

Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback Review: An Eye-Opening Look at the Legend's Major Comeback Attempt

In director John Scheinfeld documentary about Elvis Presley, the filmmaker offers a passionate look at the comeback that almost didn't happen.

BY GREG ARCHER PUBLISHED 3 DAYS AGO



Elvis Presley may have died on Aug. 16, 1977, but his music, passion for the craft, and his legendary status as the King of Rock 'n' Rock continues to live on to this day. Audiences never tire of The King. Baz Luhrmann's stunning biopic, *Elvis*, nabbed Academy Award nominations in 2022 for Best Picture and its star, Austin Butler. Meanwhile, *Priscilla*, from director Sofia Coppola, is based on the book *Elvis and Me*, by Priscilla Presley and Sandra Harmon, hits theaters in September.

There have been numerous adaptations of Presley's life in between, and just when you think you've learned everything about the man, another filmmaker comes along and surprises you with something inventive.

This time, it is John Scheinfeld, who wrote and directed the captivating documentary ***Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback***. The outing tracks Presley's mesmerizing attempt at a comeback via an NBC special produced by Steve Binder, a legend in his own right and the man behind other films about musicians, such as John Coltrane and Herb Alpert. Binder is on board as executive producer in this documentary, too. He has close ties to the comeback special, in fact — he was the original director of that endeavor, which was dubbed *Elvis*, although it's been commonly referred to as *The '68 Comeback Special*.

On Sunday, July 30, *Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback* will play in select theaters nationwide. (See [Reinventing Elvis](#) for a full list of theaters.) Following the special theatrical screening, the documentary will debut on Paramount+ on Aug. 15, with an international debut slated for Aug. 16 during "Elvis Week," the commemoration of Elvis' 1977 death. So, how does *Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback* hold up? In the words of Elvis himself: "Truth is like a sun. You can shut it out, but it ain't going away."

Showing Elvis at a Crossroads



There is plenty to appreciate in *Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback*. The documentary captures the icon to winning ends, but more importantly he creates an informative and engaging tale about an icon struggling to maintain relevance in the late-1960s. Elvis exploded on the scene in the 1950s and was quickly swept away by fame. Songs like *Jailhouse Rock*, *Don't Be Cruel*, and *Hound Dog* delighted the younger generation of the 1950s. In the early 1960s came *Return to Sender* and *Can't Help Falling in Love With You*, and others. But by the late 1960s, something was amiss.

Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback establishes what's at stake early on as Steve Binder recounts the night of Elvis' comeback — the mounting pressure, the intensity of the production, and the fact that Elvis almost didn't make it onto the stage. From the get-go, director John Scheinfeld ignites the story he wants to tell with something interesting and a purpose to follow through on. What truly went into the making of that special, and what would it ultimately mean for Elvis Presley?

One must understand, too — and Scheinfeld does a good job at this — where Presley was at that time in his life. His celebrity had soared so high, but he had fallen back to Earth. It's captivating to look behind the scenes here, as we get an even deeper look at Presley's shrewd manager Colonel Tom Parker, who seemed just fine keeping the Elvis cash coming rather than allowing his star broaden.

The doc points out that Elvis went on to make dozens of films, but that most of them all blended together. By the late 1960s, as the Vietnam War got under way and civil rights revolution had exploded, by comparison, Presley's films seemed tame and didn't really comment on the times. These are but a few of the fascinating reveals in *Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback*.

Exceptional Editing Drives the Story



Most documentaries have a gaggle of talking heads. It's no different here, however, in *Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback*, Scheinfeld and Binder make great use of the commentators they bring on board. There's singer/songwriter Darius Rucker, actor/singer Drake Milligan, and Gillian Gaar, author of "Return Of The King: Elvis Presley's Great Comeback," among others. All of it helps weaves together a story you feel inclined to stay with until the very end.

The heart of the doc, it seems, comes from Binder's own revelations, which have long been kept under wraps. His interest is in Elvis the man, Elvis the entertainer, and Elvis the great television presence — he was expected to create a showstopping TV event at the time — shines through mightily. Interestingly, while the documentary does leap back through Elvis' history, it doesn't stay there too long to weigh this project down. We learn how the NBC special came to life and what happened to Elvis before, during and, perhaps, after that. And, how Binder had an entirely different vision for the special, which Elvis' manager, Colonel Parker, didn't jive with. Watching and hearing how that played out is downright fascinating.

To be sure, that NBC special was to showcase Elvis performing in a way that audiences hadn't seen him perform in a decade. A lot was at stake. The filmmakers do an exceptional job with editing here, keeping the spirit fiery as he cuts from talking heads to Elvis on stage in that Burbank studio to vintage photographs. The inclusion of bright red lines and backdrops throughout is a nice touch, suggesting a kind of burning passion always lying beneath the surface.

A mesmerizing twist comes in the film's second half when we learn more about Colonel Tom Parker, who was born Andreas Cornelis van Kuijk in the Netherlands. Allegations of the man's "shady" past paint an even sharper portrait of the many things that fueled Presley's career. "The Colonel, he's the devil himself," we see Gladys Presley, Elvis's mother, quoted as saying.

Overall *Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback* offers yet another passionate look at an icon nobody wants to forget. And these glimpses back into 1968, and seeing Elvis on stage, is a treasure. The best moment in this doc, and perhaps that beloved special from so long ago, is watching Elvis Presley croon the song *If I Can Dream* in its entirety. Talk about showstopping.

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