BUDDY HOLLY

The last of the true giants to emerge in the 1950's, Buddy Holly remains one of rock's most enduring and inspiring artists. He was a good friend and touring companion of the Everly Brothers and Eddie Cochran, and had a similar interest in combining his country roots and the melodies of pop with the harder edges of rock & roll, and a penchant for innovations in the studio that pre-dated and surpassed Cochran's. His tragic death in a plane crash on February 3, 1959—immortalized in Don McLean's "American Pie" as The Day the Music Died—was one of rock's greatest losses. While the crash catapulted Holly to Rock Legend status, it extinguished a musical vision that was uniquely capable of pointing the young music toward the next decade—toward a new model of a rock "band" and a new synthesis of rock and pop that, with his death, would not be fully realized until the arrival of the Beatles.

Buddy Holly & the Crickets

Buddy Holly was the most eclectically creative of rock's Founding Fathers. In less than two years, beginning in 1957 with "That'll Be the Day," Holly turned out "Peggy Sue," "Maybe Baby," "Words of Love," "Everyday," "Not Fade Away," "It's So Easy," "Rave On" and other rock classics that run the gamut from ballads and mid-tempo pop songs to hard rockers and rockabilly rave-ups. Holly was the first major white artist to write and produce his own songs, and the first to fully appreciate the recording studio as a creative "instrument" and to explore its possibilities, experimenting with new sounds, instruments and production techniques. Holly was an inventive singer—his stretched syllables and playful hiccups are rock trademarks—and an influential guitarist who popularized the Fender Stratocaster and, with Chuck Berry, pretty well defined rock & roll guitar playing.

Holly was also a member of a true band, **The Crickets**—the prototype for the self-contained rock band we now take for granted. While Holly was clearly the focus, the Crickets were a band of equals, often co-writing and always working out the song arrangements together, so that the "arrangement" and the "song" were inseparable. Holly, guitarist **Niki Sullivan**, bassist **Joe B. Mauldin** and drummer **Jerry "J. I." Allison** established the two guitars, bass and drums attack that fueled the British Invasion. Holly was revered in England, where the Crickets model became the norm and Holly's songs became staples of every band's act. (The Beatles and the Hollies even took their band names from the Crickets' inspiration. In fact, the first song the Beatles ever recorded, in a makeshift Liverpool studio in 1958, was Holly's "That'll Be the Day," and their first official release, "Love Me Do," was clearly influenced by Holly's inventive simplicity. The big beat and arching melodies of "She Loves You," too, seem straight out of the Buddy Holly songbook—the playful twist on "well I saw her yester*da-ee-aay"* only confirms the debt. The Rolling Stones, meanwhile, made their first dent on the American charts with their cover of Holly's "Not Fade Away.")

It's a good thing the Crickets *didn't* depend on the personal magnetism of a star frontman... Gangly, bespectacled and supremely ordinary, Buddy Holly looked more like a class nerd than a rock star, and he certainly didn't look *anything* like that paragon of sexuality, Elvis Presley, against whom all rock stars were supposed to be measured. Holly's endearing "boy next door" image turned out to be an asset, however. While it

was painfully unrealistic to imagine ever being like *Elvis*, Holly's message to all guys with glasses and shy personalities was: "That could be ME!" Buddy seemed reachable—an attainable goal, and one could almost hear a collective sigh of relief and the sound of guitar sales skyrocketing when average guys everywhere caught their first glimpse of the kid singing "That'll Be the Day." Holly's utter lack of sex appeal also helped keep the focus on the music, where it belonged. As Jerry Allison recalled, "compared to Frankie Avalon and all those slick dudes, we were just a bunch of ugly pickers who just picked. But really, that made it all seem better, because we felt like everybody that liked us, liked us because of what we *could* pick. They were fans because of the music, not just because of the emotions or the good looks or whatever."[i]

The simple purity of Holly's songs—the chords, melodies and lyrics all seem immediately familiar—link him the other great "rock poet" of the era, Chuck Berry. Like Berry, he chronicled life in Young America with great wit and insight. Unlike Berry, however, Buddy always sang in the first person—not as an objective observer, but as an active participant very much in the fray, going through and giving voice to all the joys and heartaches his audience felt. Holly figured in the transition from the brazen sexuality of the rockabillies and Little Richard to the more innocent "holding hands" love of the early '60's pop era, but his view of love was never simple-minded and his songs have an emotional resonance that was sorely lacking in the music of his "teen idol" descendants. Holly's music still rings true. As Bruce Springsteen once said, "I play Buddy Holly every night before I go on—it keeps me honest."[ii]

