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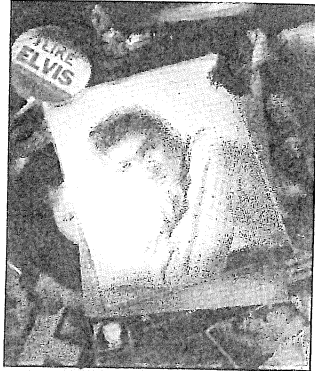
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The Proclaimers provide several gems on new album/3E

Bay WEEKEND

FRIDAY



TV specials examine a king and his fans

By CAROL CAIN
Entertainment Writer

Elvis Presley had a dental appointment late on the night he died.

He arrived home at his beloved Graceland shortly after midnight on Aug. 16, 1977. He unwound by playing a few games of racquetball, and told friends he was excited about the next leg of his concert tour.

He also sang a few songs at the piano, including "Unchained Melody" and "Blue Eyes Crying In The Rain." Finally, he retired to his private suite upstairs.

A few hours later, his girlfriend, Ginger Alden, found the fallen King's body in the bathroom.

He now rests in a grave at Graceland's Meditation Garden, beside his parents and grandmother.

But the King is anything but dead in the hearts and minds of his fans. More than 350 Elvis Presley fan clubs thrive all over the world, 16 years after he sang his last song. Elvis impersonators have swiveled and lip synced their way to a multi-million dollar industry.

And more than 650,000 people visit Graceland each year, making it the most famous house in the United States, second only to the White House.

Some come to honor the man whose unforgettable music still quickens their pulse. Others harbor morbid curiosity about a singer who, despite great wealth and adulation, remained insecure and lonely. Still others come to ogle his opulent lifestyle, sealed in a time capsule.

Whatever the reason, Elvis mania reaches a fever pitch in Memphis each Aug. 16, the anniversary of Presley's death. Tourists overflow into hotels in Arkansas and Mississippi.

To help sate the appetite of fans who can't make the pilgrimage to Tennessee, Raycom and WEAR-TV Channel 3 offers two specials this year: "America Comes To Graceland" and "Elvis: His Life and Times."

The programs mark the world premier of "Elvis on Raycom," a five-year collaboration between the sports and entertainment company and Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc. The series of annual specials will culminate with a 20th anniversary tribute in 1997, according to Ken Haynes, executive vice president of Raycom, based in Charlotte, N.C.

In the first special, "America Comes To Graceland," Raycom hopes to show a "truer image" of Elvis fans, Haynes said. "The tabloids portray the people who go to Elvis tributes as fanatical types — overweight women weeping at the grave. I went, and it's not a circus. There's something else going on besides hysterics."

What impressed him was the vast number of teens who attend, although they're not old enough to have seen the King in concert.

In addition, "America Comes To Graceland" will take viewers on a tour of the mansion with hosts Lisa Hartman Black and Mac Davis, who wrote the hits "In The Ghetto," "Don't Cry Daddy" and "Memories" for Elvis.

Filming at Graceland was no simple task, Haynes reported, because the crew had to work around tour hours. "Most of our work was done between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. After the last tour each evening, we'd move all the cameras in, light up the mansion and go to work. Then we'd tear it all down at 6 a.m. to get ready for another day of tourists."

In addition, the show includes interviews with Elton John, George Harrison, John Denver, Dwight Yoakam and Travis Tritt, explaining how Presley influenced them.

The second special, "Elvis: His Life And Times," features a rare BBC documentary, never before seen in the United States. "We asked Graceland if

they had unseen footage as they came up with this BB special," Haynes said. "It's great in-depth look at Elvis. When I viewed it I understood him so much better."

The British documentar shows a different perspective of the singer, examining "how hard he had to work for his breaks. Nobody heard him in high school and said 'I'm going to make you a star.' He had to be in the right place at the right time or it never would have happened."

In addition, "Elvis: His Life And Times" offers interview with old friends and colleagues, taking viewers from his humble childhood in Mississippi to his rise to international fame.

"We interviewed his pron date, whom nobody had interviewed before," Haynes said. "She said the date was great but who knew he would be come a star?"

Although Raycom is best known for its seasonal sports coverage, shows like the "Elvis experience" flesh out its year round programming. In October, look for a documentary about the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy.

"The chances of a conspiracy theory are far greater than John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr.," Haynes promised.