

= Heartbreak Hotel =

" Heartbreak Hotel " is a song recorded by American singer Elvis Presley . It was released as a single on January 27 , 1956 , Presley 's first on his new record label RCA Victor . It was written by Tommy Durden and Mae Boren Axton .

A newspaper article about the suicide of a lonely man who jumped from a hotel window inspired the lyrics . Axton presented the song to Presley in November 1955 at a country music convention in Nashville . Presley agreed to record it , and did so on January 10 , 1956 , in a session with his band , the Blue Moon Boys , the guitarist Chet Atkins , and the pianist Floyd Cramer . " Heartbreak Hotel " comprises an eight @-@ bar blues progression , with heavy reverberation throughout the track , to imitate the character of Presley 's Sun recordings .

The single topped Billboard 's Top 100 chart for seven weeks , Cashbox 's pop singles chart for six weeks , was number one on the Country and Western chart for seventeen weeks and reached number three on the R & B chart , becoming Presley 's first million @-@ seller , and one of the best @-@ selling singles of 1956 . " Heartbreak Hotel " achieved unheard of feats as it reached the top 5 of Country and Western , pop , and Rhythm ' n ' Blues charts simultaneously . It would eventually be certified double platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America . Presley had first performed " Heartbreak Hotel " during a live show in December 1955 during a tour of the Louisiana Hayride , but the song gained strong popularity after his appearance on Stage Show in March 1956 . It became a staple of Presley 's repertoire in live appearances , last performed by him on May 29 , 1977 , at the Civic Center in Baltimore , Maryland .

In 1995 " Heartbreak Hotel " was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame , and in 2004 Rolling Stone magazine named it one of the " 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " . That year it was also included in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame 's " 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll " . A rock and roll standard , since its original release " Heartbreak Hotel " has been covered by several rock and pop acts , including Willie Nelson and Leon Russell , who recorded a duet version that topped the Country charts in 1979 .

= = Background and writing = =

The song was written in 1955 , by Mae Boren Axton , a high school teacher with a background in musical promotion , and Jacksonville based singer ? songwriter Tommy Durden . The lyrics were based on a report supposedly in The Miami Herald about a man who had destroyed all his identity papers and jumped to his death from a hotel window , leaving a suicide note with the single line , " I walk a lonely street " . In 2016 , an article in Rolling Stone magazine suggested that the story in reality originated from a report about a painter and petty criminal , Alvin Krolík , whose marriage had failed and who wrote a partial autobiography including the line " This is the story of a person who walked a lonely street . " Krolík 's story was published in news media , and received further publicity after he was shot and killed in an attempted robbery in El Paso , Texas . On August 25 , 1955 , the El Paso Times reported Krolík 's death under the headline " Story Of Person Who Walked Lonely Street " .

Axton and Durden give different accounts of how the song was written . Durden 's account is that he had already written the song and performed it with his band the Swing Billys before he presented it to Axton . Axton 's account is that Durden had only written a few lines of the song and asked her to help him finish it . She says that the report of the suicide " stunned " her , and she told Durden , " Everybody in the world has someone who cares . Let 's put a Heartbreak Hotel at the end of this lonely street " . They were interrupted by the arrival of Glen Reeves , a local performer who had previously worked with Axton . The duo asked Reeves to help with the song , but after hearing the title he remarked that it was " the silliest thing I 've ever heard " , and left them to finish it themselves . The song was written within an hour , and Durden recorded it onto Axton 's tape recorder . Reeves returned , and after hearing the song he was asked to provide a voice demo for Axton in the style of Elvis Presley . Reeves obliged , but once again turned down the offer of a writing credit for his input .

Axton approached the popular singing duo the Wilburn Brothers , and offered them the chance to record " Heartbreak Hotel " . However , Doyle and Teddy Wilburn declined , describing the song as " strange and almost morbid " . Axton , however , agreed to a publishing deal with Buddy Killen , a young Nashville bass player , who had recently set up his own publishing company called Tree Publishing . With a publishing deal in place , Axton arranged through Presley 's manager Colonel Tom Parker to present the song to Presley at the annual Country Music Disc Jockey Convention in Nashville , Tennessee , where he was to be named the most promising male country star of 1955 . Axton had been hired earlier in the year to publicise the Hank Snow Jamboree concerts at the Gator Bowl Stadium in Jacksonville , Florida , which included Presley in the line up . During one concert Axton observed the reaction of the audience to Presley 's performance , in which a crowd of screaming fans chased him back to his dressing room and ripped his clothes off to take as souvenirs . Axton followed Presley 's career closely after this incident , and met him at a July 28 concert in Jacksonville , this time interviewing him for the local media . According to author Albert Goldman , Axton made writing Presley 's first big hit one of her ambitions .

