

# *I Forgot to Remember to Forget:*

Specht: Elvis Presley in Texas - 1955

## *Elvis Presley in Texas-1955*

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*A techno remix of Elvis Presley's 1968 "A Little Less Conversation" reached #1 on the UK pop singles chart during the summer of 2002. A few months later in October, Elvis: 30 #1 Hits debuted at the top of the Billboard 200. The flood of official product from RCA, Elvis's record company, continues unchecked. Books and articles, in both the tabloids and scholarly journals, roll off the presses with regularity. More than twenty-five years after his death, Elvis Presley's popularity and influence live on. And while all aspects of his career remain open for discussion and speculation, it is the early years, the mid-to-late 1950s, that retain a special fascination. The recent publication of Stanley Oberst and Lori Torrance's Elvis in Texas: The Undiscovered King, 1954-1958 serves as a reminder, too, of what an important role the Lone Star State played in the initial stages of Presley's phenomenal rise to the top.<sup>1</sup>*

The story of Elvis in Texas during these early years is one of personal appearances and shows performed on flatbed trailers set up on baseball fields and parking lots, as well as those in high school gyms, small clubs, auditoriums, and eventually coliseums. In addition to the Texas landscape and blacktop highways, the cast of characters includes girls, girls, girls and would-be followers such as future Rock and Roll Hall of Famers Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison and even more girls, girls, girls. These were innocent times for Elvis, times when he honed his craft and still had opportunities to relax and hang out with fans and friends without causing a riot, at least for awhile. But the unchecked excitement and growing whirlwind of success that surrounded him would soon make such moments impossible.

The primary reason for Presley's initial splash in the state was

Longview, Paris, Seymour, Stamford, and Sweetwater. It is easy to understand the numerous gigs in Houston and East Texas because of the proximity to Shreveport and the *Louisiana Hayride*, where he was committed to perform most Saturday nights. What is worth noting, though, are the regular sweeps he made out west: five stops apiece in Lubbock and Odessa, three in Midland, two each in Abilene and San Angelo, and even two in tiny Stamford. Altogether, Elvis made at least twenty-six appearances in West Texas in 1955.

Texans, particularly young teen girls, responded with more than squeals; they also dug into their pocket books. Presley's music publisher, Hill and Range, later reported that sales of Elvis's first song folio were "doing very well in Memphis and Texas."<sup>4</sup> His Sun Records also sold well partly due to the active

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his involvement with Shreveport's Louisiana Hayride. With two Sun Records singles under his belt, "That's All Right"/"Blue Moon of Kentucky" and "Good Rockin' Tonight"/"I Don't Care If the Sun Don't Shine," Elvis, along with guitarist Scotty Moore and bassist Bill Black (soon to be known as the off-and-on-again Blue Moon Boys), signed a contract to make regular appearances on the *Hayride*. As a member of the *Louisiana Hayride* from November 1954 to April 1956, Presley could be heard many Saturday nights, along with the rest of the cast, on stage or on the air over KWKH, a 50,000-watt clear-channel Shreveport radio station. Not only did KWKH blanket the Ark-La-Tex area, but the station's AM frequency also bounced and skipped its way west across much of North Central and West Texas. Once Elvis joined the *Hayride*, bookings for personal appearances quickly followed, and the Lone Star State became a prime testing ground for what some reporters would later call Presley's atomic-powered performances.<sup>2</sup>

Elvis, Scotty, and Bill got their first taste of Texas hospitality soon after joining the *Louisiana Hayride*. They made several stops in East Texas and Houston during November and December 1954, but 1955 was the year that the Presley-Texas connection was really forged. In 1955, Elvis performed in fifteen states, primarily in the South, making approximately two hundred appearances, excluding *Louisiana Hayride* shows. At least eighty of these, or almost 40%, were in Texas. And while a few of the dates are open to question, when compared with twenty or so stops each in Arkansas and Mississippi, the two next most visited states during the year, it is evident where the Hillbilly Cat spent a great deal of his time.<sup>3</sup>

During 1955, Presley made at least thirteen appearances in Houston; Dallas was second with six. He also played shows in such places as Alpine, Beaumont, Breckenridge, Conroe, DeKalb, Gilmer, Gladewater, Gonzales, Hawkins, Joinerville,

involvement of Alta Hayes of Big State Record Distributors. Based in Dallas, Big State handled jukebox and record store distribution for independent companies such as Sun Records. Primarily because of the support from Alta Hayes, Elvis's first Sun release, "That's All Right," broke out quickly in areas serviced by Big State, especially in Dallas.<sup>5</sup> In Houston, KNUZ's disc jockey/promoter Biff Collie also became an important and influential early booster.<sup>6</sup>

