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Elvis! - performs live at Civic Centre July 1

■ By JASON LOTHIAN

It seems we're always hearing of Elvis sightings in California.

Well get ready Vauxhall - the King of Rock n' Roll is coming to town for the first ever International Elvis Gospel Festival.

As usual, a member of the local religious community is involved and flustered.

"If you've got more than one Elvis - is that Elvi?," queries festival organizer Rev. Bruce Sheasby of Parkview United church.

The musical celebration is slated for July 1 in the Vauxhall Community Complex, - proceeds will go to Parkview United Church, the same church which sponsors the yearly Blue Christmas celebration, and the winning Elvis' favorite registered charity.

"We're allowing Elvi from around the world to be eligible," says Sheasby.

"This is no town restricted event. We're really trying to entice those closet Elvi to come out and those people who are Elvis fans and gospel fans."

That might prompt another philosophical question - what do you call a whole bunch of Elvi together in one place - a school of Elvi? A bouquet? A flock? Possibly a Pride.

With Elvis, comes scandal and controversy over his hip shaking rock n' roll style.

"Elvis got a hard time for some of his performing style back in the 50s," says Sheasby. "By today's standards he is pretty tame. When he was interviewed (on the subject) my recollection is that he would say, 'the hipbone is connected to the vocal cords.'"

"It's foot tapping music."

It's also an opportunity to discover the depth and extent of Elvis' musical influences. Elvi may have been the King of Rock n' Roll - but he recognized the supremacy of the divine.

Familiar gospel fare such as Amazing Grace, How Great Thou Art and Peace in the Valley were mixed by Elvi with more contemporary songs such as Crying in the Chapel and Stand By Me. In fact, Elvi's early musical training began with gospel music.

Sheasby is hoping to hear all that and more come the Canada Day long weekend in Vauxhall.

The reverend, a closet Elvi himself, says it generally takes a tube or two of Brylcreem to get in to character.

"After that it's just my old black leather jacket and a nervous lip."

When he was 16, the respectable cleric visited Babylon, or California, in search of fame on The Gong Show, performing as, you guessed it, Elvi.

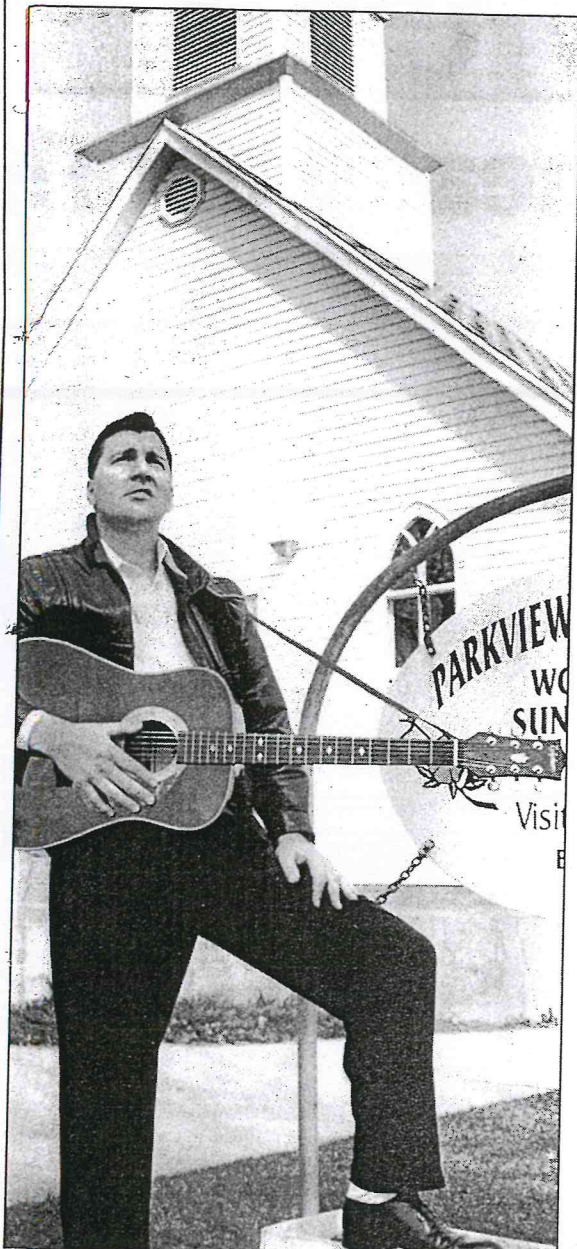
"I went on twice," he says, without a hint of remorse.

