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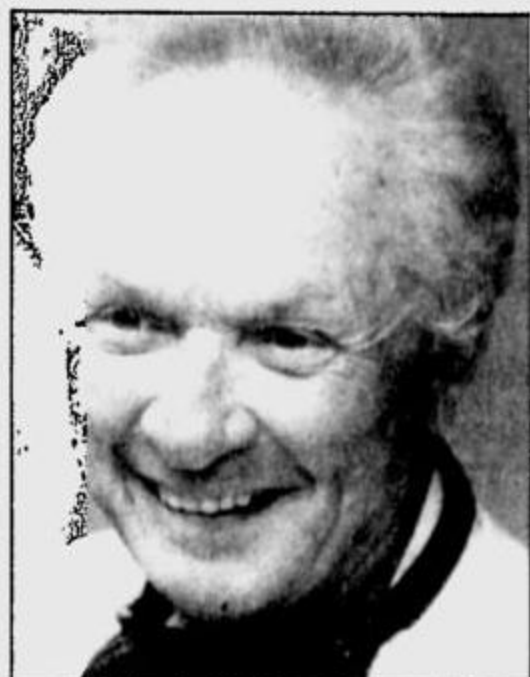
Arts & Travel

THEATER

Kathleen Marshall
directs today's
premiere of
new
Broadway
revival of
"Grease"
4F



Music



ALAN YOUNGBLOOD/STAR-BANNER

Country superstar Mel Tillis shares a laugh Thursday during a WTRS radio show in Ocala.

Tillis says Hall of Fame means a lot

BY ANTHONY VIOLANTI
STAR-BANNER

He's just a big ol' country boy who talks with a stutter, chews toothpicks, hunts possum and tries to keep his boots clean.

Mel Tillis also happens to be something else: a country music hall of famer. The 75-year old singer/actor/songwriter/comic who has a 62-acre ranch in Ocala, will be inducted in the Hall of Fame in October.

Two months ago, Tillis was inducted into the Grand Ole Opry.

"That only took 50 years," he said with a grin. On the night of the induction, Tillis told the audience, "another part of the dream has been fulfilled. It's been a long, hard road."

And the Country Music Hall of Fame?

"It means a lot to me because my peers recognize everything that I've accomplished in my career," Tillis said this week. "I've done just about everything in this business. Now I'm going in the Hall of Fame and I keep thinking of the people who went before me, like Minnie Pearl and Grandpa Jones."

"As a singer, songwriter and performer, Mel set a high standard for all entertainers," Tammy

■ **Tillis continues:** Singer spends most of his time in Ocala. 3F

Forever fascinated

Tom Petty's love for rock 'n' roll began the day he met Elvis in Ocala

BY BILL DEAN
THE GAINESVILLE SUN

One summer morning in 1961, an 11-year-old Tom Petty sat on pine straw in his front yard, wondering how he was going to spend his day. By the end of the afternoon, he knew how he would spend his life.

To be sure, the events of that afternoon added another notch to rock 'n' roll history and a tantalizing addition to Florida lore.

For, by the end of the day, the young, callow-headed Petty would encounter none other than Elvis Presley, the swivel-hipped sensation who already had been crowned "The King of Rock 'n' Roll." And

by that evening, the Gainesville youngster would be forever fascinated — and hooked — on rock 'n' roll.

"I caught the fever that day, and I never got rid of it," Petty later said in

Paul Zollo's 2005 book, "Conversations With Tom Petty."

"That's what kicked off my love of music. And I'd never thought much about rock 'n' roll until that moment."

Sadie Darnell, Tom's cousin who accompanied him to see Elvis that day, told *The Gainesville Sun* that the meeting between the King and Gainesville's future rock 'n' roll son was a "life-altering moment" for young Tom.

"He was completely, completely enthralled," said Darnell, who today is sheriff of Alachua County. "And Tommy told us as a family that he was going to be a rock star."

On that day, as young Tom sat under a pine tree in his Gainesville home's front yard, Presley was filming, appropriately enough, a movie called "Follow That Dream" on location in Central

■ **Petty's continues:** Petty learned Elvis' early songs. 3F



TRACY WILCOX/THE GAINESVILLE SUN



ROBERT WILLIAMS/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Elvis Presley performs for 14,000 fans at Russwood Park in Memphis in 1956. At left, Tom Petty performs at the Stephen C. O'Connell Center in Gainesville in 2006.



