

ELVIS PRESLEY

ROCK & ROLL KING WITH COUNTRY ROOTS

Elvis Presley was rock & roll's first superstar, and more than forty years after his death, he remains its king. His sound and style influenced all forms of popular music and culture, but he had deep roots in country, and made a powerful impact on the genre.

Born on January 8, 1935, in Tupelo, Mississippi, he was the only child of a truck driver and a garment factory worker. Showing an early interest in music, Presley absorbed the different songs he heard on the radio and in churches: country, African American gospel, and blues. The Presleys moved to Memphis when Elvis was thirteen, and he thrived on the city's rich music scene.

Elvis was working as a truck driver in 1954 when he first entered Sun Records and recorded "That's All Right," a song originally written and recorded by African American blues singer Arthur Crudup. Presley's version, a regional hit, was a fresh mixture of country and rhythm & blues. "That's All Right" is now considered one of the earliest rock & roll recordings, but at the time, the genre was still too new to have a widely accepted name.

His first national hit, "I Forgot to Remember to Forget," reached #1 on the country chart in 1955. By then, he was performing on country music tours as a "rockabilly" artist, a name that embraced both rock and country (hillbilly) music. In early 1956, he released "Heartbreak Hotel," which reached #1 on both the pop and country charts.

Presley began acting and singing in movies, then served two years in the U.S. Army. In 1968, he



reclaimed the stage with electric performances that reminded the world he was still the "King of Rock & Roll."

From 1969 to 1976, Presley performed primarily in Las Vegas and kept racking up hits, including "Suspicious Minds" and "Burning Love." He never strayed far from his country roots, and often added country songs to his live act. In 1971, he released *Elvis Country*, an album of classic country songs.

In his later years, Presley suffered from health problems and abused prescribed drugs. At age forty-two, he died of a heart attack on August 16, 1977, at Graceland, his longtime home in Memphis. In 1986, he was part of the first class inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He entered the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1998.

SOURCES

Country Music U.S.A. by Bill C. Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal; *Encyclopedia of Country Music*; the *New York Times*; *Rolling Stone*