

Richie Lee rocks Shuler crowd back to the '50s

By **Tim Keller**
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RATON — Richie Lee and the Fabulous 50s took Raton by storm Thursday night in a Shuler Theater concert that danced its way through many of the greatest songs of the decade that spawned the birth of rock and roll.

Sporting a gorgeous Gretsch hollow body electric guitar and backed by rhythm guitar, electric bass, and drums, Lee's youthful charm and rocking licks quickly won over an audience tightly packed into the Shuler.

At 21 years, Lee is already a road-proven veteran. He formed Richie Lee and the Fabulous 50s in his hometown of Des Moines, Iowa, when he was 13, having discovered early rock and roll when he was 6 years old. An impressive multi-instrumentalist — he also played electric bass Thursday night and a showy drum tour de force on the surf classic "Wipeout" — Lee and his backing band tour incessantly: the Raton show was one of six consecutive one-nighters played in the states of Montana, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas and Nebraska, in that order.

As the musicians took the stage Thursday, the first



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Richie Lee plays guitar during a concert at the Shuler Theater in Raon Thursday night. The 21-year-old rocker wowed a wildly enthusiastic crowd with his star power and Gretsch hollow body electric guitar.

impression was visually troubling: rhythm guitarist Dan Jones and bassist Mike Davidson looked like they got the week off from middle management positions at IBM; Lee's gaudy deep-cut blue shirt added to the impression that the group had raided the Bee Gees' closet for cheap black and blue polyesters. The costumes were tacky and off by at least a decade.

It didn't matter. From Lee's first guitar notes, the audience joined Lee's joyride through 26 of the best songs from the first burst of the new music called rock and roll. I was sitting next to a 5th-grade boy and 9th-grade girl: their faces wore big ear-to-ear smiles throughout Lee's two 45-minute sets. You didn't have to remember the 1950s to be swept up.

It wasn't just Lee and his solid rhythm section anchored by drummer Jason Kempis: the co-star was the songs themselves. The "Fabulous" in the band's name really refers to the remarkable songs created in rock and roll's first decade.

Opening with Jerry Lee Lewis's "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," Lee and company brought out the

carefree fun in songs by Chuck Berry, Ricky Nelson, Eddie Cochran, Bobby Darin, the Everly Brothers, Richie Valens, the Bobby Fuller Four, the Ventures and the McCoys.

Lee's promotion suggests that he's a Buddy Holly revival act. He opened the second set as Buddy Holly, but he wore the signature glasses uncomfortably through "Peggy Sue,"

"Maybe Baby," and "That'll Be the Day." He was glad to discard them for "Rave On," perhaps correctly sensing that this music was too real and too fun to need gimmicks.

If Lee wanted to be a revival act, he'd do better to take on Elvis Presley. When a standing ovation brought him back on stage for an encore, he left his guitar on its stand to sing "Hound Dog" from the front edge of the stage.

The amazing powers of Elvis are best seen in "Elvis '56," the film documentary of the electrifying year he turned 21 and won fame. For one triumphant song, 21-year-old Richie Lee channeled that Elvis at the Shuler Thursday night, ignoring all the bloated clichés repeated by every other Elvis impersonator to recreate the youthful first moves that shocked and thrilled the world in 1956. It was exhilarating.

By then, Lee had so stirred up the audience that it took him more than 15 minutes to work his way up the aisle to the lobby, signing autographs at each step. Here was a performer with a great future; the new fans gathering around him for autographs were hoping that his future will bring him back many times to Raton.