

In celebration of Baton Rouge's bicentennial, *The Advocate* is sharing moments from the past, tapping its 175 years of serving the community. Throughout the year, we are publishing pages from our archives which capture some of the local, national and world happenings -- everything from wars and hurricanes to festivals and social events -- that helped shape our city.

We hope you enjoy them.

THE ADVOCATE

Telling Louisiana's story for 175 years



Elvis Concert: Rite of Spring But No Longer Musical Event

By SMILEY ANDERS
Advocate Staff Writer

"Despite what you read or hear, we're here and we're healthy and the hell with anything else," said Elvis Presley to a cheering crowd of some 12,000 fans Tuesday at the LSU Assembly Center.

Presley, who took sick at a previous show a couple of months back, was indeed at the Assembly Center. And his devoted fans loved it, showering him with roses and teddy bears and plastic guitars and trophies, etc., while he tossed them sweaty scarves from around his neck.

But he didn't look healthy and the show was much like his 1976 performance, emphasizing his clowning around with fans rather than any solid musical accomplishment.

Perhaps it is time we stopped expecting the periodic appearances of Elvis to be musical events, and judging them on that basis.

For the latest Elvis show was an event of more interest to anthropologists than music critics.

To be sure, there was music there. Lots of music by some very talented pickers and singers. The Stamps quartet is a solid-gospel group, and the Sweet Inspirations are an accomplished trio. And the two bands were strong, together and obviously highly experienced. There was also an unfunny comedian who complained that the Advocate didn't spell his last name right last time. Sorry about that, Jack, we'll see that it doesn't happen this time.

But the fans (derived from the word "fanatic") on hand for Elvis don't really give a flip about the music. Any more than the fans who screamed earlier at Frank Sinatra or later at the Beatles cared about the music.

As mentioned last year when Elvis was here, his concert is not a musical event. The fans, predominantly female, were there not to hear but to see -- to see their idol in the flesh.

An Elvis concert is a rite of spring, a pagan worship ceremony, a ritual for those bent on recapturing lost youth. And the concert has the same unvarying

mob.

While this concert was very much like last year's, several thoughts came to mind watching Elvis perform. One is that he owes a very great debt to such contemporaries of his as Chuck Berry and Ray Charles, who provided him with some of the songs he sounded best on Tuesday -- "Hail, Hail, Rock and Roll" and "Johnny B. Goode" from Berry and "I Got a Woman" from Charles.

Another thought is that Elvis rarely finishes a song. He drops verses on most numbers.

But the best numbers were the ones he did all the way through -- "This Time You Gave Me a Mountain" and the more recent "Help Me" and, surprisingly, Gordon Lightfoot's "Early Morning Rain."

He was especially loose in his handling of his past hits -- "Teddy Bear" and "Love Me" and "Jailhouse Rock."

Hearing him do the old ones like "Little Sister" and "Don't Be Cruel" reminds us old-timers of sock hops and '56 Chevies and malts at Hopper's.

And it reminds us that Elvis, like us, ain't as young as he used to be.

He's had a hell of an impact on our music, and he still could be an important performer.

But watching him in that white suit, trying to do a split, is a sad experience, very much like watching Johnny Unitas during his last heart-breaking year with the San Diego Chargers or Willie Mays with the Mets. And the feeling you get is the same -- damn it, you were the best, don't cheapen our memories . . .

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An Elvis concert is a rite of spring, a pagan worship ceremony, a ritual for those bent on recapturing lost youth.

And the concert has the same unvarying quality of a religious ceremony, where tradition forbids any tampering with the ritual.

The warmup band, the girl singers, the comedian, Elvis himself in his white suit and spangles and scarves, even the audience, are the same from year to year. Perhaps some fans are beginning to be a bit disillusioned with his shows. The show

was not a sellout. This would have been almost unthinkable just a year ago, when he drew some 15,000 at the Assembly Center.

Still, there is an undeniable thrill when the band strikes up that dramatic intro from the movie "2001" by way of Strauss, and Elvis materializes to the strains of "C.C. Rider."

"We made it here," he shouted to the throng. "We're glad to be here."

And the crowd, evidently, was glad he was too. So glad, in fact, that hard-working deputies had to physically restrain several matrons bent on tossing themselves at the feet of the singer.

"We came to redeem ourselves," he said. And to the crowd on hand, he did just that. It was as loud and enthusiastic as any seen around here short of an LSU football crowd, which is only one step away from a mob.

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