Rumors had been circulating in the press for several weeks that Presley , who had begun his career at Sun Records , was ready to move to RCA Victor to help launch him nationally . Axton played the demo to him in his room at the Andrew Jackson Hotel on November 10 , 1955 . Upon hearing the demo , Presley exclaimed " Hot dog , Mae , play that again ! " , and listened to it ten times , memorizing the song . After signing with RCA on November 21 , 1955 , Presley accepted Axton 's offer of a third of the royalties if he made the song his first single on his new label . Presley performed the song for the first time in Swifton , Arkansas on December 9 , 1955 , and declared to the audience that it would be his first hit .

= = Recording = =

" Heartbreak Hotel " was the second song Presley recorded at RCA Victor , following " I Got a Woman " , during his debut session at 1525 McGavock Street in Nashville on January 10 , 1956 . Presley arrived at the studio with the song ready to record without seeking RCA 's approval , and although producer Steve Sholes was not sure that it would be a success , he recorded " Heartbreak Hotel " believing that Presley knew what he was doing . Recording at RCA Victor was a different experience for Presley and his band , who were used to a more relaxed atmosphere at Sun Studio . Guitar player Scotty Moore later commented , " It was a larger studio than Sun 's and more regimented - they called everything by a tape number . We would sit around at Sun , eat hamburgers and then somebody would say , ' Let 's try something . ' " .

Almost immediately Sholes discovered a problem while recording Presley . RCA Victor had always insisted their performers stay still as they sang so the microphone would pick up the vocals ; even the slightest tilt of the head would result in missing sound . Sholes had told Presley to stand on a painted X on the floor , telling him " Whatever you do , don 't move " . During the recording of " I Got a Woman " , Sholes noticed that Presley 's voice and guitar were not always being picked up by the microphone . Presley explained to Sholes that he had to " jump around to sing it right . It 's something that just happens ? just a part of the way I sing " . Sholes arranged for the whole studio to be re @-@ miked so that Presley 's voice and guitar could be picked up from anywhere in the studio , and recording continued .

As well as the Blue Moon Boys , his regular backing band of Moore , bassist Bill Black and drummer D.J. Fontana , Presley was joined by established RCA Victor musicians Chet Atkins (who also helped Sholes produce the session) on guitar , and Floyd Cramer on piano . Following a suggestion from Presley , Sholes used a hallway at the studio to get an unusual echo for the single . Sholes was attempting to recapture the Sun Records sound , but he was unaware that Sun founder Sam Phillips had used two tape recorders and a slight time delay to create it on previous Presley recordings . When Phillips first heard " Heartbreak Hotel " , he remarked that it was a " morbid mess " . Most others at RCA agreed , declaring " Heartbreak Hotel " a terrible choice of song , especially after hearing that the finished recording sounded nothing like Presley 's Sun recordings . Internal memos from the time show that every one of RCA 's executive corps disliked it so much that one of

them insisted " We certainly can 't release that one " .

In an interview , Durden conceded that he did not recognize his song after Presley had made the changes to it in the studio , including the tempo , phrasing , lyrics , and overall sound . In subsequent recordings , these major modifications to the existing material became a normal procedure for Presley who took over the role of producer , although Sholes was still credited . Speaking of Sholes ' producing credits , Phillips said " he was not a producer . Steve was just at every session " .

Mae Boren Axton was gulled by Elvis ' manager , Colonel Parker , into giving up a third of the song 's royalties to Elvis , as well as adding Elvis ' name to the list of songwriters for the song .

= = Release and reception = =

" Heartbreak Hotel " was released as a single on January 27 , 1956 , with B @-@ side " I Was the One " , a song that was also recorded during Presley 's RCA debut sessions . Billboard magazine praised it as " a strong blues item wrapped up in his usual powerful style and a great beat " . However , " Heartbreak Hotel " was less @-@ than @-@ warmly received by the British music press . The New Musical Express wrote that , " If you appreciate good singing , I don 't suppose you 'll manage to hear this disc all through " . BBC , which held a monopoly on broadcasting in Britain at the time , didn 't consider it fit for general entertainment and placed it on its " restricted play " list .

