

*Buddy*

The **BUDDY HOLLY** Story



**BACKSTAGE** GUIDE

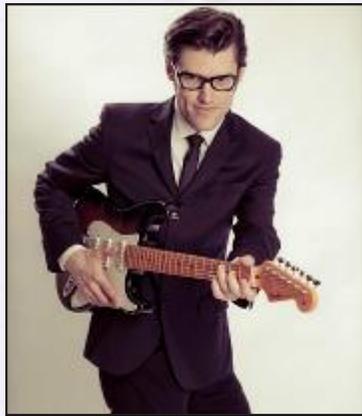
A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at  
**AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

## BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

# BUDDY - THE BUDDY HOLLY STORY

Written by Alan Janes

Directed by Lili-Anne Brown  
Music directed by Michael Mahler\*



Zachary Stevenson as Buddy Holly

Before the Beatles or the Rolling Stones ever played a note, rock & roll was forever changed by the bespectacled kid from Texas. *Buddy* tells the true story of Buddy Holly through his short – yet spectacular – career and features the classic songs “That’ll be the Day”, “Peggy Sue”, and the Big Bopper’s “Chantilly Lace”, Richie Valens’s “La Bamba”, plus many more.

*\* Ensemble member of American Blues Theater*

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## BACKSTAGE Contributors

Elyse Dolan  
Assistant Producer  
American Blues Theater

with Gwendolyn Whiteside, Michael Mahler,  
Rick Sims, and Sarah E. Ross



## NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR **GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE**



Artistic Director  
Gwendolyn Whiteside

Welcome to the final production of American Blues Theater's 32<sup>nd</sup> season "The Beat Goes On". We proudly present a revival of *Buddy – The Buddy Holly Story* for Chicago audiences.

Charles Hardin Holley (nicknamed "Buddy" in childhood) was born in Lubbock, Texas during the Great Depression. His early music was influenced by the gospel, country, and rhythm & blues genres. After opening for Elvis Presley at the age of nineteen, Buddy shifted his aesthetic to rock & roll. Due to a simple typo on his record contract – a missing "e" in his surname – the name "Buddy Holly" stuck, as did his infectious tunes.

In his too-short life, he wrote, recorded, and produced his own material. He's regarded as one of the most significant figures in the birth of rock music. He's often cited as the innovator of the traditional rock lineup of instruments – two guitars, bass, and drums.

Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and Elton John all name Buddy Holly as a major inspiration in their respective careers. John Lennon and Paul McCartney paid homage to Buddy Holly & The Crickets by naming their band after another insect. McCartney even owns the publishing rights to the entire Holly song catalogue.

Buddy Holly is an American music icon. Lost too soon, we're fortunate to have his vast songbook and recordings. American Blues is thrilled to share his legacy with the next generation. It's our mission to partner each production with great causes. For *Buddy – The Buddy Holly Story*, we offer complimentary tickets to students of Chicago Public School and Guitars Over Guns. In addition, our extraordinarily talented artists will visit assisted-living facilities to give mini-concerts.

From the young to old, Buddy Holly's music appeals to all ages. His songs will fill your heart with a hopeful spirit. Who couldn't use that? •



Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside addresses the crowd at the 2015 *Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival*

# ABOUT BUDDY HOLLY AND THE CRICKETS

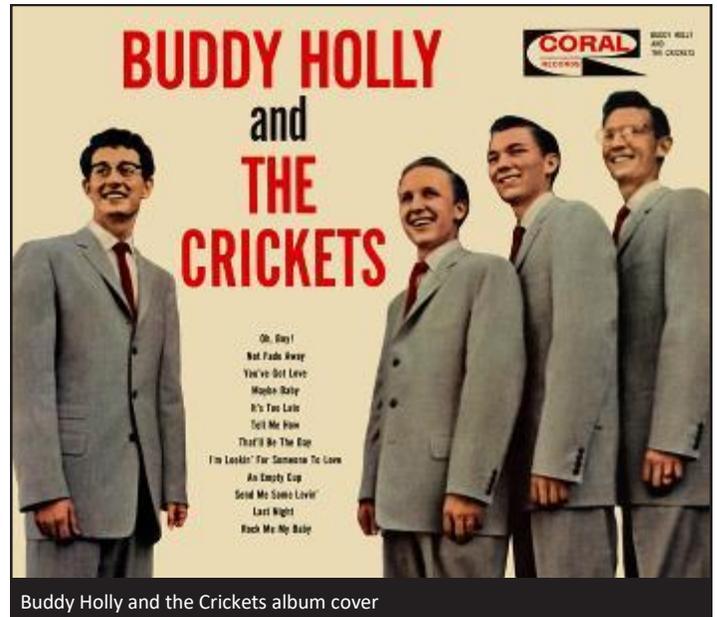
Charles Hardin Holley (September 7, 1936 – February 3, 1959), known as Buddy Holly, was a central figure of mid-1950s rock and roll. He was born in Lubbock, Texas, to a musical family during the Great Depression, and learned to play guitar and sing alongside his siblings. His style was influenced by gospel music, country music, and rhythm and blues acts.

In 1955, after opening for Elvis Presley, Holly decided to pursue a career in music. In October that year, when he opened for Bill Haley & His Comets, he was spotted by Nashville scout Eddie Crandall, who helped him get a contract with Decca Records. In the contract, Decca misspelled Holley's last name as "Holly" and from then on, he was known as "Buddy Holly".

Holly was unhappy with the results of his time with Decca, and decided to visit record producer Norman Petty. Together with drummer Jerry Allison, bassist Joe B. Mauldin, and rhythm guitarist Niki Sullivan, Holly went to Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico. The group recorded a demo of "That'll Be the Day", a song they had previously recorded in Nashville. Now playing lead guitar, Holly achieved the sound he desired. Petty became his manager and sent the record to Brunswick Records in New York City. Holly, still under contract with Decca, could not release the record under his name, so a band name was used; Allison proposed the name "Crickets". In September 1957, as the band toured, "That'll Be the Day" topped charts in the U.S. and the U.K. Its success was followed in October by another major hit, "Peggy Sue".



From top: Jerry Allison, Buddy Holly, and Joe Mauldin



Buddy Holly and the Crickets album cover

During a visit to the offices of Peer-South, Holly met María Elena Santiago. He asked her out on their first meeting and proposed marriage to her on their first date. The wedding took place on August 15, 1958. Petty disapproved of the marriage and advised Holly to keep it secret to avoid upsetting Holly's female fans. Petty's reaction created friction with Holly, who had also started to question Petty's bookkeeping. Holly ended his association with Petty in December 1958, and also split from the Crickets. Petty was still holding the money from the royalties, forcing Holly to form a new band and return to touring.

In early 1959, Holly embarked on a tour of the Midwest called the "Winter Dance Party Tour." After a show in Clear Lake, Iowa, Holly chartered an airplane to travel to his next show. Soon after takeoff, the plane crashed, killing him, Ritchie Valens, J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson, and pilot Roger Peterson in a tragedy later referred to by Don McLean as "The Day the Music Died".

