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Dramatic Publishing

ELVIS PEOPLE

By
DOUG GRISSOM



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Elvis People was first presented by Robert Rush at Mill Mountain Theatre, Roanoke, Va., on January 31, 2006. It was directed by Chip Egan; the scenery was by Bob Sims; costumes by Jennie Ruhland and lighting by Jimmy Ray Ward. The cast was as follows:

Barbara Farrar
Ed Sala
Lucinda McDermott
Thomas Kee
Claire VanCott
Nick Newell
Chris Holmes
Meredith Holcomb
David Howard
Katie Nigsch

Elvis People opened off-Broadway at the New World Theatre on June 21, 2007. It was produced by Robert Rush; directed by Henry Wishcamper; scenery by Cameron Anderson; costumes by Theresa Squire; lighting by Robert P. Robins; sound by Graham Johnson and video production by Maya Ciarrocchi. The cast was as follows:

Jordan Gelber
Jenny Maguire
David McCann
Nick Newell
Nell Page
Ed Sala

ELVIS PEOPLE

ACT ONE

Ed Sullivan
The Button
The Car
Running Away
Elvis Was a Southern Boy
Snapshot
Elvis in Vietnam

ACT TWO

Elvis in Academia
Artifact
Shelter
Publishing
Leaving
The Impersonator
Elvis Is Alive

PRODUCTION NOTES

Elvis People is a collage; the play consists of self-contained scenes and monologues. As such, there are numerous characters, and the casting is totally flexible. The play would probably work best with a cast of 6 to 10, but this is completely up to the discretion of the director and producing organization. The female-male ratio is flexible; an equal number of men and women would work best. (In scenes with more than three characters, roles can easily be doubled.)

The stage environment is likewise totally flexible. There could be an elaborate set, or none at all. All that's needed to stage the play are a few chairs and a table. The play takes place in a variety of locations, but the location (if important) is apparent from the context of the scene. There are only a few specific props that are called for. Since each actor plays multiple parts, perhaps the costuming could have an overall "uniform" effect, with accessories used to define character. But as with the set, the overall tone should probably be somewhat abstract and minimal, so that no time, or as little time as possible, is taken between scenes.

Though the scenes in this script must be presented in this order, the producing organization has the option of doing fewer scenes if a shorter evening is required. The producing organization may decide which scenes to delete from the evening.

ACT ONE

ED SULLIVAN

MOM

DAD

SUSIE

VOICE. On September 9, 1956. Elvis appeared on *The Ed Sullivan* show for the first time.

(MOM, DAD, daughter SUSIE are watching TV.)

MOM. Oh my.

DAD. He can't even sing.

MOM. He looks like a...juvenile delinquent.

DAD. He looks like he's retarded.

MOM. He can't carry a tune! He just...hiccups or something.

DAD. Inbred. That's what he is. Half the people in the South are inbred, you know.

MOM. They are?

DAD. Certainly.

MOM. How do you know?

DAD. I've been down South.

MOM. Why doesn't he just stand still—you can't sing when you're moving around like that.

DAD. He's trying to act colored. Colored people dance like that when they're all liquored up, you know.

MOM. They do?

DAD. Certainly.

MOM. How do you know?

DAD. I've been—never mind. It certainly isn't the kind of thing you show on television.

MOM. Just awful. Listen to those crazy girls screaming!

DAD. Well, I'd scream too if I was there.

MOM. But they like it!

DAD. They're hopped up on something.

MOM. They look normal, though—they're just screaming.

DAD. They're not normal, Mabel—normal people don't act like that—they're on something. Dope. Like the beatniks use.

MOM. Beatniks use dope?

DAD. Certainly.

MOM. How do you—

DAD. Never MIND, Mabel! I could sing better than that with a sock stuffed in my mouth, right, Susie?

(They notice SUSIE, who has been watching the TV with rapt attention.)

MOM. Susie!

SUSIE. What?

MOM. Your father's talking to you.

SUSIE. Oh. *(Returns her attention to TV.)*

DAD. It's so disgusting she can't believe it. Right, Susie? Can you imagine somebody actually enjoying that? *(No response.)* Susie!

SUSIE. What!

MOM. Don't you talk to your father like that—he was talking to you and you weren't even paying attention.

SUSIE. Well, I'm trying to listen!

MOM. Please tell me you don't like that.

(SUSIE is again entranced)

SUSIE. Like? I don't know. I don't know if I like him, but I... *(melts into the TV)* I can't stop watching...

MOM *(to the audience)*. So this...Elvis Presley person finally finishes "singing"—

DAD. And so *that's* over. We think. The rest of the night, though, Susie's in this kind of daze.

