

history theatre



Buddy- The Buddy Holly Story

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Buddy Holly 1936-1959



Charles Hardin Holley was born on September 7, 1936 in Lubbock, Texas. Being the youngest of four children, he was always called "Buddy" by his family. Holly, the popularized spelling of his last name, came later from a spelling error in a record contract. His two older brothers taught him how to play the guitar and, at age eleven, he began taking piano lessons, but soon switched to the steel guitar. Thoroughly inspired by the blues and country that he heard on the radio, Holly won five dollars at age five singing **Down the River of Memories**.

In 1951, Holly met Bob Montgomery, a fellow seventh-grader at Hutchinson Jr. High, who also played guitar and sang country songs. By the time Holly and Montgomery entered high school, they were growing their audience by appearing at youth clubs, performing music they now dubbed as "Western and Bop."

Local radio stations also developed Holly and Montgomery's career. KDAV, the nation's first all-country radio station, held a weekly "Sunday Party" live on air, where Holly and Montgomery were frequent guests. In fact, their popularity grew so much they were given their own half-hour program each Sunday. Their repertoire remained primarily country, with Bob Montgomery singing lead. However, as 1954 progressed, Holly began to sing more numbers on the show. Although Montgomery was the principal composer during their partnership, Holly also began to write.

In addition to airing the "Sunday Party," KDAV also had the duo open local shows. The opening performance for Bill Haley & His Comets, organized by Eddie Crandall, played a crucial role in the advancement of Holly's career. As a result of that performance, he was offered and signed a contract to record country music on the Decca label in 1956. The first session was in Nashville on January 26, 1956, and held at producer Owen Bradley's recording studio. Don Guess, another Lubbock boy, played bass with Sonny Curtis on lead guitar. Drummer Jerry Allison, who was still in high school at the time, sat in for only one session.

On the label, his name "Buddy Holly" was spelled for the first time and adopted for his professional career from then on. Although reviewed favorably in the trade press, the country record did not do well in the marketplace. Holly recorded a number of records that went nowhere, but when select songs were re-recorded as a rock version, would become popular. Among them was **That'll Be the Day** that, recorded as a rock song, would be one of his biggest hits.

Along with genre struggles, recording with Decca was tense from the beginning. Ow-

en Bradley, who was the producer at Decca, would not let Holly use his own musicians. Holly thought that the recordings were bland and confronted Bradley about his lack of input in his music. Bradley told him that if he didn't cooperate, he would never record at Decca or in Nashville again, going as far as to call Holly the biggest no-talent he had ever worked with. On January 22, 1957, Decca informed Holly that his contract would not be renewed and insisted that he could not rerecord any of the songs from his sessions for five years.

After the split with Decca, Holly returned to Texas and began to write prolifically. Holly and drummer Jerry Allison started opening for known stars, including once for Elvis Presley who influenced Holly's move to rock and roll. In February of 1957, Holly and his new band The Crickets, drove to their new manager Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico to cut a demo. **That Will Be The Day** was released on May 27, 1957. The record was released under the Brunswick label, which was a subsidiary of Decca. To bypass Decca's legal rights, the song was released naming The Crickets as the performers. The song rose to number one by September and was an international multimillion dollar seller. This led to an appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on December 1, 1957. Holly and the band also went on a national tour, with one stop being the Apollo Theatre for six nights in August 16-22, 1957. It took several performances for the audience to warm up to the rockabilly style, but once they were accepted, Holly and the Crickets brought down the house. At the time, they were the only all white band touring in black neighborhood venues.



Under his contract with Petty, some of the songs were released under The Crickets and others by Holly's name. Holly's first hit under his own name was the song **Peggy Sue**, named in honor of Allison's girlfriend. It would eventually become one of Holly's biggest hits.

On February 28, 1958, Holly and The Crickets arrived in London to begin a twenty-five day tour in the UK. The tour was a big success and The Crickets remained a major group in the UK throughout their career.



In 1958, Holly met Maria Elena Santiago; a secretary for a New York music publishing company. He proposed to her on their first date and they married in Lubbock on August 15, 1958, less than two months from the date that they met. Holly wrote the song **True Love Ways** about his relationship with his wife. It was recorded in her presence on October 21, 1958.



Picture - Buddy Holly and The Crickets' appearance of The Ed Sullivan Show on January 26, 1958.

Holly began thinking that The Crickets should move their operation to New York and start producing their own records, breaking their professional relationship with Norman Petty. His band mates, however, wanted to stay with Petty and return to Lubbock. On November 3, 1958, Holly terminated his business relationship with The Crickets and Petty and moved to New York City.

After Holly's split from his band and producer, Norman Petty collected The Crickets royalty checks and kept them for himself, leading to legal problems. Unhappy with this situation, Holly hired renown lawyer Harold Orenstein to collect his part of the royalties.

