

**Bellevue
Public
Schools****Alumni
Spotlight**

Billy McGuigan

Bellevue East, 1993

Billy McGuigan has been performing on stage since 1990. The Bellevue East grad has headlined over 15,000 performances since then. The largest crowd he's performed in front of was 2003, Memorial Park in Omaha, where he opened for the Village People and Pointer Sisters in front of 80,000 people. Billy recently was the youngest member inducted into the Nebraska Music Hall of Fame! Billy took some time before his East Coast Tour to answer some of our questions.

What high school did you attend and what year did you graduate?

I graduated from Bellevue East in 1993.

Did you attend any other schools in Bellevue?

I didn't. My Dad was stationed here in 1990. I am the proud product of several school systems - Bamburg, Germany; Largo, Florida; Columbus, Georgia and then a move to Bellevue the summer between Freshman and Sophomore year. I'm pretty sure it coincided with Bellevue East becoming a 9-12 school, so I was just one of many new kids.

How did you end up in Bellevue?

I was born in Delaware in the mid-70s. After my brother Ryan was born, my Dad joined the military and our life on the road began. We bounced all over - Texas, Germany, Florida, and then Georgia for 7 years. We never really had much, so we ended up listening to our Dad's music and watching the same movies over and over. Moving to Bellevue was truly a dream. I compare it to the scene in Back To The Future where Marty goes back to the 50s. You could almost hear Mr. Sandman playing as you walk down Mission Ave.

Could you talk about a few of your favorite teachers?

The three that made the most impact on me both personally and later professionally were Mr. Hanon (Drama), Mr. Barnard (Chorus), and Ms. Gangwish (Forensics). They have molded me into the performer that I am today. However, two teachers that I think of often are Mrs. Lucky and Mr. Langhorst. Things that they said or taught pop into my head all of the time.

Did you have a favorite class?

Drama was my favorite class. I took it all 3 years at East and still utilize skills we learned in that class.

What clubs, groups, and organizations were you involved with?

*closes his eyes, squinting back into the past...

I did 3 fall plays and 3 spring musicals, competed in Forensics my senior year, and worked in the counselor's office as the tour guide for new students.

Did you have any favorite places to hang out in town?

My best friend's basement was called The Lazy Puppy. We were definitely good kids! We mostly hung out, watched TV and TALKED! Yes, I feel old.

Do you have siblings?

All of my brothers attended Peter Sarpy and then Mission Junior High. My brother Ryan made it to Bellevue East his freshman year and then moved to Florida.

Do you still have any family in Bellevue?

Being a military kid, Bellevue feels full of family. My brothers and I are now Omahans and the rest of my family lives in Florida. I have friends who are like family that still live in Bellevue.



What did you do after high school graduation?

In the summer of 1993, I went off to Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri. I was a theatre major...then they started hugging trees...so I switched schools, majors, and cities several times before graduating from UNO in 1999.

When did you start performing professionally?

My first stage appearance was in 1977. My parents entered me into a Fonzie lookalike contest...I won! My next professional stage appearance was at Noodles Comedy Club in the Old Market in the summer of 1992 with Teen Improv. I haven't stopped since!

What would you say your 'big break' was - where you realized this would be your career?

Without a doubt, my big break was being cast as Buddy Holly in the musical about his life. I was a fledgling actor and a struggling musician who could not figure out what to do. The night I was "discovered" in Benson by the Omaha Community Playhouse, there were 5 people in the audience. By the time Buddy closed 6 months later, there was a waiting list of 1,500 people who couldn't get a ticket.

Could you elaborate on a few key moments of a timeline of your career?

After the closure of Buddy in Omaha in 2002, I wanted to keep the excitement alive. This led me to create my original show, Rave On! The Buddy Holly Experience quickly became the most successful touring Buddy Holly show in the country. Building on this success, in the summer of 2007, I launched Yesterday and Today: The Interactive Beatles Experience, a unique Beatles show where the audience has full control over the setlist. Instead of dressing and acting like the Beatles, my brothers and I created a show focused on people's love of the bands' music. Over the past 17 years, it has transformed from an underground Omaha Beatles show to the most successful touring Beatles show in the US, touring the country and captivating audiences everywhere.

