

Presley's Still the King; It's the Music, not the Man

The king still rules.

A quarter-century after his death, Elvis Presley continues to top the public's charts as the greatest rock 'n' roll star of all time. Indeed, while he reaches mythic status among older middle-agers, he even leads the pack among those too young to remember Elvismania.

But it's the music, not the man, that commands affection. While vast majorities say Elvis' music made a lasting and positive contribution to American culture, most also say that in terms of his personal character the King was no role model. Bloated to 250 pounds, he died of a drug-induced heart attack at age 42 on Aug. 16, 1977.

THE GREATEST – All these years later, 38 percent of Americans name Elvis Presley as the greatest rock 'n' roll star ever. Of the 128 performers named, no one else even breaks single digits; second – with four percent – is Jimi Hendrix. (Appearing on this list, both with single mentions, may be the only thing Yanni and Alice Cooper have in common.)

Ladies and gentlemen!
Please welcome warmly...
the greatest rock 'n' roll star
of all time...

Elvis Presley	38%
Jimi Hendrix	4
John Lennon	2
Mick Jagger	2
Bruce Springsteen	2
Paul McCartney	2
Eric Clapton	2
Michael Jackson	2
120 others	1 or less

Presley held the top spot, by similar margins, in polls conducted in 1999 and 1995.

Naturally, Presley has fans even among those who don't say he's No. 1 with a bullet. Nearly half of American adults, 49 percent, say they're Presley fans. And again, while this soars among people age 55 to 64, it also includes a decent number of young adults.

MOVIN' ON – Nonetheless, history does move on, and the differences by age indicate that Presley won't dominate the charts forever. Among people age 55 to 64, a huge 66 percent are Elvis fans. Among young adults, age 18 to 34, this drops to 38 percent – still a good number, but also a lot fewer.

Similarly, among people age 55 to 64, 68 percent call Presley the greatest rock 'n' roll star of all time. Among 18- to 34-year-olds that falls precipitously, to 19 percent. Still, even among those young adults, Elvis leads No. 2 Hendrix by better than 2-1. (Another drug-related fatality, Hendrix died at age 27 on Sept. 18, 1970.)

There's also a generational break moving upward: While Elvis is hugely popular among 55- to 64-year-olds, he's far less enthralling to those age 65 and up. Maybe they still pine for Patty, LaVerne and Maxene.

	Age				
	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Fan of Elvis Presley	38%	54	57	66	39
Call him "the greatest"	19	35	44	68	49

IMPACT – Older people, age 65 and up, are also a bit less apt to think that Elvis, through his music, had a positive impact on American culture – 73 percent say so, but that compares to 88 percent of those under 65. And just 19 percent in the older group say Elvis had a “very” positive impact, compared to 31 percent of those 18 to 64.

Overall, the impact of Elvis' music is seen as huge: Ninety-one percent of Americans say he had a lasting impact on American culture, and 85 percent say that impact was positive.

CHARACTER – The man's personal character is more problematic for some. Fifty-eight percent say Elvis was not a good role model for Americans today, and a mere five percent call him an “excellent” role model. His ratings as a role model are weakest in the oldest age group – some of whom may have watched those rotating hips and sneering lips, and wondered what this world was coming to.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News.com poll was conducted by telephone Aug. 7-11, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,023 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Here are the full results:

29. On another subject, who do you think is the greatest rock 'n' roll star of all time?

	8/11/02	3/7/99*	8/30/95*
Elvis Presley	38	33	35
Jimi Hendrix	4	2	3
John Lennon	2	1	2

Mick Jagger	2	5	4
Bruce Springsteen	2	2	1
Paul McCartney	2	2	2
Eric Clapton	2	2	2
Michael Jackson	2	2	5
Ozzy Osborne	1	1	--
Steven Tyler	1	1	--
Bob Seger	1	1	--
Buddy Holly	1	--	--
Jim Morrison	1	--	--
Rod Stewart	1	1	1
Little Richard	1	--	--
Chuck Berry	1	--	--
Jerry Garcia	1	*	2
Other (111 mentions)	16	15	13
None (vol.)	7	2	3
No opinion	15	22	26

*Gallup

30. Do you consider yourself a fan of Elvis Presley, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
8/11/02	49	51	1
8/13/97	45	55	*

31. In terms of his music, do you feel that Elvis Presley had a lasting impact or only a short-term impact on American culture?

	Lasting impact	Short-term impact	No impact (vol.)	No opin.
8/11/02	91	7	1	2

32. Again in terms of his music, do you see Presley's impact on American culture as very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative or very negative?

	-----Positive-----			-----Negative-----			No	No opin.
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Very	Somewhat	impact (vol.)	No opin.
8/11/02	85	29	56	11	2	9	1	2

33. From what you know about his personal character, how would you rate Elvis Presley as a role model for Americans today - would you say he's an excellent role model, a good role model, a not-so-good role model or a poor role model?

	----Excellent/Good-----			-----Not so good/Poor-----			No
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Not so good	Poor	op.
8/11/02	40	5	34	58	41	17	3

END