

BILL HALEY, JR., LOCAL AUTHOR, AT POTTSTOWN LIBRARY

**Author of Crazy Man, Crazy:
The Bill Haley Story appears Nov. 8, 2019**

Bill Haley, Jr., local businessman, publisher, musician, and now author, will appear at the Pottstown Regional Public Library on Friday, November 8, 2019, from 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm, to discuss his new book, *Crazy Man, Crazy: The Bill Haley Story*, a biography of his father, Bill Haley, and his band, the Comets.

Bill Haley and the Comets were a breakthrough group who introduced the biggest change in mainstream music up until that time. In 1953, the song “Crazy Man, Crazy” became the first rock ‘n’ roll song to be in the Billboard Top 20, followed by “Rock Around the Clock” at number one. The music of Bill Haley and the Comets has been a constant in American culture ever since, even if Bill Haley, Senior himself had but a fast-burning, short-lived presence in all of it.

Bill Jr. tells the history of a time in American music, set against the dysfunction and

tragedy his father created for his family. The family stories and background are as interesting as the music, even after all these many years. The book, written by Bill Jr. with noted biographer Peter Benjaminson, has been celebrated as the first complete biography to tell the story of the first star of rock ‘n’ roll.

You know the melodies and basslines, you know the words, you probably even know the dance steps. Come to the Library to hear stories about all of it, compiled by Bill Jr. from years of research and interviews.

RSVPs are appreciated for the author-program and book-signing on November 8th, but not necessary. There is no charge to attend. Bill will have copies of his book available for purchase and signing. The Library is located at 500 E. High Street, Pottstown, at the corner of E. High and Washington Streets.



BOOK REVIEW – CRAZY MAN CRAZY: THE BILL HALEY STORY by Bill Haley Jr & Peter Benjaminson

By Bill Shute

In 1990, Bill Haley’s son John co-wrote a now-rare book, *Sound And Glory*, which many consider the go-to source for Haley’s work up through the early ‘60s and his move to Mexico. Now, another of Haley’s sons, Bill Jr, has co-written a new biography, *Crazy Man Crazy*, which balances Haley’s music and his personal life. It has the benefit of the detailed insights from Haley’s first two wives, Dorothy (who was there for the years of struggle, when Bill was a regional artist and working on his fusion of country boogie/R&B in local bars and on local Philly labels), and Cuppy (who was there during Bill’s breakthrough in the founding days of rock & roll through his biggest fame until things crashed circa 1959 and he left the country), and Haley fans will thrill at the wealth of detail and specifics about the early tours and television appearances and band dynamics and business problems and the like. It’s as if you are there as “Crazy Man Crazy” flies up the charts in 1953,



and audiences and radio programmers are trying to figure out what this curious musical hybrid Haley calls rock ‘n’ roll is about—and as “Rock Around The Clock” is featured in the film *Blackboard Jungle*, months after its original release and modest reception (it wasn’t even the A-side of the single!), and Haley and his Comets become superstars, for a time at least.

Bill Haley had a passion to become a famous music personality and an equal passion to create a new form of music, combining the elements of the many American musical forms he loved, from gospel to polka (the early Comets had an accordion) to jazz to honky tonk (the Comets had a steel guitar), though especially country boogie and R&B. Haley tried various approaches, but hit the right combination in 1951 with his cover of “Rocket 88” and mastered the newly created form with his 1953 hit “Crazy Man Crazy.” This book puts you alongside Bill during those agonizing early days as things are coming together.

Unfortunately, you are also right beside Bill as things fall apart in the late ‘50s, mostly due to mismanagement and Bill’s loyalty to friends from the neighborhood who were in way over their heads in business affairs. Also, Bill was not a model father or model husband with his first two marriages, and the picture emerges of a solitary man with a pleasant and friendly public image who lived for music, but found life and family more difficult to master. Fortunately, his third marriage, to Martha, whom he met in Mexico, proved more successful, but by the late ‘60s, when he’d moved to South Texas and began working in the US again (his tax problems resolved), his drinking problem had taken its toll.

Crazy Man Crazy is not a happy read (with Haley’s inconsiderate behavior toward family members and the man’s own sad run of bad luck), but it’s inspiring in a way to see Haley soldier on decade after decade, often in reduced form, excitedly representing pure ‘50s rock and roll during periods where few cared. The book is a compelling read and will surely become the standard biography of one of the key architects of rock & roll.