

**GREAT  
LAKES  
THEATER**

**TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE**

# MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET



Book by COLIN ESCOTT and FLOYD MUTRUX

Original Concept and Direction by FLOYD MUTRUX

Inspired by ELVIS PRESLEY, JOHNNY CASH, JERRY LEE LEWIS and CARL PERKINS

Directed by HUNTER FOSTER

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dear Educator .....	3
A Note to Students: What to Expect at the Theater.....	4
GLT: Our History, Our Future.....	5
Director’s Note .....	6
Musical Numbers .....	7
Million Dollar Quartet .....	9
Jerry Lee Lewis .....	10
Carl Perkins .....	12
Johnny Cash .....	14
Elvis Presley .....	16
Marilyn Evans and the Million Dollar Quartet .....	18
All Shook Up: A Brief History of Rock n’ Roll .....	20
Costume Design.....	22
Scenic Design.....	24
If You Only Have One Day to Prepare .....	26
Pre-Show Activities .....	27
Post-Show Discussion/Activities .....	29
If You Have More Time With The Play .....	31
Quiz .....	32
A Brief Glossary of Theater Terms .....	33
How to Write a Review .....	35
A Sample Review Written by a Student .....	36
Notes .....	37
Generous Support .....	39
About Great Lakes Theater .....	40



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at Playhouse Square

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Spring 2019

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production *Million Dollar Quartet*, which will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from May 3rd through 14th.

On December 4, 1956, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins and Elvis Presley fatefully found themselves together in a Memphis recording studio. The historic rock 'n' roll jam session that resulted was electrifying. Step back in time to experience this irresistible tale of broken promises, secrets and celebrations – which boasts powerhouse performances and an incredible score of rock 'n' roll, R&B and country hits, including “Blue Suede Shoes,” “Fever,” “Walk the Line,” “Great Balls of Fire,” “Folsom Prison Blues,” “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On,” “Hound Dog” and more.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *Million Dollar Quartet*. We offer special thanks to retired teacher Madelon Horvath for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

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Director of Educational Services

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The mission of Great Lakes Theater,  
through its mainstage productions  
and its educational programming,  
is to bring the pleasure, power and  
relevance of classic theater to  
the widest possible audience.

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# A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER

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You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc., be completely powered off once you have entered the

theatre. Even the glow from a silent cell phone (used for text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as a camera and editor, choosing his or her personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and

"tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there are design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.



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# GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE

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Tom Hanks and fellow company member Bert Goldstein.



The beautifully renovated Hanna Theatre.

Since 1962, Great Lakes Theater (GLT) has brought the world's greatest plays to life for all of Cleveland. In 1961, the Lakewood Board of Education president persuaded a Shakespeare troupe, led by Arthur Lithgow, to make Lakewood Civic Auditorium its home. The theater that opened its doors on July 11, 1962 as Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival presented six Shakespeare plays in rotating repertory. In exchange for free rent, the company provided student matinee productions. The repertory was expanded in 1965 to include non-Shakespearean classics as a result of an exchange of productions with Princeton's McCarter Theater. The Company outgrew its original home at Lakewood Civic Auditorium and, in 1982, made the move to the Ohio Theatre in Playhouse Square, launching the revitalization of downtown Cleveland's Theatre District.

In 2001 the company was searching for a new Producing Artistic Director, and the Board sought a candidate with well-established business skills as well as artistic leadership. Charles Fee was selected for his commitment to Shakespeare and his reputation for building Idaho Shakespeare Festival into a highly successful regional theater. GLT recommitted itself to its founding core values: Shakespeare, rotating repertory and an acting company of the highest caliber. During Fee's tenure, the company has been recognized for its artistic excellence, winning the *Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award* for excellence in Theater in 2005 after three years of being a finalist, as well as *The Free Times Reader's Choice Award* for Best Performing Arts Group in 2006, and for eliminating the inherited accumulated net deficit of over one million dollars.

The company has also been a revolutionary producing model unlike any other in America to create cost efficiency and enhance our artistic product. We now exchange our repertory productions with Idaho Shakespeare Festival (ISF) in Boise, Idaho and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (LTSF) in Nevada. This deep collaboration between independent producing organizations is a first in American theater. With this visionary model now fully in place, GLT, ISF, and LTSF are able to deepen the artistic quality of the work on our stages, share our production costs, maximize our resources, and provide nearly year-round employment to our resident company of artists.

Now, GLT has entered into a new phase, making the historic Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square its home. The renovation of the Hanna Theatre, as well as the creation of GLT's first endowment fund, is part of our *Re-Imagine A Classic* Campaign to ensure GLT's future. Our new home in the Hanna features a hydraulically operated thrust stage, a first for this region, and innovative and intimate seating where no seat is farther than eleven rows from the stage. We believe that this extraordinary theater experience will revolutionize the way Northern Ohio experiences classic theater.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. With a plucky history of bucking economic trends to strive for and nurture the highest artistic quality, it remains a distinctive and significant cultural resource in an extraordinary American city.

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# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

BY HUNTER FOSTER

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It's hard to imagine the world of music today without the influence of Sam Phillips. He was a pioneer and an innovator, creating a whole new sound that transformed the music industry. He's been called the "Father of Rock 'n' Roll," and it's true there would be no Elvis Presley without Sam Phillips. It's staggering to think that so much of rock 'n' roll's lineage tracks back to that tiny Memphis Recording Service he created at 706 Union Street in Memphis. The Beatles claim that Carl Perkins was one of their greatest influences, covering his songs more than any other artist. Johnny Cash influenced the likes of Bob Dylan, and Elton John called Jerry Lee Lewis one of his greatest musical heroes. Today's performance reflects one legendary evening when all four of these great artists returned to that tiny studio, to their true home, to the place "where the soul of a man never dies."

Many thanks for the creation of this show must go to the original director, Eric Schaeffer, and musical director Chuck Mead. Their passion and inspiration for this story and these legendary characters led to the show's creation.

Enjoy the show!

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Brother Jay.....	Eric Scott Anthony*
Fluke.....	Dave Sonneborn*
Jerry Lee Lewis.....	Gabe Aronson*
Sam Phillips.....	James Ludwig*
Carl Perkins.....	James Barry*
Johnny Cash.....	Sky Seals*
Dyanne.....	Kristen Beth Williams*
Elvis Presley.....	Sean Michael Buckley*

**On December 4, 1956 in Memphis, TN | Inspired by an actual event**

\* Members of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

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# MUSICAL NUMBERS

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## ACT ONE

Blue Suede Shoes.....	Carl, Johnny, Jerry Lee, Elvis
Real Wild Child.....	Jerry Lee
Matchbox.....	Carl
Who Do You Love?.....	Carl
Folsom Prison Blues.....	Johnny
Fever.....	Dyanne
Memories Are Made of This.....	Elvis
That's All Right.....	Elvis
Brown Eyed Handsome Man.....	Carl, Jerry Lee, Elvis
Down by the Riverside.....	Carl, Johnny, Jerry Lee, Elvis
Sixteen Tons/My Babe.....	Carl, Johnny
Rockin' Robin/I Shall Not Be Moved.....	Carl, Johnny, Jerry Lee, Elvis, Dyanne, Jay

## ACT TWO

Long Tall Sally.....	Elvis
Peace in the Valley.....	Carl, Johnny, Jerry Lee, Elvis, Dyanne
I Walk the Line.....	Johnny
I Hear You Knocking.....	Dyanne
Party.....	Carl, Johnny, Jerry Lee, Elvis, Dyanne
Great Balls of Fire.....	Jerry Lee
Hound Dog.....	Elvis
Ghost Riders.....	Johnny
See You Later Alligator.....	Carl
Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On.....	Jerry Lee

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# MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET



The original Million Dollar Quartet. Elvis is at the piano. Behind him, left to right, are Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash. (Photo: GEORGE PIERCE SUN RECORDS)

Visiting the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum is a point of pride for any native Clevelander. Striding through that soaring glass pyramid, soaking in the sound of music from every corner, navigating the warren of spaces displaying the artifacts of popular music; the wild clothing, busted instruments, remnants of nightclubs. It's exciting and overwhelming, like the music that made Cleveland famous.

But have you ever stepped into Sun Studio in Memphis, Tennessee? The legendary site of Elvis Presley's first recording, a cover of Arthur Crudup's *That's All Right Mama* in 1954? Today you couldn't be blamed for picturing a modern recording studio, of a kind you have seen in films or on TV – vast, sprawling, dimly-lit, dense with recording equipment, tucked deep inside a towering city building.



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Picture instead a neighborhood storefront. The front door opens into a small reception area, and beyond that the room. One room (it's Sun Studio, not "studios") with a tile floor, guitars, drums, a piano, an electric board, waiting for someone to play them. Just beyond that, the recording studio itself. Small, cramped. It's all very basic. And it's humbling.

It was in that room on a day in early December, 1956 that producer Sam Phillips was working with Carl Perkins to create some new recordings, and it was Phillips idea to add his new discovery, piano player Jerry Lee Lewis, into the recording session.

