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God Save the Queen

“No Elvis, Beatles or the Rolling Stones in 1977 ...”

– Joe Strummer

Until the death of Elvis Presley, the summer of 1977 had belonged to George Lucas, and *Star Wars*. Released on May 25th, the film had instantly become a worldwide pop-culture phenomenon. Produced with a budget of just \$11 million, it earned \$460 million in the United States and \$314 million overseas, easily outstripping the previous year’s blockbuster, Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws*, as the highest-grossing film of all time.

Lucas, a precociously talented director (and businessman) had made his mark with his own take on teenage subculture *American Graffiti* in 1973 before writing, directing and completing *Star Wars* over the next four. The *Washington Post* called it “A Spectacular Intergalactic Joyride,” suggesting that Lucas had supplied 20th Century Fox with a new lease of life. “George Lucas’ delightful science-fiction adventure fantasy is a new classic in a rousing movie tradition: a space swashbuckler” while Roger Ebert’s review hailed it as “an out-of-body experience,” comparing its special effects to Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Star Wars started breaking records the moment it was released – even though it was originally only shown on 32 screens. It made \$2.8 million in its opening week, but didn’t receive a wider nationwide release for another two months, and then only after huge public demand. So idiosyncratic was

Star Wars thought to be that 20th Century Fox didn't know how to market it; in the end it didn't matter, as the public marketed it for them. For months there were lines around the block wherever the movie was shown; people just couldn't get enough of it.

Groundbreaking. Pioneering. Paradigm-shifting. *Star Wars* was 24-carat popcorn, a blockbuster of such power and influence that it changed the nature of cinema completely, ushering in a new era of cinematic behemoths. It was so successful, so quickly, that critics didn't really understand what had happened. *Star Wars* drew a line under auteur-driven cinema, and waved goodbye to the likes of *Easy Rider* and *Taxi Driver*, as Luke Skywalker and Hans Solo jetted off into a galaxy far, far away.

People loved *Star Wars* in a way no film had been loved since *Gone With The Wind*.

In San Francisco, the manager of the Coronet on Geary Boulevard reported that "I've never seen anything like it. We're getting all kinds. Old people, young people, children, Hare Krishna groups. They bring cards to play in line. We have checker players, we have chess players. People with paints and sequins on their faces. Fruit eaters like I've never seen before. People loaded on grass and LSD. At least one's been here every day."

Novelist Jonathan Lethem saw the film 21 times that summer, and only stopped at 21 because the number seemed "safely ridiculous and extreme ..."

Whether George Lucas was rekindling mythology in the Homeric tradition, or whether his inspiration lay in the pages of lower-brow Asimovian pulp sci-fi, the pseudo-mythical underpinning of *Star Wars* paved the way for *The Matrix* and *Lord Of The Rings* trilogies, where heroes struggle against the forces of evil. Lucas was no doubt influenced by

Tolkien's labyrinthine mythography in the first place, but pre-1977, moviemakers did not truly think in epic terms. He pioneered a new kind of epic, one that relied on rather old-fashioned ideas of what going to the movies should be like. It was designed as a family-friendly flick, with morally just heroes in whom everyone could believe. Tellingly, when the unfinished film was shown to Fox executives, World War II dogfights were shown where battles between TIE fighters and the Millennium Falcon would be.

Ridley Scott had just released his first film, a stately adaptation of a Joseph Conrad novel, *The Duellists*, which won the Special Jury Prize at Cannes. However the premiere was completely overshadowed by the release of Lucas's film, which Scott queued to see at the Egyptian Theater on Hollywood Boulevard. "The actual air was agog, the air was excited. I'd never seen so many crowds outside a theatre. To me this was what cinema at its best should be. A mass medium, a mainstream audience, and everybody standing outside, having queued for days. We got some pretty good seats, about thirty feet from the front, so I got the best sound and this picture was in my face, and frankly I couldn't believe it. I'd done my little film, which I was happy about, but this film was massive. It actually changed my mind about what I would do next. I'd been developing one thing, and then decided, really, how can I go down that route? I must go in another direction and so instead I made *Alien*."

Star Wars not only changed what kind of films people watched, but how they watched them. The film made such a fortune for cinema owners that it enabled them to build multiplexes. 20th Century Fox, which had been on the brink of bankruptcy, became a major studio, its stock prices tripling in 1977.

And as you drove to the movie theatre, you were probably listening to Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*.

