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**"Sound"**

*Despite being easy to insult  
 Elvis still has real appeal*

By Stew Magnuson  
 Diversions

*And the man who could sing/Though he hasn't got a thing/He's the King!/Of the whole wide world.*

-Elvis

**Backtracks**

*We're dragging Elvis from the grave? With a pick-up and a chain/We're draggin' Elvis from the grave? The world is saved!*

-13 Nightmares

Elvis Presley. Who in the Western world doesn't know about "The King of Rock 'n' Roll?" Elvis was the man who helped create most of the music we hear today. Elvis was the man who combined white country-blues with the soul of a black man. Elvis was the one who popularized and shaped rock 'n' roll and made it palatable for the millions of inherently racist baby-boomers growing up in the late fifties.

When Elvis died in August 1977, I was fishing in Canada on a lake 100 miles north of nowhere. I was far away from civilization: no roads, no TV. Barely audible shortwave radio stations was all we had. An Indian from a nearby village came up to the dock where my father and I sat

fishing.

"Elvis died," he told us flatly. I shrugged my shoulders and cast my line back in the lake.

The only thing I found amazing at the time was that they had already heard about Elvis' death from civilization. "The King's" death itself really didn't mean much to me.

Years later, Geraldo Rivera on the news show "20/20" broke the big story: Elvis died a junkie. "The King of Rock 'n' Roll" died strung out on a catalog of drug-store prescriptions, all made out and prescribed by Elvis' cronies and his personal physician. Now Elvis' death had meaning for me in some sick way. Local punk bands started making sick tributes to Presley. It was hip to make fun of "The King" and Elvis-worshipping by the older generations. How can one not laugh at alleged vials of Elvis' sweat selling for \$10 at the local flea market? How can one not laugh at the droves of middle-aged women dressed in polyester paying to take tours of Graceland, Elvis' home?

Oh yes, I've made light of Elvis' death in my writing this semester. Let's face it, by making so many laughably bad movies, he left himself open for ridicule.

I believe that laughing at Elvis is a way the younger generation, or at least myself, shows its hostility and rebelliousness toward the older gen-

eration. It's a way of saying:

"Hey look, Mom, the man you worshipped and adored, the man you called the king of rock 'n' roll, he died a strung-out pill-popper. Ha!"

Of all the early rock heroes, only Buddy Holly had the advantage of dying early. His memories and music are preserved without being scarred by later misfortunes. Little Richard had to become a preacher. Chuck Berry had to give up trying. Jerry Lee Lewis had to marry his 14-year-old cousin. And Elvis had to make bad movies and die a junkie.

Now that I've taken the time to listen to "The King's" music, I have to admit having more respect for him than I did years ago. No, Elvis didn't write his own music. His songs were written by a stable of proven hit writers. No, Elvis couldn't play the guitar very well; he could hardly be called an innovator like Lonnie Mack or Chuck Berry.

But Elvis was the one who popularized rock 'n' roll. He was the one who came on stage and twisted his hips as if he wanted to take his guitar to a cheap hotel and have an affair with it.

Before turning to such mundane crap as "Clambake, we're going to have a clambake, Yeah!" in his later movies, Elvis performed fresh and exciting music that still sounds good on my turntable 30 years later.

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