Background: Lubbock and Nashville

Charles Hardin Holley was born on September 7, 1936 in Lubbock, Texas, a conservative West Texas Bible Belt city known as the "Hub of the South Plains." The youngest of four children, he was given the affectionate nickname "Buddy" at birth. (He decided to drop the "e" from Holley after his name was misspelled on his first recording contract; he often used his middle name for songwriting credits.) The Holleys were something of a musical family, and Buddy developed an early love for the country & western and western swing that filled the dancehalls and radio airwaves of the Southwest. Holly was also influenced by black music, though Lubbock's geographic isolation and the Holley's middle class, urban sensibilities meant that Buddy did not have the direct contact with black music and culture that his rockabilly compatriots in the Deep South experienced. The radio was his link, and he was particularly fond of "Stan's Record Review," a late night rhythm & blues show from Shreveport, Louisiana. (Guitarist Sonny Curtis, who played with Holly in 1955-56, recalls the many nights he "fell asleep in Holly's old Oldsmobile listening to Shreveport at 1 o'clock in the morning."[iii])

The arrival of Elvis Presley in Lubbock in 1955 was the turning point for Holly, who was already playing in a "Western and Bop" combo that had a regular booking on a local radio station. Holly had been a fan of Elvis since "That's All Right" hit the South, but the records were one thing—*seeing* Elvis in action was quite another, as Curtis recalls: "Elvis just blew Buddy away. None of us had ever seen anything like Elvis, the way he could get the girls jumping up and down, and that definitely impressed Holly. But it was the music that really turned Buddy around. He loved Presley's rhythm—it wasn't country and it wasn't blues, it was somewhere in the middle, and it suited Buddy just fine. After seeing Elvis, Buddy had only one way to go."[iv]

Buddy embraced rockabilly and imitated Elvis as best he could. The growing popularity of rockabilly brought his band steady work around Lubbock and, sooner than he'd dreamed possible, won them a recording contract with Decca Records. Holly left for Nashville in January 1956, confident that he was on his way to stardom. Instead, his association with Decca and producer Owen Bradley was uncomfortable for all concerned. The Nashville establishment was searching for an answer to Elvis, though with little taste or feel for the rockabilly that seemed so natural in Memphis. Only two poorly promoted singles, "Blue Days, Black Nights" and "Modern Don Juan," were released before Decca decided to drop its option on Holly's contract at the end of 1956. Owen Bradley: "I think we gave him the best shot we knew how to give him, at the time. But it just wasn't the right combination; the chemistry wasn't right. It just wasn't meant to be. We didn't understand, and he didn't know how to tell us."[v] (Bradley's 1956 recordings with the Johnny Burnette Trio met a similar fate, and Nashville remained clueless about the rock market until the Everly Brothers came along a year later.)

The Crickets and Norman Petty

A disheartened Buddy Holly returned to Lubbock and assimilated the lessons—good and bad—he'd learned in Nashville. In February of 1957 Holly, drummer Jerry Allison and bassist Larry Wellborn traveled the hundred miles from Lubbock to Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico to record some demotapes to send out to other record companies. For the occasion he revamped a song that he had already recorded for Decca: "That'll Be The Day."

Norman Petty built his studio in 1955 to record his own group, the Norman Petty Trio, then began recording other acts to finance his operations. As the owner of the best-equipped studio for many hundreds of miles around, his services were in great and constant demand. Petty was one of the independent producers so crucial to the development of rock & roll: a Southwestern Sam Phillips, though unlike Phillips he did not start his own record label and chose instead to lease his recordings to established labels. Petty worked briefly with a young Roy Orbison in 1956 and recorded the 1957 hits "Party Doll" and "I'm Sticking With You" for Buddy Knox and Jimmy Bowen, but his place in rock history was assured by his association with Buddy Holly and the Crickets.