With the money still being held and bills becoming due, Holly was forced to go on the road. Holly was offered by GAC Agency (General Amusement Agency) and reluctantly joined the Winter Dance Party Tour. Without his friends, Holly had to decide who would back him up musically. He chose Tommy Allsup to play lead guitar, Waylon Jennings on bass, and Carl Bunch on drums. After a few days of rehearsal in Holly's Greenwich Village apartment, the four got on a train to meet the other groups, beginning the tour on January 23, 1959 in Milwaukee, WI.

Half way through the grueling one-night stands through the snowy Midwest, Holly chartered a plane to the next stop of the tour. He called his two-month pregnant wife on the pay phone in the lobby of the Surf Ballroom and told her about the miserable conditions on the road and they talked about future plans. He told her he had chartered a plane to the next gig so that he could do laundry and get some much needed rest. Shortly after the plane took off, it crashed in a nearby cornfield, killing all on board.

Holly's funeral was held on February 7, 1959 at the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Lubbock and is buried in the town's cemetery. Holly's headstone carries the correct spelling of his name, Buddy Holley. It also features a carving of his favorite guitar. Holly's pregnant wife did not attend the funeral and miscarried soon after.

Buddy Holly only released three albums in his lifetime. Regardless, he made an enormous impact on music. The single **It Doesn't Matter Anymore** was released and made it to #13 on the hit chart after his death in 1959. He left behind enough demos and uncompleted recordings to be overdubbed and released posthumously for ten years.

The music of Holly and The Crickets, with their innovative use of the studio and writing of their own music, displayed an emotional intimacy and sense of detail that set them apart from other 1950's bands that still resonates today. Holly's music inspired and influenced contemporary and later musicians including The Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Elvis Costello.

In 1986, Holly was in the first group of inductees to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in New York City. Holly's widow, Maria Elena, accepted on Buddy's behalf.



Waylon Jennings, Buddy Holly, and Tommy Allsup at the Surf Club Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa.

1956

Blue Days, Black Nights
Modern Don Juan

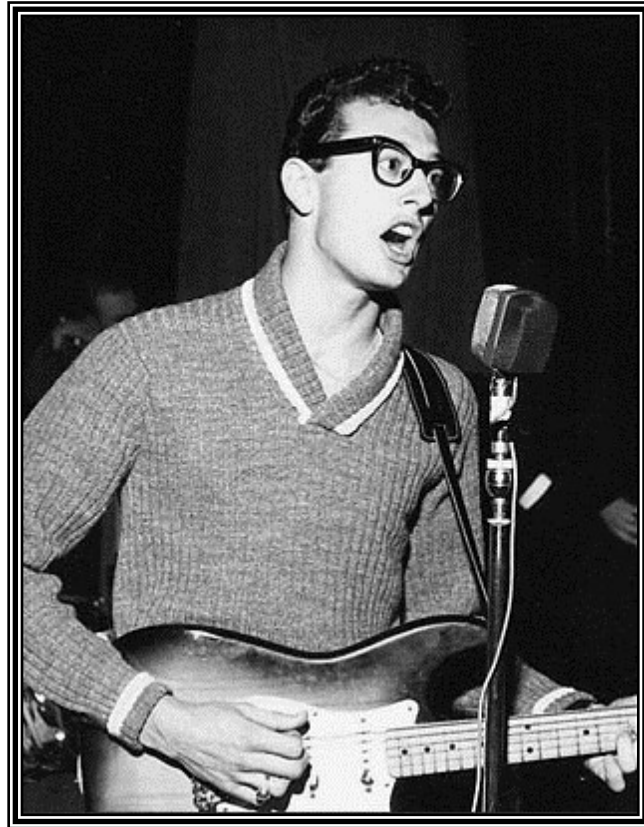
Buddy Holly's Singles

1957

That'll Be the Day
Mailman, Bring Me No More Blues
Words of Love
Rock Around With Ollie Vee
Peggy Sue
Everyday
Oh Boy
Not Fade Away

1958

Love Me
Your Are My One Desire
I'm Gonna Love You Too
Listen To Me
Maybe Baby
Tell Me How
Rave On
Take Your Time
Think It Over
Fool's Paradise
Girl On My Mind
Ting-A-Ling
Early In The Morning
Now We're One
It's So Easy
Lonesome Tears
Real Wild Child
Oh You Beautiful Doll
Well All Right
Heartbeat



1959

It Doesn't Matter Anymore
Raining In My Heart
Peggy Sue Got Married
Crying, Waiting, Hoping

Post humorous- Songs were overdubbed from unissued recordings. Songs were also rereleased with redubbing. Rereleased songs are not listed.

