

NEW ORLEANS NOSTALGIA

Remembering New Orleans History, Culture and Traditions

By Ned Hémard

Creole Gumbo

"King Creole" tells the story of a young musician making his way in New Orleans and is (for the critics, at least) the best of Elvis Presley's many movies. After all, its director was Michael Curtiz, who directed Erroll Flynn as "Robin Hood", Bogie and Bergman in "Casablanca", and Cagney in "Yankee Doodle Dandy". The fourth film for Elvis takes place in the Crescent City and is based on the novel by Harold Robbins, "A Stone for Danny Fisher". One of the world's best-selling authors, Robbins also wrote "The Carpetbaggers", loosely based on the life of Howard Hughes.



Elvis was no stranger to New Orleans. His first appearance in the Crescent City was on February 4, 1955, at Jesuit High School on Banks Street. At his side was a promising young country-western singer

named Ann Raye, nee Martha Ann Barhanovich. She would graduate two years later from Sacred Heart High School in Biloxi. A Decca recording artist who performed at the Grand Ole Opry in 1953, she cut "You Can't Go Riding In My Wagon Anymore" and "Sentimental Fool". Raye's father was a promoter who had paid Elvis \$600 for performing three evenings on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

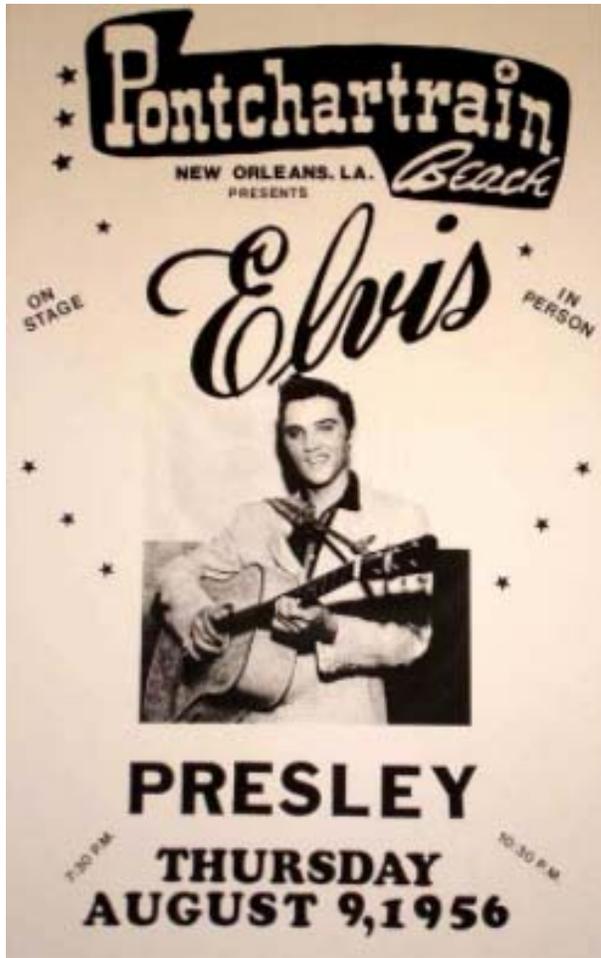
Elvis also appeared at Pontchartrain Beach in 1955 and 1956, as well as at the Municipal Auditorium. His Beach appearance on September 1, 1955, boasted the added attractions of Mrs. Jimmie Rodgers, Jim Reeves and a contest among "lovely, luscious teen-agers" competing for the title of "1955 Miss Hillbilly Dumplin'" and a grand prize of an "all-expense-paid week's vacation at Gulf Hills Dude Ranch" in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Popular country music star Red Smith did the emcee duties for the show. In the photo below, Elvis is more than just "Alright Mama" with his white bucks. After all, Labor Day in 1955 was still a few days off on September 5th.



*Elvis (far right) at Pontchartrain Beach, September 1, 1955
Ann Raye is down in front with Red Smith
Rockabilly artist Joe Clay from Gretna is second from right*

In 1958, Elvis was back in the city for the filming of "King Creole". The King and his entourage rented the entire tenth floor of the Roosevelt Hotel. Operating under the Fairmont name beginning in the

mid-60s, it reopened as the Roosevelt once again in 2009 as a Waldorf Astoria Hotel.



