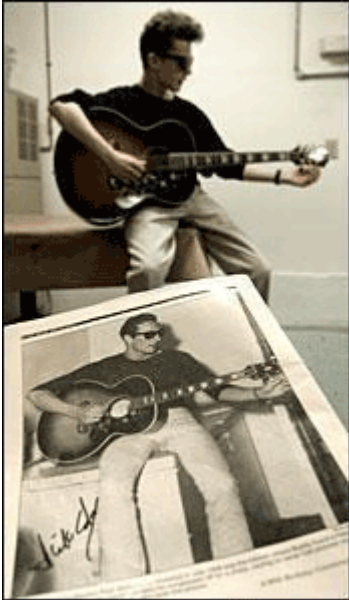


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Teenager recreates Buddy Holly in image and sound

By MELODY PARKER, Courier Arts / Special Sections
Editor RICK CHASE / Courier Staff Photographer

WATERLOO --- Richie Lee perches on the edge of a table in the kitchen at Electric Park Ballroom, tuning his guitar. "How's this look? This is the way Buddy is holding his hand in the picture. He's turning this tuning key," says the 15-year-old musician. His eyes are concealed by heavy-framed dark sunglasses, but a brief smile flits across his face. "Right on target --- it's a go," replies longtime Waterloo photographer Dick Cole.



Richie Lee, 15, follows photographer Dick Cole's original Buddy Holly image to achieve the exact pose Holly used in 1958. Both original and recreation were shot by Cole in the Electric Park Ballroom kitchen.

RICK CHASE / Courier Staff Photographer

(NOTE: Rick Chase was inducted into the IOWA ROCK'N ROLL MUSIC ASSOCIATION HALL OF FAME in 1998 with the "Echos V" of Des Moines)

And the clock turns backwards.

It's July 1958 and that young man is Buddy Holly, as he appeared in one of the most famous photographs taken of the rock 'n' roll legend. Cole, who was 17 and working part-time for the Courier, shot the photo in a session just hours before Holly climbed on stage at Electric Park.

For Lee, it is a dream come true.

The talented young singer/musician from Des Moines is making a name for himself performing Holly's music at '50s style dances and clubs, and this photo session with Cole is meant to recreate the black-and-white photograph seen in books and magazines, rockumentaries and on album sleeves. Holly's widow, Maria Elena, chose it as her favorite image and a large print is displayed at the Texas Tech University Museum in Lubbock, Holly's hometown. Lee is posing before his own Electric Park Ballroom performance with his trio, Richie Lee and the Fabulous '50s.

"I'm a huge Holly fan and a big fan of those photos, so it's exciting to recreate them, especially the kitchen one because everyone recognizes it," Lee enthuses.

The photo session is challenging, Cole says, because "the kitchen has changed in 47 years. There's no chest freezer, which is what Buddy sat on when I did the photos. The kitchen's layout is different, too, so we're having to improvise. I want to get the look and feeling right."

Another difference? Cole is shooting with a digital camera, not the 2 1/4-inch twin-lens reflex Mamiya he used then.

Myron Kelleher, founder of the Iowa Ballroom Project, made the pitch to Cole. "I'm just impressed with how talented a singer and musician Richie is, and he's trying to keep this music alive. I just knew something like this would be fun to do and help Richie," he explains.

Cole is having a good time. "It's kind of an honor to think someone as young as Richie knows those photos and I don't mind doing it, especially since it's a guy just getting started on his career. For me it brings back lots of memories of Buddy and the Tuesday night teen dances we used to have at Electric Park. We were lucky because everyone came through here ... Everly Brothers, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis ... and it only cost a buck-fifty to get in."

The famous photographs often appear without permission, although Cole holds the copyrights. He usually doesn't mind if he gets credit. Filmmakers contacted him before the making of "The Buddy Holly Story" in 1978 and when Texas Tech first displayed Holly's photo, Cole told them all he wanted as a plaque next to the picture stating it was taken by "Dick Cole at Electric Park Ballroom in Waterloo, Iowa, July 1958."

Lee credits his parents, Nancy and Richard, for idolizing Holly. "My parents listened to '50s music because they're older and when I was little, my dad did this game with me where he'd play 'Peggy Sue' and ask me 'who's that?' I was trained to say 'Buddy Holly,'" Lee recalls, laughing.

At 6, he strummed a toy guitar. When his mom entered him in a Buddy Holly contest, Lee wore black-rimmed glasses and lip-synched "Maybe Baby" and "Every Day." As he grew up, Lee began to appreciate Holly's crisp, clean guitar style and "I loved that vocal hiccup. I liked his vocal style."

Lee studied piano but nagged his parents for a guitar. At 11, he got his wish.

"He got his first guitar and all the strings were broken a week before the first lesson. We took it back to the music store and had them keep it until his lessons started," Nancy says. Ten months later, Lee had mastered all the teacher had to offer.

He convinced his dad to take him to jam sessions around Des Moines, where he impressed local guitarists. He took singing lessons to make sure he was singing correctly. He also mastered playing the drums in four months.

Now Lee is studying banjo --- "you know, Flatts and Scruggs kind of stuff. I'm not a sports person. I like my music and that's all I want to do," says the North High School freshman.

He has criss-crossed Iowa performing at the state's legendary night spots and ballrooms, including several Winter Dance parties at the legendary Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, where Holly, Ritchie Valens and J.P. "Big Bopper" Richardson gave their final performance. They were killed along with the pilot in an airplane crash Feb. 3, 1959, near Clear Lake.

Lee is adamant that Holly's music "not fade away."

"I want to bring back this sound for kids so it's not forgotten. I want to them to hear what real rock music sounds like."