



Buddy

The Buddy Holly Story

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE PACK

www.buddythemusical.com



THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL ROCK 'N' ROLL MUSICAL

A bit of background...

Buddy tells the story of a young boy from Lubbock, Texas, who shot to stardom in the 1950s. The show is set in an America of great political and cultural change, and works as a showcase for the music that sparked the American youth movement – effectively “the invention of the teenager”. By combining a live performance or your own staging of the show with points for discussion and study (see page 9), the aim of this document is to present the show as an entertaining educational tool, giving teaching professionals some ideas on how to use the show in an educational capacity.

Ages suitable for:

Set in the late 1950s, *Buddy* exudes the charm and innocence evocative of that era. While it does not contain nudity or swear words, we would recommend that the show is not suitable for children under the age of seven.

The Experience: What you get out of it

The theatre is an exciting experience for a young person, with each performance being unique to its audience. Musical theatre works to stimulate, entertain and excite, combining traditional theatrical acting with music and singing. *Buddy* was the first compilation musical and has been followed by many more. What's more, the cast of *Buddy* are not only talented actors, they are also musicians.

The creators of the show envisioned a brand new concept with *Buddy*, where the majority of music is played live by the cast. The show's ground-breaking format of theatre incorporating live music has been imitated but never matched.

There is something for everyone in the show. The best thing about bringing a class to see *Buddy* is the audience is positively encouraged to make noise and join in with the fun onstage.

After the Show...

Included in this document are some exercise suggestions to use in conjunction with the show, which can be undertaken in the form of an essay or discussion.





THE MAN... THE MUSIC... THE LEGEND...

CHARLES HARDIN 'BUDDY' HOLLY (1937-1959)

Buddy is set in the late 1950s and tells the story of the meteoric rise to stardom of a young, seemingly geeky musician from Lubbock, Texas. Charles Hardin 'Buddy' Holley (the 'e' was dropped, accidentally, on a recording contract in 1956) produced hit after hit over a period of 18 months between 1957-1959, before being killed in a plane crash in Clear Lake, Iowa, along with two other luminaries of early rock 'n' roll – 17-year-old Latin sensation, Ritchie Valens, and the rollicking personality that was J. P. 'The Big Bopper' Richardson.

This tragic accident, on February 3rd 1959, has become legend in the history of rock 'n' roll, immortalised in a haunting ballad by Don McLean in 1971 as "the Day the Music Died" in the song 'American Pie'.

The lyrics of this song, which went to the top of the charts, describe the emotions of a young boy who is delivering newspapers announcing the death of his heroes on that infamous day:

A long long time ago

I can still remember how that music used to make me smile

And I knew if I had my chance

That I could make those people dance

And maybe they'd be happy for a while

But 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

Many older people who were teenagers at the time will remember the shock they felt when three of their young heroes died in such tragic circumstances, at the height of their creativity and influence.

For many British people this was a major loss as Buddy had completed a month-long tour of England the previous year and was one of the first American exponents of rock 'n' roll to do so. Elvis Presley, a huge star at the time, never came to Britain and Jerry Lee Lewis was forbidden.

To many it seemed a wicked irony that a man who had given the world such a unique, happy, fun sound should have his life ended prematurely.

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THE REBEL WHO LIVED NEXT DOOR

Buddy is a fun show which follows the story of the poor polite boy who knows his own mind, becomes the champion of the 'new music' they called 'Rock 'n' Roll', and broke many taboos and stereotypes in his quest for recognition.

It wasn't an ugly fight; Buddy suffers some disappointment but no great hardship to achieve his breakthrough. He is essentially a well brought-up young man whose schoolboy charm complimented his talent to break the mould.

Yet he was someone who, from a very early age, knew his own mind and pushed to break the musical conventions of the day, thus defining his own style. Though he didn't possess the looks of an Elvis Presley, he nevertheless broke the mould of the perception of a musician in 1957.

Buddy was a tall, 'geeky' young man who defied convention by wearing glasses on stage, and was one of the first performers to write, play and perform his own music.

In the 1950s it was still very much a tradition for songwriters to compose music and lyrics, and then persuade artistes to perform their songs. This tradition grew up in New York City in the late 19th century in what was termed 'Tin Pan Alley', where songwriters would tout their songs to performers, producers and publishers in order to make a living.

Buddy broke the mould and when he toured England in 1958, he inspired the Beatles to carry on with their musical ambitions to write and perform their own music. Indeed, it was because Buddy's band was called the Crickets that the 'Fab Four' from Liverpool changed the name of their band from the Quarrymen to the Beatles.

