

BOBBY VEE

40 Years of Keeping The Magic of the Music Alive

Bobby Vee broke into the ranks of rock 'n' roll through a tragic twist of fate and went on to become one of the biggest rock 'n' roll stars of the pre-Beatles era, never forgetting the magic of the music heard round the world.

Vee, born Robert Velline on the Great Plains of Fargo, North Dakota in 1943, formed his first band The Shadows with his brother and a friend in 1958 when he was 15. A year later on February 3, 1959, the early rock 'n' roll pioneer and innovator Buddy Holly was on a bus tour through the Upper Midwest, performing shows with Ritchie Valens, the Big Bopper, Dion, and others. Tired of bus travel and anxious to get to the next stop to do his laundry, Holly chartered a light plane to fly him to Moorhead, Minnesota, just across the Red River and the state line from Fargo.

Shortly after takeoff near Clear Lake, Iowa in the early morning hours, Holly's plane developed problems and crashed, killing the now-legendary rocker and his fellow passengers. Back on the icy stretches of endless highway, across frozen winter farmlands, the tour bus rolled out with the remaining members of the tour who were unaware of Holly's fate until they reached their destination and saw the news on television. Shocked and heartbroken about the loss, the rock troupe decided to continue the tour as organizers scrambled to find a local act who could fill in on short notice.

The Shadows & Bob Dylan

Bobby Velline's group, The Shadows, got the job at the eleventh hour by calling the local rock 'n' roll radio station that had put the word out for a replacement act. Even though the fresh teenage kid from Fargo knew all the words to Holly's songs, he never sang any that night, but he did make an impression. A manager eventually convinced the singer to shorten his last name to Vee, so at sweet 15 Bobby Vee was born. Recording first with a small Midwestern label called Soma Records in Minneapolis, Bobby Vee and The Shadows had a local hit with "Susie Baby."

Just like hundreds of rock 'n' roll hopefuls during the period, The Shadows and Bobby were on their way. Among them, making his own climb to renown, was a young, ambitious kid named Bobby Zimmerman who played piano briefly with the group (under the name of Elston Gunn) before heading to New York's Greenwich Village folk scene where he emerged as Bob Dylan.

Record producer Thomas "Snuff" Garrett, who was 20 years old in 1959, heard "Susie Baby" and liked both the song and Velline's style. Garrett had known Buddy Holly from his days as a DJ in Lubbock, Texas before moving to Los Angeles and Liberty Records in 1958. The young record exec signed Velline to a recording contract with Liberty. About the same time in England, a singer named Adam Faith had come up with an imitation of Holly's style and had recorded "What Do You Want?" Bobby Vee was given the assignment of covering the song to sell in the US market, but his version never cracked the charts.

Vee Gives Liberty The Hits

Garrett later relied on a hit formula that helped form the popular sounds of rock's classic period, picking songs from the prolific songwriters in New York City's legendary Brill Building, a hotbed of rock 'n' roll creativity and songwriting craft. Vee's big US chart breakthrough was "Devil or Angel," a Top Ten hit late in 1960 when Vee was only 17. He followed it a short time later with another Top Ten hit, "Rubber Ball," co-written by another popular '60s hitmaker and performer Gene Pitney. "Rubber Ball" also introduced Bobby Vee to rock 'n' roll fans in the UK, where, like "More Than I Can Say," it reached number four on the Top of the Pop Charts.

Recording for Liberty in the early '60s, Bobby Vee became one of rock 'n' roll's biggest stars on both sides of the Atlantic. His innocent style and ample supply of Brill Building compositions made him enormously popular. In 1961 he recorded a Carole King song, "Take Good Care Of My Baby," and came up with a smashing number one hit that stayed on the US charts for three weeks, an almost unprecedented feat for the time. Arguably among his most soulful performances, "Baby" was followed by "Run To Him," another Top Five record worldwide.

In 1962 Bobby Vee had other major hits such as "Please Don't Ask About Barbara," "Sharing You," and, in the UK, "Forever Kind of Love." The same year he recorded "Bobby Vee Meets The Crickets," a critically acclaimed album that once again linked him with Buddy Holly. Although the two young rockers had never met, their paths were forever crossed in the spirit of the music and the times. Vee enjoyed another huge hit early in the '60s on the eve of the so-called British Invasion with "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes" after placing that and other Top 40 songs on the charts around the world. He also appeared in the movies "Swingin' Along," "Just For Fun," and "C'mon Let's Live A Little," among others.

