

Elvis has left the building; legend lives on

Written by Jes-c Brandt



Do You Remember When...

Some trivia sources claim that Elvis Presley ranks with Jesus Christ and Richard Nixon as one of the most well known western names in China. Whether it's true or not, there is no denying Elvis is an international icon.

Aug. 16 will mark 33 years since Elvis died in 1977. Even so, most remember the legacy he left behind.

On Jan. 8, 1935 the world had no idea that one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century was being born. Vernon and Gladys Presley welcomed their son Elvis into the world in Tupelo, Miss.

Elvis continued to live as an average boy, no more well known than anyone else for the next 19 years of his life. He was recognized at a local level for having an excellent singing voice, and he was playing guitar and singing for his own enjoyment throughout his teenage years.

At 18 Elvis recorded a few demos at Sun Studio. Believe it or not, the beginning of Elvis' vast music career started with a mere \$4 recording. His looks and voice caught the attention of the owner, Sam Phillips, who wanted to see what Elvis could do. Phillips set him up with Scotty

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Moore and Bill Black, playing the guitar and the bass.

The trio recorded Elvis' first single to be released by Sun Records, That's All Right backed by Blue Moon of Kentucky. The three of them continued to play together, cutting additional records and performing at local venues and on radio stations.

1955 was the breakthrough year for the young musician. Colonel Parker became Elvis' manager and Elvis signed with RCA Records. Sun sold their contract to RCA for a whopping \$35,000.

During his first session at RCA, Elvis recorded Heartbreak Hotel, backed with I Was the One. This was Elvis' first big hit. The single sold 300,000 copies in three weeks. It was #1 on Billboard's pop singles chart for eight weeks.

Elvis continued performing live shows and made his first television appearances on Stage Show, the Milton Berle Show, the Steve Allen Show and the Ed Sullivan Show. His popularity grew rapidly, especially among the young women.

"We all liked his music in high school, and the parents thought he was a little wild," Marge Berry, one local Elvis fan, said. And that seems to be the general consensus: while the kids loved him, the adults were often a bit wary of Elvis.

Another Holyoke resident Ruth Kinnie added that she remembers when she was in high school, as Elvis rose in popularity everyone started rocking.

In one appearance on the Milton Berle Show, Elvis did one of his most controversial performances. Singing Hound Dog, Elvis' gyrations tickled the younger crowd, but appalled much of his older viewers, earning him much criticism and such nicknames as Elvis the Pelvis.

It seems the controversy simply brought more attention, making the star even more famous.

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Elvis took his criticism in stride, and responded saying “rock and roll music, if you like it, if you feel it, you can’t help but move to it. That’s what happens to me. I can’t help it.”

Famous for his movies as well as music, Elvis’ first movie was Love Me Tender in 1956. As was usually the case, Elvis’ singing was utilized in the film, featuring several songs.

Elvis’ career continued strong, with his concerts becoming more and more wild. Extra security soon became the norm in an attempt to control riotous fans.

March 24, 1958 Elvis’ life turned in another direction. He was inducted into the army, given serial number U.S. 53310761.

People nationwide wondered what this would mean for Elvis’ future, but he completed his duty, and in the process lopped off his famous locks and met Priscilla Beaulieu. March 5, 1960 he was officially discharged from active duty.

Despite uncertainty of what two years away would do to his popularity, Elvis returned with fans still waiting and a long music and acting career ahead of him.

After meeting Priscilla in his time in the army, the two continued seeing each other until they were finally married May 1, 1967. While their Las Vegas wedding was private, it made news after the fact throughout the world. Marge Berry remembered hearing about the wedding fondly, saying it was so romantic, like a fairy tale. The couple had a daughter, Lisa Marie Feb. 1, 1968.

After several years focusing on movie productions, Elvis made a musical comeback in what is often referred to as the ‘68 special. The television show and the soundtrack album were both wildly popular.

This was the beginning of a new era for Elvis. He was seen as a more mature individual as he continued to give his fans new music and tour the country.

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Many of the people who fell in love with the 21-year-old heart throb in the 50s were thrilled to see his comeback in the 70s. A whole new generation of fans was also present as he performed. During this time, Elvis spent much of his time performing in Las Vegas, where he is still an important presence to this day.

Elvis continued to tour and perform until 1977. His last show was June 26 in Indianapolis, Ind. He had plans to continue his tour in Maine, but on the morning of Aug. 16, Elvis was found to have died of heart failure.

His death was truly a shock to the world. Newspapers across the country shared the sorrowful news, radios played his songs and fans everywhere mourned together. Thousands made the pilgrimage to Memphis where the King was laid to rest. Between 25,000 and 30,000 people were estimated to have passed by Elvis' open coffin during the visitation.

Newspapers in the following days were full of photos featuring weeping fans and special sections dedicated to the memory of Elvis. It was a time that many still remember as a greatly sad time for the nation.



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Aug. 16, 1977 certainly did not mean the end of Elvis. His music is still well known, used often in everything from discotheques to blockbuster movie soundtracks.

In the days shortly after Elvis' death, fans everywhere rushed out to buy his albums. More recently, compilation CDs such as Elvis: 30 #1 Hits and Elvis 2nd to None give modern listeners easy access to some of his greatest recordings.

For fans wishing for more than the music to keep the memory of Elvis alive, there has long been a number of available options. Elvis impersonators are a ubiquitous phenomenon.

Graceland is the destination for many travelers to Memphis, Tenn. every year. Here visitors can see the very place where Elvis and his family lived, a number of videos and photos and items from his past including cars, stage costumes and movie memorabilia.

This year a European Tour offered Elvis fans a chance to relive an Elvis performance, titled Elvis Presley In Concert. The memorial concerts have been traveling the world since 1998. Former Elvis bandmates, as well as other musicians, play live on stage, while video of Elvis is projected on screen. Apparently it's the closest to the real thing possible.

A Modern People special tribute issue printed shortly after Elvis' death ran the headline "Elvis is dead but the legend will live forever." So far the legend has indeed lived on.