

## Old But Not the Least Bit Tired

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BY VICKY PETERS



Photo of A Neon Rome (Neal Arbick, Ian Blurton, Kevin Nizel, John Borra, Bernard Maiezza) at the Beverly, 1985, by Bruce Lam.

Tonight's [Elvis Monday](#) showcase at the [Drake Underground](#) signifies twenty-five years since the very first Elvis Monday at the Beverly Tavern in 1983. The anniversary caught many former regulars off-guard—probably some current regulars as well. A twenty-five year history carries with it the weight of institution, whereas Elvis Mondays has always been more of a low-key insiders' affair, a favourite haunt of its regular roster of musicians. Last year [Ca Va Cool](#) blogger Renante Rondina [mentioned a conversation](#) he had had in the Bathurst Subway station with two members of [Spiral Beach](#), in which they had secretly confided to him the existence of Elvis Mondays but had added that “no one is supposed to know about them.”

The most remarkable legacy of Elvis Mondays is the sense of community it has fostered amongst successive generations of Toronto indie musicians. The continued practice of giving certain bands an Elvis Monday month-long residency (or in the case of The Ground, eight months) keeps the same people returning time and again. The ties forged during the Monday stints often last for years, with bands continuing to play together long after they graduate from their first Elvis Mondays gigs. “All the people I hung with [the summer of 1985], or met, have become my longest and best friends,” says drummer Joel Wasson. His first Elvis Mondays gig at the Beverly Tavern was in a band called Big King Corpse with guitarist Scott McCullough, who went on to found Montreal greats [The Doughboys](#). “It was like *Cheers* for me,” adds Sticky Rice guitarist [Paula Tiberius](#), who made her first stage appearance at an Elvis Monday in the '90s as a singer. “And what the fuck else are you doing on a Monday night?”



Photo of Disco Jesus (Crocky Teasedale, Soraya Rashid, Joel Wasson, Bernard Maiezza) at the Silver Dollar, 1988, by Bruce Lam, courtesy of Bernard Maiezza.

Elvis Mondays began when William New dreamt up a publicity stunt to promote a show his band Groovy Religion was playing—he said he needed to raise money to get to Memphis and marry the 13-year-old [Lisa Marie Presley](#). The band's three-night run at the Beverly Tavern was so successful that they were invited to host a weekly gig every Monday, the bar's slowest night. The gigs were always shared with a roster of regular Beverly bands, but they also became an important venue for newer performers such as [Meryn Cadell](#) or [The Cowboy Junkies](#) to cut their teeth on. The resident host reins were handed over to former [Forgotten Rebel](#) [Chris Houston](#) a year later, and then on to [A Neon Rome](#) (the band immortalized in Bruce McDonald's first film, *Roadkill*) the year after that. But the Beverly fun came to an abrupt end one night during A Neon Rome's tenure. A bar brawl broke out after a drunken yahoo decided to use the roof of a car belonging to one of the musicians as a trampoline, caving it in. Mic stand-wielding musicians faced down the drunken hooligans, the police were called, and A Neon Rome were permanently banned from the bar. The Beverly itself was transformed into a glorified commissary within the year when pop-music megalith [MuchMusic](#) moved into the newly renovated [Methodist Church headquarters](#) across the street.



Photo of Spiral Beach (taken at the Phoenix) by David Topping.

[Elvis Mondays](#) has always had a very supportive atmosphere for trying out the new—perhaps because there's less pressure playing on the slowest night of the week, or perhaps because the bands have almost always been booked by other musicians, and not by club owners or promoters. It's a great place for young musicians—like [Cory Martin](#) and [Billy Talent](#)—to get their first shot on stage in Toronto. But it's also a great setting in which established bands can experiment. [Change of Heart](#) tried out their first gig with new

drummer John Richardson at an Elvis Monday in 1992. **Spiral Beach** played secretly just this year using the fake name “Skunt” to test out fresh songs and perfect their new live show. The opportunity for younger musicians to socialize with their mentors has been a critical factor in the success of Elvis Mondays’ long run. The experiments aren’t always successful, though. **C’Mon’s Ian Blurton** recalls a band he formed with Mike Dent called Sudden Puppies that consisted of whoever happened to be around at Elvis Mondays that night and felt like joining in. He says, “We only played Elvis Mondays. We never jammed and had no songs.”

The regular Monday night gig has had a few retirements over the years, whether caused by bar brawls, foreclosures (like the original 1150 Queen), flooding (like in the basement bathrooms of the Soup, the club under the **Paddock**), or simply lack of interest. William muses that he’s never been the one to initiate its resurrection, but that the request to do so always seems to reflect that the time is right. This latest run at the Drake Hotel, combined with the earlier run in the entirely different pre-renovated Drake of the ’90s, make it the longest running host venue.

The success of the latest incarnation of **Elvis Mondays** speaks to its continued relevance. When asked about any particularly fond memories, William New responds that this year’s **Spiral Beach** show (as Skunt) with **The Miles** was one of the best Elvis Monday shows he’s seen. Ever. And that it is incredibly satisfying that he can still be moved by rock ‘n’ roll music after twenty-five years.

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