

KEEP AN EYE ON: travis poelle

BY AMBER ADRIAN, *Associate Editor*

FROM RUNNING EDAMAME THROUGH THE SENSORS AT TRADER JOE'S TO mimicking the dulcet tones of Buddy Holly, Travis Poelle has managed both to evade insanity and elicit raves from theatregoers and those ever-elusive theatre critics. The insanity evasion is probably more impressive to anyone who's ever visited Trader Joe's on a Saturday morning. "As far as grocery stores go it was great, but if I ever hear one more of those bar code beeps, I'm going to take a hostage," says Poelle with the cheerful forbearance of a maligned checker. More specifically: The cheerful forbearance of a maligned checker who has just abandoned his day job. "This is the first time in my career I've been able to quit my job and focus on the part, and I feel very lucky I can do that."

Focusing on the part has reaped all the benefits one would hope for after hours upon hours spent matching vocal inflections, devouring biographical information and watching television clips. Completing his Buddy image with thick glasses, hair dye and bouffant curls, Poelle both looks and sounds like Buddy Holly—words straight from the mouth of Buddy Holly's widow Maria Elena Holly herself. Critics from the *Monterey County Herald* all the way up to the *San Francisco Chronicle* have buried Poelle under a hailstorm of laudatory adjectives for his performance in the title role in *Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story* at Pacific Repertory Theatre and San Jose Stage.

His well-documented ability to "rock out magnificently" (*San Francisco Chronicle*) was honed at Whitman College, where he graduated in 2000 with a major in music, and polished further in Vienna, where he spent six months receiving operatic training. Though operatic training and rocking out may not belong in the same sentence, Poelle's classically trained vocal chords have translated Buddy Holly's music very effectively.

Buddy has been a long run for Poelle, a phenomenon he calls "a lesson in how to keep things fresh and dynamic." Poelle continues, "I've been living in Buddy-land since May"—and was still performing as the late, great rock and roller in December when he spoke with *Theatre Bay Area*. "It's become an epic portion of my life—I speak with a Southern accent wherever I go. When the show is over, there will be a psychological reentry into the world. As in, 'You can let your hair go blond again, Travis, it's OK.'" But the relative

Poelle has performed in *Wit*, *The Three Musketeers*, and an eight-month run of *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*.

Having grown up in the Bay Area (he credits Lincoln High School in San Jose with planting the seed for his later endeavors), Poelle has recently set off in search of smoggier pastures. He is now living in Los Angeles and commuting back up the coast. He has an agent for his theatre work but is hoping to venture into the television, film and recording genres. "Every time I think I want to focus on one thing, I'll get



Travis Poelle.

stability of a long-running show makes a nice change from the usual month-to-month lifestyle of an actor. And Poelle declares, "The pure joy makes up for any kind of monotony."

Though he does have a certain affinity for playing dead musicians (his résumé also includes *Forever Plaid*), Poelle's local career has been more varied. A veteran of San Jose Stage Company, Theatre on San Pedro Square, American Musical Theatre of San Jose and the San Jose Jazz Society,

pulled in the opposite direction. As long as I'm working in a creative area, I'm happy." And theatre will always be a priority for Poelle. "When you reach that certain moment on stage when you can totally forget that you're being watched by hundreds of people, nerves fall away and you can totally connect with the person you're performing with. It rarely happens but makes it all worth it."