

# ELVIS PRESLEY: 1954-1961



TIME  
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MUSIC

*The*  
**ROCK'N'ROLL**  
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Digital Remaster

**ELVIS PRESLEY: 1954-1961**

- 1 **That's All Right** (1:57) 1954
- 2 **Heartbreak Hotel** (2:05) 1956
- 3 **Hound Dog** (2:14) 1956
- 4 **Love Me Tender** (2:41) 1956
- 5 **Don't Be Cruel** (2:00) 1956
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- 10 **(Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear** (1:46) 1957
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- 22 **Can't Help Falling in Love** (2:56) 1961

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TCD-106

MADE FROM MASTERS OWNED OR CONTROLLED BY BMG MUSIC

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**ROCK'N'ROLL**  
ERA

**ELVIS PRESLEY: 1954-1961**

COMPACT  
**disc**  
DIGITAL AUDIO

2RNR-06 TIME  
TCD-106 LIFE  
MONO MUSIC

100-106  
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- 1 That's All Right 2 Heartbreak Hotel 3 Hound Dog 4 Love Me Tender
- 5 Don't Be Cruel 6 All Shook Up 7 I Want You, I Need You, I Love You
- 8 Jailhouse Rock 9 Love Me 10 (Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear 11 Too Much
- 12 Hard Headed Woman 13 One Night 14 Wear My Ring around Your Neck
- 15 A Fool Such As I 16 Don't 17 A Big Hunk o' Love
- 18 It's Now or Never\* 19 Stuck on You\* 20 Are You Lonesome Tonight?\*
- 21 Little Sister\* 22 Can't Help Falling in Love\*

\* Stereo

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## ELVIS PRESLEY: 1954-1961

Elvis Aaron Presley, a Southern child of the Depression born in 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi, was a member of the first generation of Americans to grow up with radios, record players and jukeboxes as a part of everyday life. When he was a young boy, he sat for hours listening to the radio in the truck that his father drove for a grocery. At home, he heard *Grand Ole Opry* broadcasts, Jimmie Rodgers, the Blackwood Brothers and all manner of pop.

In 1948 the Presleys moved to Memphis, where Elvis began listening to WDIA, the first Southern black-operated radio station. Memphis was possessed by the blues in the late '40s and early '50s. At 706 Union Avenue, ex-radio announcer Sam Phillips had founded the Memphis Recording Service, which gave numerous Southern black musicians who had no place else to go an opportunity to record.

Presley's musical background, however, was not confined to radio and records. With his parents, Gladys and Vernon, Elvis attended the Pentecostal First Assembly of God Church, experiencing firsthand the theatrics of religious hysteria, and as a teenager he sought out the blues on Beale Street and in W. C. Handy Park. So it seemed inevitable that one day Elvis would wander into Sam Phillips' studio, the perfect home for a young man surrounded by Southern sounds gone electric.

The Memphis Recording Service was a sideline of Phillips' record company, Sun, which cut blues, raw hillbilly and some gospel sides. It was a make-your-own-record service, and in the summer of 1953, taking time off from his job driving a van for the Crown Electric Co., Presley did just that, recording two songs popularized by the Ink Spots, purportedly as a gift for his mother. In January 1954, he returned to the studio to see if Phillips might be interested in recording him for

Sun, though it was not until April that Sam invited him to make a demo record. "If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel," Marion Keisker, Phillips' secretary, recalls her boss saying, "I could make a billion dollars."

Phillips put Elvis in touch with two members of a local country act, guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black. The three rehearsed for months, nearly every afternoon and evening after work, trying to shape a sound that would cross the barriers of country, blues, pop and gospel. They built that sound in the studio, analyzing playbacks with Phillips' help. And, fooling around between takes, they found something.

On the evening of July 5, 1954, Elvis Presley made his first commercial recording, a seemingly spontaneous interpretation of a blues, **That's All Right**, originally cut by Mississippi bluesman Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. It remains a bold first step: an attempt to assimilate all of American music in a single outburst disguised as a casual gesture. Almost immediately, Memphis disc jockey Dewey Phillips (no relation to Sam) aired the Sun single, spinning the record 14 times in a row, while forgoing its country flip side, an up-tempo version of Bill Monroe's *Blue Moon of Kentucky*.

Sun released four more Presley singles, which were largely rejected by white disc jockeys as too bluesy and by black disc jockeys as too country. Teenagers, however, flocked to see "the Hillbilly Cat," whose every quiver caused excitement. Elvis' records sold modestly, but his image was still too crude and in need of focus.

