

Elvis 'artist' to shake, rattle, roll at WSCC

By: BEV BROOKS, Tribune Correspondent

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He's not an impersonator.

**"We're not called impersonators any more," Jesse Wade explains.
"Technically we're Elvis Tribute Artists, or ETAs."**

Wade, a well-known ETA who will be performing twice at Walters State Community College Saturday, has been stepping into Elvis' boots for about 15 years.

"Actually, probably even before I was born," Wade said. "Have you ever heard the saying that if somebody sees something when they're carrying a child, the child will be marked? Mama loved Elvis. When I grew up, all I could remember was being Mama's little Elvis. She'd Brill Cream my hair, and she bought me a little guitar. When I went to school with all the other kids in the '70s, there I was with the slicked back hair and the sideburns."

Soon after leaving the military, Wade was in Memphis when he decided to check out an Elvis contest at Bad Bob's Vapors Club.

"I thought golly, some of these guys are really good," he explained. "My mother said, 'hey, you ought to hear yourself sing,' so I went and did a recording. The guy doing the recording said 'you really need to take it serious, have you ever thought about doing it?' So I got a couple of costumes. Back then they were cheap, but now they're a thousand bucks each, easy. Once you see them you'll understand why."

Wade never actually got to see Elvis perform live, though he did come close.

"I had a chance to see him in 1976 in Pine Bluff, Ark.," Wade said. "An hour and a half after they announced the concert, it was sold out. That was the year before he died."

"Elvis was just a phenomenon, a once in a lifetime thing," Wade continued. "He started out in rock and roll, he helped black music be more accepted, and that was kind of cool."

There was a lot of folks, like The Ink Spots, that were really good. He opened doors for a lot of people. Even John Lennon said 'before Elvis there was nothing.'

"I think what helped Elvis, and I have the same claim to fame, is being a mama's boy," Wade said. "He loved his mother, he tried to do real good, he didn't dodge the draft. He went and did what he was supposed to do, pulled guard duty. He didn't take the cushy treatment. He did some unpopular things, some stupid and some good. His best movies were his first four. After the army, they were just kind of the same thing, they kept recycling. But once he got out of contract and he did the comeback in '68, that was it."

Wade continued, "I'm sure Elvis is not a favorite of everyone, but if you do a poll, you're not going to get a whole lot of people to say anything bad about Elvis. We've had presidents do worse. The thing about his faith in God."

Now everybody wins a Grammy, a dime a dozen, for any crazy thing, 'trunk rattle' music, I call it. Elvis won three Grammys, and it was for his three gospel albums. He never won a Grammy for 'Hound Dog' or 'Don't Be Cruel,' all of his big, big songs. You know, that's why there's a Book of Psalms- God loves music.

Exactly what was behind the fascination with Elvis, both during the time he was alive and in recent years?

"It was talent and charisma, that's all you can say," Wade said. "Look how everybody is now, all the young folks call their jewelry bling bling. Elvis was the first. If you saw him in concert, he had a ring on every finger. The jewelry, his clothes, the cars, he set so many cultural standards."

Concerning the success of recent releases from Elvis' catalog, Wade said, "For the last two years he's had the biggest-selling and longest-on-the-chart hits, and they were remixes of older hits. 'A Little Less Conversation' was 18 weeks at number one in the UK, and 14 weeks with 'Rubberneckin' When you and I are long gone and our kids are grown, their kids will be watching Elvis in some type of movie or commercial."

There are about 40,000 ETAs all over the world, including Indian, Asian and African, according to Wade.

"They're really critical about whether you're doing a tribute or making somebody look bad," Wade said. "Actually, Elvis Presley Enterprises isn't real happy about a lot of the tribute artists. They think that some of them are out to capitalize off the name of Elvis, and really it's not like that. Some people love Elvis, and I love Elvis. A lot of us thought he was immortal and nobody thought Elvis would ever pass away, but unfortunately he did. He's had the last laugh. How many years has it been? He's still selling more records than all the people that are touring."

Wade will perform 2 p.m. Saturday during the Lady Senators basketball game half-time, and again at the Senators' game at 4 p.m. in the "Z" Buda Gymnasium at Walters State.

He will also do a Valentine's Day show at 7 p.m. at Hoovy's Grill, located on North Cumberland Street in Morristown.

Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis has left the building.

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