

TV: New Phenomenon

Elvis Presley Rises to Fame as Vocalist Who Is Virtuoso of Hootchy-Kootchy

By JACK GOULD

ELVIS Presley is currently the entertainment world's most astonishing figure. The young man with the sideburns and mobile hips is the rage of the squealing teen-agers and his records are a top item in the never-never land of juke box operators and disk jockeys. By any reasonable standards of success he is big business.

Mr. Presley made another television appearance last night on the Milton Berle show over Channel 4; indeed the entire program revolved around the boy. Attired in the familiar oversize jacket and open shirt which are almost the uniform of the contemporary youth who fancies himself as terribly sharp, he might possibly be classified as an entertainer. Or, perhaps quite as easily, as an assignment for a sociologist.

Mr. Presley has no discernible singing ability. His specialty is rhythm songs which he renders in an undistinguished whine; his phrasing, if it can be called that, consists of the stereotyped variations that go with a beginner's aria in a bathtub. For the ear he is an unutterable bore, not nearly so talented as Frankie Sinatra back in the latter's rather hysterical days at the Paramount Theatre. Nor does he convey the emotional fury of a Johnnie Ray.

From watching Mr. Presley it is wholly evident that his skill lies in another direction. He is a rock-and-roll variation on one of the most stand-

ard acts in show business: the virtuoso of the hootchy-kootchy. His one specialty is an accented movement of the body that heretofore has been primarily identified with the repertoire of the blonde bombshells of the burlesque runway. The gyration never had anything to do with the world of popular music and still doesn't.

Certainly, Mr. Presley cannot be blamed for accepting the adulation and economic rewards that are his. But that's hardly any reason why he should be billed as a vocalist. The reason for his success is not that complicated.

Nancy Walker and Norman Feld lent some poignant moments to "Nick and Lettie," last night's presentation on "Playwrights '56" over Channel 4. They played an Army nurse and Navy lieutenant who had the common failing of always trying to be funny; on board ship they find each other and in so doing finally escape the burden of endeavoring to be clowns.

Whether being the comedienne or the woman in love, Miss Walker was so completely genuine and often so amusing that she sustained the hour; Mr. Feld also was good. But the play as a whole, adapted by Nelson Gidding from a story by Lonnie Coleman, leaned to the obvious side and much of the dialogue was extremely strained. The introduction of the business about the cowardice of the captain of the nurses was particularly unnecessary.

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