Buddy insisted on wearing his spectacles on stage during his performances. Up until this time it was classed as a taboo as bespectacled singers were really only ever acceptable on a comedic level rather than as serious musicians. During his tour of England, Buddy made such an impression on John Lennon that he decided he could also wear his glasses onstage. It is remarkable that up until the time that John Lennon saw Buddy onstage, he never wore his glasses and could not see the front of the stage, let alone the audience.

BUDDY WITHIN CONTEXT: WAS BUDDY AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE ROCK 'N' ROLL GENERATION?

Although an unlikely persona for a rebel, his music ignited a fire in young people of the day – a generation which, through its music, was to find an identity and develop a voice that a decade later would shake the world through the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War protests of the late '60s.



At the time Buddy began recording, the younger generation was just a younger version of their parents, in terms of dress, music, general outlook and aspirations. To see early television programmes made for young people, like *American Bandstand* and *The Dick Clark Show*, it's clear the youthful audience are very conventional and look like clones of their parents.

At organised school dances, it was the norm for young people to dance like their parents, with strict rules about the amount of touching and embracing that was acceptable. When Elvis Presley first wiggled his hips on TV there was a public outcry against the indecency of such moves.

Young people were expected to follow in their parents' footsteps, the girls to wed and have families and the boys to join the family business. Buddy's older brothers never believed anyone could make a living out of music, let alone their little brother. They constantly tried to persuade him to join them in the tiling business.

Although television was just emerging, radio was the medium of the day. Rock 'n' Roll and Rhythm & Blues was firmly relegated to specialist and often unlicensed radio stations. In a strange way, to listen to Rock 'n' Roll was almost as big a sin as playing it, and many teenagers in the '50s had to listen to the music that turned them on in secret, which of course added to the attraction.

American radio was dominated by commercial sponsors who would use the station to sell and endorse their products. The output from these stations was very establishment, promoted the status quo, and very definitely did not play anything that was overtly sexual and might offend the listeners. Young people had to fight hard to get airtime on the radio in the '50s for the 'new sound they call Rock 'n' Roll'. Ten years on, radio and TV could not get enough of it.

By the 1960s, rock 'n' roll had given this generation a voice, a dress sense, choice – and heroes that were not its parents. This generation did not support the established mores of the previous generation and had a unique view of the world, which they were prepared to articulate.

It is a fact that in the U.S.A. there were government committees investigating the effect of this 'devil's music'. Rock 'n' Roll was classed in some quarters as a "communicable disease".

BUDDY THE INNOVATOR: CUTTING EDGE OR NECESSITY?

Buddy broke the mould with the help of Norman Petty in the recording studio in Clovis, New Mexico. Here, Buddy and Petty combined their talents to experiment in search of a unique sound. Although it may seem rudimentary to us today, they were both at the forefront of the modern music business. With the advent of electronic instruments came all sorts of recording problems not previously encountered with orchestral and acoustic sound. For both it was a hugely creative time in which they wrote and recorded over 15 hit records in less than 18 months.


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Buddy and Petty started to experiment with a new concept – double-tracking the vocals – by effectively singing it the same way twice, in order to get the effect they wanted.

They created an 'echo' effect by getting Buddy's older brothers to tile a small portion of Norman's attic space, creating a tiled booth. Buddy would sing the vocal, which would be played through a speaker in the booth, to be recorded by a microphone in the attic and onto the disc. In this way they created a crude but effective echo effect.

The recording studio in Clovis was so small that Jerry Allison, the drummer, used to play the drums in a stairwell outside the studio, in order to gain some separation for the recording. The volume was controlled by microphone and the player, to get the effect Buddy and Petty wanted.

On the record 'Not Fade Away', Jerry Allison is actually playing a cardboard box (a Jim Beam whisky box) in order to create the right rhythmic effect for the song!

In 'Everyday' the introduction of the celeste and the fact the rhythm is being created by Jerry Allison slapping his thighs, instead of the drum-kit (he is credited with 'knee slapping'), gives the song an effect which is unique in its simplicity.

Buddy was a performer who composed his songs without writing them down. The sound he heard was in his head and in Norman Petty he found a record producer willing to experiment, to define the style which we now recognise as Buddy Holly.

In a world where the technology was simplistic and new, and everyone was experimenting, one of the factors that gives Buddy's recordings a timeless quality is that the songs are not overproduced. It seems that Buddy has a knack for knowing just what was needed and moving onto another song. This leaves the songs distinct. All are Buddy Holly songs but each has its own clear identity. Some would say he never had time to create a 'trademark sound' that would colour all his creative output; or the technology to remix and add complications at will like modern-day artists. Some would argue that maybe that's because at Clovis they never had the resources to get too flashy. However, the work they did by adding different sounds into this early electronic Rock 'n' Roll did mark them forever as essentially Buddy Holly.

