

'Million Dollar Quartet' Rocks Greater Boston Stage Company

By Sheila Barth

They came by busloads, walking cautiously, touting canes, pushing walkers, chatting excitedly. Others, raring to go, pushing their way through Greater Boston Stage Company's crowded lobby at last Wednesday's senior matinee.

They were all eager for the show, Tony Award-winning musical, "Million Dollar Quartet," to start.

The lively musical features the true story of a Dec. 4, 1956 impromptu jam during a recording session at Sun Records in Memphis, Tenn. - the birthplace of rock 'n' roll - when Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash and Jerry Lee Lewis rocked together for one night, now etched in rock 'n' roll history. Colin Escott and Floyd Mutrux' take poetic license but recapture that magical, musical night in that postage-stamp size studio.

The upbeat, two-act, rhythm-laden musical evokes high-spirited memories of days of "real" music - when lyrics made sense - okay, not all of it, like Little Richard's "Tutti Frut-

ti," etc. But there was harmony, pulsating rhythm, performed by extraordinary singers-musicians, such as Johnny Cash, the deep-throated man in black; Elvis "The King" Presley, whose sexy, hip-gyrations made teenage girls swoon, while parents, church groups, and a conservative adult population decried his "Negro, sinful music".

At least, Carl Perkins was everybody's favorite He was more morally acceptable, with his country-rock tunes, including his single biggest hit, "Blue Suede Shoes". Joining the unprecedented, impromptu, historic music event, newcomer Jerry Lee Lewis offended everybody with his unconventional piano-plinking, wacko, unbridled, swaggering, blustery, egotistical demeanor, and scandalous romances.

However, millions of fans overlooked the "morally bankrupt," iconoclastic Lewis, rising rock and roll firecracker, who shocked the world by marrying his young, teen-age cousin. Nevertheless, they reveled in his raw talent, endless energy, unconventional, movements and musicianship, which actor-music

director James Scheider brilliantly recaptures in songs "Real Wild Child," and signature, self-descriptive "Great Balls of Fire".

Portraying Johnny Cash, Austin Price's low-key persona and deep rich baritone resonates in songs, "I Walk the Line," "Folsom Prison Blues," and Tennessee Ernie Ford's hit, "Sixteen Tons".

Luke Linsteadt, doesn't resemble Elvis, but he captures the King's voice, gyrations, and gestures in "Hound Dog," "That's Alright Mama," and "Long Tall Sally," while Nile Scott Hawver delivers a solid rendition of Perkins' "Blue Suede Shoes".

Imagine that December 1956 night at Sun Records, 70 Union Ave., Memphis, Tenn., the small, corner, former auto parts store, where former WREC radio engineer/affable talent discoverer-founder Sam Phillips converted country and small-town performers into legendary superstars.

During Carl Perkins' recording session, the studio pulsates during an impromptu jam fest, as Perkins, Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley and his curvaceous, plat-

inum blonde girlfriend Dyanne, (Melissa Geerlof), and rising wild star Jerry Lee Lewis let the music rip. Besides highlighting each star's hits, the four southern country boys musically returns to their modest roots, singing rockabilly, ballads, country-western, gospel, and more. Dyanne shares the spotlight, too, with her sizzling rendition of Peggy Lee's immortal song, "Fever".

Portraying Sam Phillips, Boston's versatile award-winning star Robert Saoud narrates and re-enacts the event.

Phillips says he had to sell Elvis' contract to raise money and keep his studio solvent. It enabled him to surprise Cash with a three-year contract and rebuild Perkins' career, but he didn't know the two had other ideas,

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At New Repertory Theater, Jeffrey Petersen's cluttered set of Dr. Ruth Westheimer's apartment has stacks of carton boxes she's filling, preparing to move elsewhere, the following

BOX OFFICE

Two-act award-winning musical, book by Colin Escott and Floyd Mutrux, directed by Associate Artistic Director/choreographer Ilyse Robbins, appearing through May 19: May 8, 15, senior matinees, 2 p.m.; May 9, 16, 7:30 p.m.; May 10, 17, 8 p.m.; May 11, 18, 3, 8 p.m. (May 18th, 8 p.m. show sold out); May 12, 19, at 2 p.m. at Greater Boston Stage Company, 395 Main St., Stoneham. \$50-\$60; seniors, \$45-\$55; students with valid ID, \$20; 781-279-2200, greaterbostonstage.org. Group discount, call Bryan Miner at 781-587-7907, e-mail bryan@greaterbostonstage.org.

especially Cash, who accepted a lucrative contract with RCA Records. After auditioning Lewis on the spot, Phillips comments, "In the next 10 seconds, I knew I had my next star."

Rounding out the cast are musicians Trey Lundquist and Matthew Pitts.

This wildly talented cast ignites sparks as they perform together, "Peace in the Valley," "Down by the Riverside," "Ghost Riders," and rip-roaring "Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On," bringing the crowd to its feet, swaying and bopping.

Becoming Dr. Ruth

BOX OFFICE

New Repertory Theater presents Mark St. Germain's biographical, one-woman, one-act, 90+ minute comedy about the iconic sex therapist, through May 19: May 9, 12, and 6:30 p.m.; May 10, 17, 8 p.m.; May 11, 18, at 3, 8 p.m.; May 12, 19, 2 p.m.; May 15, 16, 7:30 p.m.; Mosesian Center for the Arts, MainStage