True Love Ways (60)
That Makes It Tough (60)
Reminiscing (62)
Wait Until The Sun Shines, Nellie (62)
Bo Diddley (63)
Brown Eyed Handsome Man (63)
Wishing (63)
What To Do (65)
Slippin' And Slidin' (65)
Love Is Strange (69)
You're The One (69)

The Crickets



Jerry Allison

Jerry Allison was born on August 1, 1939 in Hillsboro, TX. He joined Buddy Holly as his accompanist early in Holly's career, and for a time playing around Lubbock, TX. When Holly had his first, unsuccessful recording sessions in Nashville in 1956, Allison was there playing drums. That band, christened The Crickets in early 1957, took the form of a trio and sometimes quartet. But Allison was more than just part of the rhythm section—the delicacy and variety of his playing made him part of the melody, his tom-toms and snare work often serving to highlight aspects of the melody and the guitar parts, or even the lyrics. Allison also contributed substantially to the group's songwriting. He was a composer in his own right and responsible for a good portion of the content of **Peggy Sue** and many other Holly songs. Following the split with Holly in late 1958 and Holly's death in February of 1959, Allison became the leader of the Crickets. He also occasionally assumed the role of singer with the group, and has led versions of the group—frequently with other longtime members—across the decades since. Allison is considered one of the first important drummers to emerge in rock and roll and rockabilly music. In 2012, he was inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of fame to correct the mistake of not including the Crickets when Buddy Holly was inducted in 1986.



Sonny Curtis

Born in Meadow, Texas on May 9, 1937, Sonny Curtis grew up in a musical family and learned how to play the fiddle and guitar at a young age. Curtis recorded his first solo recording **Because You Love Me** in June of 1955 which also featured Buddy Holly. He went to Nashville in 1956 to perform on Buddy's Decca Sessions. When Holly opted for the rock sound and Sonny wanted a bluegrass sound, they parted ways. Curtis went on to play guitar for Slim Whitman, an American country singer. After the tour ended, he went to KPIK radio in Colorado Springs and began to develop his writing skills. His first success was **Someday** written for Webb Pierce. He then went on to work with artists such as Red Sovine, Carl Smith and Ronnie Self. After Holly died, Curtis was recruited as the guitarist for the new version of The Crickets that featured Earl Sinks on vocals. When Sinks left, Curtis took over on lead vocals. After he was drafted, David Box took over as the lead singer. Curtis rejoined the band after

David Box was killed in a plane crash that was taking him and fellow band members to a gig. In the 60's and 70's, Curtis returned to writing music, including the song **Love is All Around** – the theme song for the Mary Tyler Moore Show. In 1978, unhappy with the biopic of Buddy, Curtis wrote the song **The Real Buddy Holly Story**. In 1995, he returned to the Crickets as lead vocalist and is still currently with the group. In 2012, Curtis was also inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.



Joe Maudlin

Joe Maudlin was born July 8, 1940 in Lubbock, Texas. Had it not been for Larry Welborn's inability to play a gig in New Mexico, Joe might well never have found a career beyond his native town. However, Welborn was unable to play and it was Maudlin who signed on as a member of the Crickets. By mid 1958, he was among the most well known bassists in the country. Maudlin initially joined with Jerry Allison on the side of producer/manager Norman Petty in the split that took place between Holly and the others in late 1958. He did have second thoughts soon after, and, with Allison, had hoped to mend fences with Holly. He was one of the pallbearers at Holly's funeral in February of 1959, and remained a member of the Crickets through 1965.

Maudlin eventually moved into sound engineering, and was closely associated with Gold Star Studios in Los Angeles beginning in the 1960's. He also played behind country musicians, usually credited as Benson Maudlin, and has rejoined Allison in various performing and recording incarnations of the Crickets in the decades since. In 2012, he was inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame along with the other members of The Crickets.



Niki Sullivan

Niki Sullivan, born on June 23, 1937 in Lubbock, Texas, toured and recorded as a member of Buddy Holly's band during their climb to stardom in 1957. He met Holly at a jam session in Lubbock in the fall of 1956. His name will forever be associated with many of Holly's hits, including **That'll Be The Day**, for which he sang back-up vocals and played rhythm guitar. On **Peggy Sue**, after many attempts, Sullivan knelt at Holly's side and flipped the switch on his guitar, enabling Holly to achieve the masterpiece guitar break in the piece. In addition to playing rhythm guitar, Sullivan also did backing vocals on **Not Fade Away** and the early, cha-cha version of **Maybe Baby**. Sullivan was with The Crickets when they made their historic appearance at the famed Apollo Theater in New York City. He was also featured on the cover of the group's **Chirpin' Crickets** LP appeared with the Crickets when they were on the Ed Sullivan Show. After their appearance on

that show, Sullivan left the group and eventually retired from the recording business altogether and took a job at Sony. He died suddenly in 2004 of a heart attack. He was posthumously inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall with the other members of The Crickets.



Ritchie Valens 1941-1959



Richard Steven Valenzuela was born on May 13, 1941 in Pacoima; a neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles. He was the youngest son of Joseph Steven Valenzuela and Concepcion "Connie" Reyes. In 1944, his parent divorced and Valens lived mostly with his father. He also spent a considerable amount of time with his Aunt Ernestine and Uncle Reyes.