In the June 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Billboard*, Cecil Holifield, owner of record shops in Midland and Odessa, reported that "Elvis Presley continues to gather speed over the South. West Texas is his hottest territory to date, and he is the teenagers' favorite wherever he appears."<sup>7</sup> Elvis was very much aware of this, too, as he told Mae Boren Axton during an interview on May 7, 1955, in Daytona Beach, Florida: "Yes, ma'am, I've covered a lot [of territory], mostly in West Texas is where, that's where my records are hottest. Down in San Angelo, and Lubbock, and Midland, Amarillo."<sup>8</sup> Obviously the King of Western Bop had been accepted with open arms by many in the Lone Star State.

The Texas connection also pops up in Mark Childress's novel *Tender*, a thinly disguised Presley chronicle. A chapter in *Tender* offers a glimpse of what it might have been like in those days. It is August 1955, and Leroy Kirby (Elvis) and his Blue Rhythm Boys, Tommy Hannah (Scotty) and Jack Brown (Bill), are in East Texas. The grind of the road, the constant bookings, and the growing excitement of the crowds are all here, and for Leroy, when the show's over, it's time to, "Sign a few autographs. Sweet-talk a girl or two. Pack the instruments in the car. Roar into the night."<sup>9</sup> After playing for the grand opening of a Rexall drugstore in Big Sandy, Texas, the next stop is sixty miles south in Palestine at Eddy's Sho-Boat Lounge. The booking turns out to be a mistake, but Leroy and the Blue Rhythm Boys go ahead and play for the crowd – four customers, a waitress, and the owner.

Lean times to be sure, but Childress does give the reader a sense of the electricity that Leroy generates. And as the momentum grows, so too does Leroy's confidence: "The last traces of his stage fright had dried up somewhere in West Texas, weeks ago."<sup>10</sup>

Elvis's Texas sightings abound, then, in both fact and in fiction, but two recent discoveries in Sweetwater demonstrate how fragile the evidence is when it comes to accounting for some of his comings and goings in the early years. Because of the existence of a ticket stub for a concert on June 8, 1955, it has been assumed that Presley performed in Sweetwater on that date (*Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, *The King on the Road*, *The Elvis Atlas*, *Elvis Day By Day*, and *Elvis in Texas* all indicate such). The June 8<sup>th</sup> show had to be cancelled, however, due to "rain and bad weather," and it was rescheduled for the next day on June 9<sup>th</sup>. Information on the postponement turned up in a cache of newspapers donated to the Pioneer City-County Museum in Sweetwater (microfilmed copies of the *Sweetwater Reporter* for 1955 have been missing for years).<sup>11</sup>

Even more intriguing is an advertisement found in the December 15, 1955, edition of the *Sweetwater Reporter*, announcing a Presley appearance in Sweetwater on the next evening. At least four residents recall Elvis performing twice in Sweetwater, and now the newspaper apparently confirms it. None of the Presley chronology books have any mention of the December 16, 1955, concert. In fact, there are no other documented Elvis bookings in Texas for the entire month of December. The question now becomes why trek all the way back to the state for only one night in Sweetwater? It will be interesting to see what Presley scholars make of all of this.<sup>12</sup>

In another Texas tidbit, during his tenure with Sun Records and before signing with RCA Victor, Presley made perhaps his only recordings in a studio setting, outside of Memphis, in Lubbock. Elvis, Scotty, and Bill visited radio station KDAV on either January 6 or February 13, 1955, to promote their evening show, and the trio laid down a couple of tracks on acetate for the station to play later over the air. The two selections were "Fool, Fool, Fool," a 1951 R & B chart-topper for the Clovers, and "Shake, Rattle and Roll," first a hit for Big Joe Turner and then for Bill Haley.<sup>13</sup> "Shake, Rattle and Roll" became a regular

feature on Elvis's concert playlist, and he recorded another version for RCA the next year.<sup>14</sup>

