

Elvis returns to hollywood film studies essay



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The change in Elvis Presley's image in the movies post his army stint was brought about by starring in a chain of formulaic musical comedies, beginning with 'G. I. Blues'. 'G. I. Blues' for Paramount Pictures was Elvis Presley's fifth movie that commenced production in late April '60. A musical comedy produced by Hal Wallis, it is based on Elvis Presley's real life in the army. The character too is positioned in Germany, just like Elvis. The absence of hard sound and a controversial sensual style in the fast-paced soundtracks, make it distinctly different from Elvis Presley's pre-army movie songs of the '50s. Moreover, his controversial image too was toned down. Critics gave excellent reviews while the movie and its album too were exceedingly successful, making him appeal to older audiences. In fact, the ads targeted the family audience as "See and Hear the New Elvis: The Idol of the Teenagers is the Idol of the Family." Elvis later said, "The next thing I knew, I was out of the service and making movies again. My first picture was called, G. I. Blues. I thought I was still in the army". Elvis didn't quite revel in the success of 'G. I. Blues', and was less interested in more such musical comedy formula movies that would follow. The problem Elvis felt was that, while the songs were too many, the lyrical quality of many songs were poor. Some of them even looked artificial within the plot. Moreover Elvis patiently kept waiting for his most challenging and demanding role as he had envisioned about his Hollywood career. The month of July did bring Elvis some good news though, one being his father Vernon, who got married to divorcee Dee Stanley, a lady he had met back in Germany, and the other came towards the end. Soon after Elvis got his first degree black belt in karate, his wish had come true. Beginning August '60, at his persistence, Elvis got an opportunity to work in the next two dramatic movies, 'Flaming

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Star' directed by Don Siegel with an interracial subject, and ' Wild in the Country' a drama, directed by Philip Dunne later that year. These movies gave Elvis the chance to prove himself as a serious actor, where he was certainly noticed for his fine acting histrionics. But though they didn't show any financial loss, they weren't commercially rewarding, so Elvis Presley was compelled to return to the ' musical comedies'. Furthermore, his screen performances let down his fans, who bestowed upon him the following year with, ' the most disappointing performers of 1961', Damp Raincoat Award by Teen magazine. This thwarted his expectation of ever becoming a serious actor, as the realisation dawned on him and Colonel that his fans could not digest his serious persona.

Elvis and his benefit concerts

Colonel Parker was against Elvis maintaining any dedicated relationship as he felt it would harm his rising career graph. So Elvis carried on his long distance relationship with Priscilla over the phone for the next two years. But for now, Elvis still continued dating Anita Wood, apart from several more Hollywood actresses. By October ' 60, ' G. I. Blues' soundtrack album was fixed to the number one slot. It was followed in December by the massive success of Elvis Presley's first LP gospel album ' His Hand is Mine', that peaked the U. S. pop chart remarkably at no. 13 and U. K. chart at no. 3. The following year in 1961, 26-year old Elvis performed two live concerts that benefited charities and their concerns. They are his last live stage shows during his Hollywood career, which would commence again after eight years. On the 25th of February event, he benefited nearly 38 charities in Memphis with two shows at the Ellis auditorium. Elvis Presley was also awarded a

plaque by RCA that officially declared that his albums had recorded worldwide sales figure of over 75 million, an astonishing feat for Elvis! While Elvis would continue his life-long support and aid to the Memphis charities that slowly grew in numbers, a second live fundraising charity concert followed on 25th March, to build the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. Elvis generated huge awareness about the mission and managed to raise in excess of \$52, 000. His noble gesture was certainly appreciated with official credits, while he received more respect from wider audiences. This worked towards solidifying his new image in tune with the times, especially since he had also just recorded for his next album, ' Something for Everybody' in his now restrained and pleasing pop style. Nevertheless, throughout his life Elvis was quietly involved in many more philanthropic activities that remained an unknown affair. Four years later, Elvis contributed magnificently to the Motion Picture Relief Fund, amounting to a magnificent \$50, 000. Certainly Elvis was a benevolent gentleman by nature, who always showed concern towards community benefits. He was also known to pay off any debts for his family, friends and at times even for unfamiliar persons. That was not all, as he even gave elaborate and expensive gifts such as Cadillac cars and jewellery, mainly to his family and associates. He would say, " Money's meant to be spread around. The more happiness it helps create, the more its worth." Presley travelogues

Elvis Presley's management now only wanted to promote Elvis in soundtrack formulaic movies and target mainstream viewers since the beginning of 1961. They were hell bent on generating dazzling sales figures, and belittled his role as a modern, revolutionary musician and trendsetter. Elvis was starring in at least three movies a year, a gruelling movie-making schedule prepared by Colonel

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Parker. Then (after 1963), he totally abandoned the non-soundtrack album recordings for a few years. Moreover, his live concert appearances too were discontinued, as they were considered risky due to the hysterical crowds. So, Elvis kept his focus on his successful formula based movie career, first developed by Hal Wallis. With his next musical comedy 'Blue Hawaii', there was a further narrowing down on the type of movies Elvis would be starring in as the '60s progressed. 'Blue Hawaii', whose production began in March 1961, was a model musical comedy featuring 14 soundtracks with a blend of rock and pop music. Hal Wallis had tailored it for Elvis Presley. It also had the famous song, "Can't Help Falling in Love" that Elvis chose to end his '70s live concerts with. It is widely regarded as Elvis Presley's best musical comedy, which firmly established his formula for success in Hollywood, and restarted his popularity trend. 'Blue Hawaii' was his biggest-selling soundtrack album, selling 2 million records within the first year of its release. RIAA awarded it the status of double platinum in March 1992. This movie and similar light-hearted musical vehicles that followed were known as the 'Presley travelogues'. 'Presley travelogues' were a total family fare, but they were also popular among the teenagers, hence called 'teen musicals' characterized by youthful delights and pursuits. They showcased fun-filled entertainment in exotic locations, full of romance, girls, and a breakaway from the hum-drum of daily life. While some showcased escapades in distant lands, they ended with Elvis Presley's carefree, yet mature character that practiced some unconventional livelihood, finally winning over his love.' Presley travelogues' would soon become a routine. Initially, till mid '60s, these successful movies were considered to have first-rate production values. Few of Elvis Presley's movie soundtracks even became a hit on the

