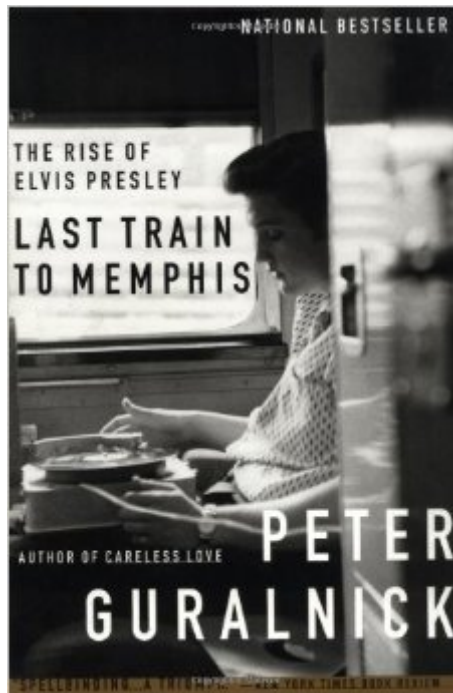


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# Last Train To Memphis: The Rise Of Elvis Presley



## Synopsis

From the moment that he first shook up the world in the mid 1950s, Elvis Presley has been one of the most vivid and enduring myths of American culture. *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* is the first biography to go past that myth and present an Elvis beyond the legend. Based on hundreds of interviews and nearly a decade of research, it traces the evolution not just of the man but of the music and of the culture he left utterly transformed, creating a completely fresh portrait of Elvis and his world. This volume tracks the first twenty-four years of Elvis' life, covering his childhood, the stunning first recordings at Sun Records ("That's All Right," "Mystery Train"), and the early RCA hits ("Heartbreak Hotel," "Hound Dog," "Don't Be Cruel"). These were the years of his improbable self-invention and unprecedented triumphs, when it seemed that everything that Elvis tried succeeded wildly. There was scarcely a cloud in sight through this period until, in 1958, he was drafted into the army and his mother died shortly thereafter. The book closes on that somber and poignant note. *Last Train to Memphis* takes us deep inside Elvis' life, exploring his lifelong passion for music of every sort (from blues and gospel to Bing Crosby and Mario Lanza), his compelling affection for his family, and his intimate relationships with girlfriends, mentors, band members, professional associates, and friends. It shows us the loneliness, the trustfulness, the voracious appetite for experience, and above all the unshakable, almost mystical faith that Elvis had in himself and his music. Drawing frequently on Elvis' own words and on the recollections of those closest to him, the book offers an emotional, complex portrait of young Elvis Presley with a depth and dimension that for the first time allow his extraordinary accomplishments to ring true. Peter Guralnick has given us a previously unseen world, a rich panoply of people and events that illuminate an achievement, a place, and a time as never revealed before. Written with grace, humor, and affection, *Last Train to Memphis* has been hailed as the definitive biography of Elvis Presley. It is the first to set aside the myths and focus on Elvis' humanity in a way that has yet to be duplicated.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Last Train to Memphis" and its sequel, "Careless Love", make a deeply engrossing, carefully researched, finely written biography of Elvis Presley. Author Peter Guralnick took eleven years to exhaustively research sources and interview people who knew Elvis personally and would tell their firsthand experiences. Guralnick's scholarly approach automatically eschews any hint of the fan adoration that can taint celebrity biographies. Guralnick might even have erred on the dry side rather than the juicy or dishy side of the story. This is all to the good, because Elvis' life story, a fantastic, zany, epic arc through American pop culture, is one that needs no embellishment and is served well by a measure of journalistic restraint. Guralnick made a wise choice with the two-book format, because in Elvis' life there was a distinct "Rise and Fall." "Last Train to Memphis" is the rise: "Careless Love" is the fall. In each volume, Guralnick reveals much not just about Elvis, but about the people who were his family and closest friends and how their actions and relationships to him and to each other shaped Elvis into the man he became. Accounts of his school days, his early days as a musician, his early girlfriends, and his family life all flesh him out as a human being and penetrate the shell of celebrity to offer a three-dimensional glimpse of the individual and his own ideas and aspirations and insecurities. The first volume ends with the death of Elvis' mother, a loss that sent him into the first tailspin of many, from which he never seemed to recover.

But it's not true...Elvis DOES live...in the pages of Guralnick's outstanding biography of Elvis Presley, a biography that will stand the test of time as the definitive study of the King of Rock n Roll. In Volume One, Guralnick takes us from Elvis' humble beginnings in Tupelo, Mississippi to his departure for Army duty in Germany twenty-three years later. In between, readers will be fascinated with what they THOUGHT they knew about Elvis. LAST TRAIN differs from other books about Elvis in two very distinct ways: First, the author gives us first hand accounts from the people who were actually there. There's no tabloid journalism or second-hand anecdotes. Guralnick has done his research and it shows. Second, Elvis is never presented as an icon or an idol. Guralnick has the unique ability to step back away from the action as an impartial observer and give us an extraordinarily clear image of what Elvis was really like - a really nice, clean, religious kid who was

consumed with music and making people happy. You can almost feel the electricity of the recording sessions at Sun Studios. You can watch Sam Phillips as he realizes that this boy could change the course of popular music forever. Elvis' girls, friends, musicians...they're all here and they all have a piece of the story to tell. And what about the "Colonel" Tom Parker? Genius or huckster? Of course, the hysteria is recorded as well. After all, it's part of the story. Crazy fans were nothing new. After all, girls had been going nuts over singers like Frank Sinatra and many others for years. But the world had never seen anything like this? How can you explain it? Guralnick never really comes right out with an explanation, but you'll be able to pick it up between the lines.

Peter Guralnick demonstrated in his definitive history of Soul music, *Sweet Soul Music : Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom*, that he has a nearly unique grasp of the singular way in which popular music and the political culture intersect in American society. Along with Robert Palmer (*Deep Blues*) and Greil Marcus (*Mystery Train*), he has helped to craft a still pretty slender body of literature which takes pop music and its impact seriously, but also places it within a larger societal context. Now, in his two part biography of Elvis Presley, he has set out to strip away both the mythology (Volume One) and the demonology (Volume Two) that obscure Elvis and to restore some reasonable sense of perspective on the man and his music. In so doing, he offers us a new and useful opportunity to understand the personal and societal forces that converged to make him into The King, one of the genuine cultural icons of the 20th Century, and to trigger the Rock & Roll Era. There are several main factors that Guralnick cites, which appear to have had a particular influence on how events transpired. First is the city of Memphis itself, which served as a nearly perfect crucible for forging the blend of Gospel, Country, Blues and Rhythm & Blues that made up Elvis's sound. A southern city, but not Deep South, there was at least limited interaction between the white and black worlds. But most importantly for this story, the city was saturated with music.

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