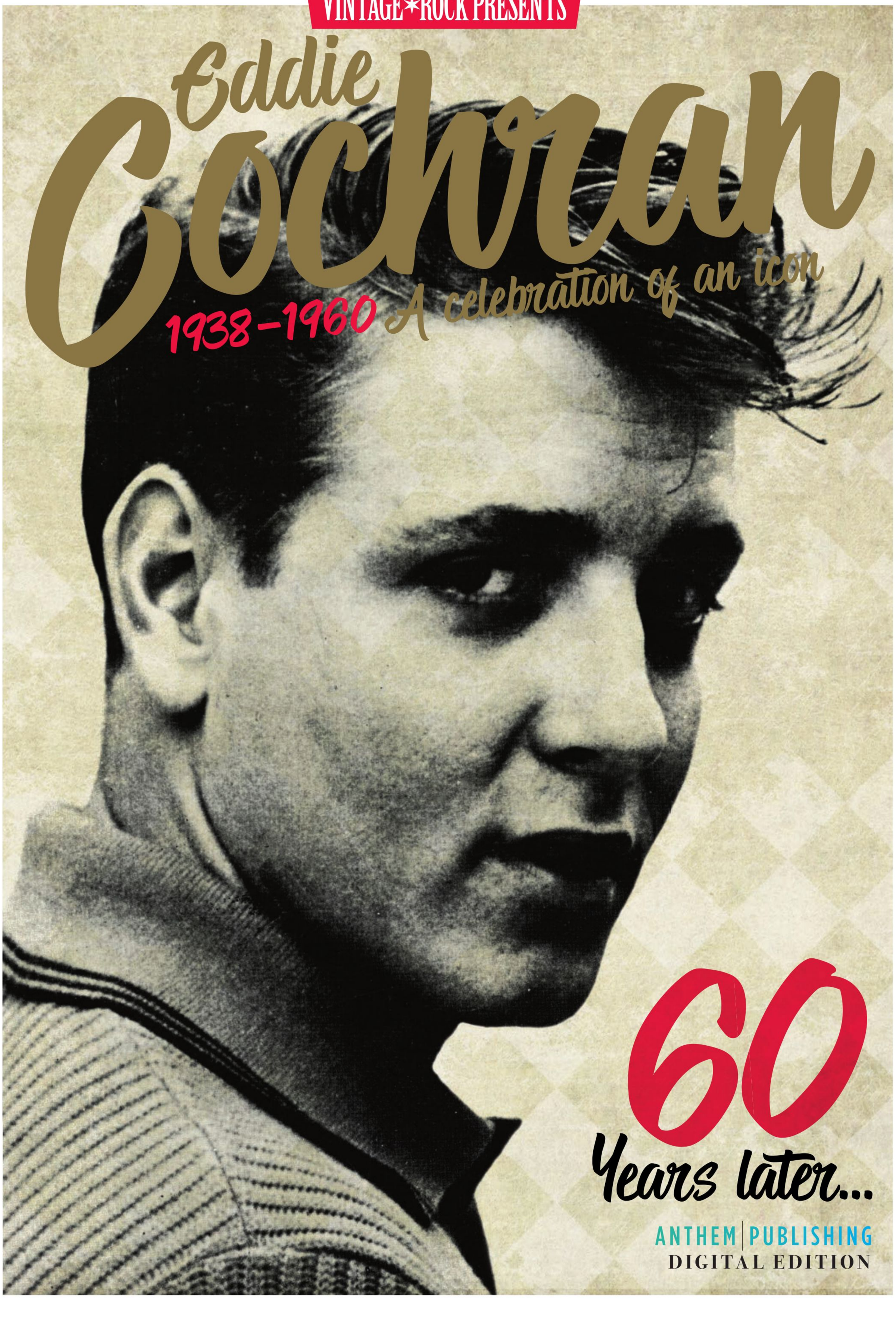
VINTAGE★ROCK PRESENTS

Eddie Cochran

1938–1960 A celebration of an icon



60 Years later...

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WELCOME...