THE APOLLO THEATER – HARLEM, NEW YORK

Coming from Texas before the advent of civil rights, at a time when racial segregation was still a reality, a singer like Buddy, who was white but 'sounded black', was bound to cause confusion.

The racial tensions of the time are humorously explored in the show when Buddy and the Crickets are accidentally booked into the Apollo Theater, Harlem, as a black act.

The performers at the Apollo, who are at first resentful of the white boys' arrogance (in thinking they can perform at what was a purely black theatre), are soon won over when they discover that these young 'honky' boys from Texas can rock with the best of them. This culminates in an uninhibited joyful 'all for one and one for all' rave up of Rock 'n' Roll, which crosses the boundaries and unifies both cultures.

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Harlem's Apollo Theater is a world-renowned theatre which at the time, was run by two white Jewish impresarios, but had a policy of booking only black acts. It was a hotbed of talent, where the popular black acts of the day would take their new material and try it out on the home crowd before taking it on the road. The audience at the Apollo was notoriously honest – if they didn't think you could cut the mustard you'd get booed off stage. It was a hard house to play with very much a community feel, and is famous to this day for its 'Amateur Nights', where fresh talent from all over the U.S.A. can get up in front of the audience to perform.

Should the audience at the Apollo not like the act a famous 'hook' was employed to drag those who overstayed their welcome off the stage. The flip side of this was that if the audience liked the act it could make them a star overnight. The adage applied – "if you could play the Apollo, you could play anywhere!" Billie Holiday, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, the Jackson 5, and many other famous black artists owe their breakthrough into the music business to these amateur nights.

The mistake of booking Buddy Holly and the Crickets for the Apollo as a black act was made because their music had a black feel in terms of rhythm. Radio was the main communicator of the day and listeners automatically assumed that this 'black' R&B sound was being created by a black group. Also, they were called 'The Crickets' when it was custom for most black acts to name themselves after animals – e.g. the Ravens, Orioles, etc.

Although the show touches on the issues of the day through this real incident, the racial tensions in the U.S.A. at the time were very serious. African-American culture that we know today was only just finding its voice. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were yet to emerge on the national stage.

This was a time when the tour bus would be stopped by authorities at the borders of some states, and the black musicians segregated from the white musicians and made to travel on separate buses and stay in different hotels. Buddy was one of the few performers who would not accept this and insisted they all stayed together, resulting in Buddy often staying in a 'black' hotel.

THE MUSIC

The music of Buddy Holly is a unique mix of Rockabilly and Country & Western, fused into simple structured Rock 'n' Roll, that is redolent of an era before popular music became the industry it is today.

Buddy found his voice through the church and had a natural affinity in his early years for Country & Western, having achieved some success as a double act with Bob Montgomery – as 'Buddy & Bob' – before forming the Crickets with Jerry Allison and Joe B. Mauldin.



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At the time Rhythm & Blues was considered a 'negro' sound and not acceptable in the musical establishment of the day. Buddy and the Crickets used to take a crystal radio and head out into the desert in an attempt to listen to the unlicensed black radio stations that were emerging at the time.

Heavily influenced by the new music Rock 'n' Roll, which was emerging from the old Rhythm & Blues, Buddy struggled to become accepted as a recording artist. The Crickets began their careers performing at roller-skating rinks and supermarket openings around their home town of Lubbock, Texas.

Opening the bill for Elvis Presley and also Bill Haley in Lubbock in 1955, created interest that would result in a recording contract with Decca Records in Nashville. However, Buddy's sound was so unique – a blend of styles around his particular vocal talents – that Owen Bradley, a producer at Decca, told him to forget about a career in music!



It wasn't until he was introduced to Norman Petty at the NorVaJak studio in Clovis, that Buddy found a producer who was prepared to 'go with the flow' and experiment with him in creating his own unique sound. Once discovered, they produced 15 hit records in 18 months before Buddy, encouraged by his new wife Maria Elena, moved to New York to work with the top musicians of the day.

There is a radio interview with Buddy in which when asked, "How long will this Rock 'n' Roll fashion last?" he states, "Oh I don't know, maybe 18 months or so, but it sure is fun whilst it's happening."

Little did he know then that the phenomenon called Rock 'n' Roll, which he was pioneering, would change the world he knew and that 'Pop' music would become the influence it is today.

