

The Crickets

A rockabilly/rock and roll/pop band formed in 1957 in Lubbock, Texas, and best known for helping launch the career of rock and roll icon, Buddy Holly. The founding members Charles Hardin Holley (aka Buddy Holly), lead vocals and guitar, (b Lubbock, Texas, Sept 7, 1936, d Mason City, Iowa, Feb 3, 1959), and Bob Montgomery, vocals and guitar, (b Lampasas, Texas, May 12, 1937) met at Hutchinson Junior High School, and, by the Fall of 1953, were playing on Lubbock radio station KDAV's 'Sunday Party' program as the Buddy and Bob Show. The two were soon joined by friend and bass player, Larry Welborn (b Lubbock, April 13, 1939). The three soon performed "Flower of My Heart," a song written by Montgomery for a contest at Lubbock High School. The tune was chosen as the 1954 Senior Class Song. Following this local success, Holly, Montgomery, and Welborn then headed to Wichita Falls, Texas, in order to record demos of other songs.

1955 was a busy year for Holly and his friends. In February they opened for Elvis Presley at Lubbock's Fair Park Coliseum. In October, they performed in a show featuring Bill Haley and the Comets and then opened for Elvis again. Soon Holly signed a solo recording contract as a 'country' artist and left Lubbock for Nashville, causing the trio to break up. By 1957, however, Holly had met with little success in Nashville. He returned to Lubbock and was joined by Joe Mauldin (b Lubbock, July 8, 1940) on bass, Jerry Allison (b Hillsboro, Texas, Aug 31, 1939) on drums, and Niki Sullivan (b South Gate, California, June 23, 1937, d Sugar Creek, Missouri, April 6, 2004) on rhythm guitar. These four friends drove to Norman Petty's recording studio in Clovis, New Mexico, to record some singles. It was at this time that the Crickets were officially formed and signed with Brunswick Records.

The band's name, the Crickets, began as a ruse to avoid provisions of a contract Holly had signed with Decca in 1956. The name stuck, and, from then on, they were billed as either the Crickets or as Buddy Holly and the Crickets. Brunswick Records released the group's first single "That'll Be the Day" (flipside "I'm Looking For Someone To Love") in May 1957. It hit Number 2 on the pop charts and Number 3 on the R&B charts. The Crickets soon appeared on several popular television shows of the day, including *American Bandstand* and the *Ed Sullivan Show*. The band began its first major concert tour in Washington, D.C., in August 1957, and, in October, released its second single "Oh Boy!" (flipside "Not Fade Away"), which sold close to one million copies.

Niki Sullivan left the group in December 1957, and the Crickets toured as a trio until they were joined in 1958 by Tommy Allsup on guitar. It was with this new lineup that the group released "Maybe Baby" (flipside "Tell Me How"), which reached the Top Ten. At the same time, Coral Records, a subsidiary of Decca/Brunswick, which owned the Crickets masters, also released the single "Peggy Sue" under Holly's name. The song, co-written by Allison and Holly,

was inspired by Allison's high school girlfriend. The tune quickly became a Number One, million-selling single for Holly.

By late 1958, Holly was looking for a change and wanted the band to move to New York City. Norman Petty, however, convinced Mauldin and Allison to remain in Clovis as the 'Crickets,' signaling the break up of the original group. In January 1959, Holly was back on tour with a new band, which included Allsup on guitar, West Texas radio disc jockey and friend, Waylon Jennings on bass, and Carl Bunch on drums. Tragically, Holly died in a plane crash in between tour dates on February 3, 1959, in Mason City, Iowa.

After Holly's death, Allison took over leadership of the Crickets and re-formed the group to include Mauldin, with the addition of Sonny Curtis on guitar and Earl Sinks on guitar and lead vocals. The band's first singles did not do well on the national charts, so Sinks left the group, and Allison recorded a new Crickets session in Los Angeles, California, with the teenaged West Texas lead singer, David Box. However, these recordings also failed to chart nationally, so Box returned to West Texas to pursue his solo career. Mauldin soon quit the group, and Decca/Brunswick Records released the Crickets from their contract.