Richard showed interest in music around age five. By age eleven, he learned how to play the guitar, trumpet and drums. By the time he hit junior high, he was taking his guitar everywhere, entertaining his friends and appearing in variety shows.

When he turned sixteen, Valens joined a local band called the Silhouettes as their guitar player. When the lead vocalist left the band; Valens took over singing. They soon became local stars. During this time, he was heavily influenced by Mexican folk songs, R&B and country music.

In May of 1958 Bob Keane, owner of a small record label, went to see the Silhouettes play. Keane was impressed enough to have Richard have a formal session for his record label Del-Fi. The contract was signed on May 27, 1958.

This was the point in Valen's life that his name was changed. Keane thought that there were too many Richies in the music business, so they decided on Ritchie. His last name was also changed to Valens to broaden his appeal to White Americans.

Valen's first single ***Come On, Let's Go*** was released locally in the early summer of 1958. The song became a hit throughout Los Angeles. By August, it was released nationally and sold a half of a million copies.

Valens went on a short tour after ***Come on, Let's Go*** became a hit. One of his first stops was Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* on Oct. 6, 1958. When he returned to Los Angeles, he began recording his biggest hit. The ballad ***Donna*** was written about his high school sweetheart and went to #2 on the charts. The flip side of that record was ***La Bamba***, a reworking of a traditional Mexican folk song.

Although ***La Bamba*** only hit #22 in the pop charts, it is considered by many his most influential recording; not only as a hit, but for blending Latino music with rock and roll. Interestingly, the Valenzuela family only spoke English in the home. Ritchie only knew a little Spanish, so he had to learn the lyrics to ***La Bamba*** phonetically.

On January 23, 1959, Valens joined the Winter Dance Party. He flipped a coin and won a seat on the plane Holly had chartered for after their Clear Lake, Iowa performance. He had only recently overcome a huge fear of flying due to his performance schedule the summer before, his fear stemming from a freak two-plane collision that happened on January 31, 1957. The crash happened above his school's playground while he was away at his grandfather's funeral. The crash killed and injured several of his friends.

On February 3, 1959, he lost his life in the plane crash with Holly. He was only 17 years old. He is interred in the San Fernando Mission Cemetery in Mission Hills, California.

Valens' recording career lasted only eight months, but his career was impactful. He is considered the first Latino to ever successfully cross over into rock and roll and his music inspired such groups as Los Lobos, Carlos Santana and Los Lonely Boys. Ritchie was inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001.

Ritchie Valens Singles

1958

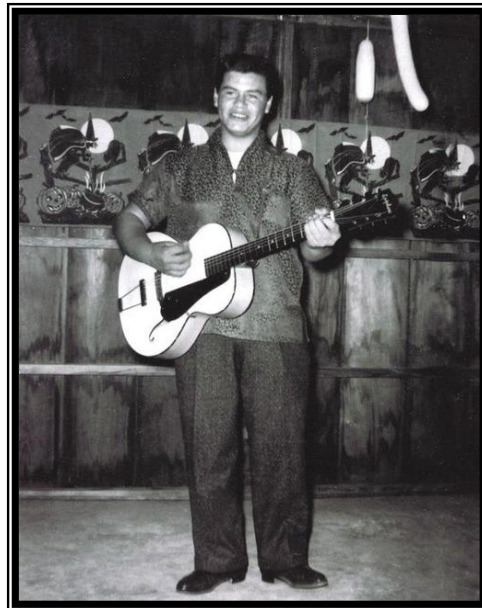
Think It Over
Fool's Paradise
Early In The Morning
It's So Easy
Heartbeat

1959

Fast Freight
Big Baby Blues
That's My Little Suzie
In a Turkish Town
Little Girl
We Belong Together
Stay Beside Me
Big Baby Blues

1960

The Paddiwack Song
Cry, Cry, Cry



Jiles Perry Richardson, Jr. The Big Bopper 1930-1959



Jiles Perry Richardson, Jr. was born on October 24, 1930 in Sabine Pass, Texas. His parents, Jiles and Elsie, moved their three boys to Beaumont, Texas soon after. Following graduating from high school in 1947, he studied pre-law at LaMar College. During his college years, he was a member of the band and chorus and played the guitar with the Johnny Lampson Combo.

Jiles worked part-time for the radio station KTRM in Beaumont during college. He was hired full time in 1949 and quit college. In 1953, he was promoted as Supervisor of Announcers at KTRM, the same year his daughter Debra Joy was born to he and his wife, Adrienne Joy Fryou.

In 1955, Jiles was drafted into the Army and served his two years as a radar instructor at Fort Bliss in Texas. After his discharge, he returned to the radio station where he became the Station Program Director. He also covered the 3-6 pm on air time slot. At this time he started calling himself The Big Bopper.