As the Crickets' manager and producer, Petty has been a much-maligned figure among Buddy Holly fans. Shortly before he died, Holly split angrily with Petty over his failure to account properly for the group's earnings, and Buddy's widow claims that, because of Petty, Holly was virtually forced to go on his fatal final tour, a backbreaking mid-winter marathon that he would never have considered unless he was in desperate need of money. (Maria was pregnant at the time, which heightened Holly's financial anxiety. She miscarried after his death.)

Petty was clearly guilty of the common practice of adding his name to the songwriting credits of songs he had little or nothing to do with, thereby gaining a share of the publishing royalties. (Petty is listed as co-author on nearly all of Holly's songs, including "That'll Be The Day," which Holly had recorded a year earlier for Decca!) Petty was also largely responsible for the syrupy background vocals that mar some of Holly's greatest songs. With the exception of "That'll Be the Day" and "Not Fade Away," in which the background vocals were actually sung by the Crickets, all of the background

vocals were added later by Petty using Clovis singing groups. (Unfortunately, the Jordanaires' backing vocals on Elvis' RCA records seem to have been Petty's model for achieving an accessible pop sound—one Elvis influence too many, perhaps.)

Nonetheless, without Petty's creative support and valuable connections within the music industry, Holly might never have had a hit or tapped his true potential as an artist. Petty's state-of-the-art studio, relaxed manner and technical and musical knowledge provided a perfect environment for Holly's creative growth. Petty was as eager to experiment as Holly and was willing to give him free reign in the studio and a control over his own music that was rare for any artist in those days, and a far cry from the frustrations Holly had experienced in Nashville. In Petty, Buddy found his catalyst—an independent producer, free from any direct pressure to conform to a record company's idea of a "hit" and willing to let his artist develop his own style.

"That'll Be the Day"

A comparison of the stilted Decca version of "That'll Be The Day" with the hit version recorded in Clovis offers a clear example of the benefits of artistic freedom. The Clovis version is remarkably self-assured and original—no longer "rockabilly" and no longer an imitation of anyone. It is the real Buddy Holly: a fully realized synthesis of pop, country, rockabilly and rock & roll.

"That'll Be The Day" glides along with a spacious sound and a mid-tempo, shuffling swing feel that accents every beat (in contrast to the frantic backbeats of rockabilly). The well-honed interplay between Holly's guitar and Allison's drums is particularly striking in the fills between the verses and choruses and the sudden, surprising shift to triplets in the final chorus (which the Beatles lifted for the ending of "I Want to Hold Your Hand"). Holly was essentially a *rhythm* guitar player, concerned primarily with creating a good blend with the band and a good feel for the song. Even his solos were, for the most part, merely sped-up and embellished rhythm figures, played with a jangling, trebly tone but otherwise very different from the single-string country picking and blues licks of rockabilly.

Holly shared Bo Diddley's love for sheer sound—for tone and timbre as shaping elements—and Chuck Berry's style of repetitive, rhythmic solos. In "That'll Be The Day," he takes the idea of a "rhythm lead" to an extreme: after launching the lead break with a brief double-string figure repeated in rapid succession, he locks onto one chord, hammers out a furious beat and builds up to... nothing! At the height of the solo, the guitar plummets to a simple, low-string boogie/rhythm pattern as Allison drops to an equally plain drum beat, leaving a huge hole in the middle of the song. The high register filigree then returns, along with Allison's cymbals, and dovetails into a repeat of the song's opening guitar figure to round out the lead break and usher the vocals back in.[vi] This type of juxtaposition of low and high, dark and bright, and simple and embellished guitar styles was a central feature of Holly's playing (for which the wide range of tone settings and bright, chiming sound of the Fender Stratocaster was perfectly suited).

"That'll Be The Day" also features the sudden leaps, dramatic swoops, clipped words, playful hiccups, stretched syllables ("a-all your hugs," "we-ell-uh") and other trademarks of Holly's singing. While Gene Vincent exaggerated the dark and sexual overtones of Elvis' mannerisms, Buddy took Elvis' example in the opposite direction and sounded enthusiastic and playful rather than rebellious and sexual. Holly was always

happy to pull back and poke fun at himself and his macho posturing in his songs, which, in this case, came from an appropriate source—John Wayne's sardonic refrain of "*That'll* be the day" in the 1956 movie, *The Searchers*. The phrase became faddishly popular with teenagers, so Holly and Jerry Allison wrote the song around it, juxtaposing their hero's smug assurance that his girl could never leave him ("*That'll* be the day...") with his sheer terror that she actually might ("...when I *die*").