Buddy Holly was a major influence on later popular music artists, including Bob Dylan, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, Weezer, and Elton John. He was among •

## INTERVIEW WITH MUSIC DIRECTOR **MICHAEL MAHLER**

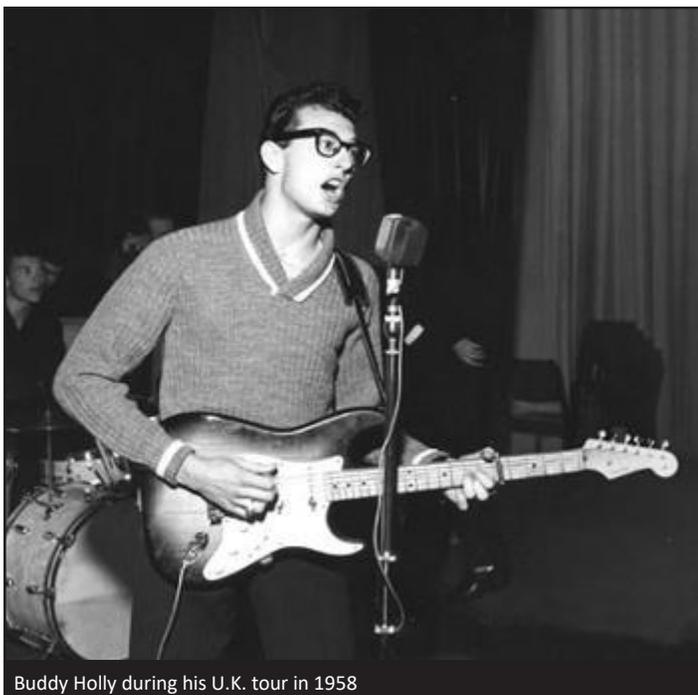
Assistant Producer Elyse Dolan discusses *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story* with Music Director, “Tommy / Cricket”, and American Blues Theater Ensemble member Michael Mahler.

### What excites you most about working on this production of *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story*?

I can't wait to dive deeply back into this music. Buddy Holly's songbook is astonishing, especially considering how briefly he was with us. His songs were simple and true and cut to the heart and made you wanna jump for joy. He had a huge influence on me growing up and paved the way for many of my favorite bands. I'm not sure I'd even be a songwriter today if not for Buddy Holly - he forged the template (along with Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and others) of the rock singer who writes his own material, which was revolutionary at the time. I'm really excited to try, in this production, to make his songbook feel as fresh and dangerous and exciting to today's audience as it did in Buddy's time.



Music Director  
Michael Mahler



Buddy Holly during his U.K. tour in 1958

### What are the duties of a Music Director?

The way a director is in charge of the show as a whole and the choreographer is in charge of the dance routines, I'm in charge of the music. I teach the songs and harmonies to the actors, coach them to make sure they're singing everything well, work with the band to make sure they're playing everything well, and work with the sound designer and rest of the production team to make sure it's sounding great to the audience. Especially for a show like this, in which music is so central, it's my responsibility, along with the director, to make sure the audience has a thrilling theatrical and musical experience.

## Why do you think the music of Buddy Holly has withstood the test of time?

It's the hardest kind of music to write - simple. Like folk music. Not to say it's trite, but rather, its perfect simplicity is what makes it powerful and profound. He struck a chord that resonated with so many people because his songs had something deep to say about the human condition, in a way nobody had said it before. They spoke to what it is to be young. In love. Brokenhearted. Ecstatic. Plus, they're catchy as hell, with a good beat you can tap your feet to.

## Do you have a favorite Buddy Holly song?

I keep coming back to "Everyday". It's one of those songs that feels like it has always existed, like there was never a time before it was a song. It's strange to me to remember that a really young guy made it up in the late '50s. Plus, it was a good song to sing while my wife Dara and I awaited the impending arrival of our first child.

## What will you be working on after *Buddy*?

I'm music directing *Pinkalicious* at the Marriott Theatre, and my musical *Something in the Game* about Knute Rockne is being produced at Northwestern University this summer. I'll be performing a one-man Paul McCartney show (speaking of genius pop composers) on October 24th. And this winter I'll be back at American Blues for another season of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* •



Buddy Holly and the Crickets performing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1957

## DESIGNERS' CORNER: "THE BACKSTORY" WITH RICK SIMS

American Blues Theater Artistic Affiliate Rick Sims is the Sound Designer for *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story*. We asked Rick to share some lesser-known facts about himself in "The Backstory".

### **If I weren't a designer:**

I'd be in a band

### **Childhood nickname:**

Len

### **Best career advice I've received:**

Be nice and say "yes"