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pop charts in the first half of the '60s. Some of them were dignified ballads. Now, their screen presentation was different from the presentation of his '50s movie soundtracks (before his army stint). In 'Presley travelogues', one can see that his pop-rock and sometimes ballad styled songs take the story forward, just as in 'Blue Hawaii'. However, the character often erupted into a song irrespective of the time, often in artificial situations, something that Elvis evidently did not appreciate. When he was asked at a press conference about the kind of roles he preferred, his answer was, "something with meaning, I couldn't dig always playing the guy who'd get into a fight, beat the guy up, and in the next shot sing to him." Clearly, Elvis Presley wanted to perform more substantial roles than he was receiving through 'Presley travelogues', where his character roles got extremely limited, eclipsing his acting talent. This movie style became monotonously repetitive and their soundtrack album quality too deteriorated progressively over the '60s. Moreover, these movies did not contribute much to Elvis Presley's music reputation. In reality, they hampered his acting potential and critics damned his Hollywood career. Beginning with the movie 'Kissin' Cousins', around October '63, the filming schedules for further 'Presley travelogues' grew shorter and the budgets too reduced sharply, along with a decline in production values. So their movie quality too steadily worsened despite registering financial success. Incidentally, people came to the theatres to watch the alluring magnetism of Elvis, which surpassed any type of average quality movies or songs. Often these low-budget movies were produced by Hal Wallis, who would openly state that a 'Presley' movie proved economical to produce since it guaranteed success. Elvis began feeling utilised and unhappy when Hal Wallis, directed his profits generated by a low-budget '<https://assignbuster.com/elvis-returns-to-hollywood-film-studies-essay/>

Presley' movie, towards his more important movie projects. But Presley's management too was reluctant to deviate from these lucrative formulaic movies and their albums. So this trend of releasing low-budget movies and their soundtracks in rapid succession continued throughout Elvis Presley's Hollywood career. Elvis just managed to breeze through because of his reputation till 1965. A gospel single, "Crying in the Chapel" was his only song to reach Billboard Top Ten positioning itself at no. 3 in '65. Yet, Elvis soon grew increasingly discontented as the silly movies that he was starring in began to bother him. Moreover, no one was paying attention to investment on good songwriters, as Elvis often had to sing mediocre lyrics provided by Hill and Range, many of whom were downright pathetic. Despite these problems, he always gave his best, and delivered his songs with full sincerity. From amongst these poor quality movies which his detractors would indicate as a 'pantheon of bad taste', were some exceptionably worth mentioning ones. Elvis Presley's 15th musical movie Viva Las Vegas released in 1964, was tremendously successful. It is distinct for his on-screen chemistry with his co-actress Ann-Margret. The actress was known as 'the female Elvis Presley', as she could sing and match her energetic dancing moves with Elvis' in her own mind-blowing style, with panache. She made an explosive pair with Elvis on-screen that led the publicity mills wildly producing news of their off-screen romance, though it was not to last. Elvis Presley's off-screen relationships with his co-actresses were publicised often in columns, entertainment magazines, etc. in order to garner interest regarding his projects, but they were made-up most of the time or were unsuccessful. Besides Elvis' personal life was well guarded and kept out of sight from his audience, thanks to Colonel Parker, who probably felt that the

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one and only girl for whom Elvis had a special place was Priscilla Beaulieu. Meanwhile, Priscilla had already arrived on the scene in America by the end of '62, after which she completed her High School from Memphis, exactly as Elvis had requested to her parents earlier, who were living in Germany. Elvis and his parents had taken charge of her education. Initially she was living with his parents, after which she began living a private life in Graceland with Elvis' grandmother Minnie Mae, since Elvis was mostly away in Hollywood. Anita Wood then moved on. Elvis too knew the implications of dating Priscilla then, who was a minor, and managed to keep her out of the public eye while she was staying in Graceland. A Spiritual side of Elvis PresleyIt was during this unhappy phase of his ongoing Hollywood career that Elvis met Larry Geller in April '64. Larry was his hairdresser and a member of his 'Memphis Mafia', but an evolved soul. He introduced Elvis to spirituality. Larry had recalled their first meeting when Elvis revealed his philosophical personality with his queries, "... there's got to be a reason... why I was chosen to be Elvis Presley. ... I swear to God, no one knows how lonely I get... and how empty I really feel." Elvis Presley had a religious upbringing since his childhood. But he wanted to uncover the veil of the mystical world. He always seemed to be seeking knowledge on the deeper meaning of life. Larry became his closest friend who guided Elvis in his spiritual quest to achieve self-realisation. He brought Elvis plenty of books on religion, mysticism and spirituality. Together with Larry, Elvis would spend nights at Graceland, voraciously reading and discussing many ancient religious books like the Bible. Larry guided him in spiritual teachings of saints like Paramhansa Yogananda, Kahlil Gibran etc. Elvis even carried loads of such books with him on his later year tours. He was known to carry mystical book like Joseph Benner's 'The Impersonal Life'

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that divinely inspired him. He gifted this book to many of his friends and would even discuss about spirituality with his companions and co-actors on his filming sets. Another engrossing book was Cherio's Book of Numbers that drew Elvis' interests in birthdates, associated birthstones and semiprecious stones. Dazzling outfits studded with semi-precious stones and jewellery would later be the highlight of Elvis Presley's concert tours of the '70s. Elvis now felt at home with his new found recreation that gave him inner peace, away from the world of glamour where he was struggling to meet the expectations of his fans as well as his demanding manager Colonel Parker, his mentor and friend with whom he shared a complex relationship. The books were happy inspirations that gave him the strength to withstand his troubled professional life, devoid of any creativity.

