



Artist: Elvis Presley

Album: 50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong, Elvis' Gold Records Volume 2

Producer: Steve Sholes

Label: RCA Victor

Recorded: Feb 23, 1957; Sept 6, 1957; Feb 1, 1958; June 10-11, 1958

Release Date: November 13, 1959

Of all the Elvis albums released by RCA, what makes his 1959 *50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong* release so noteworthy? This album of hit singles represents a pivotal point in Elvis' career and musical history. First, a portion of this album was recorded at RCA Radio Recorders in Hollywood, while other tracks were

recorded at the newly built RCA Studio B in Nashville. The recording sessions for this album at Radio Recorders are distinct in terms of sound and history, featuring band members Scotty Moore (guitar) and Bill Black (bass). The great Scotty Moore and Bill Black were the only two members with Elvis at the start of his Sun Label musical career in 1954 Memphis and continued throughout the RCA label transition until 1958. But the recording sessions for this album at Nashville (and many future sessions) feature new band members. This was also the last album recorded and released in the 1950s, emanating a distinct sound of that era and fittingly closed out the decade. Within the Elvis catalog, there is a shift in sound from his 1950s albums vs. 1960s, coinciding with the shift in tastes and culture. The raw edge that Elvis' vocals frequently exhibit on this album are no longer evident after his return from US Army service in 1960. This album was also the last Elvis album recorded in full mono, as his first album back from the army in 1960 *Elvis Is Back!* was recorded in full stereo (all future Elvis mono albums would be fold downs from the stereo recording to my knowledge). Overall, this album is often forgotten and an underrated gem, having a special place in the Elvis canon.

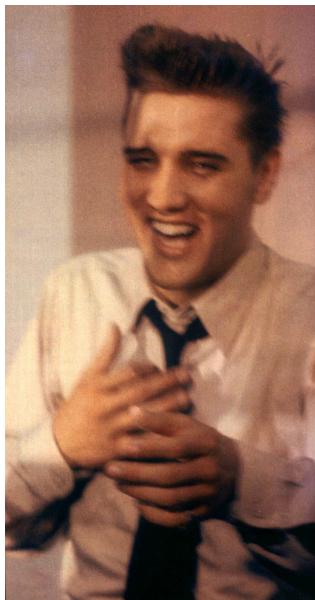
To keep the fans – and RCA – happy while Elvis served in the US Army, Colonel Tom Parker's (Elvis' manager) 1959 Christmas present to the world was Volume II of *Elvis' Golden Records*, today best remembered for the outfit Elvis sported on the cover. The legendary gold suit – made by Nudie's of Hollywood – may have been unforgettable, but it actually had a very short life. Elvis noted how incredibly uncomfortable it was to perform in, while the Colonel fretted because expensive flecks of gold paint flaked off every time Elvis flexed his legs. For more on the *50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong* album title, see the Vinyl Release section of this review.



The famed gold Nudie's of Hollywood suit featured on the album cover

Researching this album and the life of Elvis was like stepping back in time. The release of this album, seen in its proper historical context, is an indicator of just how bright Elvis Presley's star power shined in the late '50s. His first hits collection (*Elvis' Golden Records*) was issued in March 1958, on the eve of his initial service in the Army; this album would be Elvis' second hits collection album released, and the first

"volume two" greatest-hits album EVER issued for a rock & roll star. Anyone who believes Elvis was more tame during his first years at RCA will find revelation in "A Big Hunk of Love," "I Need Your Love Tonight," and "I Got Stung," some of the greatest pieces of hard rock & roll that the King ever released. Ironically, they were all recorded in the midst of Elvis' stay in the Army, in a hastily arranged session in Nashville during June 1958, as we will see.



Elvis between takes from the June 1958 Nashville Recording Session

For this album release, Elvis' voice was becoming one of the finest instruments in rock & roll - his idolization of Dean Martin and other popular singers were paying off with a degree of control and articulation that many rivals could only envy, and it's all laid out here on what are still some pretty hard-rocking sides. But the gospel-style ballads on the album also display Elvis' overlooked versatility both as a musician and performer.

In terms of musical history and the ever-evolving sound of rock 'n' roll, this album would be one of the last great rock albums that defined the sound of the 1950s and serves as a homage to the music that was. Patrick Humphries notes that by the time of this release, "Elvis was already out of sight, far away in Germany doing his military service – but back home in America, things were fast getting out of control in the rock 'n' roll firmament...There was no denying the fact that with Elvis away, rock 'n' roll had entered the doldrums – and that lethargy would continue to dog it until the breakthrough of the

Beatles half a decade later. Of course, the period between Elvis' army service and the outbreak of Beatlemania did contain some great one-off singles – courtesy of Phil Spector and Berry Gordy to name but two; but the threat that rock 'n' roll had posed since Elvis' breakthrough in 1956 now seemed strangely eviscerated. It became clear that Elvis' army haircut had taken away more than just his famous sideburns. In the two years during which Elvis had been away on duty, a whole host of lesser talents had plugged the gap. Rock 'n' roll had been further emasculated by Chuck Berry's imprisonment in 1959. Buddy Holly had established himself as one of the prime movers of rock 'n' roll. Buddy had been an enthusiastic member of the audience when Elvis had breezed through Lubbock, Texas just four years before, but by the age of 21 the myopic Holly had enjoyed big hits of his own, with classics like "Oh Boy," "Rave On," "That'll Be The Day," and "Peggy Sue" to his name. As the 50s drew to an end his pioneering use of strings on "It Doesn't Matter Anymore" would suggest something of a new direction for rock 'n' roll; but by then Buddy himself was already gone, killed in a plane crash on Feb. 3, 1959, along with the Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens. In 1960, a car crash took the life of Eddie Cochran and injured Gene Vincent. Little Richard virtually disappeared from the music scene and limelight for religion. A scandal broke out when the public discovered Jerry Lee Lewis married his 14 year-old cousin. The sound of rock 'n' roll from the 50s would be no more, as new artists named Dylan, McCartney, Lennon, Jagger would take over the airwaves. Motown would be introduced as well. Just five months after Elvis flew home from Germany in March 1960, the Beatles made their first appearance in Hamburg. In the famous lyrics of Bob Dylan, "The Times They Were A Changin."

From Tupelo to Memphis

The greatness of Elvis Aaron Presley, he was a once in a lifetime talent: Singer, Entertainer, Movie Star, Cultural Icon. Elvis never fit neatly into any boundaries or genres – he was just different in every sense of the word. And that was why Sam Phillips of Sun Records held onto this eager kid from Tupelo, Mississippi with such persistence in 1953 - 1954, even though he couldn't figure out what made Elvis so unique and how to harness his talent.



Born January 8, 1935 in Tupelo, MS, Elvis was born an only child, as his twin brother died as a stillborn during birth (which contributed to how close and protective Elvis' relationship was with his mother). Elvis biographer extraordinaire Ernst Jorgensen notes how the music Elvis eventually recorded was already a part of his life from day one: "It was in the churches, in the juke joints, on street corner, on the radio, where friends gathered. All of the elements Elvis would eventually incorporate into his music and transform them, were already part of the lifeblood of East Tupelo, Mississippi, and of the American South. As a young child and even into last years, nothing meant more to Elvis than the gospel music of the church. But Elvis also loved country & western, rhythm & blues, the current pop music of Dean Martin, Bing Crosby, and even opera style of Mario Lanza. [All throughout Elvis' life], in both private and professionally, he would hum, sing, play and record songs dredged up from his musical memory, as if to remind himself and everyone around him of where it had all come from."

As a musician, Elvis was largely self-taught - always hanging around the neighborhood and local radio stations in hopes of picking up some vocal and guitar tips. While in Tupelo, he lingered around WELO, Tupelo's radio station and when his family moved to Memphis in 1948, he would hang around Beale Street (THE place for the Blues), and the local radio station that featured "race records" (later called R&B). As a teenager in Memphis, Elvis would begin to create his image and signature dress code that mimicked the current honkytonk stars, standing out among his classmates. He would often be seen hanging around town, carrying his guitar and singing in hopes of being recognized. Though later known for his outlandish rock arrangements for the day, Elvis only sung ballads while growing up. Ironically, Elvis stated that he never "sung a fast song" until his first official recording session with Sun Records. Though tenacious, Elvis was known for his restrained approach toward singing. Yet he was determined for success: "to many he seemed like a loner, but he was always hanging around, watching, listening – waiting to make his move."



Sam Phillips ran the Sun record label at the Phillips Recording Studio in Memphis, tapping into the exploding R&B scene of the south. As the musical tastes slowly began to change from the big band era following World War II, Phillips was looking to capitalize on the new blues and rock 'n' roll revolution. The Sun studio had a service facility where anyone could make a two-sided acetate record for \$8.25. During one of these private sessions in the summer of 1953, Elvis recorded "My Happiness" and "That's When Your Heartaches Begin." After listening to Elvis during the private session, Marion Keiser who worked for Phillips made a note: "Good ballad singer. Hold." Nothing came of that opportunity, and in January 1954 Elvis made another acetate record, singing "I'll Never Stand in Your Way" and "It Wouldn't Be The Same Without You." Jorgensen summarizes this session as

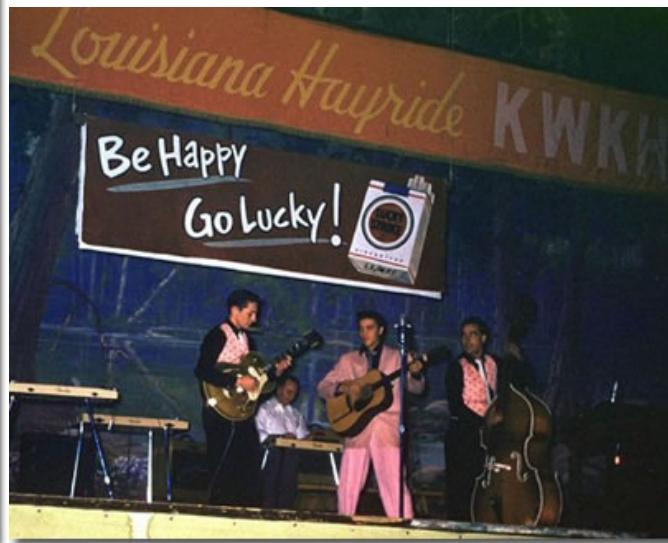
the following: "the plaintive, insecure but strangely passionate voice seemed to hold no commercial promise whatsoever." Nothing happened until June 26, 1954, when Elvis got a call from Phillips that he may have some ballad ideas for him. Despite all his efforts, Elvis couldn't make the ballads work.

