

## Oh, boy!



Holly heaven: Richie Lee, 15, performs as Buddy Holly. Here he rehearses in his bedroom.

DAVID PETERSON/THE REGISTER

### Des Moines teen keeps Buddy Holly's hits hot!

By KYLE MUNSON  
REGISTER MUSIC CRITIC

The "day the music died" might have been premature.

It has been nearly 47 years — Feb. 3, 1959 — since the single-engine plane carrying the tragic rocker Buddy Holly crashed in the middle of a frozen field near Clear Lake, Ia.

Holly enjoyed just 18 months of fame before his untimely death at age 22.

Since then, he's been channeled and championed by most rock stars, including Bob Dylan, the Stones and the Beatles.

Now, Holly is being reborn in a teenage boy's cramped bedroom in Des Moines.

Meet Richie Lee, a 15-year-old sophomore at North High School. Lee lives so far in the past, musically, that it's not a question of whether he pays attention to the rappers and rock stars idolized by his peers.

This kid has yet to succumb to Beatlemania.

Lee is fixated on Holly down to the tiniest detail. He even styles his hair into a pompadour every day.

"I've got naturally curly hair, and it pretty much stays in place," he shrugs. His mom is his stylist.

He wears glasses, but he reserves the Holly-style black, horn-rimmed frames for performances.

In his bedroom, he straps on a replica Fender Stratocaster (the guitar Holly helped to popularize) and sings into a microphone on a stand, recording his own versions of "Peggy Sue" and "That'll Be the Day" on a primitive cassette recorder.

Primitive by today's standards, not the 1950s.

Lee is taking his vintage sound on the road throughout 2006 — at least on weekends, when school isn't in session.

Even on school nights, Lee spends his time practicing at home. He first records the

### Richie Lee & the Fabulous 50's in concert

TODAY — 8 p.m. at Keystone Banquet Hall, Winterset, (515) 729-2370, \$5

JAN. 27 — 7:30 p.m., Expo Building, Dickinson County Fairgrounds, Spirit Lake, FREE

FEB. 2 — 7 p.m. Country View Theatre/Dance Hall, Decorah (with Tommy Allsup and Carl Bunch), (563) 382-2315, \$15 in advance

FEB. 4 — Noon, VFV Hall, Clear Lake, free

FEB. 18 — Eagles Club No. 109, 6567 Bloomfield Road, Des Moines

MARCH 4 — Col Ballroom, Davenport

MARCH 11 — 8 p.m., Electric Park Ballroom, Waterloo

MARCH 25 — Community Center at the Cass County Fairgrounds, Atlantic

● Go to [www.richielee.com](http://www.richielee.com) for more info.



### Buddy and Richie: a dual timeline

SEPT. 7, 1936: Buddy Holly (Charles Hardin Holley) is born in Lubbock, Texas.

SEPT. 23, 1957: Holly charts his first No. 1 song with the Crickets, "That'll Be the Day."

FEB. 3, 1959: Holly dies in a plane crash near Clear Lake that also kills Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper.

JAN. 15, 1972: Don McLean's Holly-inspired "American Pie" reaches No. 1 and coins the phrase "the day the music died."

1978: "The Buddy Holly Story" starring Gary Busey hits theaters, and Busey receives an Oscar nomination for Best Actor.

FEBRUARY 1979: The Surf Ballroom stages the first of its "Winter Dance Party" tribute concerts on the anniversary of Holly's death.

1986: Holly is among the first class of inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

1989: "Buddy," the musical, premieres in England.

FEB. 18, 1990: Richie Lee Luckenbill born in Des Moines.

1998: Richie Lee wins radio station Holly impersonation contest at Merle Hay Mall.

2003: Lee forms his band (the Fabulous 50's), records his debut CD and plays his first gig at the Iowa State Fair.

2006: Lee is working on his second CD, studying music theory and touring.

### Hear for yourself

Listen to Richie Lee perform a Buddy Holly song on [DesMoinesRegister.com/music](http://DesMoinesRegister.com/music).

Left: Richie Lee at age 7.

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See LEE, Page 2E