It was 60 years ago this April that Eddie Cochran was taken from us in the cruellest way possible. Aged just 21, he was one of the very first rock'n'roll stars, a blazing talent that had the swoonsome looks of a movie idol as well as a fiery spirit that helped give birth to some of the era's most innovative and enduring songs.

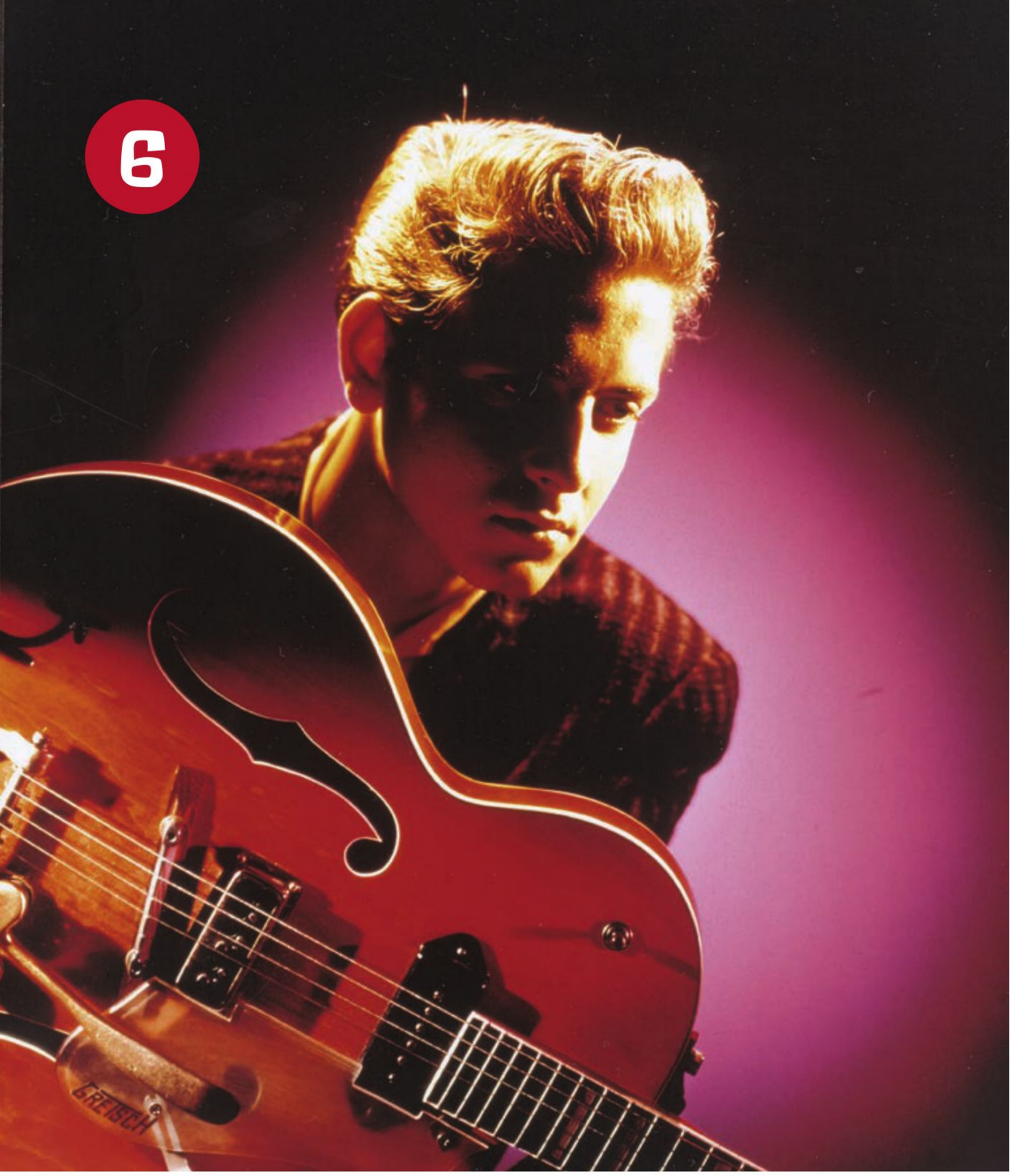
Had Eddie lived, he would have celebrated his 82nd birthday this year. Who knows how his career would have unfolded had he not taken that fatal taxi ride from Bristol through Chippenham on 17 April 1960. Some Cochran fans, such as modern rockabilly hero Darrel Higham, believe that Eddie would have moved with the times and that he would have been as musically and culturally relevant at 40 – and even 80 – as he was in the fresh bloom of youth.