Presley made his national television debut on January 28 , appearing on CBS ' Stage Show , starring Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey . As Stage Show 's ratings had been slipping , producer Jack Philbin agreed to have Presley on because he was relatively cheap at \$ 1 @,@ 250 ; after looking at a photograph of the singer , Philbin exclaimed , " He 's a guitar playing Marlon Brando ! " Despite the single having been released only a day before to coincide with Presley 's national television debut , the Dorsey brothers did not allow Presley to perform it on their show because it didn 't work well in rehearsals . For his second appearance , on February 4 , Presley was again aware that he could not perform " Heartbreak Hotel " . However , at his third appearance on Stage Show a week later , Sholes pressured CBS to give consent . Subsequently , Presley and his band performed " Heartbreak Hotel " with borrowed instruments (their own were being driven to Florida in preparation for a tour) with the backing of the Dorsey Brothers ' orchestra .

On February 22 , the song entered the Billboard pop chart at number 68 , and the Country and Western chart at number nine . Within two months , " Heartbreak Hotel " reached number one on both charts . It also made top five on the R & B chart , the first Presley single to chart there . This resulted in " Heartbreak Hotel " becoming only the second single in history to reach all three Billboard charts , after Carl Perkins ' " Blue Suede Shoes " . The song spent a total of twenty @-@ seven weeks in the top 100 . By April , " Heartbreak Hotel " became a million @-@ seller , earning Presley his first RIAA @-@ certified gold record , and going on to be the biggest selling single of 1956 . " Heartbreak Hotel / I Was the One " was certified Platinum by on March 27 , 1992 and 2 x Platinum on July 15 , 1999 by the RIAA . The song made its debut on the UK Singles Chart in May 1956 ; it peaked at the second spot the next month and stayed on the charts for 22 weeks .

= = Personnel = =

Elvis Presley ? lead vocals
Scotty Moore ? electric guitar
Chet Atkins ? acoustic guitar
Bill Black ? double bass
D.J. Fontana ? drums
Floyd Cramer ? piano
Steve Sholes ? producer , A & R
Bob Farris ? engineer

= = Legacy = =

Presley would perform the song during most of his live shows between 1956 and 1977 , performing it for the last time on May 29 , 1977 , at the Civic Center in Baltimore , Maryland . The song has been released on almost every Presley compilation album since 1956 , and alternative takes have also surfaced on several compilation albums . " Heartbreak Hotel " was awarded by the Broadcast Music Incorporated in its Country music Awards . It was re @-@ released in 1971 for the UK market where it charted at number ten . In 1979 , following Presley 's death , author Robert Matthew @-@ Walker wrote " Heartbreak Hotel became one of the legendary rock performances . For many people it is Elvis Presley , and it continues to excite and fascinate listeners . Heartbreak Hotel is a classic performance , yet when it is analyzed it appears so simple that one cannot recall a time when one did not know it . " In 1995 , the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame , and was re @-@ released in 1996 to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of its recording .

In a 1975 interview , John Lennon recalled his friend Don Beatty introducing him to Presley 's music . Lennon said that his family rarely had the radio on , unlike other members of the Beatles who grew up under its influence . Beatty showed Lennon a picture of Presley that appeared along with the charts on the New Musical Express , and Lennon later heard " Heartbreak Hotel " on Radio Luxembourg . Lennon has said :

When I first heard " Heartbreak Hotel " , I could hardly make out what was being said . It was just the experience of hearing it and having my hair stand on end . We 'd never heard American voices singing like that . They always sang like Sinatra or enunciate very well . Suddenly , there 's this hillbilly hiccuping on tape echo and all this bluesy stuff going on . And we didn 't know what Elvis was singing about ... It took us a long time to work what was going on . To us , it just sounded as a noise that was great

George Harrison described " Heartbreak Hotel " as a " rock n roll epiphany " when in 1956 , at age 13 , he overheard it while riding his bike at a neighbor 's house . Some have said that " Heartbreak Hotel " turned that well @-@ mannered schoolboy into a guitar @-@ crazed truant who would audition for John Lennon 's Quarrymen the following year .

The Rolling Stones ' guitarist Keith Richards wrote in his 2010 autobiography that " Heartbreak Hotel " had had a huge effect on him . Beyond Presley 's singing itself , it was the total effect of his sound and his silence that so totally affected Richards :

Then , " Since my baby left me " ? it was just the sound ... That was the first rock and roll I heard . It was a totally different way of delivering a song , a totally different sound , stripped down , no bullshit , no violins and ladies ' choruses and schmaltz , totally different . It was bare right to the roots that you had a feeling were there but hadn 't yet heard . I 've got to take my hat off to Elvis . The silence is your canvas , that 's your frame , that 's what you work on ; don 't try and deafen it out . That 's what " Heartbreak Hotel " did to me . It was the first time I 'd heard something so stark .

Led Zeppelin 's lead singer Robert Plant stated that the song " changed his life . " He recalled hearing it for the first time when he was eight years old :

It was so animal , so sexual , the first musical arousal I ever had . You could see a twitch in everybody my age . All we knew about the guy was that he was cool , handsome and looked wild .