### **Favorite part of the job:**

Breaking the code

### **Worst part of the job:**

Not being able to break the code

### **How I made my first dollar:**

Shoveling snow

### **Last meal I'd want:**

Ice cream and more ice cream

### **Favorite item of clothing:**

My tech hoodie

### **If I could invent one thing:**

An alternative self renewable energy source

### **One of my hidden talents:**

I'm pretty adept at carpentry! •

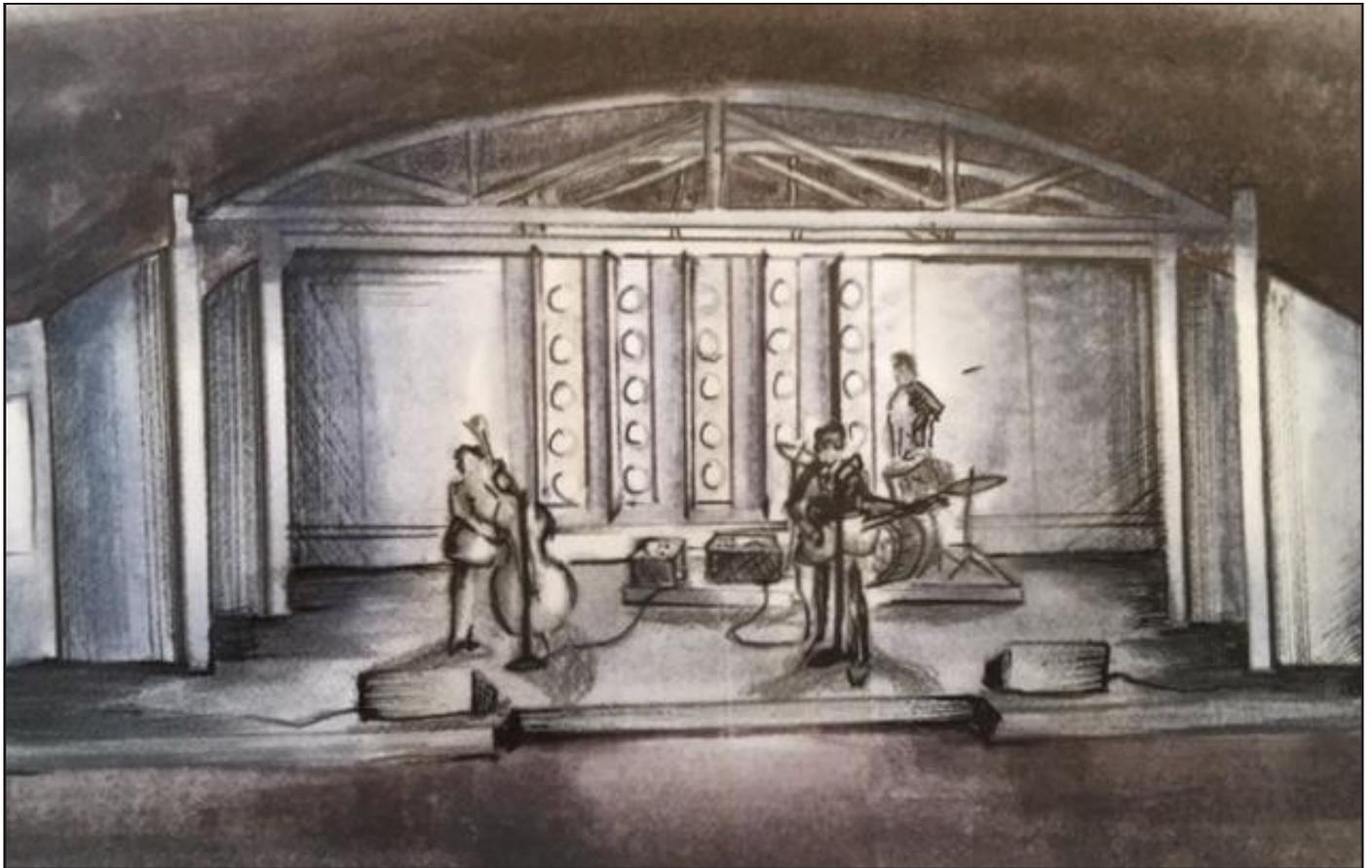


Sound Designer Rick Sims



Sound Designer Rick Sims onstage at the 2015 Equity Jeff Awards

DESIGNERS' CORNER:  
**SPOTLIGHT ON SCENIC DESIGN**



**Above:** Scenic Designer and American Blues Theater Ensemble member Sarah E. Ross shares an early sketch of her design for *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story*.

**Right:** Sarah E. Ross' designs have been previously seen on the American Blues stage in *Collected Stories* (Scenic Design—Jeff Award nomination), *The Rainmaker* (Scenic Design—Jeff Award winner), *Side Man* (Scenic Design), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Puppet Design—Jeff Award nomination), and more!



## TIMELINE OF EVENTS DURING **BUDDY HOLLY'S LIFETIME**

Below is a look at significant international, cultural, and personal events that took place during Buddy Holly's life (1936—1959).

★ **September 7, 1936:** Charles Hardin Holley—known as Buddy Holly—is born in Lubbock, Texas.

**September 1, 1939:** Nazi Germany invades Poland and World War II begins.

**July 27, 1940:** *Billboard* magazine publishes its first music popularity chart.

**December 7, 1941:** Japan attacks Pearl Harbor and the U.S. enters World War II by declaring war on Japan the next day. Three days later, the U.S. declares war against Germany and Italy.

**March 31, 1943:** *Oklahoma!*—the first musical written by the team of composer Richard Rodgers and librettist Oscar Hammerstein II—opens on Broadway.

**April 12, 1945:** Franklin D. Roosevelt dies and Harry S. Truman becomes President.

**August 15, 1945:** Japan surrenders following the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The surrender is formally signed on September 2, 1945, officially ending World War II.

**July 26, 1948:** Truman desegregates the armed forces.

**February 1950:** Senator Joseph McCarthy gains power and McCarthyism begins.

**July 16, 1951:** *The Catcher in the Rye* is published by J. D. Salinger.

★ **1952:** A 16 year old Buddy Holly and friend Jack Neal participate in a talent contest on local television.

**November 4, 1952:** Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected president.

★ **1953:** Buddy Holly joins forces with his friend Bob Montgomery to form the duo "Buddy and Bob". The duo performs on the *Sunday Party* show on KDAV and perform live gigs around Lubbock, Texas.

**May 17, 1954:** *Brown v. Board of Education* is decided.

★ **February 1955:** Buddy Holly opens for Elvis Presley, and then does so again in April and June.



Bill Haley & His Comets

**July 9, 1955:** Rock and roll music enters the mainstream, with "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley & His Comets becoming the first rock record to top the *Billboard* pop charts.

**July 17, 1955:** Disneyland opens at Anaheim, California.

★ **October 1955:** Holly opens for Bill Haley & His Comets where he is seen by a Nashville scout.

**December 1, 1955:** Rosa Parks incites the Montgomery bus boycott.

★ **January 26, 1956:** Buddy Holly attends his first formal recording session and is signed to Decca Records the next month.

★ **April 1956:** Decca releases Holly's "Blue Days, Black Nights" as a single, with "Love Me" on the B-side.

**July 30, 1956:** "In God We Trust" is adopted as national motto.

**September 9, 1956:** Elvis Presley appears on *The Ed Sullivan Show* for the first time.

★ **February 25, 1957:** Dissatisfied with Decca, Buddy Holly and his band go to Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico and record "That'll Be the Day". However, because Holly is still under contract with Decca, they cannot release the record under Buddy's name, so Jerry Allison proposes the name "Crickets".

★ **May 27, 1957:** "That'll be the Day" is released and shortly after the band begins touring as Buddy Holly and the Crickets.

★ **August 16 - 22, 1957:** Buddy Holly and the Crickets play the iconic Apollo Theater in New York City.

★ **August 26, 1957:** Holly appears on *American Bandstand* hosted by Dick Clark.

**September 9, 1957:** the Civil Rights Act of 1957 becomes the first civil rights legislation enacted by Congress since Reconstruction.

**September 1957:** School desegregation begins in Little Rock, Arkansas.

★ **September 20, 1957:** Coral releases "Peggy Sue", backed with "Everyday", with Holly credited as the performer. By October, "Peggy Sue" reaches number three on Billboard's pop chart.

**October 4, 1957:** Soviets launch Sputnik and the "space race" begins.

★ **December 1, 1957:** Buddy Holly and the Crickets perform "That'll Be the Day" and "Peggy Sue" on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Following the appearance, Niki Sullivan leaves the group because of the intensive touring.

★ **January 26, 1958:** Buddy Holly makes his second appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* performing "Oh, Boy!"

★ **February 20, 1958:** Buddy Holly's self-titled solo album is released.

★ **February 1958:** Buddy Holly and the Crickets tour Australia, followed by a 25 city tour in the U.K. in March and a 41 city U.S. tour in April.

