

HOME THEATER

'The King' on the movie screen



'Jailhouse Rock' (1957)

Elvis Presley played the occasional stinker during his movie career, and his arrogant, violent Vince Everett in Richard Thorpe's "Jailhouse Rock" is one of the stinkiest.

Vince lands in the big house after killing a man during a barfight. His cellmate, Hunk Houghton (Mickey Shaughnessy), is the prison "banker," cigarettes being his No. 1 currency. Hunk is also a faded country music star who teaches Vince to play guitar and sing. Back on the outside, Vince becomes a pop star with the help of an industry pro (Judy Tyler) who learns that loyalty is not his strong suit.

Presley contributed choreography to the famous prison dance number. Tyler — a former cast member of TV's "The Howdy Doody Show" — was killed in a car accident after shooting concluded. Presley was so distraught at the news that he reportedly declined to watch the finished film.



'G.I. Blues' (1960)

In real life, Presley was stationed in West Germany during his well-publicized stint in the Army. Art imitated life when Presley played a crew-cutted soldier in Germany who — whaddaya know? — happens to sing rock 'n' roll.

Norman Taurog's film has Tulsa McLean (Presley) planning to launch a nightclub in the States once his hitch is up. To help raise the seed money, Tulsa agrees to a bet that he can woo the region's most desirable woman, a French dancer named Lili (played by lithe, funny Juliet Prowse) who performs at swanky Café Europa. Prowse stops the movie with her sultry introductory dance number.

Corniness alert: "G.I. Blues" gets sappy while Tulsa is romancing Lili. When a "Punch and Judy" show malfunctions, Tulsa rescues it by singing with the puppets.

Movie tough guy Arch Johnson plays the gruff sarge.



'Blue Hawaii' (1961)

You thought Angela Lansbury was the mom from hell in "The Manchurian Candidate"? Wait'll you see her in "Blue Hawaii" as Presley's overbearing mother, a Southern belle whose every ancestor is a Civil War hero (or so she believes). Considering that Presley's father is played by Roland Winters — best known as the last of the Charlie Chans in the '30s-'40s film series — you couldn't find two actors who look *less* like they could sire the singer.

Presley plays a happy-go-lucky islander who returns from the service to rekindle relationships with his gal and posse. Mama disapproves of Presley's romance with a Hawaiian girl (Joan Blackman), which might have played more convincingly if only they had *cast* a Hawaiian girl.

"Blue Hawaii" features a lovely, solemn alternate version of Presley's #2 hit "Can't Help Falling in Love."



'Roustabout' (1964)

Presley is a saloon singer who is between gigs. His motorcycle is run off the road by an aggressive carnival manager (Leif Erickson) who takes umbrage when Presley flirts with his young daughter (Joan Freeman). To smooth things over, the carnival's owner (Barbara Stanwyck, yep, *that* Barbara Stanwyck) offers Presley a temporary job as a "roustabout" — carny speak for a jack-of-all-trades.

Presley is a good worker, but his true aim is to romance Freeman. Erickson's drinking doesn't help the situation.

Business is bad, but when Presley starts singing rock 'n' roll, teenagers are suddenly attracted to the carnival. Then rival carny boss Pat Buttram — Mr. Haney on "Green Acres" — lures Presley away, to Stanwyck's disappointment.

Watch for Richard Kiel — big baddie Jaws in 1970s James Bond films — as the carnival's strongman.



'Elvis' (1979)

The greatest Elvis Presley impersonator of all has to be Kurt Russell, a former child star in his first "big boy" role, who took the job seriously in "Elvis," the 1979 TV movie directed by John Carpenter. Without a trace of parody, Russell channels Presley the performer — his hip-swiveling rivals that of "the King" — and musters dramatic authenticity as Elvis the person. With a wild assortment of wigs and wardrobe, Russell achieves a remarkable resemblance. You feel like you're watching the genuine article.

"Elvis" depicts Presley's poverty-stricken childhood, through career and life milestones (Sun Records, "The Ed Sullivan Show," the movies, marrying Priscilla, the birth of Lisa Marie, the 1969 Las Vegas comeback). But "Elvis" scores highest when depicting Presley's increasingly paranoid, passive-aggressive treatment of his wife and crew.



'Elvis and the Beauty Queen' (1981)

Three years before "Miami Vice," Don Johnson was ill-advisedly cast as Presley in Gus Trikonis' TV movie, which is at turns silly and dark. It is based on the true story of Linda Thompson (Stephanie Zimbalist), a onetime Miss Tennessee, "Hee Haw" cast member, Presley girlfriend, and Mrs. Bruce (now Caitlin) Jenner. In the film, Presley is back in circulation after separating from his wife. He sets a series of traps for Linda (who continually insists she is "saving herself"), beginning with a private screening of kung fu movies; to a lesson in how to cook peanut-butter-and-banana sandwiches; to chaste (at first) co-habitation.

Things get dark when Elvis' posse enables his pursuits. It reminds you of the Liberace biopic "Behind the Candela-bra," or worse tactics uncovered by the MeToo movement.

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