I experienced a whirlwind of touring and travel over the next decade until the unforeseen pandemic disrupted everyone's lives in 2020. We were compelled to reimagine our approach to performances as we faced limitations on how we could



engage with our audience. In response, we became one of the first performers in the world to resume our shows, albeit in a drive-in style setting in a parking lot.

Furthermore, in 2021, we established the **McGuigan Arts Academy**. Our mission at the academy is to impart life skills through immersive studies in music, theatre, film, art, and technology. This venture represents our commitment to nurturing and empowering individuals through the arts, fostering creativity, and promoting valuable life lessons.

We have now resumed our full touring schedule and don't have any plans to slow down any time in the future!

Tell us about the McGuigan Arts Academy.

The McGuigan Arts Academy focuses on teaching essential life skills through hands-on studies in various artistic disciplines such as music, theatre, film, art, and technology. The academy is dedicated to nurturing creativity, enhancing personal development, and empowering individuals to pursue their passions in the arts while working touring and entertainment industry professionals.

The McGuigan Arts Academy opened in 2021. Recognizing the transformative power of the arts and their potential to instill valuable life skills, the academy was founded to create a platform where aspiring artists and enthusiasts can immerse themselves in a supportive learning environment.

Our mission is simply to “Create Boldy”! The McGuigan Arts Academy has continually evolved and expanded its programs to meet its students' diverse interests and educational needs. By providing opportunities for hands-on learning, mentorship, and collaboration, the academy strives to shape well-rounded individuals who are not only proficient in their chosen artistic disciplines but also equipped with the skills necessary for success in various aspects of life.

Our teamwork with Kids' Time kids over the course of three weeks we bring our Theatre, Art & Music camps to Bellevue every summer! We take over the Bellevue Public Schools Foundation's Kids' Time Program and every student attending the Kids' Time Program gets to participate in our unique theater, arts, and music camps!

What are you working on right now?

We took this summer off from touring, so we are in preparation for an East Coast tour of Yesterday and Today!

Do you have a top career highlight? Or maybe something surreal - like maybe a moment in your career when you thought, "I can't believe this is happening?"

Last year, a prominent Hollywood manager and producer had a memorial service on the Paramount lot in Hollywood. We were asked to perform as the person was a huge Beatles fan. It was a who's who of comedy legends. Our audience was a collection of THE MOST famous comedic names in show business. Most of them spoke at the service before we played and Paul McCartney also sent a personal message that was played moments before we started. So, I guess, Paul McCartney opened for me?!?!

What are some awards you have earned over the years?

I won the Fonzie Look-Alike Contest (1977), Spotlight Award for Best Actor in a Musical for his performance as Buddy Holly in Buddy - The Buddy Holly Story (2004), an Omaha Entertainment and Arts Award for Yesterday and Today: The Interactive Beatles Experience (2010) and a recipient of Midland Business Journals 40 under 40 award (2013). I was the recipient of the College Public Affairs Community Services (CPACS) Alumni Award for Excellence in Public Service, awarded by the Faculty and Staff and the University of Nebraska (2017) and most recently I became the youngest person inducted into the Nebraska Music Hall of Fame (2023).



What are a couple of things on your bucket list?

Love this question. Professionally, a tour of Japan and Europe. It's a logistical nightmare, but it's time!

Personally, I really need to come up with a personal bucket list.

What advice do you have for current Bellevue students?

The ultimate advice I got in high school was written by my drama teacher Mr Hanon in my yearbook. "Don't be complacent." Without realizing it, I've lived my whole life this way. If you have to look it up (like I did then), it's worth your time. And don't.

What is your all-time favorite song?

I've Got A Feeling by The Beatles

What is your favorite song to perform?

Let It Be. I've been lucky enough to perform it with my brothers since we were little kids...in my head, it's now a montage of them all throughout their life. That's a pretty cool view.

What is the most amazing venue you have performed at?

Bellevue East High School stage, curtain call of the Music Man, April 1991. If you were there, you know how electric it was.



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