Elvis at Pontchartrain Beach, 1956

The hit title song of the movie, "King Creole" was written by the brilliant songwriting team of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. This dynamic duo also wrote "Hound Dog", "Kansas City", "Jailhouse Rock", "Yakety Yak", "Stand By Me" ... the list could go on forever. Although not doubting the team's ability to create a hit, native New Orleanians wonder what the lyrics "a crawdad hole", "like a ton of coal" and "like a catfish on a pole" have anything to do with anything *Creole*. Not only that, but "New Orleans" is pronounced two different ways in the song.

The cast of "King Creole" has many familiar names. Walter Matthau appeared before his later fame in "The Odd Couple". Paul Stewart had made his movie premier in "Citizen Kane". Carolyn Jones (who would go on to play Morticia in "The Addams Family" television series) was at the time married to Aaron Spelling. Perhaps the most prolific TV producer ever, Spelling would go on to produce "The Love Boat", "Charlie's Angels" and "Starsky and Hutch" (to name just a few).



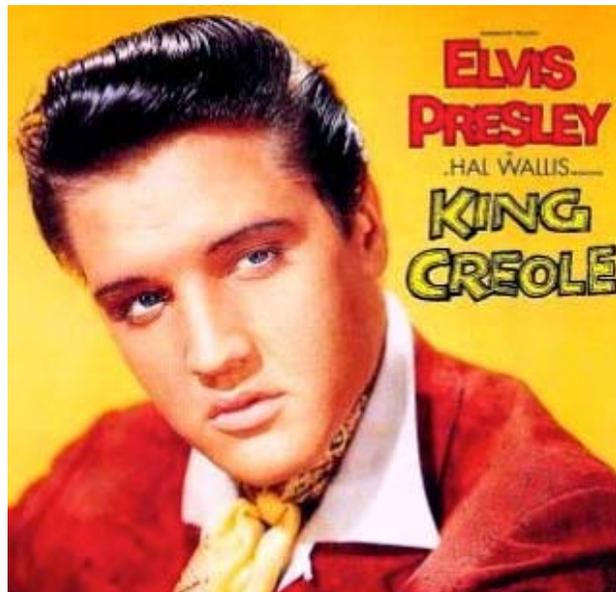
Elvis in New Orleans

Many remember Dean Jagger as the general in "White Christmas" (also directed by Michael Curtiz). He also played the principal to teacher, "Mr. Novak", on that popular television series. The lead actor, James Franciscus, would later portray a blind insurance investigator in "Longstreet". The twenty-three episode series (1971-1972) took place in New Orleans, but it was unfortunately filmed in Los Angeles. Apparently the producers were blind to the benefits of filming on location. Martial arts legend Bruce Lee appeared in four of the episodes as Li Tsung, an antique dealer and *Jeet Kune Do* expert. Mike Longstreet's seeing eye dog was named Pax. It is interesting that James Longstreet, Robert E. Lee's top general, moved to New Orleans after the Civil War and was the only senior Confederate officer to join the Republican Party during Reconstruction.



Director Michael Curtiz, Elvis and Dolores Hart on "King Creole" set

Vic Morrow played "Shark" in the movie. He had earlier starred in "Blackboard Jungle", which introduced the song "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley. He was cast in the television series "COMBAT!" from 1962-1967. Holding two small children in his arms, Morrow died tragically while filming "Twilight Zone: The Movie" when a helicopter being used on the set spun out of control and crashed. He is the father of actress Jennifer Jason Leigh.



Actress Dolores Hart (niece of Mario Lanza) had a supporting role as the love interest to Elvis in the 1957 release, "Loving You". In "King Creole" she took the part of Nellie, with Elvis as Danny Fisher. Besides the romantic role opposite "hip shaking King Creole", Hart starred in "Where the Boys Are" with Connie Francis and George Hamilton. She plays one of the co-eds who is confronted with her newly-found sexuality on spring break in Fort Lauderdale. After four more films, Hart decided to go "Where the Boy's Are Not". At only twenty-five

years of age, she became a Roman Catholic nun at a Benedictine Abbey in Connecticut, ultimately becoming its Prioress.



Dolores Hart, actress

Dolores Hart, Reverend Mother

Latin hymns have replaced Rock and Roll, and Reverend Mother Dolores Hart, O.S.B., is today the only nun to be an Oscar-voting member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

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