

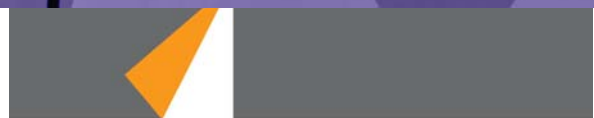
TORONTO, MISSISSIPPI

By Joan MacLeod



February 28-March 21, 2009

PLAY GUIDE



PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE COMPANY

MAX REIMER, ARTISTIC MANAGING DIRECTOR

Toronto, Mississippi

By Joan MacLeod

Co-presented by



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WELCOME

This booklet was created to help audience members explore the play beyond the actual performance. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for the guide please contact Meredith Elliott, Outreach and Education, at 604 629 2097 or by email at melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com.

About the Company

The Playhouse Theatre Company is dedicated to producing live theatre of the highest quality – to presenting a stimulating and challenging repertoire of plays that speak to today’s audiences. This year the Playhouse presents a five-play mainstage subscription series running from September to May, as well as a bonus production in April 2009.

The Playhouse was founded in 1962 to provide the people of British Columbia with professional live theatre. Since then it has grown from a core of volunteers operating out of basement offices into one of the country’s leading regional theatre companies, presenting an outstanding selection of plays produced by the very best actors, directors, designers and craftspeople from across the country.

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Theatre relies on the give and take between actor and audience. The actors can see and hear the audience just as the audience can see and hear them.

Seating is assigned. Please sit in your assigned seat and respect the fact that other seats have been reserved for other patrons.

Latecomers are seated at the discretion of the Playhouse Theatre staff; otherwise, they may take their seat at intermission.

A note to student groups: If you are unable to attend the dedicated Wednesday student matinee we are happy to book you into another matinee performance. If you are booking a Tea Matinee performance instead, please note that many of our senior patrons attend these events.

Talking during a show (even in a whisper), fidgeting, rustling papers or candy wrappers all disturb the actors’ concentration and disrupt the performance. On the other hand, audience responses can inspire the actors to do their best work. This interplay is the essence of live theatre.

As a courtesy to performers and patrons, **all pagers, phones, cameras and other recording and noise making devices should be turned off.** This regulation is strictly enforced.

No **outside food or drink** is permitted inside the theatre. Also, audience members should be aware that **heavy perfumes and colognes** may also disturb others.

All performances are for patrons aged **6 years and up** (any exceptions will be announced).

DID YOU KNOW? MORE ABOUT THE PLAYHOUSE'S EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Talkbacks

Following every student matinee and select evening performances, audience members are invited to remain in their seats to ask questions of the actors. *How does an actor prepare for a role? Do actors rehearse every day? How do the actors personally handle a play's difficult issues?*

***Toronto, Mississippi* runs approximately two hours with one 15-minute intermission. Please plan to stay for approximately twenty minutes after the end of the performance.**

Production Centre Tours

As a group, you can book a complimentary guided tour of the 25,000 square foot Production Centre and explore scenery and prop shops, the wardrobe department and rehearsal halls. The Playhouse recently moved into a new facility on East 2nd Avenue, which will be the company's home until 2011.

Salon Saturdays

The second Saturday matinee of each production features our Salon Saturday pre-show chat. Explore the issues and ideas at the heart of each production in this informative and fun series that presents in-depth topics about the play, the playwright or the design. Past speakers have included broadcasters, playwrights, (musical) directors, actors, journalists and professors.

The Salon Saturday for *Toronto, Mississippi* takes place on Saturday, March 14, 2009. The speaker will be Joan Macleod, the award-winning playwright of *Toronto, Mississippi*.

Dedicated Student Matinees

Each year the Playhouse introduces thousands of school children to the magic of live theatre at deeply discounted prices. Every production has a dedicated student matinee on the first Wednesday afternoon of the run, which is followed by a talkback with the actors and director, as available. Our popular weekday tea matinees are also open to those student groups not able to attend the student matinee.

For information about any of our education programmes, including E-Stage: Playhouse Young Playwrights and show specific outreach initiatives, please contact Meredith Elliott, Outreach and Education Manager at 604 629 2097 or by email, melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com.

For **group ticket bookings, discounts** and **Playhouse PERKS**, contact Stasa Andric, Sales Manager, at **604 637 3094** or by email, groups@vancouverplayhouse.com.

TORONTO, MISSISSIPPI AT A GLANCE

NUTS AND BOLTS

Toronto, Mississippi premiered at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto in October 1987. It made its Vancouver debut in November 1988 at Touchstone Theatre.

Toronto, Mississippi is a co-production with Theatre Aquarius. It ran January 21 to February 7 in Hamilton, before returning to Vancouver.

Setting

A middle-class living room in Toronto. October 1987.