In 1957, he broke the record for the longest on-air broadcast, performing for five days, two hours and eight minutes.

Richardson started his professional music career as a song writer. He wrote George Jones ***White Lightning***, which became Jones first number one hit. He also wrote Johnny Preston's ***Running Bear*** with Richardson singing backup in the song. The song was released in September after his death and it soon became a number one hit.

Harold Daily signed The Big Bopper to his Mercury Record label in the summer of 1958. His first single ***Beggar to a King*** failed to gain leverage on the charts, but his next song ***Chantilly Lace*** became a top ten hit and spent 22 weeks on the top 40.

Richardson is credited for coining the term *music video* in 1959. He was convinced that videos were the wave of the future. He wanted to produce videos for television and develop juke boxes that would play them and recorded a music video of ***Chantilly Lace*** and two other songs 1959. However the business venture was cut short by his untimely death.

With the success of ***Chantilly Lace*** and his follow up song ***The Big Bopper's Wedding***, Richardson took a leave of absence from the radio station and joined the Winter Dance Party Tour. The Big Bopper was not feeling well during the performance at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa. He talked his way into getting a seat on the plane that took his life.

His son, Jay Perry, who was born two months after The Big Bopper's death, had his father's remains exhumed in January of 2007. He had an autopsy performed to see if he had initially survived the crash. Due to how far The Bopper's body was found from the crash site, there had been speculation that he had walked away from the disaster. The autopsy, however, found that he had died instantly. He was reburied at Beaumont's Forest Lawn Cemetery.

Richardson had only wanted to stay in the singing business long enough to make enough money to start ventures he was interested in. He was building a recording studio at the time of his death, he had written 20 songs for himself and other artists to record, and was also planning to invest in a radio station. Although not yet inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, The Bopper was inducted in the Rockabilly Hall of Fame in 1997 and the Texas Radio Hall of Fame in 2008.

Big Bopper Singles

1957

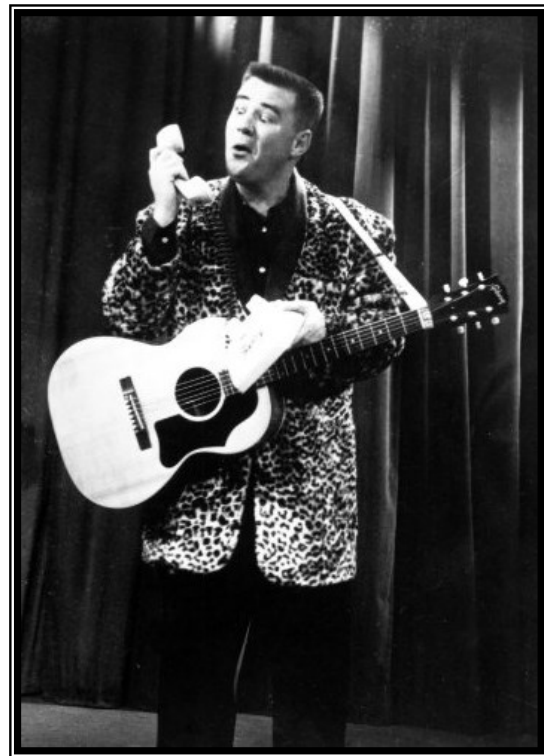
Beggar to a King
Crazy Blues

1958

Chantilly Lace
Big Boppers Wedding
The Purple People Eater Meets The Witch Doctor
Little Red Riding Hood
Monkey Song
Teenage Moon
Walking Through My Dreams

1959

Someone Watchin Over You
It's The Truth Ruth
Pink Petticoats
The Clock



Dion and The Belmonts



Dion DiMucci was born in the Bronx, New York on July 18, 1939. He is credited with melding doo-wop and R&B musical styles, though many remember him for his teen idol status. Dion began a singing career in his early teens, and made his first TV appearance on a show called *Teen Club* in 1951. He later recorded ***The Chosen Few*** with a group called The Timberlanes.

In 1957, DiMucci rounded up the best singers he could find and began rehearsing on the subways heading into Manhattan. They called themselves Dion and the Belmonts, after Belmont Street in the Bronx. The group included tenor Fred Milano, tenor Angelo D'Aleo and bass singer Carlo Mastrangelo. By 1958, the group had its first hit with the doo-wop sounding ***I Wonder Why***. Released the first week of May, 1958 it was on the national charts two weeks later. Before the month was out, they were on Dick Clark's Saturday night CBS-TV show. Their next song ***Teenager In Love*** was released the next winter and they soon joined the Winter Dance Party Tour.

