



On February 3, 1959 a small charter plane took off from an airport in Iowa, USA. On board, on their way to a scheduled tour destination, were three of the 1950's great American Rock and Roll stars, Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper. Tragically, the plane crashed soon after take off, leaving no survivors. It was a dark day that Don McLean later referred to as "The Day The Music Died," when he sang of the event in his song *American Pie*.

Buddy Holly, with his characteristic black-rimmed glasses, appeared on the music scene in the late 1950s. In one sense he was filling a hole left by some departing stars, including Elvis Presley, who had joined the Army, and Little Richard, who had become a minister. He had really only been singing Rock and Roll for two years before his tragic death. However, in that time he had already produced several hit singles including *Peggy Sue* and *That'll Be the Day*. He was also responsible for standardizing what is now considered the typical rock band formation of two guitars, bass and drums. Although his life was short, Buddy Holly managed to have a tremendous impact on the development of rock and roll music. It was a legacy that would influence many later artists including The Beach Boys, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan. In fact, The Beatles derived their name partly in honor of Buddy Holly, whose own band was named "The Crickets."

Jiles Richardson (The Big Bopper), was as well known for his sense of humor and bigger-than-life personality as he was for his music. His biggest hit, *Chantilly Lace* made the top 10 list on the charts in 1958. The new kid on the block, 17 year old Ritchie Valens was also making waves with his hits *Donna* and a re-working of a traditional Mexican song *La Bamba*. His recording career lasted eight months before his untimely death.

The plane crash of February 1959 left a country in mourning and a music industry wondering whether it could possibly recover from such a tragedy. However, the industry would indeed bounce back and there would be countless others to carry on the unstoppable evolution of Rock and Roll.

### Fast Facts

**Time Span:** late 1950s

**Influences:** Rhythm & Blues, Swing, Boogie Woogie

**Primary Instruments:** Guitar, double bass, drums, Piano and vocals

**Major Artists:** Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, Jiles Richardson (The Big Bopper), Jerry Lee Lewis

### Fun Fact

The "Winter Dance Party" tour of February 1959 had been somewhat of a logistical nightmare. It was winter and the musicians were being ferried around the Midwest of The United States in a bus with faulty heating (with temperatures of -25°F/-32°C) that kept breaking down. Buddy Holly was tired and not looking forward to another long overnight bus ride in the cold, so he chartered a plane for himself and his backing band. Richardson only happened to be on the plane because he had come down with the flu and was given one of the band's seats. Valens had never been on a small plane before and playfully begged the other band member for his seat. A coin was tossed to decide who should go on the plane. Valens won the toss but lost his life.

