

The 'King': His memory lives on...

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

Elvis may have "left the building," but the fans weren't leaving their seats. Judging from the numbers who visited "Elvis: A Musical Celebration" last month at the Fox Theatre, "Elvis Lives!" or at least the legend of the King lives on, perpetuated by Kalamazoo sightings and Graeceland birthday parties.

Mingling with the opening night hordes at the Fox were people costumed in everything from sequined cocktail dresses and tuxedos to jeans and flannel shirts. They arrived in stretch limousines, luxury cars, pickup trucks and the city of Taylor senior citizen bus. More than one over-the-hill Elvis impersonator were among the faithful.

We asked a handful of them, "What qualifies you as a true blue, radical, fanatical Elvis follower?" and got varied responses.

JUDY ROCK and her 23-year-old daughter, Jodee Riley, came with two less fanatical friends. Rock had seen Elvis in person nine or 10 times, the last time at Olympia Arena in April 1977 just months before his death. She caught the traditional thrown scarf.

"How did he look then?" we asked.

"Fat," both friends answered. "A little heavy," Rock contradicted, "but he was precious."

RILEY RECALLED the time she was 9 and a novice Elvis fan.

"My mother dragged me with her to Los Angeles to his home."

"Imagine," her mother said, "I was hanging on the gate waiting for him to come out. His car started coming and Aunt Jan said get out the way, he's not going to stop, but I knew he would."

"He tried to get Jodee to come to the car and I said, 'How about me?' but he wanted the little girl. She went up and touched his hand, but she wouldn't kiss him. I jumped on the hood of the car and got a picture of his chest and the gold chains."

That picture and dozens of others photos, plaques, plates and other memorabilia are on display in the Rock home in Warren.

Riley, newly married, said her husband Steve won't let her bring it to their home. "He's kind of jealous."

SKIP CHAMPAGNE, 39, of Inkster was accompanied by her husband, Bill Skip, whose brother "gives tributes" (not impersonations) of Elvis, was dressed in a pink satin jacket with burgundy letters that spelled out "ELVIS."

"I've got to be part of this," Skip said. "I went to Graeceland on his 50th birthday."

While her 50th husband, Tom, shook his head, Jane Smithson of Troy was one of the few interviewed who admitted she owned a blue velvet painting of the King. Tom accompanied her and his sister, Mary Denmark, who first saw the Elvis movie "Love Me Tender" at the Fox Theatre in 1956.

Francis Wolaitis of Detroit sported a pompadour and sideburns in the manner of his hero. He went all the way to Las Vegas to see the Elvismania show, but it was sold out. When tickets went on sale for the Detroit show, he was in line early.

"Elvis is all he talks about," his stepson and brother-in-law said.

POLICE OFFICER Erich Laubert of St. Clair Shores likes Elvis so much, "he imitates him every year at our spring dance in a rented costume," his wife said.

"He does the whole bit with the '2001' opening and the scarves."

"The women screamed," Erich said, a grin on his face.

Jeff Dombrowski of Dearborn has 20 hours of news tapes of the day Elvis died.

"I would have had the whole 24 hours, but I ran out of reel," he said.

Two months after Elvis' death, Dombrowski went to Graeceland "to stop by and take a look at the real radicals, the ones crying at the fence," he said.

"Am I a fan?" superfan Carol Campanella repeated. "When Elvis died I got sympathy cards. My boss gave me a day off to attend the funeral, but my boyfriend took my credit card. I only got as far as Woodhaven."

"I LIVE FOR Elvis and he lives for me," said Tanya Church, 25, of Royal Oak.

She went to Kalamazoo when she heard he was sighted at a fast food restaurant, "but I lived in Battle Creek at the time," she said. "It wasn't much of a trip."

Pat Nowasleski, 57, has dedicated one room of her Dearborn home to Elvis, but the memorabilia have spilled over into other rooms, including the bathroom in which a portrait of E.P. dominates. Friends have given her scarves, books, pictures and clocks.

A makeup artist, she saw Elvis at Olympia in '77 and at least 40 impersonators since. She does the makeup for many of them.

Sylvan Lake's John Dent, 26, has an Elvis record collection in the 1957 Wurlitzer jukebox he keeps in the kitchen.

"I try to emulate Elvis," the tall, handsome copywriter said, "especially when I dance. Except Elvis sneered and I like to smile."

NOT ALL members of the audience were pro-Elvis. Jill McCoy, 11, and sister Julie, 16, of Livonia were there with their mother and her best friend. The friend brought her daughters, Jodi and Amy Schwab of Millford.

"Our mothers wanted us to see what they did in the '60s," Amy said. "But we'd rather be at a hockey game."

Pat Patterson of Redford and a dozen other members of the Friends for Elvis Fan Club were at the Fox opening night. The newly formed sanctioned fan club generally meets on the 16th of the month at the Metro Hall, Plymouth and Beech Daly roads in Redford, to hear music and talk about their idol.

They recently held a party for Elvis' birthday (Jan. 8) and hired a local impersonator. Their next big event is a country-western night.

