



Alfred Wertheimer/Courtesy Taschen

'WE'RE GONNA ROCK all our blues away,' Elvis Presley sang at Sun studios in Memphis on Sept. 10, 1954. And so he did, almost from the moment 'That's All Right' hit the radio that summer. In early 1956, Alfred Wertheimer was assigned to photograph their 21-year-old sensation as he prepared to go on the 'Dorsey Brothers Stage Show,' and so followed him around New York, catching every loud rehearsal and quiet moment as he walked the streets, still mostly unknown. In the next year, Mr. Wertheimer took more than 3,000 candid shots of the Hillbilly Cat, some among the most iconic: We see him from the hips down, tapping his heels onstage in white leather shoes, or (in a lush color image) beatifically crooning into a microphone. The events of that year—and a few shots from Presley's stint in Germany in the U.S. Army in 1958—are sumptuously reproduced in 'Elvis Presley and the Birth of Rock

and Roll' (Taschen, 418 pages, \$700). One close-up series simply documents Presley shaving, though he hardly seems to need to: His smooth skin, lush lips and eyebrows mark him as hardly older than the fawning fans who pin him up against the CBS studio door. (They would be scandalized by the steamy embrace of a young woman Mr. Wertheimer captured backstage). Presley's moodiness gives way to a vital intensity, though, when he played—whether strumming guitar backstage or leaping into the air on Dorsey's show. One shot (above) captures him just as a flash bulb from a camera in the crowd creates a starburst above his head, coincidentally reminiscent of the Sun Records logo. It was the quintessential rock 'n' roll moment—and yet, as other images show, Elvis and his trio were performing that day with the backing of a big band. It took awhile to rock away all the blues. —The Editors