Elvis wins his first Grammy Award

Elvis was rotting away in disappointing Hollywood movies. Moreover, poor quality soundtracks for these 'Presley travelogues' formed the chunk of Elvis Presley's music recording activity between January '64 and May '66, despite their profits. As Elvis would later say, "I sure lost my musical direction in Hollywood. My songs were the same conveyer belt mass production, just like most of my movies were." It was then in early '66 that Elvis decided to record gospel songs soon, that deeply soothed him. His music interests had revived to an extent by now, so he invested in musical equipments at home. Along with Charlie Hodge and Red West from his Memphis Mafia, Elvis was now experimenting with folk music. Elvis then began recording for the spiritual gospel album, 'How, Great Thou Art' at RCA's Nashville studios in mid-May. Now, Elvis had on board a different producer, Felton Jarvis as well

as new musicians, notably his favourite gospel groups, the Statesmen and Blackwell Brothers, the new group Imperials, and the Jordanaires. Elvis was extremely elated to sing his second gospel album with them. These gospels helped Elvis rise and heal his spiritual being, which renewed his interests in music. Gospel songs also revved up his creative talents making him feel completely at home, and before long, Elvis regained his joie de vivre.

Meanwhile, Priscilla's parents and the Colonel wanted Elvis to either get committed to Priscilla or leave her. So before Christmas, in joyful spirits at Graceland, Elvis finally took the plunge and proposed Priscilla in marriage. Amongst his personal happiness, Elvis reached a landmark in his singing career when he received the prestigious Grammy Award in the Best Sacred Performance category for this second gospel album, the following year in February 1967, which was his first out of three Grammys. Renowned rock historian Dave Marsh described Elvis Presley as, " arguably the greatest white gospel singer of his time [and] really the last rock & roll artist to make gospel as vital a component of his musical personality as his secular songs." Certainly, Elvis felt deeply rewarded for his efforts as this helped him put his frustrating movie career at the back of his mind. Elvis' Hollywood career wanes Soon, Elvis was also spending quality time at his recently purchased Wallis ranch in Mississippi, named Circle G, with his longtime girlfriend Priscilla Beaulieu who was now living permanently in Graceland since ' 63. Together with the Memphis Mafia gang and their wives, the couple enjoyed the little pleasures of horse riding as cowboys. This activity too seemed to rejuvenate Elvis. Horse riding was a recent interest developed among all his associates after Elvis proposed marriage to Priscilla last Christmas, when he gifted her one horse. Meanwhile, the movie ' Clambake', which was being

filmed between March and April' 67 had made Elvis extremely unhappy. Uninterested and unresponsive to its pre-production work, Elvis enjoyed staying at his ranch. Repeated attempts to call him for filming proved to be a daunting task. Elvis eventually slumped in melancholy and put on much weight, which he was asked to shed. Then, before the filming commenced, he had slipped, hurting his head and thus delayed the schedule again. Later, the LP album for this movie ' Clambake' would hit a record low by the end of the year ' 67, and jolt RCA's management. Moreover, by now none of Elvis' soundtrack albums charted anywhere near the Top 20, and the Hollywood ' musical comedy' formula too had reached a dead end. Slowly, Elvis Presley's on-screen glory waned, and the box-office too gained less revenues. Elvis had had enough and felt it was time to quit from his movie-making career. Except for few movies, it had deprived him the honour of shining as a serious actor with mettle. His deepest desire would forever remain unfulfilled. Elvis Presley's words in Time magazine reflected his thoughts, " I don't regard money or position as important. But I can never forget the longing to be someone. I guess if you are poor, you always think bigger and want more than those who have everything when they are born." Moreover, there was nothing much Elvis could do as Colonel Parker had bonded him in three-picture contractual liabilities that prevented him from quitting immediately, so he continued his grinding Hollywood schedule.

Elvis Presley marries Priscilla

Finally, on 1st May 1967, Elvis and Priscilla were married at a privately held service in Las Vegas, after nearly seven and half years of courtship. Elvis was now of 32 years, while Priscilla would turn 22 three weeks later. After

marriage, Priscilla visited Elvis occasionally on his movie sets with his associates and their wives, who were her constant companions. Later that year, the couple also bought their first home at the famous Beverly Hills area, a posh locality that housed the rich and the famous. But the following year brought Elvis great personal joy as he became a father on 1st February 1968. Elvis was an adoring father to his one and only little girl, Lisa Marie Presley. Years later, Elvis would buy a Convair 880 Jet and name it ' Lisa Marie', after his lovely daughter. Though Elvis always dearly loved his daughter, his relationship with his wife Priscilla had begun to show cracks. Elvis now decided to return to his foremost love that would keep him happy, his music and live concerts.