"That'll Be the Day" was picked up and issued, direct from the Clovis demotape, by Brunswick Records—a Decca subsidiary, of all things.[vii] The record broke first in regional markets, then climbed up the national charts through the summer of 1957 and ended up at #1, still a rare feat for a rock & roll singer. The record was issued under the name "Crickets," a name Holly, Allison and new members bassist Joe B. Mauldin and rhythm guitarist Niki Sullivan had decided upon while looking through bug names in an encyclopedia. Niki Sullivan: "We did consider the name 'Beetles,' but Jerry said, 'aw, that's just a bug you'd want to step on,' so we immediately dropped that. Then Jerry came up with the idea of the Crickets... I remember him saying, 'they make music by rubbing their legs together,' and that cracked us up."[viii]

The success of "That'll Be the Day" landed the Crickets on the package tours promoted by Dick Clark and Alan Freed, which brought rock fan Holly into close contact with personal heroes like Bo Diddley, Little Richard and Chuck Berry (who became his favorite crap-shooting partner during the endless hours on the tour buses), and fellow newcomers like Jerry Lee Lewis, Eddie Cochran and the Everly Brothers. While touring in the fifties wasn't the high-powered operation it is today, it did have its moments: the image of the two great "rock poets" shooting craps is certainly compelling, and Holly's widow Maria recalls times when Buddy had to calm down a naked, out of control Little Richard on the tour bus and throw a drunken Jerry Lee into a shower to sober him up for his set. Above all, a spirit of camaraderie and fun prevailed, which was especially important when the tours headed South into the land of racial hatred and segregation, where the black performers were forced to eat on the bus and stay at separate hotels, and where many city ordinances would not allow whites and blacks to appear on the same stage, forcing either the white or the black performers to temporarily leave the tour. Unfortunately, the happy unity that characterized the best aspects of rock & roll was far ahead of the general state of race relations in the real world.

NOT FADE AWAY: THE CRICKETS' MUSIC

The Crickets continued recording in Clovis (and, occasionally, New York) through 1957 and most of 1958. In that relatively brief period they produced a body of work that illustrates the formidable range of Buddy Holly's talent and his unique ability to combine the energy of rock & roll with the melodicism of pop. Although the Crickets' music gained much of its resonance from Holly's knack for transcending musical labels, it can still be loosely divided into three categories: the rockers, the ballads and the midtempo fusions of pop and rock.

Rockers

Songs like "Rave On," "Oh, Boy!," "I'm Lookin' for Someone to Love," "Rock Around with Ollie Vee" and "Not Fade Away" show Holly's love for straight rock & roll,

which remained his stylistic home base through his brief career. "**Not Fade Away**" is one of Holly's strongest set of lyrics (and his greatest song title), sung with a swaggering confidence and backed by an astoundingly tight rhythm section. The song is built around a skeletal Bo Diddley beat, punctuated by constant stops and starts and fused together by Jerry Allison's truly inspired drumming—on a cardboard box! The exultant lead break of "Not Fade Away" is really just a fuller, higher and brighter version of the basic rhythm pattern—once again the *sound* and *feel* matter most to Holly, who had a true gift for knowing what to leave out, as the airy open space of "Not Fade Away" attests.

Inspired by the recurring "rave on!" refrain in Carl Perkins' "Dixie Fried," "**Rave On**" opens with a six syllable(!) "well," then plunges through two 12-bar blues verses that illustrate Holly's gift for finding a perfect melody for any mood or set of chords. The 16-bar chorus ("rave on, it's a crazy feelin'...") features a syncopated stop-start rhythm that dominates the rest of the song (in fact, the verses simply disappear, giving the song a rather strange aabbb form). Norman Petty's piano doubles Holly's rhythm guitar and takes the solo in the lead break. Although he is often called a "rockabilly," the relaxed feel, syncopated rhythms and tunefulness of "Rave On" point to why the label really isn't appropriate, even in his uptempo rockers.

