

Is Michael Jackson our kids' Elvis?



As preparations are underway for Michael Jackson's funeral tomorrow, I've been hearing comparisons between the loss 30 years ago of The King of Rock Roll – Elvis – and the King of Pop. I began to wonder if losing Michael Jackson is the same to our kids as losing Elvis was to my generation.

So I asked the kids around me and I've come to this conclusion – it's not, at least not yet. The reason doesn't have anything to do with either artist's impact on music or their standing as the "king" of their respective musical genres, but more to do with how our kids get their influences now. I was 10 years old when Elvis died.

I remember the moment I heard the news on the radio as I rode in my parent's car. I cried instantly and thought about how sad it was for Lisa Marie, who was my same age. That night my family went to a party at a friend's house and I remember the moms cried as they all talked about Elvis and watched the news on TV, and never being one to miss out on a good crying session, joined in.

The day of Elvis' funeral, my Grandma told me about the first time she saw him on the Ed Sullivan show. She declared through her tears he sang better than Sinatra and was "better lookin', too" and once again, I cried. I knew something big had happened when he died, and I grieved. Through his movies, his TV specials, and his music, Elvis was a part of my little life.

I grew up listening to Michael Jackson on the AM radio of my

parents' station wagon. I roller skated to "PYT" and "Rock with You" on Friday nights at the Holiday Roller Rink in Fountain Valley—every song on "Off the Wall" still takes me to my happy place. My friends and I were glued to the TV waiting for the premiere of the video "Thriller" on MTV. I peppered my daughters' playlists on her iPod with the music of the Jackson Five, but when he died last week, she didn't know who he was. I had to sing a little bit of "ABC" for her to finally nod her head and say "Oh, yeah, that's sad."

I place the blame squarely on the back of the music and television industry that has manufactured an entire youth-oriented subculture that hardly existed when I was kid. My eight-year-old daughter has her own music artists, her own radio stations, her own TV stations—think Radio Disney, Nickelodeon, Noggin.

Not to be all "when I was her age," but when I was her age my music was my mom's music. I listened to whatever she was listening to on the radio, whatever records she played are now the soundtrack to my childhood memories. OK, fine, we had the random teen heartthrob, Shaun Cassidy and Leif Garrett, but mostly Elvis, The Eagles, The Carpenters, and The Beach Boys were the musical fare in our house growing up and darn if I haven't tried to make that the way things go down in my home.

I tell my kids all the time, "I listened to Grandma's music growing up, so you have to listen to mine!" as I crank up The Clash. I burn them CD's with Elvis Costello, Jason Mraz, and Crowded House. I show them Madness videos on YouTube – but the mighty force of the Jonas Brothers and their cronies is just too intoxicating to her young mind. The proliferation of cable TV, satellite radio, and iTunes has given our kids choices where we had none.

In some ways it makes me a little sad because it changes a big part of what being a kid was about 30 years ago – like singing along to Bread with my parents from the back seat. The layers

of media options that separate us from our kids has, I believe, made the death of someone from "our generation" have less of an impact on them and their world. There are other factors, too: MJ's recent legal troubles (*and their nature*), the lack of new material, and palpable, willowy weirdness also contribute to the disconnect with our kids, but I am hard-pressed to think of any artist that would die now and have the same overflow of grief from three generations like when Elvis died.

I'm certain Michael Jackson will have his rightful place next to the iconic big hitters of our time, like Elvis, Marilyn, James Dean and Bogart. He can take his stool at the diner on "The Boulevard of Broken Dreams" and eventually his gloved, red-jacketed image will be on purses, t-shirts and black velvet murals throughout the OC Marketplace, and I will burn yet another CD for my daughter with his music, still hoping to have some influence on her music.

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