‘ 68 Comeback television special marks a third turning point in Elvis’ career

" I'll never be more than what I am... a swingin' little guitar man."-Elvis Presley
Amidst filming and soundtrack recordings, 33-year old Elvis the entertainer was now thinking of getting back to live concerts. Elvis was nervous about the idea and not very convinced, as he had last performed live for the benefit concerts, a good seven years back. But after seeing the Welsh singer Tom Jones performing at Las Vegas and receiving a good response, Elvis regained his confidence and decided to make a comeback to live acts. Meanwhile, an arrangement with NBC-TV was worked out by Colonel Parker early in 1968, to telecast a Christmas Special program where Elvis would apparently sing Christmas songs. But Director Steve Binder and NBC wanted to depict a revolutionary changed Elvis, who had been away from the mainstream music scenario for some years. So, his production team

then weaved a script to tell the story of Elvis Presley's musical journey, his trials and tribulations and finally his return to his music world, his heaven. Though initially hesitant about a radical image change, Elvis was pretty eager, and worked wholeheartedly for the project with their concept. This 60-minute special titled 'Elvis' featured his live performance amongst some excited studio audiences, associates and family friends, his first performance after 1961. It also included informal jam sessions of Elvis with friends from the Blue Moon Boys, who narrated stories from his life that connected the different segments in the script, such as musical pieces and recorded sessions. The rehearsals began in early June '68 while the video filming was done from 27th till 30th June. Elvis Presley had another feather in his cap when his special 'Elvis', was broadcast on 3rd December '68 on NBC-TV. This was his first television appearance since his Frank Sinatra Timex Special. Elvis was wearing outfits designed by Bill Belew, and was seen by 42% viewers singing and playing his guitar with a powerful force, reminding of his rockabilly days. His stage presence too was overwhelmingly strong, while his performance showed a refreshing liveliness. It sparked out excitement amongst his live studio audience while Elvis reconnected with them, something he had missed doing in Hollywood films. Indisputably, Elvis had unleashed his unfulfilled spirit, which had been held hostage in Hollywood, where he was always being told what to do. Elvis now reintroduced the audience to his roots as, "Rock 'n' roll music is basically gospel or rhythm and blues, or it sprang from that. People have been adding to it, adding instruments to it, experimenting with it, but it all boils down to [that]." The show however had no Christmas songs. Elvis ended with a new song 'If I can Dream', specifically written that reflected his emotions on the

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recent passing away of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, whom he reverently admired. This music special turned out to be one of television's biggest hits of 1968 and was popularly known as 'The '68 Comeback Special'. While watching this musical special being broadcast, Elvis told his director Steve Binder, "It's the greatest thing I've ever done in my life. I give you my word I will never sing a song I don't believe in." This show is also revered as a spectacular moment in the rock-pop memoirs that took Elvis to a whole new level of contemporary music, which soon became the rage among his fans. With widespread critical acclaim, Elvis was now riding on the top again. The Eye Magazine had published a review by rock writer John Landau, which read, "There is something magical about watching a man who has lost himself find his way back home... He sang with the kind of power people no longer expect from rock 'n' roll singers." Rock critic Greil Marcus too refreshed memories after several years by saying about this show, "It was the finest music of his life. If ever there was music that bleeds, this was it." This indicated a third turning point in his career. Soon Elvis announced that he was quitting Hollywood movies and returning to music and live performances. The New York Times had aptly reported after the super success of his television show, 'Elvis had found his way home'. By the year end, after Elvis completed shooting for his 30th movie 'The Trouble with the Girls'. Elvis also accepted the invitation of the brand new International Hotel in Las Vegas (later known as the Hilton International), which commenced yet another exciting period in his career.

Elvis returns to mainstream album recording

34-year old Elvis Presley was revitalised by the success of his comeback television special. With his confidence regained, early in the year in January 1969, he moved away from the clichéd RCA ambience and begin recording in Memphis, choosing the American Sound studio. Elvis was recording in Memphis after almost 14 years. At the American Sound Studio, where Chips Moman was the producer, Elvis dedicatedly sang and recorded all night, producing some of his best musical works with enthusiasm. Backing him were the most appropriate in-house studio band, some of the best Memphis musicians, blacks as well as whites, exclusively hired by Moman. They were well-versed with the Southern culture of music, many of whom were very fond of Elvis' songs, as they grew up with it. Elvis enjoyed recording the fresh and original lyrical material across genres that he got to choose, feeling artistically satisfied and productive. These 32 songs, mostly modern country rhythm, some rock flavoured soul music and R&B music, reflected the new '70s music environment that produced two hit albums and four classic singles from this session. This resumed his mainstream recording career, which was temporarily in the backseat due to the Hollywood soundtrack recordings all these years. It also brought about a deviation from his Hollywood image, where Elvis was mostly cast as a singing hero. From the recording session Moman produced the albums ' From Elvis in Memphis' released in mid-' 69, and ' From Memphis to Vegas/From Vegas to Memphis'. Every song reflected Elvis Presley's pulsating energy level that marked the criterion for all his future songs. ' From Elvis in Memphis' was certified a gold record in January 1970 by RIAA. This session also brought out four singles that were hits, ' Kentucky Rain', ' Suspicious Minds', ' In the Ghetto' and ' Don't Cry, Daddy'.

Now, truly Elvis Presley's music quality had reached new dimensions where he again recreated a new sound. Rock critic Dave Marsh portrayed Elvis' new albums as " a masterpiece in which Presley immediately catches up with pop music trends that had seemed to pass him by during the movie years. He sings country songs, soul songs and rockers with real conviction, a stunning achievement." But Elvis was yet to see the peak of his fame and glory as he would set the stage on fire with his dynamic performance at his Las Vegas engagements, which would soon follow. Elvis then began winding up his movie contracts and soon starred in his 31st movie ' Change of Habit', incidentally his last for which filming began in March ' 69. Elvis also sang some good songs in it and performed naturally. This movie rose to no. 17 on the Variety's Box Office Survey after hitting theaters later that year.

