

Sun Collection classically Elvis

by Ian Holloway

Although this record was released in the mid 1970's, it consists entirely of cuts recorded by Elvis Presley between July 1954 and July 1955. It is the youthful Elvis, not yet tainted by success and entirely motivated by the love of music. The music on this album is simple and sparse, and in places Elvis seems not to have found his characteristic 'voice', but nonetheless Elvis completely captivates the listener with his vocal style which was soon to become so famous.

Sun Records was a small Memphis record company run by one Sam Phillips. It seems incredible that such a small concern should have contributed so much to rock and roll, yet, besides Elvis, Sun began the careers of the likes of: Carl Perkins (of "Blue Suede Shoes" fame), Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Charlie Rich and Roy Orbison.

To this day, Elvis' short career with Sun remains shrouded in mystery. It is said that Sam Phillips used to boast that if he could find a white singer who could sing like a Negro he would make a million dollars. He may not have made his million (Elvis' contract was sold to RCA for only \$35,000), but he certainly found his man. Indeed, in those racially segregated days of the 1950's, many southern white DJ's refused to play his records because he sounded so black!

The first cut on the album is an old Arthur 'Big Boy' Crudup tune, "That's All Right Mama". In many ways this song can be said to typify that musical form known as Rockabilly; the swinging country beat, rocked up with an electric backing and with catchy but simple lyrics. In fact, the recording of this song came about quite by accident. Elvis, along with Scotty Moore on electric guitar, and Bill Black on acoustic bass was trying to record the country ballad "I Love You Because" (which, incidentally, is also on this album), but was not making much progress. The trio had decided to take five when Elvis grabbed his acoustic guitar and started beating out this song. Scotty and Bill joined in and Sam Phillips captured the recorded version on tape. All done in one take!

The next really significant cut is "Good Rockin' Tonight". It features Elvis singing in that sexy snarl which was later to elicit screams from millions of teenage girls. As a point of interest, when the Beatles met with Elvis in 1965 to jam, this was one of the songs they played. In a

way, it seems to embody that simple message that both the early Beatles and early Elvis carried: "Have you heard the news? There's good rockin' tonight!"

The next track "Milk Cow Blues Boogie" was recorded in December 1954. Originally a blues song composed by Sleepy John Estes, it is characteristically interpreted by Elvis and co. After a tantalizing blues intro, Presley cuts in; "Hold it fellas. That don't move me. Let's get real, real gone for a change." They then break into a rousing Rockabilly version.

The final cut on the first side is "Baby Let's Play House" which has left a very interesting legacy. At Woodstock, Ten Years After incorporated it into their version of "I'm Going Home". It features a stuttering opening which Led Zeppelin copied for their "Candy Store Rock", and it was a line from this song: "I'd rather see you dead, little girl/than to be with another man" which gave John Lennon the idea for "Run For Your Life". Side two opens with an inspired version of Junior Parker's mystery train. This is one of the first songs which Elvis recorded which featured drums, those being supplied by D.J. Fontana.

Another interesting cut from the second side is "Blue Moon", a beautiful ballad which was recorded at one of the first sessions in 1954. It introduces the 'echo effect' which was featured to such advantage on "Heartbreak Hotel". Following this is a speeded up rendition of "Just Because". Native Maritimers or Mainers may be familiar with this song, albeit in a much different form, as it is the piece de resistance of Jenny on Stacey's Country Jamboree. Let it be said, however, that Elvis does a much more listenable job.

"The Sun Collection" contains vintage, pre-"Heartbreak Hotel" Elvis. It is the young Elvis who sings purely for the love of music. It is Elvis before he went Hollywood and made those innumerable Grade B movies. It is Elvis before he had become a drugged out spectre of his once great self. It is the Elvis who, more than anyone else, was responsible for the emergence of Rock and Roll. In the Sun Sessions Elvis successfully fused the forms of white country and black blues into what can be said to be the true roots of Rock. There certainly is good rockin' with this album.



Rum flavoured.
Wine dipped.

Crack a pack of Colts along with the cards.

