

# Music makes Metropolis' revival of 'Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story'



Travis Shanahan, second from right, plays Buddy Holly and Kelan M. Smith, Jack Morsovillo and Roy Brown play The Crickets in Metropolis Performing Arts Centre's "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story." ( *Courtesy of Ellen Prather* )



**Barbara Vitello**

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**"Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story" -- ★ ★ ★**

There are several reasons to recommend "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story," the jukebox bio-musical and tribute concert running through

Aug. 31 at Arlington Heights' Metropolis Performing Arts Centre.

Most of those reasons have to do with the score, which consists mostly of Holly's songs plus a few tunes by other rock 'n' roll innovators. Few of those reasons have to do with Alan Janes' by-the-numbers book that trades in music biz tropes offering little insight into a seminal artist.

But that's not why audiences embrace this show, which premiered in London in 1989 and ran 14 years in the West End. Audiences come for the music: the buoyant tunes composed by Holly, who died in 1959 at age 22 when the plane he was flying in crashed in an Iowa cornfield killing him, singers Ritchie Valens and J.P. Richardson (The Big Bopper) and pilot Roger Peterson, a loss memorialized in Don McLean's 1971 hit "American Pie."

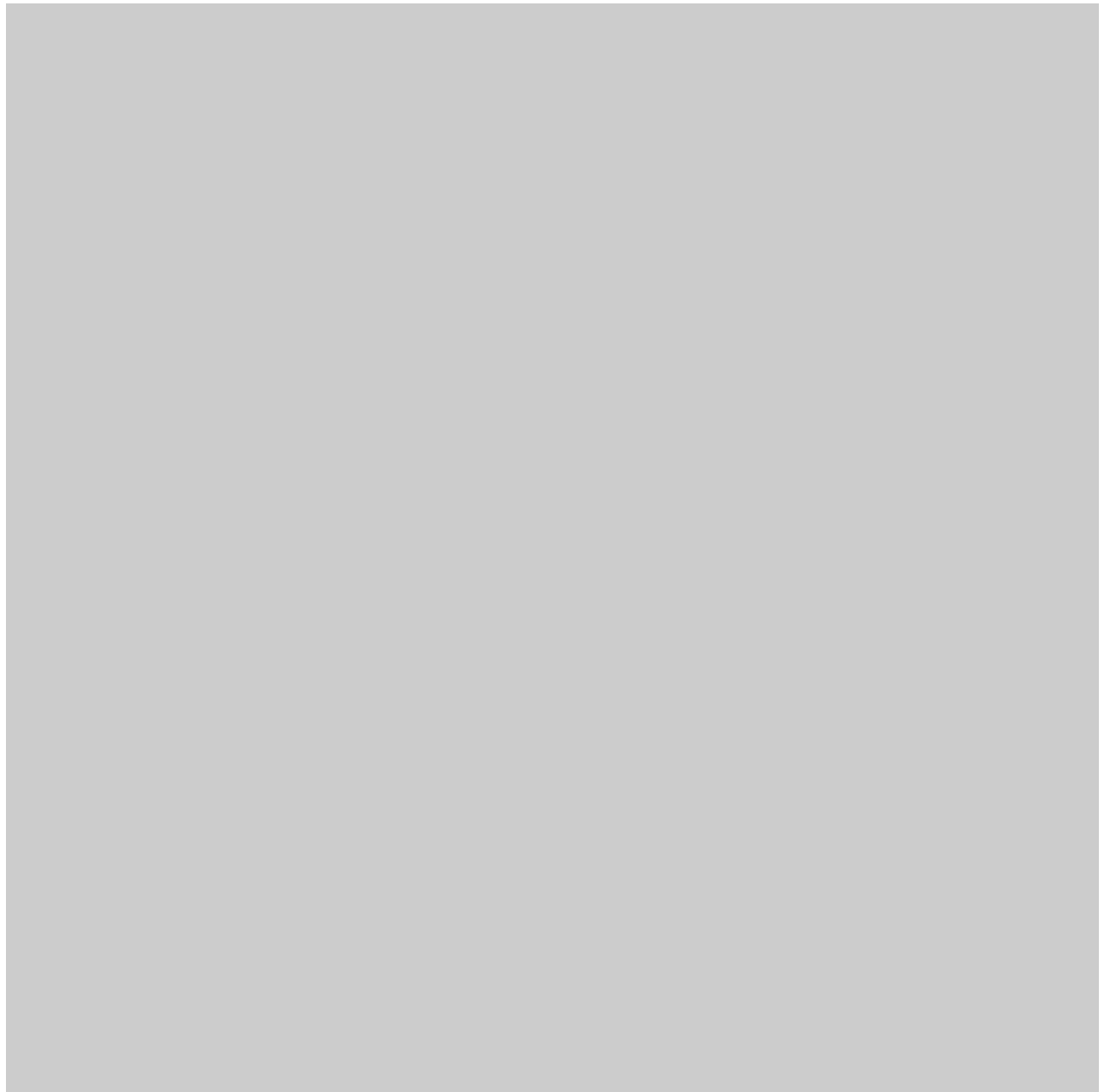


**Buddy (Travis Shanahan) serenades his wife, Maria (Jessica Miret Garcia), in "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story," running through Aug. 31 at Metropolis Performing Arts Centre. - Courtesy of Ellen Prather**

For Metropolis' "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story," director Joe Keefe and music director/conductor Kenneth McMullen have assembled top-notch vocalists and instrumentalists, including a seven-member, onstage orchestra.

Travis Shanahan (who ably imitates Holly's signature, vocal hitch) plays the titular, prototypical singer/songwriter. We meet him and The

Cricketts -- bassist Joe (the indefatigable Roy Brown) and drummer Jerry (Jack Morsovillo), later joined by guitarist Tommy (Kelan M. Smith) -- during a live, 1956 radio broadcast. While their music delights teenagers, disc jockey and manager Hip Pockets Duncan (a sympathetic Gabriel Fries) worries it will alienate sponsors. Still, Duncan negotiates a recording contract with Decca Records' country label, which ends almost before it begins when Holly and the band refuse to play country music.



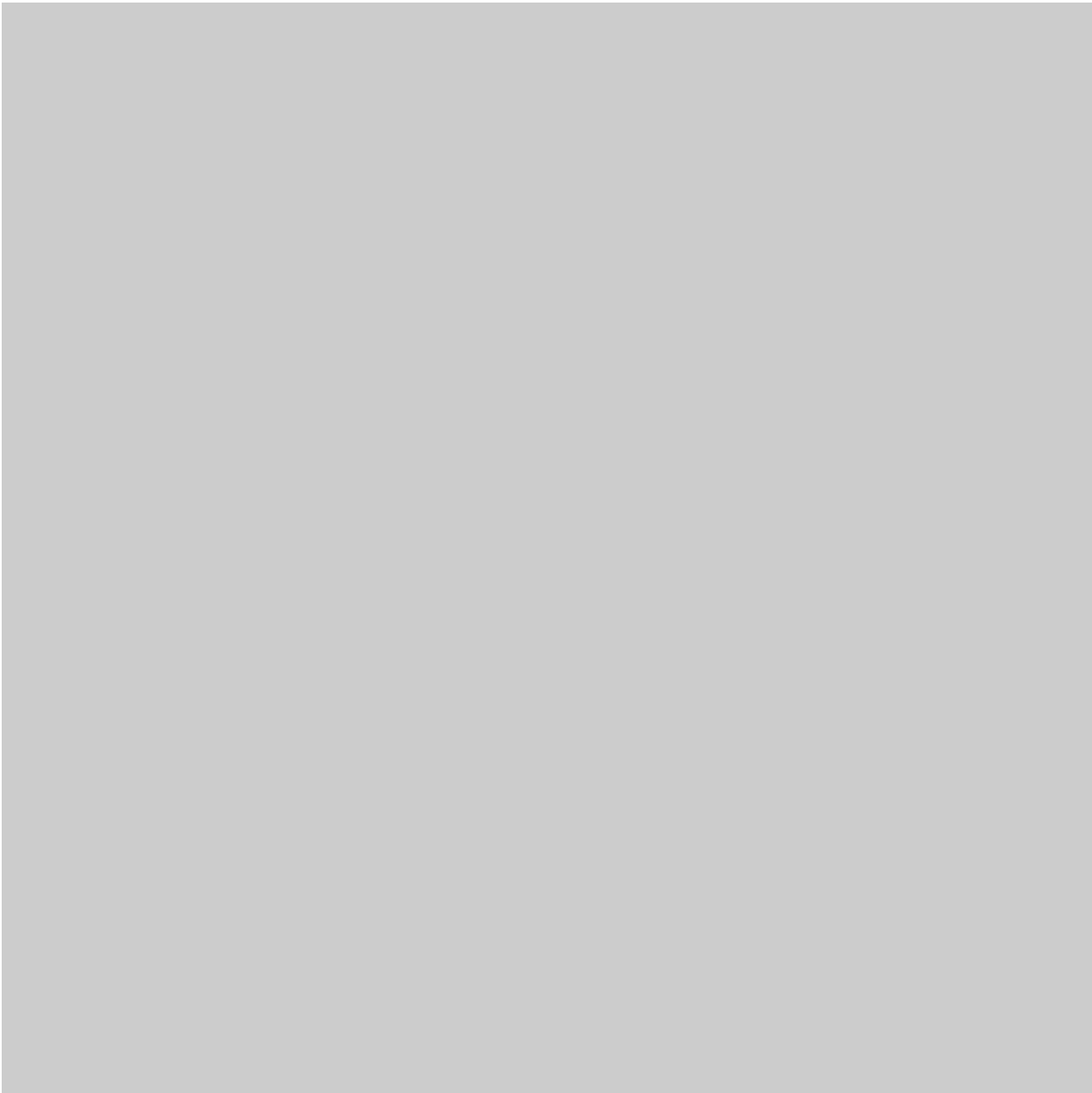
**Jasmine Lacy Young, left, Bre Jacobs, Austin Nelson Jr. and Jordan Burns stop the show with their rendition of "Shout" in Metropolis**