Released in February, *Rumours* topped the *Billboard* charts for over thirty weeks, and all three major US trade publications – *Billboard*, *Cash Box*, and *Record World* – eventually named it as their album of the year. By March, it had already sold more than ten million copies worldwide, including over eight million in the US alone. If you drove down any main street, in any town, in any city, the songs you would hear pouring out of the stores and the malls were all from *Rumours*: “Go Your Own Way,” “Don’t Stop,” “Dreams,” and “You Make Loving Fun.” It was almost as if the harmony-driven sound of Fleetwood Mac had taken over the whole country.

During the late Seventies, Fleetwood Mac’s only rivals in bottling the musical essence of Los Angeles and southern California were the Eagles, who had spent the best part of the decade working up to it; with Fleetwood Mac it sort of happened by accident. Before Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham joined, Fleetwood Mac was a middle-ranking British blues band that had recorded a handful of already classic songs – “Black Magic Woman,” “Albatross,” “Man Of The World,” “Oh Well” – all written by the now-departed guitarist Peter Green.

Fleetwood Mac 2.0 were a different proposition altogether, able to fuse the singer-songwriter pretensions of the early Seventies with a slick pop sensibility (and a great drum sound) that sounded just fine on FM radio. Especially in your first car, with the top down, and four or five friends in the back, passing beers and smokes between them. Visually, the group played it safe too, their image synonymous with the leather and lace of singer Stevie Nicks – a look that originally consisted of a chiffon dress, a leotard, a small jacket, a pair of suede platforms and a top hat. All black.

Rumours cost over a million dollars to produce, was

recorded in seven different studios, and took over a year to finish. Yet it turned out to be a bona fide classic, not so much a concept album as a soap opera, chronicling the convoluted romances of the band's five members. The artists' real lives became virtually indistinguishable from the songs they were singing, and in some respects the album was the apotheosis of confessional pop writing. The making of *Rumours* was tortuous as Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks' relationship broke down during its recording, as did the relationship between John and Christine McVie. Then there were the drugs, which fuelled the band's work ethic. "It was the craziest period of our lives," according to Mick Fleetwood. "We went for four or five weeks without sleep, doing a lot of drugs. I'm talking about cocaine in such quantities that, at one point, I thought I was really going insane."

As one critic put it, *Rumours* articulated the conflicting morass of love, possessiveness, freedom and reflection that the end of a relationship brings. It had some great harmonies too, harmonies that suggested the Californian coast, even if you were actually just driving along the M40 after an evening spent at the Hope and Anchor.

In Britain, bands like Fleetwood Mac were meant to be on the way out in 1977, banished to the margins by the likes of the Sex Pistols and the Clash, but though the zeitgeist might definitely be elsewhere, *Rumours* was as perfect a pop record as anyone could hope to hear.

Bossa nova also had an unexpected renaissance in 1977, in the form of Joao Gilberto's extraordinary *Amoroso* album. The Brazilian "new trend" had been at its most fashionable in the early Sixties, yet Gilberto's LP used lush orchestration to move the genre a little further towards the mass market. And in 1977 it was nothing less than a revelation. In particular his version of the Antonio Carlos Jobim classic "Wave" could be

heard on beaches from Miami to Rio, from Puerto Banus to St. Tropez.

Woody Allen also owned 1977, propelled by *Annie Hall* into the mainstream as a writer, actor and, most importantly, a director. The movie turned his nerd alter-ego into a sex symbol, a man who was finally saying goodbye to the Sixties. Diane Keaton's *Annie Hall* may have kick-started a fashion for big hats, baggy trousers and waistcoats, but Allen's lovable loser became the archetype with whom most people identified. The film won four Academy Awards, was adored by critics, and managed to convince its audience that New York was the most sophisticated city in the world. It was pretty funny, too.

Elsewhere, in Michigan to be precise, Led Zeppelin set a new world record attendance for an indoor solo show at the Pontiac Silverdome when 76,229 people attended a concert there on April 30th. On March 10th, five days before Luciano Pavarotti made his first appearance on American television, the rings of Uranus were discovered. This was the year when music went truly universal: when NASA launched their Voyager unmanned probes, each spacecraft carried a golden record containing sounds and images representing life and culture on Earth, including the first movements of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode." *American Bandstand* celebrated its 25th anniversary with a special hosted by Dick Clark, including an all-star curate's-egg of a band, made up of the Pointer Sisters, Booker T and the MGs and Gregg Allman among others, performing another Chuck Berry song, "Roll Over Beethoven." Elvis wasn't anywhere to be seen, but then he never was, unless he was performing alone.