Las Vegas brings Elvis back to live stage concerts

The beginning of July ' 69 saw Elvis Presley busy assembling his band of top grade, back-up musicians for the Las Vegas rendezvous at the new International Hotel. His musical entourage was massive, as he had to perform live to an audience in a large 2000-seater showroom. Being an untested stage, Colonel Parker had advised Elvis not to inaugurate it, so Barbra Streisand was booked for it in July, while Elvis was scheduled for August, on a four-week concert covering 57 shows. Colonel Parker, who always commanded foremost control on Elvis' career, now promoted his live stage comeback as the year's show-business event, labeling him, ' the World's Greatest Entertainer', for which Elvis would receive half a million dollars. Colonel placed full-page ads in the newspapers, on billboards and even made arrangements for Elvis Presley merchandise and souvenirs in the

hotel's lobby. Without a doubt the television comeback special 'Elvis' in '68, had given Elvis much needed confidence to think about making a solo stage comeback, at a time when the British musical group 'The Beatles', tilted public attitude favourably towards group singers. So after weeks of continuous rehearsals, Elvis and his band were ready to begin their show on the night of 31st July 1969. Memories of his past show at the New Frontier Hotel in 1956 that had ended in a fiasco, lingered on in his nervous mind. But Elvis overcame his anxiousness and delighted his euphoric audiences, including prominent celebrities to emerge victorious on his first live stage concert since 1961. A black haired Elvis now had his longest sideburns since his pre-army days, and looked extremely handsome and healthy, a result of the diet that he was maintaining. His lean, handsome form was accentuated by his attractive karate suit in black mohair designed by Bill Belew. After his final act, Elvis performed an encore singing 'Can't Help Falling in Love', that would from now on be his closing number. Overall, the show had new songs and few classic hits presented in a fresh and exciting manner, which was shared with his appealing frolics and talks about his journey. An album of this live concert, 'Elvis in Person at the International Hotel' too was recorded at the event. Elvis Presley earned excellent reviews from the press and critics. While the 'Rolling Stone' magazine expressed Elvis as a 'supernatural' being, other glowing reviews appeared in magazines such as 'Newsweek' that reported, "There are several unbelievable things about Elvis, but the most incredible is his staying power in a world where meteoric careers fade like shooting stars." Needless to say, all 57 shows that followed received a fabulous reception, breaking all audience records in Las Vegas. Elvis, the live entertainer was now warmly welcomed back among his supporters, and he

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felt glad deep within his heart. Colonel Parker too was emotional to see Elvis bustling with energy and fruitfully conquer his personal fears, while he regained professional acceptance. In fact, after the first performance night, the crafty businessman immediately renegotiated his famous client, Elvis Presley's contract with the general manager of the International Hotel. Sitting at the coffee shop, Colonel detailed his terms on a red tablecloth for twice a year program over the next five years. Both parties signed the contract on the red tablecloth, which is now the legendary 'red tablecloth deal' that denoted Elvis was being offered \$1 million each year for two engagements. While his smashing success at Las Vegas continued during February and August engagements each year ahead, Elvis Presley continued to sell out to full audiences, even breaking his own records.

The final revolutionary image and sound makeover

By now Colonel Parker and Elvis Presley had already set the objective of being seen in tune with the times for Presley's career in the '70s, after considering its need. So yet again, Elvis followed the pattern of creating a new image and sound for himself, to connect with his live audience, just as he had done way back in 1956 and then again in 1960. At his second Las Vegas show in February 1970, Elvis consciously attempted to establish a new everlasting image and sound for the final time that would stay with him till his end. He now delivered a range of contemporary lyrical material and sound created at American Sound Studios, while limiting his past songs or introducing them in a medley composition. In his acts he even incorporated karate moves, as he was now holding a second degree in black belt. In a lighter vein, Elvis even joked with the crowd about his past image. The most

touching moment of this show was the song performance "Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime", which Elvis dedicated to his favourite pop icon Dean Martin, present on his first concert night amongst the audience. His next live album, 'On Stage' too was recorded from this show that hit the album chart at no. 13. Elvis now wore a white jumpsuit, diamond studded gold finger rings and a macramé karate belt. On each subsequent Las Vegas appearance, Bill Belew continued designing Elvis Presley's outfits, which evolved to take the form of the famous one-piece 'Elvis Presley jumpsuits', each one ostentatiously glitzy than the previous, studded with jewels and semiprecious stones. His jumpsuits at times had a floor or waist length cape, that seemed to glorify his timeless image. They came to epitomize the legendary 'King' in the '70s. Each concert of his can be identified with his costumes, that was often decorated with symbols like sundials, karate motifs, tigers, peacocks, dragons, sundials, etc. that were embroidered or embossed. The 'American Eagle' jumpsuit is the most famous jumpsuit worn in his ground-breaking concert 'Aloha from Hawaii' that would follow soon. Though Elvis Presley's costumes and over-stated theatrical acts kept changing, the layout of his unbelievable unique shows and music style would remain the same henceforth. In the end, Elvis did meet his goal as all his Las Vegas shows, somewhat helped distance audience memories of Elvis as a crooning movie star, something he always disapproved. Moreover, his varied contemporary songs in his strong and clear voice ensured that Elvis was never associated with the resurrection of rock 'n' roll during that period of 'rock-nostalgia', though he certainly was an inspiration.

