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## Bucks County Review: 'Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story'

By Neal Zoren

John Dewey may be a young theater performer, but he must know what it feels like to be a rock star because he receives a thunderous spontaneous ovation at the end of "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story" at New Hope's Bucks County Playhouse and deserves every clap and cheer.

Dewey is the most mortally dangerous of the quintuple threats populating the BCP stage under Hunter Foster's energetic direction. His acting is superb. He doesn't quite look like Buddy Holly — he's better looking — and the hair is all wrong, but Dewey radiates the Holly persona. You believe him every minute and rarely think you're seeing a performance rather than Buddy living out his ambitions by insisting on controlling his music and all that surrounds it.

This embodiment of Buddy is important because the weakest part of "Buddy" is Alan Janes's utilitarian script, which gets all of the facts right and keeps the story humming but smacks of every "life of" saga regarding an entertainer you can think of.

While the script shows Holly's rise to stardom by accentuating the conflicts and opportunities during the 18 months in which he went from Lubbock, Texas, striver to constant contender as a Billboard chart topper, no scene makes you admire the writing.

However, Foster and choreographer Lorin Latarro mask lack of depth with liveliness — with Latarro keeping things so busy she has the constantly fun and vivid Elizabeth Nestlerode weaving and careening all around the stage in scenes in which she plays the lone woman in a country band.

The draw here is Holly's music, which is blessedly plentiful, rarely interrupted by more than five minutes, and is presented with gusto. The music is great — with songs including "Shout" and "Johnny B. Goode" — and Dewey and cast perform up a storm, always at a high and rousing level.

In fact everyone in Hunter's cast can act, sing, dance, exude high spirits, and play an instrument with panache. While Dewey is the solid foundation, Nestlerode stuns with her versatility. Ensemble member Maximilian Sangerman leaps out of nowhere to win your admiration for all of his abilities, ranging from playing the trumpet con brio to dancing so vigorously he makes Jerry Lee Lewis or Peter Allen look like slouches. And Gilbert D. Sanchez (Richie Valens) gets the award for million-watt dancing.

The fun and spirit of the era also comes alive with super drummer Zach Cossman jumping over his drum kit to downstage front, James David Larson practically making love to his bass while hurling it into various positions as if it was his jitterbug partner, and Brandi Chavonne Massey, whose Apollo Theater performer makes you want to interrupt the show so she can do her own.

With Dewey's Broadway-level performance, BCP is already bringing this exciting production to Philadelphia's Kimmel Center. If it wants to break into New York and glom one of those regional theater Tonys, this is the show that merits the attempt.

Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story, Bucks County Playhouse, 70 South Main Street, New Hope, PA. Through Saturday, June 17. \$40 to \$85. 215-862-2121 or [www.bcptheater.org](http://www.bcptheater.org).