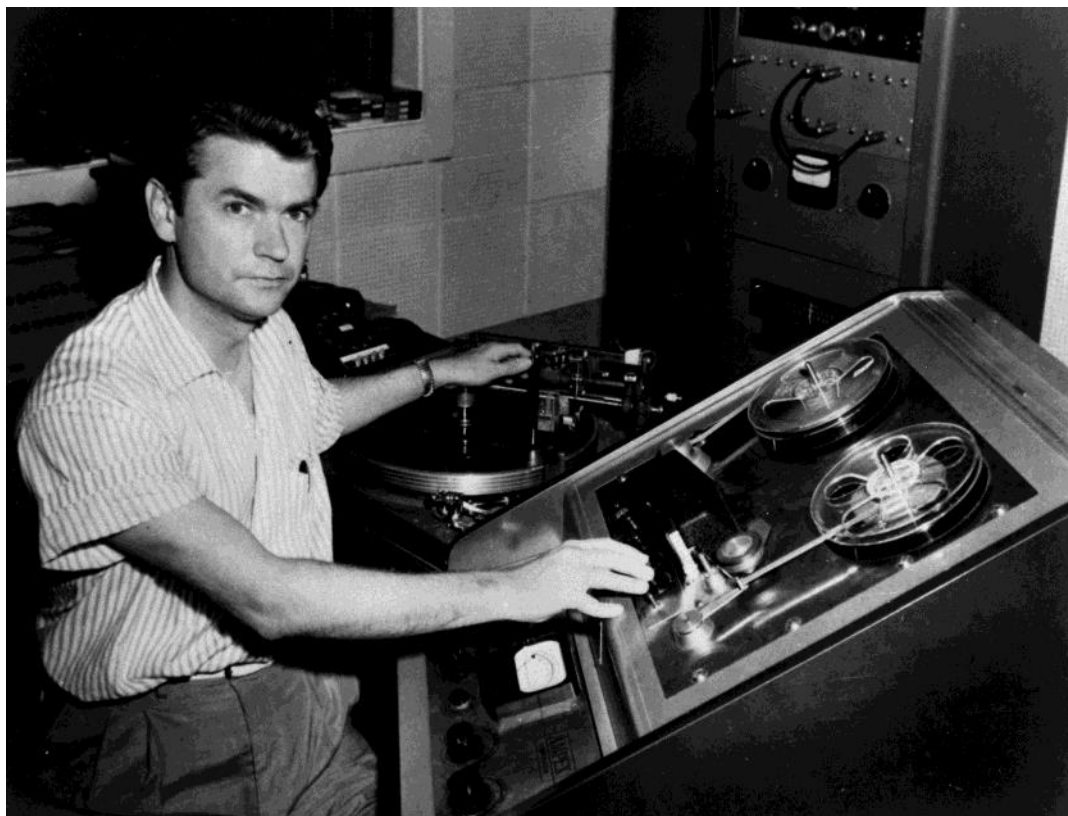


Record of Blue Suede Shoes by Carl Perkins.

As the story goes, Elvis Presley was just stopping by. He'd recently moved from Sun Records to RCA, but still welcome where he'd gotten his start. And depending on whose story you hear, another Sun recording artist, Johnny Cash, was either already there or arrived shortly after, just to listen to the Perkins session.

There's not much more to it than that, four young, Southern men, country and rockabilly artists, famous, less-famous, soon-to-be famous, all in one room at the same time. That room. They got to playing. And thank goodness someone thought to hit record.

*David Hansen is the Education Outreach Associate for Great Lakes Theater.*



Sam Phillips, founder of Sun Records.

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# JERRY LEE LEWIS

Jerry Lee Lewis is the only member of the “Million Dollar Quartet” who is still alive today, and he worries every day whether he will go to heaven. Lewis, age 83, now lives with his seventh wife in Nesbitt, Mississippi. Seven marriages – one to his 13-year old cousin, two of which ended in the mysterious deaths of his wives.

Like many Southerners of his day, Lewis had a very strict religious upbringing. “I was always worried whether I was going to heaven or hell ... I still am. I worry about it before I go to bed; it’s a very serious situation. I mean you worry, when you breathe your last breath, where are you going to go?”

Lewis grew up in poverty in Ferriday, Louisiana. His parents literally mortgaged their house to buy the piano that he learned to play. His talent was immediately apparent and his father would hoist the piano into a wagon and take it around local towns for Jerry to play.

Like Elvis and other early rock singers, Lewis was strongly influenced by African American blues musicians. Jerry would hide in the local blues clubs to hear these artists’ music at night. However, he quickly developed his own style: a mixture of blues, country, and rock and roll. His religion taught that he was playing “the Devil’s music” when he played blues or rock and roll, and he struggled with this dichotomy all his life. “How can it be the devil’s music? Satan didn’t give me the talent. God gave me the talent, and I’ve always told people that.”



Jerry Lee Lewis publicity photo, 1950s



Photo: Sun Records

When the “Million Dollar Quartet” met at Sun Records recording studio in December of 1956, Jerry Lee Lewis was the newcomer in the group. Although Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Elvis had had big music hits and growing reputations, Lewis’s egotism was such that he believed he would be the star of the group. Sam Phillips, the head of Sun Records, saw Lewis’s potential and signed him. Within a year he had his first small hit, “Crazy Arms,” which sold well locally, but by 1957 “Great Balls of Fire” and “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On” had become mega hits, making him a star.

Known as “The Killer,” Lewis’s reputation was well-earned. Biographer Rick Bragg, who interviewed him in 1984, put it this way,

“As the weeks went by, he told me stories about honky-tonk fights and pharmaceuticals

and passed-out airplane pilots, and shooting false teeth off the wall of a dentist's office. He rarely got mad at me even when I had to ask him some harsh questions, questions about his drug use, his women; and I had to ask mind-breaking ones, about the coffins that had passed him by, including those of two sons.

"I had read he once shot a bass player, more or less accidentally. One afternoon, he showed me a brushed-steel .357, but he was not mad at me at the time and, me being a Southern boy myself, I think he thought I would just enjoy seeing it, the way other people might show off a Matisse, or a Ming vase. He kept it under a pillow, 'in case somebody bothers me,' he said, and smiled at me. I smiled back, but on the way out the door I realized he had not meant to shoot the bass player, either.

Few of the early rock and roll singers are still alive to tell their stories today. Jerry Lee Lewis was one of the earliest stars. He fought Carl Perkins across the trunk of a '57 Buick. He watched Johnny Cash steal a motel TV.

"We was legends," he said of those early days. "We was legends, an' we didn't even know it." The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and other legendary performers say he, as much as anyone, lit the fire and showed the way.

*Madelon Horvath is a retired high school English Language Arts teacher.*

Sources:

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Cramer, Richard Ben. RollingStone.com. "The Strange and Mysterious Death of Mrs. Jerry Lee Lewis. March 1, 1984.

Simon Hattenstone. TheGuardian.com. "Jerry Lee Lewis: 'I worry about whether I'm going to heaven or hell.'" August 8, 2015.



Jerry Lee Lewis and his third wife, his 13 year old cousin Myra Gale Brown.



Jerry Lee Lewis and his wife Judith Brown



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# CARL PERKINS

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Early publicity still of Carl Perkins.

Carl Perkins was one of the most influential of the early rock and roll innovators, and also one of the least-well known. Perkins's most iconic song, "Blue Suede Shoes," was the first single to simultaneously reach top slots on the country, R&B, and pop charts, but the song is constantly mis-attributed to Elvis Presley (whose cover version only reached #20 on pop charts). Perkins and Presley were friends, but Carl lived out his life in Elvis's shadow. Yet, Beatles' guitarist George Harrison told people that if not for Carl Perkins he might never have bothered to learn how to play.

When Carl Lee Perkins was born in Tiptonville, in 1932, sharecropping in Tennessee was at its post Civil War peak and the Tennessee Valley Authority had not yet been formed to bring electricity to the rural one-room shacks where field workers like the Perkins family lived. By the time he was 6, Perkins was picking cotton alongside his parents and his older brother, Jay, to help the family survive.

Perkins poured this background into his music — rockabilly in its truest sense — an amalgamation of poor, rural music, with a driving beat, energetic guitar licks, and down home lyrics. Young Perkins

heard work songs in the field during the day and country music on the radio at night. He learned to play guitar from another sharecropper, John Westbrook, who taught him African American gospel and acoustic blues. As a boy, Perkins couldn't afford new guitar strings, so he had to retie his broken ones. In order to avoid cutting his fingers he taught himself how to bend notes, creating unintentional "blue notes," which would become a hallmark of his style.

As a teenager, Perkins moved with his family to the bigger town of Jackson, Tennessee. He formed a band with his brothers Jay and Clayton and started playing the local bars and honky tonks, known locally as the "Get Hot or Go Home Circuit." He quickly figured out how to get hot, and was renowned for his skill at reading an audience for the rest of his life. At 13 he wrote the song "Movie Magg," which would be his first single with Sun Records in 1955.

