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Bucks County Playhouse's 'Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story' take you back in time

- May 30, 2017 -- By Frank Burd



The cast of "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story."

Bucks County Playhouse is bringing back Buddy Holly! I missed it last year so I was one of the many lucky ones to be able to see this show about the extraordinary young musician who had such a profound effect on music and rock n' roll in its early days. The story is a little piece of Rock n' Roll History and the production is first rate.

Charles Hardin Holley was only 22 when he died in that infamous plane crash while on tour during his brief but amazing career. He and his band (they were known as Buddy Holly and the Crickets) had opened for Elvis Presley several times before he was 20 and also for Bill Haley and the Comets before signing a contract with Decca Records that same year. Originally a country and western performer, he had turned to rock n' roll but when he got to the Decca studio, they wanted no part of it.

"The Buddy Holly Story" doesn't attempt to cover his whole life in this biopic musical. What it does do is show us how determined Holly was to record his own songs and arrangements despite all the attempts to force him into the traditional country and western music of his Texas roots. He was told that he was no Elvis Presley or that he was just creating second rate Negro music. In fact Buddy Holly and the Crickets would be the first white band to play the famous Apollo Theater in Harlem.

We meet his fellow Crickets, Joe on bass and Jerry on drums , two incredibly talented musicians portrayed by James David Larson and Zach Crossman. We encounter his supportive and understanding new manager Norman Petty (Kent M. Lewis). But as I said, it's not an attempt to detail his life during this brief three-year period. It is a display of the amazing music that the group recorded and performed.

"That'll Be the Day," "Peggy Sue," and "Maybe Baby" are just a few of the two dozen songs they play. Near the end, Buddy is joined by the Big Bopper (Karacc Osborn) and Richie Valens (Gilbert D. Sanchez) and they sing their classics, "Chantilly Lace" and "La Bamba." We also meet the incredibly talented Brandi Chavonne Massey who portrays a performer at the Apollo Theater. Her rendition of "Shout" was another treat from this talented cast.

But the center of “The Buddy Holly Story” is Buddy. John Dewey IS Buddy Holly. I can’t use capital letters large enough to tell you how good Dewey is, black, horned rimmed glasses and all. His voice, his words, his music, his persona! He will take you back in time.

As I sat in the audience watching the show, I felt like I was in a crowd of a late 50’s rock concert. I listened and watched, wondering why my parents didn’t like rock n’ roll. It seemed so normal, so natural. As it neared the end, I saw a girl, then two girls, then a boy- no they were women and men. They weren’t teenagers but folks in their 60’s and 70’s. They were standing up and rocking to the beat. Soon, they were joined by more and more. It was a very special moment for all in the house.

Don McLean called that date, Feb. 3, 1959, when the plane crashed killing Holly, Valens, and the Big Bopper, “the day the music died” in his 1971 song, “American Pie.” See those days before that fatal moment at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope. You won’t be sorry.