

WOKING'S NEW CINEMA CLUB

The Main Feature

Season 42 – Issue 13 – Screening 23 March 2023

Elvis

Australia/US 2022
159 mins. Certificate 12A

Directed by	Baz Luhrmann
Screenplay by	Baz Luhrmann, Sam Bromell, Craig Pearce, Jeremy Doner
Cinematography	Mandy Walker
Music	Elliott Wheeler
Costume Design	Catherine Walker
Film Editing	Jonathan Redmond, Matt Villa
Production Design	Catherine Martin, Karen Murphy, Beverley Dunn

Cast

Elvis	Austin Butler
"Colonel" Tom Parker	Tom Hanks
Priscilla	Olivia DeJonge
Gladys	Helen Thomson
Vernon	Richard Roxburgh



This is the story of Elvis Aaron Presley (1935-1977) and his relationship with his rapacious manager, "Colonel" Tom Parker (1909-1997), a former carnival huckster.

Presley was born to Gladys and Vernon in Tupelo, Mississippi. His twin brother Jessie was still-born. The family moved to Memphis, Tennessee when Elvis was 13. Presley grew up in poverty, doted on by his mother, and found escape in the comic book adventures of Captain Marvel Jr. and especially in rhythm and blues, country, and gospel music.

The film is narrated from the start by Parker (Tom Hanks), lying on his death-bed in 1997 after a stroke. It emerges later that Parker is really Andreas van Kuijk, a stateless illegal immigrant from the Netherlands, unable to leave the US and with a severe gambling addiction.

Parker discovered Presley in 1955 and managed his meteoric rise to become the biggest ever selling solo artist. When Presley's energised interpretations of (black) music and sexually provocative performance style proved controversial in the segregated South ("it's the white man, driven to the level of the negro!"), Parker is relieved when Elvis is drafted to serve 2 years in West Germany. When Elvis returns home, his rebellious mojo is tamed by an endless string of money-spinning but mediocre Hollywood movies and accompanying soundtrack albums. He was still the highest paid actor in the world in 1966. Barbra Streisand later offers Presley the key role in *A Star Is Born* (which Parker rejects as Elvis would not be the headliner) prompting Elvis's lament "I never made that classic film I can be proud of." Elvis is increasingly at odds with popular culture, but Parker plots a way back with a 1968 Christmas TV Special, envisaging an hour of feel-good, frivolous songs: Elvis dons iconic black leathers and performs more edgy material, invigorating his career. Parker persuades Presley to accept a "short-term" residency at the new International Hotel in Las Vegas, and finds reasons to continually defer Elvis' wish to tour internationally.

Presley ends up spending 5 years in Vegas, at a fixed fee of \$100,000/week, with Parker using him as a bargaining chip for his gambling debts. Elvis is imprisoned – “I’m caught in a trap.... I can’t walk out.” Presley’s personal life gradually deteriorates (his wife Priscilla leaves him in 1973, taking their 6-year-old daughter Lisa Marie – who died in January this year) and his prescription drug addiction worsens.



Parker remains unrepentant even as his own death approaches - “I did not kill Elvis,” he says “I made Elvis! Without me there would be no Elvis Presley.”

Baz Luhrmann, the Australian director and co-writer, previously made *Strictly Ballroom* (the top-rated film shown by the Club in 1993), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), and *The Great Gatsby* (2013). His style is energetic and fast-paced, and

the film is a kaleidoscope of split screens, whip pans, animation, fast cuts, and spinning camera shots, with the occasional (and rather jolting) rap treatment of Presley songs.

Austin Butler is a revelation in the title role (and won the BAFTA for Best Actor). He spent a year with a voice coach mastering the sound of young Elvis, while Luhrmann digitally blended in some of the King’s later crooning to perfectly replicate Presley’s definitive 1970s rasp. Hanks had to spend 5 hours a day in make-up and (rather strange accent apart) captures Parker’s shamelessly reptilian nature.

The film was shot entirely in Queensland. It suffered a 6-month COVID-induced shut down in 2020. It was first shown at Cannes in May 2022 to rapturous applause. Critical reaction was largely positive with qualms mainly limited to aspects of the script, Hanks' performance, and the runtime.

Kevin Maher in the Times commended “a mind-altering, pleasure-filled, rock’n’roll fever dream” and Robbie Collin of The Telegraph called it “a bright and splashy jukebox epic with an irresistible central performance from Austin Butler: it’s the most impeccably styled and blaringly gaudy thing you’ll see all year, and all the more fun for it.” Entertainment Weekly noted “as fun as Elvis often is, it scores some remarkably sharp points, particularly regarding Presley’s unfaked love of black musicians, and the appropriations that fuelled his crossover success.” Peter Bradshaw of the Guardian was unconvinced, describing the film as “another pointless explosion of super-spangly sparkles in celluloid form...a relentless, frantically flashy montage, epic and yet negligible at the same time, with no variation of pace.”

Despite the large cast and long run-time, it is really a two-hander and Priscilla’s role is rather underdeveloped. There is little exploration of Elvis’s relationship with his adored and adoring mother (who died when Presley was just 23, and had her own battles with addiction).

