

Review

Elvis and the Colonel

By ALEX BARRIS

The canonization of pop-culture heroes has become somewhat bigger than a cottage industry. In recent years, there have probably been more books about Marilyn Monroe, for instance, than about the Kennedys and Martin Luther King combined. Similar, if less elaborate, treatment is given to James Dean, Buddy Holly and John Lennon.

And then there's Elvis. Of all the pop idols, none seems to ignite more emotional hoopla than Presley. The mere mention of his name can still send women in their 40s into lachrymose expressions of bereavement more deeply felt than those reserved for next of kin or favorite pets.

The latest paean to Presley is a slender volume called *Elvis And The Colonel*, by Dirk Vellenga with Mick Farren (Doubleday, 278 pages, illustrated, \$24.95). Perhaps 278 pages doesn't seem slender, but the last 100 pages are devoted to a detailed listing of all Presley's recordings, including dates of release.

Vellenga and Farren have a good grasp of the undertaker's art. They recognize that before the body can be placed on public view, it must be cleansed of all blemishes and otherwise cosmetically treated so that the candidate for canonization appears not only beautiful but blameless.

The best way to achieve the last-named goal is to identify a villain, a person or force at whose feet can be laid the blame for any wants too visible to be ignored. In the case of Elvis, the search for such a Judas began and ended with Col. Tom Parker, the rotund, flamboyant manager who "controlled" Presley's every move from almost the beginning of his career to its sordid end.

IN-FIGHTING

The colonel is a likely enough candidate for this role. The ugly in-fighting that followed Presley's messy death revealed much about Parker's venality. That he lived high on the hog and got more than his share of the proceeds of what the authors call "the Elvis industry" is beyond dispute.

But Vellenga and Farren have elected to go much farther, to construct an epic monster who not only cheated our hero, but virtually designed and orchestrated Presley's disintegration. ("It might be an exaggeration to say that Elvis Presley's death warrant was signed on that red tablecloth, but not that much of an exaggeration," they write. The red tablecloth was the one on which Parker signed a contract with a Las Vegas hotel owner that would pay Elvis a million dollars a year for five years.)

The scam on Parker, according to these hard-digging investigative journalists, is supposed to shock a lot of people - even though Parker's "secret" was revealed several years ago during the legal battles over the Presley estate.

Col. Tom Parker - here it is, folks - was actually named Andreas van Kujik, and he was born in Breda, Holland. After a rebellious childhood, he ran away from home with a carnival, drifted into the U.S. Army in 1929 and later drifted back to Holland. When he returned to the US for good, he came as an illegal immigrant and remained one.

He held various menial jobs with carnivals in the 1930s and then drifted into managing entertainers. Over the years, he handled such singers as Gene Austin, Hank Snow and Eddy Arnold and, according to our accusatory authors, did nothing but hurt their careers.

The book grudgingly concedes that Parker's wheeling and dealing helped make Presley one of the highest-paid entertainers in the rock 'n' roll field during his 15 years of stardom. But the authors still charge that Parker mismanaged Presley's career.

Parker is blamed, for example, for the poor quality of the movies Elvis made, especially those made after Presley's two-year hitch in the army. In fact, all but the first four movies were made after his release, and he made 33 movies in all. (When Elvis was stationed in Germany, Parker couldn't visit his client for fear of border-crossing difficulties.)

'RUINED CAREER'
The authors charge that Parker "ruined" Presley's career by greedily keeping him tied to movie studios for 10 years, during which he made no personal appearances. Yet, those films - however bad they were - made a lot of money for Presley and Parker.

Then, when Parker did put Presley back on the road, they blame him for working Elvis too hard, thus leading to the exhaustion that resulted in Presley's need for drugs.

Here and there, the book makes fleeting reference to the vague possibility that Elvis may have shared some of the blame. The authors suggest that just possibly Elvis could have stood up to the Colonel, guided his own destiny, made decisions about the movies he'd make or the songs he'd sing. There are even a few references to the "Memphis Mafia," the small army of sycophants and drug pushers who formed a protective wall around Elvis - keeping even the Colonel out.

Actually, there is relatively little about Elvis Presley in this book. He is, after all, the candidate for canonization and his participation in the ceremony is minimal.

The book is about the greedy, conniving, insensitive, self-serving manager who made every single decision concerning the Presley destiny - and made them all for his own benefit.

The authors argue, again and again, that Parker's fear of exposure (of his illegal status) led the Colonel to keep Elvis from making appearances outside the US. They point to the fact that Parker allowed Elvis to do a 1973 show in Hawaii, mostly because Parker didn't need a passport in that US state. (No mention is made of the 1964 Presley movie, *Fun in Acapulco*, filmed in Mexico, where Parker would presumably have faced border-crossing problems.)

As a final indictment, the authors take Parker to task for his heartless exploitation of Presley after the star's death - the continued sale of souvenirs, records, posters, pictures, memorabilia, etc., that Vellenga and Farren call "the Elvis industry" - until the courts stripped Parker of his holdings.

It appears the Elvis industry goes on, and two more players have found a way of entering it.

-Alex Barris is a Toronto-area author and film and music commentator.

Mischief charges

Two Georgetown males have been charged by police in connection with a Cedarvale Park fire deliberately set June 4. Police say two suspects set portable stages on fire, causing \$900 damage. A youth, 17, and a Georgetown man, 26, have been charged by police with public mischief. Both will appear in provincial court in October.

Early Christmas shopping at museum

Over 45 artisans from across the province will be displaying their crafts at the Ontario Agricultural Museum's 5th annual Christmas Craft Fair, Saturday, Sept. 24 and Sunday, Sept. 25, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Located in the rustic environment of the Museum's Gambrel Barn, visitors have the opportunity to just browse or to purchase quality home-made crafts.

Exhibitors from Manitoulin Island to Terra Cotta will be in the Fair displaying quilts, pottery, knit sweaters, jewellery, folk art, preserves and more.

Over 4,600 people last year came to visit during the two-day event.

The Ontario Agricultural Museum is a 32 hectare outdoor site consisting of over 30 buildings and displays.

Costumed interpreters perform daily demonstrations of open-hearth cooking, blacksmithing, spinning and weaving, and wheelwrighting.

The Museum is open daily 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$3 for adults, \$1.50 for students, \$1.50 for seniors, and a family rate of \$7.50. This fee includes admission to the Craft Fair.



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Cookbook

are now under way

The Halton Hills Herald invites you to submit recipes

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Deadline for entries:

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Be part of The Halton Hills Herald's 1988 Cook Book by sending us one or more of your favourite recipes. You may be eligible to win part of \$250 prize money if your recipe is one of the top three chosen by our special panel of judges. We'll also print the best of the other recipes you submit to us.

Rules include:

- Write plainly or type double-spaced on one side of the paper only.
- Print your name, address and telephone number on each recipe.
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- Use all imperial measures.
- There is no limit on the number of recipes you can submit, but to avoid duplication you may want to submit more than one recipe. Organizations may also submit recipes.
- Recipes may be for any type of food or beverage.

Other features include stories and photographs on meal planning, cooking with microwaves, special holiday dishes and other kitchen tips. So send us your favorite recipes because we'd love to see what's cooking in your kitchen.

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