

BUDDY HOLLY



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1956-1959</i>	<i>Early rock'n'roll</i>	<i><u>Words Of Love</u> (1957)</i>

Page contents:

- [THE «CHIRPING» CRICKETS](#) (1957)
- [BUDDY HOLLY](#) (1958)
- [That'll Be The Day](#) (1958)
- [The Buddy Holly Story Vols. 1-2](#) (1959-1960)
- [The Crickets] [In Style With The Crickets](#) (1960)



THE «CHIRPING» CRICKETS

Album released:
Nov. 27, 1957

V A L U E
2 3 4 4 5

More info:



Tracks: 1) Oh Boy; 2) Not Fade Away; 3) You've Got Love; 4) Maybe Baby; 5) It's Too Late; 6) Tell Me How; 7) **That'll Be The Day**; 8) I'm Lookin' For Someone To Love; 9) An Empty Cup (And A Broken Date); 10) Send Me Some Lovin'; 11) Last Night; 12) Rock Me My Baby.

REVIEW

If you listen to all of the Beatles' officially released recordings in chronological order, the very first song you are going to hear is 'That'll Be The Day', pressed by the Quarrymen in 1958, approximately just one year after the song had appeared on the Brunswick label as the first official single by the Crickets. Naturally, this is no matter of coincidence since, by all accounts, Buddy Holly was *the* single greatest influence (out of many) on the early Beatles, at least up until the band's «musical globalization» circa 1965 (and, in fact, for most of their subsequent lives as well, even extending into Paul McCartney's solo career).



For the rebellious rock'n'rolling mind, this might seem a little bizarre. When Buddy made the world aware of his existence, in mid-1957, «rock and roll» had already been firmly established — Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Carl Perkins, Elvis, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis were all recognized stars, with an imposing bunch of hit singles under their belts and with their taboo-breaking images firmly entrenched in the popular mind; Buddy was a relative latecomer to this parade of flashy, aggressive personalities. Compared to each of them separately, he did not seem to stand much of a competitive chance. Never a technically great singer like Elvis; never a particularly gifted or fluent instrumental player like Chuck or Jerry Lee;

definitely nowhere near an «onstage volcano» in terms of performance — just a normal, quiet Texas kid, happy enough to wear a neatly pressed tuxedo and bowtie, with a proper haircut and with a pair of silly thick glasses that really made him look more like an aspiring Ivy League freshman than a rock'n'roller. In fact, a careless eye could easily pigeonhole him into, if not the «teen idol» category of Ricky Nelson, then at least into the «rock'n'roll for parents» category.

So what exactly did Buddy Holly bring to the table that was not already on it? Perhaps, first and foremost, it was *hope* — hope for all those thousands of kids who were not blessed with the vocal cords of an Elvis, the natural dynamism of a Jerry Lee Lewis, or the cool looks of a Gene Vincent. It was Buddy who conveyed to them the important message — what matters is not style or technique, what matters is *substance*. All of Buddy's major achievements lie in the field of songwriting. Had he mostly stuck to covering other people's material (like Elvis), he would have remained but a small footnote in the history of popular music, as his first LP proves without a doubt: out of the 12 numbers on **Chirping Crickets**, the ones that stay with you once it's over are almost always the ones where Buddy is credited as chief songwriter.

I will not shy away from saying that I almost always prefer other people's covers of Buddy's material to the originals. Even that early Quarrymen cover of 'That'll Be The Day' sounds *almost* as good as Buddy's (and would have sounded even better had the lads had access to better studio equipment, not to mention had they decided to record it with George Martin any time in 1963-64). 'Not Fade Away' would eventually be expropriated, toughened up, and set for early anthemic status by the Stones. And when John Lennon later covered Buddy's interpretation of 'Send Me Some Lovin' on his **Rock And Roll** album, he raised the bar tenfold in the vocal department, adding explicit emotional torment where Holly only hinted at it.

But none of that mattered back in 1957 — and even though it matters today, it is also a pretext to try and figure out why, in the long run, these early songs have survived and are still listenable today. Sure enough, there is some stuff on this Crickets debut that is *not* all that listenable. In particular, «The Picks», a New Mexican family vocal outfit, provide a rather corny doo-wop-style backing, spoiling much of the ballad component of the album ('Last Night', etc.) — not that Buddy Holly himself was ever made for doo-wop, of course, but it also has to be kept in mind that, like everything else at the time, **The Chirping Crickets** was really just a bunch of cool singles surrounded by obligatory filler.

We will disregard the filler, then, and focus all the attention on the classics: 'That'll Be The Day' and 'Not Fade Away' as the best known; 'Maybe Baby', 'Tell Me How', 'I'm Looking For Someone To Love' as their lesser worthy brethren. First and foremost, this is not «threatening» music: Buddy was not a «rebel», he had a thoroughly «pop» conscience through and through, and the music avoids dark bass lines, distortion, aggression, etc., as much as possible (just look at how niftily the

«spooky», «tribal» Bo Diddley beat is transformed into a happy celebration of love and fidelity on ‘Not Fade Away’). At the same time, it is not cheesy pop — it is jangly, guitar-based pop, no strings, pianos, or production slickness attached, something that even the rough’n’tough garage-rock crowds of the early 1960s would find easy to appreciate. Most importantly, it all just sounds natural and realistic. Where Ricky Nelson (whose public image appeared the same year as Buddy) gave the impression of «glossy manufacture» from the start, Buddy simply is as buddy does.

What I really mean to say is that Holly compensates for his technical flaws with evident charisma — present everywhere, not just in his looks (always clean, never glossy), but also in his sweet, shaky, naturally-stuttery vocals, and in his guitar playing, with delicate, memorable phrasing that sometimes mimicks Carl Perkins or Scotty Moore, but just as frequently consists of original lines (unfortunately, «The Picks» too often overshadow them — ‘Maybe Baby’ could have been so much better without all the waah-waahs and the pa-da-dams). The songwriting ideas might have been replicated and enhanced, but the personality could not: Buddy Holly offers that perfect compromise between the «gruff rocker» and the «teen idol» that is actually much harder to attain than it might look upon first sight.