In the summer of 1955, Colonel Tom Parker, the former manager of Eddy Arnold and Hank Snow, began booking Presley. At that point, Phillips must have known that Sun, a haven for such rockabilly artists as Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins, would soon lose

its chief asset. By November, Parker had swung a deal with RCA to purchase Elvis' contract and previous Sun recordings for the princely sum of \$35,000. RCA was a good bet for Elvis and the Colonel—it was the biggest record label in America, with heavy connections to TV and the movies.

On January 10 and 11, 1956, Presley recorded his first songs for RCA in Nashville. In addition to Moore and Black, the backup band included D. J. Fontana on drums, Floyd Cramer on piano, Chet Atkins on second guitar, and the Jordanaires on vocals. From these sessions, **Heartbreak Hotel**, a respectable attempt to re-create the Sun sound, became Presley's first RCA single; it stayed at No. 1 on *Billboard's* charts for eight weeks. Implicit in the recording was sexual melodrama—just what Elvis needed to help define his image. On January 28, 1956, Elvis debuted *Heartbreak Hotel* to a TV audience via *The Dorsey Brothers Stage Show*. His hip-shaking moves undoubtedly shocked many viewers, but it was not until he performed **Hound Dog** on *The Milton Berle Show* in June that "Elvis the Pelvis" became a public epithet.

Written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, and first recorded in 1953 by Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, *Hound Dog* presents Elvis at his most savage. It took almost 30 takes to get the song right, its arrangement copied not from Thornton but from a Vegas lounge act, Freddie Bell and the Bellboys. (The flip side, **Don't Be Cruel**, was a perfect complement, an aching plea for reconciliation; the record sold over nine million copies.) As Presley performed *Hound Dog* on television, there were attempts to civilize the young barbarian—on *The Steve Allen Show*, he crooned to a basset hound; on *Ed Sullivan*, America viewed him only from the waist up.

Because Elvis had become so popular as a television personality, Colonel Parker was able to swing a major

*Elvis gets a royal welcome from his hometown Memphis fans in 1956, as screaming teen-age girls reach out to touch the King.*





deal for him in Hollywood. Presley made four films before his induction into the Army in 1958—*Love Me Tender*, *Loving You*, *Jailhouse Rock* and *King Creole*. Although he was not much of an actor, these films gave Elvis the opportunity to clean up his bad-boy image. Now a movie star doing his job, Presley tried to transcend the garbage engulfing him: bad songs, inept film dialogue and merchandise hustled by the Colonel.

Elvis cut most of his classic material between 1956 and 1961. These songs came from various sources and used a range of styles. **It's Now or Never** (1960), based on the Italian song *O Sole Mio*, is an example of Presley as balladeer, striving for the phrasing of Dean Martin. For fast, intense rock 'n' roll, **Jailhouse Rock** (1957) is hard to beat. Elvis was also quite capable of an affected style; consider **(Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear** (1957) or **Wear My Ring around Your Neck** (1958), both huge hits but songs that border on self-parody.

Yet for every Tin Pan Alley ballad like **Are You Lonesome Tonight?** (1960), Elvis could tear into a rhythm-and-blues scorcher like **One Night** (1958), recorded originally by Smiley Lewis as *One Night of Sin*, or revive his rockabilly fervor with a song like **A Big Hunk o' Love** (1959). Sometimes, if he was lucky, Presley received strong material by talented songwriters, such as **Little Sister** (1961), written by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman. More often, as with **Love Me Tender** (1956), Elvis would have to rise above pure sentimentality. He accomplished this—it seems now almost without effort—because his extraordinary voice could move between reverie and action, tradition and revolt, tenderness and fury.

As the hits accumulated, as the films began to blend, Elvis Presley, pampered and spoiled by his mother since birth, got swallowed up by his own legend in his pursuit of the American Dream. He recorded some fine

R & B material in the early '60s, though, not surprisingly, some of the best recordings he made during the rush of success were of gospel songs, the music he loved the most.

John Lennon once said, "Before there was Elvis, there was nothing," but not even Presley could compete with Beatlemania. He was a singer, not a songwriter, a soloist in an era that was increasingly group-oriented. So he slipped into semiretirement at his Memphis mansion, Graceland, releasing tepid but unfailingly popular sound-track albums.

However, Elvis fought back with two grand strokes: a 1968 NBC special (and its rehearsal music), in which the black-leathered Memphian returned to the casual style of his early career; and two sessions at American Sound Studios during the winter of 1969—his first sessions in Memphis since Sun—which yielded 35 recordings. After that, there was Vegas, tabloid tales and death.

