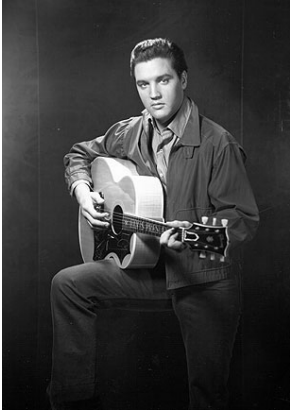


Rolling Stone

Filmmakers Looking to Cast an Unknown as Elvis Presley

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Filmmaker John Scheinfeld made his name directing documentaries about John Lennon and Harry Nilsson, but he's the first to admit that it's hard to pull off a great feature film about a famous rock star. "A lot of those movies try to do too much," he tells *Rolling Stone*. "They go cradle to grave and they're racing through scenes and they don't give dramatic moments their due. They also feel obligated to show the artist on stage, so you're seeing concert performances with an actor. As good as they are, they aren't the artist. We have an image of these people in our mind, and an actor just won't match up."

With all that in mind, Scheinfeld has a big challenge in front of him: he's been hired to write and direct *Fame & Fortune*, which tells the story of **Elvis Presley** through the eyes of his best friend Sonny West. "I want to do an intimate drama and one of the guys happens to be Elvis," he says. "We're not doing his full life. We're not doing everything that ever happened to him. We're taking the audience on a journey of this friendship and everything that it went through over 17 years."

Scheinfeld feels that casting the right Elvis will be his biggest challenge. "My feeling is that we need to cast an unknown," he says. "If you cast a known actor, then it's 'there's so-and-so playing Elvis.' I want to find an actor who can really inhabit Elvis. So, I have in mind that we'd have to do a worldwide sort-of Scarlett O'Hara search to find the best guy for this. Then, because it's an indie film and there are commercial considerations, I think we're going to be looking to cast known faces in most of the other parts."

The script isn't finished yet, and Scheinfeld doesn't know whether or not they'll be able to acquire the rights to Elvis' master recordings. "It's a little too early to say," he says. "We'll do our best though. We have spoken to the Jordanares, who backed up Elvis on many of his recordings from 1959 to 1969, and they are really excited about singing on some new tracks on the film. We are also going to reach out to the TCB Band, who was his hot Vegas band from 1969 to 1970, and see if they'll play on some tracks as well."

The movie will be based on the book *Elvis: Still Taking Care of Business*, a 2007 book written by West. "This is a great way to tell an extraordinary story," says Scheinfeld. "It's someone who was there, but off to the side, sort of watching it all, as opposed to the straight Elvis story that's been told many times on TV movies and other specials. The press tends to focus on his last few years. They forget what an extraordinary artist he was and how influential he was. What I would like to do is take him out of the tabloid world, where he has been for far too long, and replace the caricature with a fully realized, 3D human being."

A key scene in the movie will be Elvis' 1965 meeting with the Beatles. "It's the end of the first act of the movie," says Scheinfeld. "It's the past meeting the future head on. When the Beatles speed off after that four-hour meeting, he knows that the future is driving away without him."

Fame & Fortune has no release date at the moment. "Once I finish the rewrite I'm working on we'll budget this version of the script," says Scheinfeld. "Then we'll hire a casting director and get started. Much of the schedule will depend on the availability of actors. Particularly, we won't get started until we find our Elvis."

There have been announcements over the years of movies about Keith Moon, Janis Joplin, Brian Wilson and other rock icons – but the films never seem to actually get made. "A lot of the time it's script issues," says Scheinfeld. "Or somebody feels like nobody will come to the movie. By treating this like a buddy story, we're putting in a different place. But also, it's Elvis, the king of rock & roll. Not to pick on Keith Moon, but he didn't sing or write songs. He was a crazy rock & roller. My fear about a story like that is that there would be a sameness to the scenes. With this Elvis movie, I think we have a very rich and textured story."