Actually, Buddy Holly is not so much the epitome of a «teen idol» as he is the epitome of a *teen* — heck, maybe even pre-teen, since the defining spirit of most of his songs is that of sweet, energetic, totally innocent happiness that we humans usually tend to lose just a few years after lactose tolerance, and only a select few like Buddy happen to retain into their grown-up years. For all the cover tunes he did of other artists, it is impossible to imagine him covering Bo Diddley’s ‘I’m A Man’ — because *that* kind of man he never was, and never could impersonate. ‘Not Fade Away’, as I have already said, transforms Bo’s tribal dance into a happy romp around the dining room table. ‘That’ll Be The Day’ is a very childish refusal to believe that good things can ever go wrong, borrowing not just its title but also its stubborn nature from John Wayne. ‘Maybe Baby’ and ‘Tell Me How’ distill the idea of romance to its most arithmetic essentials, peeling away all the layers of troubadour and Tin Pan Alley experience.

Yet this minimalism never feels like the product of laziness or lack of talent — it’s more like Buddy just felt the time was right for getting back to the basics and building a new foundation for the future edifice of pop songwriting in the rock’n’roll era. More likely, he did not even realize that — unfortunately, he died way too young for us to know what he himself thought of his songwriting principles — but this is how it feels to at least some of us: on this album, Buddy Holly re-formats pop music for future achievements, much like the Ramones, twenty years later, would re-format rock music to bring it into the modern age. From a purely melodic standpoint, these tunes here are not among his best — the melodies still owe way too

Only Solitaire

Artist: *Buddy Holly*

Album: *The «Chirping» Crickets (1957)*

George Starostin's Reviews

much to all the people who had influenced Buddy himself — but from a symbolic standpoint, he would never make a sharper, more career-defining point than he had done with those earliest singles.





BUDDY HOLLY

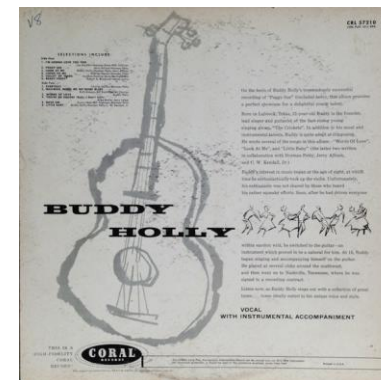
Album released:

Feb. 20, 1958

V A L U E

3 3 4 4 5

More info:



Tracks: 1) I'm Gonna Love You Too; 2) Peggy Sue; 3) Look At Me; 4) Listen To Me; 5) Valley Of Tears; 6) Ready Teddy; 7) Everyday; 8) Mailman, Bring Me No More Blues; 9) **Words Of Love**; 10) (You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care; 11) Rave On; 12) Little Baby.

REVIEW

It so happened that, for all the tiny amount of time he had to himself on this Earth, Buddy had to share it between *two* formal careers — as the semi-anonymous leader of «the Crickets» and as a solo artist. The only real difference, however, was that as «The Crickets», Buddy's backing band worked together with «The Picks» and had this rather questionable tendency to drift off into suave doo-wop territory. In other words, as illogical and anti-intuitive as it may seem, (1) Buddy Holly + the Crickets = «Buddy Holly»; (2) Buddy Holly + the Crickets + the Picks = «The Crickets». What this really means for us is that, of the two completed LPs released by Buddy in his lifetime, the self-titled **Buddy Holly** is, on the whole, a slightly better showcase for his songwriting talents and personal charisma — even if, like so many pop LPs of the time, it neither succeeds in being totally filler-free, nor even tries to. Then again, out of five «Buddy Holly» singles released up to that point, it does include three of the best ones and discard two of the more passable ones, meaning that, up to a certain point, quality control did matter.



Be that as it may, the inclusion of 'Ready Teddy' and 'Baby I Don't Care', two songs more typically associated with Elvis (and, in the case of the former, Little Richard, of course), has more of a symbolic nature to it — Buddy openly aligning

himself with the leading «rockers» of the day — than actual entertainment value. For all his versatility, Buddy could never dream of outplaying the King and his backing band on that toughness-meets-tightness field, nor could he dashingly open up some new, hitherto unsuspected dimension in these songs (at the time, they were way too proverbially one-dimensional to be openable up to anything else, though eventually technological and spiritual evolution would change that — even John Lennon in 1975, it could be argued, would reinvent ‘Ready Teddy’ quite radically, if not necessarily for the better). His forced little roar on ‘Ready Teddy’ is more likely to raise a condescending smile than a couple of tightly clenched fists, and the juggling of high- and low-pitched vocals on ‘You’re So Square’ feels much too imitative of Elvis as well.

Also problematic is the inclusion of Fats Domino’s ‘Valley Of Tears’, though the revision of this Fats Domino classic is easier to defend — not only does it feature a somewhat special «funeral parlor» organ part played by Norman Petty, but Buddy also does not try to recapture the lazy New Orleanian nonchalance of the original, instead giving it a more romantic, fragile reading which certainly suits him better. I guess that in the process they take all the New Orleans out of the song, but that’s OK, Buddy Holly and New Orleans were never meant for each other anyway.

Yet even if we treat all those covers as filler, I would still take solid rock’n’roll filler over shaky doo-wop filler any day, even more so if the filler in question is interspersed with the single largest number of indisputable original classics on a Buddy album. ‘Peggy Sue’, ‘I’m Gonna Love You Too’, ‘Words Of Love’, ‘Rave On’, ‘Every Day’ — each of these is practically an institution in itself, definitely so if we judge «objectively», on the basis of received accolades and tributary covers. As simple and natural and obvious as these melodies sound, most of them *were* actually written either by Buddy or by his closest partners — on a pre-existing basis of blues, folk, and country chord sequences, but with their own unique input which only added to the overall catchiness.

‘Peggy Sue’, in particular, had a strange kind of magic to it that won the hearts of *both* Lennon and McCartney — and it would be incorrect to think that this only had to do with the insane paradiddles of Jerry Allison, since the song works fine even without its percussive thunderstorm (look for a charming McCartney solo acoustic performance from 1975); actually, the vocal melody, replete with all of its hiccups, pretty much sets the standard for «not-one-note-wasted catchy pop formula», and must have served as the guiding star for the Beatles throughout their career. The lyrics, the subject, the mood — trivial to quasi-embarrassment; the vocal movement is all that matters. (There is even a bit of playfully fake «darkness» as the bridge cuts in with an almost threatening «pretty pretty pretty pretty Peggy Sue...» before the sun comes out again — a musical red herring if there ever was one within a two-minute pop song).