1977 was also the year in which Spain held its first democratic elections for over forty years, General Franco

having died in 1975; the US Supreme Court ruled that states were not legally required to spend Medicaid funds on elective abortions; and South African anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko died in police custody, aged just thirty.

The United States was still recovering from Watergate, keen to see their new president, Jimmy Carter, wash away the paranoia and indignity of Richard Nixon's reign. Carter offered a new dawn, a new hope. And then just as the country appeared to be forgetting its troubles, and indulging in some good old-fashioned American science fiction, one of its most revered, most treasured folk heroes went and died.

Elvis had left the building.

There were two enormous television events in 1977. In January, the twelve-hour, eight-episode TV adaptation of Alex Haley's novel *Roots* was screened on consecutive nights. Among the most emotive series ever made, it traced the capture and enslavement of Kunta Kinte, a Mandinka born in Gambia in 1750, and the emancipation of his descendants after the Civil War. It was an enormous hit, breaking US audience-rating records and winning nine Emmys and a Golden Globe.

Later, in an extraordinary journalistic coup, David Frost broadcast four ninety-minute interviews with disgraced former President Richard Nixon in May.

In March, KLM flight 4805 crashed into taxiing Pan Am flight 1736 as the KLM jumbo jet attempted to take off from Los Rodeos Airport in Tenerife, killing 583 people. The airport was crowded with diverted planes following the detonation of a terrorist bomb at Las Palmas' main airport for the Canary Islands. Fog had made the runways unmanageable, and not only could the aircraft pilots not see each other, neither could the air traffic controllers. At the time it was the world's worst air disaster, and remains so to this day.

Elvis Has Left the Building

In the fashion world, the TV show *Charlie's Angels* was all enveloping. The principal star was Farrah Fawcett, whose long feather-cut and big flicked hair, as well as her well developed body, made her a pin-up for both men and women. Other big hairstyles of the day included the pageboy and Vidal Sassoon's wedge.

On June 5th, Apple launched its first personal computer, the Apple II.

Britain, meanwhile, had by 1977 appeared to lose not only its pride but even its ability to manage itself, after over half a decade of unwieldy inflation, strikes, flip-flopping governments and even a three-day week. After all but running out of money in 1976, and having to negotiate a loan from the International Monetary Fund, the country was perceived to be the sick man of Europe, a term once reserved for the Ottoman Empire. What it needed was a massive celebration, a year-long street party – and it got one, in the form of the Silver Jubilee.

A couple of months before Elvis's death, the week of festivities celebrating the Silver Jubilee of the Queen's accession to the throne began when she lit a bonfire in Windsor Great Park. That was the first of a hundred beacons that lit up the sky all over the country. There were street parties everywhere, even in places that didn't strictly have streets. On June 7th, more than one million people lined the streets of London to watch the Royal Family make their way to St. Paul's at the start of the official celebrations. The Queen, dressed in pink and accompanied by Prince Philip, led the procession in the golden state coach. At St. Paul's, 2,700 selected guests joined in the ceremony. It started with Vaughan Williams' arrangement of the hymn "All People That On Earth Do Dwell," which had been played at the Queen's coronation in 1953.

For a while, people in the UK discovered a new sense of belonging, and while the economy was still in disarray, and the unions still playing up, the anniversary was a much-needed fillip.

However, in the UK, above all else, 1977 was the year of punk, the anti-Jubilee cult. Punk was an oratorio of aggression, with everything calibrated to annoy. Although opinions differ as to the precise provenance of punk, the *Economist* got things pretty much right in its obituary of Johnny Ramone: “The counterblast began on August 16th 1974, in front of a tiny crowd in a seedy New York bar called CBGB. Four young men – Johnny, Joey, Dee Dee and Tommy Ramone – walked on stage. The concert they gave was shambolic; they spent as much time shouting at each other as playing. But they improved rapidly, and it soon became clear they had hit on something.”

Punk, basically.

