

# ELVIS. Birth of The Legend

## Alfred Wertheimer

October 29 – December 14, 2014

The Lumiere Brothers Center for Photography is pleased to present Alfred Wertheimer's exhibition – the photographer who was fortunate enough to capture Elvis Presley in the very beginnings of his journey to stardom career. The exhibition at the Large Hall of the Center for Photography features sixty black-and-white portraits of the “king of rock'n'roll”, covers of his numerous recordings and documental videos.

In early 1956, an RCA Victor publicist asked Alfred Wertheimer to photograph an up-and-coming crooner from Memphis. Little did Wertheimer know that this would be the job of his life. Wertheimer was 26 years old, the crooner – 21. His name was Elvis Presley, and Alfred had never heard of him before. Wertheimer was photographing Elvis for the next two years and took around 2,500 photographs. Trailing him like a shadow, Wertheimer managed to document a real story and candid emotions of young and carefree Elvis: at CBS studios in New York and at the hotel reading fan mail, at live performances and its backstage, as well as during fateful recording of “Don't Be Cruel”/“Hound Dog” that became the first ever to top all three *Billboard* charts in one month. After the assignment was officially over, Wertheimer decided to follow Elvis home to Memphis, where he shoot a series of Elvis in private with his family and close friends. No photographer would ever get this close to Elvis again. After that, he saw the singer just once more, in September 1958, when Elvis was leaving for Germany after his induction into the army.

These early photographs of Elvis from Wertheimer's collection remained in oblivion all the way until 1977 and death of Elvis which caused a new wave of interest for his persona. Wertheimer's work has appeared in publications including *LIFE*, *Paris Match* and *Rolling Stone*. In 1979 the first book with Wertheimer's photographs (of Elvis) was published. Subsequently it has been reprinted several times and translated into different languages. In 2013 Taschen released collector's edition featuring extensive selection of Wertheimer's photographs of Elvis on more than 400 pages.

In 2010 the Smithsonian created Wertheimer's solo exhibition for National Portrait Gallery in Washington dedicated to Elvis, which later successfully traveled all around the States, including the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles and Virginia Fine Arts Museum, as well as to National Portrait Gallery in Canberra (Australia) in 2013.

Born in Bavaria, Wertheimer emigrated with his family to the U.S. — fleeing Nazi ascendancy — in 1936, when he was just six years old. He grew up in Brooklyn, attended Cooper Union and honed his skills as a photographer. Upon graduation in 1953, he was drafted into the army; two years later, honorably discharged, he worked for a year for fashion photographer Tom Pulumbo, then headed out on his own as a freelancer. The photographs Wertheimer took of the early Elvis remain the most remarkable and intimate photographs of the celebrity ever made.

Curator: Anastasia Lepikhova