MOM. It worried me a little, but it's just a TV show.

DAD. The next day, she comes home with this...record.

SUSIE. My parents had always been easy to live with. They pretty much let me do what I liked. I put on "Heartbreak Hotel" and suddenly—

MOM. WHAT are you playing?

DAD. You are NOT playing that in my house.

SUSIE. I like it—what's wrong with it?

MOM. That boy can't even sing!

SUSIE. Why do you care if he can sing or not?

MOM. Did you see the way that boy moved his body?

SUSIE. You can't see him move on the record player!

DAD. We are not discussing it! I'll buy you another record.

MOM. That boy Pat Boone's nice—

SUSIE. No! I want Elvis!

MOM. Our daughter had never defied us like that.

DAD. America changed. The America after Presley wasn't the same country I grew up in. Kids had this...attitude

they never had before. Kids didn't look up to adults anymore. All of a sudden we were...the enemy.

MOM. And it showed up everywhere—even *Leave It to Beaver*. Oh yes! Beaver and Wally always have this underlying attitude of...if parents want us to do it, it can't be fun.

SUSIE. Daddy broke the record over his knee. Then he threw it in the fireplace. That was about the only funny thing, because the melting record caused such a stench that we had to evacuate the house for three hours.

DAD. There will be no more Elvis in this house!

SUSIE. Since then I've thought...if my parents didn't ban Elvis, would I have been so obsessed? Finally, one day I got so mad...

MOM. She walked in from school one day—

DAD. Stomps upstairs—

SUSIE. I just bought "Jailhouse Rock"—

MOM. She puts on Elvis—

DAD. She BLARES Elvis—

MOM. We rush upstairs.

DAD. —and she's locked the door!

MOM. You let us in!

DAD. SUSIE!

SUSIE. I'm singing, dancing, jumping!

DAD. What are you doing?!

MOM. She's gone crazy!

DAD. I'm going in!

MOM. It's not really easy to kick a door in—

DAD. But it's possible!

MOM. —but it's possible!

SUSIE. He actually KICKS THE DOOR IN—

DAD. I pick the record player up—

MOM. Tosses it through a window!

SUSIE. A *closed* window!

MOM. Glass is everywhere!

SUSIE. DADDY!!!

MOM. And then everything stops.

DAD. Just *stops*.

SUSIE. The three of us look at each other.

DAD. We don't believe what's just happened.

MOM. Looking back. I always thought there were several...paths open to us.

SUSIE. We could have rushed into each other and cried.

MOM. I almost thought that was going to happen.

SUSIE. I could have walked out the door and run away. I almost thought that was going to happen.

DAD. We could have stuck to our guns! Maybe...

MOM. But what happened...

SUSIE. ...was the one thing that didn't seem possible.

DAD. We didn't say a word.

MOM. I got a broom and dustpan and started cleaning up the glass.

DAD. I picked up the door and examined what we had to do to fix it.

SUSIE. I sat on the bed. I didn't cry. I looked straight ahead.

MOM. This sounds incredible, but...

DAD. We never—

SUSIE. —ever—

DAD. Talked about it.

SUSIE. Elvis Presley was never mentioned in the house again. I'd listen to him other places.

MOM. We knew that. But we didn't do anything about it.

DAD. Things became normal again.

MOM. They were never normal again.

SUSIE. My last year of high school was uneventful, and then I went away to college. Didn't come home that much. Then I got married and moved across the country. I stayed in contact with my parents, of course, we were always...cordial. Yeah, that's the word.

MOM. My husband became...subdued. He had never had a bad temper, but he had a normal temper, you know. The only time he ever lost control was that one time. But after that, nothing ever really got him mad...things just made him...distant. Something would happen and he'd just look off into space. I think the only time I saw a real flash of anger again was when the Beatles come on Ed Sullivan.

DAD. Goddam it!

MOM. He snapped off the TV and went right to bed.

THE BUTTON

VICK

MARSHA

(VICK and MARSHA, two teenagers in 1950's clothes, come running on. VICK is holding something balled up in his fist.)

MARSHA. What'd you get, what'd you get!?

(VICK drops to the ground still secretly clutching something.)

VICK. How you know I got anything!?

MARSHA. I saw you grabbin' at him!

VICK. How could you see anything in that riot?

MARSHA. 'Cause I saw your arm shoot out—it was the only boy arm in that pack of females!

VICK. Those girls were crazy, boy—they about ripped me apart.

MARSHA. You were acting as crazy as any of them—I saw you shovin' those girls aside.

