

Buddy Holly Lives!

The newest Texas export to Hollywood is Buddy Holly
by Jim Dawson

BUDDY HOLLY LIVES, and if you don't believe it, come to Los Angeles. To hear Columbia Pictures tell it, you'd think Hollywood got its name from the Texas rock star.

For the benefit of all children under ten, recent immigrants from Botswana, and other readers unfamiliar with the name, Charles Hardin "Buddy" Holley was a Lubbock western & bop musician who switched to rockabilly in 1956, blossomed into the first genius of rock, then died in a 1959 airplane crash at the age of 22, leaving behind a string of hits like "That'll Be The Day" and "It Doesn't Matter Anymore."

For years the big Hollywood studios have tried to put Buddy Holly's story on the silver screen. Universal Studios made three unsuccessful attempts to get the right to Holly's life, in hopes of filming a television movie. Then 20th Century Fox went to Texas and spent two weeks shooting a film tentatively called *Not Fade Away* before production closed down because the executives had failed to acquire film rights. Finally, in 1977, a small Philadelphia-based company went straight to the source the others had overlooked: Holly's widow, Maria Elena Diaz.

Filming began at 20th Century Fox's Culver City Studios on October 24 and finished up in late January, 1978. The movie, in the cutting room as this is being written, will premier in Texas theaters on May 18. The rest of the country will have to wait until the middle of June.

The Buddy Holly Story is the baby of three men: executive producer Ed Cohen, who raised \$2 million for the production budget; producer Fred Bauer, who personally gained the film's rights from Buddy's widow; and director Steve Rash. The Cohen-Bauer-Rash trinity is responsible for dozens of music-oriented television programs including *Louis Armstrong*, the

All-American Boy and *The 20th Anniversary of Rock'n Roll*. In 1973, while Philadelphians Bauer and Rash were visiting Cohen's office in New York, they marvelled that in the years since Bill Haley and The Comets introduced "Rock Around the Clock" in 1954, nobody had yet produced the definitive rock 'n roll film. Bauer decided there and then that his mission was to make "a historic good-time movie about the roots of rock & roll."

Why did they pick Buddy Holly? "Because Buddy set the tone and established certain standards for the rock'n roll idiom," Bauer said recently in Hollywood. "He was the first to write, produce, sing and play his music all at once. He was also the progenitor of a succession of white singers and instrumentalists that combined the black rhythm and blues sound with the more country white sound." Bauer is also quick to point out among rock stars, Holly's life, untouched by scandal and drugs, is one of the few that can be ethically glamorized.

Bauer visited Maria Elena in Coral Gables, Florida, and assured her he would give her the last word on the script, in order that the film would not exploit Buddy's memory. Once she authorized the rights, Robert Gittler was turned loose on a screenplay, which went through numerous revisions before everyone was happy

about it. Then veteran casting director Joyce Selznick was given the nod to assemble a crew of actors. It was agreed first of all that (1) Buddy Holly must be played by an unknown so that the actor would not overshadow him, and (2) Holly and his band members, the Crickets must be accomplished musicians, for the film's fifteen songs were to be recorded live. "A rock'n roll movie should be done by people who know how to gig," Bauer explained.

The man found to portray Buddy Holly was Gary Busey, whose many credits include character roles in *A Star is Born*, *The Gumball Rally*, and *The Execution of Private Slovik*. Busey is also a professional musician. He toured with Kris Kristofferson and Leon Russell playing drums under the name of Teddy Jack Eddy, and he is an accomplished guitarist.

The two Crickets are played by Charl Martin Smith on upright bass and Don Stroud on drums. Smith has appeared in many films and TV episodes but most viewers will remember him as the resident creep, Terry the Toad, in *American Graffiti*. Stroud is a familiar TV and film villain who recently switched from heavies to play Officer Sam Niles in *The Chosen*.

The three actor-musicians practiced the film's fifteen Holly numbers for several weeks before they performed before the cameras. To make sure their efforts were properly recorded and tracked, Fred Bauer brought in Joe Fein of Sound Advice, A Philadelphia audio company. Fein has set up hundreds of live telecasts for such top rock acts as Johnny Winter and Frank Zappa. It was his job to capture the Crickets' concerts without showing any of the required modern audio equipment. looked at pictures from that



A scene from "The Buddy Holly Story" starring Gary Busey.

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