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Jhana is a teenaged girl with developmental issues. She lives with her mother, Maddie, and their boarder, Bill, a cheerfully morose poet. Her father, King, is an Elvis impersonator, who left the family a decade before and now spends his days traveling between gigs. Maddie and Bill are doing their best to prepare Jhana for life in the outside world, but Jhana is 18 now and becoming aware of her own sexuality. When King returns for a visit and decides he wants to become part of their lives again, Jhana's world expands with both possibilities and problems.

SOMETHING TO NOTE

Since the publication of *Toronto, Mississippi* in 1987, the vocabulary surrounding what would be Jhana's diagnosis has changed significantly. Maddie alludes to this changing vocabulary in the quote cited below.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

"Every dream I've ever dreamed has come true a hundred times. I'm always the hero. None of this surprises me." King

"Someone from York just did a research project on her. She's moderately mentally handicapped—moderate. I like that, like the weather when we lived on the coast. Superbly dyslexic . . . very complicated version of it. Symptoms of autism or soft autism. That's what they're saying now. That's the style. There is a style of everything. But then you'd know all about that." Maddie

"Poetry is functioning at its best when nobody has a clue what's going on." Bill

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



Joan MacLeod was born in 1954 in Vancouver, British Columbia, and studied creative writing at the University of Victoria (BA 1978) and the University of British Columbia (MFA 1981).

She was encouraged to write plays while attending a poetry workshop at the Banff Centre for the Arts in 1984 and joined the Playwrights Unit at the Tarragon Theatre in 1985. Her first produced work was the libretto for *The Secret Garden* (1985), which earned her a Dora Mavor Moore Award for Best New Revue or Musical. MacLeod remained as playwright-in-residence at Tarragon for six years, where her plays *Jewel* (1987), *Toronto, Mississippi* (1987), *Amigo's Blue Guitar* (1990), and *The Hope Slide* (1992) all premiered.

Her other plays include *Little Sister* (1994), *2000* (1996), *The Shape of a Girl* (2001), and *Homechild* (2006). Her most recent play, *Another Home Invasion*, premieres in February at Alberta Theatre Projects in a co-production with Tarragon. Her plays have won numerous awards, including the 1988 Prix Italia for the CBC production of *Jewel*, the Governor General's Award for *Amigo's Blue Guitar* in 1991, and the Chalmer's Award for *The Hope Slide* and *Little Sister*. *The Shape of a Girl* has been produced continually since its premiere in 2001 – including a sold-out run on Broadway and a recent production at the Sydney Opera House. They have been produced across Canada, and in England, the United States and Europe, and translated into eight languages.

MacLeod's plays very often deal with social issues, but she frames her stories within the context of the personal, rather than the overtly political. Her plays are full of warmth and humour, and of characters who learn about themselves through connecting with these greater issues. For example, Braidie in *The Shape of a Girl* who comes to understand her own behaviour and the behaviour of her friends through the trial of the teenaged girls accused of murdering Victoria teenager Reena Virk. *The Hope Slide* traces the emotional journey of an actress through her fascination with three Doukhobors who died violently, allowing her to come to terms with the death of a friend from AIDS.

In 1992, MacLeod returned to Vancouver, where she taught creative writing at the University of British Columbia and Kwantlen College. She has been an Associate Professor in Drama in the University of Victoria's Department of Writing since 2004. This spring, she will be the Senior Playwright-in-Residence at the Playwrights' Colony at The Banff Centre.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Because I had the good fortune, so many years ago, of working with people who had what was then called a handicap, my understanding of the community I lived in grew immeasurably. Thankfully, the language around any kind of mental or physical diagnosis has changed to be more thoughtful and considered, based on individual experience and environment surrounding society's treatment of special needs citizens. We are hopefully more aware of the impact our words have on our "diagnosed" friends and family.

As in many stories, it is the universal basic needs that we identify or relate to, bringing us a little closer to understanding those we might perceive as "different." Indeed, it is perhaps our humanity that allows us to embrace and learn from anyone that may offer a unique point of view.

Here, we have a skilfully crafted story about four people challenging their own ideas (and ours) on how to love each other. MacLeod offers us poetic insight into the lives of these beautifully flawed characters. With myriad emotions fuelling the scenes, we can witness the extraordinary spirit captured here and celebrate the complexities that contribute to this expression of love and understanding.

Dean Paul Gibson

THEMES AND ALLUSIONS

Creativity

In many ways, *Toronto, Mississippi* is about finding your own voice. King makes his living impersonating a dead rock star. Bill's poetry is a voice for women. Jhana has difficulty communicating, so she echoes what other people say to stay involved in conversations. And yet, in their own way, they are finding their own path to creativity, even if they're speaking through other people.