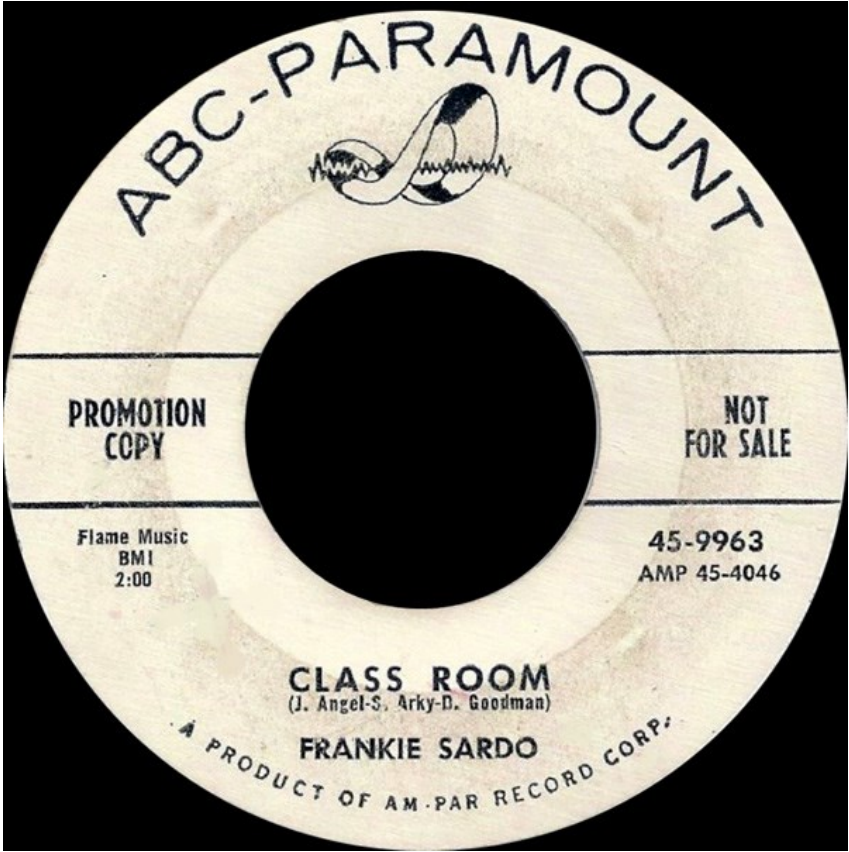
On the night of February 2, 1959, Dion was offered a spot on the plane chartered in Clear Lake, Iowa. He, however, balked at the price of the plane ride. \$36 was more than his parent's paid on rent for a month for their apartment in New York, so he declined a seat on the plane. After the crash, Dion and the Belmonts continued with the tour. Bobby Vee and Jimmy Clanton were added to the line up. Dion broke from the Belmonts in October of 1960 and started a solo career. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1989.

Frankie Sardo



The Italian Frankie Sardo was born in 1939 in New York City. He made his musical debut at age five by acting, singing, and dancing with his parents in Italian theatres. Upon graduating from high school, he continued to produce and act in plays, joined a comedy team, and then teamed with his brother to record under the name Frankie and Johnny.

In 1959, he recorded a new solo song written by his brother called **Fake Out** for the record label ABC-Paramount. He was soon invited to join the Winter Dance Party tour. He continued with the tour after the fatal night; performing alone with Dion and the Belmonts at the next stop - Moorhead, MN. Sardo continued to record until 1962. He quit performing and then went into record production and film producing.



Winter Dance Party Tour

The Winter Dance Party Tour was planned to cover twenty-four cities in a short three week time frame (January 23 - February 15, 1959). It was a grueling schedule, planned in the middle of the winter in the Midwest. The tour was not logistically well planned out, with the schedule often hundreds of miles apart from one another as the route went from one state to another and then back again. The winter of 1959 was also one of the coldest and snowiest winters in decades.



Buddy Holly joined the tour because he needed the money. He was newly married and had recently broken with his band mates The Crickets and left his record company. Holly would be the headliner with Carl Bunch, Waylon Jennings and Tommy Allsup as his backup musicians. Ritchie Valens, probably the hottest of the artists at the time, Frankie Sardo, Dion and the Belmonts and The Big Bopper would round out the list of performers.

The Surf Ballroom was not a planned stop on the tour. There was a three-day hole in the schedule that was filled at a later date. The show at the Surf Ballroom cost \$1.25 and about 1,500 people showed up on short notice for the show.

Between acts, the talent would come out and talk to the audience. People could tell that they were tired and a few of them were not feeling well. Buddy Holly played drums for each band due to Carl Bunch getting frostbite on the charter bus that was often without heat.

The concert lasted until just before midnight. Holly declared after his final song **Brown Eyed Handsome Man**. "Good night! We've got a plane to catch but we'll be back in spring!"