Nonetheless, it is now the 2nd biggest grossing musical biopic ever (after *Bohemian Rhapsody*), garnered 8 Academy Award nominations and won 4 BAFTAs.



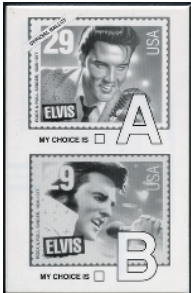
Enjoy - you’ll be all shook up! Unless you have a wooden heart...

Eugene Smith



We thank Red Eye for subsidising the cost of printing these notes. Red Eye Print, Unit 2D, Lansbury Estate, 102 Lower Guildford Road, Knaphill, GU21 2EP Tel: 01483 772111

Eugene Smith analyses Elvis in Numbers

500m+	Records sold. Some estimates double this number
\$40,000	Cost in 1956 for RCA to buy out his initial contract with Sun Records
50%	Share of income taken by the Colonel per Elvis' contract – expenses extra!
82.6%	Share of US TV audience when Elvis appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1956 – representing 60 million viewers
\$28,000	Offer from the London Palladium for Elvis to perform for a week in 1969. Equivalent to more than \$210k in today's money. Parker allegedly said "That's fine for me, how much can you get for Elvis?"
1	Countries outside the US where Elvis toured (Canada – 3 shows in the 50s)
2 hours	Time officially spent on British soil. His flight back to the US in 1960 landed to refuel at Prestwick, near Glasgow. It emerged in 2008 that Presley had earlier (1958) paid a sightseeing visit to London in the company of Tommy Steele.
14	Drugs found in his body at autopsy – 10 were "in significant quantity"
31	Films made by Elvis (excluding concert shows) between 1958 and 1969
5.8	Average rating of said films on IMDb. <i>Kid Creole</i> (1958) was highest-rated at 6.9; <i>Stay Away, Joe</i> (1968) was lowest ranked at 4.5
December 1970	Presley meets President Richard Nixon at the White House. The subsequent photo is the most requested picture ever from the National Archives. The meeting forms the basis of <i>Elvis and Nixon</i> released in 2016. 
500m+	Global viewers for "Aloha from Hawaii," an Elvis concert broadcast by satellite in 1973. Some sources claim over 1bn watched (which would be more than saw the Moon landing in 1969)
1.2 million 	Number of Americans who voted - by postcard - in 1992 to select one of 2 choices for the US Postal Service's 29c Elvis commemorative stamp. Stamp A won with 75% of the vote, and was issued in January 1993.
\$102,500	Original purchase price of Graceland (March 1957)
1982	Year Graceland was opened. 20 million had visited by May 2016
\$28-\$215	Cost of visiting Graceland in 2023. The top price ticket includes tours of Elvis' custom jets and car museum, an opportunity to purchase special merchandise, lunch in the restaurant and a keepsake backstage pass.
\$85m	Estimated cost of <i>Elvis</i> movie
\$287m	Box-office gross of <i>Elvis</i> movie (as at Feb 2023)
214	Different award nominations for <i>Elvis</i> , from over 50 different film bodies, proving - once and for all -- that there are just too many awards around!

Comments and reactions to: **The Perfect Candidate**

No of reaction slips received = 19

Average score = 7.16

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	1	3	8	6	1	~

What a remarkable film for so many reasons – thank you for showing it!

The old man in the hospital doesn't deserve to get any treatment, but at least he did in the end make amends

A bit slow, but a good story well-told

The plight of women!

A good story well-told

A fine film from a pioneering film maker

I'm glad I don't live in Saudi Arabia

Excellent insight into women's life in Saudi

The notes were well written

The ending words of the film were right. Dr Maryam deserved to win

As a member of Justice Mission I am appalled by the need to give this message again and again. It needs wider viewing

Slight and over-mannered. Last year's Permission covered similar themes with more passion

Position	Film	Average score
1	Belfast	7.96
2	The Duke	7.75
3	Seven Chances	7.61
4	Mandela and de Klerk	7.47
5	After Love	7.36
6	The Perfect Candidate	7.16
7	The Band Wagon	6.91
8	Flee	6.79
9	Day for Night	6.57
10=	The Mole Agent	6.00
10=	Son of Saul	6.00
12	Guardians of the Galaxy	5.53
13	L'Eclisse	3.00

Forthcoming attraction: 13 April 2023 – **Midnight Cowboy**



John Schlesinger won the best director Oscar for this tawdry, strident yet deeply affecting tale of a naive Texas stud striking up a relationship with a tubercular conman. Schlesinger was the perfect director to cast an alien eye on Manhattan's sexual permissiveness and Warhol weirdness, and exposes the jaundiced stratum beneath the hip surface with scalpel-sharp precision. Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman are a perfectly matched odd couple adrift on the sea of amorality in a warped buddy picture that cleverly walks a fine line between warmth and cruelty. The movie also won Oscars for best film (the first X-film to receive the award) and best screenplay. And lest we forget, there's also a wistful score from John Barry and Harry Nilsson singing Everybody's Talkin' over the opening credits. Radio Times