Although King is assuming someone else's persona, he's finding a way to express himself through Elvis's music. When he performs, it's not about nostalgia. "I have re-invented the man," he tells Bill, "put all the parts back together in a way better suited to survive." As he gets older, however, he has to compromise his own vision of Elvis in order to make a living. So he buys a white cape, the ultimate symbol of sell-out., because it's no longer a voice he believes.

Bill is a poet, whose one collection of poetry sold 37 copies. His poems are deeply personal, yet when he's asked to do a poetry reading and discuss his process, he struggles to find the words for his own work. Maddie tells him that what he needs to express is his voice, not be the voice for women. But that is his voice. Like King, he speaks from his heart through others.

Jhana struggles to express herself. She's not a poet like Bill; words don't weave together with ease for her. She can't remember the words to a song, so following her father onstage is only a dream. And yet despite her limitations, she finds her own way to express herself. She might not be able to kiss her elbow yet, but she's going to keep trying.

Empowerment

Jhana is taking a life skills course designed to help her live more independently. Maddie is concerned that she's not ready to take these steps and over-reacts when Jhana struggles to repeat her address. She only wants to protect her, but her life has been so consumed with looking after Jhana that she has difficulty letting her go, allowing her to grow up.

Because King is not around, she relies on Bill to support her. While Bill has no confidence in himself, he is wonderful with Jhana, helping her practice the life skills that will make her more independent. They pretend to call 911, role playing as Elvis and Priscilla Presley, and by the end of the play, the lessons have sunk in. Bill tries to empower Jhana, encouraging her to pursue a relationship with Andrew, until he realizes that Andrew is her supervisor, not someone else in the program. He wants her to have a full life, but not outside the limitations and expectations placed on her by society. She can live and love, but with people like herself. He places the same limitations on himself. He loves Maddie, but it's only when he's drunk that he has the courage to put himself forward as a possible romantic partner.

Coming of Age

Jhana is eighteen, and while in many ways she has the mind of a child, she has the body of a young woman. She is growing up and experiencing the first stirrings of sexual awareness, but without the inhibitions that normally control behaviour. When Jhana talks about touching on the bus, Maddie's first assumption is that Jhana has been assaulted. But when Bill leads Jhana through the encounter, it is clear that Jhana has been the one touching inappropriately. Maddie sees her daughter growing up without the tools to protect herself and is terrified of what could happen to her. But while she drills Jhana on repeating her address and pushes her to do well in her work placement, Bill role plays "dates" with Jhana, trying to prepare her for adult relationships. While his encouragement ends up being misguided, he at least recognizes that Jhana has needs that the social workers and work placements can't address.

GLOSSARY

7-Eleven

The largest chain store in the world, 7-Eleven has nearly 35,000 convenience stores in 18 countries worldwide. The company began in 1927 in Dallas, Texas, as an improvised storefront on an ice dock. Originally called Tote'm, the name changed to 7-Eleven in 1946 to reflect the opening hours of 7am to 11pm.

Margaret Atwood

(November 18, 1939-)

A Canadian poet, novelist, and critic, Margaret Atwood has published 12 novels, 10 collections of short stories, 17 collections of poetry, as well as several books of non-fiction. She received the Booker Prize in 2000 for *Alias Grace*; only Iris Murdoch has received more nominations for the prestigious literary award. Atwood also received a Governor General's Award for her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and her collection of poetry *The Circle Game*.



Autism

A developmental disorder characterized by impairment in social interaction, communication and imagination. People with autism often have extremely focused and narrow interests and will display repetitive behaviours and mannerisms.



Blue Hawaii

A 1961 musical film starring Elvis Presley as a young man recently released from the army, who goes to work as a tour guide rather than join his family's pineapple plantation. The movie featured the songs "Blue Hawaii," "Hawaiian Wedding Song," and "Can't Help Falling in Love."

Lord Byron

(Jan. 22, 1788-April 19, 1824)

George Gordon Noel Byron, 6th Baron Byron, was one of the great Romantic poets of the early 19th century. Born into an impoverished branch of a noble family, he inherited his title and estate at the age of 10 from his great-uncle. His poems and verse tales include *Childe Harold*, *The Prisoner of Chillon*, and the unfinished masterpiece *Don Juan*, though perhaps his most lasting contribution to literature was the "Byronic hero" – a mysterious, flawed, yet idealized character. Byron died of fever while fighting for Greek independence from Turkey.



Cadillac

A brand of luxury vehicles, during the mid-20th century Cadillac became synonymous with high quality. Cadillac was formed as a new automotive company from the dissolution of the Henry Ford Company in 1902, but was purchased by General Motors in 1909.

Carleton

A university in Ottawa founded in 1942 as Carleton College. It is known for its diverse range of degree programmes, especially in the faculty of public affairs, journalism, and international affairs. Notable Carleton chancellors have included Lester B. Pearson, Ray Hnatyshyn and Marc Garneau.