Live recordings from the period have also surfaced, and these provide aural evidence of what audiences were experiencing. Not unexpectedly, one of the earliest known tapings of an Elvis concert comes from Texas, a gig at Eagles Hall in Houston on March 19, 1955. Introduced by Biff Collie as "the boppin' hillbilly," Presley and the Blue Moon Boys opened with a frantic version of their second Sun Records release "Good Rockin' Tonight." Then on to the most recent Sun offering, "Baby Let's Play House," followed by "Blue Moon of Kentucky," Ray Charles's "I Got a Woman," and finally "That's All Right." Elvis's voice is up front. His breathing is reckless, almost slobbering into the microphone, with the audible squeals of girls in the background. Scotty and Bill are off mic, but they are still a formidable presence with Moore's cranked-up guitar breaks and Black's steady, thumping bass. Elvis

introduces "I Got a Woman" with tongue planted firmly in cheek: "This one's called ... little darlin', you broke my heart when you went away, but I'll break your jaw when you come back." On the final number, "That's All Right," Black bangs wildly on his bass and chimes in on the "that's all rights" in falsetto. Moore plugs the cracks with pungent guitar fills. Presley's voice soars. Total running time is less than fifteen minutes, and that's it. Elvis has left the building.<sup>15</sup>

The impact of performances like this inspired numerous audiences, to say the least. In Dallas, Kay Wheeler formed the first documented national Elvis Presley fan club in the world, and with his frequent flurries into the state, it did not take local musicians long to catch on to what Presley was up to as well.<sup>16</sup> Many white teens were already in tune with the rhythm and blues sounds that were in the air, but Elvis effortlessly mixed white hillbilly or country music with black R & B like no one before. With Presley as "the avator, the unforgettable boy-daddy of rockabilly," as Nick Tosches so anointed him, disciples from the Lone Star State quickly became part of the vanguard's leading edge.<sup>17</sup> Buddy Holly and Roy Orbison are the most famous, but there were others in this initial wave who were just as affected,

December 15, 1955 Mystery Concert ad for Presley concert in Sweetwater



Courtesy of Texas Music Museum, Austin.

including Dean Beard, Johnny Carroll, Mac Curtis, Sonny Fisher, Sid King, Buddy Knox, Bob Luman, Joe Poovey, and Alvis Wayne. And these Texas “cats” put their own twist on the Elvis Sun sound, helping to meld it into the music that would soon be called rockabilly.<sup>18</sup>

Buddy Holly was a spectator the first time Elvis played in Lubbock on January 6, 1955, and Buddy’s friend, singer/songwriter Sonny Curtis, remembers the very next day they started doing Presley songs: “Buddy wanted to be like Elvis.”<sup>19</sup> Presley returned to the Hub City four more times during the year, and Holly and his then singing partner Bob Montgomery performed on some of the same shows. Presley and Holly got to spend time together, too, with Buddy even giving Elvis a tour of the town.<sup>20</sup> On one occasion, Holly’s brother Larry recalls that Buddy “found him [Elvis] a girl. She was not anyone you’d find on this side of town.”<sup>21</sup> Although Holly moved on to produce his own unique brand of music, Buddy was always the first to point out, “Without Elvis, none of us could have made it.”<sup>22</sup>

Elvis testimonials are plentiful, and those from fellow musicians such as Holly are especially telling; many having a Damascus Road-like quality. Roy Orbison’s initial exposure to Presley in person was most likely in Dallas at the Big D Jamboree on April 16, 1955, while Orbison was a student at North Texas State College.<sup>23</sup> And what he caught sight of “was a punk kid. A weird-looking dude. I can’t over-emphasize how shocking he

looked and sounded to me that night ... his energy was incredible and his instinct was just amazing.”<sup>24</sup> Orbison later said, “After that, I wanted to put on a show like Elvis.”<sup>25</sup>

Often forgotten, except to rockabilly aficionados, Sonny Fisher, a native of Henderson County, was already playing in clubs around Houston when he saw Presley perform during one of his first stopovers in the Bayou City in November 1954. As Fisher told an interviewer, “Everything we did came from R&B ... Then we heard Elvis and I recognized it as something a little different just like everybody else.”<sup>26</sup> By January 1955, Sonny was in the studio recording some Elvis-styled tracks but with a different beat, literally. Fisher used drums when Presley was still *sans* “skins.” The two were later booked on the same bill, and Elvis asked to borrow Sonny’s drummer for his portion of the show.<sup>27</sup>

Coleman’s Dean Beard, an unsung “Rock-me boy,” often referred to as the “West Texas Wildman,” also shared the stage with Presley.<sup>28</sup> Beard was the opening act in Breckenridge on April 13, 1955, and later that night Dean witnessed Elvis as “he tore the roof off that place.”<sup>29</sup> The next day a write-up appeared in the *Breckenridge American* by Ann Cowan that just might be “the first post-show review of an Elvis concert.”<sup>30</sup> Beard was in attendance for other Presley shows, including a July 4<sup>th</sup> appearance in Brownwood. Afterward Dean recalled inviting Elvis over to Coleman for a visit: “He [Presley] had a pink Cadillac. Boy, I felt like something riding down the main street of Coleman in that pink Cadillac.”<sup>31</sup>



Courtesy of Texas Music Museum, Austin.

