

Exclusive Interview

Elvis Ate Lunch at Hardee's

By C.W. Heiser

I was stunned. I had just gotten out of my car in the Hardee's parking lot and there he was.

The hair was silver-white, but I'd know that D.A. style anywhere.

I approached with trepidation, but, when I told him I wrote for the *Capital Times*, he readily agreed to an interview.

The following is a transcript of that interview.

As is customary with Elvis literature, this transcript has been edited extensively, and I have extracted only those portions which fit my pre-conceived notions.

As any good Elvis fan knows, it is not the truth we're after, but the TRUTH, regardless of the facts.

Elvis (Handing the counter girl a hundred dollar bill for his iced tea): Thanks darlin' and you keep the change too.

Counter girl (Wide-eyed): Aren't you...? Aren't you...?
Oh-My-God, it is you!

Elvis (Winking): Ah won't tell if you won't.

Counter girl: I understand.

(Elvis sits and begins dumping 16 or 17 packets of sugar into his iced tea.)

C.W.H.: Let's get right to the heart of the matter, Elvis. Why did you do it? Why did you fake your own death?

Elvis: Ah needed a break. Mah lifestyle at that time was jest churnin' me up.

C.W.H.: I see, but why this elaborate charade? Why not take a vacation? Or retire?

Elvis: Well, Ahhl tell ya, Ah did it for my fans.

C.W.H.: For your fans?

Elvis: Yep. Mah fans love me, ya see, and if Ah was to jest up and take off it'd break their hearts. They'd be yellin' and hollerin' all the time for me to come back and entertain agin. Ah didn't want my wonderful fans all anxious and makin' themselves sick.

C.W.H.: But your estate has made more money since your "death" than the whole time you were "alive."

Elvis: Yeah, Ah love mah fans.

(A man in a red T-shirt approaches our booth.)

Man in red T-shirt: I don't believe it. Aren't you...? You couldn't be...?

Elvis: Ah won't tell if you won't.

Man in red T-shirt: I understand.

Elvis: Here, buddy, these are the keys to that powder blue Cadillac out there. It's yours.

(The man in the red T-shirt rushes to the parking lot.)

C.W.H.: Let me ask you, Elvis, what have you been doing since you faked your death in 1977?

Elvis: Ah like to move around. Go where mah fans go, see what mah fans do.

C.W.H.: Why Middletown?

Elvis: Ahhl tell ya, buddy, there's some wonderful places to go to see mah fans here in Middletown. Why jest today Ah was down the road at your McCrory's lookin' at the tropical fish and watchin' mah fans takin' care o' biz.

C.W.H.: At McCrory's?

Elvis: Yep. And somebody should do somethin' about the tropical fish in that store. They're all belly-up dead. Ah love animals.

(A little three-year-old girl's head is by my shoulder. She's leaning over from the booth behind me.)

Little girl: Mommy, look! I think it's... Mommy, do you think it's really...?

Elvis: Hush, child. Ah won't tell if you won't.

Little girl: I understand.

Elvis: Here, honey, you take mah watch.

(Elvis hands the little girl his Rolex.)

C.W.H.: This is amazing, Elvis. Since we came in here, three people have recognized you, including that little girl. How many people know you're alive?

Elvis: Only a few thousand. Oh, mebbe eight or nine thousand people in all.

C.W.H.: But what happens if everyone has recognized you?

Elvis: Mah fans are loyal. They'll keep my secret.

C.W.H.: I see... I think.

Elvis: Ah have to go. Ah want to get over to that Jamesway before it closes. Ah'd like to see some of mah fans do some late evenin' shoppin'.

(Elvis walks to the door. As he begins to push the door open, a middle-aged woman in a pink pants suit is entering.)

Woman in pink: It couldn't be... Is it...? Is it really you?

Elvis: Ah won't tell if you won't.

Woman in pink: I understand.

Elvis: Here darlin', here's \$500. You buy yourself a color T.V.

(Elvis has left the building.)

Album Review

Sam Phillips Wows Critic

By David A. Blymire

In light of the recent televangelism debacles, one might be tempted to write off anything that goes under the label "Christian," especially after many weeks of seeing ready-made, self-inflicted caricatures flaunted on America's TV screens.

In the area of music, however, one finds something completely different.

Christian musicians like Canada's Bruce Cockburn and Ireland's U2 have gained respect by simply demonstrating a thinking faith and sensitivity to the human condition.

Sam Phillips
The Indescribable Wow
Virgin Records

Add to the growing list of artists who seem intent on continuing that tradition the name of one Sam Phillips (formerly Leslie).

Her latest album features some of the freshest sounding Beatlesque rock and roll to be produced in some time.

In making The Indescribable Wow, Phillips collaborated with T-Bone Burnett, who produced the album, played guitar and co-wrote two of the album's songs.

Burnett, who also produced Phillips' last album, The Turning, also produced albums for Elvis Costello, the Bo-Deans, and Los Lobos, to name only a few.

The fiercely idiosyncratic Burnett has recorded five albums of his own, and in 1984 a writer for Rolling Stone magazine said Burnett was probably one of the best songwriters in America.

Phillips, in taking for a pseudonym the name of the rock entrepreneur who lunched the careers of early rockabilly and R & B performers like Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and others, immediately conjurs up images of roots-oriented rock.

The known religious confusion of these figures makes a sharp contrast with Phillips' Christian orientation adding another dimension to the statement the album makes on the dichotomy between rock and religion in American popular culture.

(It should be noted here that evangelist Jimmy Swaggart used to pound out a hard-driving R & B tune himself, but now views rock as the "devil's music".)

The album features various 60s sounds with a harpsichord and an organ reminiscent of The Doors, giving 80s listeners a break from the monotony of layered synthesizers.

Burnett fills out the sound with his haunting trademark guitar.

His known disgust for poor drum work has also paid off here: drummer Alex Acuna keeps a sharp beat throughout.

At other times you might be tempted to believe you're listening to Rubber Soul, and one of the album's songs, "What do I do," begins with a Sgt. Pepper-style orchestra fade-in.

The album stands in the same stream as The Turning, which marked her

departure from Contemporary Christian Music.

The Indescribable Wow portrays pain and offers no simple answers.

Songs like "I don't want to fall in love," and "I can't stop crying" reveal an experience of life that hasn't been expressed very often in Christian music.

Phillips seems to be suggesting that pain is a normal part of faith.

Phillips doesn't, by any means, descend into religious polemics, either, but her point of view does come through in the form of suggestions.

Of these, "Trying to hold on to the earth" is probably the best example.

She suggests that while the current world isn't entirely meaningless, some of its trappings can be misleading.

"Long black cadillac/marble hot tub in the back/champaign waterfall/solid gold question mark twenty-feet tall."

In "She can't tell time," Phillips addresses the difficulty of holding on through difficult circumstances, and a quiet despair over the passage of time.

Phillips' wide-ranging voice seems to get better with each album, and this one is no exception.

Her vocal performance is powerful and mature.

However, the album's main problem is that the lyrics are hard to make out at times -- a real disappointment, given her abilities.

Overall, though, The Indescribable Wow marks a truly fine piece of work, and stands as a significant addition to the dialogue on the role of religion in rock and roll.

As Christian artists work at throwing off the ugly stereotypes that have descended on anything labeled "Christian," they can take to heart the quality of Phillips' effort.

David Blymire will be joining C.W. Heiser as a columnist for the *Capital Times*.

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