



PREVIEW SCREENINGS

Priscilla

Priscilla

Directed by: Sofia Coppola
©: The Apartment S.r.l

An Apartment Pictures production

With: American Zoetrope

Presented by: MUBI, A24, The Apartment Pictures

Executive Producers: Priscilla Presley,

Roman Coppola, Fred Roos, Chris Hatcher

Produced by: Sofia Coppola, Lorenzo Mieli,

Youree Henley

Co-producers: Bumble Ward, Charles Finch

Written by: Sofia Coppola

Based on the Book 'Elvis and Me' Written by:

Priscilla Presley, Sandra Harmon

Director of Photography: Philippe Le Sourd

Film Editor: Sarah Flack

Production Designer: Tamara Deverell

Art Director: Danny Haeblerlin

Costume Designer: Stacey Battat

Original Music by: Sons of Raphael

Production Sound Mixer: Trisha Harris

Re-recording Mixers: Steve Foster, Stephen Barden

Supervising Sound Editor: Nelson Ferreira

Cast:

Cailee Spaeny (*Priscilla Presley*)

Jacob Elordi (*Elvis Presley*)

Rodrigo Fernandez-Stoll (*Alan 'Hog Ears' Rodrigo*)

Daniel Beirne (*Joe*)

Dan Abramovici (*Jerry*)

Tim Dowler-Coltman (*Red*)

Matthew Shaw (*Charlie*)

Dagmara Dominczyk (*Ann Beaulieu*)

Ari Cohen (*Captain Beaulieu*)

Tim Post (*Vernon Presley*)

USA 2023©

113 mins

35mm and Digital

A MUBI release

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If you had somehow forgotten who made *Priscilla*, the very first shot would set you right. Girlish bare feet, sporting a bright coral pedicure, pad across a bedroom, every step sinking deeper into the pink carpet's impossibly fluffy pile. It could almost be the start of a '90s teen comedy, or a madcap '80s Susan Seidelman flick, but there's a sincerity to its sherbetty palette that gives it away. This could only be a Sofia Coppola movie; she is our foremost *auteuse* of a youthful, frilled femininity that is so invested in obvious signifiers it becomes borderline subversive; so full of love for the way things look that it becomes an examination of the way things are.

This talent for creating substance out of surface, and ace contributions from Coppola's regular crew (costume designer Stacey Battat, cinematographer Philippe Le Sourd) make her maybe the perfect filmmaker for this adaptation (co-written by Coppola and Sandra Harmon) of Priscilla Presley's memoir *Elvis and Me*, the very point of which is the inside-outside disconnect between a gradually developing sense of self and a relationship with the most iconic public figure of the time.

The feet belong to Priscilla Beaulieu (Cailee Spaeny, earning her Venice Best Actress award by investing her callow character with a few feathery strands of steel), a 14-year-old schoolgirl living on a US Army base in Germany, convinced of her own ordinariness and bored beyond belief. Of course she knows that Elvis (Jacob Elordi, appealingly thoughtful, toweringly tall), already world-famous, is posted to the same base. But he might be on a distant planet for all the expectation she can have of meeting him.

Then, like the Lana Turner myth that had Turner 'discovered' at the counter of Schwab's drugstore, Priscilla is sitting in a diner, when she is approached by a member of Elvis's entourage – a gaggle of interchangeable young men who physically dominate Priscilla in a manner that exactly inverts Le Sourd's compositions in *The Beguiled* (2017), where Colin Farrell's soldier was buried in the lace and pastels of a girl's boarding school. She's invited to a party at Elvis's house, and pulls out every trick in the book to get her reluctant parents to allow her to go. Eventually they relent.

Like everything in *Priscilla*, Coppola presents this pivotal event without further commentary. Instead, the director's luscious craft swathes the movie as though in ruffled fabric, deceiving the eye as to the lumps and bumps beneath. Priscilla often wonders, amazed, why me? It's the biggest question that *Priscilla* doesn't answer. Because once she's there, at that party, a daisy among gilded lilies, it's less difficult to account for why she caught Elvis's eye, leading to an intense if non-sexual courtship, and her removal to Graceland to finish her schooling and thereafter become his wife. Elvis loves her (because it is a kind of love, however wildly unbalanced its power dynamic) not *despite* her naivete, but because of it. 'Stay the way you are,' he makes her vow on the way to the airport as he leaves Germany. The lure of Priscilla, for Elvis, is the blankness of her slate, and how willing she is to be nothing for anyone else, and everything only for him. It must seem like such a small price to pay for the sublimation of every teenage fangirl's dream.

