

# *The Buddy Holly Recordings*



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## The Recordings Fact File:

Information in this E-Book has been accumulated over a period of 50 years reading about, listening to, playing and finally writing about one of the most influential song writer/ singers, the music world has ever known.

With his backing group The Crickets, Buddy Holly recorded his first hit in 1957. In 18 months time, he would be dead, killed in a plane crash. It wasn't because his rise to fame was so short, or how he died, that he is remembered 50 years on with such admiration and affection; it was because he was so damned good.

This E-Book includes a list of every recording made by Buddy Holly in both studios and at his home and the homes of his friends and fellow musicians: with links to where you can buy all those recordings that have been released. Many of the titles have alternative versions which include those recorded on a tape recorder featuring only Holly singing and playing the guitar. Some of these versions have never been released and most have been overdubbed many times and released on several occasions.

Jon Daly



## THE E-BOOK OF **BUDDY HOLLY & HIS MUSIC**

Buddy Holly (real name Charles Hardin Holley) was the youngest of four children all of whom had musical talent. Nicknamed Buddy by his friends and family, he first won a singing competition at the age of five with a rendition of "Down the River of Memories". He took piano lessons when he was eleven, learned to play the steel guitar, then switched to acoustic guitar in his early teens. Buddy Holly first performed on stage in a duo playing country music with his friend Bob Montgomery. They were known as Buddy and Bob performing at Junior High Assemblies and on local radio, often with a young bass player by the name of Larry Welburn. Tapes were made of some of these performances but in most cases, unsatisfactory dubbings made after Holly's death, obscured the true sound they made. Holly followed closely in the wake of the young Elvis Presley and was greatly influenced by his early music, which in 1955 also had a strong country flavour, known as Rockabilly.

Holly first made proper studio recordings with Decca in 1956 with fellow guitarist, Sonny Curtis (also a fiddle player of some considerable talent) and bass player Don Guess. At the time, drums were considered taboo for trios and more importantly, Elvis did not use a drummer. Percussion was derived by the bass player slapping his strings a fraction before plucking the note. Elvis' first recording, "That's all right Mama" is an excellent example of this.

The Decca recordings were a flop, mainly because the recording engineers did not understand Rockabilly, or Rock n' Roll, and completely failed to market the product! Further recordings were made at Decca on another two occasions with the addition of Jerry Allison on drums (by this time Elvis was using a drummer), but again they were a flop.

A version of "That'll be the Day" was recorded at the second of these sessions but Decca didn't release it at the time and only did so when the popular version was a number one hit.

Holly, Curtis, Allison, Don Guess and Larry Welburn and others (who claimed to have played with Holly and probably did), continued to perform live in and around their home town of Lubbock Texas, often supporting established groups and singers and, on one occasion the group supported a show which included Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash. They also recorded demo's both in their homes and occasionally, at Norman Petty's studios in Clovis, New Mexico. Some of these recordings have survived, but again were subject to unsatisfactory overdubbing during the 1960's. Petty, who eventually became The Crickets's manager finally decided to give Holly licence to experiment with his music in his studios and although their relationship deteriorated later, he was instrumental in making Holly a successful recording artist.

By 1957 Sonny Curtis, who was considered a more accomplished guitarist than Holly, did not relish playing rhythm behind him and Don Guess, who would not buy his own bass, left the group.

Early in the same year, Holly, on vocals and guitar, Larry Welburn on bass, Jerry Allison on drums, Nikki Sullivan, June Clark, Ramona and Gary Tollett providing the backing vocals, recorded a demo of a new version of "That'll be the Day". Norman Petty secured a contract with Brunswick Records (ironically, a subsidiary of Decca), who actually released the demo, believing it could not be improved upon by re-recording. The record was slow to start, but it became a Number 1 hit in the USA, the UK and Australia, selling 1 million records in six months. The Crickets, as they now called themselves, were launched to stardom, but unfortunately for Welburn, he had left the group and been replaced by Joe B Maudlin on bass prior to "That'll be the Day" hitting the charts. Nikki Sullivan joined the group as a rhythm guitarist and toured and recorded as a member of the Crickets for the remainder of 1957. Contrary to popular belief, the Crickets did not sing the backing vocals on all their records. After "That'll be the Day" vocal backings as in "Oh Boy", "Maybe Baby" etc, were dubbed on later by a vocal group. Where these vocal