As an aside, the July 4<sup>th</sup> concert in Brownwood was Elvis's third outing of the day, after earlier performances in Stephenville and De Leon. This would be the only occasion ever when Presley played a "triple header," three towns in the same day.<sup>32</sup> Before going on stage in De Leon, Elvis told James Blackwood of the Blackwood Brothers: "I ain't gonna sing nothing but gospel music today." Much to the chagrin of the promoter and to the equal disappointment of the De Leon crowd, gospel music was all he sang. One more Texas first and something Presley never did again.<sup>33</sup>

In an often quoted Elvis remembrance, Bob Luman, another wild-eyed East Texas rockabilly, told journalist Paul Hemphill what it was like to watch Presley at a show in Kilgore on May 20, 1955: "He made chills run up my back. Man, like when your hair starts grabbing at your collar ... That's the last time I tried to sing like Webb Pierce or Lefty Frizzell."<sup>34</sup> After hearing Elvis's version of "That's All Right" on the radio in Littlefield, Texas, future country music superstar Waylon Jennings had similar thoughts: "The sound went straight up your spine ... It just climbed right through you ... Up at the station, I looked at the yellow Sun label from Memphis as if it were from Mars."<sup>35</sup>

Not everyone was as taken, however. Bill Malone, the dean of country music historians, was a second year student at the University of Texas in 1955 when he observed Presley perform in Austin, and he was not prepared for the encounter. It wasn't the music that bothered him so much, but rather Elvis's "physical gyrations" and the "screaming response" of the females in the audience.<sup>36</sup> With an opportunity to reflect over the years, Malone now understands he witnessed "a revolution in American music," but at that moment, it was more like "the barbarians had entered the gates of country music."<sup>37</sup>

Up to this point, Presley toured primarily with members of the *Louisiana Hayride* or country music revues. And while his first number one hit record, "I Forgot to Remember to Forget," registered only on the country charts, it soon became clear to most observers that he could not be pigeonholed into a country music slot, or any other category for that matter.<sup>38</sup> During these early years, both the media and fans scrambled for words to describe Elvis and his music. Monikers included the Hillbilly Cat, the Folk Music Fireball, and the Nation's Only Atomic Powered Singer. As Presley biographer Peter Guralnick has so astutely pointed out, "[Elvis's] titles alone betray the cultural schizophrenia with which he was greeted."<sup>39</sup> But surprisingly, none of them yet carried a rock 'n' roll, or even a rockabilly, appellation.

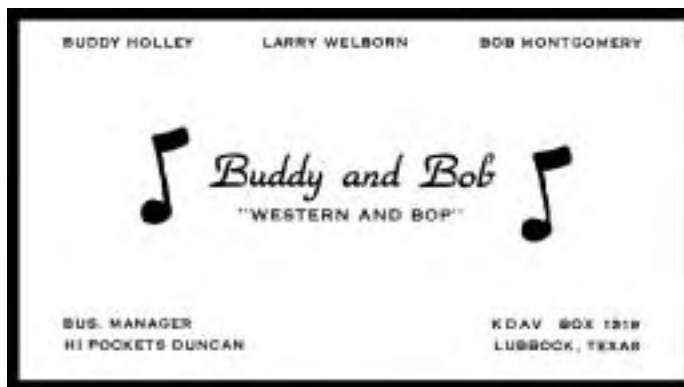
One of the more unique tags could well have its origins in the Lone Star State, and it tied Presley and his music to bebop or

just plain "bop."<sup>40</sup> The term "western and bop" was already in circulation on the South Plains. Buddy Holly and Bob Montgomery had business cards that read: "Buddy and Bob – Western and Bop."<sup>41</sup> But Elvis gave a whole other worldly dimension to the phrase. The bop references began to show up as early as his first swing through West Texas in January 1955 with billing in Midland as the "King of Western Bop."<sup>42</sup> For his second appearance in Lubbock on February 13, an advertisement announced: "Elvis Presley, The Be-Bop Western Star of the Louisiana Hayride, returns to Lubbock."<sup>43</sup> The next night in Abilene, citizens of the Key City were invited to come out and see "Elvis Presley and His Bop Band."<sup>44</sup>

