



SET DESIGN, ACROBATIC EQUIPMENT AND PROPS

The lines between scenery elements, acrobatic equipment and props in Viva ELVIS are not always clear – and that, according to designer Mark Fisher, was a deliberate choice.

The design of the Elvis Theater has a conventional proscenium layout reminiscent of an opera house. The stage is wide and the backstage area and wings are vast. They have to accommodate the large-scale set elements and the need for speed in changing scenes imposed by the rapid pace of the show.

The sides and the rear of the stage are fixed areas while the center is composed of 16 platforms, separated into 12 sections which can rise to a height of ten feet. Depending on the scene, the platforms may at various times in the show support performers, singers, dancers or set elements. The widest platform measures 18 feet by 80 feet and is raised by four powerful motors 26 feet below the stage.

In the image of the King of Rock 'n' Roll

“Elvis has transcended reality and become a kind of mythic figure,” says Mark Fisher. “So his reappearance in Las Vegas has to be done on a scale that reflects that status.”

Mark Fisher's designs illustrate many of the most significant events in the life and career of Elvis, notably for the following scenes:

Show Opening Scene

The opening number features a giant jukebox. The chrome and gloss black structure is 70 feet wide and 22 feet high with dance platforms on two levels. It incorporates a 50-foot tall video screen.

The gigantic Blue Suede Shoe that appears on the stage is 29 feet long, weighs 7,000 lbs and is made of steel and fiberglass.

Got A Lot of Livin' To Do

The set for the Got A Lot of Livin' To Do features seven trampolines and the whole structure was inspired by Elvis' love of fairgrounds, which he would visit with his friends after hours. The structure weighs some 30 tons and takes up the full 78-foot width of the stage, is 23 feet deep and 32 feet tall.

Jailhouse Rock

The challenge for Mark Fisher was to come up with a set for Jailhouse Rock that would reference the iconic set used in the film, but at the same time be original and fresh. He based his new design on the technical requirements for a circus art called "marche inversée." The structure incorporates ten tracks for acrobats to walk upside down, attached by their feet, while dancers perform right side up on other levels. The 82,000-pound set is 60 feet wide, 45 feet deep and almost 40 feet tall. Up to 36 artists appear on it at the same time.

Viva Las Vegas

Used in the last few songs in the show, this set captures the glamor of Las Vegas with a huge ceremonial staircase as its central feature. Pavilions on the sides house the musicians, and decks above the pavilions serve as stages for the dancers, jugglers and other circus artists.

To complete the glamor and provide the show with a climax, there are two beautiful gold-leaf sculptures of Elvis in iconic poses from the peak of his popularity in Vegas.

The predominant color of the whole set and theatre is gold in a reference to the baroque era as well as to Elvis' own identification with gold as the universal symbol for the wealth of kings, and as a stylized reference to all of his gold records.

Acrobatic equipment – larger than life

Given its larger than life scale – as befits a show about Elvis – some of the acrobatic equipment could be considered part of the set design, too:

- A tubular aluminum structure measuring 45 feet by 18 feet that supports two acrobats who represent Elvis and his twin brother who died at birth, is instantly recognizable as a guitar.
- A huge 15,000-pound structure that consists of five fixed bars and two sets of parallel bars on three levels, does not so much dominate the stage as blend with Mark Fisher's overall design for the Return to Sender sequence, which represents Elvis's army training.
- Two large hoops – symbolizing Elvis and Priscilla's engagement rings – are seven feet in diameter. Two acrobats perform on each hoop.

"'Larger than life' are the watchwords that inspired our acrobatic approach to Viva ELVIS," says Daniel Cola, the show's Acrobatic Performance Designer.

A few more details

- The superhero characters and the set for Got A Lot of Livin' To Do were inspired by the Marvel comics that Elvis had read since he was a boy.
- The giant lasso used in the Western sequence is 40 feet long, and three giant "cowboys" representing Elvis complete the decor. They are made of fiberglass and measure 35, 31 and 17 feet high.
- The American flag used in the Return to Sender scene is made of genuine long underwear and boxer shorts, and has only 48 stars because Elvis entered the service in 1958, the year before Alaska and Hawaii were admitted to the Union.
- The wedding cake is a scale replica of Elvis and Priscilla's wedding cake.
- The curtain and the stage floor are decorated with golden disks that recall the 151 Elvis Presley albums, singles and EPs that went gold, platinum or multi-platinum in the USA.