Billboard: "One of the Top 10 Most Consistent Chart Makers Ever"

The Beatles burst on the pop music scene in 1964 and permanently altered the history of rock 'n' roll. Suddenly the innocent songs and the wholesome image of Bobby Vee and his fellow rockers, male and female, were no longer in vogue. In some circles the entire genre went under attack. He fell off the Top 10 charts completely for a few years, but in 1967 he bounced back in a big way. "Come Back When You Grow Up," by Bobby Vee and The Strangers, soared to number three and re-established Bobby Vee in the minds of rock fans everywhere. He has other minor hits before leaving the charts for good in 1970. But during the much-touted British Invasion, Vee was a consistent hitmaker: during this period he had 38 hits while the Rolling Stones had 39 and The Beatles had 65. Billboard Magazine called Bobby Vee "One of the Top 10 most consistent chart makers ever," with more than 25 albums and dozens of singles. With these stats, is it any wonder?!

By the early '70s, it seemed Bobby Vee had faded away, his time, look and era a mere branch in rock's flourishing family tree. The polite, clean-cut singer from rock's innocent era, however, continued to reap the rewards of a world-class rock 'n' roll singer.

The Beat Goes On

Off the charts and out of the public eye, Bobby Vee continued to perform around the world from Sydney, Australia to Lubbock, Texas, from Scotland to Malaysia and all over the USA. Always well liked by people in the music business and, of course, by his legion fans everywhere, this ideal—but tragically overlooked—Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame candidate persevered. Even Bob Dylan remembered his former employer from the stage one night, back in Fargo again during a 1990 concert. After the two reunited in Dylan’s dressing room, the enigmatic artist (who rarely speaks at all between songs) smiled and told the cheering crowd, “I learned a lot from Bobby Vee.”

Into the ‘90s, the beat goes on. With the continuing demand for product by classic-oriented radio stations and collectors alike—along with new converts to the Vee catalog, including the contemporary rock duo They Might Be Giants—EMI/CEMA issued a 25 song re-mastered compact disc and cassette as part of the Legendary Masters series in 1990. Later that year, a re-issue of Vee’s 1963 Christmas album was made available. To coincide with his sold-out 1990 tour of England, Bobby also issued a 17-song collectors edition cassette called “U.K. Tour ‘90,” on his own Rockhouse Records label. The tape, an anthology of sorts, included new material recorded with his three sons who make up a band called The Vees, as well as several previously unreleased songs from past years.

In 1992 critics and collectors alike gave great reviews to his “Last Of The Great Rhythm Guitar Players” CD, a stunning collection of self-penned songs that reflected a diversity of styles and songwriting influences from Buddy Holly, Neil Diamond and Nick Lowe to Smokey Robinson, Carole King and others.

As testimony to Bobby’s high-energy show and continued popularity, the annual readers poll by the popular British ‘60s music magazine *The Beat Goes On* voted him:

- ✓ 1991 Best American Act
 - ✓ 1992 Best Live Performer
 - ✓ 1993 Favorite Male Singer
 - ✓ 1994 Runner Up to Paul McCartney in the category of Most Accomplished Performer
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- September 1995. The McCartney connection blossomed when Bobby and his sons Jeff, Tom and Robby, along with band members Ar Stevens and Greg Armstrong, were invited to perform for Paul’s “Buddy Holly Week,” sharing the stage with The Crickets, Mike Betty and the late Carl Perkins. The evening concluded with a rave-up version of “Rave On,” led by Sir Paul.
 - 1998 March. Bobby & Company flew to the UK to take part in Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber’s 50th birthday party celebration before a sell-out tour of Australia.
 - Fall 1998. In advance of Vee’s 40th anniversary, a new 50-song EMI/UK collection titled “The Essential Bobby Vee” which, along with his many hits, is released including a number of previously unreleased songs from the Liberty Records vaults.
 - February 1999. Bobby Vee begins celebrating his 40th anniversary in rock ‘n’ roll with a 40th anniversary tribute concert to Buddy Holly at the Surf Ballroom. To commemorate the event

and kinship he still holds with Holly and early rock 'n' roll, he returns to his rockabilly roots with a new tribute to Holly titled "Down The Line," recorded with his sons Jeff, Tommy and Robb at Rockhouse Studio.

Between Europe, Australia, the far East, and America, these days Bobby and his band, The Vee's perform more than 100 concert dates a year. He is continually involved in the production of various other musical projects at his Rockhouse Recording Studio, located outside St. Cloud, MN, halfway between Fargo and Minneapolis. When he is not touring or working on his own music, he enjoys the endearing company of his wife, childhood sweetheart Karen, to whom he has been married for 38 years in 2001, and his daughter Jennifer, a successful graphic artist in Minneapolis who runs his own business, Sassafras Design.

From the white socks and ducktail days of "Susie Baby" and the '50s to today's digital high-tech, Bobby Vee continues to grow as an artist and entertainer, enjoying the loyal following of fans and friends alike. As Crickets' drummer Jerry "JJ" Allison says, "Bobby Vee helps keep the music and the magic of the music alive."