It didn't take long before this description had spread eastward across the Sabine River. In her interview with Presley on May 7 in Florida, Mae Axton asked, "Elvis, you are sort of a bebop artist more than anything else, aren't ya? Is that what they call you?" And Presley answered, "Well I never have given myself a name but a lot of disc jockeys call me Boppin' Hillbilly and Be-

bop...I don't know what all."<sup>45</sup> A month later a promoter based in Washington D.C. declared, "Presley has crossed bebop with country music."<sup>46</sup> And in a radio interview/promotion for the *Louisiana Hayride* in August, Bob Neal, Presley's manager at the time, described his protegee as "the King of Western Bop."<sup>47</sup>

The same month back in Texas in a pre-concert plug, a staff writer for the *Austin American* commented on



Western and Bop card. Courtesy of Bill Griggs

Elvis's "boppish approach to hillbilly music" and "his half-bop, half-western style."<sup>48</sup> And prior to an October 6th appearance in the Capital City, the *Austin Statesman* reminded its readers that Presley's fans had "labeled [him] 'the king of western bop.'"<sup>49</sup> The following week an Amarillo ad reiterated that Elvis was the "King of Western Bop," but pointed out "his wardrobe runs to the 'cool cat' type of dress rather than western apparel."<sup>50</sup> Three days later in Abilene, the promoters welcomed "Elvis Presley and his Western Bop Jamboree."<sup>51</sup> The characterization continued to follow Elvis outside the state, too, with billings as the "King of Western Bop" in Newport, Arkansas, and Booneville, Mississippi.<sup>52</sup> When he made his debut in Las Vegas in April 1956, the *Las Vegas SUN* reported: "Presley's singing is a 'peculiar brand of western bop.'"<sup>53</sup>

Western bop? It is interesting to note how the expression has persisted. As recently as 1999, Ace Records issued a CD anthology of late 1950s rockers recorded by Buddy Holly's producer Norman Petty, entitled *West Texas Bop*, and a rockabilly combo currently working out of the Washington, D.C. area calls itself J. P. McDermott & Western Bop.<sup>54</sup> Of course, when one



Joe Brown: Photo courtesy of David Dennard and Dragon Street Records.

thinks of bop, the names of jazz bebop pioneers such as Charlie Parker, who incidentally died the same year (1955) that the term western bop was linked to Presley, come immediately to mind. And in a sense, Elvis, like Parker and his bebop contemporaries in

the mid-1940s, provided what jazz critic Martin Williams called “a renewed musical language (or at least a new dialect).”<sup>55</sup>

But “bop” in this case was, obviously, being used as a code word. It meant more than just a “Negro” beat. Bop was also something *new* and *cool*, and it involved an element of the dance, too. The sexuality oozing from Presley could not be ignored either. In a 1960 interview, Elvis coyly confided, “I can’t dance to rock and roll. I can slow dance, but I never learned to bop.”<sup>56</sup> But his fans knew better and so did the media and the public at large. Presley’s stage moves were described in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as the “dirty bop.”<sup>57</sup> The Alabama White Citizens Council was even more explicit when it railed against “this animalistic nigger bop.”<sup>58</sup> In addition to the music mixing, then, another ingredient was the way Elvis stirred in front of an audience, up on the balls of his feet, twitching, seemingly ready to spring off the stage. As novelist and journalist Michael Ventura has observed, “Elvis’s singing was so extraordinary because you could *hear* the moves, infer the moves, in his singing.”<sup>59</sup> Clearly Texans were among the first to pick up on the new lingo and understand what Elvis and his music were all about.

With his star rapidly on the ascent after signing with RCA Victor Records and appearing on national television, and with Hollywood and Las Vegas beckoning, Presley made only 19 appearances in Texas in 1956. The last was in San Antonio on October 14 for two shows at the Bexar County Coliseum. Elvis came back in 1958. However, this time he was a draftee in the United States Army stationed at Fort Hood from April through August.

