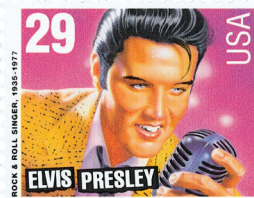


This Day in History... December 3, 1968

Elvis's '68 Comeback Special

Elvis's famed '68 *Comeback Special* aired on NBC on December 3, 1968. The show was a huge success, establishing that Elvis was again on top of the music world.

Elvis shot to fame in the 1950s. But the sixties brought tremendous changes in music and pop culture. While Elvis had been limited to churning out movie soundtracks, the rest of the music world evolved. The Beatles, Rolling Stones, The Doors, and others had burst onto the scene. By the end of the decade, he had nearly fallen out of the pop culture scene and hadn't had a No. 1 hit since 1962, with "Good Luck Charm." Elvis longed to be in front of his music fans instead of a movie camera. He was eager to be the name everyone was talking about and told a producer, "I want everyone to know what I can really do!"



Some 1.228 million ballots were cast to select the design of the 1993 Elvis stamps.

for happiness and a career, the obstacles he faced, and his eventual journey back home to his musical roots. The song "Guitar Man" was used as the theme link between the scenes. Elvis began working with the producer and writers in June. During their meetings, Robert Kennedy was assassinated. When the writers realized how deeply affected Elvis was by the death and violence, a songwriter was asked to write an inspirational song for the finale. "If I Can Dream" was written especially for Elvis in reaction to the turbulent times. Upon hearing the song, Elvis said, "I'm never going to sing another song I don't believe in. I'm never going to make another picture I don't believe in." When he recorded it, the backup singers had tears in their eyes.

Costume designer Bill Belew was called upon to outfit Elvis. It was the start of a relationship that would last for the rest of Elvis's career. Belew envisioned Elvis in black leather with a high Napoleonic collar. Elvis didn't care for either denim or leather, but Belew's suggestion of a denim type outfit made of black leather was a hit. When worn by the fit and trim star, it evoked memories of James Dean and Marlon Brando-type motorcycle films, the very era when Elvis rose to stardom.



From the Music Icons Series; features a 1955 photo of Elvis

Elvis became so immersed in rehearsals that he moved into his NBC dressing room. Binder came across him one night as Elvis was laughing and jamming with his friends. The scene gave Binder the idea to add a jam session to the show. The opening scene showcased Elvis in front of 89 guitar men in silhouette. The jam sessions, featuring his earliest bandmates Scotty Moore, D.J. Fontana, and Charlie Hodge, were intimate and powerful. In addition to recording some of his most famous songs, Elvis also told stories about his early performances. He closed the concert in a simple white suit, singing "If I Can Dream."

The concert was one of the most substantial achievements of Elvis's career. 42% of the television viewing audience tuned in to the December 3, 1968, show, giving NBC its biggest ratings victory of the season. The producer proclaimed it to be the first one-man special to appear on American television (earlier shows relied on several stars to entertain the audience). It was the first time Elvis performed in front of an audience in seven years. Not only the public loved it, but the critics also loved it too, giving it rave reviews. In the words of music critic John Landau, "There is something magical about watching a man who has lost himself find his way back home... he sang with the kind of power people no longer expect from rock 'n' roll singers."

Following the program, Elvis played to sold-out audiences in Las Vegas and around the country. He proved to himself and the world that he was still a superstar.

Colonel Park entered negotiations in 1967 *Issued on Elvis's 58th birthday*

for a television special starring Elvis. NBC agreed to produce a movie and a Christmas television special to be aired during the 1968 holiday season. It would be Elvis's first television appearance in ten years. Parker proposed a traditional performance of Christmas carols by his world-famous star. NBC producer Steve Binder, who understood that the music scene had changed drastically, argued that a more dramatic performance was needed. Binder envisioned choreographed musical numbers, big sets, and a full orchestra. To prove his point, Binder challenged Elvis to walk down the street – without his entourage – and count the number of young people who recognized him. Not a single person spotted the star of 25 movies, 54 Top 20 singles and 28 Top 20 albums!

The experiment convinced Elvis to take a risk. A semi-autobiographical script was written that told of a young man who left home to search



Elvis Booklet Stamp

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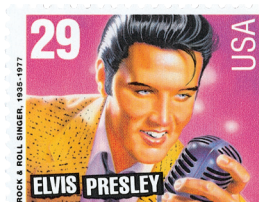
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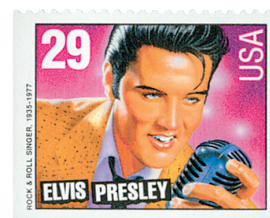
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