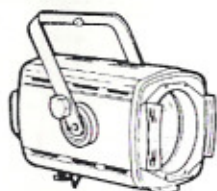


SPOTLIGHT ON Tom Green



A Dedication To Elvis

By Julia Ann Charpentier



Women crowd around the stage as the man with thick black hair and studded blue jumpsuit bends down to touch their outstretched hands. They range in age from twenty to seventy. They're in a trance as they watch the seductive movement of his hips and mouth. His eyes are concealed behind dark glasses. He passes out scarves in ritualistic fashion. Just the simple act of taking a drink is onstage foreplay. The women regard his every move with passion.

Another scarf is placed about his neck, and he saunters to the edge of the stage getting ready to bestow the sweat-soaked cloth upon a waiting admirer. An exciting young lady looks into his face. She regards a stranger, but for one magical moment he is Elvis Presley.

She reaches for him.

He teases her with hesitancy, then wraps the scarf around her shoulders. She's one of the lucky few to receive a kiss.

He walks away, and she stares at him enraptured.

The man has the look, sound, and feel of Elvis. He's one of many stylists throughout the world making a living off the Presley image. What makes him special?

Tom Green is among the best. And he's a Wisconsin native. Green boasts of nineteen successful years in entertainment, seventeen of which have focused on his dedication to the King. His first professional engagement was in 1974 at a bowling alley in Milwaukee. In 1987 he left the stage for two years to improve his vocal skills and pursue his interest in classical music. He joined the Bel Canto Chorus in 1988. His nightclub act reaped the rewards.

He believes Presley's mark on the twentieth century was made by his voice. Stylists who capitalize on the idol's physical appearance alone are making a mistake. "They just grow sideburns, put on a white suit, and think they can do the show. That's not where it's at. The essence of Elvis is in his voice. Nowhere else." He says the quality of entertainment is always more important than smoke machines, shaky legs and jumpsuits.

Green sports the sideburns. He gyrates the hips. He wears the flashy clothes. That's the easy part. It's when he picks up the microphone he's more than just another Elvis impersonator.

Impersonator he is not. Skilled vocalist he is. Green is as close as the imitators come to the real thing. "I talk as me. I sing as me

and present the songs as me, but I can recreate the voice of Elvis." He strives for authenticity.

He says the two years he performed before Elvis died were a struggle. He was a novelty act. Now that Elvis is gone people look to Green for a Realistic version of Presley, rather than a cartoon version, which a lot of entertainers present.

Like other stylists he's been typecast in the past, but he doesn't perceive this as failure. "I look upon it as notoriety. If you're truly talented you can break out of a typecast."

As he's taken an informative approach with his show people have begun to realize he puts a lot of himself into his presentation. "I am most proud of the fact that people recognize me for me now instead of Elvis."

His latest show is a history of Elvis in which he does a song from each year of his career. Everything from "That's All Right" to "My Way."

Quality is an important factor in his shows. He does no more than fifteen performances a month, interspersing his regular nightclub appearances with charity events and school seminars. He wants young people to know show business isn't how it appears on the surface. "It isn't all glamour and glitz and lights and mikes and women and drugs."

Success, for thirty-six-year-old Green, is meaningful only on his own terms. He'll pass on the money and step out of the footlights for the sake of preserving integrity. His deep appreciation for the profession is evident in his manner onstage and off.

Green dreams of performing as a classical soloist. He spends four hours a week rehearsing with the Bel Canto Chorus as a first tenor and much more time practicing on his own. The members are dedicated but not paid.

He'd always been a closet classical music enthusiast until he joined Bel Canto. "The only barriers put up are by the fans of music and the critics of music. The musicians don't put those barriers up."

As he achieves technical perfection he says he finds it harder to project emotion. In classical music standards are set. In popular music anything goes. "It's easy to emote when you don't have to worry about your technical skills. The best of both worlds is what we strive for in classical music: technical perfection with the ability to convey emotion."

Richard Hynson, music director for the Bel Canto Chorus, remarks, "Tom is a wonderful example of what the vocal art is really about and that's communication. In the music he sings as Elvis he projects the meaning of the song, and he invites his audience into the music. He brings the same sense of communication to the classical style."

Green says music is all the same language. Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo, and Jose Carreras are classical singers he admires. What do these vocalists have in common with Elvis Presley?

Technique. He believes Elvis was the best. "I have never heard another singer have that balance between raw talent and meticulous technique."

This is where Green sets out to emulate the King. This is what sells his act. His voice.

He has a style of his own, which is a unique blend of rockabilly and classical. He projects with the power and drama of an opera singer on ballads such as "Unchained Melody." On fifties rock and roll standards such as "Don't Be Cruel" he delivers with a country flavor.

Who knows what the future holds for this talented man?