Perkins might have stayed in Jackson, playing clubs and doing a weekly stint on local radio, if not for hearing Elvis's recording of "Blue Moon of Kentucky" on the radio in the summer of 1954. It was a song he and his brothers played regularly, and as he told his wife Valda, "There's a man in Memphis who understands what we're doing. I need to go see him."

A year and a half later, he wrote "Blue Suede Shoes" on a brown paper bag after he saw a kid at dance complain to his date that she'd scuffed his shoes, recorded it a week later in two takes, and made history when it was released in early 1956. Until that song, crossover appeal was still hard to find. In fact, it was the b-side -- "Honey Don't" -- which was first a regional hit in the south, playing mostly on country stations. It was Cleveland, Ohio, DJ Bill Randle (who already had a long history of breaking musical boundaries on his "Interracial Goodwill Hour") who favored the a-side, prompting the Ohio distributor to request an additional 25,000 copies, and paving the way for the groundbreaking success of "Blue Suede Shoes."

The Perkins brothers were on their way to New York City to make their national television debut on the Perry Como Show, poised to break big, when they collided with a produce truck and all ended up in the hospital. Jay would never fully recover. Carl was laid up with broken vertebrae and other injuries for several weeks, and





Clayton Perkins, Carl Perkins, Fluke Holland, and Jay Perkins in 1957.



Carl Perkins

from his bed he watched Elvis Presley perform “Blue Suede Shoes” on the Milton Berle Show.

Perkins would recover physically and go on to record several more important songs — including “Matchbox,” which was what he was working on the day of the Million Dollar Quartet session — and write even more for other musicians, from Johnny Cash to The Judds. But he never could catch up with Elvis and the other new stars of rock and roll. By 1958 he was broke and disheartened and mourning his brother Jay’s death and struggling with a drinking problem. He left Sun Records for Columbia, but none of his records ever equaled the success of “Blue Suede Shoes.”

Little did he know that a pair of English boys by the names of John Lennon and Paul McCartney had spent the last two year begging sailors on the Liverpool docks to borrow the Carl Perkins records they’d brought back from the U.S.

The Beatles would record “Matchbox,” and seven other songs by Carl Perkins, more songs than they would cover by any other songwriter. On a trip to England with Chuck Berry in 1964, Perkins would find out just how much he had influenced them. And in the late 1970s he would win back the publishing rights to his songs from Sun Records and finally make some money from them too.

Perkins never stopped making music. He played with Johnny Cash for many years and then toured sporadically with his own band. In the mid-80s, the BBC made a special, “Carl Perkins and Friends,” that shows him beaming as he trades guitar licks with George Harrison and Eric Clapton, with members of the Stray Cats on drums and bass. He looks happy.

At his funeral, George Harrison played an impromptu rendition of Perkins’ “My True Love,” all the influence and all the affection plain in his voice. Wynonna Judd sang back-up. Valda, his wife of 45 years, looked on. We’ll never know what might have happened if he’d made it to the Perry Como Show.

*Toni Thayer is an English teacher at Hathaway Brown Upper School.*



Eric Clapton, Carl Perkins, George Harrison, Ringo Starr and Dave Edmunds.

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# JOHNNY CASH

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Everyone knows that Johnny Cash shot a man in Reno just to watch him die.

Questions of murder and morality haunted the singer's work for decades. So did love.

Late in his life, Cash released a 3-CD boxed set titled, *Love, God, Murder*. Each disc contained a thematic selection of songs, some written by Cash himself, others by fellow songwriters. He handpicked all the songs in this collection, and the recordings stretched back to his Sun Studio days in the 1950s into the 1990s and his work with rock and rap producer Rick Rubin.

From his first recordings at Sun, Johnny Cash sang the song of a lover. Find the stage of your relationship and he had a tune for it: pining for love lost ("I Still Miss Someone"), an explosive attraction that can't be denied ("Ring of Fire"), the struggle to remain faithful ("I Walk the Line"). And these songs came with verifiable proof, in his long second marriage to June Carter Cash. "Never has there been a deeper love than my love for her," Cash said.

Born in 1932 in rural Arkansas, the fourth of seven children, his birth name was simply J.R. But soldiers can't use initials for names, and so when he enlisted into the army he chose John for J. He had an older brother he was very close to, named Jack (a common



Early publicity still of Johnny Cash.



Johnny Cash with his first wife, Vivian Liberto. Courtesy of Cindy Cash via VC Reporter

nickname for John) who was killed in a horrible work accident when Cash was twelve. Cash the performer always presented a somber public demeanor, no better projected than in his choice of dress, as the "Man in Black."

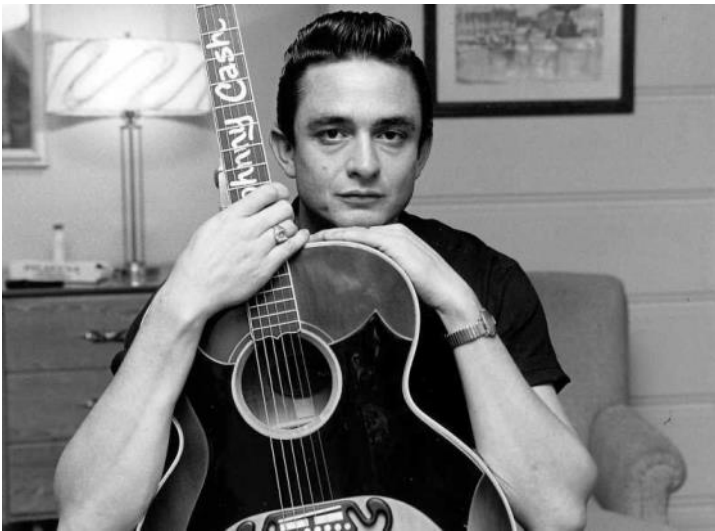
He learned his trade by singing gospel music with his family, spending long days in the cotton fields of northeastern Arkansas. Throughout his career, he sang songs of praise, but after years battling drug addiction, his voice could soar



In 1956, Sam Phillips presented Johnny Cash with a gold record for "I Walk the Line" and now that disc is on display at Nashville's Johnny Cash Museum.



Johnny Cash and June Carter visited London a few weeks after their wedding in 1968.



Johnny Cash and his Guitar, 1956.

to the heavens because it had spent time in wasted places. Fellow singer-songwriter Bono said, "Johnny Cash doesn't sing to the damned, he sings with the damned, and sometimes you feel he might prefer their company." That empathy gave him an unblinking scrutiny that Cash cast on no one more than himself.

Which brings us back to that murder in Reno, and the line in "Folsom Prison Blues," a song he first recorded at Sun in 1955. When asked why he wrote it, he once said that was about the worst reason he could imagine for killing someone. On *Murder*, he reminded his listeners, "These songs are just for listening and singing. Don't go out and do it." And therein lies the therapy. We can be transported into a world of cold

decisions and harsh consequences, yet come out on the other side not only unscathed (and unimprisoned) but somehow better for the experience.

Over nearly five decades, Johnny Cash took his listeners along on some dark rides, just as he tenderly professed his love and worshiped his God with powerful lungs. And he did all three with all the messiness of contradiction but not a trace of hypocrisy.

*Kimberly Burge is a Washington, DC-based writer and author of the book, The Born Frees: Writing with the Girls of Gugulethu.*

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# ELVIS PRESLEY

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Elvis Presley at age 21 in 1956. A Studio portrait for “Love Me Tender.”

Leonard Bernstein, the legendary composer and conductor of the New York Philharmonic once said, “Elvis Presley is the greatest cultural force in the 20th century ... He introduced the beat to everything and he changed everything – music, language, clothes, it’s a whole new social revolution. The ’60s come from it.”

I remember watching Elvis’s first performance on the Ed Sullivan show in 1956. I was just a little kid, but I remember that performance and my dad saying, “Those guys always die young.”

Elvis was 21 when the “Million Dollar Quartet” met on December 4, 1956 at Sun Records, the studio that made him a star. He had by this time signed with RCA and his songs were dominating the charts. His sexy dance moves, gyrating hips, and hooded eyes created a stir. Young audiences adored him, and girls reacted in a frenzy to his performances, which many people thought were indecent.

Elvis and his music were blamed for juvenile delinquency and he was denounced by racists for singing “black-sounding” music. In spite of this, he always appeared polite, soft-spoken, even shy when he was interviewed. Ed Sullivan told his televised audience, “I wanted to say to Elvis Presley and the country that this is a real decent, fine boy,” and to let him know that “we’ve never had a pleasanter experience on our show with a big name than we’ve had with you.”

In the late 1950’s Presley’s career was thriving. He was “everywhere – on the radio, television and the silver screen – working as a musician and actor.” But in 1958, Elvis was inducted into the army. Girls cried as his hair was cut in military style. While he was in the army his beloved mother grew ill and died and he was deeply saddened by her death. However, he returned to active duty in Germany following her funeral. During this time he met 14-year old Priscilla, whom he married seven years later, in 1967.

