



RESOURCE PACK FOR TEACHERS

BUDDY – THE BUDDY HOLLY STORY

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CHARLES HARDIN HOLLY (“BUDDY”) 1937-1959: THE MAN... THE MUSIC... THE LEGEND

BUDDY is set in the late 1950s and tells the story of the meteoric rise to stardom of a young geeky musician from Lubbock, Texas, who produced hit after hit in a period of two years (1957-1959) before being killed in a plane crash in Clear Lake, Iowa, along with two other rock ‘n’ roll legends – J. P. Richardson (The Big Bopper) and Ritchie Valens.

This tragic accident, on February 3rd 1959, has become legend in the history of rock ‘n’ roll and was forever embodied in a haunting ballad by Don McLean in 1971, marked forever as “The Day the Music Died” in the song ‘American Pie’.

The lyrics of this famous song 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*

Don McLean ‘American Pie’, 1971

Many older people who were teenagers on that fateful day 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.

EXERCISES

Points for discussion

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.

1. Is the legendary status, created by the quality of the performer, a unique loss to the world?

An early demise never allows the performer to grow old, turn fat and ugly or invade our consciousness with any later failure or misdemeanour, or dissipation of that once bright talent. Many successful stars in reality shine in their heyday then slowly fade away. The successful stars that die early never have a chance to fade away but stay at the zenith of their talents.

2. Is achieving legendary status due to the fact their careers are contained within a set period and preserved in aspic?

3. Is iconic status automatically created by dying young, famous and successful?

4. 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?

5. Does dying early give fans an opportunity to research and share the short lives of their heroes in greater detail, as a full stop is put on their hero's career?

6. Do the unknown possibilities of 'what might have been' fuel the legacy, adding a mythical patina to the real events contributing to the creation of the legend?

7. Is legendary status created by an inherent nostalgia tinged with sentimentality in people? Does early death cause fans to eulogise on 'what might have been' and hence give more credence to what there actually was?

8. Has it always been the case that the best musicians die young?

9. Is early death a natural fallout from the fast lifestyle of the modern pop musician?

10. Is this a modern phenomenon, with the advent of fast cars, air travel and the proliferation of the drug culture?

11. What other professions have a similar fallout, in terms of fast living and early death of the stars? (Movies, modelling, horse racing, sports?)

Ritchie Valens was 17 when he died and had just had two hit records with 'Donna' and 'La Bamba'.

J.P. Richardson – 'the Big Bopper' – had been a personality DJ on a Texas radio station before he had a huge hit with 'Chantilly Lace'. He also recorded another song called 'The Big Bopper's Wedding', and posthumously had a big hit with 'Running Bear'.

Buddy left a legacy of 15 hit records. Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper had only had 1 or 2 each.

12. Would either have become a legend if they had not died in the crash?

THE 'ROCKY' FACTOR:

Buddy's story is one of a young man from an ordinary background who through his determination, talent and his music made himself into a star.

1. The 'poor boy makes good' storyline is common in many movies, plays and novels. Does this theme fulfil a need in people that touches their own aspiration for improving their lot in life?

2. What other movies, shows or novels pursue similar themes?

In the modern world there has been more social mobility, giving people from different backgrounds the ability to achieve their dreams, despite the situation in which they were born.

3. Is this a factor that brings the 'poor boy makes good' theme to the forefront of popular culture or has this always been the case?

THE SHOW:

1. BUDDY has proved a massively popular show worldwide. Why?

Is it the man?
Is it the music?
Is it the legend?
Is it the show?

2. What are the other factors one could identify in the show which could account for its worldwide success?

3. There are many ways in which this story could have been told. What other ways are there of telling the story?

BUDDY is, in effect, a story in which 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 with the audience in the theatre and the actors onstage, creating a fused feel-good celebratory ending for all.

4. BUDDY is a fun feel-good show which is funny, entertaining, fast moving 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?
Is it fantasy?

5. BUDDY is essentially an ensemble show telling the story of one man. Apart from Buddy we see the other actors take on many roles. Does this in any way detract from the belief in the characters or the emotions experienced as the story moves along?

6. 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 that the audience bring to the theatre which makes it such a powerful medium?

THE REBEL WHO LIVES NEXT DOOR:

BUDDY is a fun show along the lines 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 a man who, from a very early age, knew his own mind and wished to break the musical conventions of the day to define his own style. Not a handsome boy, not ugly, he nevertheless broke the mould of the perception of a musician in 1957.

A tall, 'geeky' young man who defied convention by wearing glasses on stage, Charles Hardin Holly (known as Buddy) 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 the U.S.A. in what was termed 'Tin Pan Alley', where most songwriters would tout their music 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 famous four from Liverpool changed the name of their band from the Quarry Men 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 in terms of comedy rather than as serious musicians. During his tour of England, Buddy was such an inspiration to 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.

1. Was Buddy's meteoric rise to fame and fortune partly due to the unthreatening nature of his 'boy-next-door' persona?

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BUDDY HOLLY – BUDDY WITHIN CONTEXT

WAS BUDDY THE VOICE OF A GENERATION?

Was Buddy at the forefront of the Rock 'n' Roll generation? Although an unlikely persona for a rebel, his music ignited a fire in the 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 a just younger version of the older generation, in terms of a dress, music and general outlook and aspirations. When looking at early television programmes made for young people, like the *Dick Clarke Band 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.

Radio in the U.S.A. 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 '60s, rock 'n' roll had given this generation a voice, a dress sense, choice – and heroes that were not parents. This generation did not support the established mores of the older 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?

Creation is often a collaborative process. Discuss

Buddy broke the mould with the aid of Norman Petty in the Clovis studios, when they 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.

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, this 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 in reality 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 recording of 'Not Fade Away', Jerry Allison is actually playing a cardboard box (a Jim Beam whisky box) in order to create the right rhythmical 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) 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 the time to create a house style 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 THEATRE – HARLEM, NEW YORK:

Music has played a big part in breaking down racial stereotypes. Discuss

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 Theatre, 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.

Harlem's Apollo Theatre is a world-renowned New York 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, which 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 played the Apollo you could play anywhere!" Stevie Wonder 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.

This was a time when the tour bus would be stopped 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 ruling and insisted that all they all stayed together, resulting in Buddy often staying in a 'black' hotel.

THE MUSIC:

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?

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.

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.

Although creating interest that would result in a recording contract with Decca Records in Nashville, Buddy's sound was so unique – a blend of styles around his particular vocal talents – that Owen Bradley, a producer at Decca Records, 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, New Mexico, that Buddy found a record 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.

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 fateful air 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.

Rob Bettinson

Co-Writer/Director