

ELVIS IN LIVERPOOL  
BY JIM BENNETT



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## Elvis in Liverpool

In 1977 when he died  
Elvis came to Liverpool  
he was on his way to somewhere else  
I don't know why but I know he came  
perhaps it was just something he needed to do  
I saw him walking along Church Street in the afternoon  
turning up his high collar  
against the Mersey breeze  
later I caught sight of him in St Georges Hall  
gazing at the mosaic floor  
then I saw him at the Pier Head  
heard him singing "Ferry Cross the Mersey"  
to himself

a parade led by Elvis started late in the afternoon

it wound its way from the Pier Head  
up past the Albert Dock  
along Upper Parliament Street  
past Gambia Terrace  
and at a vantage point he stood for a while  
looked down across the City rooftops  
and listened to the bricks  
that taught the 60's how to rock  
then along Hope Street  
past two cathedrals and back down into the town

more people joined the crowds that followed him

and all the while Elvis  
sang quietly to himself  
someone said later they heard him singing  
"You'll never walk alone"  
as he walked back down to the river  
where he went out along the dockside  
at the place the Isle of Man boat used to stop  
climbed down a wooden ladder  
then stepped out onto the water  
he stood on the water for a little while  
getting his balance  
then he walked off across the River  
towards the setting sun

the words of his last song  
"In my Liverpool Home"  
drifting back on the wind

## **Fingerprints of Elvis**

when a man  
holds the world  
in his hands  
sooner or later  
you will find  
his fingerprints  
everywhere

## Collecting

a man I met  
said he shook the hand  
of someone  
who shook the hand  
of a person who kissed  
the hand of a Pope  
another person he met  
shook hands with Diana  
he knew guys who knew or met  
the familiar faces  
traipsed across the TV  
as celebrities  
soap stars known  
by their characters names  
pop stars remembered  
for a single hit  
or the super stars  
that glitter across  
footnotes of history

he collects them all  
recalls the clasp  
that joins him to them  
notes it in his diary  
another and another  
he tells me how  
he shook the hand of a man  
who had shaken Tom Jones' hand  
and Tom was friends with Elvis  
Elvis shook hands with presidents  
the man had pictures  
to prove it

that is how it works  
he said  
we make secret connections  
to those we touch  
here another picture  
he had shaken the hand of his MP  
who had shaken the hand of  
Saddam Hussein  
the ultimate chain letter  
connecting everyone  
a homeopathic handshake  
diluted till only its  
memory remains  
written down  
collated  
kept  
and noted  
in his diary



## Remembering Elvis

I knew a man who had a motorbike accident  
not the one who died that was a different person  
his story ends abruptly  
this man survived but his memory did not  
each day a doctor would come to his hospital bedside  
ask questions like "Who is the minister of transport."  
and because he could not answer he was told  
that he was not able to go home  
one day the question was "Who is Elvis?"  
the man said "The Minister of Transport?"  
he was removed to the psychiatric ward the same day

the doctor who asked the question  
was a long time Elvis fan  
would not accept that he was dead  
thought Elvis had rigged it  
to get away from his fans  
(or that aliens had taken him)  
thought anyone who did not know who Elvis is  
was mad and should be incarcerated  
it would be no good saying  
he was a rock and roll singer  
or he was in films  
or spent time in the army  
the only answer he would accept was  
Elvis is the King of Rock and Roll  
or something that meant the same

someone told the man who had the accident  
how to answer the question  
a few weeks later when the doctor visited  
and asked "Who is Elvis?"  
the man smiled and said "He is the king"  
he was released within an hour  
in gratitude he went to Buckingham Palace  
to thank Elvis  
but Elvis was not there  
someone standing in the street outside said  
"Elvis has left the building."

## **Trout fishing on the Mersey**

it is hard to explain how people get connected to Liverpool  
hard to understand  
but it is a character I came to know  
someone I grew up with  
played with  
photographed  
drew  
it's mum and dad  
it speaks funny  
but its like when you hear it  
everyone else in the world speaks  
in the strange accents  
and this is the right one  
it walked out of Africa with Lucy  
set itself up on the banks of the Mersey  
where everyone came to find inspiration  
said it was a great place  
they told everyone else and they came  
and some time in the past the world  
moved here for a while  
trout fishing on the Mersey

it inspired everyone  
people everywhere could name streets and people  
who lived on the shores  
that would be about the time  
The Pope came and we went trout fishing  
listening to Klezmer music  
and Dylan and the Beatles  
on our portable tape machine  
happy days  
trout fishing in the Mersey  
listening to Liverpool  
breathing long and deep  
snoring as it dreamt its future  
its spires touching heaven

it is hard to explain how people get connected to Liverpool  
but they do

## **Mathew Street**

I often walk down Mathew Street  
looking for writing on the walls  
it's supposed to say "Billy Blake is fab"  
but I could never find it  
except in a poem

it's missing  
should be there  
to show the affection  
Adrian Henri had  
for William Blake  
but it's more than that

when Ginsberg came to Liverpool  
Ade took him to see  
the cast-iron Church in Everton

as they came out  
into the Liverpool sunlight  
the street sign on the road  
read "Albion Street"

they talked about Blake  
spirituality poetry  
they knew it was an omen

Adrian Henri wrote a poem  
"Mrs Albion You've Got a Lovely Daughter"  
dedicated it to Allen Ginsberg  
and he became famous

Allen Ginsberg went off  
found himself being spiritual in India  
then carried on being famous

and today a shed load of people  
walk down Mathew Street  
which is incredibly famous  
at least one of them still looking for  
"Billy Blake is fab."  
written on the wall  
by someone other than himself  
and I'm still not able to find it

