



# New Hope Free Press

Published On: Wed, May 31st, 2017

## Buddy Holly Is Back At The Bucks County Playhouse In New Hope



By John Dwyer

Is love better the second time around?

“Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story“ opened to glowing reviews last year, not just by me, but across the board. Critics and audiences loved the Bucks County Playhouse production.

And it was the rare instance where it was better than the Broadway original. In fact, it was leaps and bounds better. The script, when it was on Broadway, was too long and without a strong focus. But director Hunter Foster and a brilliant cast cut the script and re-focused it and made “Buddy” a musical that everybody could love. Returning to the show after a year, one wonders, “Is it still as good as before, or is it like the 1951 hit by Roy Hawkins and “The Thrill is Gone?”

Not to worry. With all the cast the same except one and the same brilliant direction, rock ‘n’ roll is here to stay and “Buddy” is back as good as ever.

John Dewey again plays Buddy Holly, and without a great lead as the linchpin to this bio-musical, the show would not work. But there is no one who could do this job better. I am sure that after this run, Mr. Dewey will need an exorcism to free himself from the soul of Buddy Holly. He is that on the mark.

As stated in last year's review, what most people will talk about is the technical skill of this cast. All are excellent musicians and singers. There is no orchestra in the pit, because all the accompaniment is played by Buddy Holly and the Crickets, which is to say, the cast. We have Zach Cossman as Jerry Allison on drums, James David Larson as Joe B. Mauldin on bass, and Maximilian Sangerman as Tommy Allsup, playing guitar and trumpet. When not playing other roles during the show, Kent Lewis (Norm Petty and Duette) is on guitar, Andrew Frace (Hipockets and Duncan) on saxophone, and Elizabeth Nestlerode (Vi Petty and MD Associate) is on piano.

The chemistry between this ensemble creates a special magic. The demands of being in a band and being in a cast makes for a kinship that have performances take off like a rocket. There are 27 songs that are performed by the group, including "That'll Be the Day," "Peggy Sue," "Johnny Be Good," "It's So Easy," "Everyday," "La Bamba" by Ritchie Valens (Gilbert D Sanchez), and "Chantilly Lace" by the Big Bopper (Karack Osborn). With a special shout out to "Shout" and the Apollo powerhouse diva known as Brandi Chavonne Massey, this is true classic rock 'n' roll immersion. The Playhouse will have to undergo construction again after the roof is blown off the building by one of the most memorable finales, with singing that shakes the rafters.

There are only a few differences from last year's show, and they are hardly noticeable. There are entrances that have been changed, and the ending is slightly different. A solid performance is given by Natalie Ortega as Buddy Holly's love interest. She is the only newcomer to the cast.

The sets by Adam Koch, as well as the lighting design by Gina Scherr, and sound design by Matthew Given and costumes by Nicole V. Mooday are expertly executed, adding to the 1950s ambience.

I have never been to a show where I have heard so much chatter at intermission and after the show: "Did you see it last year?" "Just as good as before!" "I'm coming back next week with (fill in the blank)!... Loving it!"

It is this kind of reaction that brought the show record-breaking box office and is giving it legs beyond New Hope. The show runs here until June 17, then travels to Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, where it plays from June 24 to July 9. Standing ovations are happening nightly for Buddy Holly and the Crickets. And this, as Mr. Holly would say, are "True Love Ways."

For tickets, visit the [Bucks County Playhouse online](#), or call 215-862-2121