

STYLE

The King And I

On the 40th anniversary of Elvis Presley's death, the legend's personal jeweler recalls a loyal friendship (and lots of bling)

BY BROOKE MAZUREK
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ERIC RYAN ANDERSON

THE MEMPHIAN Theater was mostly empty when **Lowell Hays** walked in and took a seat behind **Elvis Presley** on Christmas Eve 1969. The rock'n'roll icon had gathered some friends for a private movie screening at the gilded Art Deco venue on Memphis' Cooper Street — but Hays, the city's most respected jeweler, wasn't yet one of those trusted companions. He was there on business.

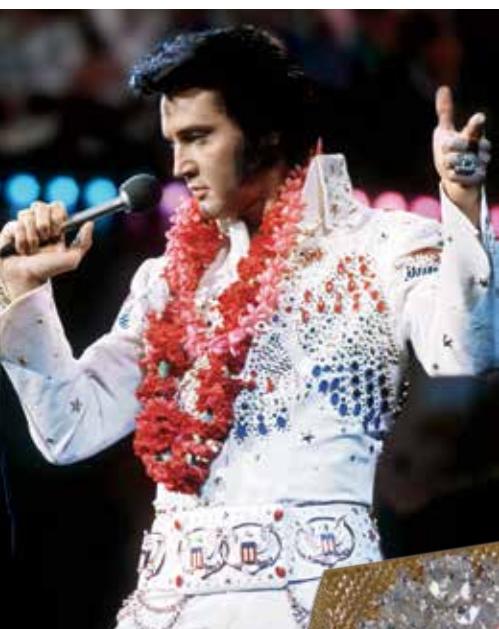
"Come on with me," said Presley, ushering Hays into the men's room, where Presley took a seat on a toilet. "You can put your briefcase right here on my lap." He gestured to the brown leather bag Hays had stocked with jewelry.

"So that's exactly what I did," the jeweler, now 78, recalls nearly five decades later at a rib joint near Presley's Graceland home. In what was the first of almost 200 purchases from the brown leather case that sits next to Hays today, Presley picked out three large diamond pieces that night.

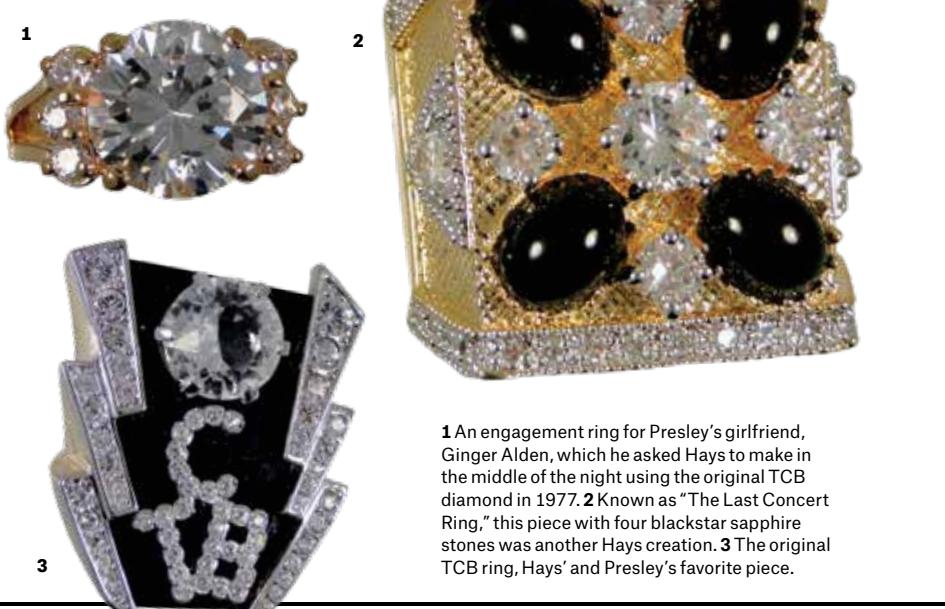
"I could tell you stories like these for hours," says Hays, whose father began repairing jewelry from the family's home attic in Memphis in 1937. "Our nickname for Elvis was 'Crazy'... You never knew what he was going to do next." It's a moniker Hays would ultimately engrave onto a gold ID bracelet for the star.

But on the occasions when Hays, who grew the family business to include a women's fine jewelry store, couldn't get away to join Presley on the road, he would send the briefcase filled with precious stone pieces to wherever the star was. "Elvis knew the combination to the lock, so whenever he wanted something, he would [take it] and tear the tag off and leave it for me."