Ballads

At the other extreme are the "true love" ballads, such as "Words of Love," "Listen To Me," "Everyday" and "True Love Ways," that highlight Holly's gift for melody and inventive studio work. "**Words of Love**" is endearingly direct and unaffected, with harmony hums and chiming guitars that take over when mere words fail: "Words of love you whisper soft and true, darling I love you, hmmmm..." Holly captures the wondrous promise of pure love without cloying or exaggerating the sentiment. "Words of Love" was also Holly's first experiment with overdubbing—he added extra guitar tracks and his own harmony vocals—and marked the first time any rock artist used the technique.[ix] Overdubbing was a still painstaking and chancy process in those days of mono recorders: the original tracks (guitar, bass and drums) were recorded on one tape recorder, then re-recorded onto another while a new part was added, and so on, with the vocals added last. With no "final mixdowns" possible, the vocal and instrumental balances had to be right each time, though every pass between machines resulted in a loss of sound quality on the original tracks. On "Words of Love," even the deterioration of the original tracks worked to the song's advantage, creating a strange blend of distant, muffled drums and bass and close, intimate voices, with a lovely wash of guitars chiming in the middle.

The ethereal "**Everyday**" features Buddy's best moonstruck teen vocals and a delicate arrangement highlighted by Norman Petty's wife, Vi, on celesta, a distinctly non-rock instrument (it's inclusion was probably inspired by the celesta on Chuck Willis' "It's Too Late," which Buddy covered). The ever-inventive Jerry Allison abandoned the drums and simply slapped his knees to create a constant rhythm without disturbing the hushed intimacy of the music and sentiment. "Well All Right" has a similarly private tone, and an equally distinctive production dominated by a powerful acoustic guitar set against a galloping rhythm tapped out on the bell of a cymbal. The sophisticated strings, harp and saxophone arrangement of "True Love Ways," recorded in New York at Holly's last session, was a dramatic departure from his earlier work and was meant to reflect his deepening vision of love (he had just been married) and his "maturing" as an artist. But if

"True Love Ways" would fit fairly comfortably within the pre-rock tradition of popular music, "Words of Love" and "Everyday" helped stake out a new, younger definition of "pop," redefined within the context of rock & roll, aimed at the young rock audience and rooted in the emotional and musical immediacy of rock & roll.

Midtempo pop-rock

Holly's best-known songs—"Peggy Sue," "It's So Easy," "Maybe Baby," "That'll Be the Day"—occupy a middle ground between rock and pop, fast and slow, hard and soft, and between the confident stance of his rockers and the idyllic innocence of his love songs. Implied just beneath the hopeful sentiment of "**Maybe Baby**," for example, is "maybe *not*." The song is full of the clever rhymes and wordplays and playful singing of Holly's "Everyteen" persona. The Crickets give "Maybe Baby" a rock & roll grounding, but the song's melody-driven formal structure (built around clear refrains and contrasting "bridge" sections) owes more to pop and country models than to the beat-driven 12-bar blues structure of most rock & roll.

"Peggy Sue"

"Peggy Sue" was recorded in June, 1957, just as "That'll Be the Day" was beginning its chart ascent. Like it's spiritual mate, Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode," the song sums up nearly every aspect of Holly's style. The words are simple and direct and the singing is a virtual textbook of Holly-isms: "Sue" is stretched from one syllable to nine in the course of the song and is sung with every possible inflection, sometimes growling and manly, other times pleading and childlike, as if he is determined to try every approach to win Peggy Sue back. While Chuck Berry might have written a lovingly-detailed character sketch of Peggy Sue, Buddy's song reveals little about the object of his affections and instead evokes the sentiment itself: like a lovestruck teenager, all he can really think to do is repeat her name, which he does—30 times!

"Peggy Sue" was originally entitled "Cindy Lou," after Holly's niece, and was conceived as a calypso-styled rhumba. Jerry Allison convinced Buddy to change the name to "Peggy Sue," after Allison's current girlfriend and future bride, and contributed the quasi-roll "paradiddles" that erased the rhumba feel and gave the song a *pulse*, rather than a beat. Allison had a hard time keeping the paradiddles steady on the initial takes, though, prompting Holly to threaten to "change it back to Cindy Lou." Allison nailed the next take. The rolling drums—all tom-toms rather than the usual snare and cymbals—give "Peggy Sue" a very unique and original feel, reminiscent only of the hypnotic beat of "Bo Diddley."