But it was never to be. Instead, we have a star that, like James Dean before him, shone briefly, but with the wattage of a thousand suns. This *Vintage Rock* special pays tribute to this true pioneer of rock'n'roll with features on his earliest adventures in music as one half of The Cochran Brothers, through his time as an in-demand sideman, and on to his first flowerings as a solo artist in the mid-1950s. We take a look back at his kinship with fellow rock'n'roll rebel Gene Vincent and remember his scene-stealing appearances on the big screen. We also profile Eddie's girlfriend, the estimable Sharon Sheeley, and talk to his nephew and guitarist Bobby Cochran, as well as long-time Eddie fanboy, Darrel Higham.

That's not all. We also have features on those evergreen long-players *Singin' With My Baby* and the posthumous *Eddie Cochran Memorial Album*, as well as articles on the legendary Gold Star Studios, Liberty Records and Eddie's trusted inner circle.

On a personal note, this bookazine means a great deal to the people making it. Our Art Editor happens to live on the very road that Eddie's taxi crashed on, while I was born at (and used to live next to) the hospital, St Martin's in Bath, that Eddie tragically died in. Eddie's music has been a part of my life since before I can remember; it's soothed me, it's inspired me and it's electrified me. Sixty years on from his passing, Eddie's music still feels as vital, as exhilarating and as downright *dangerous* as it did when he was alive.

Steve O'Brien
Editor











BEAR FAMILY MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO







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PHOTOS COURTESY OF BEAR FAMILY RECORDS

SOMETHIN' ELSE

A star at 17, dead at 21, the life of Eddie Cochran was teen rock'n'roll mythology made real. But he was more than just a tragedy. *Vintage Rock* charts the short but stellar life of a genius guitarist, writer and singer who could-a should-a been bigger than Elvis...

WORDS BY **MICHAEL STEPHENS**

It was when the Cochran family moved to Bell Gardens, California, that Eddie discovered that his muse was music. Aged 12, he wanted to join the school orchestra as a drummer but then he was forced to opt for the trombone – he wasn't allowed to play drums without piano lessons first, which he dismissed.

His teacher eventually told him he didn't have the required 'lip' for trombone. Typically headstrong, Eddie told his teacher he would quit the orchestra if he couldn't play what he wanted. Aged 14, his brother Bob showed him some chords on his father's old Kay guitar and Eddie was off and running. "He got a chord book and he seemed to just naturally take it from there," recalled his mother, Alice Cochran.

Although self-taught on guitar, Eddie was a natural. Mike Deasy, of Cochran's later backing band, The Kelly Four, vows to Eddie prowess. "Most guys will play honky tonk in E, but Eddie would play it in F, the tougher way – only it wasn't for him." Dave Shrieber, The Kelly Fours' bassist, concurs, "He was one of the few guys I've ever seen who actually played the guitar with all his fingers. Instead of playing an open chord, he'd play the same notes up the neck, giving you the same chord sound, and not a barre chord either. A lot of those licks on things like *Eddie's Blues* or *Milk Cow Blues* he did with a flat pick and two fingers. He could play anything – jazz, country, blues, rock'n'roll."