"The first time I got a 29 (points out of 30) the second time I got gonged."



Rev. Bruce Sheasby as Elvis accompanied by co-organizer Bob Dick as Col. Tom Parker. -Photo by Ryan Dahlman

They'll be crying in the chapel, Rev



DO DROP IN ... Rev. Bruce Sheasby hopes to lure other Elvis impersonators to Vauxhall, Alta.

"Collect call from the Reverend Elvis. Will you accept?" Like, you'd say no?

Meet Rev. Bruce Sheasby, formerly of Mississauga, now of the tiny town of Vauxhall, Alta. He's a 35-year-old ordained United Church minister and Elvis Presley impersonator who has found a way to marry his love of God with his passion for the King in a unique church fundraiser.

One of just two ordained ministers in the world who perform as Elvis (the other being Rev. Dorian Baxter, an Anglican clergyman from Newmarket, known as Elvis Priestly), Sheasby is inviting the world to Vauxhall on July 1 for the First International Elvis Gospel Festival. And, yes, Elvis Priestly will be there, too.

Sheasby hopes dozens of EP impersonators will join him to sing Elvis tunes and sacred songs done in Elvis' unique style.

Church far from rich

Now, Vauxhall is not a large place. Some 1,000 souls live in this community two-and-a-half hours south of Calgary, and Sheasby is responsible for about 100 of them each Sunday. Nor are there a lot of Elvis tribute acts in the area. But Sheasby hopes Elvises will respond from far and wide to his invitation to perform and help his struggling church.

Parkview United Church is far from rich. In fact, it sometimes has trouble paying the bills, let alone being able to fund much-needed outreach programs. And short of a miracle, it will always be that way.

But Sheasby has an ace up his sleeve, and a leather jacket that goes nicely with his clerical collar. For when the Rev. Sheasby

opens his mouth, he makes a joyful noise indeed. Out comes the sweet, soulful tenor of Elvis Presley.

How good is he? Well, when Sheasby was just 16, he appeared on the late, lamented *Gong Show*, where the Unknown Comic gave him a nine, Jaye P. Morgan gave him a perfect 10 and Jamie Farr offered to give him his dress.

Personally, after being serenaded down the telephone wire by the good reverend, who sang *I Can't Help Falling In Love With You*

with what may be described as a touch of (dare I say it?) worldliness in his voice, I can say without qualification this guy is very, very good. And you know that I know from Elvis.

Now, we all are aware that Elvis was a sinner. But he was also a God-fearing man, and devoted much of his time to singing gospel. In fact, Elvis won just three Grammys in his life, all of them for religious music.

And to those who raise their eyebrows at an Elvis-ecclesiastic connection, Sheasby offers these words: "As an ordained minister in the church, I have enormous appreciation for the passion and conviction out of which Elvis' own faith was conveyed through his singing. The King himself was a great fan of the King of Kings." Also, says Sheasby, loving God does not prevent folks from having a good time.

The International Elvis Gospel Festival will take place at the local Vauxhall community complex, which seats 500. Sheasby dreams of a full slate of Elvis impersonators having to do two or three shows to accommodate eve-

ryone, and the \$10 admissions piling up to help his community as a whole, and his small church and its congregation. By the way, the winning Elvises (Elvi?) will have a donation made to their favorite charity as their prize.

The preacher has sent invitations to 60 Elvis impersonators around the world, asking them to perform. Plus, he has invited members of dozens of international Elvis fan clubs. He has no money to pay the acts, and nothing to offer those who come except a night of great entertainment, and an opportunity to do some good.

An act of faith

Oh yes, they'll also get to visit Vauxhall's Canada Day celebration, with events including a beer tent, fireworks and a combine demolition derby, which should be enough to make anybody get on their bike and head on over.

It takes faith to hope a few thousand people will descend on a speck on the map of Alberta to help out a wee church, but as Sheasby says, "the faith is in somebody bigger than you and I." And he's not talkin' Elvis, folks.

The impersonators are being encouraged to perform gospel and inspirational songs done by the King, as well as his secular hits. Sheasby's set includes *How Great Thou Art*, *Crying in the Chapel* and *Teddy Bear*.