Cerebral palsy

A neurological disorder characterized by muscular impairment, as well as speech and learning difficulties, cerebral palsy is an umbrella term used to describe a group of developmental disorders usually caused by damage to the brain in utero or during birth or infancy.

Chatty Cathy

A talking doll first released by Mattel in 1959, Chatty Cathy had a ring in its back that could be pulled to make her utter a phrase, such as "I love you" or "Will you play with me?"



Cheerios

A brand of breakfast cereal, Cheerios was introduced in 1941 by General Mills. It was the first oat-based cold cereal. The "cheerio effect" in physics refers to the tendency of small floating objects to clump together due to surface tension and buoyancy.

Cocker spaniel

A breed of dog known for its long, drooping ears and silky coat, cocker spaniels were first bred in England in the 19th century and brought to North America in the late 1800s, where it developed into a distinct breed.



Cubs

A Cub Scout is the section of the Scouting movement designed for boys – and now girls – between the ages of 7-10. It was introduced in 1916 to cater to younger boys who wanted to take part in Scouting with their older brothers, but hadn't reached the minimum age.

Donovan

(May 10, 1946-)

Donovan Leitch is a Scottish singer-songwriter who first made his name in the folk scene, but developed an eclectic style blending folk, jazz, pop, psychedelia and world music. His popularity declined during the 1970s, but he enjoyed a brief revival in the 1990s and resumed his recording and performing career in 2004. His hit songs include “Mellow Yellow,” “The Hurdy Gurdy Man” and “Sunshine Superman.”



Dyslexic

Dyslexia – derived from the Greek words for “poor language” – is a learning disability resulting from an inability to process graphic symbols. It can affect reading, spelling, writing, speaking, and listening. It is usually distinguished by poor reading skills and a tendency to reverse words and letter sequences in writing. Acquired dyslexia can be caused by damage to the brain.



Elizabeth Taylor

(February 27, 1932-)

An Academy Award-winning movie star, whose private life has garnered as much attention as her films, Elizabeth Taylor grew from a child star into one of the most beautiful women in the world. Her movies

include *National Velvet*, *Giant*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* In her private life, she made headlines for her eight marriages and later her advocacy work, particularly for AIDS research.

Elvis impersonators

According to a Harris poll in 2002, eight percent of Americans claim to have impersonated Elvis (though that may be as simple as muttering, “Thank you, thank you very much,” with a hip swivel). The first Elvis impersonators, also known as Elvii, started to appear during his lifetime, but it wasn’t until his death in 1977 that they became a cultural phenomenon. According to the documentary *Almost Elvis*, there are 35,000 Elvis impersonators worldwide, compared to just 170 at the time of Elvis’s death. Elvis Presley Enterprises now runs the Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist Contest each year, with winners of preliminary rounds competing in Memphis during Elvis Week for the title.



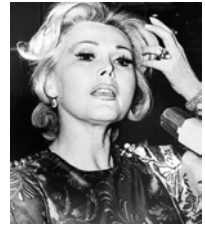
Etobicoke

A city in southeastern Canada, Etobicoke was established in 1967 and joined with North York, Scarborough, Toronto and East York to create the City of Toronto in 1998.

Zsa Zsa Gabor

(February 6, 1917-)

Sári Gábor is an oft-married Hungarian-born actress/personality, as famous for her personal life as her film and television work. She has been married nine times, including a one-day marriage that was later annulled when it was found that her previous marriage hadn’t been properly dissolved.



Graceland

A 13.8-acre estate and mansion in Memphis, Tennessee, Graceland was purchased by Elvis Presley in 1957. After Presley’s death, the estate was turned into a museum and tourist attraction that is visited by more than half a million people annually.

“Hawaiian Wedding Song”

The “Hawaiian Wedding Song” or “Ke Kali Nei Au” was originally written in 1926 for the operetta *The Prince of Hawaii*. It was translated into English in 1958 by Al Hoffman and Dick Manning, and became a hit for Andy Williams, Elvis Presley, Julie Rogers and Chet Atkins.



Harry Houdini

(March 24, 1874 -October 31, 1926)

Born Ehrich Weiss in Budapest, Hungary, Harry Houdini immigrated to the United States at the age of four and grew up to become the most famous

magician and escape artist of his era. After the death of his mother in 1913, Houdini focused his attention on debunking psychics and mediums, who promised grieving relatives contact with dead loved ones.

“The Hurdy Gurdy Man”

A song written and recorded by Donovan in 1968, “The Hurdy Gurdy Man” was released on the album of the same name, reaching #5 on the U.S. pop charts and #4 on the U.K. pop charts. It was written about Donovan’s friend and mentor, guitarist Mac MacLeod, who was playing in a Danish rock band called Hurdy Gurdy.