For every piece Presley kept for



Above Presley onstage at Hawaii's Honolulu International Center in 1973. Inset The "Aloha Horseshoe," which Presley wore for the Honolulu performance. It was auctioned off by a private seller for \$204,800 in March. Right Hays photographed June 13 at Marlowe's in Memphis with the brown leather briefcase he used to carry all of the star's jewelry. On the table are replicas of Presley pieces that are available for purchase at Graceland.



1 An engagement ring for Presley's girlfriend, Ginger Alden, which he asked Hays to make in the middle of the night using the original TCB diamond in 1972. Known as "The Last Concert Ring," this piece with four black star sapphires stones was another Hays creation. 2 The original TCB ring, Hays' and Presley's favorite piece.



Above A ruby, sapphire and diamond American flag pin that Presley wore to the White House to meet President Richard Nixon in 1970. Below Presley wearing a lion's-head pendant necklace that Hays fashioned from a brooch at Presley's request while they were on the road together. Bottom A replica of the emerald, ruby and diamond lion's-head pendant necklace.



an 11.5 carat solitaire. Intended to be a show ring — "something that would immediately make people think 'Elvis Presley'" — it incorporated Presley's "Taking Care of Business" catchphrase that also doubled as his backing band's name. To this day, the ring remains identifiably Presley, who was so thrilled with the design, he paid the \$35,000 asking price, then handed Hays the keys to his Lincoln Mark III Cartier edition as an additional token of gratitude.

But beyond the jewelry itself, time also has revealed the extent of how pioneering Hays and Presley's collaborative partnership was. Though it's now the norm for high-fashion jewelers like **Ben Baller** and **Lorraine Schwartz** to customize jewel-drenched statement pieces specifically for a musician's ensemble, Hays and Presley helped launch that aesthetic for male artists.

At the suggestion of his and Presley's lasting influence, Hays goes silent. Maybe it's out of modesty, or maybe it's a quiet admission that his work with the icon comprised only a portion of a 50-year-plus career that also attracted clientele like **Al Green** and **Isaac Hayes**. "Elvis and I were like *that*," says Hays, crossing his fingers. "We were like brothers."

It would seem that way. While Presley's entourage (also known as the Memphis Mafia, who all wore golden lightning-bolt "TCB" necklaces) were actually salaried employees, Hays was not a paid attendant. "I could come and go as I pleased," he says. When Presley, who struggled with an addiction to prescription drugs, died on Aug. 16, 1977, the jeweler had a career and life separate from his departed friend.

Which isn't to say he never stepped in to protect The King.

A few years before Presley died, during a show at the since-renamed International Hotel in Las Vegas, Hays remembers sitting in one of the circular booths when he noticed a man trying to sneak onstage. "Elvis is pointing at the man but the bodyguards weren't paying any attention, so I bailed out of my seat and took care of it." After the show, Presley ripped into the guards. "Then he looked at me and said, 'Lowell, you have any TCBs?'" Hays fetched his briefcase and handed a necklace over. "It's about time you had one of these," Presley said to him. It still rests on Hays' neck today. ●



Puth and a love interest in the music video for the top 10 hit.

ANATOMY OF A HIT

COMMANDING 'ATTENTION'

Since kick-starting his career as the singer on **Wiz Khalifa's** "See You Again," **Charlie Puth** has scored top 40 hits alongside **Selena Gomez** and **Megan Trainor**. But with "Attention," from his upcoming sophomore LP, *VoiceNotes*, Puth honed his self-produced R&B-pop sound — and collects his biggest solo single to date. How did a song jotted down in a Tokyo hotel room reach No. 9 on the Billboard Hot 100? The talents behind the track explain.

1. THE ARTIST:
CHARLIE PUTH

"I hummed the melody in Asia while traveling — it was this sad ballad, so I decided to keep the topline and put this groovy beat under it. 'You just want attention' — people say this sentence all the time, so when they hear this music, I want the sensation of 'I feel like I've heard this before.' If they can be emotionally attached to something and dance to it, that's a hit record."

2. THE CO-WRITER:
JACOB KASHER

"Charlie and I were in a session, and nothing good was coming out. The other two writers stepped out, and Charlie played me 'Attention.' I was like, 'Bro, do not play this for anyone else.' I feel like anyone who has been in a relationship or has a friend who does the most can own those lyrics. It means just as much to me, as someone who's singing it in their car, as [it does to] the person that wrote it."

3. THE EXECUTIVE:
ARTIST PARTNER GROUP VP & R MILES BEARD

"'Attention' is his first solo song with nobody else on it. It feels like it's pulling the pieces together. People knew who Charlie was, they knew the songs, but they didn't exactly know who he was in those songs. I think that when you have a great song, you can steer the ship whatever way you want, especially if you're writing and producing it. The real struggle is just making sure you're picking the best one." —TATIANA CIRISANO