**July 29, 1958:** NASA formed as the U.S. begins ramping up efforts to explore space.

★ **August 15, 1958:** Buddy Holly marries Maria Elena Santiago.

★ **December 1958:** Holly ends his association with Norman Petty, and Holly also splits from the Crickets, who are still represented by Petty.

**January 3, 1959:** Alaska became the 49th U.S. state.

★ **January 23, 1959:** The "Winter Dance Party" tour—featuring Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson, Dion and the Belmonts, and Frankie Sardo—begins in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

★ **February 2, 1959:** Buddy Holly performs his final show at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa.

★ **February 3, 1959:** Shortly after 12:55am, Holly, Valens, Richardson, and the pilot Roger Peterson are killed instantly when their plane crashes into a cornfield in Iowa. The event later becomes known as "The Day the Music Died", as named in Don McLean's 1971 song "American Pie". •



Buddy Holly on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1958



Buddy Holly performing at the Surf Ballroom in 1959: his final performance

# WHY BUDDY HOLLY WILL NEVER FADE AWAY

By Philip Norman

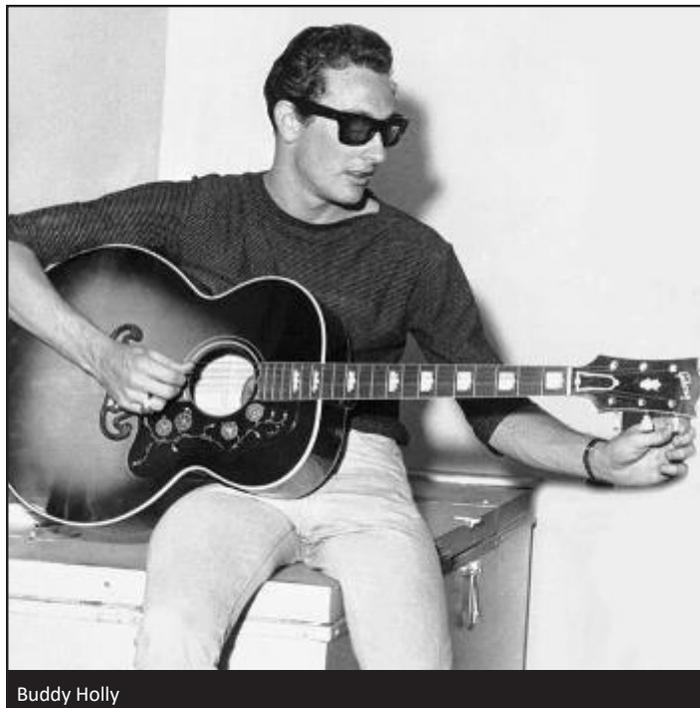
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On the basis of simply counting heads, rock music surpasses even film as the 20th century's most influential art form. By that reckoning, there is a case for calling Buddy Holly—who died in a plane crash on February 3, 1959—the century's most influential musician.

Holly and Elvis Presley are the two seminal figures of 1950s rock and roll, the place where modern rock culture began. Virtually everything we hear on CD or see on film or the concert stage can be traced back to those twin towering icons – Elvis with his drape jacket and swiveling hips and Buddy in big black glasses, brooding over the fretboard of his Fender Stratocaster guitar.

But Presley's contribution to original, visceral rock and roll was little more than that of a gorgeous transient; having unleashed the world-shaking new sound, he soon forsook it for slow ballads, schlock movie musicals, and Las Vegas cabarets. Holly, by contrast, was a pioneer and a revolutionary. His was a multidimensional talent which seemed to arrive fully formed in a medium still largely populated by fumbling amateurs. The songs he co-wrote and performed with his backing band the Crickets remain as fresh and potent today as when recorded on primitive equipment in New Mexico half a century ago: "That'll Be The Day", "Peggy Sue", "Oh, Boy!", and more.

To call someone who died at 22 "the father of rock" is not as fanciful as it seems. As a songwriter, performer, and musician, Holly is the progenitor of virtually every world-class talent to emerge in the Sixties and Seventies. The Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, the Byrds, Eric Clapton, Pete Townshend, and Bruce Springsteen all freely admit they began to play only after Buddy taught them how. Though normal-sighted as a teenager, Elton John donned spectacles in imitation of the famous Holly horn-rims and ruined his eyesight as a result.



Buddy Holly



Buddy Holly and the Crickets performing

Holly's voice is the most imitated, and inimitable, in rock. Hundreds of singers have borrowed its eccentric pronunciation and phrasing. None (except perhaps John Lennon) has exactly caught the curious luster of its tone, its erratic swings from dark to light, from exuberant snarl to tender sigh, nor brought off the "Holly hiccough" which could fracture even the word "well" into eight syllables.



Buddy Holly, Jerry Allison, and Joe Maudlin goofing around backstage

Unlike Presley and other guitar-toting idols of the mid-Fifties, Holly was a gifted instrumentalist who had grown up playing country music in his native West Texas. His playing style became as influential as his voice – the moody drama he could conjure from a shifting sequence of four basic chords, his incisive downstrokes and echoey descants. The deification of the rock guitarist, the sex appeal of the solid-body guitar, the glamour of the Fender brand: all were set in train by Buddy and his sunburst Strat.

Pop music has become an endless recycling, each new generation believing they are the first to discover its repertoire of "cool" and limited palette of sentiments and chords. In the genes of almost every band, Buddy Holly has been there, either by conscious assimilation or via his disciples. "Listen to any new release," says Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones, whose first killer riff was on the 1964 cover of "Not Fade Away". "Buddy will be in it somewhere. His stuff just

works."

Holly's time on the world stage was pitifully short, lasting only from September 1957, when "That'll Be The Day" became an international hit, to February 3, 1959, when he and two fellow performers, Ritchie Valens and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson, fatally decided to fly from Clear Lake, Iowa, to Fargo, North Dakota, to avoid a freezing night on a tour bus. The crash of their chartered aircraft into a snowy stubble-field has become rock's most famous tragedy, enshrined by Don McLean's "American Pie" as "The Day the Music Died".

In 16 crowded months, Holly had created a blueprint for enlightened rock stardom that every newcomer with any pretense at self-respect still aspires to follow. He was the first rock star both talented and strong-minded enough to insist on the artistic control his musical heirs now take for granted. He was the first not only to write his own songs but also to arrange them, directing his backup musicians to his own exacting standards. He was the first to understand and experiment with studio technology, achieving effects with echo, double-tracking, and overdubbing on primitive Ampex recorders which have never been bettered.

He was the first rock star not to be a scowling pretty boy like Elvis – to be, in fact, angular and geeky-looking, with bad skin, discolored teeth, and glasses that did not acquire their stylish black frames until the last months of his life. He was the first to make it on sheer ability, energy, and personality, appealing to a male audience as much as a female one, redefining the perception of good looks and style much as John Lennon and Mick Jagger would in the next decade.