"Before Elvis there was nothing."
— John Lennon

Elvis' influence on music stars

Elvis influenced countless music stars and they had something to say about him. The list of published quotes includes:

"Elvis is the best ever, the most original. He started the ball rolling for us all. He deserves the recognition."
— Jim Morrison

"He had total love in his eyes when he performed. He was the total androgynous beauty."
— k.d. lang

"Elvis wasn't just a poor white caricature (of black music). He was a real pioneer and a great artist for what he contributed to build the rock culture."
— Bono of U2

"Elvis is the greatest cultural force in the 20th century. He introduced the beat to everything, music, language, clothes, it's a whole new social revolution."
— Leonard Bernstein

"I love him and hope to see him in heaven. There'll never be another like that soul brother."
— James Brown



"When I first heard Elvis' voice I just knew that I wasn't going to work for anybody and nobody was going to be my boss. Hearing him for the first time was like busting out of jail."
— Bob Dylan

Petty's fascination with music began with Elvis

CONTINUED FROM 1F

Florida.

Petty's uncle, Earl Jernigan, owned a local film-developing business and worked on location shoots whenever filmmakers came to the area. Uncle Earl's proof included one item that had already earned young Tom's fascination: the rubber suit worn by the creature in "Return of the Creature from the Black Lagoon," which was shot in Silver Springs.

So when Jernigan's wife, Tom's Aunt Evelyn, rolled into the driveway and asked her nephew if he'd like to "go and see Elvis Presley," he was more than game; he was licking his chops at what would in a few hours become the adventure of his young life.

"I remember this vividly," noted Petty, who at that point primarily knew Elvis as a character who had "caused some controversy," likely due to those swiveling hips when Tom had been about 5 or 6 years old. "He was known to me as a fellow who wiggled. And I did a little impression with a broom of wiggling like Elvis."

After driving 30 miles, Aunt Ellen and Tommy, along with his brother Bruce and cousins Sadie and Norma Darnell, pulled up near the film set in downtown Ocala — where Elvis was to shoot a scene of him driving up in a car and entering a bank.

"There was a huge crowd; the biggest crowd I've ever seen in the streets of Ocala," Tom said in "Conversations."

"And then, I swear to God, a line of white Cadillacs pulled in. All white. I'd never seen anything like that," he remembered. "And I was standing up on a box to see over everyone's head, because a big roar started up when the cars pulled in."

Guys in mohair suits and pompadours began bounding out of each car — to Tom's startled cry of "Is that ELVIS?" every time.

While Presley's impact would later be carved into two halves, often referred to affectionately as "Young Elvis" or "Skinny Elvis" for his '50s persona, and "Fat Elvis" for his later days in the '70s, the character who appeared before Tom Petty in 1961 was firmly entrenched in an "Elvis No Man's Land" between the two.

Presley had long ago stormed the charts with "Hound Dog" and "Love Me Tender." But this was the era that saw the rise of Elvis movies, celluloid affairs that ranged from the critically acclaimed ("Jailhouse Rock") to pure star vehicles ("Clambake," "Spin Out" and others), in which the Pelvis usually saved the day and got the girl (played variously by everyone from Ann-Margret and Nancy Sinatra to Mary Tyler Moore).

So when the real Elvis finally appeared, Tom knew. Immediately.

"It was like he came along and whispered some dream in everybody's ear, and somehow, we all dreamed it."
— Bruce Springsteen

"The first concert I attended was an Elvis concert when I was 11. Even at that age, he made me realize the tremendous effect a performer could have on an audience."
— Cher

"When we were kids growing up in Liverpool, all we ever wanted to be was Elvis Presley."
— Paul McCartney

"Elvis had an influence on everybody with his musical approach. He broke the ice for all of us."
— Al Green

— Compiled by Anthony Violanti, Star-Banner

"That is one hell of a job to have. That's a great gig — Elvis Presley," Tom said.

Young Tom began collecting anything he could find on Elvis. He ordered "The Elvis Presley Handbook" — which he had to send one dollar for, all the way to England. And he stayed inside the house — constantly — and did nothing but listen to Elvis music.

"My dad was concerned that I didn't go outside, that I just played these records all day," said Petty.

Three years later, like other musicians-to-be with Florida ties including Stephen Stills and Roger McGuinn, young Tom became even more enamored of rock 'n' roll when The Beatles arrived on American shores, appearing on "The Ed Sullivan Show" and performing in concerts.

But Petty's fascination with rock music began with Elvis Presley in Ocala. And though

he never saw Elvis again, the flames from that fire never waned.

"I learned all of those early Elvis songs," Tom told Zollo. "And having that kind of background in rock 'n' roll, of where it had come from, has served me to this day.

"It became an invaluable thing to have. So for that, I thank him."

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