

It Wasn't Elvis

*But It Sure Did Look
And Sound Like Him*

By **BILL KING**

Twenty-one years ago, a young Elvis Presley performed one of his first Atlanta shows on the stage of the Fox Theatre.

Well, it wasn't Elvis on stage at the Fox Friday night, but you wouldn't have known it by the sights and sounds, as renditions of Presley hits such as "Love Me Tender" and "Don't Be Cruel" drew loud ovations while the gyrations of the sweating young man performing them drew choruses of screams.

No, it wasn't Elvis, but a "Memorial Tribute to Elvis Presley By Ron Young"—the 24-year-old Young being one of a number of Presley imitators who have been drawing enthusiastic audiences across the country in the last few years. Young is based in Atlanta and has, in the past, been declared the "favorite" Elvis imitator of the local Presley fan club.

Friday night's Presley "tribute," staged by Atlanta public relations man Ernest Jessee, was hurriedly put together in the period right after

Presley's death Aug. 16.

Some of the King's local fans were loud in their criticism, charging the promoters were "cashing in" on Presley's death, but Jessee denied the charge, pointing out that a portion of the proceeds from the show will be donated to the Georgia Heart Association. (Presley died of a heart ailment.)

While the turnout of between 1,800 and 2,000 didn't rival the crowds of almost 20,000 the real Presley used to draw at the Omni, officials said it was a "pretty large crowd for an imitator."

Jessee said the heart fund will get 10 per cent of the gate (after expenses) and five percent of concessions profits (copies of the special Elvis edition of the Memphis papers went for \$5). "They'll get a minimum of \$1,000 and maybe up to \$3,000," the promoter said.

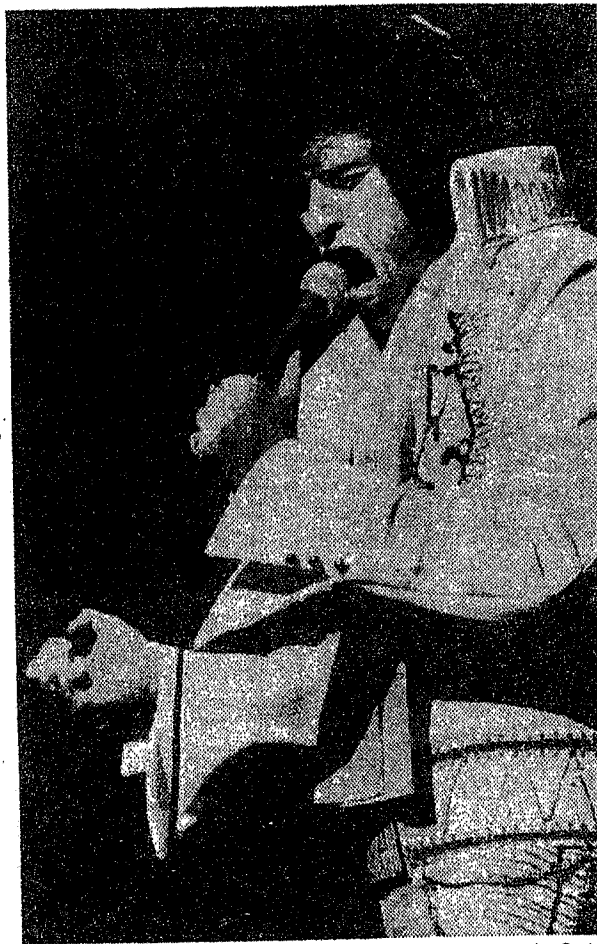
The crowd was predominantly female (ranging from young girls to middle-aged women) and many of them seemed to be there out of curiosity.

A Marietta fan, Debbie Freeman, playing her films of the real Elvis for Young in his dressing room backstage before the show, said she thought those fans upset by the show were "few and far between."

She said, "Ron's the best of the imitators. He really sounds like him and looks like him too." But, she added as she pointed toward the movie screen, "There'll never be another one like him."

It was a refrain heard frequently during the evening.

Young, who before Friday night had never played to a crowd larger than 1,000, was visibly nervous.



Staff Photo — Joe Benton

'Best of Imitators:' Ron Young

"I've only been doing Elvis professionally for about a year," he said as he ironed some of the scarfs he would later pass out to women admirers. "But I've really been doing him all my life."

He gestured toward the dancing figure in the films. "Elvis is like a father to me. The guy inspired me to live. . . . You don't have to be a female to understand Elvis."

While the band struck up the theme from the film "2001," Presley's traditional entrance music, Young, clad in a \$500 replica of one of Presley's white suits with gold spangles, jumped up and down and shook his arms, like an athlete preparing for a game.

From there on, for all intents and purposes, he was not Ron Young, but the pride of Memphis, Tenn.—the reaction was much the same.

DRAMATIZE!

The Atlanta Journal

**LOOK OUT
FOR #1**