After the October 14, 1956, concerts in the Alamo City, it would be almost fourteen years before Presley returned to perform again in the Lone Star State, but he never forgot those early days. Elvis later told a reporter for the *Dallas Morning News*, “I sorta got my start in Texas.”<sup>60</sup> Lots of Texans remembered Presley, too, and for a variety of reasons. Sid Foster, a disc jockey in Breckenridge at the time, recalls a telephone conversation with Slim Willet, Abilene media mogul and composer of “Don’t Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes.” Willet, who had just caught Elvis’s performance in Lubbock on February 13, 1955, admonished, “Sid my man, you’ve got to see this guy, no kidding. And my advice to you is don’t bring a date if you want to keep her.”<sup>61</sup> ■

## NOTES

1. Stanley Oberst and Lori Torrance, *Elvis in Texas: The Undiscovered King, 1954-1958* (Plano, TX: Republic of Texas Press, 2002). Though obviously a labor of love, careless errors of spelling and fact require that *Elvis in Texas* be read with caution.
2. An informal history of the Louisiana Hayride is available in Horace Logan with Bill Sloan, *Elvis, Hank, and Me: Making Musical History on the Louisiana Hayride* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998). As the Hayride’s program director, Logan was responsible for hiring Presley, and his memoir offers an insider’s look at Elvis when fame was lurking just over the horizon. Albert Goldman also makes the point that “radio was the real foundation of Elvis’s [early] success.” See Albert Goldman, *Elvis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 124.
3. To arrive at my “approximate” totals, in addition to *Elvis in Texas*, I used Lee Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?* (Sacramento: High Sierra Books, 1995), Robert Gordon, *The King on the Road: Elvis on Tour, 1954-1977* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), Michael Gray and Roger Osborne, *The Elvis Atlas: A Journey Through Elvis Presley’s America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), and Peter Guralnick and Ernst Jorgensen, *Elvis Day By Day* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), all of which provide chronological lists of Presley appearances. Because Texas and Arkansas can both claim Texarkana, I excluded the shows that Elvis played there in 1955 from either the Texas or Arkansas count, even though the auditorium is located on the Arkansas side of the line.
4. Jerry Hopkins, *Elvis: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 124.
5. Collin Escott with Martin Hawkins, *Good Rockin’ Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991) 67; Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), 113; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 78.
6. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 152.
7. *Ibid.*, 183.
8. Jerry Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000), 2.
9. Mark Childress, *Tender: A Novel* (New York: Harmony Books, 1990), 320.
10. *Ibid.*, 329.
11. Travis Monday, “Elvis Presley in Sweetwater,” *Sweetwater Reporter*, May 12, 2002, A1. Oberst and Torrance have Presley appearing in Andrews on June 9, 1955.
12. *Ibid.*, A10. Travis Monday hopes to follow up in more detail on this very surprising discovery.
13. Ernst Jorgensen, *Elvis Presley: A Life in Music* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 21; Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 28. The acetate of “Fool, Fool, Fool” was mistakenly labeled “What A Fool I Was.” Both recordings – “Fool, Fool, Fool” and “Shake, Rattle and Roll” – are included on the Presley box set *The King of Rock ‘N’ Roll: The Complete 50s Masters* (RCA 66050, 1992).
14. Jorgensen, *Elvis Presley*, 38-40.
15. At first thought to originate from an earlier Eagles Hall date on January 1, 1955, the consensus now seems to be that this show took place on March 19. See Jorgensen, *Elvis Presley*, 24-25. A tape of the concert has circulated in many guises on both vinyl and compact disc. My copy is *Elvis Presley The Rockin’ Rebel, Vol. II* (Golden Archives GA-300, ca. 1979).
16. Goldman, *Elvis*, 124; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 184.
17. Nick Tosches, *Country: The Twisted Roots of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 62. The chapter from which this quote is taken, “Loud Converts,” is a must read to better understand what the rockabillys and their music were all about.
18. For more on rockabilly music, see Randy McNutt, *We Wanna Boogie: An Illustrated History of the American Rockabilly Movement* [rev., 2d ed.] (Hamilton, OH: HHP Books, 1998), Craig Morrison, *Go Cat Go!: Rockabilly Music and Its Makers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), and Billy Poore, *RockABilly: A Forty-Year Journey* (Milwaukee, WI: Hall Leonard Corp., 1998).
19. Joe Carr and Alan Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights: The Story of Country Music in West Texas* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1995), 128.
20. John Goldrosen and John Beecher, *Remembering Buddy: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 29-30.
21. Ellis Amburn, *Buddy Holly: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 35; Bill Griggs, *Buddy Holly – Day By Day (September 1936 – June 1959)* (Lubbock: Rockin’ 50s’, 1997), 58.
22. Timothy White, *Rock Lives: Profiles & Interviews* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), 42.
23. The Presley-Orbison chronology is a bit of a mess. The most important point to remember, though, is Orbison was enrolled at