He may have lived a short life and have had an even shorter recording career, but Buddy's legacy still runs as strong today as it did then. It seems ironic that the musical has played to more people than Buddy ever did. He was a phenomenon and his popularity never seems to wane.

STUDY EXERCISES

Here are some suggestions for discussion topics on Buddy Holly, his music, and the show.

- Assess Buddy Holly's contribution to the evolution of popular music, with examples of his influence on subsequent generations of artists.
- 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 on what might have become of Buddy had he not died at such a young age.
- Music has played a major part in breaking down racial stereotypes. Discuss.
- In terms of the historical and cultural context of the show, what events, movements and experiences might have influenced Buddy and his music? Think about racial and geographical influences, Buddy's religious background, and other popular artists of the time that might have informed his music, and the youth movement in 1950s America.
- Was Buddy the voice of a generation?

The Cult of Immortality

Many musicians have achieved a legendary cult status and immortality through their early demise – Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison, Mark Bolan, Keith Moon, Brian Jones, John Lennon, John Denver, Jimi Hendrix, Freddie Mercury, Janis Joplin, Elvis Presley, Otis Redding, Tupac Shakur, Sam Cooke and many, many more.

Of course, an early demise ensures a performer never grows old or becomes tarnished by some later failure or misdemeanour, or dissipation of that once bright talent. In reality, many major stars shine in their heyday then slowly fade away. The successful stars that die early never have the chance to fade away, but stay at the zenith of their talents.

- Is achieving legendary status attributable to the fact their careers are contained within a set period and preserved in aspic?
- Is iconic status automatically created by dying young, famous and successful?
- Is the legend created by the events of a performer's life or the fact that their talents have a unique quality that lives on through the generations?
- Do the unknown possibilities of 'what might have been' fuel the legacy, adding a mythical aura to the real events?
- Has it always been the case that the best musicians die young?



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Buddy – The Musical

Buddy has proved a massively popular show worldwide.

- What can this be put down to? Is it the man, the music, or the legend – or is it the show?

- What other factors can you identify in the show that could account for its success?

Buddy is, in effect, a story where the events happen along a straight timeline from the beginnings of Buddy Holly's musical career to his early death. Only in the last 20 minutes of the show does that reality shift into a joint celebration between the audience in the theatre and the actors onstage, creating a fused feel-good celebratory ending for all.

- There are many ways in which this story could have been told. What other ways are there?

Buddy is a feel-good show which is fast moving, fun, entertaining, and encapsulates a feel of the late 1950s, when popular youth culture was breaking through. Although tinged with tragedy, the show is a celebration of a short meteoric talent who rose to fame and was snatched away at the height of his powers. The audience leave euphoric at having had a good night out, as well as sharing two hours with a rock 'n' roll legend.

- Is it real – or fantasy?

- What is it about 'The Man, The Music, The Legend' that makes people so happy that they return again and again to live with a fictional Buddy for a brief moment in time?

Unlike the movies, the theatre is a powerful medium which is essentially unreal because you know these people are actors acting out a part, and the setting is suggestive rather than realistic.

- What is the key factor the audience bring to the theatre which makes it such a powerful medium?



FACT NOT FICTION

- Buddy met his wife Maria Elena Santiago in the music publisher's office of Murray Deutch in New York, and proposed marriage to her five hours after meeting
- Maria Elena did have a premonition of the air crash, which manifested itself in a series of weird dreams in the weeks leading up to that fateful day
- Unfortunately Maria Elena lost the child she was expecting in the traumatic months after the crash
- On February 2nd 1959, after a concert at the Surf Ballroom, Clear Lake, Iowa, Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P. Richardson – the Big Bopper, drove to the airport where they met the pilot Roger Peterson, who was intending to fly them in a small plane to Moorhead, Minnesota. Fifteen minutes after take off, in very poor weather conditions, the plane crashed killing all four passengers
- The reason quoted for Buddy arranging to take a plane to Moorhead, instead of travelling on the 'Winter Dance Party' tour bus, was the conditions of the tour. It was tradition for all the musicians and performers to travel together from venue to venue on the tour bus. Unfortunately, the tour bus had broken down the previous day, the weather conditions were horrendous and the musicians had waited all day on the bus, in the cold, to be rescued. This resulted in musicians sleeping in the luggage racks and the drummer being taken to hospital with frostbite. Buddy decided he'd had enough of the bus and that he needed to get his laundry done and have a good night's sleep
- Ritchie Valens was not supposed to be on the plane with Buddy and the Bopper but persuaded Tommy Allsup, who was on the Winter Dance Party tour, to toss a coin for the seat. Ritchie won the toss and went on the plane

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