Predecessors had included the Velvet Underground (1966), the Stooges (1968), the MC5 (1969), Jonathan Richman, and Richard Hell (whose “Blank Generation” was written in 1974), while Patti Smith soon followed with *Horses* (1975), but it was the Ramones who first made punk flesh, who ushered in a sense of the Zeitgeist. The Ramones’ first album was released in 1976, and a fusillade of British records swiftly arrived in its wake, namely the Damned’s “New Rose” in November 1976, the Sex Pistols’ “Anarchy In The UK” the same month, and the Buzzcocks’ “Spiral Scratch” in January 1977.

While it was rooted in garage rock – these new bands were happy to use the familiar tools of rock – punk’s determination to eschew the musical and lifestyle excesses of the previous generation resulted in a “Year Zero” mentality. Punk bands made accelerated, hard-edged music, with aggressive lyrics and stripped-down three-chord instrumentation. There was a

DIY ethic, with most bands turning their backs on the multi-layered, overdubbed pop symphonies favoured by the likes of Fleetwood Mac. Punk served as an apocalyptic catalyst to so many Seventies teenagers; it shook them around, threw them up in the air, and – when they bounced back down again – forced them to confront their preconceptions about life, the universe and everything in it. Well, at least the records they bought and the clothes they wore.

Though the music may have originated in the US, it was the UK where the youth cult started. By early 1977 the centre of each and every British city, town and village was full of young people dressed as the Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten (real name John Lydon) or Johnny Ramone – complete with a floppy pudding-bowl haircut, drainpipe jeans, plimsoles, a matelot top and a (plastic) leather jacket. Overnight thousands of young men turned from being neurotic boy outsiders in oversized overcoats and hooded brows (clutching their Genesis, Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell albums under their arms), into the personification of Soho jobs or Bowery punks. The Johnny Ramone option was certainly less confrontational, and actually quite appealing: how could you not fall in love with a group who displayed such a blatant disregard for sophistication as the Ramones? Whose bare-boned playing was matched only by their idiotic singing – the lyrics to their song “I Don't Wanna Walk Around With You” were four lines long, three of which were the same. When Joe Strummer, the frontman of the Clash, as *The Economist's* obituary of Johnny Ramone relates: “approached the Ramones after seeing them play in London in 1976, he was worried that his band's musicianship was still too rough for them to start recording. ‘Are you kidding?’ said Johnny. ‘We're lousy, we can't play. If you wait until you can play, you'll be too old to get up there. We stink, really. But it's great.”

In the UK, London was the epicentre of punk, as the city became a metaphor for the whole movement: urban decay, anarchic fashion (safety pins and monochromatic severity), backstreet violence, fast drugs, silly hair. The town became vaguely mythical, a magnet for future punk royalty: the Jam's Paul Weller was so obsessed he would travel up from Woking to the West End just to record the traffic (one of the band's earliest songs was called "Sounds From The Street," and their first two albums are so poorly produced they don't sound much better than Oxford Circus at rush hour). The Jam's urban fixation showed in "Down In The Tube Station At Midnight," "In The City" and "A Bomb In Wardour Street," each of them a little snapshot of tough city life. Pop has always needed the city's shroud to make it cool – how could you be a market-town punk or an East Anglian mod? – and the urban backdrop of London in 1977 was the most perfect shroud of them all. One of punk's defining rationales was reinvention; nobody who'd made it in London wanted to admit they had actually been brought up in Henley or Swindon. And Woking? Puh-lease ...

The Clash also made a point of writing about London. In fact they seldom wrote about anything else, although they tended to concentrate on Notting Hill and points west. Pop archaeologist Jon Savage once called their debut album, *The Clash*, "virtually a concept album about North Kensington and Ladbroke Grove," which contained "White Riot," "London's Burning" and "48 Hours." While they went on to cast their concerned eyes over the Middle East, South America and any imploding quasi-Stalinist state they could find, for a while London was their world, inspiring their two finest songs: "White Man (In Hammersmith Palais)" and, of course, "London Calling" (of which Joe Strummer said, "I want it to sound like it's coming through fog over the Thames").

As I have said before in my *Biographical Dictionary of Popular Music* the early days of punk were analogous to present-day activity on the web – scattershot releases, limited edition rather than viral, but still with an urgent guerrilla sensibility. Records were released without great fanfare, and often you only knew where to buy them... if you knew where to buy them. You needed to read the right papers, know the right people, and shop at the right stores.