In terms of complexity and instrumentation, 'Words Of Love', a song that was not even a single, is the clear winner, although I must insist that the tune was brought to absolute sonic perfection only six years later, by the Beatles and George Martin — they happened to see the amazing potential of that sweetly stinging guitar ring, only hinted at in Petty's original production, and realize all of it; I am pretty sure that Buddy himself, had he had the chance, would have acknowledged the superiority of Harrison's lead playing and Martin's production. Nevertheless, this here is the original, and even if the vocal melody may seem a bit sappy, the guitar lines provide the very foundation of the «jangle-pop» skyscraper, to be erected by millions of Buddy's followers. This, after all, was the man who was taking the art of sweet sentimental balladry away from professional hacks, glossy syrupy orchestras, and formulaic crooning vocalists, and restoring it to legions of passionate kids with guitars, almost singlehandedly. Some of those kids would do it better; but few, if any, could have thought of doing it *before*. Where did that A-D-E-A guitar melody even come from? What inspired it? What preceded it? How come it embodies so perfectly the feelings you feel when softly caressing a loved one? As far as I can tell, there is simply no better proof of the touch of genius on that man than this particular bit of composing.

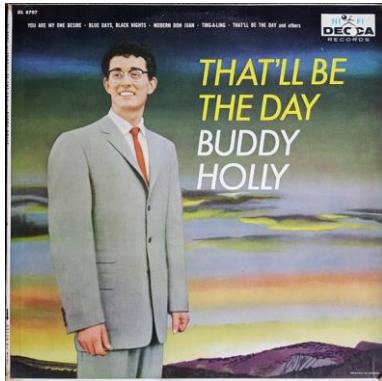
Needless to say, next to 'Words Of Love' Buddy's more rock-oriented originals look a tad more pale. Still, 'Rave On' and 'I'm Gonna Love You Too' combine pop catchiness with energetic beat pretty damn well. 'Love You Too', in terms of structure and lyrics, seems to mimic the old folk song tradition, which gives the song a blunt, stubborn edge — the repeated title at the end of each verse almost sounds like a mantra, and the ah-ah-ah harmonies are like a triumphant war cry, emitted by somebody who is damn certain of impending victory. (Twenty years later, it would be fun to see the gender values of the song inverted when Debbie Harry would appropriate the song to depict *her* own imaginary conquests). And while 'Rave On' is much too melodically similar to 'Oh Boy' (no surprise here, since itinerant Texan songwriter Sonny West was essentially responsible for both), its slightly slower tempo actually suits Buddy better, giving him more time to lay out the trap of his vocal inflections.

The pure pop songwriting craft is not always on the level of 'Words Of Love', either: thus, 'Listen To Me' slips into formula (the ringing guitar melody is essentially a slight variation on the 'Words Of Love' riff), and 'Look At Me' delivers its folksy quatrains with sympathy and charm, but no original hooks. Yet for every so-so composition there may be found a brilliant antidote like 'Everyday', with an inventive arrangement featuring the celesta as a lead instrument and knee-slapping as primary percussion — another excellent attempt at creating an atmosphere of purry heavenly delight with minimal means, instead of relying on the tried and true Hollywood orchestration. Also interesting is a stab at making 12-bar blues go pop: 'Mailman Bring Me No More Blues', driven by Vi Petty's honky tonk piano and sung by Buddy in sort of a Hank Williams

manner — plaintive, soulful, and seductive, instead of dark and grizzly in the classic blues manner; hardly a highlight, but it is amusing that this was one of the tunes played by the Beatles during their *Get Back* sessions, when they were dusting off their blues chops while still clinging on to pop stylistics.

It is a little funny that Buddy's name appears less frequently in the songwriting credits on this album than it does on the Crickets' debut — and yet the record still feels a pinch more «Buddy-true» in the end. Slowly, but surely, Holly was coming into his own as a visionary songwriter, moving away from the general rock'n'roll stylistics of his peers and into the realm of rock'n'roll-influenced, but deeply individual, popcraft, where his nerdy looks, shakey-hiccupy vocals, and simplistically sincere attitude could provide far huger benefits than 'Ready Teddy' or 'Rock Me My Baby'. There were understandable limits to that shift in the context of late Fifties' America, but it certainly *was* a shift that went much deeper than just taking off his glasses on the album cover — a move which you could with equal probability call coldly calculated (because hot girls do not go for guys with glasses) or boldly executed (because how can you truly establish a soul-to-soul connection with those heavy FAOSA frames?).





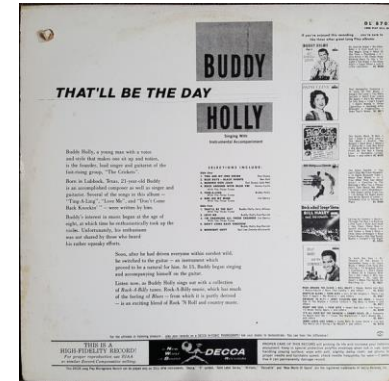
THAT'LL BE THE DAY

Album released:

April 1958

V A L U E
3 3 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) You Are My One Desire; 2) Blue Days, Black Nights; 3) Modern Don Juan; 4) Rock Around With Ollie Vee; 5) Ting A Ling; 6) Girl On My Mind; 7) That'll Be The Day; 8) Love Me; 9) I'm Changing All Those Changes; 10) Don't Come Back Knockin'; 11) Midnight Shift.

REVIEW

Technically, this LP should have been listed as Buddy's first: all of the songs here are taken from his first recording sessions for Decca, held at various dates throughout 1956, approximately one year prior to finding success with Brunswick. The story goes that, since Buddy's first singles with Decca flopped and the label was not quite sure what to make of him, they simply did not renew his contract — but as time went by and he eventually started treading the road to stardom, all these early tunes, including all the flop singles as well as a number of previously unreleased outtakes, were hastily cobbled together for an LP; easily done, since Decca still held the rights to all of them, and a common practice for labels stupid enough to have lost their stars before they became stars.