“The Impossible Dream”

The most popular song from the 1965 musical *Man of La Mancha*, “The Impossible Dream” was written by Mitch Leigh and Joe Darion and has been covered by numerous artists over the years. It became the theme song of the 1967 Boston Red Sox team, which reached the World Series for the first time since 1946 before losing to the St. Louis Cardinals in seven games.

John F. Kennedy

(May 29, 1917–November 22, 1963)

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the 35th President of the United States, the first Roman Catholic, and at age 43, the youngest president to be elected. After serving terms in Congress and the Senate, he became the Democratic candidate for President in 1960, defeating Richard Nixon in a close election. He was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald during a routine visit to Dallas in 1963.

**Kenora**

A town in western Ontario near the Manitoba border, Kenora was originally called Rat Portage and established as a trading post by the Hudson's Bay Company. It was renamed in 1905.

Lake of the Woods

Located primarily in southwestern Ontario, Lake of the Woods spans the borders with Manitoba and Minnesota. The Northwest Angle is an area of Minnesota on the lake that is only accessible by land through Canada, similar to Point Roberts.

“Light My Fire”

First released by the Doors on their self-titled album in 1967, “Light My Fire” reached number one on the Billboard charts and is ranked #35 on *Rolling Stone’s* 500 Greatest Songs of All Time and #7 on VH1’s 100 Greatest Songs of All Time lists.

Love Boat

A Saturday night staple on ABC from 1977 to 1986, *The Love Boat* was a television series set on a cruise ship. Each week, the show followed several simultaneous storylines about the passengers and crew on board the *Pacific Princess*.

Barry Manilow

(June 17, 1943-)

Born Barry Alan Pincus, Barry Manilow became one of the top adult contemporary singer/songwriters of the 1970s and 1980s with five albums on the pop charts simultaneously in 1978. He continues to enjoy a successful recording and concert career, with his 2006 cover album *The Greatest Songs of the Fifties* debuting at number one on the Billboard 200. His number one hits include “Mandy,” “Looks Like We Made It,” and “I Write the Songs.”

**Maple Leaf Gardens**

An iconic hockey arena, Maple Leaf Gardens was the home of the Toronto Maple Leafs from 1931-1999. It was also home to several other hockey, lacrosse and basketball teams during those years, and as a concert venue hosted Elvis Presley, the Beatles and The Who. Built by the Leafs managing director Conn Smythe, the building was

completed in less than six months. It is currently owned by Loblaw's, which has plans to convert the arena to a Real Canadian Superstore.

Moody Blue

Andrés Moody Blue is a sparkling wine produced in Canada, marketed as “a sassy sparkling blueberry flavoured wine refreshing when cold.” A 1.5 litre bottle is available in Ontario liquor stores for \$12.00.

**National Enquirer**

A tabloid newspaper, *The National Enquirer* was the first magazine to be sold at supermarket check outs. It is known for publishing stories about celebrity gossip, sensational crimes, and UFOs. It is also notorious for paying for informational.

Niagara Falls

One of the largest waterfalls in the world by volume, if not height, Niagara Falls is located on the Niagara River on the border of Ontario and New York. Goat Island divides the Horseshoe Falls on the Canadian side from the American Falls. A third, smaller drop, Bridal Veil Falls is also located on the American side. As well as a major tourist attraction, Niagara Falls is a significant source of hydroelectric power.

**Northern Lights**

The aurora borealis is a display of coloured and white lights in the night sky, caused by the ionization of atmospheric molecules by solar and cosmic radiation. It is mainly visible in the Arctic region, but can be observed infrequently in the Lower Mainland. The aurora australis, or southern lights, is a similar phenomenon in Antarctica.

**Oshawa**

A leading automotive centre in Canada, Oshawa is located on Lake Ontario, approximately 60 kilometres east of Toronto. It is home to General Motors Canada, which began as the McLaughlin Carriage Company and moved to Oshawa in 1876.

Pickering

A city in south-eastern Ontario, Pickering is part of the Greater Toronto Area. It is home to the Pickering Nuclear Generating Station, one of the largest nuclear facilities in the world with eight CANDU reactors.

