

## Review

Laing, D. 2010. *Buddy Holly*. London: Equinox. ISBN 978-1-84553-627-5 (pbk). 194 pp.

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Dave Laing's *Buddy Holly* is the fifth book to be published in Equinox's *Icons of Pop* series, which he co-edits with Jill Halstead. This series profiles key musicians in twentieth-century popular music, and the concise word limit and accessible style of writing is designed to appeal to undergraduates and the general reader. Laing's short study of Buddy Holly is a critical biography, and should be viewed in light of the aims of the series.

The book contains six short chapters: the first four cover Holly's musical life from 1950–59, while the final two chapters consider the aftermath of Holly's untimely death. It concludes with a very useful and detailed timeline from Holly's birth in 1936 up to 2009. To Laing's credit, the book is brimming with factual details (many of which are new to this reviewer, who teaches popular music in Holly's hometown) and is a welcome addition to the biographical literature on this seminal figure in popular music history.

*Chapter 1: The West Texas Musicscape and Buddy Holly's Musical Idiolect, 1950–55*, provides an account of Holly's musical beginnings in the city of Lubbock, Texas, and the performer's complex relationship with his family, church, school, performance venues, media, hometown, and region. Laing convincingly applies Bruno Latour's actor-network theory to Holly's movements during this time, and he balances this approach with material gathered by other researchers, biographers, critics, and commentators—people who practice 'Hollyology'.

The next three chapters examine Holly's experiences in recording studios in Nashville, Clovis, New Mexico and New York; then, his brief performing career; and lastly, Laing provides a critical study of the 1955–59 recordings. These fascinating accounts provide an insider's view of the recording and touring life for Holly, and the critical assessment of Holly's musical material will be of particular interest to aficionados and musicians alike.

The final section of the book, which includes *Chapter 5: After the Day the Music Died: Memorialising* and *Chapter 6: After the Day the Music Died: Presence and Rep-*

*resentations*, are particularly poignant. Laing looks at the aftermath of Holly's untimely death and the creation of the many myths around him, as well as the endurance of his posthumous image in popular culture. Laing also tackles the persistent truism—quoting Waylon Jennings (p. 127), 'when Buddy Holly died, rock'n'roll died'—and finds that it holds 'a certain explanatory power'. In questioning whether Holly should rightly be viewed as a member of that first generation (which ended with Elvis drafted, Chuck Berry jailed, Little Richard going to the seminary, Jerry Lee Lewis disgraced, and Carl Perkins convalescing from a near-fatal car crash), Laing then cuts him off from the 1960s by stating: 'neither was he primarily a member of the class of '58 and beyond who sang explicitly about and to teenagers as high-school students' (p. 128). Laing misses the bigger picture. Holly was the first of the great rockers of the 1960s, whose influence, after an intervening drought in American popular music, was finally realized by The Beatles, who arrived in the United States almost five years to the day after the plane crash in Iowa that killed him.

There were some frustrations with Laing's (at times) unbalanced perspective of Buddy Holly films. For example, he cites damning remarks from Vincent Canby and Chet Flippo who found the biopic *The Buddy Holly Story* (1978) to be a ham-handed, muddle-headed atrocity. However, when discussing *The Real Buddy Holly Story* (1987, Laing incorrectly gives the date as 1986)—what many believe to be an invaluable documentary and a corrective response to the biopic—Laing gives it short shrift, even failing to mention its title. One wonders whether he actually viewed the film before writing about it. Also, after attributing the film *American Graffiti* (1973) to producer Francis Ford Coppola, Laing credits *The Buddy Holly Story* to Fred Bauer, listing him as director. In fact, Bauer was the producer of that film and it was directed by Steve Rash.

These few quibbles aside, overall Laing's *Buddy Holly* provides a much-needed critical biography that references all previously published material, and ultimately provides an in-depth view of this often underrated artist.