
An electric ensemble propels Metropolis' 'Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story'

July 29, 2019



By Anna DeNoia

Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story is charming entertainment for Holly know-it-all's and novices alike.

In Arlington Heights' Metropolis' current production, **Travis Shanahan** is a terrific look and sound alike for the young star, and his boyish charm shines through as he gives the audience more and more reasons to root for their protagonist. Shanahan is supported by a terrific ensemble of quirky and eye-catching characters. A strong sense of humor is at the forefront of this vintage world. This nostalgic revue is littered with quick moments of simple comedy sure to keep audiences smiling from song to song.

When telling a story with a well-known ending, both to the performers and likely to the audience, it's easy for a production to lose its sense of urgency and give into a sense of dread. These high-energy performers, however, remain expectant and engaged, leaving the audience with no choice but to wait and see what might happen next.



This cast maintaining such strong forward motion, while impressive regardless, is an especially notable feat in this production considering its often awkward pacing. Providing an audience with satisfying performances of the songs they know and love while simultaneously capturing and recounting a life story is certainly a challenge, especially with a story that sped by as tragically fast as Holly's. The flow necessary for this type of storytelling, the perfect balance of history and song, has been attempted by many but mastered by few. This particular production's marriage between biography and cover band was rather rocky.

Unlike some of Broadway's best known biographies, such as *Jersey Boys* or *Beautiful*, *Buddy's* songs are not used to forward the plot. Instead, the narrative is stopped for isolated moments of music, which, while pleasant, make for some slightly unsteady storytelling. The lengthy chunks of dialogue punctuated with sudden musical bursts make for a bit of a bumpy ride for audience members. This shaky structure also robs this production of some of the intimacy audience's crave when learning about their favorite stars. We hear Holly's heartfelt lyrics only in concerts and recording studios, as opposed to more personal, intimate moments in the life of the music legend.



The exception to this rule is the time Buddy spends with his wife Maria Elena, played with heart by the fiery **Jessica Miret Garcia**. In a heartwarming moment, "True Love Ways" is delivered to her as an honest serenade. The chemistry between Shanahan and Garcia is one of the production's brightest highlights, as they successfully and sweetly sweep the audience through the thrill of fast and ferocious first love.

Garcia is one of a collection of sensational supporting cast members, including **Luis David Cortes** as the dynamite **Richie Valens** with a show stopping “La Bamba.” Equally as dynamic is the quartet of Harlem nightclub performers and sensational vocalists (**Jasmine Lacy Young, Jordan Burns, Austin Nelson Jr. and Bre Jacobs**) who get the audience on their feet with “Shout.” Credit is also due to choreographer **Allyssa O’Donnell**, whose exciting work still remains true to the time. It’s hard to tell who was having more fun during O’Donnell’s dances—the cast or the audience.



These electric ensemble moments however were at times somewhat clouded by slightly clumsy handling of issues of race. A supercharged topic especially in the show’s 50’s setting, moments that neared the hot-button either pressed it too lightly or ran from it too quick.

Despite its pacing problems and occasional unmeasured moments, however, *Buddy* is an undeniable good time. The energy radiating off the stage is absolutely infectious, and audiences will find it impossible to fight off a smile when face to face with this delightful cast.

Metropolis Performing Arts Center presents “Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story” through August 31 at 111 W. Campbell Street, Arlington Heights. More information and tickets are available [here](#).

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