Sylvia Plath

(October 27, 1932-February 11, 1963)

American writer Sylvia Plath was a precocious literary talent, publishing her first poem when she was eight years old. She graduated from Smith College in 1955 and received a Fulbright Scholarship to study at Cambridge, where she met and married fellow poet Ted Hughes. Her first collection of poetry, *The Colossus*, was published in 1960 and an autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* was published under a pseudonym just a month before her suicide in 1963. She received a posthumous Pulitzer Prize for *The Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath* in 1982



Elvis Presley

(January 8, 1935-August 16, 1977)

Elvis Aaron Presley was born on January 8, 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi, in a two-room shotgun shack built by his father and uncle. In 1953, Elvis recorded two songs at Sun Record's The Memphis Recording Service as a belated birthday present for his mother. The owner, Sam Phillips, called him back to record a demo. While the recording sessions were an initial failure, Phillips realised that he'd found the mix of blues and boogie-woogie he'd been looking for and signed him to a recording contract. While appearing on the radio program *Louisiana Hayride*, Elvis met "Colonel" Tom Parker, who would become his manager, controlling Elvis's career until the end of his life. Parker persuaded RCA to buy out Elvis's contract at Sun Records for an unprecedented \$35,000. During his first recording session at RCA he laid down the tracks for "Heartbreak Hotel," his first number one single on the pop charts. He began to make appearance on national TV, including a slowed-down, hip-swivelling, "gyrating" performance of "Hound Dog" on *The Milton Berle Show* that drove teenagers in the audience wild and horrified their parents. When he appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, the networks insisted he be filmed from the waist up. His charismatic onstage presence redefined live performances and turned rock and roll into something both alluring and dangerous. Elvis churned out 31 B-movies between 1956 and 1969, most designed simply to make money and sell records, and his popularity began to decline. In December 1968, however, NBC aired what became known as *The '68 Comeback Special*. The special revitalized his career, while allowing him to return to his powerful performing roots. He began touring again – performing nearly 1100 concerts over the next eight years – but his health began to decline and he became increasingly dependent on prescription drugs. On August 16, 1977, he was found lying on the bathroom floor at his home, Graceland, and pronounced dead that afternoon. The cause of death was given as a cardiac arrhythmia, but fourteen prescription drugs were found in his bloodstream, ten in significant quantities. Throughout the course of his career, Elvis had 18 number one singles and 131 gold,



platinum or multi-platinum albums, selling more than 1 billion albums worldwide. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986, the Rockabilly Hall of Fame in 1997, the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1998, and Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2001.

Lisa Marie Presley

(February 1, 1968-)

A singer-songwriter, Lisa Marie Presley is the only child of Elvis Presley and his wife Priscilla, and the sole living heir to his estate. She lived at Graceland until her parents divorced in 1973, though Elvis and Priscilla shared custody until his death in 1977. She avoided a music career until producer Glen Ballard convinced her to produce an album, which was released in 2003, which debuted at #5 on the charts. She's been married four times, to musician Danny Keogh, with whom she had two children, a surprising marriage to singer Michael Jackson, a brief marriage to actor Nicholas Cage, and is currently married to producer Michael Lockwood. She gave birth to twin girls in October 2008.



Priscilla Presley

(May 24, 1945-)

Priscilla Beaulieu was 14 years old when she met Elvis Presley while he was stationed in Germany during his time in the army. He courted her for eight years; in 1962 she moved to Memphis, where she finished her senior year of high school and lived with Elvis's father and step-mother in a house on the Graceland estate. They were married in Las Vegas on May 1, 1967 and nine months later she gave birth to their only child, Lisa Marie. They were divorced in 1973, but remained friends. After Elvis's death, she began her own performing career, starring for several years on *Dallas* and co-hosting *Those Amazing Animals*. As chairwoman and president of Elvis Presley Enterprises, she opened Graceland to the public, vastly increasing the estate's net worth.



Queen Elizabeth

(April 21, 1926-)

Elizabeth II became Queen of the United Kingdom and Head of the Commonwealth upon the death of her father George VI in 1952. She has worked tirelessly to support and transform the role of the monarchy in the 20th century, and has traveled extensively, bringing the monarchy closer to her subjects. The latter years of her rule have been marred by scandals within the royal family, but her personal popularity has remained relatively steadfast.





RCA
Radio Corporation of America (RCA) was founded in 1919 to act as an American monopoly of radio technology for General Electric Company. It formed the National

Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to take advantage of commercial radio in 1926 and purchased the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1929, entering the phonograph and record market. RCA Records, one of the division of RCA-Victor, purchased Elvis Presley's recording contract from Sun Records in 1955.

Smitty's

A restaurant chain in Canada, the first Smitty's opened its doors in 1960 in Calgary. It now operates 115 restaurants from coast to coast and is known as a family-friendly restaurant.

Sun Records

A record label founded in Memphis, Tennessee in 1952 by Sam Phillips. It helped launch the careers of Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison and Johnny Cash by giving them their first recording contracts.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacillus *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It primarily affects the lungs and is characterized by coughing, fever, fatigue and weight loss. More than 90% of those infected with the bacillus do not develop symptoms, however, the disease can become active years after infection.

Tupelo, Mississippi

The county seat Lee County, Mississippi, Tupelo is best known as the birthplace of Elvis Presley. It was originally called Gum Pond after "blackgum," the local name for tupelo trees. After the Civil War, the city took the name Tupelo from a battle fought nearby, which was named for the trees.