Elvis Presley concert tours, documentaries and accolades in the ' 70s

" I learned how important it is to entertain people and give them a reason to come and watch you play."-Elvis Presley

Now that Elvis Presley's live performance career too was back on track, he immediately went on concert tours on the road with his sophisticated show, his first ever since 1957, and his opening venue was Houston's gigantic Astrodome in late February ' 70. Though the vast sold out crowds did intimidate Elvis, he gave six electrifying shows that was witnessed by a record breaking audience totally numbered over two lakh. Elvis experienced the exhilarating vibrations from his huge enthusiastic fans and was even mobbed by them, just like he would be in the ' 50s. At this venue, Elvis was also awarded with many gold records, a testimony to his dominating popularity and evergreen career. Now, a second road touring phase commenced in Elvis Presley's career that successfully continued till his end. Each touring schedule was extremely grueling, that lasted for at the most three weeks. Eventually it became a habit to arrive, perform a live concert and leave a city within 24 hours. This demanding schedule of performing in different locations every time, which Elvis called one - night stand, would be replicated again after a few weeks of rest. The business-minded manager Colonel Parker, had pushed Elvis into this obligatory schedule as Elvis blindly signed contracts without reading, since he detested the business aspects of his profession that was seen by Colonel. Such pressures would eventually leave Elvis fatigued physically and even emotionally drained. Moreover, he had imposed a ' no-wives' rule that was equally applicable to him. It wasn't long before Elvis was diagnosed with an early stage of glaucoma, and it was the beginning of his physical and mental

disorders like insomnia and depression, to which Elvis would overreact irritable. Yet he continued his road tours and album recordings alongside his Las Vegas performances in which he would stage 57 or 58 performances in one engagement, an equally strenuous act. Well aware of a threat to his life from goons, on his August '70 Las Vegas schedule at the International Hotel, Elvis went on the podium with a point 45 pistol concealed in his waistband, and a Derringer in his boot, though the show went off without any problems. For this show Elvis sang pure pop songs, moving away from his R&B, country and gospel roots. Meanwhile, MGM studios had begun their efforts to document the living legend at the summit of his career, with two theatrically released documentary movies. For their first documentary, 'Elvis -That's the Way It Is' they candidly filmed Elvis everywhere in this summer concert. The crew then followed Elvis on his tour of nine cities in six days of September, filming him. This film released later that year too was successful at the box office; incredible considering it was a documentary that pulled crowds to the theater! RCA, who had renewed their contracts with Elvis, released an album based on it titled 'That's the Way It Is', that had pure white pop songs, more suited to the city folks at Las Vegas. This album reflected a modification of his musical style that favoured a traditional one, and hit a high at no. 21 on the charts. Soon, Elvis became obsessed with security and he legally began carrying a gun, after being sworn as a special deputy officer in Memphis. In fact he would usually carry a gun with him on stage in the '70s, an amplification of his far from normal lifestyle. His fascination for firearms soon grew along with another pastime, collection of police badges. So when Elvis met President Nixon on 21st December 1970, he expressed his disapproval of teenagers abusing themselves with drugs as a passing fad, and requested

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for a Bureau of Narcotic and Dangerous Drug badge, for his collections to denote his loyal support. The President granted his wish, sharing the positive view that Elvis should 'retain credibility'. Unknown to both was the fact that prescription drugs would be the cause of Elvis' downfall after a few years. The following year early in January 1971, 36-year old Elvis Presley was honoured as 'One of the Ten Outstanding Young Men of the Nation' by the United States Junior Chamber of Commerce (The Jaycees). It was a proud moment for Elvis, which signified his accomplishments were recognized and popularly accepted. Deeply touched, it reminded Elvis of his lowly beginnings, his journey to become a singer, his trials and the criticism he had faced by institutions till he achieved success. Rightly, Elvis had crossed a huge milestone in his life. On accepting the award, Elvis said, "I learned very early in life that, 'without a song, the day would never end; without a song, a man ain't got a friend; without a song, the road would never bend -- without a song.' So I keep singing a song...." Then in October '71, a book 'Elvis: A Biography' written by Jerry Hopkins was released. That year, Elvis also received the Bing Crosby Award by the NARAS (National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences), that is now known as the Grammy's 'Lifetime Achievement Award.' But as Elvis continued his ruthlessly demanding and busy entertainment schedule of recording new albums and performing concerts on tours, the problems on his home front began to escalate. Long periods of Elvis' absence from home created a marital discord with his wife Priscilla. They gradually grew apart and by early 1972, feeling unfulfilled, she separated from Elvis and began living on her own with their daughter. This deeply hurt Elvis, as he never expected Priscilla to go against his terms. Moreover, Priscilla also revealed that she was now seeing her karate

instructor Mike Stone, incidentally suggested by Elvis to teach her karate. The couple finally had an amiable divorce late in the following year, though they maintained good relations and performed their joint duties towards their only daughter Lisa Marie. Elvis continued his punishing live concert tours during which MGM filmed for their second documentary that commenced filming in April ' 72 titled ' Elvis on Tour'. This captures Elvis when he undertook a road tour of 15 cities. It gives a wonderful exposure of Elvis' best and final career phase that went on to win the Golden Globe Awards, in the category of Best Documentary film of 1972. Accolades and appreciations continued with his gospel album ' He Touched Me', winning him a second Grammy Award in the Best Inspirational Performance group. Among the highlights of his concert years are his live concert at the Madison Square Garden, where he performed for the first time in New York, in June 1972. His four winning shows were attended by sold out crowds of 80, 000 persons, including many celebrities like Bob Dylan, George Harrison and John Lennon. Elvis was seen in top physical condition, wearing a festooned jumpsuit with a large belt around his slender waist, inscribed with ' The World Champion Entertainer'. While the audience reaction was fanatical, RCA recorded this historical event for its album, ' Elvis as Recorded at Madison Square Garden' that released in less than two weeks. Elvis Presley's dynamic concert performances also continued at other engagements like the Sahara Lake Tahoe in Nevada. But the most notable and extravagant show of this final period was his worldwide televised concert ' Aloha from Hawaii'.

