at all the things the teenagers already liked about him. In other words, he grew up.

Certainly, few stars in the history of the movie business have behaved with such consistent good manners in Hollywood--where Presley is now based--as has this young man. Rumors and gossip about him have been at a minimum; few of his colleagues, in fact, can remember the last one. He is, besides, unusually well mannered in an industry noted for its stiff-armed, and he has a good deal of working tact and respect for his colleagues. Earl Wilson once wrote of him: "Elvis was quietly non-circusy when I found him in his portable dressing room. He wore a thin red sweater and dark slacks, and his hair was smartly combed. He has retained the nice habit of saying 'Sir' and 'Ma'am.'"

Part of this may come from real shyness. Elvis has never become part of the Hollywood party scene, not even in the most casual way. He lives in cloistered seclusion with his wife and year-old daughter, Lisa. He prefers to spend his time with a group of old friends from Tennessee, who travel with him and assist him in various capacities. It is, according to some of them, an extremely lonely life for the star, who cannot pick up and go off to a movie or a night club without being besieged by enthusiastic fans. Because of the unyielding demands of time in properly preparing and scheduling his motion pictures, recordings and his smash hit television special, it was not until this Las Vegas appearance that Elvis has been able to make a live appearance, though literally thousands of requests have come from all parts of the world asking for personal appearances.

Because of Presley, pop music once and for all took its dominant characteristics--mainly the driving, monotonous beat--from Country Western repertoire and absorbed the whole colorful spectrum of gospel music and rhythm and blues into its mainstream. Because of Presley, too, young unknown artists, eager for the big break, took heart at his success and revolutionized the story of pop singles recordings in this country; they became within a few years the big stars

in the field while displacing the old, familiar names whose presence on a recording was, at one time, the assurance of a hit. Those days quickly vanished as the singles record market became dominated, more and more, by younger and younger teenagers, most of whom were girls attracted to the Presley personality.

When the Presley entourage arrived in Hollywood for the first time back in the 1950s, the Colonel remembers with pleasure, the town didn't give them six weeks, and was quick to tell them so. Well, Presley has just finished his thirty-second film. Six weeks have turned into fifteen years; overnight success, into a long-term career.

Whatever the original predictions of the professional and amateur "put-downers," Elvis Presley is today one of the half dozen chief members of show business "Establishment," and to him can be given the headiest compliment of all: he changed the entire course of international pop music in the past fourteen years and set the path it would take for the rest of most of our lifetimes.

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