Phillips allowed him to keep singing whatever songs he knew, trying to figure out what could work for the young aspiring singer. Phillips knew there was something special about this kid, and it all came together about 10 days later. Phillips suggested that Winfeld Scott "Scotty" Moore, a young guitar player who also hung around the recording studio, connect with the young ballad singer to come up with something for a recording session. Without any more instructions, Scotty, bass player Bill Black and Elvis met the following Sunday (since everyone had regular jobs during the week) at Scotty's house and went through all the songs Elvis knew. Scotty Moore was the serious one in the group, with Elvis and Bill Black more laid back and often clowning around. During that first Sunday meeting, the thing that impressed Scotty and Bill was Elvis' outrageous appearance: "Elvis arrived dressed in a black shirt, pink pants with a black stripe, white shoes, and a slick hairdo, all sideburns and ducktail." The next night (Monday), the band went to rehearse at the studio.

That fateful evening on Monday July 5th/6th 1954 was when the legend of Elvis really took shape and musical history was made. With the group (Elvis, Scotty, and Bill) in the recording studio, initially there wasn't anything special. But toward the end of the evening, Phillips heard something magical coming over the monitor in the control room. Late into the evening, Elvis and Bill were fooling around with the famous blues song "That's All Right" by Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup. The more reserved Scotty Moore jumped in quickly on guitar, and then Phillips knew he found something completely original, creative, and innovative. Phillips stopped them in mid-verse, had them start over, and pressed RECORD on the tape machine. As Jorgensen highlights, "relaxed and loose, Elvis injected a bright, breezy, more melodic feel into the traditional blues, and with only two guitars plus the slap of Bill's bass, a sound came through that got Sam's eyes dancing. Suddenly, they were making a record." Later that night, they then made the perfect B-side to "That's All Right;" they converted the country waltz style classic "Blue Moon of Kentucky" into a rhythm & blues song by changing it to an upbeat tempo and converting it from 3/4 to 4/4 time. Phillips rushed the record to the hippest DJ in Memphis, Dewey Phillips (no relation), and immediately after playing it, the station switchboard was lighting up. The sound was fresh, unlike anything being played, and Elvis' musical career would never be the same.



Scotty, Elvis, Bill: Sept. 4, 1954



Scotty, Elvis, Bill playing the Louisiana Hayride: Jan. 22, 1955

Phillips continued to let Elvis tinker with some ballads, such as the Rodgers & Hart Blue Moon, which Elvis turned into an eerie blues rendition by eliminating the cheerful verses and chorus. But Phillips knew the unique magic of Elvis of that time period lie in the up-tempo reworking of older R&B numbers with stronger and more emphatic beats. And this applied not just for Elvis, but for the other

band members as well. Phillips was always trying to get Scotty Moore away from playing like his idol, Chet Atkins, from a pretty fingerpicking style to more gutsier guitar licks and styles.



Feb. 3, 1955 Sun Recording Sessions: Elvis, Bill, Scotty, & Sam Phillips

The “Blue Moon Boys” (as the locals used to refer to the Elvis, Moore, & Black band) toured throughout the South, mainly Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas. While they continued to have great success with such hits as “Shake, Rattle & Roll,” “I Got A Woman,” and “Baby Let’s Play House,” the Sun label’s limited financial base and distribution made it hard to gain national exposure.

From Sun to RCA

At a live show in Houston, Elvis caught the eye of music manager “Colonel” Thomas Parker, who soon began adding Elvis to more headline bookings and extensive radio airplay. Parker then started the early negotiations of getting Elvis on a major/national record label. Parker began talks with RCA’s country & western A&R man, Steve Sholes in February 1955. Sholes would eventually produce Elvis’ RCA material, including this album *50,000,00 Elvis Fans Can’t Be Wrong*. Then on May 16, 1955 at the Mosque Theater in Richmond, Virginia, two RCA reps were at a show to support their new RCA hopeful, Jimmie Rodgers Snow. And when Elvis came on stage, the two RCA executives (Brad McCuen & Chick Crumpacker) were in shock: “The RCA pair’s loyalty to the already-signed Jimmie Rodgers Snow couldn’t obscure the facts: Elvis blew away not only Jimmie, but everyone else on the show. Crumpacker (RCA promotions manager) didn’t quite believe what he was seeing: a slicked-up country-rhythm hybrid, so raw he spit out his chewing gum and tossed it into the audience. Crumpacker could have done without that, but the music stayed with him. He bought copies of the four Sun singles the boy had made and took them back to his boss, Steve Sholes.”

The wild live performances that Elvis conducted frequently led to outrageous behavior. After a highly publicized riot in Jacksonville, Florida on May 13, 1955 where a crowd of 14,000 stormed backstage ripping apart Elvis’ clothes (witnesses said the girls went crazy when Elvis said “Girls, I’ll see you backstage), Colonel Parker was convinced of Elvis’ unsurpassed popularity.

Meanwhile, Sam Phillips made intentional efforts to reach racially diverse audiences with Elvis’ Sun recordings. For example, the A-side “Baby Let’s Play House” was completely different to the B-sided “I’m Left, You’re Right, She’s Gone.” This was Sam Phillips attempt to thread the racial needle, with “I’m Right...” having a bright melodic attractiveness and winning huge country airplay compared to the highly emotionally charged up “Baby Let’s Play House.” Eventually, exclusive booking rights were given to Colonel Parker and talks with RCA became more aggressive. But Phillips was unwilling to sell Elvis’ contract; Phillips tried his best, adding percussion, steel guitar, and piano to the trio and tried other singles along the way. But eventually Colonel Parker obtained exclusive rights (with ongoing disputes with Sun promoter Bob Neal) to negotiate all future contracts, promising to steer Presley’s career toward more national recognition with a lucrative record deal, national television, and even a shot at the movies. As Sun’s limited distribution and promotion were hampering Elvis’ national success, Phillips and Neal didn’t stand much of a chance.

During a Sun recording session in Memphis on a November night in 1955, Elvis went to talk with Sam Phillips in the control room for about 30 minutes. Elvis came back out and told the band the recording session was over. Due to financial struggles, Phillips had just given Colonel Parker an option to sell Elvis' contract to another record label. Jorgensen notes, "Elvis' success had put Sun in a bind: It took a lot of cash to keep product flowing, and Phillips was getting strapped. At the same time Phillips was in need of funds to finance the new WHER radio station he was opening in the brand-new Holiday Inn downtown. The Colonel, meanwhile, had spent the recent weeks in constant talks and negotiations with both Phillips and RCA C&W head Steve Sholes. Colonel Parker didn't want the release of a new single to jeopardize the RCA deal he'd just arranged. If Elvis cut a new Sun record that broke through on the national level, Phillips' asking price for Elvis' contract might go through the roof – and the Colonel might get cut out of the picture altogether. Phillips was already asking an astronomical \$40,000 despite the fact that every record company Parker approached had balked at paying \$10,000 - \$25,000 for Presley. Now, against all odds, the Colonel and Bob Neal had convinced Sam [Phillips] to give them the option they needed. The Colonel had 2 weeks to come up with the money. Parker had already put down \$5,000 of his own, which he'd lose if he failed to finish the deal. But he was bent on success, and suddenly everything seemed to be going his way."



November 21, 1955: RCA contract at Sun studios is officially signed. From left to right: Bob Neal, Sam Phillips, Coleman Tilly, Elvis, & Colonel Parker

With just three days left on the two-week window, Parker got financial support from the Aberbach Brothers (owners of the Hill & Range song-publishing company) in exchange for co-publishing rights to Elvis, which finally made the RCA deal possible. On November 15, the deal was finalized, and on November 21, all parties gathered at the Sun studio to sign and make it all official. Elvis was now headed for stardom.

From mid-November 1955 to Elvis' first RCA recording session on January 10th 1956 (which he cut "I've Got A Woman," "Heartbreak Hotel, and "Money Honey"), RCA wasted no time trying to cash in on their huge financial undertaking with this budding star. An aggressive campaign included sending out more than 4,000 promo records to every A-list pop and C&W radio station, running non-stop full page adds and publicity stories, and having a frenetic touring and television schedule. Elvis' RCA recording sessions were often an eclectic mix, featuring isolated singles spanning different albums and movies over the next four years prior to his departure for the army. Prior to the release of this greatest hits album of hit singles, RCA would release numerous 45 RPM singles and many other albums and compilation LPs at a feverish pace: *Elvis Presley*, *Elvis*, *Loving You*, *Elvis' Christmas Album*, *Elvis' Golden Records*, *King Creole*, *For LP Fans Only*, and *Date With Elvis*. Which brings us to the recording sessions for this album, beginning in February of 1957: *50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong*, *Elvis' Gold Records Vol. 2*.