Elvis Presley in his Worldwide concert ‘ Aloha from Hawaii’

" A live concert to me is exciting because of all the electricity that is generated in the crowd and on stage. It's my favorite part of the business -- live concerts".-Elvis Presley Colonel Parker would keep putting off Elvis Presley's ambitious ideas of performing live on a worldwide tour citing lack of security issues. As a result, Elvis mostly performed in America, except for five concerts earlier in Canada before his army stint. Colonel then successfully organised the gigantically scaled benefit concert in Hawaii for the Kuiuokalani Lee Cancer Fund, ‘ Aloha from Hawaii’, that proved to be Elvis Presley's most pioneering show. A full dress rehearsal was first held at Honolulu International Center Arena on 12th January ‘ 73 that was recorded, though not broadcast. A live concert was then performed in front of a large audience on 14th January ‘ 73. Technological advancements in the field of global telecommunications had facilitated this innovative concert to be transmitted live via Intelsat IV satellite to many countries all over the world. This recorded television special was also rebroadcast to 28 European nations the following day. It is estimated that more than a billion people saw it in 40 countries. The first broadcast to American audience though, was on 4th April 1973 on NBC television that was seen by 51% viewers, breaking the record of the number of people who watched man's first walk on the moon. Undeniably, Elvis Presley had created television and entertainment history that night. This concert album continued to remain on the Billboard's album chart for 52 weeks at the no. 1 slot, and was Elvis Presley's last album at the top while he was alive. ‘ Aloha from Hawaii’ records 38-year old Elvis Presley's finest moments in live concert at the peak of his career during the ‘ 70s, in which donations amounting to almost \$75000 were raised in the two

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shows. Wearing a richly ornate, stone studded jumpsuit embroidered with the American eagle, Elvis gave a lively performance singing from his extensive range of current hits and few of his classic rock and pop songs. The enormous popularity of 'The World's Greatest Entertainer' amongst his live audience was clearly visible with his natural display of his larger than life image. Like always, Elvis too met his fans expectations by his dramatic stage acts, which romanticised his intimate image further. For example he would wipe his brow and throw 'gifts' like white towels and scarves to his audience, that were stocked by the organisers. The fantasizing audience, especially females too would respond back by throwing teddy bears, bouquets and even underwear on stage. The audience waited to kiss and hug him, like being blessed with his divine touch. These were a regular feature of Elvis Presley's '70s colorful live concerts that speaks volumes about him and his extremely loyal audience with whom he had bonded over his career. In fact, Elvis was always under pressure to satisfy his fans and live up to his image. On being asked about his satisfaction with his image, Elvis had replied, "The image is one thing and the human being is another. It's very hard to live up to an image, put it that way".

The fading years –1973 to '77

"I'm just so tired of being Elvis Presley". -As told to producer Felton Jarvis by Elvis Presley
In 1973, Elvis performed in maximum number of concerts, totalling 168. He also began recording few albums at a Memphis recording studio apart from his intensive recordings at RCA, which was equally backbreaking. But after the 'Aloha from Hawaii' concert, Elvis Presley's debilitating and continuous touring program had begun to show its

detrimental effects. His mind, body and soul were now on a descending journey that would slowly disintegrate and later take a turn for the worse. Elvis had begun displaying tremendous mood swings, whims and irritations. He was also suffering from hypertension, digestive problems and other ailments. Moreover, boredom had caught up with him on road tours and he grew professionally unchallenged. Elvis then lost his drive and enthusiasm to bring about a novel change in his shows. Slowly, his concert tour performances, though they were always sold out, became predictably identical as his material followed the same monotonous routine. On his personal front, Elvis was heartbroken from his marriage breakdown with Priscilla, which terminated in a divorce on 9th October 1973. He tried to come to terms with it and was even seeing Linda Thompson by now. Nevertheless, it deeply affected him. Contrary to his friendly and gregarious public persona, Elvis became a recluse in his private life, totally disconnected from the outside world, except for his professional commitments. A celebrity lifestyle has its own hazards. But Elvis Presley's lifestyle was even more unconventional and had a lot to contribute to his self-deterioration. His over-obsessive fans prevented him from leading a normal lifestyle. They besieged him when he appeared publicly, which compelled him to live in isolation in his inner sanctum at Graceland, though he never grumbled against them or the media. But in reality, he could no longer bear their excessive attention and grew tired of pleasing everyone. Elvis now grew extremely lonely and unhappy from within, despite the company of Linda Thompson. Elvis read plenty of books on spirituality to get inspiration. But he also had another harmful addiction – abnormal intake of prescription drugs for various physical ailments like pain, high blood pressure, liver damage, enlarged

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colon, etc. Already Elvis was consuming amphetamines after his army days. He asserted that prescription drugs recharged him, so he could give an energetic performance. Then after his acts, he would take another drug to fall asleep. Years later, it became known that Elvis carried three suitcases of such medication for his entire support staff during tours, who used them liberally. Elvis maintained that he needed them, but many of the prescription drugs were not meant for his maladies. There was one explanation to his exaggerated display of emotional responses. Overuse of prescription drugs, as Elvis was abusing his body to the maximum that had altered his normal behavior. Surprisingly, Elvis was never addicted to alcohol and had often voiced his opinions against illegal drug abuse. Thereafter, his mental and physical health deteriorated at an accelerated pace, especially after 1975. Yet none of his 'so-called' friends that he was usually surrounded with could prevent Elvis from his excessive drug indulgences in his den, not even Linda Thompson. By now, Elvis Presley's studio recording sessions at RCA too had declined. 40-year old Elvis directly entered the studio in March '75 to record for the album 'Today', and skipped the previous year as he continued many exhaustive concert tours. Then in March 1975, Elvis won his final Grammy award for gospel music. His live concert recording of the song 'How Great Thou Art' at a Memphis concert a year earlier, had given him the Grammy in the Best Inspiration Performance category. Now, in the mid-'70s, it became difficult and exhaustive for Elvis to give his concert performances. Age and a continuous diet of junk food too went against Elvis as he now put on weight, which he found difficult to shed. Elvis appeared bloated all over due to his poor health. So he often missed several concerts as he had to be hospitalised many times, though he eventually made up for them later. He

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would be on stage for a short duration, and was barely understandable when he sang. Miserable, melancholic, and a tired Elvis would often sit down on the stage and talk to his fans. His fans now also included grandmothers and middle-aged women. Besides, his image in the media had now widely taken a beating and changed to a tawdry pop-singer, while the critics felt that his music had precipitously decayed. Yet, Elvis showed no signs of slowing down.

