

# Elvis is everywhere ... as tribute artists

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THE ENTERPRISE

BEAUMONT — With no license or registration required, a count of how many worldwide performers try to bring back a little Elvis magic is impossible.

There's no shortage with at least two competitions planned this week in Memphis.

Sammy Stone Atchison of Beaumont plans to be at one of them, Images of the King.

Atchison started performing as Elvis when lucky audiences still had a chance to see the real thing. Crowds seemed to like his mid-1970s act, Atchison said, so he kept at it. He also has recorded "Elvis-style" country and gospel music.

Atchison saw his inspiration perform live at least six times. In the 1950s were performances in Port Arthur and at Louisiana Hayride. In the late 1960s, he saw a matinee at the Astrodome and stayed for the evening show. Around 1974 there was a Lake Charles, La., show. The last chance came March 30, 1977, in Alexandria, La.

Unlike many tribute artists, Atchison puts little emphasis on mimicking Elvis' stage moves, seeing his voice as close enough to carry him.

"I don't get drastic like some of the other people do," said Atchison, who gave his "music age" as 49, but



Freddie Schwartz performs as Elvis with his band Mid-Life Crisis at Antone's in Downtown Beaumont.

declined to reveal his real one. "They go to extremes and try to do exactly what he does, and that's not possible. ... They'll just destroy themselves and completely exhaust themselves trying to move like he did, and I've never seen anybody that could."

Atchison was not alone in performing as the King before Elvis had left the building.

Elvis Presley Enterprises, which will sponsor an Ultimate Elvis Tribute Artist contest in Memphis this

week, includes on its Web site a letter Elvis sent to a tribute artist less than a month before he died.

In the July 19, 1977, letter, Elvis congratulated "David" on winning a talent competition and wished him luck in an upcoming show.

"Do develop your own special talents and abilities though, David," the letter reads. "This is a great compliment to me that you would work so hard on this act like mine but never neglect your own special abilities to be yourself also."

For Freddie Schwartz of Beaumont, the occasional Elvis costume on stage has been just part of the fun with his band Mid-Life Crisis. He dresses in black leather or gold lame for a few songs from the early years at each gig.

"The rock-and-roll type seems to fit better," Schwartz, 55, said. "I'm not the jumpsuit guy. Then I would really have a mid-life crisis."

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