Allison signed a new recording contract with the Liberty Record label in Los Angeles in 1960. Singer, songwriter, and fellow West Texan, Jerry Naylor (b Chalk Mountain, Texas, March 06, 1939) became the Crickets's lead vocalist, and he and Allison immediately joined forces with pop singer Bobby Vee on a collaborative album for Liberty Records. By 1961, Curtis had returned from the Army, rejoined Allison and Naylor and, with the addition of a fourth member, Glen D. Hardin on piano and Fender Rhodes keyboard bass, the group was completed. The post-Buddy Holly Crickets, or 'The Liberty Years Crickets' as they were sometimes referred to in print, continued to record with Liberty Records from 1960-1965. Unfortunately, during this period the band had only minor success in the United States, with such songs as "My Little Girl" and "Please Don't Change."

However, this new Crickets lineup did enjoy great success internationally, especially in the United Kingdom, Australia, and throughout Europe. Their first international Number One was "Please Don't Ever Change," written by Carol King and Gerry Goffin. Next came the Top Five hit "My Little Girl," written by Sonny Curtis, and "Teardrops Fall Like Rain," co-written by Allison, Curtis, and Tommy 'Snuff' Garrett. The Crickets and Bobby Vee collaborative album, entitled *Bobby Vee Meets the Crickets*, rose to the number one position on the UK pop charts and topped the charts in Canada, Australia, and most European countries.

The Crickets, with Naylor on lead vocals, Curtis on lead guitar and vocals, and Hardin on piano and the Fender Rhodes keyboard bass, also appeared in a UK produced jukebox movie, *Just For Fun*, which was released in 1963. In the late fall and winter of 1962, the Crickets,

without Allison, who had been recalled to active military duty, had their most successful tour of England and Europe with Bobby Vee, celebrating the success of their joint album, and their various hit singles.

While maintaining a busy television appearance and touring schedule throughout the United States and Canada in 1963 and 1964, the Crickets were featured in a movie with the Beach Boys and Leslie Gore entitled *Girls on the Beach*. Shortly after the production was completed in 1964, Naylor suffered a serious heart attack and was forced to take a leave of absence. Buzz Cason, a friend of the Crickets and former backup group band member/vocalist for Brenda Lee, filled in as lead singer for Naylor during his illness, and the Crickets performed a summer concert tour in the UK. Naylor rejoined the Crickets in late 1964, and they appeared on several regional and national television shows and live concerts, including concerts in Los Angeles and Honolulu.

Curtis left the group for a solo recording career in mid-1965, and, soon afterwards, Naylor and Hardin departed to appear in the ABC-Television Network show, *Shindig*. Naylor went on to have a successful solo recording career with eight top nationally-charted solo recordings, and Hardin became a member of Elvis Presley's legendary TCB band. Allison toured and recorded as the drummer with the Everly Brothers and Roger Miller during the early 1970s.

In 1978, a major motion picture about the life and career of Buddy Holly sparked a renewed interest in Holly and his music. Former Crickets, Jerry Allison and Sonny Curtis, reunited with Holly's original bass player, Joe B. Mauldin for a tour. Curtis stayed with the band until 1986, when he left to pursue a second solo career, and was replaced by singer Gordon Payne. In 1988, the Crickets recorded a single produced by Paul McCartney entitled "T-Shirt." This record was a minor hit and led to the release of an album by the same name on Epic Records. The Crickets, with Allison, Curtis, and Mauldin as a trio, continue to tour internationally and have recorded several albums, including *The Crickets and Their Buddies*, which features guest appearances by Eric Clapton, John Prine, J.D. Souther, Nanci Griffith, Waylon Jennings, Bobby Vee, Phil and Jason Everly, Albert Lee, and Graham Nash.

Buddy Holly and the Crickets had a major impact, not only on the music of their peers, but also on later generations of musicians. The Crickets were one of the first rock and roll bands to write, record, and perform their own songs, which helped pave the way for many 1960s rock bands to do the same. The Crickets were also a major influence on pop superstars, the Beatles. One of the earliest songs John Lennon learned to play was the Crickets first Number One hit, "That'll Be the Day." Lennon, together with Paul McCartney as the Quarry Men, recorded the Holly tune in 1958. In fact, the Crickets not only inspired the Beatles's musical style, but also the band's name. Lennon and McCartney reportedly chose the name 'Beatles' in part as a tribute to

Holly's Crickets. The 'Fab Four' performed and recorded several Holly songs early in their career, and the first song that the Beatles played live on BBC Television was the Crickets' first Number One hit with Naylor as its lead singer, "Please Don't Ever Change."

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