The years since 1959 have seen many other great talents prematurely snuffed out. But Holly's death has a special poignancy. This was no rock and roll roughneck, hell-bent on self-annihilation, but an amiable (and deeply religious) young Texan whose life had not the least taint of scandal, discredit, or unkindness; who had recently married and was about to become a father; who went on tour through the snowy Midwest only because his ex-manager, Norman Petty, refused to pay his royalties; who took that fatal flight with his two colleagues only to snatch a few hours sleep in a hotel and get his laundry done. His fans are numbered in the millions, and grow in number with • each passing year.

## ABOUT THE **APOLLO THEATRE**

Buddy Holly and the Crickets famously played the historic Apollo Theater in New York City for a week-long engagement from August 16 - 22, 1957.

The Apollo Theater in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City is a music hall which is a noted venue for African American performers.

The theater, which has a capacity of 1,506, opened its doors in 1914 as Hurtig & Seamon's New Burlesque Theater, and was designed by George Keister in the neo-Classical style. It became the Apollo in 1934, when it was opened to black patrons – previously it had been a whites-only venue. On February 14, 1934, the first major star to appear at the Apollo was jazz singer and Broadway star Adelaide Hall in Clarence Robinson's production *Chocolate Soldiers*, which featured Sam Wooding's Orchestra. The show ran for a limited engagement and was highly praised by the press, which helped establish the Apollo's reputation.

The Apollo grew to prominence during the Harlem Renaissance of the pre-World War II years. Billing itself as a place "where stars are born and legends are made," the Apollo became famous for launching the careers of artists such as Ella Fitzgerald, who made her singing debut at 17 at the Apollo, on November 21, 1934. Fitzgerald's performances pulled in a weekly audience at the Apollo and she won the opportunity to compete in one of the earliest of its "Amateur Nights". She had originally intended to go on stage and dance, but intimidated by the Edwards Sisters, a local dance duo, she opted to sing instead. She sang Hoagy Carmichael's "Judy" and "The Object of My Affection", a song recorded by the Boswell Sisters, and won the first prize of \$25.00.



The Supremes performing at the Apollo Theater in the early 1960s



The Apollo Theater in Harlem

Jimi Hendrix won the first place prize in an amateur musician contest at the Apollo in 1964. Other performers whose careers started at the Apollo include Billie Holiday, Sammy Davis Jr., James Brown & The Famous Flames, Diana Ross & The Supremes, Gladys Knight & the Pips, The Jackson 5, Patti LaBelle, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Mariah Carey, Lauryn Hill, Sarah Vaughan, Ne-Yo, and Machine Gun Kelly.

Although the theatre concentrated on showcasing African American acts, it also presented white acts such as bandleaders Harry James, Woody Herman, and Charlie Barnet during the swing era, and, later, jazz greats Dave Brubeck, Stan Getz, and Buddy Rich, who was a particular favorite of the Apollo crowd. During the 1950s, several white rock and roll performers whose musical backgrounds were more country music oriented, such as Buddy Holly and Duane Eddy played the Apollo but scored with their audiences by playing blues-styled material.

The theater's audience was often mixed: in the 1940s it was estimated that during the week about 40% of the audience was white, which would go up to 75% for weekend shows.

In 1983, both the interior and exterior of the building were designated as New York City Landmarks and the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1991, the Apollo was purchased by the State of New York, which created the non-profit Apollo Theater Foundation to run it. It is estimated that 1.3 million people visit the Apollo every year. •

## ABOUT THE SURF BALLROOM

Buddy Holly's final performance before his tragic death was at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa on February 2, 1959.



The Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa

The original Surf Ballroom opened on April 17, 1933. It burned down on April 20, 1947 at an estimated loss of \$250,000. On July 1, 1948 it reopened, having been rebuilt across the street from its original location.

The Surf Ballroom is currently owned by the Snyder family of Clear Lake and is open to the public daily. The exterior of the ballroom has changed very little since the 1950s. It still hosts numerous events year round and has a seating capacity of 2,100 and a 6,300-square-foot dance floor. Backstage, in an area known as "The Green Room," acts that have performed on the ballroom's historic stage, such as Little River Band, Loverboy, The Righteous Brothers, The Temptations, The Beach Boys, Waylon Jennings, and Bobby Rydell have signed their names on the whitewashed walls, as well as have had photos of themselves placed on a wall alongside those of early rock and roll pioneers.

On Monday, February 2, 1959, the "Winter Dance Party" tour—featuring Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson, and Dion and the Belmonts—arrived in Clear Lake, Iowa, having driven 350 miles from the previous day's concert in Green Bay. The town had not been a scheduled stop, but the tour promoters, hoping to fill an open date, called the manager of the local Surf Ballroom, Carroll Anderson, and offered him the show. He accepted, and they set the show for that night. By the time Holly arrived at the venue that evening, he was frustrated with the ongoing problems with the bus. The next scheduled destination after Clear Lake was Moorhead, Minnesota, a 365-mile drive north and northwest (and, emphasizing the poor planning, a journey

that would take them directly back through two towns they had already played within the last week.) No let up after that was in sight, as the following day, they were scheduled to travel back almost directly south to Sioux City, Iowa, a 325-mile trip.

Holly, Valens and Richardson left the Surf immediately after the show, going to the nearby Mason City airport and chartering a small plane to take them to Fargo, North Dakota to prepare for their next show at the Moorhead Armory in Minnesota. The plane took off at 12:55 AM Central Time on Tuesday February 3, 1959. Shortly after takeoff, the plane crashed, killing everyone aboard.

A concrete monument was erected outside The Surf, and the ballroom is adorned with large pictures of the three musicians. A street flanking the facility's east property line is named Buddy Holly Place in his honor. Each February since 1979, the Surf Ballroom hosts a "Winter Dance Party" tribute show to honor the lives and legacies of the three stars. The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum designated the Surf Ballroom a historical landmark on January 27, 2009. •



A promotional poster for the "Winter Dance Party" tour

## ABOUT THE BIG BOPPER

J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson and Ritchie Valens were the other two musicians who died in the February 3, 1959 plane crash after playing at the Surf Ballroom on February 2. Both are also featured in *Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story*.

**Jiles Perry "J. P." Richardson Jr.** (October 24, 1930 – February 3, 1959), known as The Big Bopper, was an American musician, songwriter, and disc jockey whose rockabilly look, style, voice, and exuberant personality made him an early rock and roll star. He was born in Sabine Pass, Texas, the oldest son of oil-field worker. Richardson had two younger brothers, Cecil and James. The family soon moved to Beaumont, Texas. Richardson graduated from Beaumont High School in 1947 and then studied prelaw at Lamar College.

Richardson worked part-time at Beaumont, Texas radio station KTRM (now KZZB). He was hired by the station full-time in 1949 and quit college. Richardson married Adrienne Joy Fryou on April 18, 1952, and their daughter Debra Joy was born in December 1953, soon after Richardson was promoted to supervisor of announcers at KTRM.