**Performing Arts Centre's "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story."** - Courtesy of Ellen Prather

The clash between the unconventional artist determined to play his music his way and the conservative record executives who tell him he can't recurs several times in the musical, which traces Holly's career from its Decca beginnings until its tragic end about three years later.

Along the way we get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of recording sessions with record producer Norman Petty (David Gordon-Johnson) and his musician-wife VI (an engaging Nicole Frydman, whose contribution to the sweet-sounding hit "Everyday" is one of the show's loveliest moments).

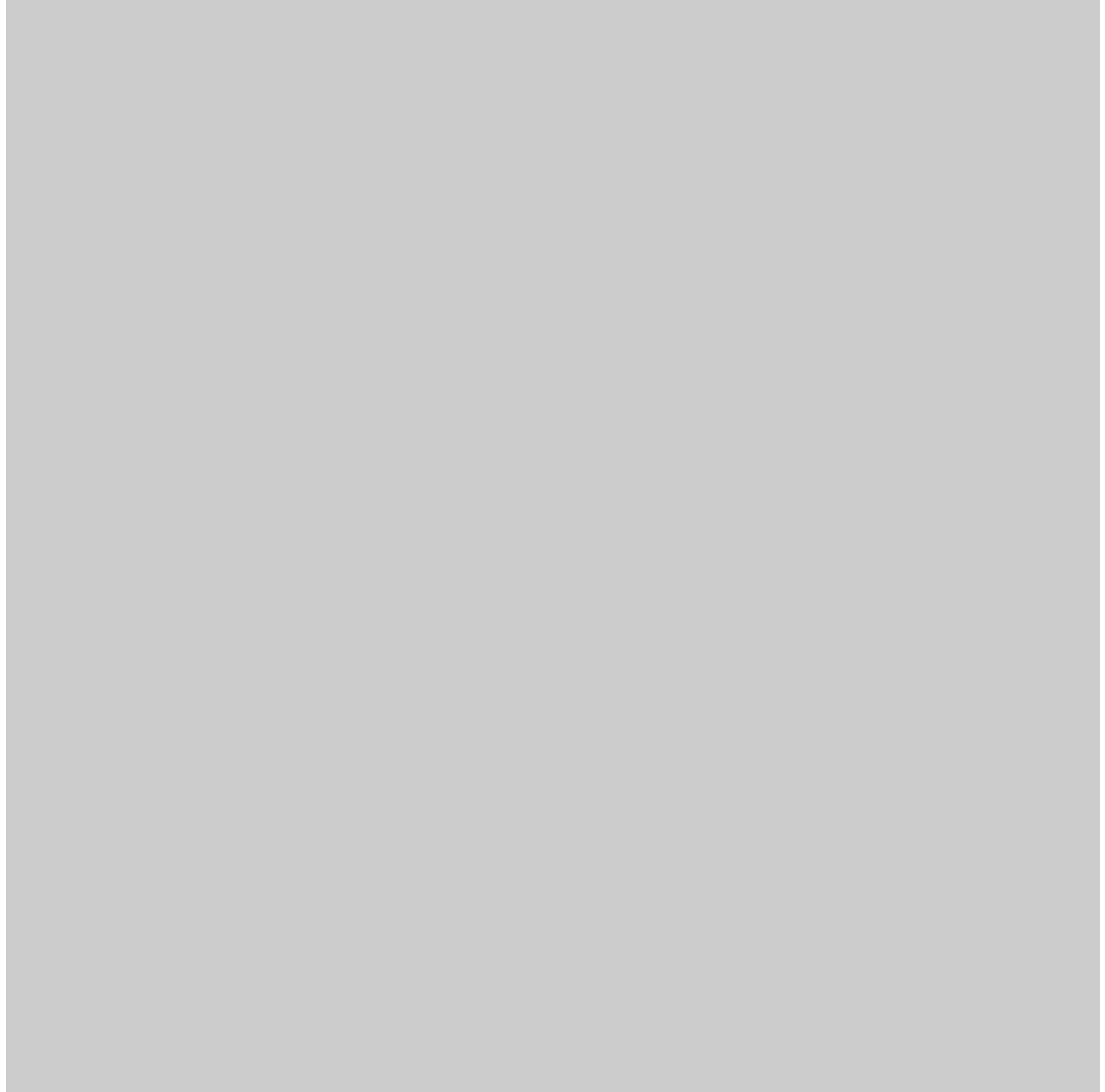
We also watch Holly's whirlwind courtship of his wife, Maria Elena (Jessica Miret Garcia), and the breakup of his band, but not before they make history as the first Caucasian group to play the Apollo Theatre.



**Buddy (Travis Shanahan), second from left, leads his band The Crickets -- Kelan M. Smith, Jack Morsovillo and Roy Brown -- in the jukebox tuner "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story" at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre. - Courtesy of Ellen Prather**

Recalling that moment, Shanahan, Brown, Morsovillo and Smith delivered an exuberant set of "Not Fade Away," "Peggy Sue" and "Oh Boy" that during Sunday's matinee set the near-capacity audience's feet tapping.

But the peppery quartet of Jordan Burns, Bre Jacobs, Austin Nelson Jr. and Jasmine Lacy Young brought down the house. They stopped the show with a barn-burning "Shout" (by The Isley Brothers), which also showcased Allyssa O'Donnell's dynamic choreography.



**Travis Shanahan plays the titular rock 'n' roll innovator in Metropolis Performing Arts Centre's revival of "Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story."**  
- Courtesy of Ellen Prather

Most of the second act consists of re-creating Holly's final concert at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, which also features Ritchie Valens

(the charismatic Luis David Cortes) and The Big Bopper (Ross Creighton Childs). It concludes with a rousing rendition of Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" featuring Metropolis' able, young cast.

Yet the moment is faintly bittersweet, a reminder of how much talent was lost, the day the music died.

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**Location:** Metropolis Performing Arts Centre, 111 W. Campbell St., Arlington Heights, (847) 577-2121 or metropolisarts.com  
(<http://metropolisarts.com>)

**Showtimes:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 3 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday; through Aug. 31

**Running time:** About 2 hours, 30 minutes including intermission

**Tickets:** \$40

**Parking:** Nearby garage and street parking

**Rating:** For all ages