

Forever Elvis

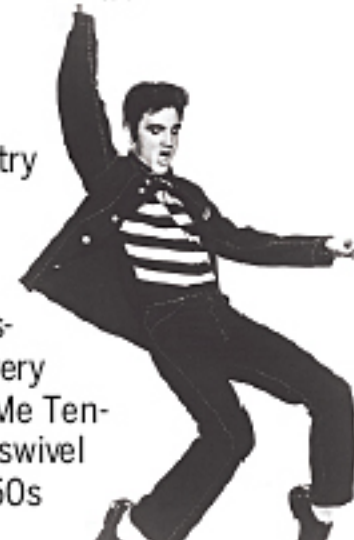
If the King of Rock 'n' Roll were here today . . .

BY CARLA MEYER
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Had he lived, Elvis Presley would be 75 on Friday. To mark the occasion, Graceland will offer special tours, the Smithsonian Institution will open an exhibit of Elvis-related photographs and paintings, and the Presley memorabilia machine, which according to Forbes.com amassed \$55 million last year, will keep churning. ■ The marketability of Elvis' image has never been in doubt since his death in 1977, but the image itself has been diminished by a surfeit of white polyester, black velvet and endless tchotchkes. ■ In honor of the King's birthday, we take a look at his true legacy – and what might have happened had Elvis made it to his 75th year.

He shook it all up

Bridging gospel, blues and country and the gap between African American-identified music and the white audience, Elvis brought rock 'n' roll to the masses. In doing so, he influenced every rock subgenre to follow ("Love Me Tender" = pure emo). ■ With a hip swivel that challenged buttoned-up 1950s mores, he also paved the way for countless black-leather-clad rock front-men, from Jim Morrison to Bono to 2009 "American Idol" runner-up Adam Lambert. Had he seen Lambert's performance at the American Music Awards, the Southern Baptist-raised Elvis might have shot up his television. ■ Yet there's no question that he opened the door for Lambert – from the jet-black hair to the intentional provocation.



All those Elvis tchotchkes

Due to a liberal approach to licensing his image – and to those entrepreneurs who don't need no stinkin' official sanction – searches on eBay and Amazon.com yield thousands upon thousands of Elvis-related knickknacks. ■ Fans can wear the King on their fingers (with decorative Presley nail decals), watch his legs mark the hour and minute on a "swinging clock" or, through the Mattel action figure depicting Elvis during his Army stint, re-enact the King's time kicking around Germany and wooing Priscilla. All this paraphernalia, combined with the timing of Elvis' death right at the apex of his white-suited flamboyance, can obscure his great artistry.

Call The Bee's Carla Meyer, (916) 321-1118. Bee staff researcher Sheila A. Kern contributed to this report.



Viva! Viva Las Vegas!