Of significant relevance to this album, Elvis would officially enter the army on March 24, 1958, with a two-year obligation scheduled to end on March 24, 1960 (though Elvis was discharged 19 days early on March 5, 1960). In the middle of his service, during a 2-week temporary leave in June 1958, Elvis recorded his last songs in the iconic 1950s. The final 4 tracks for this album were recorded during that hastily arranged one-evening session in Nashville – which is also why Elvis recorded the songs wearing his army uniform (see pictures below). After the Nashville session, on June 14, Elvis would return to Fort Hood for ten weeks of advanced tank training. In October 1958, he would ship out for Germany, to begin his 18-month army overseas duty. Elvis' first greatest hits collection (*Elvis' Golden Records*) was released in March 1958, on the eve of his going into the army. At this time in music history, no other rock n' roll star had ever issued a "Volume Two" greatest hits collection, displaying to the casual listener just how big a star Elvis Presley had become in only a couple of years.

Being a compilation of Elvis' greatest singles, the tracks for this album were recorded during different time periods and at two different recording studios, evident with the change in sound quality when listening to record. Six of the ten tracks were recorded for RCA at Radio Recorders in Hollywood, California. On Feb. 23, 1957 Elvis recorded "I Beg of You" and "One Night" in addition with other tracks for his *Loving You* album. "My Wish Came True" and "Don't" were recorded later that year on Sept. 6, 1957, which were recorded during the same sessions as the majority of tracks for *Elvis' Christmas album*. On Feb 21, 1958 Elvis recorded "Wear My Ring Around Your Neck," "Doncha' Think It's Time," and did many more takes of "My Wish Came True" from the earlier sessions. The final four tracks of the album were recorded in RCA's Studio B in Nashville, Tennessee ("I Need Your Love Tonight," "A Fool Such As I," "A Big Hunk O' Love," and "I Got Stung"). Many takes were done on each song, usually around twenty takes. Elvis would always come to the studio prepared, having already memorized the lyrics and generally what he wanted to do with each song. But each take would be slightly different – Elvis would refine and tweak his performances until he got what he wanted, even if it took all day or all night, and sometimes returning to the studio months later if he wasn't satisfied.



Studio Sessions for RCA Feb 23-24, 1957: Radio Recorders Hollywood

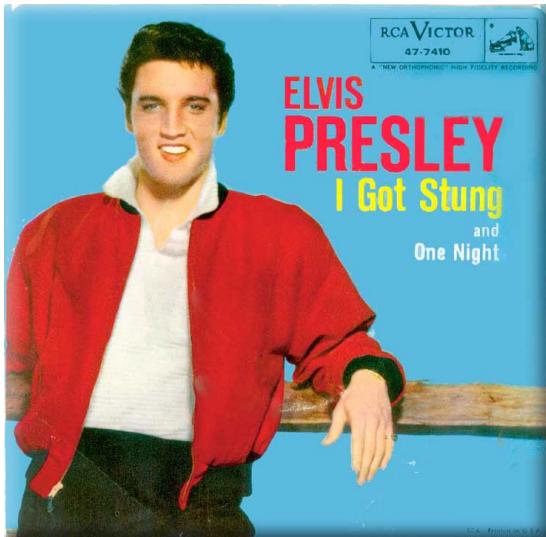
Left: Elvis laughing during the Feb 23rd Recording Sessions

A&R/Producer: Steve Sholes
Engineer: Thorne Nogar
Guitar: Scotty Moore & Elvis Presley
Bass: Bill Black
Drums: DJ Fontana
Piano: Dudley Brooks
Vocals: The Jordanaires, Elvis Presley

2/23/57 10am-2pm, 3-6pm: *Don't Leave Me Now, I Beg of You, One Night, True Love, I Need You So* **2/24/57 2-5pm:** *Loving You, When It Rains It Really Pours*

"One Night" was an R&B hit for Smiley Lewis song from 1956 that had considerably racier lyrics than this later version by Elvis. Elvis had actually recorded this sexy blues single earlier during the "Loving You" soundstage sessions on January 18th. However, it was never intended to be in the *Loving You* film due to its suggestive lyrics. Since executives decided that Elvis' version would not be released as it was, Elvis played around with it and rerecorded "One Night" with tamer lyrics during these February 23rd RCA sessions at Radio Recorders. Mike Eder notes, "Elvis is miked high in the mix, playing in tandem with Scotty Moore's sharp electric lead. Perhaps to make up for the words being tamer than

usual, Elvis sings his tail off. [But] you can tell sex is on his brain, and there is no element of humor to soften the lust driving his approach." It's worthy to note that, though the Jordanaires were used on all other songs during this recording session, they were left out of this song. Since the Jordanaires usually helped smooth out some of the visceral edge of Elvis' voice, leaving them off this raw-sounding track was a clever move.



safely tucked away in the Army, but "One Night" quickly disproved any suggestion that his music had been similarly calmed. The heavily electrified 12-bar blues benefits from a Presley vocal dripping with lip-smacking delights. Elvis threw himself in this performance in the studio and after ten takes confessed himself satisfied with the way it sounded."

Even though it was recorded in Feb. 1957, RCA did not release this until Oct. 1958. With Elvis away in the army, RCA began releasing previously recorded tracks to keep Elvis on the radio airwaves. "One Night" is one of the standouts of this Gold Records album, but interestingly was denied the No. 1 shot in America in 1959 on a technicality. Because of the complex system used to compile the US charts, sales were split between "One Night" and its B-side track, "I Got Stung" (also on this album). However, there were no such complications to muddy the water across the Atlantic – and in January 1959 "One Night" gave Elvis his third British No. 1. As Patrick Humphries notes, "in the hard-hitting tradition of "Hard Headed Woman," "One Night" was Presley unleashed, suggesting all manner of libentious thrills for the night ahead. Elvis himself might be

1957: Elvis recording at RCA, Radio Recorders Hollywood (compare to the Nashville RCA studio photo below)



"I Beg of You" was written by Rose Marie McCoy. Elvis and the band began recording this song about one month earlier (January 13th), but after 12 takes decided to change the arrangement. The earlier arrangement had a harder edge to it with a stronger repeating guitar pattern. This February 23rd Saturday session started with Take 13 and a more mellow and bubbly "I Beg of You" arrangement. Finally by Take 34, they finally hit the master take. It

begins with the bassy background vocals provided by The Jordanaires ("bum-ba-bums") to help shape the driving rhythm of the song. The highlight of this song and worth every penny is when Elvis hits the bridge/chorus on the second time around. He grunts and belts out "HOLD MY HAND AND PROMISE..." with such a playful rocking style; this ONE LINE alone makes this album worth its weight in gold and displays the brilliance of Elvis in just a matter of seconds. As one author put it, "Elvis' gruff note on the word 'hold' sends chills down the spine by virtue of its sheer audacity. Another prime

example of the era Elvis dominated, it is fifties to the core." Though I haven't been able to confirm it, I am almost certain that Elvis uses his infamous guitar slap during this song as well (see below). "I Beg of You" is one of the more underrated songs in the entire Elvis catalog, and will certainly grow on you the more you listen to it. It has become one of my favorites.

Studio Sessions for RCA September 5-7, 1957: Radio Recorders, Hollywood

A&R/Producer: Steve Sholes

Engineer: Thorne Nogar

Guitar: Scotty Moore & Elvis Presley

Bass: Bill Black

Drums: DJ Fontana

Piano: Dudley Brooks

Vocals: The Jordanaires, Elvis Presley, Millie Kirkham

9/5/57 12-3pm, 4-8pm: *Treat Me Nice, Blue Christmas*

9/6/57 12-3:30pm, 4:30-8pm: *My Wish Came True, White Christmas, Here Comes Santa Claus, Silent Night, Don't*

9/7/57 12-3pm, 4-8pm: *O Little Town of Bethlehem, Santa Bring My Baby Back (To Me), Santa Claus Is Back In Town, I'll Be Home For Christmas*

Two songs from these recording sessions appear on *Elvis' Gold Records Vol. 2*: "Don't" and "My Wish Came True." "My Wish Came True" will be discussed later since Elvis rerecorded it in later sessions. Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller already gave Elvis two No. 1 hits by writing "Hound Dog" and "Jailhouse Rock," and this time around Elvis asked them to compose a pretty ballad from him to record. Elvis was always impressed with Leiber and Stoller's hands-on enthusiasm in the collaboration process, yet "Don't" could not be more different to the previous rockers Stoller and Leiber gave Elvis. Mike Stoller recalls the story: "When they started filming *Jailhouse Rock*, I got a call to come out to MGM and play the role of Elvis' piano player. On the set one day, Elvis asked me if Jerry and I would write a love song for him. We wrote "Don't" on the weekend and on Monday when I played it for him, Elvis smiled and said, "That's really pretty, that's just what I wanted."



