

**Elvis Presley: Destination Vegas [DVD]**

(Wienerworld Ltd.) Rated: N/A

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by Leigh Edwards

Elvised Out

This documentary is marketed as an "unauthorized critical review" that "uses previously unseen private footage of Elvis Presley, and classic original songs, to tell the story of the King of Rock 'n' Roll." Serious Elvis fans might find it of interest for the historical footage, which includes several television and concert performances, some photographs of him on tour and interacting with fans, and some sound recordings of Elvis speaking from Vegas stages. While it is admirable in its intent to provide more footage of Elvis and another critical perspective on him, the documentary is ultimately disappointing.

It does not offer any new critical observations about the star, and the points it does make are often odd and unsupported. For example, a quirky little graph at the end declares that registered Elvis impersonators numbered 80,000 in the year 2000, and if the number increases at that rate into the future, by the 2030s, one in three people will be Elvis impersonators. Umm...stop your wacky outlandish claims and lay off the sauce. If the odd claims were played for humor, it would be mildly amusing. But this material is presented with absolute gravity via the old-school omniscient narrator format. As a result, it plays like a Wikipedia excerpt on Elvis read over historical footage of him all for the benefit of a British audience (we hear talk of monetary amounts in "pounds") that may not know they're getting a half-baked documentary, here.

Our voice-over British narrator makes some interesting claims at the outset. The documentary argues that while music critics have tended to dismiss Elvis's Vegas years as the nadir of his career, they should more accurately be seen as important years of expert performance and creative output on the part of the King. But after making this strong claim, the documentary fails to support it. After a broad strokes overview of Elvis's life, interspersed with full song performance footage, the documentary begins to discuss the Vegas years but never delivers on its promise. We don't hear complete arguments about why the Vegas years were important, nor do we hear convincing evidence.

Instead, we get a very incongruous several minutes on the history of Las Vegas, with no clear transitions or connections to Elvis. Then there is some pedestrian chitchat about how Elvis' drug abuse got worse in Vegas and how people thought he was out of touch artistically. This all accompanied by random bits of historical Elvis footage from the time. This blankness about Vegas is particularly weird, given that the documentary claims to be the "first and definitive" one to "tell the story of Elvis's residency in Vegas". Far from being definitive, it barely scratches the surface of that story.

The filmmakers seem to have planned their narration around the footage that was available to them, thus the story told is rather spotty, disjointed, and idiosyncratic. We hear a lot of vague summaries of how music critics were receiving his records at different times, but there is no sense whatsoever of what these aesthetic evaluative judgments are based on, nor any citations of specific critics. We hear some general summaries of how academics have generally seen Elvis but none of them are deeper than thumbnail sketches and none are anchored to any specifics.

For example, our narrator claims that some critics thought Elvis was just bringing the blues to a white audience, but that if you look more closely, you'll see he was using country and pop music elements just as much. It's an interesting and familiar claim, but there's no explanation or support for the assertion here. Just a quick gloss and then the film moves on.

There are too many unsupported assertions throughout this documentary that are presented as fact. Some of them are idiosyncratic bits of supposed data about Elvis' life that may or may not be true, but some are odd little arguments presented as historical truth. For example, the film claims that Elvis was emasculated by his Hollywood film stint and somewhat by his Vegas stint. Um...what are you guys talking about? Nobody knows, because the narration never goes beyond that quick, weird claim. An example of other points the film makes is that Frank Sinatra was rumored to have connections to the mob. That's the level of insight we get here.

In addition to the 45-minute documentary, the DVD includes some Elvis photographs (nothing remarkable) and sound recordings of some of Elvis' conversations (more interesting). The best parts of the film are recordings

of Elvis speaking from stage, where he complains about critics, explains the vastness of his tour entourage and thanks Hugh Hefner for use of his Playboy plane. The narrator claims such speeches show Elvis' "mental instability", but the random assertion does not necessarily follow from the sound recordings and from what Elvis actually says.

Ultimately, the documentary perhaps compiles some interesting historical clips together all in one place. But the content of the "unauthorized critical review" is largely out of step with Elvis scholarship, either academic or popular, and it is so oddly written and delivered that it seems unaware of the conventions of recent popular music documentaries.

RATING:  2

EXTRAS:  2

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