The irony is that Elvis will make her change everything about herself, where she lives, who she talks to, even the colour of her hair. While she passes idle, lonely weeks in the plush but homestead-y cloister of Graceland, Elvis is out in the world, making music and movies and headlines, linked to a succession of glamorous starlets in tabloid headlines that torture his secret, waiting, pining girlfriend.

It's strange that at this moment of puritanical discourse around unnecessary sex scenes, along comes *Priscilla*, a perfect example of a film that really needs

NEW RELEASES

Priscilla (preview screenings)

Previews from Wed 27 Dec. Opens Fri 5 Jan

The Boy and the Heron (Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka)

From Wed 27 Dec

SCALA!!! Or, the Incredibly Strange Rise and Fall of the World's Wildest Cinema and How It Influenced a Mixed-up Generation of Weirdos and Misfits

From Fri 5 Jan

Werner Herzog: Radical Dreamer

From Fri 19 Jan

RE-RELEASES

The Red Shoes

From Fri 8 Dec

The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser

(Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle)

From Fri 19 Jan

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 15 Jan 18:20

Preview: The End We Start From

+ Q&A with guests tbc

Mon 15 Jan 20:30

Preview: All of Us Strangers

+ Q&A with Andrew Haigh

Wed 17 Jan 18:10

Rock 'n' Roll Cinema

Thu 18 Jan 18:15

In Conversation: Cartoon Saloon's

Tomm Moore, Nora Twomey and Paul Young

Sun 21 Jan 15:15

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview:

Your Fat Friend + Q&A with director Jeanie Finlay

and Aubrey Gordon

Sat 27 Jan 17:50

Shooting the Past 25th Anniversary + Q&A with

writer-director Stephen Poliakoff and actors

Lindsay Duncan and Timothy Spall

Sun 28 Jan 15:00

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a sex scene and doesn't have one. A point is made of Elvis's repeated deferral of the relationship's consummation, and it's hardly prurient to wonder when he stopped deferring, especially given Priscilla's age, and the fact that losing one's virginity is a key moment in anyone's journey to self-realisation. Perhaps we can infer that he finally loves her tender during a montage of several days' worth of dinner plates being piled high outside their shared, tiger-striped bedroom once Priscilla graduates. But Sarah Flack's editing includes many such montages – of Elvis encouraging Priscilla to pop downers and uppers and LSD, of a hedonistic trip to Vegas, of Elvis's short-lived transcendental phase, of the pair snapping sexy photos of each other – and it always feels like they conceal much as they reveal.

Instead, the movie canters by in episodes and interludes which are set, cleverly, not to Elvis songs but to instrumental covers and other loosely period-appropriate tracks, like a perfectly deployed 'Crimson and Clover'. The seventies arrive, and across one swift cut, with infant Lisa Marie in her arms, Priscilla's beehive – so enormous it could house an entire apian colony – collapses into waves hanging loose around her shoulders. Free your hair and your mind will follow: the days are numbered for the marriage, just as the clock runs down on the movie – Coppola is far more interested in captivity than release. And so the whole of the gently heartsore *Priscilla* plays like a letter of drawn-out, loving goodbye, written in painstaking cursive on scented paper and sealed with a chaste, cherry lipgloss kiss.

Jessica Kiang, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2023-24

Cailee Spaeny on 'Priscilla'

Can I ask you how you got the part?

I didn't audition. I got a random call one day, saying, 'Sofia wants to have coffee with you.' And that was literally it. I went, 'OK, that's all I need to hear, I'm packing my bags right now!' We met at a French coffee shop, and she pulled out an iPad and started showing me photos of Priscilla and said, 'I'm really interested in this story, do you know it?' Although I'm an Elvis fan, and I grew up in the South, I hadn't heard her side of the story. Sofia said, 'I think you could pull it off.' There were talks of maybe doing an audition or a chemistry read, but it never happened.

Did you meet Priscilla Presley to prep for the role?

I did. I had all these questions prepped and the second she sat down in front of me, they all went out the window because I was so starstruck. Our first meeting went on for four hours. Then we met a few more times and talked on the phone too.

Your performance really carries this film – you're in nearly every scene. Did you find that difficult?

It was intimidating. I really thought about how she would hold herself. She was a quiet girl, who didn't say a lot, but internalised everything. She was incredibly sweet but also had this fierceness behind her. We had to get that right. We had to show this woman growing in strength without bursting into anger in every scene.

Did you grow up watching Sofia's films?

I was 14 when I found *The Virgin Suicides* and it sort of cracked me open as a teenager. I think it was the first time I ever saw someone give permission to young women in that way, show their dark sides and their wants and needs, to not underestimate them. She has such sensitivity and is really tuned into those stories.

Interview by Nicole Flattery, *Sight and Sound*, December 2023