backings occurred, records were put out under "The Crickets" on Brunswick records, whereas records without backing vocal dubs, for example "Peggy Sue", were issued as "Buddy Holly" with instrumental accompaniment, on Coral Records, a sister company of Brunswick.

Sullivan left the group in early 1958, as Sonny Curtis had found a year earlier, playing rhythm behind Holly was to a large extent unnecessary. The Crickets continued to perform as a trio for a while, touring Australia and the UK. Holly and Allison had played together so often that they could fill all the gaps and, as a duo, complimented each other so successfully that they could provide a fully acceptable backing for live performances, and often did. In the late 1950's, recording artists did not have the benefit of multi tracking recording equipment and the final result was usually one of many takes of all the group, rather than individual tracks superimposed on top of one another. Holly, however, forever experimenting, was one of the first rock n' roll artists to over dub his own voice to provide a harmony. He developed this technique very successfully and, although the sound quality suffered technically, the commercial sound was actually enhanced; "Words of Love" and "Listen to Me" being examples. Very often, Holly's recordings were only one or two takes, and a dreadful track on his first album "Mailman Bring Me No More Blues", needed only to complete the LP, was recorded within 10 minutes of being brought to Holly's attention. The instrumental break of one chord is indicative of the speed of the production and needless to say, this was the first and last time the Crickets performed the song.

In the late summer of 1958, country guitarist Tommy Allsup joined the Crickets and remained with Holly after the Crickets broke up in the October of that year. Allsup alternated playing lead with Holly on tour, bringing a "country" flavour back into the music. He also played lead on the last studio recordings Holly and the Crickets ever made. He was also, along with Waylon Jennings on bass, Charlie Bunch on drums, with Holly on the last fatal tour "The Winter Dance Party".

Many bands, not least the Rolling Stones and the Beatles, will admit to Holly's influence on their music and few will disagree that as a composer, singer, producer and performer, he was way ahead of his time. He used a variety of musicians and instruments on his records and was always prepared to improvise. The percussion on "Everyday" is Allison slapping his knees and on "Not Fade Away", Allison uses an upturned empty cardboard box instead of drums.

Holly would probably never have approved of the dubbings put on his home produced tapes and his early studio recordings, particularly those dubbed on by the Jack Hansen Combo, who tried and failed to sound like the Crickets. Most of the dubbings were, however, carried out by The Fireballs, another group under Petty's management. Why the actual original Crickets were never used in the dubbed backings is a question manager Norman Petty, who finally gained control of the tapes, would never answer. Fortunately, several of the original unadulterated tapes have survived and although not considered of commercial value, one could argue, are preferable to the dubbings. Even as late as the mid 1990's, several recordings were overdubbed by The Picks vocal group, which many Holly fans would suggest is overdoing it.

Buddy Holly was killed in a plane crash on 3 February 1959, aged 22, while trying to cut down on travelling time between tour engagements, not least so he could get his clothes washed. His last performance was at the Surf Ballroom, Clear Lake, Iowa.

The Crickets with Sonny Curtis re-joining, continued to perform and record with some success and, are still touring today. They are one of the longest surviving recording bands in history. Waylon Jennings, who became one of America's top country artists, was discovered by Holly and Holly produced and played on Jennings' first record. On the Winter Dance Party tour, Jennings gave up his seat on the plane to The Big Bopper (JP Richardson) who died in the crash with Holly and the young Richie Valens. The recording rights of all Holly's material are now owned by Sir Paul McCartney

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