And, of course, *If I Can Dream*.

■ If you can't make it to Vauxhall, but you'd like to help, donations can be made to Parkview United Church, Box 16, Vauxhall, Alta. T0K 2K0.

■ Join me at Nathan Phillips Square Monday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. for the Dove Caramel Moment of Pampering Event. For your donation, have a massage, try tai-chi, get a quick manicure or a makeup application. All proceeds go to the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation.



Linda BARNARD

CALGARY'S NEWS 6:00 PM CFCN 3

THE CALGARY CALGARY

SUN

Happy Birthday, Canada

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— KEITH AHLSTROM, Calgary Sun

She's all shook up

Bruce Sheasby, left, and Dorion Baxter — both ordained ministers and Elvis impersonators — get a strange look from Jamie Summers, 8, at the Calgary International Airport yesterday. Baxter arrived in town from Ontario for the International

Elvis Gospel Festival in Vauxhall, 170 km south-east of Calgary. Today's fund-raising festival is the brainchild of Sheasby, the town's United Church minister. Baxter, an Anglican clergyman, bills himself as 'Elvis Priestly.'

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June 30, 1997

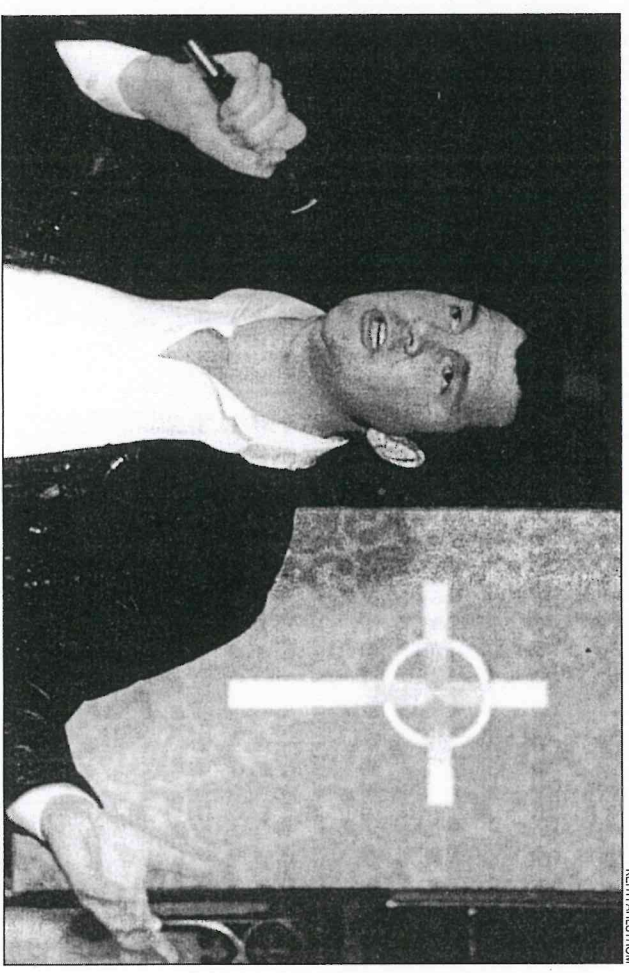
ALBERTA REPORT

The Weekly Newsmagazine

ALBERTANS

The King of Kings

Elvis is alive and well and living in Vauxhall, Alta.—well, sort of. As western Canada's only ordained minister—and one of only two in the world—who impersonates Elvis, Reverend **Bruce Sheasby** is all shook up over hosting the first-ever International Elvis Gospel Festival on Canada Day. Rev. Elvis, as he is known to his Parkview United Church congregation, has invited 60 Elvis impersonators and fans from around the world to praise the lord Elvis-style in Vauxhall's 500-seat community complex. "We'll be doing a lot of Elvis' gospel and inspirational songs like 'How Great Thou Art,' 'If I Can Dream' and 'Crying in the Chapel,'" he says. "But we'll also sprinkle in songs like 'Jailhouse Rock' and 'Blue Suede Shoes.'" Rev. Elvis, his wife Sharon and his 'own Colonel Tom Parker,' Bob Dick, came up with the idea as a fundraiser for his cash-strapped church. "The King himself was a great fan of the King of Kings," points out the 35-year-old minister, who has been impersonating his rock'n' roll idol since he was 15. He sounds exactly like Elvis and, with his high cheekbones, black leather



KEITH AHLSTROM

Rev. Elvis: No crying in the chapel, please.

jacket, greased-back hair and '50s-style attire, looks like him too. He's so good that in 1977 he travelled to Los Angeles to sing "Jailhouse Rock" on the *Gong Show*. The Reverend says the festival has but one rule: no crying in the chapel—especially not on his blue suede shoes.