Since that August day in 1977, there have been two versions of Elvis' story. One is that he was an authentic folk artist who became obsessed by the demons of success and, consequently, failed in his art; the other, that he was a prophet who rarely hit a bad note. In truth Elvis Presley was merely human, and, as with another folk hero, Huck Finn, America could never completely "civilize" him. Graceland, which had been used as a church prior to his purchase of it, became Elvis' tomb. And America still mourns.

—Robert Hull





## DISCOGRAPHY

\* Indicates highest Billboard chart position

1. **That's All Right** (1:57) *Music and lyrics by Arthur Crudup. Recorded July 5, 1954, Memphis. Original issue: Sun 209. Did not chart.*
2. **Heartbreak Hotel** (2:05) *Music and lyrics by Mae Boren Axton, Tommy Durden and Elvis Presley. Recorded January 10, 1956, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 8420. No. 1\**
3. **Hound Dog** (2:14) *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Recorded July 2, 1956, New York. Original issue: RCA 6604. No. 2\**
4. **Love Me Tender** (2:41) *Music and lyrics by Vera Matson and Elvis Presley. Recorded August 1956, Hollywood, Calif., for the film Love Me Tender. Original issue: RCA 6643. No. 1\**
5. **Don't Be Cruel** (2:00) *Music and lyrics by Otis Blackwell and Elvis Presley. Recorded July 2, 1956, New York. Original issue: RCA 6604. No. 1\**
6. **All Shook Up** (1:55) *Music and lyrics by Otis Blackwell and Elvis Presley. Recorded January 12, 1957, Hollywood. Original issue: RCA 6870. No. 1\**
7. **I Want You, I Need You, I Love You** (2:37) *Music by Ira Kostloff, lyrics by Maurice Myzels. Recorded April 11, 1956, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 6540. No. 3\**
8. **Jailhouse Rock** (2:25) *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Recorded May 1957, Hollywood, for the film Jailhouse Rock. Original issue: RCA 7035. No. 1\**
9. **Love Me** (2:42) *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Recorded September 1, 1956, Hollywood. Original issue: RCA EPA 992. No. 6\**
10. **(Let Me Be Your) Teddy Bear** (1:46) *Music and lyrics by Kai Mann and Bernie Lowe. Recorded February or March 1957, Hollywood, for the film Loving You. Original issue: RCA 7000. No. 1\**
11. **Too Much** (2:31) *Music and lyrics by Bernard Weinman. Recorded September 2, 1956, Hollywood. Original issue: RCA 6800. No. 2\**
12. **Hard Headed Woman** (1:52) *Music and lyrics by Claude De Metzuis. Recorded January 1958, Nashville, for the film King Creole. Original issue: RCA 7280. No. 2\**
13. **One Night** (2:31) *Music and lyrics by Pearl King and Dave Bartholomew. Recorded February 23, 1957, Hollywood. Original issue: RCA 7410. No. 4\**
14. **Wear My Ring around Your Neck** (2:14) *Music and lyrics by Russell Moody and Bert Carroll. Recorded February 1, 1958, Hollywood. Original issue: RCA 7240. No. 3\**
15. **A Fool Such As I** (2:18) *Music and lyrics by Bill Trader. Recorded June 10, 1958, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 7506. No. 2\**
16. **Don't** (2:45) *Music and lyrics by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. Recorded September 6, 1957, Hollywood. Original issue: RCA 7150. No. 1\**
17. **A Big Hunk o' Love** (2:10) *Music and lyrics by Aaron Schroeder and Sid Wyche. Recorded June 10, 1958, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 7600. No. 1\**
18. **It's Now or Never** (3:11) *Music and lyrics by Wally Gold and Aaron Schroeder. Recorded April 3, 1960, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 7777. No. 1\**
19. **Stuck on You** (2:18) *Music and lyrics by J. Leslie McFarland and Aaron Schroeder. Recorded March 21, 1960, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 7740. No. 1\**
20. **Are You Lonesome Tonight?** (3:02) *Music and lyrics by Lou Handman and Roy Turk. Recorded April 4, 1960, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 7810. No. 1\**
21. **Little Sister** (2:27) *Music and lyrics by Mort Shuman and Doc Pomus. Recorded June 26, 1961, Nashville. Original issue: RCA 7908. No. 5\**
22. **Can't Help Falling in Love** (2:56) *Music and lyrics by Luigi Creatore, Hugo Peretti and George Weiss. Recorded March 21-23, 1961, Hollywood, for the film Blue Hawaii. Original issue: RCA 7968. No. 2\**

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**Elvis Presley** was produced by Time-Life Music in cooperation with BMG Music. Assembly, remastering and digital conversion by BMG Studios, New York.

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Time-Life Music wishes to thank William L. Schurk of the Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, for providing valuable reference material.

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