



Million Dollar Quartet literally rocks

Description

A musical on the legendary encounter of some of rock music's greatest performers

By **Byron Toben**

This homage to rock music ends with *There's A Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On* by Jerry Lee Lewis. And there sure is in this rollicking play based on a true event that took place on December 4, 1956.

That event was the impromptu session in the offices of Sun Records founder, Sam Phillips, (**James Loye**) where, by chance or happenstance, three of his top discoveries jammed with each other.



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They were the now successful Carl Perkins, father of rockabilly (**Edward Murphy**), the swivelling Elvis Presley (**George Krissa**) and the more stationary Johnny Cash (**Sky Seals**) joined by the then fledgling Jerry Lee Lewis (**Christo Graham**).

These four men were also joined by Elvis's date, a Las Vegas show girl, here fictionalized as Dyanne (**Sara Diamond**) a wannabe female rock singer, to add some feminine energy to the stage mix (good choice!).

Phillips had left the tape running on this legendary encounter but it was never released in North America until 1990.

Opening the evening of this stage version of that evening by Colin Escott and Floyd Mutrux, both rock music historians, was *Blue Suede Shoes*, written by Perkins and popularized by Presley. Among the other 21 songs in this show are such hits sung by Cash as *Folsom Prisons Blues* and *I Walk the Line*. Those sung by Perkins include *Who Do You Love* and *See You Later, Alligator*. Presley contributed of course *Hound Dog* and *Memories are Made of This*. Lewis, the real wild child, added *Great Balls Of Fire*.



Omitted was [my own Presley favourite, *Heartbreak Hotel*. You can see that one here, thanks to the magic of the Internet.](#)

Dyanne simmered with *Fever* and *I Hear You Knocking*. On stage bassist as Perkin's brother Jay is **Evan Stewart**, joined by drummer **Peter Colantonio**. The rest of the instruments were the three guitars played by the performers and the one piano by Lewis.

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Much of the subplot humour centres on whether a piano should be

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included in a Rock show at all. Special kudos (what is a kudo,

anyway?) to Director **Lisa Rubin**, the Artistic and Executive director of the **Segal Centre**, not only for her crisp direction, but for obtaining by audition such perfect performers. It's always hard enough in a musical to find singers who can act (or vice versa) but as here, also play instruments well while gyrating and pounding, but also somewhat physically resemble the people they are enacting.



Both Mr. Krissa (as Presley) and Mr. Seals (as Cash) have played these roles elsewhere, so their selection was easier. Mr. Graham (as Lewis) and Mr. Murphy (as Perkins) created their characters for the first time and were equally impressive.

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Ms. Diamond, a Dawson and McGill grad, has been singing since age five and appearing in (shades of Nikki Yanofsky!) big time venues since twelve. She also sang the national anthem at some Montreal Canadiens hockey games.



Mr. Loye (as Sam Phillips), a British-born Montreal resident

had previously exhibited his versatility in *The Dumbwaiter* and in *Butcher*, as well as being the suave host of the 2015 META awards. Here, he masters a strong southern US accent that is nevertheless discernible without subtitles.

The show also mentions how these charismatic singers acclimated the uptight American audiences to the more soulful rhythms and beats of black music, previously dismissed pejoratively as 'jigaboo', 'picaninny', 'coon' and the like, that were gradually accepted into the American mainstream, some 'sanitized', in my opinion, beyond recognition by Pat Boone types.

Million Dollar Quartet, when it ends its run at the **Segal centre on May 14**, moves to the huge **Place des Arts from May 17 to 21**.

Information and tickets at 514 739-7944 or Segalcentre.org

Images (unless indicated): Andrée Lanthier

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Byron Toben is the immediate past-president of the Montreal Press Club

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Date Created

April 2017