

‘Reinventing Elvis: The ’68 Comeback’ Review: Fully in the Building

Elvis Presley’s 1968 TV special showcased the king of rock ‘n’ roll in his unadulterated glory. A new documentary shows how it happened.



Steve Binder was the director of the 1968 Elvis Presley television special that is the subject of “Reinventing Elvis: The ’68 Comeback.” Paramount+



By [Glenn Kenny](#)

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“I heard the news/There’s good rockin’ tonight.” That’s what Elvis Presley sang in 1954, on his second single, a cover of a jump blues tune originated by Roy Brown. The lyrics come to mind while watching the new documentary, “Reinventing Elvis: The ’68 Comeback,” directed by John Scheinfeld, because the movie seems explicitly formulated to reach people who have not, so to speak, heard the news about Presley: his impact on pop culture and his preternatural performing charisma.

Both of those realities were inarguably blunted by Presley’s manager, the slippery Col. Tom Parker. Baz Luhrmann’s [fictionalized biopic](#) of Presley from last year managed to both villainize and at least slightly humanize the guy who turned Presley from an alluring danger to youth morals into a cheesy family entertainment attraction. This movie outright brands him the villain and brings on a shot of a smoking cigar every time he’s reintroduced.

The hero of the story is the television producer-director Steve Binder, who put together the 1968 television special that briefly made Elvis electric and provocative again. (Binder is also an executive producer of the movie.)

In addition, the movie is a celebration and defense of Presley. While not overtly mentioning the accusation that Presley was guilty of cultural appropriation, the film counters it from several directions, including the critic Kelefa Sanneh's assertion that what Presley accomplished was a fusion of modes, not theft. And contemporary musicians here sing Presley's praises, including the Black country singer Darius Rucker and the Dominican recording artist Maffio.

The clips from the special itself are irresistible, as when Elvis, chatting with old bandmates, mocks his signature lip curl, saying, "I got news for you, baby, I did 29 pictures like that." He also sings up a storm. If today Presley really needs a sales pitch, this movie is a good one.

Reinventing Elvis: The '68 Comeback

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 44 minutes. [Watch on Paramount+](#).

Director John Scheinfeld

Writer John Scheinfeld

Stars Darius Rucker, Steve Binder, Maffio

Rating Not Rated

Running Time 1h 50m

Genres Documentary, Music