ITINERARY FOR
WINTER DANCE PARTY
JANUARY 23 - FEBRUARY 15, 1959

BUDDY BULLY & THE CRICKETS
THE BIG BOY/ER
DON AND THE BELMONTS
RITCHIE VALENS
FRANKIE SARDO

- JANUARY 23 GEORGE DEVINE'S BALLROOM, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN
- JANUARY 24 KENOSHA, WISCONSIN
- JANUARY 25 KATO BALLROOM, MANKATO, MINNESOTA
- JANUARY 26
- JANUARY 27 FIESTA BALLROOM, MONTEVIDEO, MINN.
- JANUARY 28 FROM BALLROOM, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
- JANUARY 29 CAPITOL THEATRE, DAVENPORT, IOWA
- JANUARY 30 LARAMOR BALLROOM, FORT DODGE, IOWA
- JANUARY 31 ARMORY, DULUTH, MINN.
- FEBRUARY 1 CINDERELLA BALLROOM, APPLETON, WISCONSIN- AFTERNOON
RIVERSIDE BALLROOM, GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN- EVENING
- FEBRUARY 2 *Clear Lake's*
- FEBRUARY 3 *Sioux City Moorhead Minn.*
- FEBRUARY 4 *SOUL CITY*
- FEBRUARY 5 VAL AIR BALLROOM, DES MOINES, IOWA
- FEBRUARY 6 DANCELAND BALLROOM, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA
- FEBRUARY 7 LES DUXE BALLROOM, SPRING VALLEY, ILL.
- FEBRUARY 8 ARAGON BALLROOM, CHICAGO, ILL.
- FEBRUARY 9 HIPPODROME AUDITORIUM, WATERLOO, IOWA
- FEBRUARY 10 MELODY HILL, DUBUQUE, IOWA
- FEBRUARY 11 MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM, LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
- FEBRUARY 12 MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM, CANTON, OHIO
- FEBRUARY 13 STANBAUGH AUDITORIUM, YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO
- FEBRUARY 14 PEORIA, ILL.
- FEBRUARY 15 SPRINGFIELD, ILL.



The itinerary for the Winter Dance Party Tour. You can see that Clear Lake, Iowa-Moorhead, MN - and Sioux City, Iowa were penciled in at a later date.

The Day the Music Died February 3, 1959

During the Winter Dance Party Tour, the musicians traveled on an old tour bus which had developed heating problems. It was so cold onboard that Carl Bunch, Buddy Holly's drummer, developed frostbite riding in it. He was dropped off in Iron Horse, Wisconsin after the Green Bay performance for medical treatment. When they arrived at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, the singers were cold and tired.

Buddy Holly had had enough of the unheated bus and decided to charter plane to Fargo, North Dakota for the next concert in Moorhead, Minnesota. Dwyer Flying Service received the charter; which was billed at \$36 per person for a single engine Beechcraft Bonanza, with 21 year old Roger Peterson as the pilot.

The plane was chartered for Holly and his back-up band. Waylon Jennings gave his seat up to The Big Bopper who was running a fever and had trouble fitting his stocky frame comfortably into the bus seats. When Holly learned that Jennings wasn't going to fly, he said, "Well, I hope your old bus freezes up." Jennings responded, "Well, I hope your plane crashes." This friendly banter of friends would haunt Jennings for years.



After the dance was over that night, Allsup came back into the ballroom to make sure everything was loaded. Ritchie was very tired; he had been playing drums for Buddy. He was coming down with a cold and wasn't feeling well, and kept asking if he could go on the plane in Allsup's spot. Allsup flipped a half-dollar for the remaining seat. Valens won the toss and the seat. Allsup had a special delivery to pick up in Fargo, so he gave Buddy his wallet so that he could pick it up for him when he got there. This caused Allsup to be identified at first as one of the victims of the plane crash.

Arrangements for the flight had been made by Mr. Carroll Anderson, manager of the Surf Ballroom. Mr. Anderson drove the three passengers to the airport in his family automobile. Accompanying him were his wife and 8-year-old son. They saw the plane take off and make its circle to take up its course.

The weather for February 3, 1959 showed a cold front with strong winds extending

from Nebraska through Minnesota with widespread snow activity. Temperatures were such that moderate to heavy icing would happen at 3,000 feet. Advisories were put out regarding visibility, ceilings and freezing that would cause icing and snow. When the Civil Aeronautics interviewed the controllers after the crash, they stated that none of the advisories were brought to the attention of Pilot Peterson. Dwyer stated, however, that he and Peterson had called the tower at least 4 times asking for the latest on the weather.

The plane took off a little after 1 a.m. and got about five miles northwest of the Mason City Municipal Airport. The official aircraft accident report states: "The aircraft was observed to take off toward the south in a normal manner, turn and climb to an estimated altitude of 800 feet, and then head to a northwesterly direction. When approximately 5 miles had been traversed, the tail light of the aircraft was seen to descend gradually until it disappeared from sight." Following this, many unsuccessful attempts were made to contact the aircraft by radio.

