

Jerry Lee Lewis & his 13 yr old bride plus How to survive being 13

The Daily mail / The Guardian. With thanks to Nik.



Spivs Comment.

I cover Jerry Lee Lewis quite extensively in my article '[Celebrity Paedophiles](#)'. Never the less, this Daily mail article (below) is well worth a read. Below that, is a 14 yr olds take on how to survive being 13. That too, is also well worth a read.

Great Balls of Scandal: How Jerry Lee Lewis' marriage to a 13-year-old wrecked his career

Among teenagers of a musical bent, there was much anticipation 50 years ago this week.

Jerry Lee Lewis, an American rock and roll singer with long blond hair who played a frenetic boogie woogie piano while standing up, and often with one foot on the keyboard, was on his way to Britain for a six-week tour.

This may not seem like a big deal today, as rock musicians criss-cross the Atlantic all the time, but in May 1958 it was

thrilling.



Whole lotta trouble goin' on: Jerry Lee Lewis with child bride Myra

To us, that first generation of rock fans, this guy was the real thing.

And that was important, because, having been completely overlooked by Elvis Presley who'd never come to Britain (and who was by then in the U.S. Army, anyway), there was a feeling that we were getting everything second-hand and missing all the fun.

True, we'd had a couple of would-be early rock stars of our

own, but they were limp counterfeits like Tommy Steele, who already seemed to have one eye on becoming the dreaded all-round entertainers.

Jerry Lee Lewis, however, or, "The Killer", as he was known, had enjoyed two classic worldwide hits with Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On and Great Balls Of Fire, and had even appeared in a Hollywood rock film, High School Confidential.

Nor was he middle-aged like Bill Haley. He was young and vital.

Could he possibly live up to his advance billing, those of us who bought the music papers wondered, as we read about him on our way to school.

Would he be the wild man of the Louisiana swamps we'd been led to believe?

No sooner had he landed at Heathrow than we had our answer, in no small part due to the inquiries of a Daily Mail reporter called Paul Tanfield.

Meeting the star at the airport, Tanfield noticed that there was a very young girl in The Killer's party. Tanfield asked whom she might be.

"I'm Myra," answered the girl. "Jerry's wife."

Tanfield was astonished. "And how old is Myra?" he asked Jerry Lee.



‘The Killer’: Jerry Lee Lewis’ nickname

“Fifteen,” the singer replied, obviously thinking that sounded suitably mature.

It wasn’t. Despite Lewis’s assertions that Myra was “a grown woman”, as far as Britain was concerned, she was below the age of consent.

The headlines the next day were not good for the star’s first day in Britain.

But they were about to get much worse when it was quickly discovered that Lewis, 22 at the time of the wedding, had been lying.

Myra wasn’t 15. She was 13, and, therefore, absolutely not a “grown woman”.

What's more, she was the singer's first cousin once removed.

And if that wasn't enough, it was also revealed that he may have been bigamously married to her, since he hadn't yet become divorced from his second wife, whom he'd married at 17, having wed his first wife at 14.

If you're becoming confused, think how we must have felt back in 1958 as the hillbilly courting behaviour of some citizens of America's Deep South unfolded in our newspapers.

We'd heard about the phenomenon of the child bride in fiction from the Tennessee Williams' play and the film *Baby Doll*. But buttoned-up, respectable, repressed Fifties Britain had never come across the real thing before.

With Jerry Lee, the Louisiana swamps had exceeded all expectations in what they had thrown up.

Goodness gracious, as the man himself was wont to sing. This furore soon was great balls of fire!

In this way began one of the most extraordinary episodes in the history of rock music – and, let's face it, there have been quite a few.

Right from the beginning, rock and roll music had been soaked in scandal, perhaps not too surprisingly when it's remembered that the actual words "rock and roll" had been, in black American nightclubs, a euphemism for sexual activity long before they became associated with music.



Legendary: Their marriage portrayed in 1989 film Great Balls Of Fire, with Dennis Quaid as Jerry and Winona Ryder as Myra

So, when the music swept the world a couple of years earlier, teachers, preachers, parents and pundits alike had been quick to fulminate against the youthful, on-stage gyrations of Elvis Presley, describing them as obscene, and to read into the lyrics of rock songs a lewd carnality which was probably accurate but being missed by most young fans.

