

## The King

A filmgoer's impression of this documentary will depend *mightily* on what they think of Elvis Presley himself, the subject of "The King." In this reviewer's case--not much. Having "grown up" with the man (! am five years younger), I could be the perfect age for one of his adoring fans. Trouble is, I never cared for his voice or his style or his gyrating or--especially *his movies*. He made about 30 of them and they were almost all mediocre or worse (though they never lost money) and that is where I gained an impression of the singer as a middling, plastic talent, no matter what his music may have offered others.

Given that massive caveat, I found "The King" only moderately entertaining. Director Eugene Jarecki is a competent documentarian, but here, he is rather diffuse and unfocussed much of the time. Clearly, he wanted to use Presley's demise and downfall as a grand metaphor for post-war America and its deep dive into celebrity-driven pap, but I don't think the movie could bear all the weight placed upon it.

The narrative gimmick of the film is a series of interview sequences with celebrities shot in one of Presley's actual cars, a 1963 Rolls Royce Phantom. Along for the ride are passengers like Alec Baldwin, Emmylou Harris, Mike Myers, Rosanne Cash, *inter alia*, and logical stops on the Road to Elvis—Tupelo. Memphis, Vegas. etc., are featured.

A few sequences were intriguing (part-time fan Ethan Hawke's comments indicating a love-hate relationship with the singer), but most were just puzzling or heavy-handed--like an out-of-the-blue "King Kong" clip, which had little but the "King" name as a connection.

The arc of Elvis's career is ultimately well covered (though oddly, with so much cinematic footage, there is very little from his films) but with a lot of burps along with the telling. And the use of a vintage Rolls as another metaphor--the great American road trip--was just semi-cute.

Moreover, I could hardly identify with the Elvis worshipers who were so moved by being in the cherished vehicle. By the way, much of the music played in the car did not exactly connect with Presley's own output, another puzzling decision by the filmmakers.

I could say more but will stop here, especially if you are a fan of the King, for which I apologize. If I were recommending it, it would be strictly for Presley fans, who would overlook everything I just said above--they won't care. As an overall "film" experience, I would have to say it was wanting.

By the way, if you *are* an Elvis fan, you might check out the earlier "Elvis and Nixon" (2016), a lively, satirical take on the famous White House meeting between the two icons in 1970. Michael Shannon is great (and seriously funny) as a shambling Presley.

*(The film is rated "R" and runs 107 mins.)*

(June 2018)