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SERVING THE

LETHBRIDGE HERALD

Elvis Gospel Festival officials hope Vauxhall will be 'All Shook Up'

By LEONA FLIM
Lethbridge Herald

VAUXHALL — They're all shook up at Parkview United.

At least, they will be July 1. The small and chronically cash-strapped church will host the first International Elvis Gospel Festival in conjunction with Canada Day celebrations in Vauxhall.

Rev. Bruce Sheasby — an Elvis Presley impersonator as well as Parkview United minister — is excited and hopes others won't be able to help falling in love with the idea, either.

In fact, he's dreaming of sold-out audiences including guests from around the world. Other Canada Day celebrations in Vauxhall — plus regional tourist attractions including Dinosaur Park, Waterton and Banff — are all part of the package he's promoting.

"This is a real Cinderella story where we have launched this thing both out of an interest in Elvis and his gospel music and as a fundraiser for our local church," says Sheasby, 35.

"I guess the Cinderella story is 'the little church that could' and tying it into something which may be somewhat controversial to some people."

Parkview United is asking inter-faith contestants to perform their best renditions of Elvis gospel songs, other sacred songs in Elvis style or any of Elvis' secular hits.

Festival proceeds, based on spectator ticket sales, will be shared by the church for ongoing operations including outreach, and charities by winner choice.

Sheasby came up with the idea with his wife Sharon and Bob Dick, whom he describes as "my Col. Tom Parker."

Show times have yet to be determined but they'll be sometime after a community dinner to be held July 1 at the Vauxhall Community Complex. Depending on interest, there may be two or three shows in the 500-seat facility.

Although the festival will include Elvis hits such as Jailhouse Rock, Don't Be Cruel and Teddy Bear, Elvis gospel tunes will be the highlight, says Sheasby.

Featured guest will be Dorian Baxter, an Anglican priest from Ontario and the only other ordained minister in the

world, as far as Sheasby knows, who performs Elvis. Baxter, who bills himself as Elvis Priestly, is also planning a world tour.

"We're very grateful that Dorian has decided to support this venue — it's given us a huge boost," Sheasby says.

Sheasby has sent about 60 invitations to Elvis performers worldwide and dozens of invitations to international Elvis fan clubs.

A news conference is set for this Friday in Calgary to generate further interest.

"It's a real leap of faith in that we're doing this without being able to offer a lot of personal incentive to people other than to be supporting a good cause for both our church and other charities," Sheasby said.

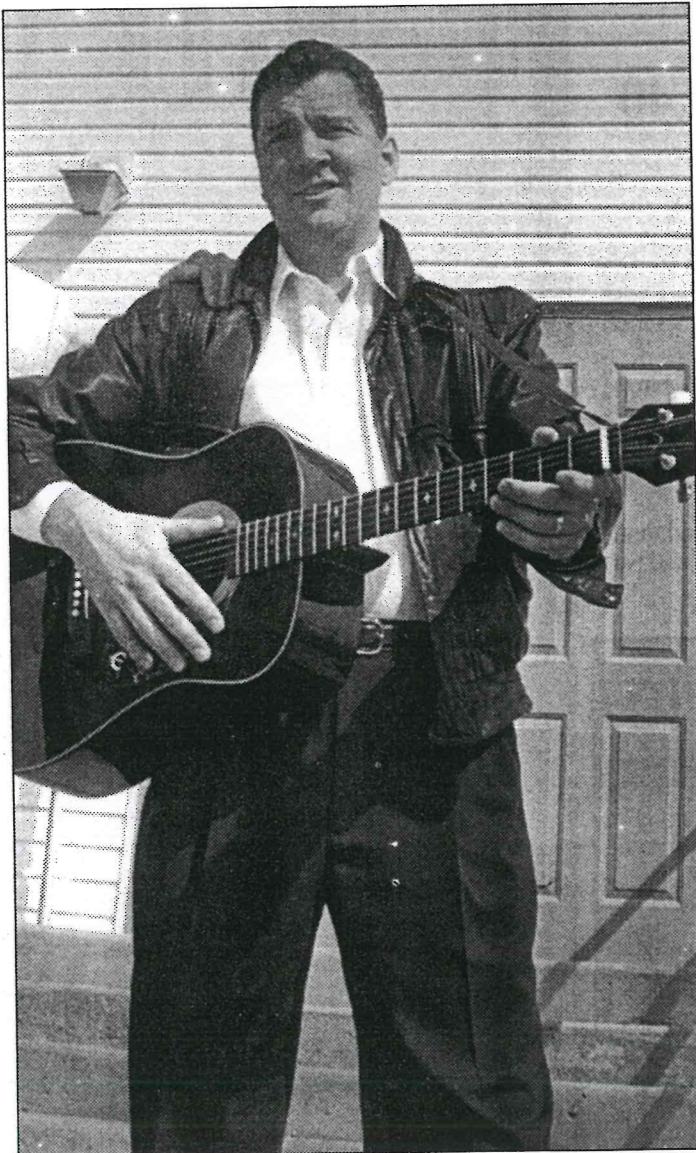
But even in that way, he said the event continues in the "spirit of Elvis" in that the performer was known for his generosity in supporting causes as much as for his power and presence on stage.

