

Local boy makes good with Buddy Holly Show

By CHARAN N. WOLLARD

PF Lazor (yes, that's his real name) was only 5 years old and hundreds of miles away the day rock hero Buddy Holly was killed in a small plane crash.

Now 25, Lazor, a Newark resident, is being billed as Buddy Holly Jr. because he looks and sounds so much like the musician who recorded such songs as "That'll Be the Day" and "Words of Love" two decades ago.

Lazor is the star of The Buddy Holly Jr. Show and has played such top Bay Area clubs as Harlow's, The Boarding House and The Old Waldorf.

His is the only Buddy Holly act sanctioned by the Buddy Holly Memorial Society.

His back-up band, The Pick-Its (Holly's group was The Crickets) includes Fremont musicians Raff Willis, 25, on drums; Mike Tried, 23, bass; and Tony Sinsinatty, 23, lead and slide guitar.

Unlike the dozens of imitator acts — a flood of Elvises, Beatles and other Buddy Hollys have hit the entertainment market during the past two years — Lazor does not consider his act to be a copy of the original.

"It would really quite offend me if that's all I thought I was," he says.

An ex-actor, Lazor sees his role as that of an actor portraying a character.

The group doesn't perform songs exactly as Holly did, preferring to use updated musical arrangements.

On stage, Lazor adds complicated dance steps. Holly stood absolutely still while singing.

When Lazor first started his Buddy Holly Jr. act, he greased his hair and faked a Texan accent to appear more like Holly. He doesn't do that anymore.

"I don't have to do that anymore. Now I feel I have his spirit," Lazor explains.

Like his predecessor, Lazor grew up in a rural community — not Lubbock, Texas, but Salem, Mich., near Detroit.

He played folk guitar and wrote a few songs as a teen-ager, but his real interests lay in other directions: acting, writing poetry, inventing, parachuting and, ironically, flying small planes.

He moved to Fremont almost four years ago to learn to fly, and now lives in Newark.

To Lazor, Buddy Holly was just a name, a performer from the distant past, until the movie "The Buddy Holly Story" was released last year.

Lazor's hairstyle and eyeglass frames were similar to Holly's and, when the movie was released, people started coming up to him and remarking, "You look just like Buddy Holly!"

Lazor went to see the movie, started collecting Buddy Holly records and studied the singer-composer's life.

"It just kind of enthralled me and brought me in," Lazor recalls of his first exposure to the Holly legend.

Lazor already had contacts in the East Bay rock music scene. He was manager of the South County band Ryde.

He bought a Memphis Stratocaster, the electric guitar Holly made famous, and started practicing.

For a joke, Ryde called him on stage to do a Buddy Holly number during a performance at Hidden Valley Ranch, Fremont.

The crowd response was no joke: The audience loved it.

Lazor also was a big hit when he sat in with Cruisin', Mark Brownly and other local bands, before forming The Pick-Its.

When he first started his act, Lazor played only simple chords on the guitar and concentrated on singing.

After practicing 16 to 18 hours a day, seven days a week for almost a year, Lazor is a competent musician on the electric guitar.

"I guess you'd say I have guitar fever," he admits.

Lazor also made a 20-minute film for Video West in which he got to do all of his favorite things: He flew a small plane, parachuted out, sang, played guitar and acted.

The film, which aired in September, was a fantasy about Buddy Holly in 1979.

Elvis Costello also appears in the film.

Besides Holly, Lazor admires Bruce Springsteen, who is also a great Buddy Holly fan.

Lazor plans to eventually branch out into original music.

Recently he signed on with Mah'Jek Talent Agency, based in Fremont.

Audience response has taken Lazor far, and he doesn't expect his success to fade.

"People like it," he says of his act. "They come for Buddy Holly, but once they come, I... can take them anyway."

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PF Lazor of Newark recently played two big San Francisco clubs, The Old Waldorf and The Boarding House