In retrospect, the Decca decision makes more sense than it made in 1958: for those with an academic interest in Buddy Holly, these earliest recordings should be priceless, but for serious Buddy Holly fans who were growing up together with Buddy, they were most probably disappointing. First of all, Side A is almost entirely devoid of originals. Three of the songs are credited to Don Guess, Buddy's buddy and original bass fiddle player, and are little more than average doo-wop ('Girl

On My Mind', with Buddy unconvincingly forcing his vocals to emulate the smooth soulfulness of classic doo-wop crooners) or second-hand rockabilly ('Modern Don Juan', which Buddy is anything *but*; the song might have been more successful in the hands of a Carl Perkins). Much gutsier is 'Rock Around With Ollie Vee', credited to Buddy's original lead guitarist Sonny Curtis — the players get into this one with an almost unexpected ferocity, although flat production and Buddy's vocal limitations remain inescapable curses in this style.

Following Elvis' love for classic and recent Atlantic hits, Buddy also tried to follow suit by choosing the Clovers' 'Ting-A-Ling', one of the most desperate odes to teenage libido of its time; he manages well enough to slip into character, with a suitably hysterical vocal tone, but on the whole, this attempt to transform professionally arranged and produced R&B into crude, spontaneous rockabilly is half-hearted and lacks imagination. It almost seems like a copycat exercise — hey, Elvis did this thing right with 'Money Honey', why can't we do it with another catchy Atlantic vocal band tune? (You can clearly hear the influence of Scotty Moore's 'Money Honey' solo on Sonny Curtis' soloing in this track: considering that Buddy and his band toured as a support act for Elvis in early 1956, this should not be too surprising). Unfortunately, Buddy Holly is no Elvis when it comes to carrying a classic R&B tune, and Sonny Curtis is no Scotty Moore when it comes to designing a terrific guitar solo and playing it as if it were improvised.

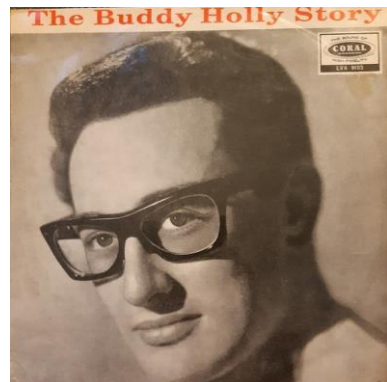
The second half of the album is overshadowed by the title track, which actually is the *original* recording of 'That'll Be The Day' — slightly slower, seriously looser, more high-pitched and hysterical, lacking vocal harmonies, and generally showing the important difference between early, «formative» Buddy Holly and the later, more self-assured and perfectionist Buddy Holly. Even the guitar introduction shows that difference: the original one features a simple, shrill, one-note opening line, directly descended from Elmore James' 'Dust My Broom' — the new version has the guitar spirally moving downward through several chords, a well-crafted flourish suggesting an already advanced level of pop craft. But just as important is the realization that it took Buddy a few years to come to terms with his own voice, and settle it into a mild, natural style which let it express itself with more clarity and passion than when it had to be forced into a screechy, let's-rock-this-house-down pattern just because it was 1956 and all the hip people were doing that stuff.

The other early originals that surround the title track are halfway decent (in particular, the B-side 'Love Me', which was Buddy's very first single, and the lyrically clever 'I'm Changing All Those Changes'), but still do not advance far beyond standard rockabilly or sped-up country-western. Too many of them simply sound like sincere, but not highly interesting tributes to Elvis and Carl Perkins from a young boy who has yet to grow himself the balls of either.

Consequently, one would have to be really mean and haughty to blame Decca for not spotting the future genius of 'Peggy Sue' or 'Words Of Love' in these cautious first moves at trying to construct one's own artistic identity — also, considering that Buddy got his new contract with the smaller Brunswick label that was legally under Decca anyway, the record industry cannot be said to have treated the rising wannabe star too cruelly. It is, however, ironic and even cruel that **That'll Be The Day** would be only the second and very last LP of Buddy Holly material that the artist himself would see released in his lifetime — and while I do not know of his reaction to Decca's commercial move, I am sure it must have been similar to the average reaction of a successful writer to the sudden publication of his teenage poetry exercises.

At the very least, unlike the stream of rudely doctored and tampered musical sketches that followed Buddy's demise, these are fully authentic documents that give you Buddy Holly in his rawest and most spontaneous state of mind — things that are held dear by certain types of people, meaning that there are most likely some fans out there who actually prefer the early version of 'That'll Be The Day' to the more complex and polished re-recording, just like there are fans out there who swear by the «wild» Hamburg period of the early Beatles before Brian Epstein and George Martin put them in suits and pacified their musical aesthetics. Problem is, some of them are indeed «born to be wild», but others are rather «born to sweet delight», and this album — a relatively wild one — happened to be released right in the middle of Buddy's sweetest delight period, which made things confusing back then and continues to make them confusing even in retrospect.

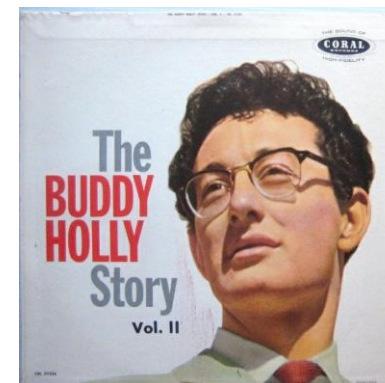




THE BUDDY HOLLY STORY VOLS. 1-2

Compilation released: **V** **A** **L** **U** **E**
Feb. 28, 1959 (Vol. 1) **3** **3** **3** **2** **3**
April 1960 (Vol. 2)

More info:

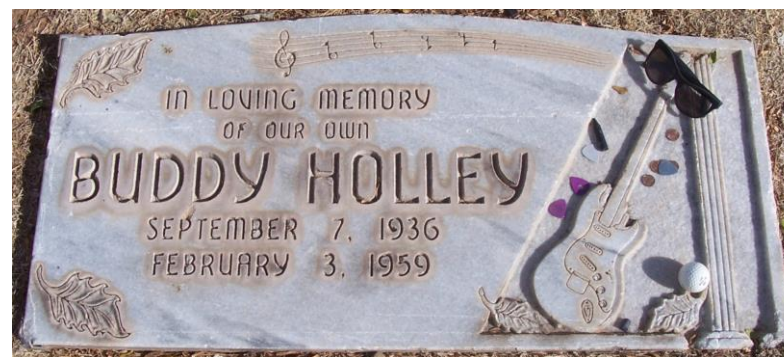


Tracks: *The Buddy Holly Story* – 1) Raining In My Heart; 2) Early In The Morning; 3) Peggy Sue; 4) Maybe Baby; 5) Everyday; 6) Rave On; 7) That'll Be The Day; 8) Heartbeat; 9) Think It Over; 10) Oh Boy; 11) It's So Easy; 12) It Doesn't Matter Anymore.