The lead break in "Peggy Sue" is a further example of Holly's rhythmically oriented lead guitar style. The high, chiming embellishment of the song's 12-bar blues outline contrasts with the darker tone used in the verses and provides an emotional release without upsetting the flow of the song the way a more intricate solo would have. Holly's constant, rapid downstrokes also add a percussive element to the verses, thanks to Petty's idea of placing a microphone by Holly's right hand to pick up the sound of his pick hitting the strings (which seems to occupy an entirely different aural space from the droning chords coming from Holly's amp). Niki Sullivan was recruited to flick the pickup switch on Holly's guitar at the beginning and end of the lead break, so that Holly could jump directly to the bright sound of the lead without disturbing his rhythm. As a

result, the lead explodes suddenly out of Holly's guitar rhythm and then, just as suddenly, implodes back into the mix when the singing returns—a great effect.

To add a further dimension to the sound of "Peggy Sue," Petty isolated Allison in a separate room, fed the drums through an echo chamber and then phased the drums in and out—from "up close" to far away—through the course of the song by varying the volume and amount of echo. (The contrast is most noticeable at the beginning of the song, where the drums alternate every two beats between a full echo and a completely "dry" sound.) It is a genuinely weird and striking effect: drums are "supposed" to keep a beat, not pulse in and out and echo around in the distance (just as guitar *picks* aren't supposed to be heard at all, and lead breaks should have *leads*). Petty and the Crickets transformed a simple nursery-rhyme of a song into a ritual lovecall unlike anything surrounding it in the pop charts.

"Buddy Holly Lives"

Buddy Holly's life had changed considerably by the end of 1958. He married Maria Elena Santiago in August, 1958, and left Clovis to live in an apartment in New York's Greenwich Village. The marriage wasn't exactly the product of a long, drawn-out romance: "We met and he took me out to dinner and proposed to me that same night. I said 'yeah, sure—why not?' I thought he was just being friendly, but the next morning he was at my door..."[x]

Meanwhile, his financial disputes with Petty brought their partnership to an unpleasant end. Holly remained close friends with the Crickets, but that partnership also ended with their decision to remain in Lubbock and continue working with Petty. Holly found himself truly a solo artist for the first time, and began to explore new possibilities. Home tapes from his last months show him experimenting with a wide range of styles, and his last recording session, produced by Dick Jacobs in New York in October 1958, yielded "True Love Ways," "It Doesn't Matter Anymore," "Moondreams" and "Raining In My Heart," all backed by a lush string section.[xi] At the time of his death, Holly was planning to open a studio of his own to produce new talent, and hoping to record duets with Ray Charles and continue his recent collaborations with the Everly Brothers and young Lubbock singer Waylon Jennings. Under pressure from his record label, however, and in desperate need of money, he put his plans on hold and agreed to go on a grueling midwinter tour of the upper Midwest.

Holly assembled Tommy Allsup, Waylon Jennings and drummer Charlie Bunch to accompany him on his tour with fellow headliners **Ritchie Valens**, a young Latin-American rocker whose "Donna" and "La Bamba" were currently climbing the charts, **J. P. "The Big Bopper " Richardson**, a Texas disc jockey who had recently hit with "Chantilly Lace," and newcomers Dion & the Belmonts. Holly never referred to his new group as "the Crickets," and always hoped for a Crickets reunion. Jerry Allison and Joe Mauldin were thinking the same thing, as Maria recalls: "They called me the night of the accident to find out where Buddy was going to be the next night so they could fly there and join him. I gave them the number where I talked to Buddy for the last time and they called him, but he had just left..."[xii]