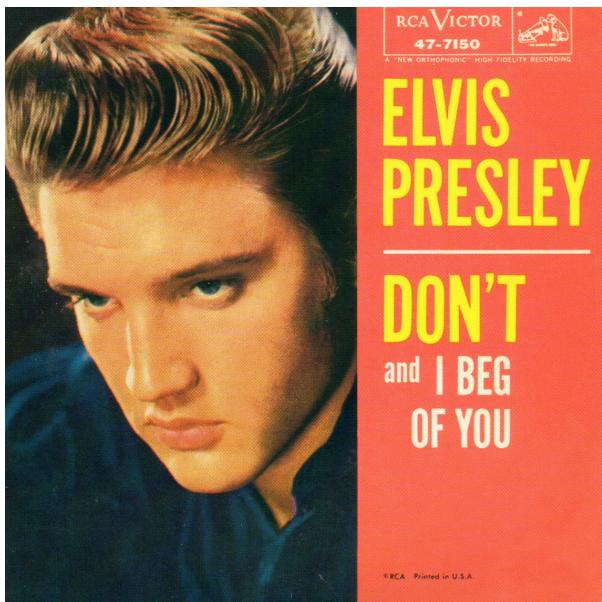
Millie Kirkham with The Jordanaires

Elvis had set aside a couple of days for recording during the filming of *Jailhouse Rock* and it was during one of these sessions that "Don't" was cut. But the RCA label also insisted that Elvis record an album of Christmas songs, thus the recording sessions were combined. To get Elvis in the

mood during these September sessions, RCA even supplied a Christmas tree with presents underneath. Over the next two days, Elvis nailed the definitive versions of "Blue Christmas" and "Santa Claus Is Back In Town" as well as a number of festive standards. Amusingly, so intoxicating was Elvis' image as a rock 'n' roll rebel, that Irving Berlin, the composer of "White Christmas," took issue with the teen idol covering his song and instructed radio stations across America to stop playing it. Important to note is that during these sessions, recording a full album of cool Yule treats was another example of Elvis' pioneering role – he would be followed by The Beach Boys, Phil Spector, The Jackson

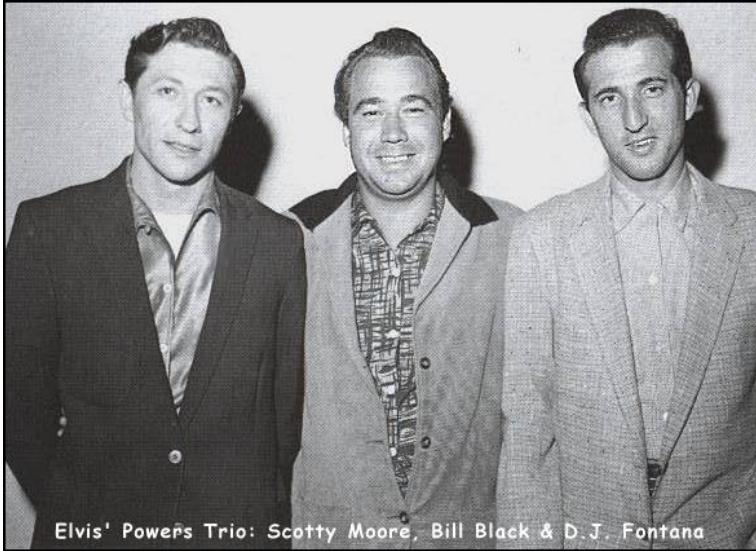
5 and many others who went on to make Christmas albums. He was one of the first rock 'n' roll artists to record a Christmas album. The Elvis "Christmas" sessions of September 1957 also produced "Treat Me Nice," the B-side of "Jailhouse Rock"; a sensitive version of Ivory Joe Hunter's "My Wish Came True"; and "Don't" – which would be Elvis' next No. 1 – the first A-side to feature a ballad since "Love Me Tender," all a year before.

"Don't" came quick and easy in only seven takes. Elvis is very relaxed but in firm control. The Jordanaires supply their trademark wall of voices and Patrick Humphries describes their sound as almost hypnotic with backing so laid-back as to sound almost soporific. "The image conjured up is one of relaxing before a blazing log fire, while the snow piled up outside, the frosted window and the hi-fi softly trickles out Elvis' latest single." Jorgensen recalls Elvis being "much more excited about recording this ballad than the Christmas standards in the middle of a heat wave. Using a very light musical framework driven more by background vocals than by song's instrumentation, the arrangement of "Don't" revealed an intimacy fully capturing the pleading tone of the song's lyrics. In fact, Elvis' startlingly clear vocals are so richly spotlighted that "Don't" is almost a musical love prayer.



Because of the honesty heard in Elvis' voice, it really seems that he had been brought to his knees by hearing, over and over again, the simple word "don't." Because of THAT word, his life was not worth living; because he could not get his lover to take the leap of faith that was necessary for their love to grow, he knew that love was doomed. Ultimately, thanks to the way that Elvis sold it, "Don't" is one of the most beautiful and haunting songs Presley EVER recorded. Elvis had months to prepare for the way he wanted to approach this song, and only took seven takes to get what he wanted. This track went very smoothly. Best of all, everyone in the RCA studio that day felt that "Don't" was a masterpiece. More than "Hound Dog" or even "Jailhouse Rock," this was the kind of song that Elvis wanted to be remembered for. It was almost unanimous at RCA Victor that Elvis never sounded

better than on this track. Despite this being a love song, many RCA executives feared backlash of misunderstanding the lyrics of young man begging a girl to give up her virginity. The debates continued of how and when to release "Don't" and they bought some time with the explosion with the success of Elvis' "Jailhouse Rock." They finally released "Don't" with the B-Side "I Beg of You" soon after Elvis received his draft notice and the backlash from parents and church groups never came (many think it was Elvis' gospel music background that gave him more credibility in the public's eye). "Don't" was a huge success, reaching #1 by February 1958, and proved that an Elvis ballad could be fully accepted by those buying rock n' roll music. Sadly, due to excessive publishing demands by Colonel Parker, the quality of Elvis' work would later suffer as the best composers and songwriters refused to share their best work with Elvis and shut off more creative avenues. "Don't" would mark a transition toward that sad result of RCA management and hindered unimaginable #1 records for Elvis' future." "Don't" would end up being Elvis' last No. 1 single as a civilian before his entrance into the US Army (see below).



Elvis' Powers Trio: Scotty Moore, Bill Black & D.J. Fontana

Simple and straightforward as the recording session had been, trouble was brewing behind the scenes. Longtime sidemen and original band members Scotty Moore and Bill Black were getting fed up with how they had been treated - their lives being turned upside down with all things Elvis. In the last couple of years they'd played on million-selling records, supported Elvis in concert, and appeared with him on television and film – but they were still being paid little more than the flat fee they had drawn in 1955, when the three of them were off touring throughout the southern states. Also, there was increased pressure from Colonel Parker to

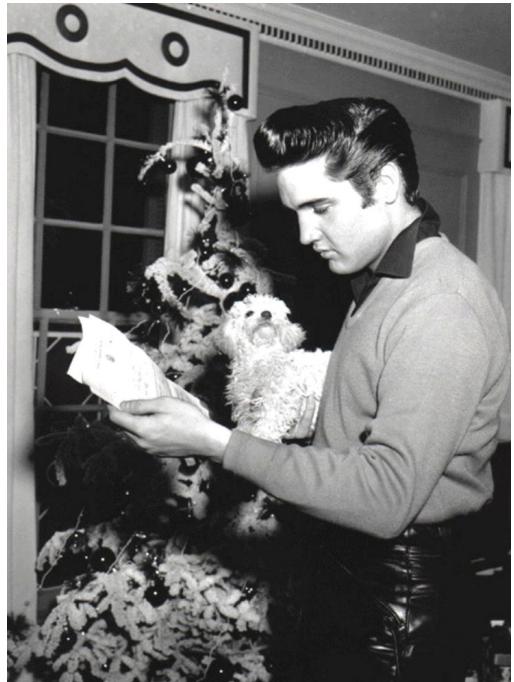
focus on Elvis' movie and television career as opposed to Sholes' RCA focus on Elvis' singles and LP releases. At this point Scotty and Bill publically quit Elvis' band. To further ignite the tension, Jorgensen states that, "Scotty and Bill had been promised recording time at the end of the Christmas sessions to record an instrumental album of their own (and Elvis promised to play piano); when they failed to get it – this wasn't the first time, the felt that they had come up short – it was too much for the pair to take. For over a year they'd gone along with an arrangement that kept them on a low retainer for the many weeks when they weren't needed, and the work they did backing him got almost no recognition; the session would have been a way to make a little extra money and do something for their own careers for a change. Now they made their demands explicit, and when they got no response Scotty and Bill publicly announced their resignation from Elvis Presley's employ." At the time, Sholes didn't care and felt Scotty and Bill held up the recording sessions progress. Sholes believed he could release more singles faster and make RCA more money. But Elvis wanted them back and appealed to Colonel Parker to the get the band rehired. Although the matter was eventually resolved, relations between them were never quite the same again. But perhaps that was inevitable: so much had happened in such a short space of time, that it was almost impossible to remember what life had been like just a few years before. As Russian satellites hurtled through space and troops were sent to desegregate Little Rock, Arkansas, the world itself seemed to be changing before their eyes – but still it seemed as though all America was really interested in was Elvis Presley."

The awkward confrontation with his musicians was only one of a series of problems that Elvis would face over the next few months, most notably his draft notice. In Nov. 1957 Elvis sailed to Hawaii, to play what would prove to be his last concert for four years. *Jailhouse Rock* opened that same month at theatres, and the following January Elvis once again set off for Hollywood to begin filming his 4th movie, *King Creole*. But this time, shooting couldn't commence until Elvis had deferred his army enlistment – and throughout filming, the threat of the draft hung over his head. As a healthy young US male, 22-year old Elvis was clearly eligible for service in the military and rumors had begun reeling that the most famous young man in America was about to be drafted. The rumors were soon followed by suggestions that Elvis might receive preferential treatment, that his manager would ease him out of the draft; and before long the tone became more critical, accusing the singer of considering himself "too big" for the Army.