VICK. It was all for you, Marsha. You don't think I'd be tryin' to rip clothes off Elvis Presley for myself, do you?

MARSHA. *So what'd you get!?!??*

(Holding his fist in front on her, still keeping it closed, teasing her.)

VICK. Well, now...what do you think?

MARSHA. I don't think it's his underwear.

VICK. I wouldn't rip his underwear off and hold it in my hand like this!

MARSHA. I'm just kidding!

VICK. Guess serious!

MARSHA. A thread from his shirt.

VICK. Better than that—

MARSHA. I don't wanna guess—show me, please... *(He slowly opens his hand.)* Oh my God...

VICK. Yeah.

MARSHA. A whole...beautiful...Elvis...*button.* *(She grabs it.)*

VICK. Hey, be careful with that!

MARSHA. This is really his, isn't it?

VICK. Of course.

MARSHA. I mean, you didn't just rip it off somebody else's shirt.

VICK. No— He was surprised as hell when I popped it off—

MARSHA. Well, sure—a guy poppin his button off— I'm sure he was surprised.

VICK. Yeah.

MARSHA. It's beautiful. And it's really *his*. (*She's holding it like some precious stone. VICK snatches it back from her.*)

VICK. And it's really mine.

MARSHA. What?

VICK. Oh, you can look at it whenever you want. But after all, I'm the one that got it.

MARSHA. You got it for me.

VICK. But this thing's valuable. You know how much I could get for this if I sold it?

MARSHA. Vick!

VICK. How bad do you want it?

MARSHA. You know how bad.

VICK. So what are you willing to give me for it? (*She kisses him.*) Well, that's a nice down payment...but it's not the whole cost.

MARSHA. What does that mean?

VICK. Guess.

MARSHA. I don't think you want me to guess. Because what I'm guessin' you better not be thinkin'.

VICK. Why not?

MARSHA. Vick Vickersham! Are you seriously saying... no, you *tell* me what you're seriously saying.

VICK. If you want this...genuine, authentic, beautiful, private, and perfectly *round* Elvis Presley button...then to

get it, we have to genuinely, authentically consummate our relationship.

MARSHA. You're a fiend, that's what you are, Vick Vickersham!

VICK. We've been going together a year and three months, Marsha! Just think of it like a...symbol of our love... like a ring or something to cement our relationship.

MARSHA. Sex is like a ring?

VICK. No, the button is like a ring!

MARSHA. How's a button like a ring?!

VICK. A year and three months, Marsha! Don and Patty have done it! Jill and Arnie have done it!

MARSHA. Cows and pigs do it too but it don't mean we have to!

VICK. Fine! We don't have to! That's just fine! *(Pause.)* I think I'll get a glass case for this. With a big, thick padlock on it. I can put it right under my bowling trophy.

MARSHA. Can I just...hold it again for a minute?

VICK. You'll never give it back.

MARSHA. Yes I will. I wouldn't trick *you*.

VICK. Just for a minute. *(He gives it to her. She holds it reverently.)*

MARSHA. Elvis...Presley's...button... *(Pause.)*

VICK. Now give it back.

MARSHA. All right. *(He holds out his hand. She continues to hold the button.)* Where will we do it?

VICK. What?

MARSHA. You have a place?

VICK. You mean...? Oh.

MARSHA. I'm not doin' it in no car.

VICK. We can go to my uncle's river cabin.

MARSHA. Okay.

VICK. You mean it? Really? For this button, you'd...

MARSHA. No, not just for that—what do you think of me? I know it's probably time, but...you know, Don was after Patty to do it for months. Arnie was after Jill to do it for months. I always bragged on you, because you never put any pressure on me about it. It didn't seem like it was so...necessary for you.

VICK. Well, it's just...time, that's all.

(She holds it up in front of her, gazing at it. VICK gazes at it too.)

MARSHA. Just think. Elvis Presley wore this. He took it in his hands and buttoned it. Elvis' fingers touched this button, just like I'm touching it. It's like my very fingers are touching his very fingers. Fingerprints stay on something, right?...and what are fingerprints?...they're part of somebody else's body left behind on something. So my fingerprints are mixing with Elvis' fingerprints *right now*. Right now.

VICK. Well don't smudge it all up.

MARSHA. Why not? It's mine.

VICK. Marsha. It's not right what I asked you. You're not ready to...do it yet. It's not something we should bargain over. I don't want us to do it until you really want to.

MARSHA. Oh Vick. You are so wonderful. I know that's the real you. *(She puts her arm around him and hugs him, leans her head on his shoulder.)* Did anybody else get a button?

VICK. It was pretty crazy...I don't think so.