- North Texas State College (now the University of North Texas) in Denton for the fall 1954 semester and the spring 1955 semester (the UNT registrar confirms he was a student both semesters). While a student at NT, Roy saw Presley live in Dallas on the Big D Jamboree, and this is where some of the confusion arises. Orbison told an interviewer he first saw Elvis at the Big D Jamboree in 1954. Since Presley's debut on the Jamboree was not until April 16, 1955, Roy was obviously mistaken about the year. Nevertheless, both of Orbison's major biographers place him in the audience at the Big D Jamboree a year earlier on April 16, 1954, when he was still attending Wink High School. This would have been three months before Presley recorded his first Sun Records single and seven months before Elvis, Scotty, and Bill had even played their initial Texas gig in Houston. See Alan Clayson, *Only the Lonely: Roy Orbison's Life and Legacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 26; Ellis Amburn, *Dark Star: The Roy Orbison Story* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1990), 28-29. Presley's biographer Peter Guralnick also falls into the trap. See Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 171. To muddy the waters even more, Guralnick and Jorgensen place Orbison in the audience for Presley's performance in Odessa on February 16, 1955. See Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 33. Colin Escott gets it right, however: "Elvis was in Odessa in February 1955, but Roy would have been in Denton at the time..." See Colin Escott, *Roadkill on the Three-Chord Highway: Art and Trash in American Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7. There is confusion on another matter: When did Orbison and the Teen Kings begin hosting a weekly television show in Odessa and when did Presley appear on the show? Several accounts have Elvis appearing on the Teen Kings show on KOSA-TV in January 1955. See Carr and Munde, *Prairie Nights to Neon Lights*, 135; Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 35; Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 171. This information is based primarily on interviews with Billy Walker (then a member of the Louisiana Hayride and later the Grand Ole Opry) who was touring with Presley at the time. With Orbison in residence in Denton, except for the 1954 Christmas break, Walker's recall has to be questioned. But it becomes even more suspect because the Teen Kings' association with KOSA-TV did not begin until the fall of 1955. See Mike Perry, notes to The Teen Kings, *Are You Ready?* (Roller Coaster Records RCCD 3012, 1995), 5-8 (Perry, in my opinion, has the best grasp of the chronology). So when did Presley appear with Orbison on Odessa television? Perhaps it was in October 1955 when Elvis played his last show in Odessa. See Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 111. Opportunities exist, then, for more research in this area.
24. Escott with Hawkins, *Good Rockin' Tonight*, 146.
  25. Amburn, *Dark Star*, 29.
  26. Bill Millar, "That Rockin Daddy Sonny Fisher," *New Komotion*, no. 25 (1980), 15.
  27. Ray Topping, notes to Sonny Fisher, *Texas Rockabilly* (Ace 10CH14, ca. 1979). The songs Fisher recorded in 1955 and 1956 were released on Beaumont's Starday Records, and tunes like "Rockin' Daddy" and "Hey Mama" offer up some of the earliest examples of the fledgling rockabilly sound on vinyl. Greil Marcus has described Fisher's Starday recordings as laced with "smoky sexual menace, authentically tough stuff..." See Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'N' Roll*, 4th rev. ed. (New York: Plume, 1997), 289.
  28. Bill Whitaker, "Dean Beard Changed Tune, Not Drive," *Abilene Reporter-News*, April 11, 1989, 1A. In 1956, Beard cut two demo sessions in Memphis for Sun Records, but Sam Phillips decided not to sign him. One of the demos was "Rakin' and Scrapin'," which Dean recorded again the next year in Abilene for Slim Willer's Edmoral label. A tenor sax, piano-driven pounder (members of the band included Jimmy Seals on tenor sax and Dash Crofts on drums), "Rakin' and Scrapin'" was leased to Atlantic Records for national distribution but for naught. Beard continued to perform locally in Texas, and he recorded regularly through the mid-60s. At one point, he was even out on the West Coast as a member of the Champs of "Tequila" fame, but ultimately Dean's story is another one of those what if...
  29. Wayne Russell, "Dean Beard," *New Komotion*, no. 23 (1980), 14; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 65.
  30. Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 61.
  31. Russell, "Dean Beard," 14. Elvis's first pink Cadillac burned up on the road sometime in June 1955 (depending on the source, it happened on either June 5, June 16, or June 17), and he didn't get a new one until the next month. See Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 40-43; Cotten, *Did Elvis Play in Your Hometown?*, 82; Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 196. In all probability, Beard and Presley took their spin around Coleman in the Caddie on another date.