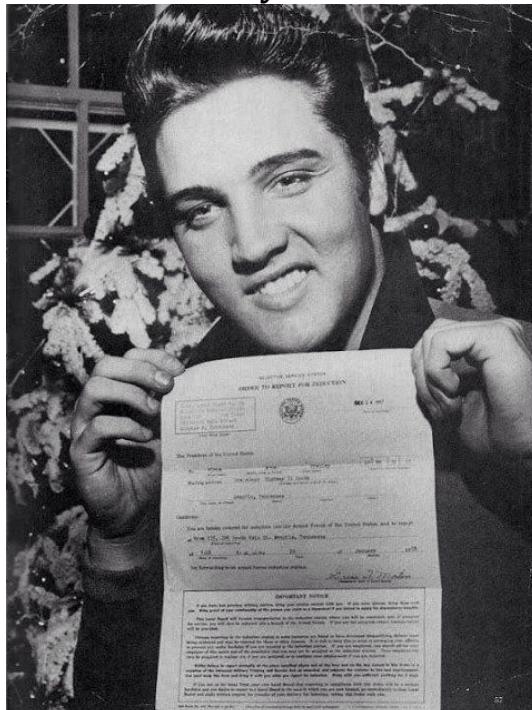
Jorgensen summarizes the looming predicament for Elvis, Paramount, and RCA: "Paramount Pictures did manage to gain Elvis a 60-day deferment, pointing out to the draft board that considerable sums of money had already been invested in pre-production costs and that without their star, they simply wouldn't have a picture. Elvis gained two extra months of freedom, but all the while he was nervous

about what lay ahead. *King Creole* turned out surprisingly well – and throughout a career in which he made over 30 films, it would remain Elvis' own favorite. But now, with filming complete, there was the matter of his military service to be addressed. Everyone was bidding for Elvis: the Navy offered to form an "Elvis Presley Company", the Air Force was willing to let him tour as a recruitment officer. But Elvis stuck with the Army, where he was hoping he might get a chance to enjoy some anonymity – something that had eluded him since the madness took hold two years previously."

And then on December 19, 1957 Elvis received news that was devastating not just to himself but also to his manager, his record company, and his film studio: his draft notice. Though everyone knew its possibility, the draft notice still came as a complete shock. Now came a sense of urgency and everyone needed to work overtime. Once Elvis entered the army in March 1958, there would be no more recording sessions for a couple of years. The majority of the *King Creole* sessions was finished in January 1958 and then followed a brief recording session Feb 1st where two more singles from the *Elvis' Gold Records Vol. 2* album were recorded.



Dec. 1957: Elvis opens up the letter to read his official US Army Draft Notice.



Studio Sessions for RCA Feb 1st 1958: Radio Recorders, Hollywood

A&R/Producer: Steve Sholes

Engineer: Thorne Nogar

Guitar: Scotty Moore, Tiny Timbrell, & Elvis Presley

Bass: Bill Black

Drums: DJ Fontana

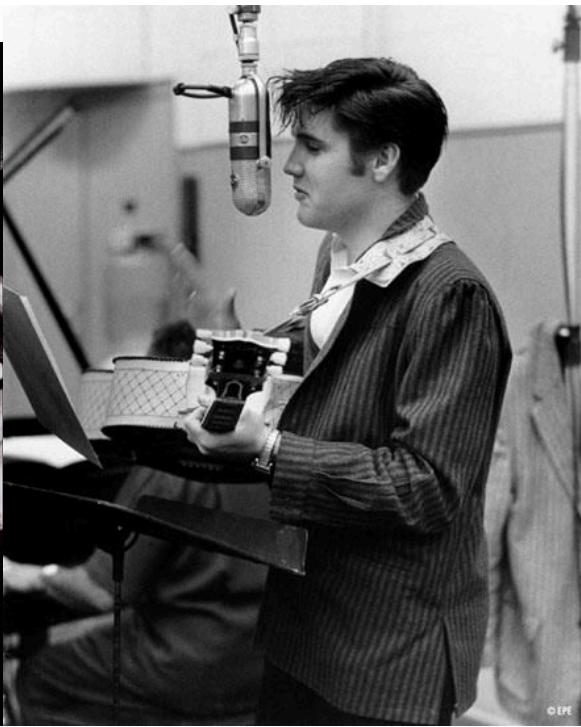
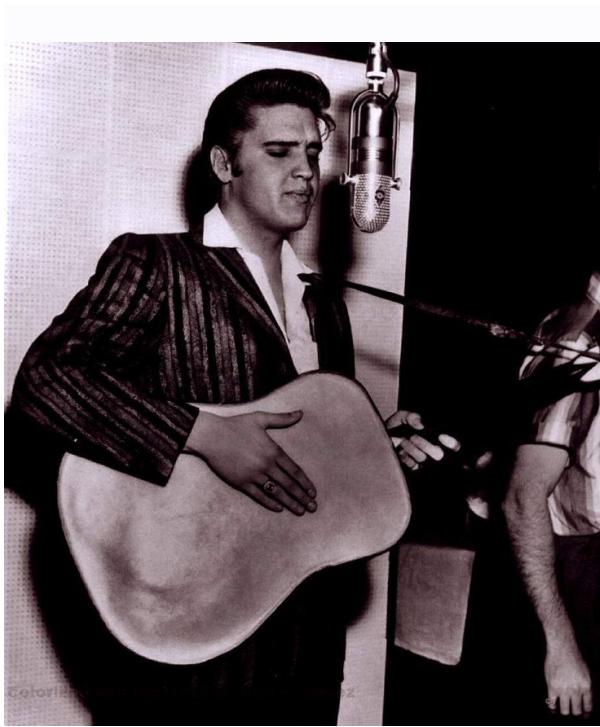
Piano: Dudley Brooks

Vocals: The Jordanaires, Elvis Presley

2/1/58 10am-7pm: *My Wish Came True, Doncha' Think It's Time, Your Cheatin' Heart, Wear My Ring Around Your Neck*

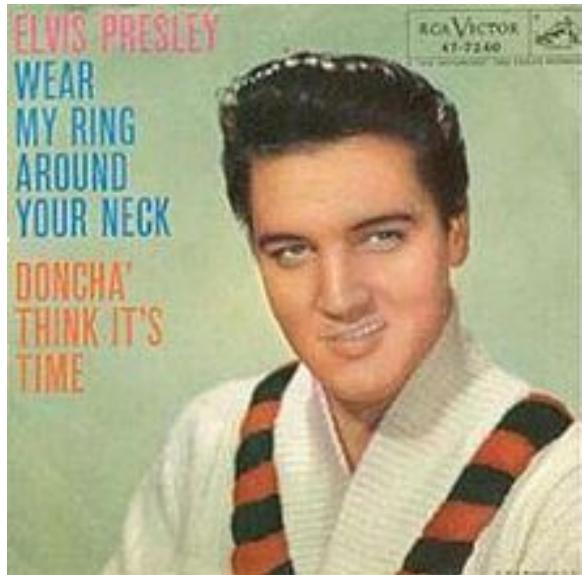
"Wear My Ring Around Your Neck," one of my all-time favorites, is a catchy and lively upbeat tune. It has a nostalgic feel, with inspiration falling right in line with the high school times of the 1950s where puppy love and extra cash helped produced a symbol found on every high school campus, malt shop, and juke joint all across the United States. Along with cars, the class ring became a symbol of status for most high school boys. Carroll & Moody who wrote this song, noted the academic and social importance of the class ring, as well as the magnified significance of when a boy felt so deeply about his girlfriend that he gave his ultimate status symbol to her. As she usually had her own class ring already, a lot of girls, in kind of a symbolic wedding ritual, looped the ring around their necklace and wore it around their neck. This became a way to show that the girl was going steady. Hence the lyrics sung by Elvis in this song: "They say that going steady is not a proper thing..."

Ace Collins noted that by the time of this recording, Elvis was far from being a teen himself at 23 years of age. But no other teen idol could've pulled off this song (such as current teen sensations Ricky Nelson or Paul Anka). The rise in African American artists on the pop charts added unique "soul" to the rock 'n' roll sound, making it virtually impossible for white artists to compete with real R&B music. And that's where Elvis' genius and talents became evident. Elvis was one of the few artists who knew no boundaries and could do justice to the African American music genre of that time. Who else could sing gospel, a gentle love ballad, a country hit, and then a bluesy R&B single and seem to fit right in with all genres? In order for this song to work and be successful, it took a special kind of energy and punch that few white artists possessed. During the recording sessions, Take 22 was deemed the final take but Elvis knew something wasn't quite right with the track. He returned to Radio Recorders on Feb 26th to play around with the song. They beefed up the piano part with some piano overdubbing and then much like Elvis did in his 1956 hits "All Shook Up" and "Don't Be Cruel," Elvis used his hand to slap out a percussion beat on the back of his guitar. Rather than use a percussion or bongo that was readily available in the RCA studio, Elvis wanted to record this energetic slap in the same manner that he often used when listening to music at home. Elvis was never credited as the "guitar slapper" but in the end, this is what gave the song that distinctive rocking R&B touch.



