



Dallas' Top Buddy Holly Fan

Appliance store owner Steve Bonner Keeps Buddy Holly memorial in his den

by Barry Brenesal

In one corner is a pinball machine—not the modern computerized kind, which plays songs, requires a logistics expert with a mathematics degree, and only accepts mastercharge in place of the usual quarter-a-sucker game. No; this is the old kind; it accepts a dime, and bongs once; you have to push a handle to raise the metal ball for positioning; it is possible to win without losing 25 dollars.

Diagonally across from it rests an early sixties jukebox, programmed to accept your 10 cents and play any one of over sixty selections. The pieces all reflect a decided taste for fifties rock, as does the decor of the room, with several dozen glossies of old rock stars, some of them autographed. Color has been added in the form of strategically placed posters, announcing the productions *King Creole*, *Love Me Tender*, *Jalhouse Rock*, *Mister Rock and Roll*, *Go Johnny Go*, *Jamboree*, *Let the Good Times Roll*, *Loving You*, and *Don't Knock the Rock*. Three little turntables (the RCA type with the built in plastic 45 spindle about half a foot high) dot the horizon.

I turned nervously to the door. I kept expecting Eddie Cochran to jump into the room, wielding his amplified guitar and moaning an electrified chorus from "Summertime Blues."

But the only other person standing around (and he didn't moan once, thank God) was Steve Bonner, appliance company owner and fifties rock buff. Steve has made a hobby out of his interest, and a museum out of his den; it is quite impressive enough to turn into a paying proposition. Fortunately, he's enjoying himself too much to bother.

His interest first began in the mid-fifties, but it wasn't until Steve bought

the l.p., the *Buddy Holly Story*, in March of '59 that his true mission in life was revealed to him. Since then, he has kept up all the contacts, but concentrated more on The Crickets and their well known lead singer.

Concentrated? Even more than evaporated milk. Steve Bonner has established ties with all the remaining Crickets (a couple have visited his home—one wonders if they tried the pinball machine). He has played Buddy Holly's guitar; he has sat astride the old (but in excellent condition) motorcycle; he became the first Texas member to the national Buddy Holly Memorial Society.

Naturally, he knows a few things you and I might find interesting. Did you realize that it was Buddy who discovered Waylon Jennings, and produced his first single? Or that Buddy was so anxious to play, that he drove from Lubbock (his hometown) to Dallas in '56 to appear without pay with a lot of other unknowns at the Sportatorium's Bid D Jamboree? Or that his initial encouragement and gigs came courtesy of Sid King (of Sid King and the 5 Strings), who is now a barber in the Dallas area? Or that the Crickets were the first white group to appear in the Apollo Theatre, because some agent had mistaken them for an earlier black group with the same name?

It is perhaps the greatest wonder of all that Steve Bonner has not decided to write a book encompassing some of his knowledge and much of his feel for the period. Now that the latest biographical film on the legendary King of Rock n' Roll has appeared, possibly he will. Assuming he does, it's bound to

be a lively work, considering the man and his considered opinions.

"Today's Country music is computerized music," he told me. "Nashville music is the worst music in the world." These words were not lightly spoken, they were uttered with feeling; Steve knows about the trouble musicians like Buddy Holly have gone through in trying to play their own kind of music and get it recorded.

"In many ways, it was harder for Buddy," he continued. "Buddy was way ahead of his time. He wanted to use his own group, not studio musicians. And when he wanted to record an older tune ("Tingaling," by the Clovers), it was unheard of. How could you re-record a song somebody else had made, and expect to make a hit? But nowadays there is hardly a singer around who doesn't re-record old songs—some of them by Buddy."

Buddy was an experimenter, and in his last year he showed an increasing interest (perhaps on account of his trouble with recording companies) in the production field. Had he lived, he might have started a new label; his aforementioned prodigee, Waylon Jennings, is one of the two modern singers Steve can handle (the other is Willie—who else?). The rest, unfortunately, is silence; unless you afford an old jukebox and key it up with your favorite rare 45's from the time when music was more open, less complicated, less regimented, and more honest.

At least, that's what Steve Bonner thinks. And who, save Don McLean, is to disagree with him?

(Incidentally, I tried the pinball machine. I lost my ass.)