His hits continued during his time in the army because his agent had stock-piled recordings that were released throughout his military service. When he returned he picked up basically where he had left off, making hit singles such as “Are You Lonesome Tonight?” “Little Sister,” “Can’t Help Falling in Love,” and “Return to Sender.” And also starring in B-movies with little plot and lots of singing.

The sixties were turbulent in many ways, and music was a part of an overall societal change in America. By 1963, singers like Bob Dylan, and British bands such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were creating new musical sounds. The Vietnam War was a political divider and young people protested by burning draft cards and refusing military service, while others served and some soldiers were vilified – in the first war that America did not win.

Elvis’s popularity began to wane as other musical styles grew in popularity. Elvis was essentially conservative in his thinking – he thought of himself as part of the “great silent majority” – the ones who didn’t protest or



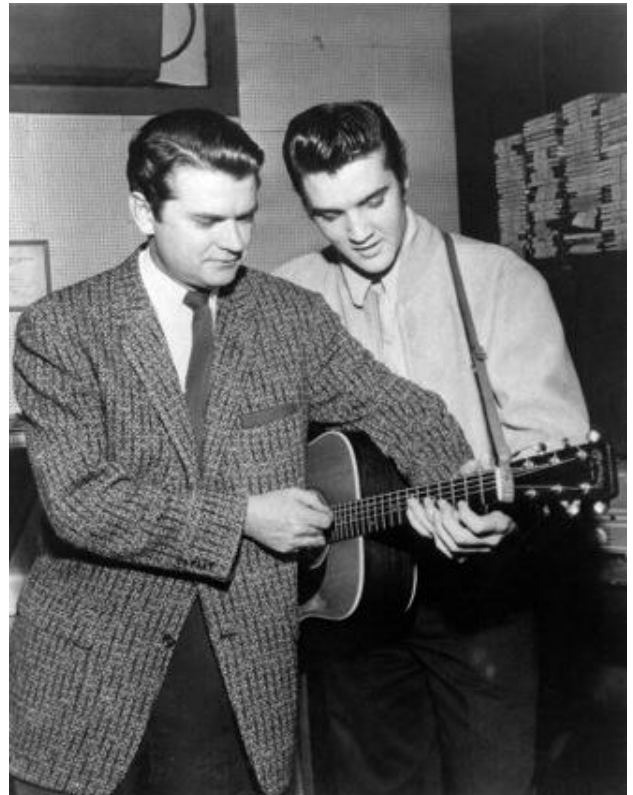
“run the country down.”

In 1970 Presley wrote President Nixon a letter claiming he had new insights into the youth unrest across the country and offering to become a secret agent of the federal government. The letter led to an impromptu meeting in the Oval Office; “A rather bizarre affair where a puzzled Nixon listened to Presley’s ramblings about the moral degeneration of the country.” In 1968, he did a televised “Comeback Special” that was very well received by a large audience. However, he never was as popular as he had been in his early career.

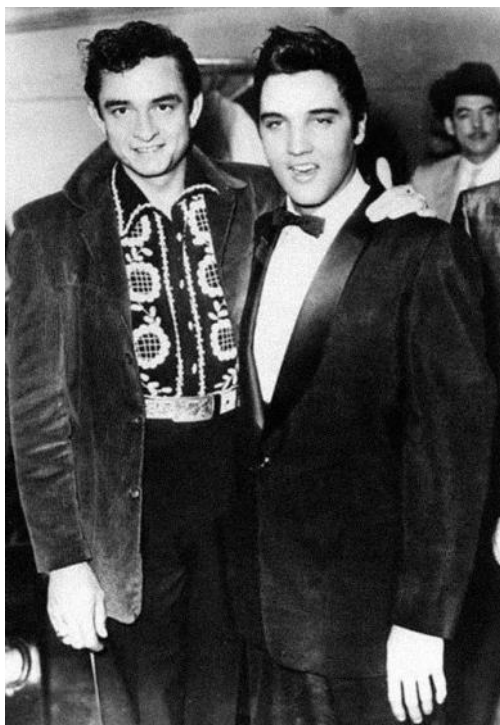
By the 1970’s Presley’s marriage as well as his life was falling apart. He and Priscilla divorced in 1973, and she received custody of their daughter Lisa Marie. He was also wrestling with a growing addiction to prescription drugs, obesity, and the influence of too many sycophants and enablers, among them his agent Colonel Tom Parker.

On August 16, 1977, he was found dead, officially of heart failure. Investigation found he was an addict of opioids, having been prescribed more than 8,000 pills. He was 42 years old.

Was Leonard Bernstein right? Did the whole ’60s come from Presley? Surely much of it did, and the ’70s too, on up to our own day. Presley’s life is an American tragedy, a talent of epic proportions, cut short by indulgence and appetite.



Sam Phillips and Elvis Presley.



Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley.

But even if his story is tragic, it’s also a story that’s not yet over. Shawn Klush, a Presley tribute artist who was on HBO’s “Vinyl” will be at Graceland this month for the anniversary of the King’s death. “I believe Elvis remains so popular 40 years after his death mainly in part due to the kind of man he was,” Klush says. “People love him, not only for his talent, but because he was a great, humble, kind man. He loved God. He loved his parents. He loved his country.”

And his country loved him—for his voice, for his spirit and because it saw in him, for better and for worse, what it was and what it hoped to be.

*Madelon Horvath is a retired high school English Language Arts teacher.*

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# MARILYN EVANS AND THE MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET

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By: Elvis Australia  
Source: Chicago Tribune  
January 1, 2016

When a promoter called Marilyn Evans in summer 1956 and asked her to join the chorus line at Las Vegas' New Frontier Casino, she could hardly contain herself--this teenager from Fresno, Calif., lived to dance. 'I thought it was probably the most sophisticated thing that had ever happened in the whole world', she said last week with an easy laugh.

She came to a Las Vegas in its infancy, a relatively innocent place, where the dancers enjoyed good pay--\$135 a week--sports cars and soirées with such headliners as Mickey Rooney and George Chakiris. 'It was just very exciting: two shows a night, seven days a week', she said. 'I was loving it'. Between shows, the dancers would gather in an employees-only coffee shop within the casino. It was there that Elvis walked in one night and sat at their table. 'Wow', Evans thought. 'He's beautiful--really, truly'. Within an hour, Elvis had slipped Evans a scrawled note on the back of a napkin.

It read: 'Can I have a date with you tomorrow night or before I leave?' Evans nodded in excitement and shock. 'He called backstage that night, set a time', she remembered. And so, for the next couple of weeks she and Elvis explored Las Vegas, driving around, hanging out and walking through the casinos. (Neither enjoyed gambling, she said.) Asked why he picked her, she giggles and shrugs. 'I think he probably liked that I wasn't 'out there'. I was respectable', she said. 'I still am respectable, you know!'

And what did this respectable teenager's parents think about her dating Parental Enemy No. 1 Evans' father had died when she was in high school, but to



Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash and Marilyn Evans - Dec 4, 1956.

head off any trouble she wrote her mother a letter that began, 'Don't flip, mama, but I've become acquainted with Elvis Presley'. Momma did flip, a little; that is, until Evans put the young star on the phone.

'He seems like a very nice person', her mom, L.E. Evans, informed The Fresno Bee in December 1956, after word of the relationship leaked. 'Elvis told Marilyn he likes her because she doesn't act like a show girl, because she's real'. Like Evans, Elvis too was performing at the New Frontier -- his first Vegas engagement--but when he left, the couple kept in touch by telephone. Then one day, he called Evans and asked her to come visit and stay at his Memphis home She said yes. And so, 52 years later, what does she remember most about the house? 'I remember that phone just rang and nobody answered, which was odd'.

In Memphis, Elvis and Evans spent their days riding motorcycles, going out to eat and watching rented movies at Elvis' house, a luxury the girl from Fresno could hardly believe. 'He was relaxed. He was comfortable there', Knowles-Riehl recalled. And at night she slept ...

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'not with him'. 'He was extremely honorable. He was young; I was young'. On Dec. 4, 1956, the couple, along with some of Elvis' friends, cruised around Memphis, as usual. But on this day Elvis stopped at Sun, where he had made his first record only three years prior.

It was there, over the next few hours, that fate (and a tape recorder) would allow a rare glimpse of the musical passions of these four future legends, as they jammed on gospel, country and blues. It was a seminal session of rock 'n' roll's origins ... and one that Knowles-Riehl barely recalls. 'I remember that outfit I was wearing was all wool', she said with a shrug of apology. 'A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then'. The fact that the session meant so little to her might help explain why she said she felt fine when the relationship faded a few weeks later.

'I always preferred classical music', she explained. 'We were just into different things, not that one's better than the other'. 'It was great, I loved it, it was terrifically exciting and wonderful, but I had other things I wanted to do', said Knowles-Riehl who, the next year, began attending the University of Utah. Asked why she never broadcast her brush with stardom, Knowles-Riehl said she never thought it among her life's highlights. Instead she prefers to gush about her two husbands--her first died--her son and a dancing career that includes 13 years as the director of the Fresno Ballet.