The Buddy Holly Story Vol. II – 1) Peggy Sue Got Married; 2) Well...All Right; 3) What To Do; 4) That Makes It Tough; 5) Now We're One; 6) Take Your Time; 7) Crying, Waiting, Hoping; 8) True Love Ways; 9) Learning The Game; 10) Little Baby; 11) Moondreams; 12) That's What They Say.

REVIEW

Conspiracy theories are one of the hottest items on the market in our age of (mis)information, so here's my own juicy take for your consumption. What really happened on the fateful day of February 3, 1959, was that Roger Arthur Peterson, piloting the Beech-craft Bonanza N3794N, was discreetly and covertly bribed by one James Paul McCartney – a handsome, devious (and probably well-connected) alumnus of the Liverpool Institute in England – to crash-land the Bonanza in some swamp, ravine, or cornfield. The operation was carried out successfully, although, to this very day, it has not been properly established why the pilot's own strategy of survival backfired, or how did James Paul McCartney get the financial backing for his nefarious plan. We *do* understand the motive, though: elimination of a dangerous competitor, threatening to privatize and monopolize the emerging pop-rock market before the potential British suppliers came out of age and got a fair chance to capture their own share. At the very least, it makes much more sense, as far as motives go, than predictably blaming everything on the FBI and CIA, as usual. (Besides, the FBI and CIA have an alibi, since they were much too busy at the time, trying to set Chuck Berry up with an underage waitress).



Anyway, whatever the actual circumstances might have been, the bad news were that Buddy Holly (along with his good friends Ritchie Valens and J. P. «The Big Bopper» Richardson of 'Chantilly Lace's fame) was, indeed, dead, and that we would, therefore, be forever left in the dark as to where his talent might have led him in the golden decade of rock music. The only slight bit of consolation was that, prior to dying, he left behind an impressive stockpile of unfinished recordings — one that would keep the small market for devoted Buddy fans occupied for years and years to come. But even this «good» news was seriously soured by the fact that most of the recordings had to be seriously tampered with in order to acquire «commercially viable» form, and that the tamperings were not always up to par (a rather unpleasant, but not uncommon, side of the music business; the same story would be repeated a decade later for the prematurely departed Jimi Hendrix).

The vaults were, in fact, opened less than a month after the funeral, although the first installation was fairly modest: **The Buddy Holly Story** consisted entirely of A- and B-sides released during the artist's lifetime (the most recent single to be included was 'It Doesn't Matter Anymore' / 'Raining In My Heart', which came out in January, just a couple of weeks before the accident). Less than a year later, in response to the high chart performance of the album, Coral followed it up with **The Buddy Holly Story Vol. II** — an entirely different story altogether, mainly consisting of «from-the-vault» stuff. Much of it came from Buddy's last recording session in December 1958, which he held in the living room of his own New York apartment, taping simple acoustic demos with nothing but his voice and guitar on show. Naturally, the record label decided that the sound would have to be brought up to standards, and... well, the best thing that can be said is that at least those results were significantly better than some of the sacrileges to follow.

Since the two LPs have this fundamental difference, it might not make too much sense to combine them in a single review, but I shall do it anyway for a technical reason — an entire half of the songs on **The Buddy Holly Story** had already gotten their LP releases in Buddy's lifetime, and most of them were discussed in earlier reviews, which would make a separate entry for just six songs a little superfluous, particularly since not all of them are masterpieces.

Taken in chronological order, the first of these is 'Think It Over', the A-side of a single released in May '58 — a bit of 12-bar blues redone in a bouncy pop format, with a catchy, repetitive guitar / piano riff (you'll recognize the same chord sequence, for instance, in the Stones' 'Under Assistant West Coast Promotion Man'); arguably, the song achieved perfection only later, when it got a new set of lyrics far more suitable to its strolling tempo, recast by Ernie Maresca and Dion as 'The Wanderer'. 'Early In The Morning' reflects a questionable choice in covers (Bobby Darin? come on, Buddy, we know you can do better than that!), especially given that the song is a lite-rock rewrite of Ray Charles' 'I Got A Woman'.

Much better — close to a mini-masterpiece — is ‘It's So Easy’, which all but sets the standard for the inventive, upbeat, guitar-based pop song of the next decade: catchy and complex choruses and verses going through multiple parts, melodic guitar solos with tiny variations from first to second, a certain overtone unity between vocals and guitars, and a bit of the Crickets’ usual roughness-round-the-edges to put a fat checkmark in the «for rebellious teenagers» box rather than the one «for respectable middle class audiences»— those shrill, ragged guitar licks are definitely for the younger generation. Plus, the chorus itself — "it's so easy to fall in love!" — registers like an anthemic statement, less of a personal statement this time and more like an enthusiastic invocation. (And don't forget the "here I go breaking all of the rules" line in the first verse: what is this, the Crickets or Judas Priest?).

Those sharp vibes would be, however, slightly dulled later in the year. The first sign was ‘Heartbeat’, composed by Buddy’s good old friends Bob Montgomery and Norman Petty. The arrangement of the tune has a bit of a Cuban flavor to it, and there is a slight tinge of lounge crooning in Buddy’s voice: compared to something like ‘Words Of Love’, with its complex lead guitar fluctuations and intimate vocal atmosphere, ‘Heartbeat’ cannot help but feel rather fluffy in comparison (rather unsurprising that the song would later be covered by so many «fluff artists» — Bobby Vee, Dave Berry, Herman’s Hermits, and the Hollies way past their prime, in 1980).