Buddy Holly gave his last performance at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, on the night of February 2, 1959. After the show, Holly, Valens and the Big Bopper boarded a small chartered plane to fly to Fargo, North Dakota, the site of the next night's

show. Tired of the rickety and freezing-cold tour bus (drummer Bunch had to quit the tour when his feet became frostbitten while riding the bus!), Holly had chartered the plane for himself and his band; but while the Crickets were trying unsuccessfully to reach Holly by phone, his new band was being saved by further twists of ironic fate. Allsup recalls: "He'd chartered this plane to take three people—me, him and Waylon were gonna fly. Well the Big Bopper had caught the flu that afternoon, so somehow that night Waylon gave up his seat to the Bopper. When I went back in Ritchie was in there signing autographs, and he said 'you gonna let me fly, guy?,' and I said 'No,' and he said 'come on—flip?' He had half-a-dollar and he said, 'let's flip a coin—heads I go, tails you go.' I said 'OK, if you want to go that bad.' Well, he won the toss..."[xiii] Sometime in the early morning hours of February 3, 1959, the plane went down, killing the three stars and their pilot.

Buddy Holly held out the promise of being one of the few fifties stars adaptable enough to survive and thrive through the changing tastes of the early sixties, and he may well have been a creative bridge between the rock & roll era and the British Invasion. Instead, he died at 22, less than two years after "That'll Be The Day" was recorded, but he still managed to leave a lasting mark on rock & roll. His music transcends generational lines, musical boundaries and the deadly confines of mere nostalgia. His songs have never needed any updating to sound vital or ring true: the Beatles' note-for-note cover of "Words of Love," the Rolling Stones' version of "Not Fade Away," Linda Ronstadt's "That'll Be The Day" and "It's So Easy," James Taylor's "Everyday" and the many other Holly covers that have been hits over the years never really *sound* like covers, just as Holly's timeless originals never really sound like "oldies." As with Chuck Berry, his influence as one of the true Originators has been so pervasive that it's no exaggeration to say that anyone who has picked up a guitar or written a rock song since 1959 is somehow descended from Buddy Holly. As Sonny Curtis put it, in a song about his old friend, "Buddy Holly lives every time we play rock & roll."

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[i]John Goldrosen, "The Buddy Holly Story," (1975; rpt. New York: Quick Fox, 1979), p. 113.
[ii]Goldrosen, "The Buddy Holly Story."
[iii]June, 1982 *Guitar Player* Magazine, Vol. 16, N0. 6, p. 78.
[iv]ibid. Buddy and Elvis became friends on that first visit to Lubbock, and when Elvis returned to Lubbock later in the year, Buddy showed him around town and took him home to meet his parents!
[v]Goldrosen, p. 47.
[vi]The opening guitar flourish was borrowed from the piano intro to Fats Domino's "Blue Monday")
[vii]The fact that Holly ended up back under the Decca umbrella was a complete and, for Holly, amusing coincidence; it also neatly solved the potentially sticky problem of releasing "That'll Be The Day" on a different label, since Decca was unlikely to sue its own subsidiary. In a unique arrangement, Holly was given a separate recording contract with another Decca subsidiary, Coral Records, which credited their releases simply to "Buddy Holly." This left the group in the rather confusing but advantageous position of being able to have two records out simultaneously (and of often finding themselves double-billed on concert marquees as both "The Crickets" and "Buddy Holly") In any case, the crediting was an afterthought based on the timing of the releases and the decision of whether or not to add background vocals to the songs.
[viii]Goldrosen, "The Buddy Holly Story." Contrary to legend, the name was not inspired by the unscheduled appearance of a chirping cricket during one of their recording sessions, though that did happen later--you can hear it at the end of "I'm Gonna Love You Too."
[ix]Holly and Petty didn't "invent" overdubbing: it was pioneered by Les Paul in the early fifties and used previously on a few pop records, such as Patti Page's 1953 hit, "Doggie in the Window."

[x]Maria Holly, in conversation with author.
[xi]The middle-of-the-road sound of "True Love Ways" may indeed have been a sign of things to come, though it seems more likely that Holly was simply experimenting to fill the empty space left by his split with the Crickets. In any case, the impression left by the lush strings in his final recordings and in the last concert scene of the otherwise excellent movie, *The Buddy Holly Story*, left many with the unfortunate impression that Holly was moving to the mainstream. He certainly wasn't touring the north plains in the middle of the winter with an orchestra! The last tour was straight rock & roll.
[xii]In conversation with author.
[xiii]Tommy Allsup quote from *The Real Buddy Holly Story* (video).