'It's like people whose high point of their life is their senior prom', she explained. 'My senior prom was good, but a lot of stuff has happened that's been great since then'. Such as ..'When it's not driving me crazy, I enjoy genealogy', said Knowles-Riehl, who divides her time between Carmel, Calif., and Salt Lake City. She also continues to dance--thanks to the fitness of a 40-year-old-- and she runs her own belly dancing troupe.

'It's pretty much the opposite of all my training, but I love it', she said. Until last week, Knowles-Riehl had never listened to the recording session from that day in Memphis. But when she did, she quickly

nixed the popular theory that she's the one who requested the song 'Farther Along'. 'That's not me', she said, as the female voice on the recording speaks with an obvious drawl.

'I wouldn't pick up a Southern accent that fast', she said, chuckling. And yet, in listening to the rest of the album from that day's session Knowles-Riehl stumbled upon another female voice, this one requesting 'End of the Road'. 'That's me', she said, as her wide brown eyes grew wider. 'It's like otherworldly', she said of hearing herself, 'out of body'.

With the headphones still on, Knowles-Riehl appeared in that moment as she does in the '56 photograph: Her face bright and blushing, wondering how could it possibly get any better than this.



Elvis & girlfriend Marilyn Evans (right next to Elvis) November 19, 1956.



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# ALL SHOOK UP: A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROCK N' ROLL

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The blues were born in the fields of the southern United States. Enslaved African Americans pioneered this genre which featured elements such as call-and-response, instruments that mimicked vocal sounds and patterns, and lyrics that sang about feelings as opposed to telling a narrative.

In the 20th century, as formerly enslaved African Americans made their way to Northern cities in an effort to escape segregation and limited economic opportunities, their music travelled with them. Along the way, elements were added that created distinct, regional sounds. For example, in Memphis and Chicago, the nature of performance spaces were different and more instruments were added to accompany what had traditionally been one artist and a single instrument. The blues were also treated to an electric sound, recognizable in the work of artists like B.B. King (who was also signed to Sun Records) and Muddy Waters.

The concept of Rock n' Roll was still quite young in 1956, but featured elements of the blues influenced by gospel along with the electronic advances in music of the mid-20th century. One of the biggest adaptations that this new genre brought was a new pace. The rock n' roll tempo was more upbeat, inspiring new dance crazes with teenagers which their elders found distressing. This music also brought black and white listeners together in a way that had not been seen before.

Many of the first rock n' roll songs that were written originated with black artists. However, due to the racial climate of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, black musicians were not featured as widely as white artists were. For one, the music featuring black artists was considered "race music" and therefore inappropriate for white teens to listen to. White separatists believed this music represented an attempt to force integration.

So white music producers surmised that if they could have white performers sing black music, they would be able to turn a profit without having to worry about crossing racial lines. Sam Phillips, himself to quoted as saying, "If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I



B.B. King with fellow Sun Records star Elvis Presley.

could make a billion dollars."

Luckily for Sam Phillips, artists like Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis were inspired by the black musicians of the time. Elvis himself said: "The colored folks been singing it and playing it just like I'm doing now, man, for more years than I know. I got it from them. Down in Tupelo, Mississippi, I used to hear old Arthur Crudup bang his box the way I do now, and I said if I ever got to the place where I could feel all old Arthur felt, I'd be a music man like nobody ever saw."

That inspiration is evident in the fact that many of the songs that white artists became famous for were often covers of songs that had been previously recorded by black artists. Even though it was the same song and still considered the "devil's music" it was easier to market with a white face.



One of the most egregious examples of an artist who made covers of hits made famous by African American performers is Pat Boone. His squeaky clean, “inoffensive” appearance was acceptable to parents who might be concerned about their children listening to “race music,” as he made hit records from his versions of Fats Domino’s “Ain’t That a Shame,” and Little Richard’s “Tutti Frutti” and “Long Tall Sally.”



Record albums of “Hound Dog” by Willie Mae “Big Mama” Thorton and Elvis Presley.

Now, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis may not have thought they were stealing music or a style from the artists whose work they performed. This was the music they loved and we fortunate enough to found a career performing it. But the producers, record label owners, the money people, they had no problem at all rewarding their white performers and stiffing the black artists who contributed so directly to their success.

Otis Blackwell, an African American songwriter who composed “Great Balls of Fire” and “Breathless” for Jerry Lee Lewis, was compelled by Presley’s agent to give songwriting co-credit (and therefore half his royalties) for “Don’t Be Cruel” and “All Shook Up,” among others, when Presley never actually collaborated with Blackwell.

Originally a hit for Big Maybelle, Lewis brought “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’” to white audiences, as he did with Chuck Berry’s “Little Queenie,” while Presley’s first hit, “That’s All Right” was written by Arthur Crudup, who never received royalties for that song at all. And that’s not all right.

*Chennelle Bryant-Harris is an Education Assistant for Great Lakes Theater.*

# SIDE NOTE



In Cleveland, DJ Alan Freed (who is credited with popularizing the term rock n’ roll) played a mix of R&B music by both white and black artists on WJW on the late-night “Moondog Show.” When he attempted to produce a concert live performance of artists (The Moondog Coronation Ball, considered the first ever “rock concert”) an estimated 20,000 white and black teenagers and young adults attended. Legend has it an alarmed Fire Marshall shut the concert down before the first song was even finished!

**MOONDOG CORONATION BALL**  
**CLEVELAND ARENA**  
3717 EUCLID AVENUE - CLEVELAND, OHIO  
**FRIDAY NITE, MAR. 21**  
 10 P.M. to 2 A.M.  
 IN PERSON FEATURING THESE SENSATIONAL STARS IN PERSON

**PAUL WILLIAMS** ★ **TINY GRIMES**  
HUCKLEBUCKERS ROCKIN' HIGHLANDERS

**THE DOMINOES** ★ **DANNY COBB**

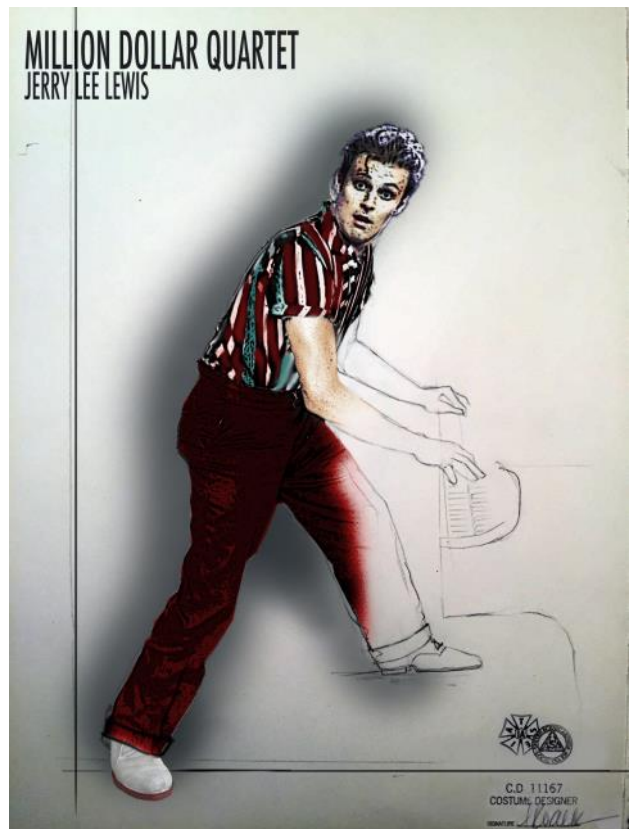
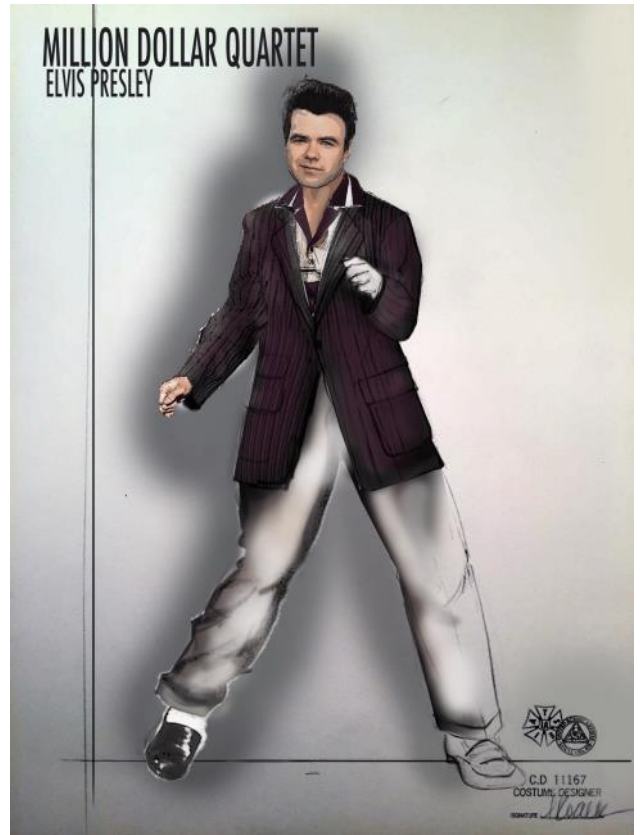
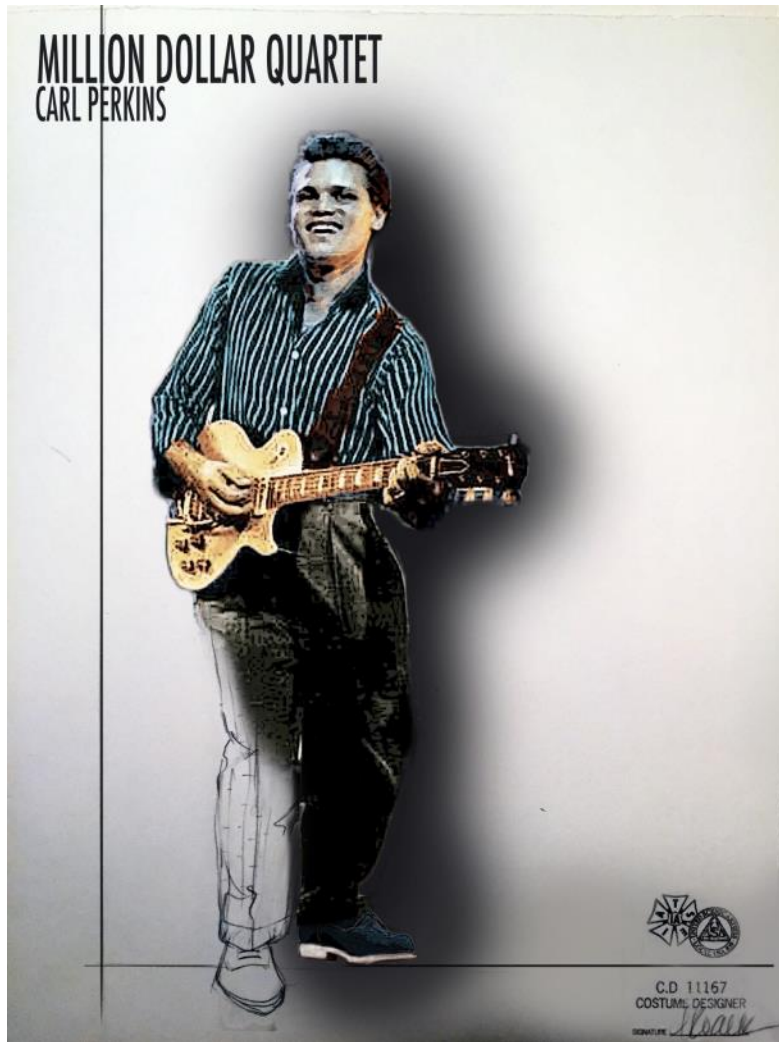
**MANY OTHERS!** ★ **VARETTA DILLARD** ★ **MANY OTHERS!**