  32. Cotten, *Did Elvis Sing in Your Hometown?*, 86; Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 109-111.
  33. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 196-197.
  34. Paul Hemphill, *The Nashville Sound: Bright Lights and Country Music* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 273. Bob Luman recorded seminal versions of "Red Cadillac and a Black Mustache" and "Red Hot" for Imperial Records in 1957, and he went on to have both rock 'n' roll and country hits. Yet, even after joining the Grand Ole Opry in 1965, Luman maintained his rockabilly roots.
  35. Waylon Jennings with Lenny Kaye, *Waylon: An Autobiography* (New York: Warner Books, 1996), 43-44.
  36. Bill Malone, "Country Elvis," in *In Search of Elvis: Music, Race, Art, Religion*, edited by Vernon Chadwick (New York: Westview Press, 1997), 3. Malone places the concert as "sometime in late 1955," but if Hank Snow was on the show as Malone remembers, then, it would be on January 18, 1956.
  37. *Ibid.*, 3; Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get About Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 10.
  38. "I Forgot to Remember to Forget" first entered the *Billboard* country music charts in September 1955, and it stayed there for thirty-nine weeks, eventually reaching the number one position in late February 1956. See Joel Whitburn, *Top Country Singles, 1944-1997* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, 1998), 272. Presley's first number one record on *Billboard's* Top 100 (the pop charts) was "Heartbreak Hotel" in March 1956. See Joel Whitburn, *Top Pop Singles, 1955-1996* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, 1997), 483.
  39. Peter Guralnick, *Lost Highway: Journeys & Arrivals of American Musicians* (Boston: Godine, 1979), 129. See also Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 103.
  40. Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins mention in passing that Presley was "billed as the 'King of Western Bop'" for a show at Overton Park in Memphis in September 1954 (the date was actually July 30, 1954). See Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins, *Sun Records: The Brief History of the Legendary Label* (New York: Quick Fox, 1980), 4. But this seems highly unlikely since it was Elvis's first advertised appearance and one of the ads even spelled his first name "Ellis." See Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 108-111. In fact, Escott and Hawkins drop the bop reference altogether in their subsequent *Good Rockin' Tonight*, 65.
  41. Goldrosen and Beecher, *Remembering Buddy*, 30. Texas music historian Kevin Coffey offers this: "When I hear the term western bop, Buddy Holly comes to mind. Not because I think that describes his music, but because I think he did, circa '55..." (e-mail from Coffey to Specht, July 9, 2002).
  42. Billy Walker has said he "saved the ad for the Midland, Texas, show. It says: 'The show will feature five stars of the Louisiana Hayride, including Elvis Presley, King of Western Bop.'" See *Elvis Up Close: In the Words of Those Who Knew Him Best*, edited by Rose Clayton and Dick Heard (Atlanta: Turner Publishing, 1994), 64.
  43. *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, February 13, 1955, VI-4.
  44. *Abilene Reporter-News*, February 14, 1955, 3-B.
  45. Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word*, 2.
  46. Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 217.
  47. Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word*, 5.
  48. *Austin American*, August 25, 1955, 17.
  49. *Austin Statesman*, October 6, 1955, A17.
  50. Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 50.
  51. *Abilene Reporter-News*, October 9, 1955, 11-B.
  52. Cotten, *Did Elvis Play in Your Hometown?*, 115, 126.
  53. Bob Lilly, "Just About Everything Under the Sun," *Las Vegas SUN*, April 26, 1956. Available: <http://www.vegas.com/lounge/elvis>.
  54. *West Texas Bop: The Original Norman Petty Masters* (Ace CDCHD 699, 1999). More information on J. P. McDermott & Western Bop is available at their official website: [www.westernbop.com](http://www.westernbop.com).
  55. Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 136. See also Patrick B. Mullen, "Hillbilly Hipsters of the 1950s: the Romance of Rockabilly," *Southern Quarterly* 22 (Spring 1984), 83.
  56. Osborne, *Elvis: Word for Word*, 163.
  57. Gray and Osborne, *The Elvis Atlas*, 95.
  58. Dave Marsh, *Elvis* (New York: Rolling Stone Press Book/Times Books, 1982), 54.
  59. Michael Ventura, "Hear That Long Snake Moan," in his *Shadow Dancing in the U.S.A.* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1985), 152.
  60. Julian Levine, "'Dad Will Be With Me,' Says Elvis," *Dallas Morning News*, August 25, 1958, 4-1.
  61. Oberst and Torrance, *Elvis in Texas*, 52.