

Review: Million Dollar Quartet *****



1956 was a memorable year. Not only did Hearts win the Scottish Cup (come on, I need something to lift my spirits) but at the end of the year there was a chance meeting of four of the greatest musicians ever to grace this planet.

Carl Perkins, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley were all in the studios of Sun Records in Memphis, Tennessee. The owner of Sun Records, Sam Phillips was desperate to keep many of his rising stars under his wing although he sold the rights to Elvis to RCA Records the previous year. Thus, on a December day in 1956, they all played an impromptu set at Phillips' studio. It was the only time these four legends played together.

This remarkable piece of music history seems to have happened by pure chance. Perkins, who by this time had already had success with *Blue Suede Shoes*, had come into the studios accompanied by his brothers Clayton and Jay and by drummer W.S. Holland, their aim being to record some new material for 'Mr Phillips' as he is referred to throughout by the young men.

Sam Phillips had brought in his latest musical talent, Jerry Lee Lewis, still unknown outside Memphis, to play piano on the Perkins session. During the afternoon, Johnny Cash and a 21-year-old Elvis Presley also arrived with his girlfriend.

Based on the book by Colin Escott and Floyd Mutrux, Million Dollar Quartet tells the story of this incredible meeting This fabulous musical is on at the Edinburgh Playhouse all this week and is, quite simply, brilliant.

The part of Sam Phillips is played by Martin Kemp, 1980s pop

star (Spandau Ballet), 1990s film star (The Krays) and television star (EastEnders). Kemp does his usual professional job, but the real stars of this production are the hitherto unknown musicians.

Matthew Wycliffe plays Carl Perkins, resentful of Elvis Presley making a hit out of Blue Suede Shows, which was originally Perkins' song.

Presley is played by Rhys Whitfield while the man the Edinburgh audience loved was Martin Kaye who played the ebullient Jerry Lee Lewis. The part of Presley's girlfriend Dyanne was played by stage star Katie Ray. But the star of the show for me was Robbie Durham who played Johnny Cash. His performance as the great singer was quite uncanny. In fact, if you closed your eyes you might think Cash was actually on stage. Durham not only sings like him but talks like him!

For those who remember the advent of rock and roll in the 1950s, this show is a throw-back to when it all began. *Blue Suede Shoes, Fever, Down By The Riverside* and many others are performed with such energy and passion by hugely talented performers. Yet, underneath, is the poignant story of Sam Phillips, a man who liked the taste of alcohol yet was savvy enough to invest the money he made from selling the rights to Elvis and, in 1969, Sun Records into the hotel chain Holiday Inn.

The audience at the Edinburgh Playhouse loved it from start to finish. On a dark Tuesday night with an Edinburgh derby being played in front of 20,000 people just along the road at Easter Road, it was perhaps no surprise the theatre was less than full. Nonetheless, if you love rock and roll and have an interest in the history of popular music, this show is a brilliant night out. You'll be guaranteed to be on your feet and dancing in the aisles!

Million Dollar Quartet is on at the Edinburgh Playhouse until

Saturday 28th October 2017.

Tickets [here](#)

Edinburgh Reporter Rating *****