Death of an American legend

Colonel Parker was later criticised for pushing his client through such a severely taxing routine. But in reality, Elvis also had a huge back-up staff to support with his concerts, which combined with the prohibitive costs of maintaining Graceland, his generosity and his expensive lifestyle, also put an enormous strain on him. So Elvis continued his strenuous schedules for money. Linda Thompson moved on in 1976, seeing Elvis in his irreversible condition. Ginger Alden would soon occupy the space as his next girlfriend, and remain till his end. In February and October 1976, RCA made alternate arrangements to record the now unenthusiastic Elvis within the comforts of his home in Graceland, as he was reluctant to record at the studio. His recording sessions with producer Felton Jarvis, generated two mediocre albums, ' From Elvis Presley Boulevard, Memphis, Tennessee' and ' Moody Blue', his last album released in July 1977. After a series of concert performances, on 26th June 1977 Elvis gave his concluding concert performance at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis. This event was also recorded for RCA's album and for a CBS television special titled ' Elvis in Concert' that was broadcast on 3rd October, after his death. Certainly it

shocked television viewers who saw his pitiable health in his final days, despite his strong voice. They all mourned the death of a superstar, who had successfully managed to destroyed himself. Elvis Presley's end came on a hot summer day of 16th August 1977 at Graceland. He had returned from the dentist late night and till the early morning hours, he was overlooking the preparation for his next subsequently scheduled tour. This next tour would begin from Portland, Maine on the next day. After spending some time with his family, and daughter Lisa who was visiting him, around 7. 00 am, Elvis then retired to his bedroom to rest before his flight late in the evening. By afternoon Elvis was found dead by his fiancée Ginger Alden in his bathroom. Elvis was holding the book, " The Scientific Search for the Face of Jesus." After all attempts to revive him failed, it was announced to the whole world that Elvis Presley had died of an erratic heartbeat at the relatively young age of 42 years. His funeral was held after two days and he was buried in Forest Hill Cemetery, beside his mother. But after his fans threatened to remove his body and prove that Elvis was faking his own death, Elvis and Gladys's bodies were laid to rest inside the Meditation garden at Graceland. Elvis was mourned by fans all over the world. But it was only years later that the official cause of Elvis Presley's death was attributed to an overdose of prescription drugs, that had caused a medical complication in his system. Legal actions were taken against his personal doctor George Nichopoulos, who was held responsible for prescribing pills in excess to Elvis. Later, he was exonerated of charges. Many controversies continued to erupt thereafter, but it proved extremely difficult for his enormous worldwide fans to take the news of his unexpected and sudden demise. They continued keeping their legendary icon alive with Elvis Presley conventions,

memorabilia, fan clubs and other charitable activities, many of them ritualistically continue till date in his memory.

Elvis Presley's legacy continues

" I like entertaining people. I really miss it."-Elvis Presley
Elvis Presley, the singer, worldwide actor and entertainer, is celebrated even today as an illustrious figure, who left a huge impact with his unbelievable contributions to popular cultures. He received several awards posthumously and has also been inducted into all three ' Halls of Fame' – Country, Rock and Roll and Gospel. On 7th June 1982, Graceland estate was opened as a tourist spot to the public. Million of visitors from all over the world come to see the house of the ' King', as he is still known as. Graceland estate is today a National Historic Park, which Elvis Presley's daughter, Lisa Marie inherited on her twenty-fifth birthday. Here, his heritage introduces Elvis Presley to a new generation of music lovers. Elvis Presley's philanthropic commitments are continued by Elvis Presley Charitable Foundation and his numerous fan clubs, who keep honouring his memory. So his name, music and image continues to re-live the ' King's' former glory. Elvis Presley, the American folk legend lives on forever in the hearts of his fans worldwide, as the legacy of his incredible success continues. Classic records and albums continue to be sold, his better movies continue to be watched, and his TV specials too continue to be rebroadcast as the 21st century rediscovers him. Over a billion Elvis Presley's records have been sold worldwide that are breaking records even in this digital age. What's more, sound engineers, remixers and research teams at BMG group, who now own RCA, have been working hard to convert Elvis Presley's songs from tapes into a digital format in order to

remix or remaster them, and present the name Elvis, his music and his image to today's audience, just as his folklore continues to flourish and attract his fans. Besides, his death didn't seem to take away his unending career, as twenty years after his death, on 16th August 1997, Elvis starred in a concert via video. Live on stage, his former band mates and the Memphis Symphony Orchestra joined him at the Mid-South Coliseum. Yet again in June 2002, Elvis Presley's song "A Little Less Conversation" was remixed for a Nike World Cup Commercial. Thus technology has kept Elvis Presley alive. So Elvis Presley continues to live his dreams even today, just as he had once said "When I was a child I was a dreamer. I read comic books, and I was the hero of the comic book. I saw movies and I was the hero in the movie. So every dream I have ever dreamed has come true a thousand times." Long Live the 'King'- Elvis Presley.