**THE MOONDOG RADIO SHOW**  
 WITH **ALAN FREED** IN PERSON  
 BROADCAST OVER WJW DIRECT FROM THE BALL

**Adv. Sale Tickets \$1.50** Including All Taxes **Adm. at Door \$1.75**  
TICKETS NOW ON SALE IN CLEVELAND AT RECORD RENDEZVOUS, 109 PROSPECT AND AT RICHMAN'S AND THE ARENA BOX OFFICE ALSO AT MANY LEADING RECORD SHOPS IN OTHER NORTHERN OHIO CITIES

# COSTUME DESIGN

BY LAUREN T. ROARK





MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET  
DYANNE



C.D. 11167  
COSTUME DESIGNER  
*Shank*

MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET  
JOHNNY CASH



C.D. 11167  
COSTUME DESIGNER  
*Shank*

MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET  
SAM PHILLIPS

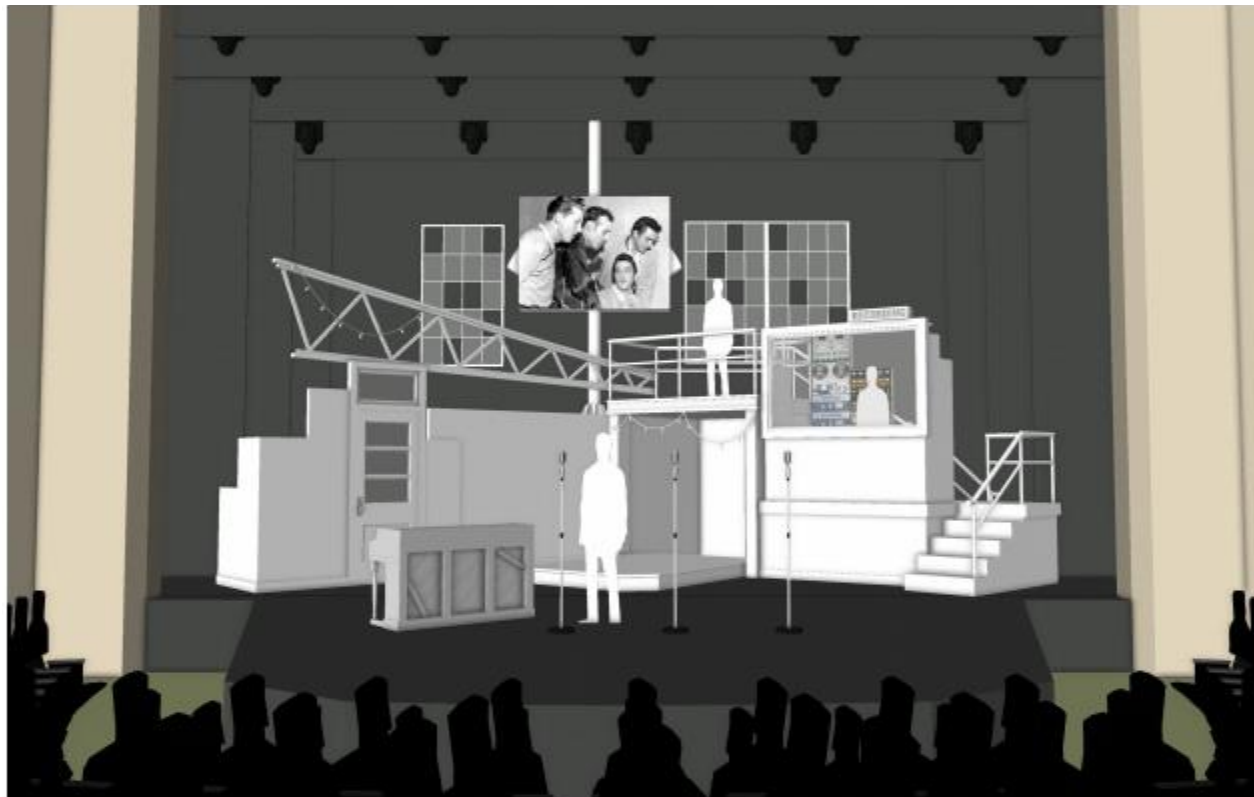


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COSTUME DESIGNER  
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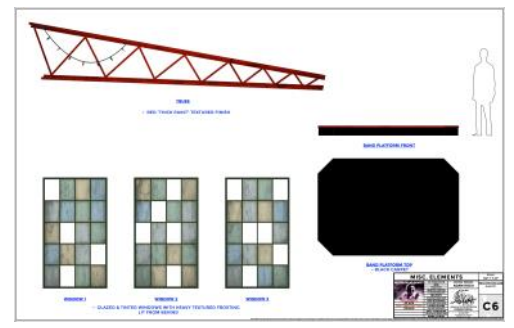
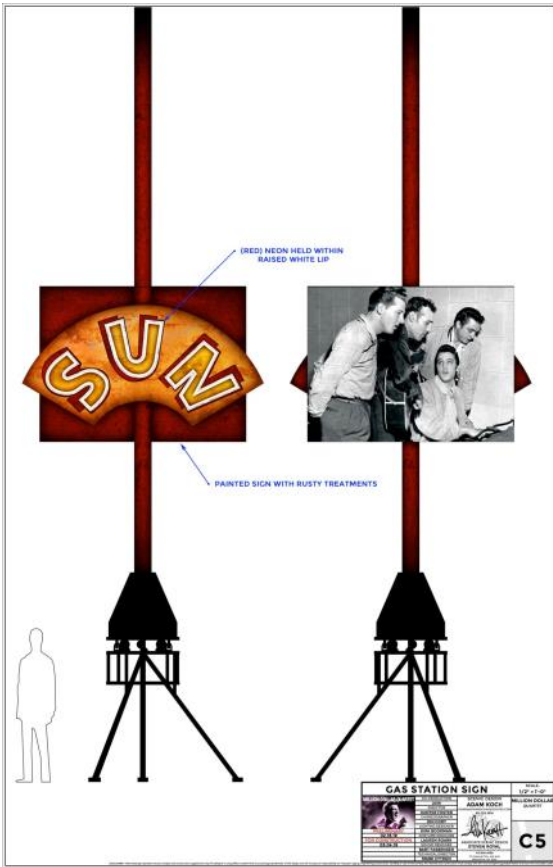
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# SCENIC INSPIRATION & DESIGN

BY ADAM KOCH







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# IF YOU HAVE ONLY ONE DAY TO PREPARE

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You probably won't be able to do all these activities in a 45 minute class period, so choose what appeals to you the most. This play is almost all music, as it recalls a day in the recording studio of Sun Records – where Rock 'n Roll is said to have been born. Most students will have heard of Elvis, Lewis, and Johnny Cash. Carl Perkins is the fourth in the group and least well known today. He wrote and first performed “Blue Suede Shoes.”