Volvo

A Swedish automotive manufacturer, Volvo Personvagnar AB was founded in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1927. It was acquired by the Ford Motor Company in 1999. Volvos ("boxy, but good") have had a reputation for safety and reliability, though often at the expense of design in its early years.



Whitehorse

The capital of the Yukon Territory, Whitehorse is the largest city in the three northern territories, accounting for 75% of the Yukon's population. Whitehorse is located at Historic Mile 918 of the Alaska Highway, at the head of the Yukon River. The city was named for the White Horse Rapids, now subsumed by Schwatka Lake, part of a hydroelectric dam.

Yonge Street

Known as the longest street in the world when it was part of Highway 11, Yonge Street is a major thoroughfare in Ontario, starting at the shores of Lake Ontario (the offices of the *Toronto Star*) and ending in Bradford 56km later. Before it was separated from Highway 11 in the 1990s, Yonge Street could claim to continue all the way Rainy River, at the Ontario/Minnesota border, nearly 1900 kilometres long.

York

Now a community within Toronto, York was one of six municipalities that amalgamated in 1998 to form the City of Toronto. It was also the original name for Toronto (until 1834) and the second capital of Upper Canada. It was the site of a major battle in the War of 1812.

Robert Young

(February 22, 1907-July 21, 1998)

An Emmy Award-winning actor, Robert Young was best known as Jim Anderson, the father in *Father Knows Best* – both on radio and television – and the title role in *Marcus Welby, MD*. In real life, he struggled with depression and alcoholism, but spoke openly about his problems to encourage others to seek help.



IDEAS AND EXPLORATIONS

Limitations

Everyone experiences limitations in their ability to do or understand things. It's merely a question of degree. A student could be good at English, but struggle in science. An excellent hockey player might be a terrible musician. Have you ever experienced difficulties in mastering a subject or game? What did you do to overcome those challenges? Have you ever had to adapt your expectations when you discovered limitations in your ability to achieve something you desired?

Looking at limitations from a different perspective, what would the world be like if everybody excelled at everything they attempted? How would you measure achievement without any kind of personal struggle?

Impersonation

Sources disagree as to how many professional Elvis impersonators there are in the world. The estimates range from a conservative 500 to a stunning 85,000 (greater than the population of Victoria). But it is universally agreed that Elvis is by far the most impersonated figure in all history. Nevertheless, there are tribute artists paying homage to musical artists from ABBA to ZZ Top.

If you could choose an artist to impersonate, who would it be? What qualities in that person draws you to him/her? What aspects of your own personality would impersonation allow you to enhance or subsume?

"Most people are impersonating somebody or pieces of different people as the basis of who they are. When we examine what's called identity in sociology we see how people construct who they are from a variety of sources, and increasingly today materials of identity formation are derived from the media. The Elvis impersonator is simply more honest about who has provided the role model of their personality." *Vernon Chadwick, Elvis expert*

Do you agree or disagree with that statement? How much influence does mass media have on shaping people's identities? Marketers often use celebrity endorsements to sell products. Have you ever purchased something to be more like a celebrity you admire?

Dreams

Imagine the perfect life. Write down a list of ultimate goals and desires and rank them in order of importance. Then rank them in order of achievability. What can you do now to make those dreams a reality in the future?

Epicurus wrote: "Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for." What do you think he meant by that? Give examples from your own experience to illustrate the explanation.

Have you ever dreamed of obtaining or achieving something and later succeeded? How did your expectations compare to the reality? Did achieving your goal change your life or simply enhance it?

Finding Your Voice

The arts provide a way for people to find their own voice. Whether it's through music or writing, through acting or drawing, creative expression is a means of sharing the way you see the world with others. It's not confined to the "esoteric" arts either – graphic design, cooking, woodworking are all creative ways of putting an individual stamp on your surroundings. What's your form of creative expression? In what ways does pursuing that expression give you personal satisfaction? How does it help you define yourself as an individual?

NOTABLE QUOTABLES

“The more I read and the more I talked to other parents of children with disabilities and normal children, the more I found that feelings and emotions about children are very much the same in all families. The accident of illness or disability serves only to intensify feelings and emotions, not to change them.” Judith Weatherly

“Congress acknowledged that society's accumulated myths and fears about disability and disease are as handicapping as are the physical limitations that flow from actual impairment.” William J. Brennan, Jr.