Singles were the only recognized currency. Oddly, albums, LPs, were for a while considered to be distinctly “old wave,” an indulgence too far. It was decreed by the cognoscenti that everything had to be short, Spartan, and almost devoid of adjectival subjectivity. Pop culture appeared to be moving so quickly that each new release came complete with its own promise of Zeitgeist-defining authority.

The British punk scene was the result of many things – the influence of the early American groups, a generational rebellion against aging pop-cultural forces, and the natural cycle of fashion. There were also various calls-to-arms in the media, one of which appeared in the *NME*. At the end of January 1976, the music paper felt compelled to run a cover that asked the question, “Is rock’n’roll an old man’s game?” The accompanying feature, by Max Bell, included the likes of Paul McCartney, Rod Stewart and Keith Richards and lots of other “aged” members of the rock aristocracy whose lifestyles involved limousines, private jets and unimaginably expensive recording studios (where, the paper said gleefully, they would make lavish-sounding *double* albums).

“It’s about time 1976 launched a few more of its own teenage heroes,” wrote Bell, “instead of leaning on the main men of an earlier generation.”

Punk was a world away from Elvis. Hell, Elvis didn’t even get the Beatles, so how on earth was he going to understand

the Sex Pistols, the Clash or Elvis Costello? Punk was all about connecting, all about the guy on top of the speaker stack or in the middle of the crowd who runs up on stage. Elvis may have said that going back to live performances in Las Vegas was all about connecting with his fans, but after a while he was simply going through the motions. Everything he had done since becoming famous involved some form of repetition. As soon as he left Sun, each of his RCA records started to sound similar to the next; his movies became interchangeable after a while; and his Vegas concerts were all versions of the same performance. Elvis wasn't inquisitive in the usual way for a performer, or at least one with his monumental powers. He was the co-custodian of his own downfall, much of which was caused by his inability to stretch out, whether by working with better record producers, better writers, better movie directors or better orchestral arrangers. Of course, everything might have been different had he worked with a more considerate manager than the notorious "Colonel" Tom Parker – the other custodian of Elvis's career – but then if that had happened we would all be living in a parallel universe.

So much has been written about punk that it has become almost impossible to imagine what it was really like at the beginning. It has been decoded and mediated in such a way that it doesn't really mean anything any more. "Punk" as an idea was gelded long ago; it has been emasculated in the same way that Motown once was – devalued through heavy rotation on commercial radio, kick-started by its repositioning in the Eighties as acceptable music for television advertisements.

Yet punk remains the most vibrant, most divisive cult of them all. Back in 1975 it was possible to tell that things might be going to change, that something might be about to happen, even though no one knew exactly what it was going to be

when it eventually arrived. The first group who indicated the approaching storm to me was Dr. Feelgood, who I saw that summer at the Nag's Head in High Wycombe. Although it took a while for this to alter how I consumed music, when it came, it came like a tsunami: the Clash, the Jam, Adam and the Ants, the Damned, Slaughter and the Dogs, the Slits, the Buzzcocks, Wire, Elvis Costello, Deathwish and so on – dozens and dozens of bands seen in sweaty basements in a two-year period that pretty much changed how my generation viewed the world.

Everything was about connection, about intimacy. We were encouraged to hate Pink Floyd and the Rolling Stones because they played huge pop warehouses like Wembley Arena and Earls Court. The new doctrine required us to see bands in clubs above pubs that were the size of wardrobes. Back then, small was good, and big was most definitely bad. Who wanted to see a band in an aircraft hangar? Who wanted to see a band from the last row in the stalls, when they looked so small they could have been anyone? No. Back in the day, small was cool.

One of my favourite memories from that period is of a concert at Friars in Aylesbury in the spring of 1977. We had come to see the headliners, the Ramones, and had never heard the support act, Talking Heads. We'd read about them in the *New Musical Express* – everyone read the *NME* at the time – but didn't know what they would be like. At all. Obviously they were extraordinary, dressed as preppies, playing like lab technicians, and introducing every song thus: "The name of this song is ..."

The Ramones, who came on after them, attempted even less communication with the audience, simply diving into each song as though it were a *fait accompli*, with a simple "One-two-three-four!" Watching the Ramones on stage

was to witness a barrage of sound, and songs played so fast and with such little fanfare that you couldn't put a cigarette paper between the end of one tune and the start of the next. It remains the most extraordinary concert I've ever seen, and one that was summed up when Graham Lewis of the punk band Wire described seeing the Ramones perform at Dingwalls, then one of the coolest venues in London: "I couldn't believe it. It was glorious. They came on stage and it was semi-lit, and they just stood there for what seemed like an age. Joey Ramone said, 'Woman, shut your mouth.' And it all started, and it didn't fucking stop, this delirium of noise, you walked in and out of it, a physical environment of noise."

