Big Bopper (1930-1959) Encyclopedia Article

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Big Bopper (1930-1959)

Moderately famous during his lifetime, recording artist J. P. (Jiles Perry) Richardson, better known as the Big Bopper, gained lasting notoriety through his death in the airplane crash that killed Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens near Mason City, Iowa.

Richardson was a successful disc jockey in Beaumont, Texas, and a locally known songwriter and performer when he was discovered by a Mercury Records producer. Half-spoken, half-sung recordings of "Chantilly Lace" and "The Big Bopper's Wedding" made it to the Top 40 during 1958 (the former to the Top Ten), while other songs written by Richardson were recorded by more established artists.

He became a familiar fixture on rock and roll tours. It was during a midwestern tour that a chartered airplane carrying three of the headliners crashed shortly after takeoff on February 3, 1959, subsequently called "the day the music died" in Don McLean's song "American Pie."

Further Reading:

Nite, Norm N. *Rock On Almanac.* 2nd edition. New York, Harper Perennial, 1992.

Stambler, Irwin. *The Encyclopedia of Pop, Rock and Soul,* revised edition. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989.