Above: Elvis' infamous guitar slap used on many recordings (such as "Wear My Ring" and "Don't Be Cruel")

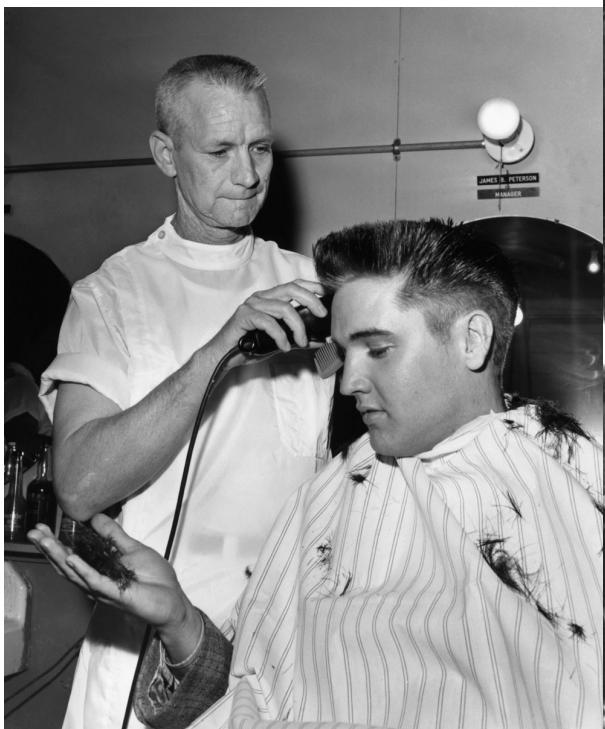
Though not really an R&B song, the R&B crowd loved it thanks to how Elvis attacked the song. Coupled with solid, driving instrumentals, especially DJ Fontana's machine gun drum-licks (which haven't been heard since "Hound Dog") and Elvis's own guitar slaps, this "Ring" did rock and was a hit for all listeners. Elvis' guitar slap is emphasized in the recording sessions and very easily heard if the correct tapes are used in any reissues. It should be front and center and is the driving force of the song.



"Doncha' Think It's Time" is a smooth, medium-paced song with a mellow easy-going vibe, so it's ironic that it took 48 arduous takes to get right! There's even a small hint of the incipient folk bloom in the prominently featured bongos. Interestingly, several versions were spliced together for the release of the single, but by mistake, a different set of versions were spliced together for this *50,000,000 Elvis Fans* album version. As Mike Eder notes, "the single version is more playful, with Elvis accentuating the ending more stridently. By working hard to blend the very best part of this track for release, the [splicing] trickery puts forth a deceptive ease. This is a classic cut despite it all, in what seems like a clear cut example of serendipity."

"My Wish Came True" was an Ivory Joe Hunter ballad that doesn't come off as well as the other tracks on the album. Ruining any sense of delicacy, Millie Kirkham's ghostly backing vocal is screechy (Millie is infamously known for her background vocals on Elvis' "Blue Christmas" recording during the same recording sessions). Though Elvis' vocals are soft and beautiful, echoing a more gospel feel, the background vocals are too distracting and take away from the overall tone of the song. In fact, Elvis wasn't happy with it, having tried unsuccessfully to remake the 1957 master during both the *King Creole* and "Wear My Ring Around Your Neck" sessions. It did surprising well to get to #12 on the charts.

Looking back on Elvis' music career, "Wear My Ring" represents a throwback for Elvis, as his raw edge and uninhibited nature in the song would no longer be evident when he returned from post service in 1960. Prior to his service, Elvis had not yet been totally tamed, and the singer attacked the notes in a way that few could. On March 24, 1958 Elvis would report to the draft board in Memphis (his fans called this day "Black Monday"), and the next day be transferred to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas where he was famously given the GI haircut that removed his trademark sideburns for his service duration. Thanks to Colonel Parker, the world's press were there in force to witness the transformation of the world's best known rock 'n' roll idol into Private First Class Presley, E.A. 53310761. Elvis is seen below on March 25th getting his Army haircut and receiving his uniform and GI boots at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. Elvis would only spend 3 days at Fort Chaffee before being sent to Fort Hood, Texas to complete his basic training. Elvis would be there 6 months before being stationed in Germany for service.



Studio Sessions for RCA June 10th 1958: RCA's Studio B, Nashville

A&R/Producer: Steve Sholes

Engineer: RLJ

Guitar: Hank Garland, Chet Atkins, & Elvis Presley

Bass: Bob Moore

Drums: DJ Fontana

Piano: Floyd Cramer

Bongos: Buddy Harman

Vocals: The Jordanaires, Elvis Presley

6/10/58: 7-10pm, 10:30pm -1:30am: I Need Your Love Tonight, A Big Hunk O' Love, Ain't That Loving You Baby, (Now and Then There's) A Fool Such As I

6/11/58: 2am-5am: I Got Stung

June 1958, Elvis was granted a two-week leave from his basic training in Fort Hood before eventually shipping out to Germany. RCA wasted no time scheduling what would be Elvis' final recording session of the 1950s at the newly constructed Nashville RCA Studios (Studio B) Music Row - his final session until he came back from the Army in March 1960. Aside from "Love Me Tender," this would also be the first album that Elvis would use "mainly" studio musicians. The last recording sessions were done with his longstanding band members at Radio Recorders Hollywood in February. The band put together this time around by Chet Atkins (RCA Nashville Operations Manager) consisted of Nashville A-Teamers: Hank Garland on guitar, Bob Moore on bass, Floyd Cramer on piano and Buddy Harman along with DJ Fontana on drums. The Jordanaires were brought in again on vocals but with newcomer Ray Walker replacing Hugh Jarrett as the new bass singer. Scotty Moore and Bill Black were not participants.



Elvis arriving at RCA Studio B, Nashville for the Recording Sessions June 10th

Due to the change in recording studios, the sound quality of these tracks will sound dramatically different on all vinyl releases. The change in sound (and not for the better) is on the actual master. It should be noted that at this time in the late 50s, Nashville was not recording center it is today; prior to this session, Elvis, as well as many other artists, hated recording in Nashville due to the poor facilities and equipment. Elvis had recorded sessions in 1956 at the McGavock St. Studio when he first signed with RCA (recording "Heartbreak Hotel" among others). But RCA hoped to change all that; dissatisfied with the limits of the earlier McGavock St. RCA facility, Chet Atkins and Steve Sholes convinced RCA that it needed to build its own office and studio. The McGavock St facility was owned and operated by the United Methodist Television, Radio & Film Commission. RCA had a studio and an office in the building; the Methodist's owned everything else. So small was the facility that Nashville A-Teamer Bob Moore (who played bass on countless sessions there) commented they had enter

the studio from a door on the side of the building via an alleyway between that building and a little coffee shop called the "Washcannons."

The outdated McGavock St. Facility studio was somewhat of a live room with a curved ceiling that notoriously created low frequency problems, causing booming bass notes that would also roll around for a long time. Musicians and engineers were always in search of a dead spot for the bass. They also had several large curtains hanging on the walls to help "deaden" the room. They employed the use of movable "wall-like" baffles to isolate instruments to minimize sound bleeding into other mics. At Elvis' first session there in January 1956, RCA was anxious to recreate the "slapback" echo effect that Sam Phillips utilized at the Sun Recording Studio in Memphis (listen to any track of "Heartbreak Hotel" to hear the echo). Chet Atkins and engineer Bob Farris created a psuedo "echo chamber" by setting up a speaker at one end of a long hallway and a microphone at the other end, while recording the echo

live. This live echo was strange for Elvis and the musicians to hear during their recording sessions since Phillips added the echo effect after recording.

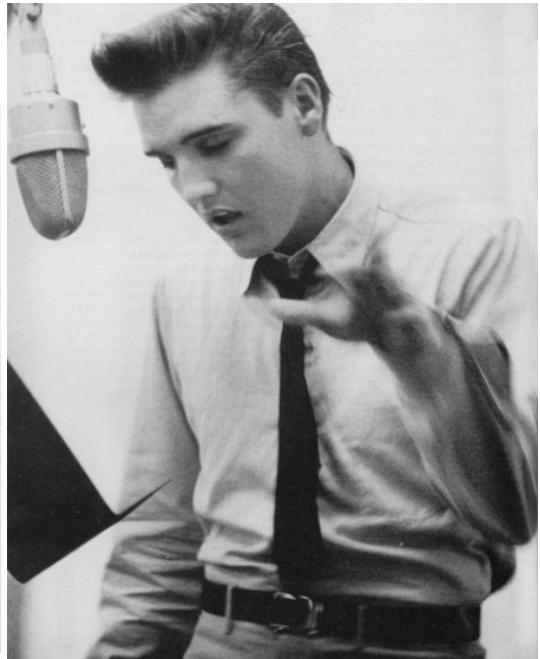


McGavock Street RCA Recording Studio, Nashville: Elvis with recording musicians DJ Fontana drums, Bob Moore bass, Chet Atkins Guitar, April 14, 1956 (note the hanging curtains-like sound panels and separate mics for Elvis and the Jordanaires)

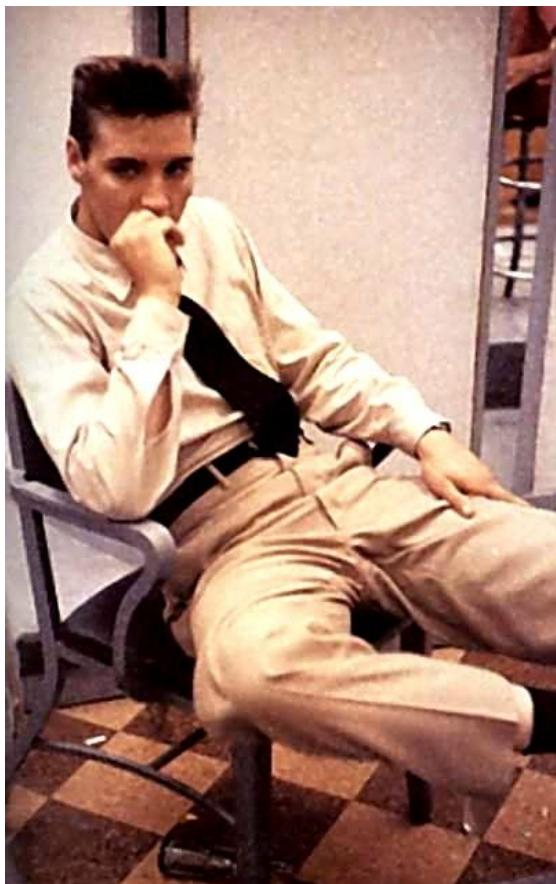
But with the success of Elvis' "Heartbreak Hotel" recorded at the McGavock St. facility in 1956, Atkins and Sholes now had the leverage they needed to get RCA

to build a new facility. Located on the corner of 17th Avenue and Hawkins (which is now Roy Acuff Place) it took four months and cost \$37,515 to build. In November 1957, it officially opened for business. Though the new RCA Nashville recording studio was state of the art when it opened, the musicians that recorded there STILL didn't like the sound of the room. Most notable were the areas of standing waves and washy, muddy acoustics.