They welcome new followers. If you own a blue velvet picture, can sing all the words to "Kentucky Rain," know which radio station hosts the Sunday morning "Elvis Hour" and can spell Elvis' middle name, write Friends for Elvis, P.O. Box 19554, Detroit 48219.

THE FOX THEATRE presents

ELVIS

A MUSICAL CELEBRATION

It's Europe 'a la mode' or doing it your way

By Iris Sanderson-Jones
contributing travel editor

Q: We've already done a group tour to Europe. This time we want to go on our own. Please give us some tips on getting around and tell us how you meet local people.

B.C.,
West Bloomfield

A: In France, it was a school teacher who invited us to tour her father's vineyard in the Loire Valley. In Italy, it was the signora who fed us garlic shrimp and wine in the coastal village of Manarola. In Spain, it was the housewife who invited us into her home, where we got a magnificent view of the 17th century bridge in Ronda. In Germany, it was the postal worker who invited us to sit down at his table in an omni-par bar.

None of these small travel experiences were on our itinerary, but they are among our most treasured souvenirs of Europe. In each case we got off the beaten track to meet the ordinary people of an area. We traveled "a la mode." No, that doesn't mean "ice cream," it means having things your own way.

In some cases, we were traveling independently in a rental car. In others, we were on a tour and either defected for a day or stayed on after the tour was over. We have had great fun traveling in groups, but that fun is usually associated with other American travelers rather than the Europeans we came to "visit."

If you too treasure the small travel adventures that occur when you step off the main tourist track in Europe, you should follow some basic travel rules. Plan ahead, but wing it as much as you can after you get there. Go where the Europeans travel. Find out about special events, in case you are in the area when they happen. Learn a few words of a foreign language, but don't worry too much if you speak only English. You will do fine in Europe.

IF YOU plan to rent a car, do your

homework in the U.S. Rental prices differ dramatically from country to country because of tax rates. Franco charges 28 percent tax. Your regular car insurance may include collision insurance on a rental car in North America, but it probably won't cover you overseas.

Collision insurance can add 50 to 75 percent to your rental bill, but there is an alternative. Some credit card companies, especially those that offer "gold" cards, provide free rental car collision insurance overseas to travelers who pay for their

rental car with their credit card. It takes time to qualify so apply early.

If you are looking for the sun, consider southern Europe, especially the destinations that Europeans choose for their annual vacations. You will find the English, German and other European tourists, but practically no Americans, on the southern coast of Portugal and Spain, and in the Balearic Islands of Mallorca and Ibiza.

The only winter "snow" in the Balearic Islands is created by billiards of almond blossoms; you can see them as early as January, but the group tour season booms in spring and fall. Most Europeans pick up a hotel or apartment for a week or two and do day trips around the islands.

If you are visiting Spain mid-summer, and you like crowds, the Running of the Bulls takes place in Pamplona July 7. It is part of the Festival of San Fermin. Barcelona is the site of the 1992 Olympics, but you won't see any sign of that yet. You will, however, find great summer music festivals in Santander, Granada and San Sebastian.

AS THE sun moves north into Germany, you can celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Port of Hamburg and the 1,000th anniversary of Bonn this year. The passion play at Oberammergau is not scheduled until 1993, but it is not too soon to start planning ahead for that!

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and travel magazines in your local library for those wonderful off-road treasures. That's how we discovered the top-rated country restaurant, Auberge de L'Ille in Illhaeusern, in Alsace a few miles north of Colmar on the French side of the Rhine River. The wonderful meal we had there would have cost us hundreds of dollars in Paris.

You should also explore your in-Europe transportation. Air fares are high, but trains are both reasonable and comfortable. French National Railroads launched its new fast Atlantic TGV train to Nantes in January. In the fall, it will start service to Brittany and in June 1990 to Tours, Bordeaux and the Spanish border. They should be just as good as the fast TGV trains that already run from Paris to Lyon and south.

French National Railroads offer a rail-car package. Air France offers air-rail-rental car packages. Air France, like several of the international airlines, are good sources of information for the countries they represent. Check the Automobile Club of Michigan or call the travel department off the Detroit Public

Library for tourist office addresses.

That will give you the hard facts. For the real travel experience, take time to wander around, get lost and meet the people who live there.

WE MET the French school teacher because we stopped her on the street to ask a question in halting high school French. It was an unscheduled train trip into an unknown Italian village that led us to the signora. In Ronda, we stayed overnight instead of taking a day tour. After the tourists had gone, it was easy to slow down and talk to a lady tending her garden.

In Germany, where we wandered into a small bar after dinner, the tables were all occupied, but we were delighted to accept an invitation to join a German group. Just last week we got another post card from Adie, the postal worker we met there. He doesn't speak a word of English and it doesn't matter a bit!

If you have travel questions, send them to Iris Sanderson-Jones, Oberver 7 Eccentric Newspapers, 35251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.



Street musicians play a lively tune for passers-by on the Kärner Strasse in Vienna.

MICKY JONES