## **There's a little bit of Elvis in us all**

I admired Elvis's effect on women  
the way his hair quiffed perfectly  
his rich deep voice  
sense of humour  
generosity  
and the way he filled his trousers

although short  
he didn't look it  
was well proportioned  
had a temper  
was a bit awkward sometimes  
could eat enough to burst  
and had some dubious friends

his choice of manager  
showed a lack of judgement  
his trust; a naiveté  
bordering on innocence  
often talked to himself  
and his dead twin brother  
loved his mother  
his house his country

you can criticise his movies  
or his fashion sense  
and it was serious bad luck  
to die on the toilet  
eating a burger

but he was the king  
just that  
the greatest rock and roll artist  
the world had ever known  
raised high on a pedestal  
far above the rest  
apart from Cliff Richard

I guess  
we forgive him everything  
smile when we hear him  
forget the lost years  
the drugs  
Las Vegas  
forgive him everything  
because  
in the end  
there's a little bit of Elvis  
in us all

**Memphis on the Mersey**  
**(for Jerry Goldman who helps keep the memory alive)**

billowing white gold from  
southern fields  
gathered to the sound  
of the delta blues  
bales on a Liverpool dockside;  
skeins loosened by billhooks  
fly like flags  
from the dock wall

from the Mississippi  
to the Mersey  
ships that carried cotton  
brought the sounds of Memphis;  
first the Blues  
a deep echo rumble of pain  
that claws at you  
then Rock and Roll  
made you feel  
you could touch the sky  
until finally the voice of Elvis  
took you there and back again  
filled you up  
then left you empty  
gasping for more

we heard it here  
in Liverpool first  
rocked before the rest of Britain  
sailors played records  
traded them  
others brought them home  
mementoes from a mythic place  
we listened

began to scrape radio dials  
catch distant faded echoes  
played scratched discs  
on radiograms  
picked at cheap guitars

56 -7 -8 -9-60 – 61  
it boiled away  
until the Mersey Sound  
exploded from cellars  
to flood across the world

from Beale Street to Matthew Street  
Memphis on the Mersey  
where two cities  
rock  
to the same beat

## **as cool as the sound of jazz**

it's late, gig over, I should be on my way home  
I suppose I can convince myself that I am  
but the roads are mysterious and the night air  
is as cool as the sound of jazz  
drifting from a basement club in Basin Street  
the car takes me down roads to see where they go  
some place I know but different  
shadows like a sheet  
change familiar shapes into strangers  
ghosts of friends  
here the sound is the rhythm of tyres  
clipping on the edge of concrete road slabs  
another time it will be the slap slap slap of windshield wiper  
and another the distant sound Dave Brubeck  
on the CD player  
volume turned down low  
and maybe some words will come and I can speak them like a song  
to the slap slap slap slap slap slap of the tyres  
or maybe not  
but it must be time to find some familiar place  
time to find my way home  
out of the seductive never ending streets  
away from the music  
away from the cool air  
away from the comfort of night  
back to the room where the sound is imprisoned by walls  
swallowed by carpets and curtains  
back to the place where tomorrow  
demands to be organised  
back to the place where darkness is trapped  
and night holds its secrets behind a closed door  
where dreams wait  
but just for now the road is empty  
yellow street lamp lit  
traffic lights all on green  
the car window open brings in the scent of early autumn  
and for now just for now  
life is as cool as the sound of jazz

## **Tonight I'm older**

each night I come  
to conduct the course  
bring my notes  
sat read them  
in the empty classroom  
as I listen to my thoughts  
echo off the walls

each night I take the bus  
find my way  
to a brown curled  
poster of a holiday  
wonder about  
the smiles on the beach  
wondered why  
I am older than Elvis  
ever got to be

every day  
I visit the freezer centre  
at Iceland  
put my head in a fridge  
to cool off  
as I look for  
food for one  
that I might like

I stop when my hair  
gets brittle  
or my nose and chest hurt  
from breathing  
freezing air

and each night I stand here  
look up to the stars  
wonder when  
they will come

I saw Elvis on stage once  
cloak spread  
waiting to fly  
to be lifted up by  
the wind from five thousand  
hands clapping  
now each night  
I am a little older than Elvis  
ever go to be

## **Elvis in the Cinema**

Elvis sat in the third row  
of the cinema  
singing along to the  
songs on screen  
where a giant Elvis  
curled his lip  
be quiet  
the audience yelled  
we paid good money  
to see this movie  
a short time later  
the manager threw him out  
too many complaints  
he said  
they came to see the movie  
not to listen to you



## **Elvis in The Willows**

I saw Elvis striding  
purposefully  
through Liscard  
smiling at people  
who recognized him  
as he made his way  
to the Willows  
he went in  
sat at the table  
in a booth at the back  
by the corridor

watched him  
order coffee  
sit alone drinking it  
still smiling as people  
caught sight of him

saw him  
chatting to the owner Steve  
who wanted to get  
his picture taken with him  
but couldn't find a camera  
soon a small crowd gathered  
Elvis left  
still smiling at people

the Willows is still open  
though it  
changed name slightly  
after Steve died  
the table at the back  
in the booth  
by the corridor is still there  
his coffee cup  
cold and half empty  
still on the table  
but Elvis never came back  
to finish it



## **JIM BENNETT**

Is a writer who was born in, and lives near, Liverpool. Many of his poems touch upon his relationship with the city. Jim teaches creative writing at the University of Liverpool and for the Workers Education Association. His most recent collection of poetry is "The Man Who Tried to Hug Clouds" pub. Bluechrome 2005, reprinted 2006. Since 2004 Jim has been editor of the internet site Poetry Kit. He tours extensively giving reading and performances of his poetry and he has been called "The best performance poet in Liverpool"

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“In 1977 when he died  
Elvis came to Liverpool  
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to do”

from *Elvis in Liverpool*