These men came from extreme poverty, made it big, and lived hard and fast lives. Ask your students to think about current rock stars and look for connections.

1. Play some 40's music as students enter the room. (List is included with this guide – or you might have favorite music of your own to play.) It's fun for them to have a sense of what the music of the 40s and early 50s sound was like in order to appreciate the changes brought about by these singers – who are often touted as having “changed everything.”
2. Break students into 4 groups to look at the four performers in the *Million Dollar Quartet* and perhaps one more group to talk about Sun Studio/Sam Phillips (see essays on the singers included in this guide). Have them read the essays included, choose a song to share with the class, and share 3-5 highlights of the singer's life.
3. Play one song from each member of the quartet. Have students choose a favorite singer and see if – after the performance – they still feel the same way about their chosen star.
4. Discuss the influence of music on culture – and vice versa.



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# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

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## A MUSICAL MEMORY TOUR

Have one student go in front of the room. Ask that person a question that elicits a memory or emotional response about music. The actor can either respond truthfully or make something up, but either way must answer immediately. For example: “I remember when I saw Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show – and my dad said, “Those guys always die young.”

“I remember a time when a lyric made me cry/laugh/want to sing along.” What special lyric do you remember?

I remember the first time I saw a musical instrument and wanted to play it.

I remember my first concert.

I remember an embarrassing moment that included music.

I remember a time when music soothed/inspired/angered me.

What musical memory do you have that includes a parent?

Students can discuss responses, particularly looking at students who chose to tell actual incidents and “lies.” Was there anything that gave this away? How did you feel listening to these emotional stories, telling a lie vs a truthful story?

How does music particularly influence our lives? Our thinking? How is your generation’s music different from earlier generations? What do you think this says about you? Them? Find/think of examples of events that would validate your theory?

## MUSIC VIDEO

Option 1: Have students find and share music videos from the performers in *Million Dollar Quartet*. They could work in groups and find the best or (in their opinions) most memorable video to share with the class.

Option 2: Have students find and share contemporary music from the 40s, 50s, or 60s and play it in juxtaposition to the *Quartet* singers. Discuss the differences/similarities. Extrapolate cultural differences from the music selections.

Option 3: Have students create a video presentation that illustrates a chosen time period. Use music as the binding concept and pull together quotes/news clips/book titles/clothing, etc. Create a title and very brief narration that clearly shows the theme of their work. Share the video with the class.

## COSTUMES AND TIME PERIODS

The clothing we wear in our everyday lives often communicates information to others about who we are. When we see musicians, their musical styles are often indicated by their clothing. What do the singers wear in

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the *Million Dollar Quartet*? Can you find pictures of them performing? Do they wear the same kinds of clothes that modern day performers wear? What does this tell you about their music style and their culture?

In the theatre, clothes send us signals similar to those in everyday life; however, there are significant differences between the costumes of everyday life and those in the theatre. Similar information is communicated about the wearer's gender, status and occupation, but on stage this information is larger because every element in the theatre is featured. Also, on stage, costumes must meet other requirements not normally expected in daily life.

Stage costumes:

- help establish the tone and style of a play.
- indicate the historical period and setting of a play.
- show the status, occupations and personalities of the characters in the play.
- indicate the relationships among the characters.
- may reinforce the significance of individual characters or the theme of the play.
- meet the needs of individual performers in terms of freedom of movement and quick changes.
- should be consistent with other visual elements and the directorial vision of the production.

The play is set in December, 1956 in the studio of Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee. How can costumes help tell the story of these characters? How does this information help to interpret or illuminate the musical we will see?

After seeing the show students may be interested in researching the clothing worn by these singers in real life. Did they change through the performer's lifetime? How? How do you account for this change? Create a poster featuring your research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.



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# POST SHOW DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES

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## CHARACTER EXAMINATION THROUGH CLASS DISCUSSION, ESSAYS, OR SOCRATIC SEMINARS:

1. The characters in *Million Dollar Quartet* are depicted in one afternoon of their lives. After reading their bios what personality traits were clear to see? How do their lives reflect the times they lived in? What outside forces shaped the lives of these men?
2. Does music influence society or vice versa? Since the time of the ancient Greeks, people have discussed the influence of music on the human soul and on society. Find quotes and examples to support your own ideas. Make sure the sources are reliable and worthy of sharing with the class.
3. A look at stardom/fame. How does it happen to some, but not to all? Is it based strictly on talent, or is luck a factor? How? Why? Do some quick research to explore the life of a famous star, and a talented singer who doesn't become famous. Lead a discussion about why fame comes to one and not the other and how it affects their lives.
4. The legendary, impromptu jam session known as the "Million Dollar Quartet" happened on Tuesday, December 4, 1956. Perhaps a little early in the Christmas season, they did play around with secular holiday favorites like "Jingle Bells" and "White Christmas." But they also chose to play numerous hymns and gospel songs including "When the Saints Go Marching In," "Blessed Jesus (Hold My Hand)," "Down by the Riverside," "Just a Little Talk With Jesus," "Peace In the Valley," and several others. Black spirituals, gospel music, and hymns were and are a common vernacular in the American South, and each of these young men were raised in the Christian traditions of their home. Throughout their careers, Cash, Lewis, Perkins and Presley would each play and record countless religious songs, on singles and entire albums of religious devotion.

At the same time, the music the rock and roll and rhythm and blues music that made them famous was considered "devil's music." Johnny Cash had a long history with drug abuse, Jerry Lee Lewis with child endangerment, Elvis with both. How do these apparently diametrical emotions live within one man? Does rock and roll encourage lurid behavior, or is it the other way around – does rock music report dangerous behaviors which already exist? How can anyone reconcile the desire to do good with the compulsion to do bad? Does leading a reckless life through the week and then singing songs of faith on Sunday count as hypocrisy, or do acts of devotion work to temper even more injurious behavior? What is hypocrisy? What is the nature of grace?

5. Several songs performed at this improvised session were written by African American performers like Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe), Chuck Berry, Clara Ward, Thomas A. Dorsey, and several others. Sam Phillips is quoted as saying, "If I could find a white man who had the Negro sound and the Negro feel, I could make a billion dollars." The idea that the wider, white American public would much more prefer to hear and see white artists is a racist idea. And the long tradition of adopting and adapting the culture and traditions of other cultures -- music, clothing, forms of speech, and art, and "making it white" – is called appropriation. Why is appropriation inappropriate? What are examples of appropriation in popular music history? What is the difference between appropriation and assimilation? When is it appropriate to appropriate?
6. American births spiked following World War Two, remaining constant throughout the 1950s before

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dropping off during the 1960s. This freakish “boom” procreation was called the “baby boom” and so its members (born between 1946 and 1961) are often referred to as members of the Baby Boom Generation. The post-war era was a time of great economic growth and expansion for the (white) American middle class, and great attention was paid to this new, young, populous generation. The term “teenager” was coined in the 1920s, as new legislation put limits on child labor. No longer children, not yet adults, teens had time, and by the 1950s, money to spend. Business worked hard to find places for them to spend it. What effect did the Baby Boom generation have on popular music? Why does rock and roll appeal to tween and teen audiences? Who are your favorite music artists? Why do you like them? What do they have in common with the *Million Dollar Quartet*?

7. Watch a video of Elvis Presley performing “Hound Dog” on the Milton Berle show, June 5, 1956. What was it about Elvis Presley that teenage girls found compelling? Teenage boys? What was it about Elvis Presley that adults found threatening? The New York Herald Tribune called this performance “vulgar” which is say, lacking in good taste, or offensive. What would make someone call this performance offensive? Why does “vulgarity” sell? Who are today’s artists that young people find compelling? That adults find threatening, or even “vulgar”? What do these artists have in common with the Million Dollar Quartet?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

### **ACTING EXERCISE (IMPROV)**

There is much information given in the play *Million Dollar Quartet* that we hear about but never see on stage. In order to study their characters, actors sometimes do “improv” work with these kinds of scenes. Below are some suggestions for two-person scenes, not in the play, that students might enjoy writing or improving and reading aloud/sharing.