Things get even more suspicious with the release of ‘It Doesn't Matter Anymore’, not just because it was written by the most recent teen idol Paul Anka, but also because it was heavily dependent on the orchestral overdubs of Dick Jacobs; the same orchestration was also used for the B-side, ‘Raining In My Heart’, credited to Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, the court writers for the Everly Brothers. The orchestral arrangements are not awful per se, featuring quirky and fun parts written for the harp, but it is fairly evident, I think, that Buddy’s voice is less than ideal for this material — he has to really strain and stretch to sustain all the complicated melismatic transitions on ‘Raining In My Heart’, basically doing something he does not at all feel comfortable with. The fact that this was the last single to be released in Buddy’s lifetime is a tad disturbing: we shall never know if this was just a one-time incongruence or the beginning of a possible new trend of Holly watering down under the pressure of outside songwriters and mellowing pop tastes, but I know for sure that if *I* were a singer-songwriter and I knew I'd have to go out with a Paul Anka song, I'd probably rescheduled that flight for several months earlier.

In a certain way, though it expectedly does not contain as many high watermarks, **Vol. 2** is more consistent than the first album, with ten out of twelve songs written exclusively by Holly or co-credited to Holly and Petty. There are only two exceptions: ‘Now We're One’, another Bobby Darin song which was the B-side to ‘Early In The Morning’ and sounds even

more inept than the A-side (if the latter was a Ray Charles rip-off, then this one largely borrows its melody from Presley's 'Too Much', with a slight infusion of 'Money Honey'), and Petty's 'Moondreams', a ballad Buddy had originally recorded with the Norman Petty Trio back in 1957 and then revived in late 1958 with more of Jacobs' orchestral arrangements. It is not a very good song, honestly, sounding like a Doris Day standard more than anything else, and the clichéd «salon gypsy violin solo» makes things even worse.

Other than that, however, **Vol. 2** gives us plenty of worthy goodies. Returning to chronological order, 'Take Your Time' (the original B-side to 'Rave On') is a rare case of Buddy being explicitly shadowed by a prominent Hammond organ, which is a refreshing change from permanent guitar dependence. (It should also probably be noted for being one of the first pop-rock songs in which the protagonist "can wait", as opposed to all those other songs in which he most assuredly *can't* — ever the gentleman, Buddy Holly puts no pressure on his maiden of choice).

Even more impressive is 'Well... All Right', the original B-side to 'Heartbeat' which, honestly, should have been the A-side: remember all those artists listed above who covered 'Heartbeat'? 'Well... All Right', on the contrary, was covered by Blind Faith, Santana, and the Smithereens (also Kid Rock, but we'll try to let this one slide, okay?). It's a song that seems so far ahead of its own time that it never sounded out of place on Blind Faith's self-titled album — in fact, its rhythmic strum has quite a bit in common with the Beatles' 'Get Back', except that Holly's acoustic melody is muted and introvert, suitable for the intimate nature of the song, as expressed in lines like "...the dreams and wishes you wish / in the night when the lights are low" (my personal mondegreen with the song is that I always hear that line as "the dreams and wishes *Jewish*", and subsequently get visions of Buddy Holly as a young Orthodox rebel quietly protesting against the *yichud*). The song's lyrics *and* melody both point a possible way to a much more mature, introspective Holly bringing wisdom and responsibility to teenage mentality — the line that would eventually be endorsed by Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys, but in their own way, close to Buddy Holly's artistic ideology but very different in terms of melodic and harmonic realisation.

All the remaining songs on the album were released posthumously, and it is not clear if all of them would have been endorsed by the artist had he lived: for instance, 'Peggy Sue Got Married', the tongue-in-cheek sequel to 'Peggy Sue', might have been written and demoed by Buddy as just a joke — it has the exact same melody and clearly follows the pattern of LaVern Baker's original 'Jim Dandy' vs. 'Jim Dandy Got Married'. But the song was still picked up by the Coral executives, dusted off, overdubbed with a rhythm section and rather corny-sounding backing vocals, and released as the first single after Buddy's death — though, honestly, the A-side should have been 'Crying, Waiting, Hoping', a song particularly famous

for its clever overdubbing by the rest of the Crickets, who had to work with Buddy's demo and fill in the «echo» vocals for the title, one of the few «post-Buddy» creative decisions on his work that has become universally accepted even after the original demo had surfaced — probably because without the echo vocals the little ladder that Buddy has constructed in the place of the vocal melody seems to be naturally lacking several steps, which his co-workers are only too happy to be able to fill in. This particular tune the Beatles did not improve on, when they played it live on the BBC — maybe because they highlighted the wrong George on it (Harrison, whose vocal performance was quite flat compared to Buddy's, instead of Martin, who may have given them a few clues on how to gloss it up properly).

The remaining five songs are of varying quality, which is even more difficult to assess because of all the sappy orchestral overdubs. I don't care much for 'True Love Ways', another standard-type ballad that's more Sinatra than Buddy Holly; I *do* care for 'That Makes It Tough', as long as somebody bothers to strip it clean of the circa-1950 style old-fashioned doo-wop backing vocals — in essence, it feels like a potentially gritty country ballad that might have been great in the hands of Hank Williams. 'What To Do' is a nice, but not outstanding, upbeat pop-rocker; 'Learning The Game' is a good example of folk-pop that I can easily envisage coming from the likes of the Searchers; and 'That's What They Say' was perfectly placed as the farewell song at the end of the album — many a tear must have been shed at hearing Buddy sing "there comes a time for everybody" in such a decisive, *final* style, and even if he is obviously singing about true love rather than you-know-what, this does not make the verse about "I didn't hear them say a word of when that time will be / I only know that what they say has not come true for me" any less bitter-ironic.

In retrospect, the two volumes of **The Buddy Holly Story** do a good job of illustrating all of the artist's sides, the great ones and the weak ones, the genius and the corniness. Truth of the matter is, Buddy Holly was not an «Artiste» (with that decisive final -e): all he wanted, like pretty much everyone else at the time, was to make pop singles that would bring fame and fortune, and he was equally happy to record melodically and spiritually exciting songs one day, and a bunch of corny schlock the other one — which is why, honestly, I remain fairly skeptical about the idea that, had he lived, he might have taken pop music to the same heights as the greatest artists of the next decade. (At best, I think, he might have attained the reputation of somebody like Roy Orbison — consistent and always respectable, but well off the cutting edge once the British Invasion swept away American resistance).