Sessions at Studio B were typically scheduled for 10:00, 2:00 and 6:00 (though often subject to musician availability times could vary) with the standard expectation for a 3-hour session to produce 4 cuts. With Elvis though, there was essentially no clock, including this June 10th evening session. Gordon Stoker describes a typical Elvis session: "He'd get into the studio around seven at night for a six o'clock session. If he was hungry he'd order out for Krystal burgers, then we'd eat and go sit with him around the piano. He liked to get warmed up with old spirituals, gospel stuff. This would help him get relaxed. After a couple of hours, we'd get around to recording." Chet Atkins said he initially tried to stay at the late night sessions after recording all day but eventually he would "just come down, say 'hello' and go home to bed while they recorded all night." Elvis was a perfectionist, doing over 20 takes on each song and spending hours in the studio. The sessions on this June 10th evening began at 7pm and Elvis (in full army garb while on temporary Army leave) and the crew did not finish until 5am the next morning. Some have stated that Elvis's June 1958 recording session in Nashville was probably the most important of his career. Before he went off to Germany, hit songs needed to be readily available to keep Elvis on the charts for next two years.



June 10th Recording Session: (Above Left) Elvis playing a Danelectro U2 guitar during the sessions, (Above Right) Elvis singing into the Neumann M49 mic at Studio B, Nashville



During this recording session, Elvis recorded dozens of takes of 5 songs the following order:

- 1) **I Need Your Love Tonight J2WB 3253-18**
- 2) **A Big Hunk O' Love J2WB 3254-SP**
- 3) **Ain't That Loving You Baby J2WB 3255-04**
- 4) **Fool Such As I J2WB 3256-09**
- 5) **I Got Stung J2WB 3257-24**

Only one of these songs was not used on this *Gold Records Vol. 2*: "Ain't That Loving You Baby." Elvis hated all the takes (over 20) and would not let RCA release this single in 1958. The recorded take in 1958 that eventually became the master single was finally released by RCA in 1964 against Elvis' wishes. It was actually placed on the *Elvis' Gold Records Vol. 4* album released by RCA in 1968. I think it is a definite hit and wish Elvis would've let RCA include it on the *50,000,00 Elvis Fans* album.

"I Got Stung"

With the clock running past 2:00am in the early hours of June 11th, there was no sign of Elvis slowing down. "I Got Stung" set the pattern of all the June 1958 recordings - all the songs were convincing hits no matter what side of the single they appeared on. "I Got Stunt" was actually the first cut released from this Nashville session, and a fine example of the animated performances from this June 10th evening. From the opening lead-in with no instruments, Elvis' opening vocals of "Holy smoke..." indicate an upbeat rocker is approaching. The band puts forth a fast boogie beat that pairs well with Elvis' hiccupping jittery lead, as do The Jordanaires' audible "ba-ba-ba-bas." The engaging "Uh uh, huh yeah!" catchphrase that Elvis

sings between humorous and catchy lines gives the cut a distinct hook. Especially with the echo from the recording studio, the lyrics are hard to catch unless you are listening closely, yet there is aura and cool factor with Elvis singing them. The overall sound just works – the hammering of Floyd Cramer's piano, Garland & Atkins on the electric guitar, Fontana on drums, and Moore on bass. If you listen closely, each instrument is audible and rhythmically is a perfect backdrop for Elvis' rapid-fire vocals. Though the song clocks well under two minutes, it is certainly one of Elvis' most memorable. "I Got Stung" was released as a double A-side with "One Night" on October 21, 1958.



June 10th Recording Sessions: Elvis in uniform with The Jordanaires on separate mics. Elvis would bring Ray Walker over to his mic for the entire "Fool Such As I" recording.

"(Now and Then There's) A Fool Such As I"/"I Need Your Love Tonight" (Released March 10, 1959)

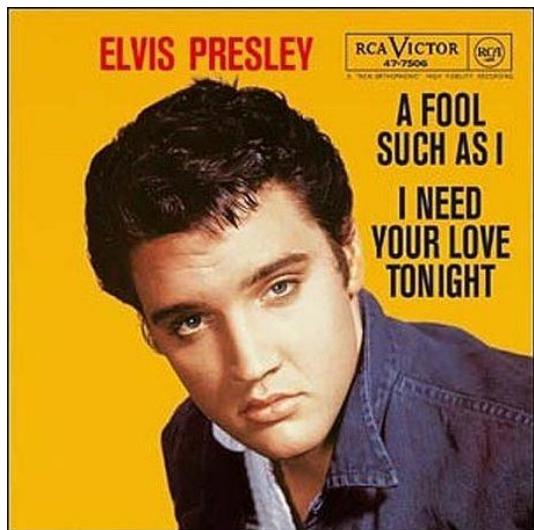
"(Now and Then There's) A Fool Such As I" is a mid-tempo and charming song, with a hint of doo-wop thanks to The Jordanaires. This song has a country origin, having been a 1952

hit for Hank Snow, also on the RCA label. Elvis had long been familiar with Snow's ballad, but it was not until this 1958 all-night Nashville session that he got around to recording his own version. While keeping the lyrics and basic chord changes, Elvis fundamentally reinvented this ballad in his own style. Elvis was most caught up by the ballad's pacing of Snow's version. The easygoing phrasing that Hank Snow employed when he sang "Fool" captured a sincerity and infectiousness that was rarely heard on an up-tempo love song. As the number was largely unfamiliar to pop audiences, and as it had only hit #3 on the country chart 6 years earlier, Elvis figured he could salute Hank without being lost in his shadow. Elvis needn't even worry about that: although his vocals would strongly reflect the same style that Snow had employed on the original, Elvis dreamed up a gimmick that would move his recording to different level.

Ace Collins highlights Elvis' creative interpretation of this song in his book "Untold God: The Stories Behind Elvis' #1 Hits": "Working out his backup vocals with the Jordanaires, Elvis asked Ray Walker to sing a strong echoing bass line whenever Elvis sang, "Now and then there's a fool such as I." Not satisfied that having Walker just sing behind him would be enough to really emphasize the vocal kicker, Elvis also had the singer open each verse with a solo line of "Now and then there's a fool such as I." This opening was dropped down a full octave lower than that of the line Elvis was singing. The effect was startling: it was as if the floor had fallen out from underneath the song.



The session had been set up just as it always had been, with Elvis on one microphone, the quartet on the other microphone. But Elvis felt that the setup did not emphasize Walker's vocals enough, so he asked the backup singer to move over and share his microphone. Elvis knew that this would make the bass vocal as strong as his own, thus creating an almost duet effect on the songs most important line. It was a stroke of genius, and it made this recording one of the most unique of Elvis' entire career.... Elvis fans felt that the casual but heartfelt emotion the singer infused into every word of "Fool" marked one of the most unique interpretations of his recording life. The song was both fun and hauntingly sad at the same time.



To millions of minds, this was Elvis' genius at work. Yet, except for a vocal "dance" found in the second verse, where Elvis swung his voice in the same kind of way he often moved his hips on stage, creating a bit of a hiccup phrasing element, the rest of Elvis' work on "Fool" was a direct reflection on Snow's original. In some places, the recording is actually a mirror image of the country cut. As was usually the case, Steve Sholes and RCA Victor were satisfied with "A Fool Such As I" long before Elvis was. Elvis kept re-cutting it, over and over again, until he was convinced that the old Snow tune had been done as well as he and his band could perform it. Then, after listening to several playbacks, he chose the 9th take as his personal favorite. One day and four songs later, Elvis walked away from RCA Victor, not to return for almost two years."



There's an effortless sense of enjoyment running throughout "Fool Such As I," and it is one of the Presley songs that provide a brief summary of what fifties rock and roll was all about. Patrick Humphries notes, "The song marks something of a change of direction for Elvis. A bluesy guitar figure ushers in the song, but the first voice you hear is that of Jordanaires' bass singer Ray Walker. When Elvis joins in, he sounds relaxed and effortlessly in control, but strangely vulnerable too, as if the worries of the outside world have finally intruded into the recording studio. With "A Fool Such As I," Elvis begins the process of easing himself out of the 50s, the decade he had dominated so convincingly. It was a long way from the nerve energy of "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Jailhouse Rock" – but still, unmistakably Elvis."

"I Need Your Love Tonight" doesn't have the same kind of finesse as "Fool Such As I," but is instead an infectious up-tempo rocker with the usual Elvis energy. The new band members display their talents as well. With a rocking uninhibited guitar solo, Hark Garland holds his own as Scotty Moore's guitar replacement,

and the new Jordanaire Ray Walker makes his presence felt by contributing solid bass vocals. But make no mistake, this song is all about the enthusiasm Elvis brings to the table. As one reviewer put it, "knowing that rock 'n' roll doesn't have to be weighty to be effective, Elvis' vocals conveys a carefree outlook that in time would be increasingly difficult for him to recapture. Elvis clearly enjoys himself,

letting out an emphatic "Yeah!" at the opening riff of Hank Garland's rousing guitar solo, and shouts the title line before Hank lets loose again. Both men must know they are making magic!"