J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson

In March 1955, he was drafted into the United States Army and did his basic training at Fort Ord, California. He spent the rest of his two-year service as a radar instructor at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. Richardson returned to KTRM radio following his discharge as a corporal in March 1957. One of the station's sponsors wanted Richardson for a new time slot, and suggested an idea for a show. Richardson had seen college students doing a dance called The Bop, and he decided to call himself "The Big Bopper". His new radio show ran from 3:00 to 6:00 pm, and he soon became the station's program director.

The man who launched Richardson as a recording artist was Harold "Pappy" Daily from Houston. Richardson's first single, "Beggar to a King", had a country flavor, but failed to gain any chart action. He soon cut "Chantilly Lace" as "The Big Bopper" for Pappy Daily's D label. Mercury bought the recording and released it at the end of June, 1958. It slowly began picking up airplay through July and August, and reached #6 on the pop charts spending 22 weeks in the national Top 40. In November 1958, he scored a second hit, a raucous novelty tune entitled "The Big Bopper's Wedding", in which Richardson pretends to be getting cold feet at the altar. Both "Chantilly Lace" and "Big Bopper's Wedding" were receiving top 40 radio airplay through January 1959.

With the success of "Chantilly Lace", Richardson took time off from KTRM radio and joined Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, Dion and the Belmonts, and Frankie Sardo for the "Winter Dance Party" tour starting on January 23, 1959. On the 11th night of the tour, the musicians played the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa. On February 3, 1959, Richardson died in a plane crash, along with Holly, Valens, and pilot Roger Peterson. The accident was famously referred to as "The Day the Music Died" in Don McLean's 1971 song "American Pie".

Richardson was survived by his wife Adrienne Joy Wenner (1936-2004) and five-year-old daughter, Debra. His son, Jay Perry Richardson, was born two months later in April 1959. Jay Perry Richardson also followed a musical career and was known professionally as "The Big Bopper, Jr.", performing around the world. •

**Richard Steven Valenzuela** (May 13, 1941 – February 3, 1959), known as Ritchie Valens, was an American singer, songwriter, and guitarist. Valens' recording career lasted only eight months, but during this time, he had several hits, most notably "La Bamba", which he had adapted from a Mexican folk song. Valens transformed the song into one with a rock rhythm and beat, and it became a hit in 1958, making Valens a pioneer of the Spanish-speaking rock and roll movement.

Valens was born Richard Steven Valenzuela in Pacoima, a neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. He was of Mexican descent, and was brought up hearing traditional Mexican mariachi music, as well as flamenco guitar, R&B, and jump blues. Valenzuela expressed an interest in making music of his own by the age of five, and he was encouraged by his father to take up guitar and trumpet, and later taught himself the drums. When he was 16 years old, he was invited to join a local band as a guitarist, and when the main vocalist left the group, Valenzuela assumed the position.

Bob Keane, the owner and president of small record label Del-Fi Records, was given a tip in May 1958 about a young performer from Pacoima by the name of Richard Valenzuela. Kids knew the performer as "the Little Richard of San Fernando". Swayed by the Little Richard comparison, Keane went to see Valenzuela play a Saturday morning matinee at a movie theater in San Fernando. Impressed by the performance, he invited the youth to audition at his home, where he had a small recording studio in his basement. After this first audition, Keane signed Ritchie to Del-Fi. At this point, the musician took the name "Ritchie" because, as Keane said, "There were a bunch of 'Richards' around at that time, and I wanted it to be different." Keane also recommended shortening his surname to "Valens" from Valenzuela.

The first songs recorded at Gold Star Studios, at a single studio session one afternoon in July 1958, were "Come On, Let's Go" and "Framed". Pressed and released within days of the recording session, the record was a success. Valens's next record—the final record to be released in his lifetime—had the song "Donna" (written about a real girlfriend) coupled with "La Bamba". It sold over one million copies, and was awarded a gold disc by the RIAA.



Ritchie Valens

By the autumn of 1958, the demands of Valens' career forced him to drop out of high school. Keane booked appearances at venues across the county and performances on television programs. Valens had a fear of flying due to a freak accident at his junior high school when two airplanes collided over the playground, killing or injuring several of his friends. However, he eventually overcame his fear enough to travel by airplane for his career. He appeared on Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* television show on October 6, 1958, where he sang "Come On, Let's Go", and returned to perform "Donna" on December 27, 1958.

In early 1959, Valens was traveling the Midwest on a multiple-act tour dubbed "The Winter Dance Party". On February 3, 1959, on what has become known as "The Day the Music Died", Valens died in a plane crash in Iowa along with Buddy Holly, J. P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson, and pilot Roger Peterson. Valens was on the plane because he won a coin toss with Holly's backup guitarist Tommy Allsup. At 17, Valens was the youngest to die in the crash. Ritchie Valens was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001. •

# INTERVIEW WITH **MARIA ELENA HOLLY**

By Ray Kelly

Originally published February 1, 2009

It remains one of rock and roll's most enduring tragedies: February 3, 1959, the day that Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson and pilot Roger Peterson, died when their Minnesota-bound plane crashed in a snowy field in Iowa. The three had played the night before at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, as part of the "Winter Dance Party" tour. They were taking the four-seat plane to their next show because of mechanical problems with their bus during the bitter-cold Midwestern tour.

All the stars had scored hits on the charts, and Valens' "La Bamba" remains a classic to this day. But perhaps it's the loss of the 22-year-old songwriting genius Buddy Holly that still lingers the longest. And, no one feels that loss more than the "widowed bride" that Don McLean referred to years later in his anthem, "American Pie".

***"February made me shiver with every paper I'd deliver bad news on the doorstep I couldn't take one more step I can't remember if I cried when I read about his widowed bride but something touched me deep inside the day the music died."***

—*"American Pie" by Don McLean*

Maria Elena Holly lives in Dallas and has spent much of the past five decades overseeing her husband's posthumous career. Now in her 70s, she is vibrant, colorful and filled with vivid memories of their brief time together.

"My life turned around when that young man came through those doors." She was referring to the day in 1958 when Buddy Holly came into the office where she worked at Peer-Southern Music Publishers in New York. "I didn't even know who he was, even though I was sending the records to the radio station to play Buddy Holly. But I had never seen him. It was a mutual admiration society right away. I just fell, like boom," she said with a laugh, adding that "he fell the same way."

Buddy asked her to dinner, but the company's policy did not allow staff to date the artists. "I'll change that," Buddy told Maria, and apparently he did, because they went out to dinner that night. "I had never had a date in my life," Maria said. "I was concentrating on my own career, I wanted to be on Broadway and I was involved in many things at that time. I didn't have time for boyfriends, but I

couldn't help it with this one."