- Elvis walking into Sun Records as an unknown, wanting to record a song as a gift for his mother.
- Jerry Lee Lewis selling sewing machines before he began his singing career.
- Carl Perkins, lying in a hospital bed, when he first realized that Elvis had made a hit out of his song “Blue Suede Shoes.”
- Johnny Cash signing on with RCA.
- Elvis, Johnny Cash, and Carl Perkins accepting payment of \$20 after playing local bars before their careers took off.
- Sam Phillips receiving his check for Elvis’s contract

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# IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME WITH THE PLAY

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## **Ideas to consider about this play:**

1. How does music affect culture change? Or is it that culture affects music change? Write an essay in which you make a case for either of the above questions. Explain why you feel this way in a well-reasoned essay that includes data as well as anecdotal evidence to support your opinion.
2. Like members of the Million Dollar Quartet, some modern singers have had run-ins with the law or problems with drugs. Choose a popular singer or band and compare him/her/them to one of the members of the Million Dollar Quartet. How are their issues similar? Different? Are they a product of their times? Their profession? Their too-quick fame and/or change in financial status?
3. If you were a best friend of one of the members of the Million Dollar Quartet, what advice would you give them? What choices did they make that were self-destructive? Did they trust the wrong people or were their problems unavoidable?
4. Many artists or talented sports figures have difficulty in their private lives – with alcohol, drugs, relationships, or finances. Are they different from “regular” people in some way? Is this simply part of the deal for them or can they do something to avoid the pitfalls that affect so many of them? Who are some talented people who have found balance in their lives? How are they different?

## **With a partner or small group create an essay or project on one of the questions below.**

1. Johnny Cash wrote “Folsom Prison Blues” and was widely thought to have spent time in prison, but this is a myth. He did spend a few single nights in local jails, mostly on drug charges and he fought addiction all his life. Find an example of another person who has been incarcerated. How did this affect their lives?
2. Research a modern singer / star who has dealt with severe personal problems. How does his/her experience compare? What connections can you find between the lives of your chosen person and one of the members of the Million Dollar Quartet?
3. Create a video using examples of music, fashion and other culture (TV, advertisements, news broadcasts, job opportunities, movies) in the 50s and compare it with culture from today. Find a theme that you follow throughout and use it in your title and in a narration that flows through the video.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2

Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Comparisons of literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

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# QUIZ

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## COMPREHENSION QUIZ

1. Why is Sun Records an important part of this story?
2. Name two things the members of the “quartet” have in common?
3. Who has already signed with another recording company?
4. Who wrote and sang “Blue Suede Shoes” first?
5. What city is the setting for this show?
6. (Bonus) Who do you think is the most important star in the Quartet? Why?

### Answer Key

1. This is the studio that discovered all of these musicians. It was as unknown as they were, but is now famous for the discovery.
2. coming from poverty, love of black musical styles, raw talent, a different musical sound
3. Elvis Presley has signed with another company. They all know this, but Johnny Cash has also signed with another company, and he hasn’t told Sun Records yet.
4. Carl Perkins
5. Memphis
6. this is an opinion question – most important part of the answer will be student’s justification of opinion



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# A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF THEATER TERMS

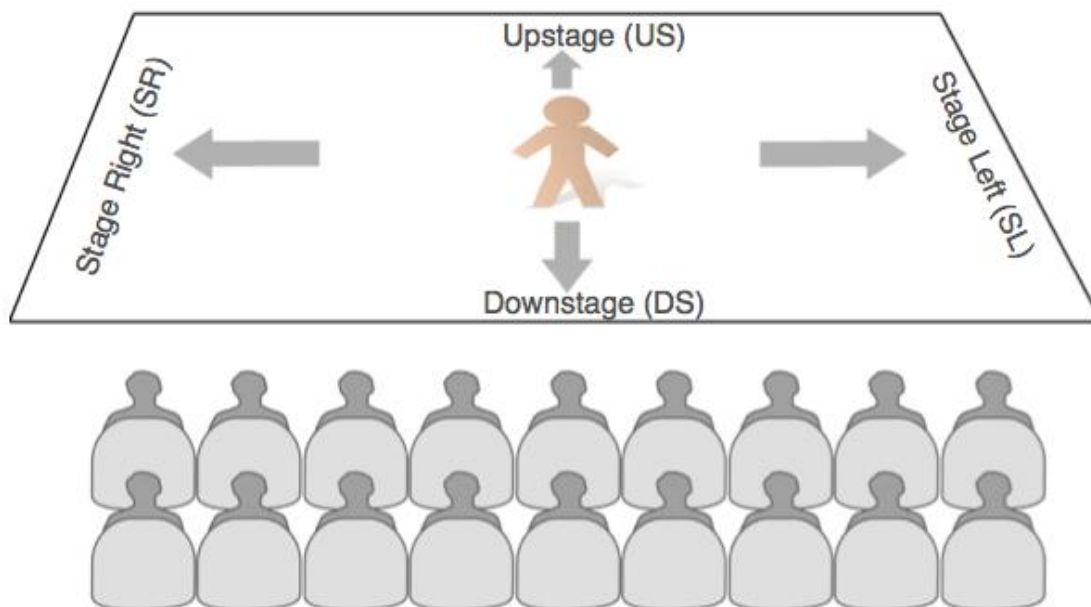
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<b>Apron</b>	The part of the stage in front of the curtain
<b>Auditorium or House</b>	Where the audience sits
<b>Beam Spread</b>	The area a single light covers
<b>Blackout</b>	Turning off all the lights in the theatre at once
<b>Board</b>	The control center for lights, sound, or both
<b>Book (The)</b>	A copy of the script containing all notes and blocking
<b>Box Office</b>	Where the audience buys tickets
<b>Box Set</b>	A set in a proscenium with three walls
<b>Call</b>	The time certain members of the production need to be at the theatre
<b>Cheat</b>	When an actor takes a realistic action and modifies it for the audience to see
<b>Cloth</b>	Scenery painted on fabric
<b>Cue</b>	A line or action that immediately leads to another action by the actor (for them to speak) designer or stage manager (to change the lights or sound)
<b>Curtain Call</b>	The bows at the end of the show
<b>Dimmer</b>	Equipment that controls the brightness of a light
<b>Director</b>	The creative head of a production. They create a vision for the show and work with actors, designers, and crew to bring that vision to life
<b>Flat</b>	A frame covered with canvas, cardboard, or some other light material which is then painted as part of the set
<b>Floodlight</b>	A light that has a wide unfocused beam covering most of the stage
<b>Fly</b>	A system used to raise set backgrounds, set pieces, or potentially actors
<b>Follow-spot</b>	A spotlight that can follow an actor as they move across around the stage
<b>Footlights</b>	Floodlights on the floor at the front of the stage.
<b>Gel</b>	A piece of plastic placed over the light to change its color
<b>Greenroom</b>	A room where the company can relax, eat, or potentially watch the show if a TV and a camera has been rigged
<b>Notes</b>	The director's notes on the performance or rehearsal
<b>Pit</b>	An area between the stage and the audience where an orchestra can sit (typically below audience level)
<b>Producer</b>	The person responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of a production (as opposed to the creative head, the director).
<b>Properties or Props</b>	Items used by actors in a show (such as swords, plates, watches, etc.)
<b>Proscenium</b>	A type of stage defined by a proscenium arch. Proscenium theatres typically

distinctly separate the audience and stage by a window (defined by the proscenium arch). The stage typically will not go far past the proscenium arch (the Ohio Theatre, for example).

<b>Raked Stage</b>	A stage that is angled (upstage is the top of the hill and downstage the bottom) so that the audience can see the action more clearly
<b>Set</b>	The scenery used in a scene or throughout the play
<b>Set Dressing</b>	Parts of the set that don't serve a practical function but make the set look realistic.
<b>Spotlight</b>	A type of light that is focused so that it can light a very specific area
<b>Strike</b>	Taking apart and removing a set from the theatre
<b>Thrust</b>	A stage that goes beyond the proscenium arch so that the audience is sitting on three sides of the set - in front, and on either side (the Hanna Theatre, for example).
<b>Tracks</b>	The rails on which curtains (tabs) run.
<b>Trap</b>	A hole in the stage covered by a door where actors or set pieces can exit or enter
<b>Understudy</b>	An actor who learns all of the lines and blocking of another actor (typically one of the actors in a lead role) who can perform in case the main actor cannot go on
<b>Upstage</b>	The rear of the stage
<b>Wings</b>	The sides of the stage typically blocked off by curtains where actors and crew can stand and wait for their cues

## STAGE DIRECTIONS



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# HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

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## MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

## THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can disapprove of the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

## WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

## DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sounds you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are in telling the story of the play.

## IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

## THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

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# A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

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## **"Gambit": More Poetry Than History** — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

*<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>*



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# NOTES

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# NOTES

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## GENEROUS SUPPORT FOR OUR STUDENT MATINEE PROGRAM IS PROVIDED BY THE FOLLOWING FUNDERS

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# ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER

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## **Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director**

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for over 30 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

1501 Euclid Avenue, Suite 300 • Cleveland, Ohio 44115 • Tel. (216) 241-5490

[greatlaketheater.org](http://greatlaketheater.org)