That was what punk was like for me, as it was for many: a physical environment of noise.

To Elvis, it would have been just noise, and noise only. Of course, he appeared to understand the finer elements of certain types of American music, and he certainly liked, and knew a lot about, rhythm and blues, country and gospel. Insurrection, anti-establishment behaviour, and anything to do with the counter culture were all beyond him, though, as they were anathema to his understanding of the world. Punk's *raison d'être* was nihilism, plain and simple, regardless of how some of those involved like to dress it up with politics or bondage trousers. Being *for* something would have been against its principles; at this point in the arc of post-war popular culture, being against something – anything, frankly – was far more fun.

Punk harked back to the time when the idea of the teenager was just beginning, at least in its modern sense. The distillation of punk could be traced back to a line in *The Wild One*, the Marlon Brando outlaw biker movie from 1953, a time even before Elvis. When a girl asks the Brando character – Johnny Strabler, the leader of the Black Rebels Motorcycle Club,

who is dressed in blue jeans, leather jacket and cap – “What are you rebelling against, Johnny?” he answers, “Whaddaya got?”

Johnny Strabler was the first popular rebel of the decade, and, like a lot of boys, Elvis was smitten with him. He loved Brando – loved the way he spoke, the way he looked, and the way he dressed. The actress Jan Shepard played Elvis’s sister in 1958’s *King Creole*, and was responsible for Elvis meeting his hero that year in the Paramount commissary. She and Elvis were taking lunch together one day when Brando came in and made a beeline for a table just behind Elvis, who didn’t notice him. She continued the story: “I said, ‘Elvis, Marlon Brando is sitting right behind you,’ and he almost put his face in his sandwich, he was so shy. He wanted to hide. I said, ‘Keep it cool, but when you get up, your chair is going to hit his chair, and he’s going to get up because I know he wants to meet you as much as you want to meet him.’ And that’s exactly what happened. Elvis played it cool, very cool, but when we got out of the cafeteria, he jumped about four feet in the air, and said: ‘My God, I met Marlon Brando!’”

Brando didn’t turn out to be the biggest Elvis fan. Never worried about speaking ill of the dead, Brando commented long after Elvis’s death that “It seems to me hilarious that our government put the face of Elvis Presley on a postage stamp after he died from an overdose of drugs. His fans don’t mention that because they don’t want to give up their myths. They ignore the fact that he was a drug addict and claim he invented rock’n’roll when in fact he took it from black culture; they had been singing that way for years before he came along, copied them and became a star.”

By 1977, even if Elvis was still a fan of Brando, the original punk, he wanted absolutely nothing to do with his progeny. Cocooned and separated from his audience, Elvis had slunk back into a world that felt safe and warm. He had no interest

in embracing anyone with a curled lip and a floppy quiff, or indulging anyone with a pink drape jacket and quilted gold winklepickers. Elvis had broken the mould himself, and the last thing he needed was a bunch of copycats to come round the mountain after his hide.

What Elvis had done felt special and particular. All the girls out front were his. He didn't need anybody queering his patch, didn't need anyone shaking their pelvis and thrusting their groin into the faces of all those pretty young girls. That was his job, Elvis's job, and it should be done by Elvis and no one else.

Far from being a talismanic rebel, an iconoclast who wouldn't suffer fools gladly, by 1977 Elvis had become a good ol' boy, a man who liked to be surrounded by men, and who knew the importance of the Confederate flag. Elvis didn't like competition.

Back in the Fifties he had taken a dislike to the wannabes thrust in his face by rival record companies – after all, why on earth would Elvis warm to the likes of Fabian, Frankie Avalon or Guy Mitchell? Who was Pat Boone? And Tab Hunter? Seriously, which one was he? Was he the one with the puppy dog smile and the party shirt?

In the Sixties Elvis had been circumspect about the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and all the British beat groups who had arrived in America to try to steal his crown.

And in some respects the Seventies seemed to have passed him by completely.

In 1977, Elvis knew exactly what Elvis was doing, but he had no idea what was happening in the rest of the world.