During the dinner, Buddy briefly left the table. "Buddy comes back with his hands behind his back, and sat down," she recalled. "He brought out a red rose and said 'Will you marry me?' I had gotten the idea from my aunt that most musicians were not all there, crazy, and I thought 'Uh-oh my aunt was right. This guy's not well, he just met me and here we go, now he's asking me to marry me.'"

She countered by saying "Do you want to get married now or after dinner?" As she recalls the story, "Buddy said, 'No, I'm not kidding.' I said, 'Well, in that case you have to come over to my house and talk to my aunt about it.'"

She thought her aunt, who worked as an executive at the same publishing company, would shoot the idea down, but Buddy charmed her as well. Soon after, the couple got married in Buddy's hometown of Lubbock, Texas.

Maria went on the road combining the role of manager and roadie when her husband was making various appearances. She said that he was electrifying in concert. However, racism was a significant problem on the road at the time and Maria said that she and Buddy sometimes would have to get out of the tour bus and buy food for black entertainers they were with who could not get served in some public restaurants. "Buddy did not like that," she said. "I come from an island (Puerto Rico) where we see no color and Buddy believed that we are all the same human beings. Thank God everything has changed for the best since then."

She then recalled the famous story that's documented in the film "The Buddy Holly Story" in which Holly and his band the Crickets were mistakenly booked into the famed Apollo Theater in New York because the person in charge of hiring thought the Crickets were a black act. "When they came to talk to the man in charge of the Apollo, he said 'What can I help you with?' They said 'We're booked here for tonight.' He said, 'No. What's the name of the group?' They said 'Buddy Holly and the Crickets.' The man said 'Oh my God, we thought you were black.' Buddy said 'We have the contract, we signed it and I'm going to appear.' The man said 'Be my guest.' Buddy came on-stage and said to the audience, 'I know there are some differences between us, but I don't see it, and I hope that you like my music.' And then he went ahead and started playing and that place went bananas."

Holly had amicably split with the Crickets late in 1958 and was touring that winter with a backing band that included future country star Waylon Jennings. Buddy insisted Maria not go on the "Winter Dance Party" tour because she was pregnant, but he called her each night from the road.

"The tour didn't go well," Maria said. "People were getting sick, the bus was breaking down. Buddy took over and said 'This has to be changed.' When they reached the Surf Ballroom it was very cold and there was a lot of snow. He spoke to me but he did not tell me he was taking a small plane." During the interview, she noted some of the infamous details about the ill-fated flight, including the fact that guitarist Tommy Alsup lost a coin-flip to Valens for the final seat on the plane and that Dion was also offered a ride, but didn't like flying and didn't want to spend the \$36 cost for the flight. Maria and Dion remain good friends and had been reminiscing while dining together just a few days before this interview.

It took her a long time to deal with life after her husband's death. "I just could not accept it," she said. "But eventually the fans were writing and talking and requesting information about Buddy and then I realized I was not being very nice. I knew fans wanted to know more about Buddy, what he had in mind, where he was going with his music and I realized I was the only person left in his life who would know all about that. So that's what helped me, and I decided to continue up to this date." She eventually remarried and has three children, but she divorced her second husband (who has since died) long ago.

And as Holly's legacy continues to thrive, Maria continues to be involved with the projects. She's extremely excited by the release of two new albums, the three-disc hits' set called *The Buddy Holly Memorial Collection*, and the double disc of rarities, *Down the Line*. "It's pretty hard for me to listen to them sometimes because it's like Buddy being here," she said. "But I was ecstatic hearing these. It's so clear. There have been things out there that bootleggers did a poor job with, but this is worth the wait. The fans are going to be very happy with it."

Buddy Holly's list of classic songs is staggering, especially considering that he died so young. Asked to name her favorite, Maria said, "I have to say the one he wrote for me, 'True Love Ways,' but I love them all because no two are alike."

Had he lived, Maria is certain that Holly would have had a long musical career. "If you listen to some of his last



Buddy Holly and Maria Elena Holly on their wedding day in 1958

recordings, like 'Raining in My Heart' and 'It Doesn't Matter Anymore,' Buddy was ahead of his time. At that point a rock star putting strings on a composition was unusual, so Buddy was starting to do things that are happening now. He was actually thinking of doing an album of duets with another well known artist, Ray Charles, and he was thinking of recording with Mahalia Jackson as well."

Holly was also contemplating recording some music in Spanish, and, after touring England, came home to tell his wife that there was so much talent brewing in England he had major thoughts about opening a studio there in order to record some of the up-and-coming musicians.

"Look what happened next," Maria said. "We had the Beatles (who took their name from Holly's Crickets) and all the great artists coming from London. Those were his priorities. He recorded Waylon Jennings, and he was already starting to get involved with all these other projects. He was unbelievable for a 22-year-old. I always call him 'my old soul.' To me, Buddy was an old soul in a young body. That's how I remember him."

And as for "American Pie", the Don McLean hit that told the history of rock and roll but centered on the death of the three greats in the plane crash? She likes the song but still has problems with that one famous line. "Buddy may not be here, but the music has not died," she said. "It is still alive and well." •

# THE STRANGE CASE OF **BUDDY HOLLY'S FINAL PAIR OF GLASSES**

By Nick Keppler

Originally published February 27, 2016

Sheriff Jerry Allen of Cerro Gordo County, Iowa, was combing through a storage vault in a courthouse basement on February 29, 1980 when he came across an envelope. It was from the coroner's office and read, "Charles Hardin Holley, rec'd April 7, 1959." Allen opened it and found a pair of black-framed angular eyeglasses, the lenses scratched.

The sheriff instantly connected them to the most famous incident to have ever happened in that rural patch: "The Day the Music Died." On February 3, 1959, a charter flight carrying musicians Buddy Holly, J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson, and Ritchie Valens to a tour stop crashed into a cornfield outside Mason City, Iowa. The crash killed all three early rock stars and the pilot, Roger Peterson.



Buddy Holly's glasses on display in Lubbock, Texas



Buddy Holly in 1958

Besides Holly's glasses, the envelope discovered by Sheriff Allen also contained some dice, a cigarette lighter, and two wristwatches, one engraved with the name "J.P. Richardson"—The Big Bopper's real name. The watch still ran "quite well," Allen told a reporter for United Press International a few weeks later. "I cranked it up."

When first responders scoured the crash site in 1959, they collected personal effects, which were sent to the victims' families. Allen speculated that the leftover items were flung from the plane and found by a farmer two months later, when the snow melted. The coroner's office collected and then misplaced them in the process of moving to a new county courthouse. The envelope spent 21 years in a locked steel cabinet in a storage vault.

The glasses were Buddy Holly's trademark. The Texas-born singer had 20/800 vision and couldn't read the top line of the eye chart as a boy, though he initially went spec-less at gigs, thinking glasses would hurt his image. According to *Texas Monthly*, that changed after an early show where he dropped his guitar pick

and had to crawl around on stage searching for it. He still ditched his glasses for his first promotional photos, but he finally found a style of black frames he liked. In a great leap for bespectacled nerds everywhere, Holly managed to make the thick-framed glasses cool.

