

## Just because your favorite singer is dead doesn't mean you can't see them 'live'

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### Warm-up question:

If you could witness any historical event or performance in an immersive experience, what would it be and why?

**Listen:** Link to audio [[HERE](#)]

### Read:

A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

Elvis is making a **comeback** this fall in an **immersive** theater experience in London. Its creators say Elvis Evolution will use the latest in AI technology to bring the late so-called King of rock 'n' roll back to life. As NPR's Chloe Veltman reports, many stage shows featuring dead or absent celebrities make use of a magic trick that's nearly 200 years old.

CHLOE VELTMAN, BYLINE: Concert experiences headlined by simulations instead of live artists have captured the public imagination. Tupac Shakur's posthumous appearance at California's Coachella festival back in 2012 is a cultural touchpoint to this day.

VELTMAN: Audiences continue to flock to the ongoing ABBA Voyage experience in London.

VELTMAN: And there's been lots of **chatter** over the past couple of months about the **forthcoming** Elvis Evolution.

VELTMAN: But there's something we should clear up about these hologram shows before we go any further.

PAUL DEBEVEC: None of these are technically a hologram.

VELTMAN: Paul Debevec is a researcher at the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies. He says holograms are

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actually three-dimensional still images created by laser technology, like the security icon on a credit card. And we can blame a little sci-fi movie made back in 1977 for the word's misuse.

DEBEVEC: If you watch the movie "Star Wars," they use holograms to mean a person suspended floating in space.

DEBEVEC: The whole help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi effect - that certainly **captured the popular imagination**.

VELTMAN: So if the theatrical reincarnations of Elvis and his **ilk** aren't holograms, what then are they?

VELTMAN: Andrew McGuinness is the CEO and founder of Layered Reality, the London-based company behind Elvis Evolution, as well as two other high-tech immersive experiences currently running in London, The War Of The Worlds and The Gunpowder Plot. He says the technology for putting the King back on the concert stage can essentially be broken down into two parts.

ANDREW MCGUINNESS: First of all is how we will create the content, and that's where the AI comes into it.

VELTMAN: McGuinness says his company acquired the global rights for the creation of an immersive entertainment experience based on Elvis and his story and, as a result, is feeding all sorts of stuff from the star's official **archives** - hundreds of hours of video footage, photos, music - into a computer model. This model effectively learns in minute detail how Elvis sings, talks, dances and walks.

MCGUINNESS: For example, if a performance of Elvis was originally shot from the front, we will be able to show you a camera angle from behind that was never actually shot.

VELTMAN: The second part of the process involves delivering this AI Elvis in a way that will make him seem real to live theater audiences. That's where **a slew of** other technologies, including an old stage trick called Pepper's ghost, come in.

JIM STEINMEYER: I think audiences would be surprised going to see these, quote, "**state-of-the-art**" displays that what they're looking at is something from 1862.

VELTMAN: That's Jim Steinmeyer. He's a designer of stage illusions who also writes books about magic history, including one about Pepper's ghost.

STEINMEYER: It was used to put a three-dimensional ghost on stage interacting with actors.

VELTMAN: Steinmeyer says the Victorian trick originally involved an actor dressed as a ghost hidden beneath the stage.

STEINMEYER: And then an angled piece of glass would let you see the actors on the stage. But it would also work to reflect the actor that was concealed.

VELTMAN: British engineer Henry Dircks first came up with the concept.

STEINMEYER: It should've been called Dircks' ghost, and Dircks was bitter about that for many, many years.

VELTMAN: But Steinmeyer says scientist John Henry Pepper, a P.T. Barnum-like figure who created elaborate, crowd-pleasing public lectures in London, turned Pepper's ghost into a truly workable system.

STEINMEYER: It was a scientific **novelty**, but it was a kind of fantastic visual success. Since then, it's been used in many different forms.

VELTMAN: Outside of concert settings, this old illusion has shown up in all sorts of places, among them the 1931 movie romance "Daddy Long Legs..."

VELTMAN: ...Where spectral figures play the organ and waltz across the ballroom. Layered Reality CEO Andrew McGuinness says he's excited to bring together these old and new technologies for Elvis Evolution. But ultimately, he says, it all needs to be **in service of** the audience's emotional journey.

MCGUINNESS: What I dream about is for people to forget about the technology **in its entirety**.

VELTMAN: McGuinness says he wants people who attend the show to feel like they've really seen Elvis perform. Chloe Veltman, NPR News.

### Vocabulary and Phrases:

1. **A comeback:** A return to popularity or public attention.
2. **Immersive:** Providing or involving a completely engaging experience.
3. **Chatter:** Informal talk or discussion, usually about unimportant matters.
4. **Forthcoming:** About to happen or appear.
5. **Capture the popular imagination:** To become something that a lot of people find exciting, interesting, or appealing.
6. **Archives:** A collection of historical documents or records.
7. **A slew of:** A large number or quantity of something.
8. **State-of-the-art:** The most recent stage in the development of a product, incorporating the newest ideas and features.
9. **Novelty:** The quality of being new, original, or unusual.
10. **In service of:** Done for the benefit of or in order to achieve something.
11. **In its entirety:** Completely; as a whole.

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. What is the name of the immersive theater experience featuring Elvis?
2. Why do people often confuse the technology used in shows like Elvis Evolution with holograms?
3. How is the content for Elvis Evolution created using AI?
4. What old stage trick is used to create the illusion of three-dimensional figures on stage?
5. Why does Andrew McGuinness emphasize the importance of the technology being in service of the audience's emotional journey?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What do you think about the use of technology to recreate performances of artists who have passed away? Is it respectful to their legacy?
2. How do you think immersive theater experiences compare to traditional live performances? Would you prefer one over the other?
3. Discuss the ethical considerations of using an artist's image and performance in shows like Elvis Evolution. Who should have the rights to an artist's archives?
4. Imagine you could create an immersive experience featuring any artist, past or present. Who would you choose and why?
5. How can technology enhance the storytelling and experience of theater and concerts?