Up to this point, however, most of the outrage against rock had happened in America. Now, as Jerry Lee Lewis and Myra arrived in London, a storm of outrage erupted here, too.

And instantly the fashionable Westbury Hotel in London's Mayfair, into which The Killer's retinue was booked, found itself besieged by competing armies of fans, the Press, police and outraged citizens.

To start with, Lewis seemed to find it difficult to understand what all the fuss was about.

In fact, initially he was quite pleased with all the publicity he was getting.

While, for her part, Myra was happy watching children's

television in their suite, chirpily telling anyone who would listen that although her husband had given her a red Cadillac, what she really wanted was a wedding ring.

Were this to happen today, any star would instantly surround himself with a legion of publicists who would do their utmost to put a positive gloss on the situation – not the easiest of tasks, I have to admit.

Come to think of it, just about impossible.

But those were less sophisticated times when it came to media manipulation.

The best thing to do, Jerry Lee decided, was to get on with his tour as if nothing had happened, and, since he maintained he was a God-fearing country boy, to ask the good Lord for help.

Consequently, it is said, he and his whole entourage fell down on their knees and prayed for a full hour before he took the stage at the Gaumont State, Kilburn, North London.

For some reason, God doesn't seem to have been listening – but then in the Southern states where Lewis came from, many people believed that rock and roll was the Devil's music.

Whatever the reason, nothing stopped The Killer, dressed in what was described witheringly in one newspaper as a "custard-coloured jacket", making his British debut to a half-full theatre with a performance that was repeatedly interrupted by whistles and boos and cries of "cradle snatcher" from the audience.



2005: Jerry in Essen, Germany, while touring Europe with Little Richard and Chuck Berry

Off stage, things were getting much, much worse.

On learning of Myra's age, the police had turned up at the Westbury Hotel to interview the star and his bride, after which their notes were passed on to the Director of Public Prosecutions to see if any British laws had been broken.

Meanwhile, in the House of Commons, the Home Office minister, Iain Macleod, was called upon to answer questions from MPs.

Jerry Lee thought he could struggle on and win the fans round. By now, however, the posh Westbury Hotel had had enough.

The star was asked to leave.

Desperately, Lewis and his manager tried to explain that it wasn't that unusual for girls of 13 to marry in Mississippi, and that the marriage to Myra couldn't have been bigamous, because at the time of Jerry Lee's second marriage he'd still been married to his first wife.

Thus the second marriage had been null and void, and as he was now divorced from the first wife, everything was fine and dandy!

Neither the newspaper reporters nor the Rank and Grade organisations, in whose theatres the Jerry Lee concerts were to have taken place, were convinced.

After only three appearances, the tour was cancelled, and Jerry Lee and Myra, his managers and hangers-on, were back on a plane to America.

A little less than nine months later, Myra gave birth to a boy.

The maker of some classic rock hits he might have been, but The Killer's career never properly recovered. He became a musical pariah.

And after disc jockeys around the world refused to play his records, he never had another big hit.

From \$10,000-a-night shows, he was reduced to earning \$100 a night.

Myra divorced him in 1970, after 12 years of marriage when she

was all of 25, became an estate agent and wrote her autobiography, *Great Balls Of Fire*, which was filmed with Dennis Quaid as Jerry Lee and Winona Ryder as Myra.

The scandal of 1958 proved, however, to have lasting effects in quite different ways.

It may have been coincidental, but very quickly attempts were made in America to clean up the image of rock and roll.

Payola investigations were begun and several famous disc jockeys were revealed as having taken bribes to play records.

And when the mighty Elvis himself fell in love with a 14-year-old girl, Priscilla Beaulieu, the following year, steps were taken to make sure that not a word of scandal leaked out.

As for us here in Britain, within a few months, we'd come up with our own pop star, someone whose reputation was, and would remain, cleaner than clean.

His name was Cliff Richard.

One thing, however, couldn't be denied. Although the affair had ruined the career of Jerry Lee Lewis, it had also made him very famous, infamous, actually.

And as the Fifties rolled into the Sixties, rock Svengalis would soon see that the right kind of scandal, carefully managed and well publicised, could work wonders for the careers of rock stars.

Five years later, Andrew Loog Oldham, the young manager of the Rolling Stones, would give a masterclass in how this could be done.