Upon discovering the glasses, Sheriff Allen planned to turn them over to Buddy Holly's parents. However, Holly's widow, Maria Elena Holly, who lost her husband when he was just 22, objected. The parties couldn't come to an agreement and the matter went to court. They weren't the only people who wanted the glasses. According to *The Day the Music Died: The Last Tour of Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens* by Larry Lehmer, Sheriff Allen ignored a Holly fanatic from Delaware who offered \$502.37 for the glasses, pleading to Allen that it was his entire life savings. "I'd wish I'd have just put the damn things back and forgotten about them," complained Allen, according to Lehmer.

On March 20, 1981, a judge granted the glasses to Maria Elena Holly at the same Mason City courthouse where Allen had discovered them. According to *Texas Monthly*, she sold them for \$80,000 in 1998 to Civic Lubbock, the nonprofit behind the city's Buddy Holly Center, where they are on permanent display. •



The Buddy Holly Center in Lubbock, Texas



A memorial to Buddy Holly near the crash site in Iowa

# ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

## AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

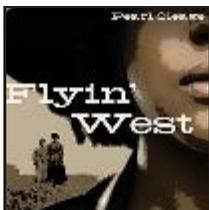
Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious 2016 National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.

Our diverse and multi-generational 33-member Ensemble has nearly 600 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of 2018, our theater and artists have 197 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 35 Black Theater Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades.

For over thirty years, American Blues has created essential productions and live theatrical experiences for Chicagoland. Their best known production is Chicago's holiday tradition *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* that has entertained over 50,000 patrons since 2002! Terry Teachout of *The Wall Street Journal* wrote American Blues is "exceptional" and the company "feels like home." Chris Jones of *Chicago Tribune* claimed Blues is "strikingly honest [with] deep emotional souls."

In addition to first-class theater, American Blues Theater believes it is an honor and duty to serve the community. They provide an integrated arts education program to Chicago Public Schools that serves nearly 3,000 students annually. They hold "Pink Previews" which donates a portion of box office sales to breast cancer research. They donate thousands of complimentary tickets to underserved communities. They provide community engagement events called "Town Halls" for patrons following Sunday matinee performance, including curated discussions with Northwestern University psychologists. As a Blue Star Theater, they honor military service and first-responders through various initiatives. Former President of Illinois Labor History Society, Larry Spivak wrote, "American Blues is a dynamic force in Chicago – connecting culture, art, history, and politics into a holistic, aesthetic experience." •

## SEASON 33 "Home Sweet Home"



by Pearl Cleage

Directed by  
Ron OJ Parson

Oct 5 - Nov 3, 2018



from Frank Capra's film

Directed by  
Gwendolyn Whiteside\*

Music direction by  
Michael Mahler\*

Nov 16, '18 - Jan 5, '19

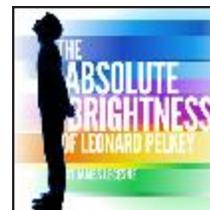


by Steven Dietz

*Chicago premiere*

Directed by  
Halena Kays

Feb 1—Mar 16, 2019



by James Lecesne

*Chicago premiere*

Directed by  
Kurt Johns

Mar 29 - Apr 27, 2019



by James Valeq &  
Fred Alley

Directed by TBA

Music direction by  
Malcolm Ruhl

May 10 - June 22, 2019

\*Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

# ABOUT **AMERICAN BLUES THEATER**

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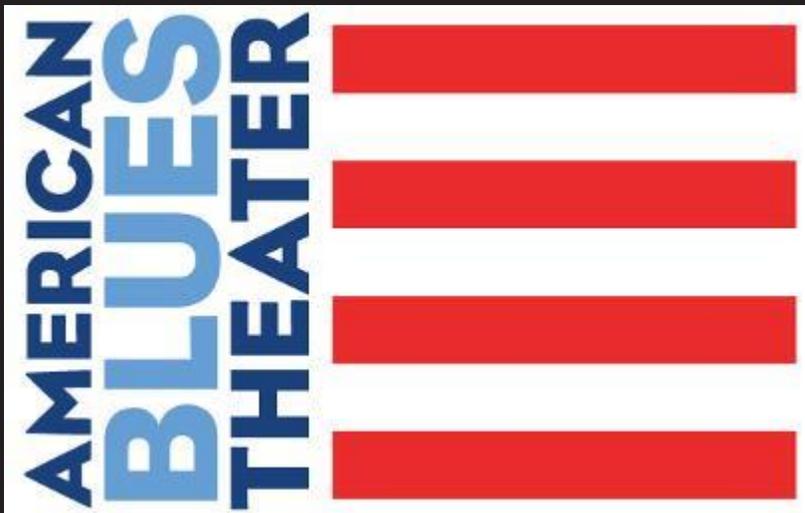
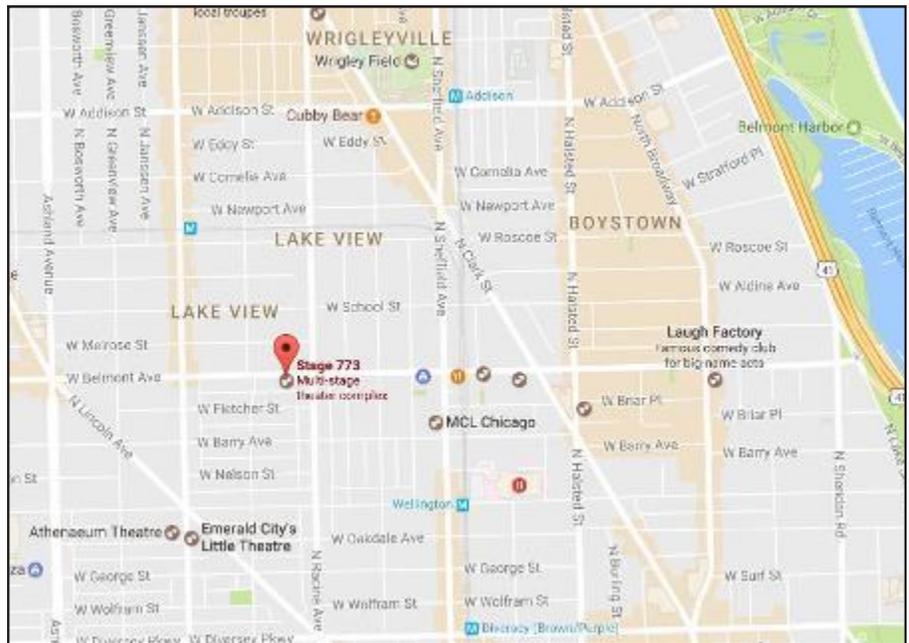
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### **BOX OFFICE**

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### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

[AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com)



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