On the other hand, even his late period songs such as 'Well... All Right' and 'Crying, Waiting, Hoping' show that he was anything *but* spent as an interesting songwriter, and there is really no telling what that songwriting style would have

evolved into with the arrival of new trends, from surf-rock to Merseybeat. Clearly, it would be «soft» — we see a very clear tendency to tone down Buddy's rocking side from his early to his late days — but what sort of «soft» (Roy Orbison-soft? Brian Wilson-soft? Engelbert Humperdinck-soft?) remains unclear. So just blame it on Paul McCartney.





[THE CRICKETS] IN STYLE WITH THE CRICKETS

Album released:
December 1960

V A L U E
3 3 3 1 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) *More Than I Can Say*; 2) Rockin' Pneumonia And The Boogie Woogie Flu; 3) Great Balls Of Fire; 4) Ting-A-Ling; 5) Just This Once; 6) Deborah; 7) Baby My Heart; 8) When You Ask About Love; 9) Time Will Tell; 10) A Sweet Love; 11) *I Fought The Law*; 12) Love's Made A Fool Of You; 13*) Someone, Someone; 14*) Don't Cha Know; 15*) Why Did You Leave?; 16*) Smooth Guy; 17*) So You're In Love; 18*) Peggy Sue Got Married.

REVIEW

Although any time past 1960 it was probably only the adventurous explorer who even knew that this album exists, **In Style With The Crickets** is an absolutely seminal record — the quintessential «sail-on-sailor-even-after-your-captain-has-been-washed-away» musical enterprise. Years before The Doors decided to carry on without Jim Morrison, decades before Thin Lizzy or Alice In Chains would do the same without Phil Lynott or Layne Staley, The Crickets agreed that their own bonds of friendship were too tightly formed to let such a minor incident as the passing of Buddy Holly to shatter them, and that the memory of their late leader would much better be served by continuing to function as an active musical group than by packing it in and going back to the proverbial farm.



There were a couple of problems with that decision, though. With Buddy's passing, The Crickets essentially consisted of just the rhythm section — Jerry Allison on drums and Joe Mauldin on bass. They certainly could play, and both could even compose a little, but neither of them could sing, play decent guitar (lead guitar at least) or just have enough confidence to

act as a front man on stage. The guitar problem was the easiest one to solve, though: throughout Buddy's early years with the band, his friend Sonny Curtis would often perform the function of a de-facto extra Cricket, and, in fact, according to some sources, Curtis officially joined The Crickets even before Buddy's demise, some time in late 1958. With plenty of guitar playing skills, a solid ability to compose new songs, and an established musical reputation, Curtis rather nicely filled in the position of ship captain. However, he was not much of a singer, at least not when it came to rock'n'roll, which was still the main genre The Crickets wanted to play in.

After a short search, the role of lead singer went to Henry Earl Sinks, another fellow Texan who had also made his first recordings with Norman Petty back in 1958, performing as «Earl Henry» on a couple of semi-decent, but not particularly imaginative singles ([‘Whatcha Gonna Do?’](#) is a representative example of «Earl Henry»'s approach to rockabilly — sort of like a watered down version of Johnny Burnette). Sinks only lasted with the Crickets until February 1960, when he quit the band over either creative or financial disagreements; just a few months before that, Curtis was drafted into the army, which pretty much left The Crickets back where they were at the moment of Buddy's death. Unperturbed, Allison and Mauldin carried on, recruiting yet *another* fellow Texan, David Box, to replace both Curtis and Sinks at the same time — however, since they'd already recorded plenty of new material with those guys, **In Style With The Crickets**, whose release was for various reasons delayed until late 1960, featured no contributions from Box.

The results of those 1959 sessions were a pretty mixed bag — but, at the very least, interesting. The main problem was obvious and predictable: there was no way, certainly not at such short notice, to replace Buddy Holly with anyone who could have his charisma, let alone talent and vision. Sinks is, technically, a decent singer, closer in tone and timbre to any one of the Everley Brothers than to Buddy, but no matter whether he is in «soft» or «hard» mode, he fails to bring in any serious excitement. He's just a singer in a rock'n'roll band, just a-wanderin' on the face of this earth, like so many others; God did not grant him any particular gifts other than a desire to live in the world of art. (Later on, he would have a career as a movie actor that nobody has ever heard about, and after that, as a record producer producing artists that nobody has ever heard about. Talk about tough luck indeed!).

Armed with this rather morose replacement for Buddy, The Crickets make another mistake by cramming the album full of covers of songs that are just too good for them to be able to do anything of interest. ‘Rockin’ Pneumonia And The Boogie Woogie Flu?’ Covered as close as possible to Huey Smith's original arrangement, its jokey New Orleanian flavor is only hinted at in this version — no improvement whatsoever. ‘Great Balls Of Fire?’ The collective talents of Sinks and guest

player Dudley Brooks on the piano do not amount to a tenth part of the excitement generated by Jerry Lee Lewis on any of the studio or live versions of the song ever captured on tape. ‘Ting-A-Ling’? At least in this case they try to put their own spin on this old R&B classic from The Clovers... by setting the vocal melody to the instrumental melody of ‘That’ll Be The Day’, including the immortal intro riff and an almost note-for-note recreation of the original guitar solo. Maybe Sonny just wanted, so very badly, to record his own version of ‘That’ll Be The Day’ that he agreed to settle for such an odd compromise; in the end, though, all it does is provide some fuel for the discussion that all pop songs are really one, when you learn to disregard minor insignificant nuances in chord structure. (Ironically, the song that is *closer* in melody to the original ‘Ting-A-Ling’ on here is ‘Time Will Tell’, credited to Louisiana-born R&B songwriter Paul Gayten).