The plane was located in an open field the next morning around 9:35 a.m. The wreckage laid about 1/2 mile west from the nearest gravel road and the farm homes of the Albert and Delbert Juhl. The main part of the plane lay against the barbed wire fence at the north end of the stubble field in which it came to earth. Examination of the wreckage indicated that the first impact with the ground was made by the right wingtip at a speed of 160-175 miles per hour. Parts were scattered over a distance of 540 feet. The shape of the mass of wreckage approximated a ball with one wing sticking up diagonally from one side. The body of Roger Peterson was enclosed by wreckage with only the legs visible sticking upward. Richard Valenzuela's body was south, lying prone, 17 feet from the wreckage; Charles Holley's body, also in the prone position, was lying southwest, 17 feet from the wreckage; and J.P. Richardson's body, lying partly prone and partly on the right side, was 40 feet northwest of the wreckage across the fence in a picked cornfield. None of the seat buckles were found around the victims.

The conclusion by the Civil Aeronautics Board was that at night, with overcast skies, falling snow, no horizon, the pilot made an unwise decision to embark on a flight that he was not properly certified to do.

Discussion Questions and Class Activities

1. What obstacles did Buddy Holly have to overcome to allow him to show his talent?
2. What did Buddy Holly contribute to American society?
3. Assess Buddy Holly's contribution to the evolution of popular music, with examples of his influence on subsequent generations of artists.
4. Would Buddy Holly have become such an icon had he not died at 22? Present examples in your argument of musicians who have died and become icons in a similar way. You might also like to speculate about what might have become of Buddy had he not died at such a young age.
5. In terms of the historical and cultural context of the show, what events, movements, groups and experiences, might have influenced Buddy and his music?
6. Play some Buddy Holly songs and then play some early Beatles songs. Ask the students to identify which portions of the Beatles songs derive from Buddy Holly's music.
7. Why was there a moment of tension when Buddy Holly and The Crickets were introduced to the black audience at the Apollo Theater? Why were they so well received by that same audience when they began to play?
8. Write B-U-D-D-Y-H-O-L-L-Y vertically on the chalkboard. Invite students to name a word or phrase about his life that is associated with each letter.
9. Imagine you are a parent of a teenager in the late 1950's. Write a letter to the editor to a local newspaper expressing your disapproval of rock and roll. Give examples of why you are concerned. Use the website: history-of-rock.com and click on Teenagers of the 50's for insight.
10. Divide the class into groups. Give each group one of the following people: Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper, Richie Valens, Dion, Niki Sullivan, Joe Maudlin, Sony Curtis and Jerry Allison. Have them design a Facebook page for them including personal information, a friend list, some posts they may have written and any other important information.
11. Choose three current musicians and write a paragraph explaining what you think the reaction would be from fans, the media and other groups if they were to die in a plane crash.

American Pie & The Day The Music Died

1. As students enter the classroom, have recording of Don McLean's "American Pie" playing.
2. As students are settled, ask students if they can identify the song they are hearing. Ask them when they think the song was first popular and what it might have been about?
3. Read the following transcript: "In January, 1972, the pop chart was topped by the 8 minute melancholy review of rock's first 15 years. Mournful and enigmatic, Don McLean's ballad 'American Pie' struck an emotional chord with a nation exhausted by conflict."
4. Watch the video interpretation of "American Pie" by Don McLean. Ask students to focus on the story being told, the lyrics, as you play the recording of "American Pie." Ask students what story they think is being told in this ballad.

YouTube: The Meaning of American Pie:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ycgegp0KdE4>

5. Review with students the composer Don McLean's comment about the song: "I wanted to combine a sense of what was going on in the country politically with what was happening musically and do it almost as if it were a dream." You may also point out the comment from Ira Jackson, former aide to Boston mayor. "It was a plaintive cry of remorse about some chapters in American life. It was about a culture losing its innocence, losing some of the best of its youth." (If appropriate, discuss the political climate of 1972.)
6. Ask students if they have heard of Buddy Holly and the Crickets, identifying him as a rock and roll singer who died in a plane crash in Iowa in 1959 along with singing stars The Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens. The song "American Pie" laments his death as "The day the music died"--or the end of an era of rock and roll music.
7. You can watch the story of the Winter Dance Party:

YouTube: Behind the Music: The Day the Music Died

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SvoFBssgHLE>

8. If your students are interested in further research on the lyrics, have them go to <http://wilstar.com/midi/americanpie.htm>. This website gives notation for each symbolic line in the song. You could have them prepare a report on their interpretations of the lyrics.

9. Have students interview their parents or other adult relatives or family friends about "American Pie." Have them ask the following questions and then share their findings orally with the class.

- A. Do you remember when you first heard "American Pie"?
- B. Did the lyrics had any special meanings? What do you recall was the meaning?
- C. Were there different interpretations of the lyrics? And what were they?
- D. Did you and your friends like the song? Do you still?



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