As for Sheasby, he's been impersonating Elvis — who won just three Grammys in his life, all for religious music — since age 15. After the singer died in 1977, Sheasby went to Los Angeles to sing Jailhouse Rock on The Gong Show. He later studied theology.

"As an ordained minister in the church, I have enormous appreciation for the passion and conviction out of which Elvis' own faith was conveyed through his singing," say Sheasby, in a prepared statement he likes to repeat. "The king himself was a great fan of the King of Kings."

Tickets for the International Elvis Gospel Festival — presented in association with the Canadian National Elvis Convention on the 40th anniversary of Elvis

PHOTO BY RYAN DAHLMAN, VAUXHALL ADVANCE



IF I CAN DREAM: Rev. Bruce Sheasby as Elvis hopes to lure other Elvis Presley impersonators to Vauxhall July 1 in a festival of world-scale proportions.

having performed in Canada — are \$10 per adult, \$5 per youth under 16.

Depending on advance sales, tickets may be available at the door.

For more information on the festival or to compete or buy tickets, call 654-2410 or 654-4286.

In addition to the festival and community dinner, other Canada Day events in Vauxhall will include a heavy horse pull, combine demonstration and fireworks.

The King rocks Vauxhall

■ By JASON LOTHIAN

Vauxhall's King triumphed Tuesday night.

Rev. Bruce Sheasby, of Parkview United Church, took home the gold as the best Elvis

to rock the Vauxhall Community Centre.

"There's no doubt about it - it was a dream," he says. "There was just no way of predicting how it was going to come together. I'm delighted and over-

whelmed."

Almost a thousand people crowded into the centre for the three shows available. The event attracted national media attention and tourists from as far away as Ontario.

"The gears are stripped in the transmission," comments one of the organizers, Bob Dick. "I'm wiped."

When questioned as to the likelihood of seeing another festival next year he can only chuckle wearily.

"Anybody who can start planning the day after for the next one didn't put enough energy into the first one."

A final count is not yet available, but \$2,000 was raised by the event for charity and Dick and Sheasby estimate more than \$5,000 for the United Church.

Four Elvises formally took part in the competition.

"We truly feel blessed," says Sheasby. "There truly was a higher power that helped to pull this together."

"I think it's a testimony to what a group of people can do when they pull together."

1996 Canadian Showstopper champion at the National Elvis Fan Club and Convention, Dorien Baxter, an Anglican minister, says he didn't mind losing to Sheasby.

"I think he's got a lot of talent. He's very gifted," says Baxter, also known as Elvis Priestly.

Baxter has invited Sheasby to join him in this year's competition. Around 120,000 Elvis fans are expected to attend.

"We've become very close friends. It's been exciting," says Baxter, who leaves for a European tour Aug. 14-28.

"The crowd was fantastic. I couldn't believe the support. There were almost a thousand people in there.

"That's the population of Vauxhall."




-Photo by Glen Maurer

Bruce Sheasby got the crowd rocking on Tuesday night.

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