Critic Robert Cantwell wrote in his unpublished memoir *Twigs of Folly* :

The opening strains of " Heartbreak Hotel " , which catapulted Presley 's regional popularity into national hysteria , opened a fissure in the massive mile @-@ thick wall of post @-@ war regimentation , standardization , bureaucratization , and commercialization in American society and let come rushing through the rift a cataract from the immense waters of sheer , human pain and frustration that have been building up for ten decades behind it .

President Bill Clinton performed the song on saxophone during his appearance on The Arsenio Hall Show on June 3 , 1992 . In 2004 it was ranked number forty @-@ five on Rolling Stone 's list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " , the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame included it in its unranked list 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll and in 2005 , Uncut magazine ranked the first performance of " Heartbreak Hotel " in 1956 by Presley as the second greatest and most important cultural event of the rock and roll era . Paul McCartney , who participated in Uncut 's poll stated , " It 's the way [Presley] sings it as if he is singing from the depths of hell . His phrasing , use of echo , it 's all so

beautiful . Musically , it 's perfect . "

Heartbreak Hotel , a film based on a mythical incident involving the kidnapping of Presley , was released theatrically in 1988 . It starred David Keith as Elvis Presley , and was directed by Chris Columbus . In 1999 , Elvis Presley Enterprises purchased a Wilson World Hotel branch and after several renovations , opened it and named the hotel after the song , located across the street from Presley 's home , Graceland , in Memphis , Tennessee .

In 2015 , " Heartbreak Hotel " was named as The # 2 Song of the Rock Era in the book The Top 500 Songs of the Rock Era : 1955 @-@ 2015 .

= = Early cover versions = =

Radio humorist Stan Freberg parodied " Heartbreak Hotel " immediately after its release , because the vocals on the original record featured a heavy use of reverb . In the cover , the lead singer repeatedly asks for " more echo on [his] voice . " When Presley recorded " Hound Dog " a few months later , he had taken over the role of producer , using what he learned at Sun Records (although Sholes was still credited) and decided not to use echo .

Connie Francis recorded the song for her 1959 album Rock ' n ' Roll Million Sellers ; this album also features " Don 't Be Cruel " . Country singer Johnny Cash parodied the song in 1959 on the television show Town Hall Party , imitating Presley 's characteristic crib and hip movements . Before the performance Cash explained that it was " an impersonation of a rock and roll singer impersonating Elvis , is what this really is " .

Beatles historian Mark Lewisohn noted that , at first as The Quarrymen then later as the Beatles , the group performed " Heartbreak Hotel " live from 1957 until 1961 (in Liverpool then later in Hamburg and elsewhere) . It is unclear whether the lead vocal was by John Lennon or Paul McCartney or both . A recorded version has not been forthcoming . However , McCartney (using Bill Black 's upright bass) did a version for a documentary Elvis - Viva Las Vegas , which also appears on DVD .

= = Later renditions = =

Part of the original personnel of the 1956 recording released their own versions , Chet Atkins recorded it for the 1963 album The Guitar Genius , and also , Presley 's lead guitarist Scotty Moore recorded the song for his 1964 album The Guitar that Changed the world . Willie Nelson and Leon Russell had a number one cover version in 1979 on the country charts , it was Russell 's only number one hit on the charts .

Paul McCartney later also made another cover of the song in Chaos and Creation at Abbey Road , performing it with Bill Black 's bass . Others who have covered the song include Ann @-@ Margret , who would later co @-@ star with Presley in the 1964 motion picture Viva Las Vegas , the Cadets , Delaney Bramlett , Justin Timberlake , Cher , Roger Miller , Bob Dylan , Bruce Springsteen , John Cale , Merle Haggard , Tom Jones , Dax Riggs , Roger McGuinn , Suzi Quatro , Van Halen , Jimi Hendrix , Neil Diamond , Lynyrd Skynyrd , and Guns N ' Roses .

In the 1992 film Honeymoon in Vegas , Billy Joel made a version of " Heartbreak Hotel " and " All Shook Up " , while the same year in True Romance , actor Val Kilmer performed an a cappella version . Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman covered the song in a medley with Prince 's " Kiss " , for the 2006 Warner Bros. film Happy Feet . The song was also featured in Alvin and the Chipmunks ' 1990 television special Rockin ' Through the Decades , as part of the fifties medley and its soundtrack and again for the 2007 video game Alvin and the Chipmunks .

= = Charts = =

= = = Elvis Presley = = =

= = = Willie Nelson and Leon Russell = = =