



FILM: **ELVIS**

FDG RATING: 3.4 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Baz Luhrmann: *director*
Austin Butler: *actor, Elvis*
Tom Hanks: *actor, Colonel Parker*

DATE: February 19, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **ELVIS**

Austin Butler deservedly won the 2023 Best Actor Golden Globe for his performance as Elvis. But our discussion participants felt that the film didn't deliver the heart and soul of the iconic performer. The story begins when Colonel Parker, a carnival promoter, hustler, with many connections in the entertainment business met Elvis backstage after a performance and convinces the young singer that he could take Elvis to the next level. The story is actually told from his perspective, which most discussion participants found annoying and irritating because Parker's voice and accent were grating and he was an abhorrent scoundrel who took advantage of Elvis driving him to drugs and unfairly capitalizing on the performer's success. This approach interfered with our visceral experience of watching the King of Rock and Roll really shine as he rises to international stardom. We expected to be mesmerized but, despite the glamour, glitzy tight-fitting costumes, sexual gyrations, and his velvety voice, for whatever reason, something was missing.

In contrast, the vignettes of the Black performers who influenced him were fabulous:

Rhythm and blues legend Big Mama Thornton, Little Richard, Sister Rosetta Tharpe. Those were the best vocal scenes in the film. We weren't aware of how much Elvis was influenced by African American music and how he blended the best of black music with the best of white music and gospel church music. A flash back shows him as a young boy in church, being completely enthralled by the Black gospel music. He grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Tupelo, Mississippi. Some critics accused Presley of profiteering off the works of Black artists. Others were more supportive. Evidently, James Brown said "I wasn't just a fan, I was his brother," Little Richard said Presley opened the door for him and B.B. King argued that the rock and roll legend didn't steal music but re-interpreted the music he grew up on.

Yes, Parker's promotion efforts were the reason Elvis rose so quickly to meteoric fame. But Parker selfishly pushed the performer to the point of exhaustion doing two shows a night, seven days a week and driving him to drugs. At the same time, Parker was feeding his gambling addiction with the profits from performances, pocketing 80% of Elvis' income.

Critical comments from some discussion participants pointed to the over stylizing of a conventional story and flat performances except for Tom Hanks as Parker and Austin Butler as Elvis. Others enjoyed the film, liked the music, and appreciated the insight into his youth, his musical inspirations, and rise to stardom.

Familiar Elvis songs were fun to hear and we would have liked more, possibly with less focus on gyrations. Despite being almost transported to the 1950s with the excellent performance by Austin Butler, we couldn't quite get there. We graced the film with a somewhat lonesome 3.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net
www.filmdiscussiongroup.com