

“If I could find a white man who had an African-American sound and feel, I could make a billion dollars” - Sam Phillips (Head of Sun Records)

On July 4th, 1954 when a young truck driver with a tough exterior, slightly long hair, flashy clothes and a crooked half smile entered Sun Records to record a Christmas song for his mother, Sam Phillips knew he had found what he was looking for. He believed that if he could find a white singer who identified with the huge audience of white teenagers who generally were better off, but could move and sound like a black rhythm and blues singer, then he could make millions and even billions of dollars. He certainly found what he was looking for in Elvis Presley, a star who even to this day is referred to as “The King of Rock and Roll”. During his lifetime, it is believed that he sold over 1 billion records and earned more awards and chart-topping positions than any other artist in history.

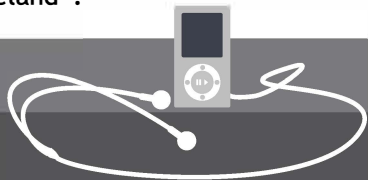
It all began during a recording break with an impromptu rendition of an old **R&B** song by Al Crudup called *That's Alright Mamma*. When Phillips realized that it was the sound he was looking for, he asked if he could re-record it, and within days of playing it on air at a local radio station, it became one of Elvis's first overwhelming successes.

Elvis then began appearing regularly in local venues with two other musicians. It is said that in his first shows, Presley's legs shook uncontrollably with nerves, causing teenage girls to “go crazy.” These moves became an Elvis trademark and along with some other cowboy antics, were incorporated into his shows.

By 1956-57, Elvis had become a national star and teen idol. He sang in prime time television shows, debuted on popular local radio stations and performed with unprecedented riot-filled success. His first movie called *Love Me Tender* made a million dollars within three days of being launched. All of his singles in that year went “gold” and included hits such as *Heartbreak Hotel* (which sold in excess of \$1million dollars in just a few months), *Blue Suede Shoes*, *Hound Dog*, *My Baby Left Me*, *Love Me Tender*, *Jailhouse Rock* and *Hound Dog*.

Between 1958 and 1960 Elvis joined the US Army and served in Germany. His fans were still able to see him in many films he had made prior to leaving and when he came back he recorded a number of other hits such as *Are you Lonesome Tonight*, *Can't Help Falling In Love*, *Return To Sender* and *Suspicious Minds*. As Elvis aged, he became increasingly more unfit on stage and died in 1977 of a drug overdose. Today, even more than 30 years after his death, millions of people from all over the world still pay homage to this memorable artist at his former residence called “Graceland”.

Fast Facts



Time Span: mid 1950s-1977

Influences: Gospel, Blues, Country

Primary Instruments: Guitar, double bass/
bass, drums, vocals

Fun Fact

One reporter nicknamed Elvis Presley “Elvis the Pelvis” because of the way he moved his hips when he danced. His style was seen as too suggestive for his day and in order to maintain a sense of decency, television stations only permitted Elvis to be filmed from the waist up.