Of the four classic recordings laid down at that session, the first, "I Need Your Love Tonight," many considered the strongest. "The lyrics ('paw, paw,' 'ooh wee') may have bordered on the silly," Jorgensen noted, "but they were all part of the irresistibly light arrangement, and Elvis had fun playing around with them, using every trick in his book of sexy phrasings." Hank Garland's guitar work gave the recording much of its power and energy. The single pairing of "I Need Your Love Tonight" (#4) and "A Fool Such As I" (#2) became one of Elvis's biggest two-sided hits. These two singled were an extremely strong duo from the June 1958 sessions, both sides of this single raced up to the Top 5.



Elvis with Colonel Tom Parker, June 10th Sessions, RCA Nashville

On March 10, 1959, Fifty weeks after Elvis was inducted into the army, "A Fool Such As I" was released with "I Need Your Love Tonight" on the B-side. While this was released, Private First Class Elvis Presley was half a world away, manning a tank and completely unaware how his songs were doing on the charts. As a result, he had no idea that a bad decision by his record label would keep him from celebrating another American chart topper. Ace Collins highlights this: "On paper, it would be the Fleetwood's classic "Come

Softly to Me" that would keep "A Fool Such as I" from hitting #1 on the pop charts. But in truth, the single's chance at a #1 spot were killed by a decision made at RCA Victor. The flip side of the new Elvis record, "I Need Your Love Tonight," was such a strong song that it gained almost as much airtime as did "A Fool Such As I." As a result, some stations ignored the ballad, focusing instead on the rocker. Other stations chose the country cover and forgot about the one that really moved. This double-sided war over radio play created an atmosphere in which "Fool" was stopped in its tracks by the success of its own B-side. Ultimately, "I Need Your Love Tonight" would hit #4 the week that "Fool" hit #5. Then "A Fool Such As I" would go on to jump over "Love" and land at the #2 spot. Had RCA released each number separately, backing them with weaker B-sides, both singles would probably have topped the charts on their own. Although Elvis was shut out of the #1 spot on the pop charts, RCA Victor figured that the single would mark the singer's return to the upper level of the country playlists. After all, the Bill Trader-penned classic ["Fool Such As I"] had strong country roots. But country stations did not even acknowledge the single. It was as if they were saying, "This is a Snow hit – no new version need apply." Nevertheless, Elvis would still earn a #1 with the country cover. At the same time that "A Fool Such As I" ran out of gas in the United States, it was picking up steam in Great Britain. On April 4, Elvis registered his fourth #1 hit in the United Kingdom. "Fool" would become one of the most successful Elvis hits ever to cross the pond and land on the British Isles. In retrospect, it seems strange that a song that first became a hit in country music would have to be exported to another country to top the charts. But perhaps this record was a testament to the ability of Elvis Presley to make his music something more than country, rock, or pop, or even American music as a whole. When Elvis sang now, he sang the music of almost the whole wide world."

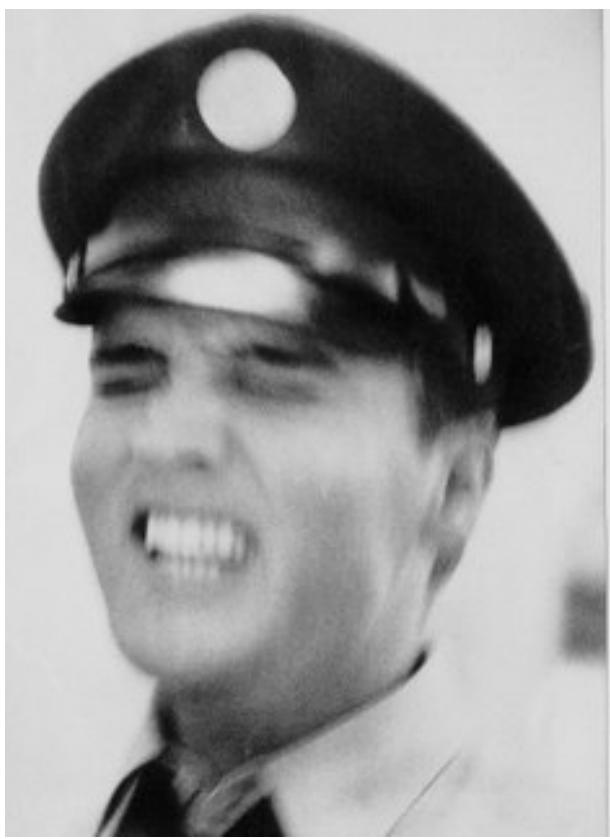
"A Big Hunk O' Love"/"My Wish Came True" (Released June 23, 1959)



"A Big Hunk o' Love" was the last of the 1958 recordings to be released while Elvis was away in the army. It is one of his wildest rocking cuts on this June 10 recording night, and shows that even at the age of 24, he could stand rock out has he did early on his career. The song's quick-tempo party vibe starts immediately that the needle drops, beginning with Floyd Cramer's piano hammers and The Jordanaires' bassy vocals. Elvis' vocal comes in quickly, and it's easy to visualize Elvis singing this tune with a smirk on his face and a hint of gazing sexuality on his mind. Elvis effectively uses a hoarse and raspy vocal sound quality, having a similar feel to the famous hit "Let's Have A Party" by the Queen of Rockabilly, Wanda Jackson. The master was spliced together from Takes 3 and 4.

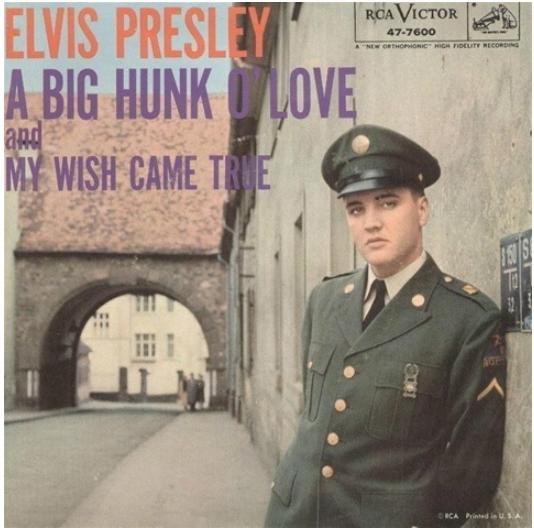
Humphries notes in his book 'Elvis #1 Hits, Secret History of the Classics': "Elvis' performance was a timely reminder to those who had been captivated by the softer sound of "A Fool Such As I" that he was still the king of rock 'n' roll. The song itself is rooted in the blues tradition that Elvis had grown to love while still a teenager in Memphis; and at the studio session Elvis was delighted with the hand-picked Nashville

musicians like guitarists Chet Atkins and Hank Garland and electric bassist Bob Moore, who had been drafted in to replace the departed Scotty Moore and Bill Black. Floyd Cramer's piano hammers the message home – and vocally, Elvis sounds uncharacteristically out of control."



"A Big Hunk O' Love" would be Elvis' final No. 1 of the 50s, going out of the decade with a bang. But when the record was released, just a year later, it marked an end of an era in more ways than one. With Elvis off in Germany, it was a big gamble whether his fans would be willing to wait for more. As it turned out, it was a gamble that paid off; but of course no one – not Elvis, not the Colonel, not RCA, not even his fans – knew that for certain at the time. Humphries concludes: "When Elvis went to Germany, he really did wonder if the world would still remember him when he finished his two years of army service in 1960. His departure from America had been hysterical, marked by a press conference carefully orchestrated by the Colonel – who saw a perfect opportunity to plug the latest Presley product – *King Creole*. And there had been similar pandemonium when Elvis first arrived in Europe on October 1, 1958. In Europe, rock 'n' roll was still seen as a threat, a harbinger of doom – Billy Haley & The Comets' concert appearances had ended in mayhem, as teenagers trashed the venues in homage to the kiss-curled avuncular one. Even screenings of *The Blackboard Jungle*, which featured Haley's "Rock

Around The Clock" on the soundtrack, frequently ended in riots. Buddy Holly's 1958 British dates had been more sedate, but teenagers like John Lennon and Paul McCartney nevertheless sat mesmerized by his TV appearance, on *Sunday Night At The London Palladium*, literally watching Holly's every move.



It was hardly surprising then that the presence of Elvis Presley on the European mainland had sent the rumor factory into overtime. But despite substantial encouragement from the army authorities, Elvis didn't make a single concert appearance during his army spell. The closest he ever got was to sit a piano in a Paris nightclub while on leave in 1959 and sing "Willow Weep For Me," but this was to be the first and last European performance of his life. In his off-duty hours in Germany, Elvis relaxed by playing the piano, listening to albums of gospel music and trying out songs on his newly purchased tape recorder – as ever, his repertoire consisted both of current rock 'n' roll favorites and songs recalled from his youth. RCA was still pressuring Elvis to come up with some new recordings – the label even suggested that he fly home to the USA during his

army leave specifically to record. Elvis refused that offer, but he did spend time in Germany sifting through sheet music, considering songs that music publisher Freddy Bienstock wanted him to record as soon he was safely back on American soil." And when it was all over, finally, after two years of army service, the newly promoted Sergeant Presley was discharged in March 1960. Let the 1960s begin.



Elvis arrives in Europe, 1958



NOTE: The material for this review was pooled from many different sources: *Elvis Presley: A Life In Music: The Complete Recording Sessions* by Ernst Jorgensen; *Elvis, The #1 Hits* by Patrick Humphries; "Elvis Music FAQ" by Mike Eder; "Untold God: The Stories Behind Elvis' #1 Hits" by Ace Collins; Scotty Moore's Official Website.