However, in spite of all these massively underwhelming covers, **In Style With The Crickets** still leaves plenty of space for good songwriting. *Most* of Curtis’ and Allison’s contributions here fall either under the easily predictable category of «Buddy Holly could have written this» or the slightly more surprising, but ultimately still predictable category of «The Everly Brothers could have written this». For instance, ‘Just This Once’ is a fast-rollickin’ pop-rock number that is very much up Buddy’s alley; but immediately following it is ‘Deborah’, a ballad whose guitar melody, lead vocals, and approach to vocal harmonies owe much more to Phil and Don than to Buddy. ‘When You Ask About Love’, released as a single (later to be covered by the rockabilly revival band Matchbox in 1980, whose version was lovingly described as «pukeabilly» in *Record Mirror*), is mid-tempo Buddy Holly; ‘Baby My Heart’ is loud and proud Everly Brothers-style rock’n’roll with more group harmonies. Interestingly, although we rarely ever remember ‘Baby My Heart’, its intro riff will be recognizable as the classic riff of Johnny Kidd & The Pirates’ ‘Shakin’ All Over’ — they most likely nicked it from this song, given that it was released as a B-side in the UK in April 1960, whereas ‘Shakin’ All Over’ came out in June of the same year; just another reminder of how fickle the concept of «original songwriting» really is.

But while the only historical function of ‘Baby My Heart’ might have been to provide external inspiration for a much more enduring classic, its A-side has deservedly received far more accolades. ‘More Than I Can Say’, driven by Dudley Brooks’ gentle piano riff rather than guitar (the chord sequence here eerily sounds like a shortened preview of the famous piano melody of Leiber’s – and possibly Stoller’s – ‘Spanish Harlem’, which *could* have very well been influenced by this song), is a Curtis original that is melodically equidistant from both Buddy and the Everlys, and is rather a natural precursor to the gentle folk-pop sound of The Searchers. Sonny himself takes the lead on the song, showing himself in possession of a far more expressive and charismatic voice than Sinks — just not at all suitable for singing a Buddy-style rocker, but for this kind of material it is absolutely perfect. The result is empathetic sentiment without either pathos or saccharine, reserved

but deeply sincere, and *far* better than the subsequent hit covers by Bobby Vee and especially Leo Sayer (who completely bypasses the «deep sincerity through restraint» principle and ends up horribly oversinging it). Do not accept inferior substitutes — the original version of the song as sung by Sonny Curtis is the real deal masterpiece.

Perhaps it should be added that it is also a masterpiece of positioning — being the opening number on the album, its lyrics ("*I miss you every single day / Why must my life be filled with sorrow / Miss you more than I can say*") are difficult to construe as anything other than a tender lament for the band's dearly departed friend and leader. Of course, when we get to the bridge section with the "*do you mean to make me cry, am I just another guy?*" bit, that impression gets a little shattered (unless we're talking about a homoerotic connection between Buddy and Sonny, which is never totally out of the question), but the power of first impression is never to be underestimated. The only downside of this beautiful opening is that it provides us with a false hope — the rest of the album never truly lives up to it, and when a gorgeous original composition welcoming you to the LP is immediately followed by two completely pointless rock'n'roll covers, that feeling of heavy disappointment is hardly to be underestimated, either.

Still, there is at least one more indisputable classic awaiting us later on: the original version of 'I Fought The Law', a song much better known through the hit version of Bobby Fuller in 1966 and then, of course, The Clash's cover more than a decade after Fuller's. Why Fuller's version was such a big hit and The Crickets' was not can only be ascribed to extra-musical factors — the band released it as a B-side to the much less distinctive 'A Sweet Love', getting no airplay, while Fuller had it as an A-side (not to mention the sharp rise of public interest in the song after Fuller's probable suicide several months after the song's release). Essentially, the two versions are very similar, except that Bobby throws on a little musical reference to Eddie Cochran's 'Summertime Blues' in his cover, and the production values are, of course, a little higher for 1965 than they were for 1959 — also, it may be conceded that the song's unusually acute level of social conscience is fairly atypical of Sonny "Love Is All Around" Curtis' general style and would connect much better with such a rockabilly rebel as the late Bobby Fuller. But we shouldn't pretend that The Crickets themselves do not do the song justice — and, for that matter, if you want 100% anger and rebelliousness, The Clash blow both versions away anyway.

I came across a couple of interviews with Sonny where sensation-hungry journalists keep bugging him about whatever it caused him to write such a glorious outlaw anthem — and, as you can guess, he mostly just shrugs and says something about writing it on the spot, in about twenty minutes, as a country pastiche, never ascribing it any particular significance. Musically, it's really not that much, just another stereotypical Buddy-like pop-rocker; and it does not really sound all that

much like a rebellious anthem (not even in the Bobby Fuller version, even if Bobby may already have sensed the potential), but then again, neither does a heck of a lot of the whole «outlaw country» thing. It's just a catchy song with a great lyrical hookline, efficiently hammered into your head through endless repetition. Could have actually made a great prison work song if the tempo were slowed down just a bit — no sane prisoner would ever dare to "break rocks in the hot sun" at such a suicidal speed.

By this time, you probably get the general idea that **In Style With The Crickets** is a really, *really* mixed bag, combining utter throwaways with flashes of genius — which makes it into quite a curious historical artifact, even if the best songs from it have long since been hijacked by other artists. Fortunately, the album remains in print, and one of the later CD releases even offers it bundled with a bunch of bonus tracks from 1960 — several singles and outtakes that already feature David Box on guitar and vocals, replacing both Curtis and Sinks at the same time. They are rather poorly produced, and feature little of interest other than the «completed» version of Buddy's unreleased 'Peggy Sue Got Married' and the original version of the folk-rocker 'Don't Cha Know', later also covered by The Searchers in an aesthetically similar, but technically superior-sounding version. Overall, Box has a more lilting and flexible voice than Sinks, but is a less interesting guitar player than Curtis, so it's not really clear how much of an improvement he really was.

In any case, the bonus tracks are nice to have, but not essential — although, to be fair, the only *truly* essential track on the album itself is 'More Than I Can Say', which, for some reason, nobody could ever do more justice than its own creator. The best thing I can say about the rest is that they are rarely embarrassing to listen to (with a couple of the more obvious mismatches in style like 'Great Balls Of Fire'). They simply present very little progress, with the band more concerned about «preserving» the spirit of Buddy (and, to a lesser extent, the Everly Brothers) than trying to take risky guesses about where that spirit might have wanted to head, had Buddy never mounted that plane. Which is, in itself, not a crime as long as there is some legitimacy behind it (with Allison, Mauldin, and Curtis all aboard, there's plenty) and as long as it is mostly done in good taste and style — and on that count at least, the album's title certainly doesn't lie.

