

A celebration of Buddy Holly

Metropolis play tells tale of day the music died
By Regina Belt-Daniels - Shaw Media Correspondent

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The final production in the Metropolis 2018-19 Main Stage Series, “Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story,” is a magnificent blockbuster.

Director Joe Keene has assembled a spirited, vibrant ensemble of 20 who leap, dance, twist and shout across an authentic period set designed by Eric Luchen.

This docu-musical, written by Alan James, first opened in 1989 at London’s Victoria Palace Theater and ran for an incredible 12 years. “Buddy” is more a revealing jukebox concert of Buddy Holly songs that follow his mercurial rise from Lubbock, Texas, country and western

local favorite to rock 'n' roll superstar to that ultimate fateful night when the music died (a tragic Feb. 3, 1959, plane crash that also killed Richie Valens and the Big Bopper after the Winter Dance concert at Clearwater, Iowa).

Travis Shanahan is a phenomenal Buddy. Making his Metropolis debut, he owns this production from beginning to end. Holly's determination to "make the music everyone wants to hear" is brilliantly and believably brought to life by Shanahan. He is a subtle multi-talent. The Crickets, as portrayed by Jack Morsovillo, Kelan Smith and Roy Brown are powerful allies onstage; they're just delightful and Brown does some pretty amazing things with that bass.

Their supremacy, however, is almost stolen by a rendition of "Shout" at the Apollo by four magnificent and very flexible performers: Jordan Burns, Bre Jacobs, Austin Nelson Jr. and Jasmine Lacy Young.

And despite the obviously superb ability of the entire supporting ensemble, there are other standouts: Luis David Cortes is a charismatic Richie Valens; Gabriel Fries is a wonderful KDAV DJ "Hipockets" Duncan; Jessica Miret Garcia is a sweetly determined Maria; David Gordon-Johnson is a strong, smooth Norman Petty; and Nicole Frydman puts a great spin on Vi Petty.

Both Acts I and II are quite lengthy. Act II is a reliving of that fateful Winter Dance Surf Ballroom concert with an abrupt ending. And yet, particularly in Act II, the upbeat, joyful choreography of Allyssa O'Donnell will keep you dancing in your seat. Besides the musical skills of Shanahan, Morsovillo, Smith and Brown, there is a live six-piece band. Conducted and directed by keyboard player Kenneth McMullen, they are all just sublime.

There's a constant celebration of Holly's life through 30 of his dynamic songs in this production. Yes, there's "That'll be the Day," "Chantilly Lace," "Johnny B. Good" and "Peggy Sue" (and listen for that title's comedic origins).

There's also a catalog of the lesser knowns: "Not Fade Away," "True Love Ways" and "When You Ask About Love" to name a few. As performed by this ensemble and musicians, it's a rocking extravaganza.

Director Keefe throws everything and the kitchen sink at you with this ambitious musical.

Judging from the audience reaction, "Buddy" is in for a triumphant run at the Metropolis in Arlington Heights.

- Regina Belt-Daniels just completed a run as director of RCLPC's summer offering "Morning's at Seven" and will continue to do what she loves best: teach, travel and write theater reviews. A retired District 47 educator, she has appeared in or directed more than 50 shows in the northern Illinois area and can be seen as Senator Karen Spelosi in the Mike Preston film, "Citizen Dick."

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