"Disability is a matter of perception. If you can do just one thing well, you're needed by someone." Martina Navratilova

"It seems that for success in science or art, a dash of autism is essential" Hans Asperger

“Keep your dreams alive. Understand to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself, vision, hard work, determination, and dedication. Remember all things are possible for those who believe.” Gail Devers

“A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.” Oscar Wilde

“If life was fair, Elvis would be alive and all the impersonators would be dead.” Johnny Carson

“At Sun Studio in Memphis Elvis Presley called to life what would soon be known as rock and roll with a voice that bore strains of the Grand Ole Opry and Beale Street, of country and the blues. At that moment, he ensured — instinctively, unknowingly — that pop music would never again be as simple as black and white.” David Fricke, *Rolling Stone*

“Elvis Presley's death deprives our country of a part of itself. He was unique and irreplaceable. More than 20 years ago, he burst upon the scene with an impact that was unprecedented and will probably never be equaled. His music and his personality, fusing the styles of white country and black rhythm and blues, permanently changed the face of American popular culture. His following was immense, and he was a symbol to people the world over of the vitality, rebelliousness, and good humor of his country.” President Jimmy Carter

“Well Saturday gives what Sunday steals
And a child is born on his brothers heels
Come Sunday morn the first-born dead
In a shoebox tied with a ribbon of red
Tupelo-o-o!”
Nick Cave, “Tupelo”

“When I was a child, ladies and gentlemen, I was a dreamer. I read comic books, and I was the hero of the comic book. I saw movies, and I was the hero in the movie. So every dream I ever dreamed has come true a hundred times . . . I learned very early in life that ‘Without a song, the day would never end; without a song, a man ain't got a friend; without a song, the road would never bend – without a song’. So I keep singing a song. Goodnight. Thank you.” Elvis Presley

RECOMMENDED READING & VIEWING

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time, Mark Haddon

An award-winning novel about an autistic boy who investigates the mysterious death of a dog, and discovers his own history in the process.

The Sound and Fury, William Faulkner

Faulkner explored the decline of the old South through the ruin of the Compson family. Divided into four sections, the first part is told from the viewpoint of Benjy Compson, the mentally handicapped youngest son in the family.

Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck

The story of two migrant workers who dream of one day owning their own farm.

Riding the Bus with My Sister, Rachel Simon

A memoir about the time the author spent with her mentally handicapped sister riding buses around the city.

What's Eating Gilbert Grape, Peter Hedges

Gilbert Grape is trapped in small-town Iowa by his feelings of responsibility to his family, especially his mentally handicapped younger brother.

The Boys Next Door, Tom Griffin

A play about four mentally disabled men who live in a group home.

Rain Man

A self-absorbed car dealer discovers that his father left his multi-million dollar estate to an old brother he never knew he had, an institutionalized autistic savant,

I Am Sam

The story of a mentally handicapped man and his efforts to retain custody of his daughter.

Bill

Based on the true story of a mentally disabled man who ventures out into the world after being institutionalized for more than 40 years.

Almost Elvis

A 2001 documentary about Elvis impersonators.

A few of Elvis's movies:

Jailhouse Rock (1957)

Elvis plays an ex-con who starts a recording career after being released from prison.

King Creole (1958)

One of Elvis's only dramatic roles, he plays a young musician in New Orleans who runs afoul of the mob.

Viva Las Vegas (1964)

Elvis plays a race car driver who travels to Las Vegas to compete in the Grand Prix and falls in love with a swimming instructor.

Elvis (The '68 Comeback Special)

The television special that revitalized Elvis's concert career after seven years dedicated solely to making increasingly bad movies.

INTERNET SITES OF NOTE

Playhouse Theatre Company

www.vancouverplayhouse.com

Visit the Playhouse website for more information about *Toronto, Mississippi* and the entire Playhouse season.

Theatre Terrific

www.theatreterrific.ca

Western Canada's oldest theatre company for people with disabilities.

Society for Disability Arts and Culture

www.s4dac.org

A Vancouver organization that presents and produces works by artists with disabilities.

Elvis Presley

www.elvis.com

The official website of the King of Rock 'n' Roll. Includes information about the 2009 Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist contest.

North Shore ConneXions Society

www.nsamh.org/

An organization dedicated to creating social and educational services for people with developmental disabilities.

Developmental Disabilities Association

www.develop.bc.ca/home.html

Information about the community-based programs and services designed to help people with disabilities reach their full potential.

YOUTUBE CLIPS:

The Ultimate Elvis Tribute Contest

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=Fp8G7IZ29MY>

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj6V9gLJR8Y>

Winners of the 2007 and 2008 Ultimate Elvis Presley Tribute Contest, sanctioned by Elvis Presley Enterprises

The Complete History of Elvis Impersonators in 10 minutes

http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=zuZsiXrOu2w@feature=channel_page

A bonus feature from the documentary *Almost Elvis*

And the real thing:

Elvis Presley - Heartbreak Hotel 1956

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=1Qo1eaWF8c>

Elvis' Legendary Performances

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=zXzBt9Qa6yw>

On the Milton Berle Show - June 1956

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=X5JALwwaASg>

Trailer for the DVD release of the '68 Comeback Special

<http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=uEyiYZSpG6k>