While the nicely-turned out Beatles began to find fame by sticking carefully, in public, anyway, to the goody-goody script neatly mapped out for them by their manager Brian Epstein, Oldham did everything he could to grab outrageous

headlines for the five, gurning, rebellious Rolling Stones.

Stunt followed stunt, from urinating in public, to singing more blatantly than anyone else about sex.

If there was a rule to be broken, the Stones broke it, and in the process built legends for themselves as the bad boys of rock and roll.

Indeed, by the mid-Sixties it had got to the point that just about anything could be believed about them, whether true or not.

There never was a Mars Bar at that party with Marianne Faithfull down at Keith Richards' house in 1967, but anyone who had followed their careers in the newspapers believed there was, and the band didn't mind at all.

Confrontational in the extreme, they milked scandal about themselves for all it was worth.

Of course, as with Jerry Lee Lewis and every other rock attraction, there were always a lot of girls involved, though none as young as Myra Lewis – at least, not until, having left the band, 47-year-old bass player Bill Wyman fell for 13-year-old Mandy Smith.

He married her when she was 18.

By the Seventies, outrageous behaviour had become synonymous with rock music, as groups vied with each other for publicity. Some set their amplifiers on fire on stage while others drove cars or pushed grand pianos into swimming pools.

It was all about creating controversy, getting headlines, and nothing to do with music.

Thus the punk group the Sex Pistols swore on television, Ozzy Osbourne was alleged to have bitten the head off a bat and Madonna disgracefully mimed having sex on Top Of The Pops.

And so it goes on, as every new generation of stars struggles to be noticed in the rush.

Sometimes, of course, publicity isn't sought, as both Michael Jackson and Phil Spector have recently found in lurid and tragic circumstances.

But, believe me, the bigger the headlines about rock music the greater the stepping stones to stardom.

Quite what Jerry Lee Lewis thinks about the behaviour of some of today's musicians would be worth knowing.

Today, at 73, after suffering from bouts of alcoholism and depression, he still tours.

Appreciated by some stalwart fans as one of the pioneers of rock and roll, he is remembered by most of us, if at all, for that week in London 50 years ago when his bizarre marital life shocked the nation.

How to survive being 13

The Guardian

A Netmums survey suggests that 13 is the most difficult age of all. A 14-year-old explains how to get through it



Be careful what pictures you put on Facebook ... Photograph: Alamy

According to a [Netmums survey](#), 13 is the most difficult age. But it's not only parents who find it hard going – it's tough for the teenagers too. Here's how to make it through to being 14, by Miranda Smith, aged 14 and four months.

1. Don't put up [pictures of yourself on Facebook](#) with a bottle of WKD beside you and a comment like: "Got SO drunk last night." No one thinks it's cool – and WKD is only 4% proof.

2. You're going to feel a whole lot more grumpy when you're 13 than you did at 12. But the thing is it's not just you – every other 13-year-old feels exactly the same. Knowing that helps a bit.

3. It's tempting, but [try not to be on your phone 24/7](#). It really bugs your parents but, worse, it's boring for your friends.

4. Thirteen is the age when you're likely to start getting

attention from the opposite sex. Don't get carried away by this – there's nothing more moist than a lovesick 13-year-old.

5. [Don't send pictures of yourself in your underwear to ANYONE](#) – because they'll end up being spread around, and you'll regret it.

6. Your friends will annoy you, make you angry and get on your nerves. But don't insult them on Twitter – 13-year-olds do that all the time. [Twitter is a public forum](#), and if you start tweeting about your issues anyone can get involved even if it's none of their business.

7. A few months ago, you hardly thought about your body at all. Now it's the only thing on your mind. Of course your body matters: but the thing to think is that no one else notices it as much as you do. So try to chill about it.

8. At precisely the moment when you decide there's no better way to spend a Saturday than staying in bed til late afternoon, your parents will become obsessed with you doing the chores for them. Rule of thumb: you can only say, "I'll do it later," five times. After that, just do it.

9. Thirteen-year-olds have massive fights with their friends, all the time. A year on, you won't even remember what those fights were about – but you will remember how unhappy they made you feel.

10. Plan a really good party for when you reach 14. When the parents say they want to be around you'll think, "OMG no," ... but it's probably going to be best to let them stay. Agree on the conditions, and stick to your side of the bargain provided they stick to theirs.

As told to Joanna Moorhead