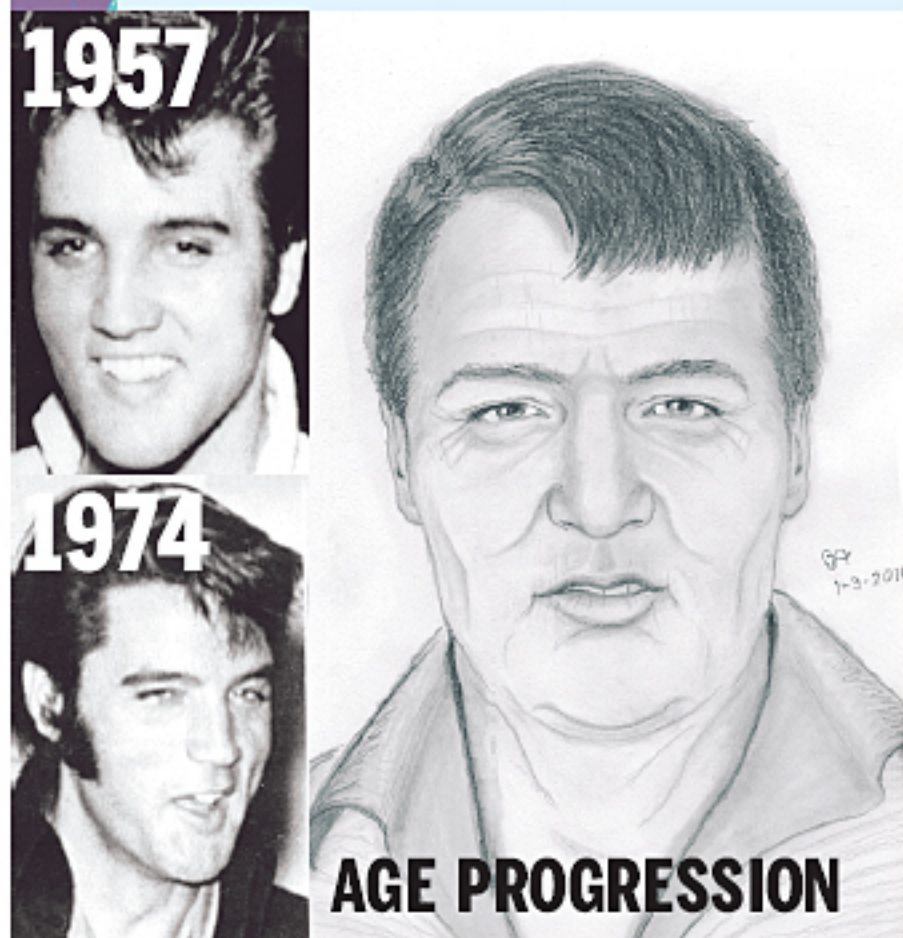
No disrespect to the Mafia, but Elvis made Las Vegas, starting with the 1964 film "Viva Las Vegas," which paired Elvis with Ann-Margret, his female counterpart in sexy, kinetic magnetism. ■ Elvis helped transform Vegas' image from a haven for the Rat Pack and for made men into a place that Middle Americans could enjoy. Elvis cemented the deal with hundreds of Vegas shows in the 1970s. ■ He still accounts for roughly 7 percent of all employment in the city, having inspired the mutton-chopped impersonators who work casino stages, perform quickie marriages and wield sponges at local car washes. ■ In February, Elvis will receive literally high praise from the Cirque du Soleil when it unveils its tribute show "Viva Elvis" at the Aria Hotel.



To do an age progression:

Elvis' crooked smile is important to keep, as is the flip in his bangs. With his fame and fortune, if he had lived to be 75 years old, I am sure he would have had some plastic surgery. With that in mind, I was gentle in adding facial lines. ■ As for his hair, most male entertainers do not let their hair go gray or bald. They would keep their hair colored or wear a hairpiece. His hairline would have receded on the sides, so I showed that change in the sketch. The flip to his bangs is a feature he has kept through the years, so most likely he would keep it the same out of habit. ■ Most of the pictures I saw of him showed him wearing a collared shirt, which is why there is one in the sketch. I left out the glasses. They were a 1970s fashion accessory. ■ He was taking prescription drugs the last few years of his life and put on a significant amount of weight, but I doubt that with all his money he would let his outward appearance diminish.

– Barbara Anderson, a forensic artist and now a forensic photographer with the federal government



What would Elvis be doing?

Jerry Lee Lewis (far right), Little Richard (right) and Chuck Berry (top), all rock 'n' roll pioneers, still perform at least semi-regularly. ■ It's not out of the question to think that if he had lived past age 42, Elvis might still be shaking it to "Hound Dog" on stage. Or he could have shed the jumpsuits and reinvented himself. ■ Like Johnny Cash, Elvis is a perennially hip icon for younger musicians. He could have experienced a senior-years musical resurgence under the guidance of a hot producer such as Rick Rubin, who worked with Cash, or Jay-Z, while also taking featured roles as charming villains in Quentin Tarantino films.