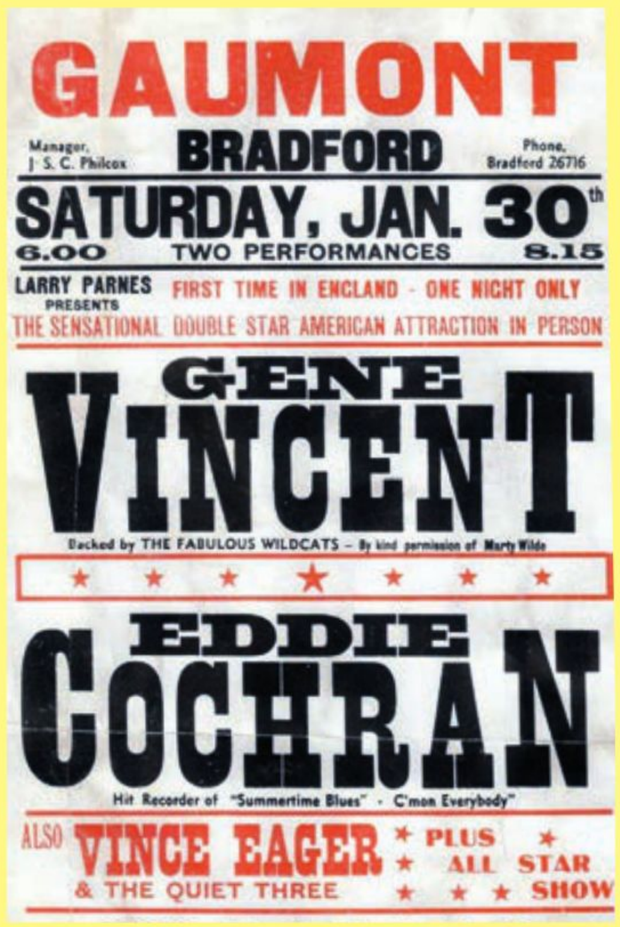
COCHRAN LEFT HIGH school early, determined to make it as a pro musician. He recorded some cuts with Chuck Foreman and Don Deal (1953—54) and others, but his major break came with Hank Cochran. Although no relation, they recorded together as The Cochran Brothers in a swinging western style – the likes of *Guilty Conscience* and *Two Blue Singin' Stars* caused ripples rather than waves, but got them on the radio. The proto-rockabilly of *Pink Peg Slacks* became an underground favourite. Eddie, just 16, shared vocals and played lead guitar, and it gave him the confidence when the faux Cochran 'brothers' split to go it alone.

With Hank, Eddie had worked with aspiring songwriter Jerry Capehart, who soon became Cochran's manager. And Eddie soon had a deal with Liberty Records. That said, Darrel Higham – the UK guitarist and Cochran's co-biographer – believes Eddie was still very much his own man.

"Everyone originally thought it was Capehart who brought Eddie to Liberty, but according to Si Waronker [Liberty Records] Eddie himself turned up on Liberty's doorstep and auditioned just with his guitar. Waronker told me that, had he known Capehart was at all involved he wouldn't have signed Eddie. Jerry Capehart, even then, had a pretty bad reputation in the business."

The machinations of the deal didn't matter at the time. In 1956, still just 17, Cochran became part of Liberty's growing roster. Cochran's first solo Liberty 45 was *Sittin' In The Balcony*, a sedate slice of rock'n'roll, but it got him a slot on *Dick Clark's Bandstand* TV show and he became a young star. In 1956, another big break came when he appeared in the classic rock'n'roll flick *The Girl Can't Help It* performing *Twenty Flight Rock*.

"HE'D PLAY THE SAME NOTES UP THE NECK, GIVING YOU THE SAME CHORD SOUND, AND NOT A BARRE CHORD EITHER"



JUST LIKIN' EDDIE

FAMOUS FRIENDS AND FANS...

"He's it. He's my main man... He was the best."
BRIAN SETZER, **who played the role of Cochran in the movie *La Bamba*.**

"He was like a brother to me. That man was a good cat, man, and he's dead."
GENE VINCENT

"Eddie was the best at picking up girls in the room. He never even talked to them. He just picked them up!" PHIL EVERLY

"He was a brilliant musician who could play guitar, bass and drums equally well. He was also a very generous guy who enjoyed passing on his knowledge to other musicians." VINCE EAGER

"I really loved him. We had a lot of fun in the short time we had together."
DUANE EDDY

"Eddie was a primal influence on me. His playing on *Three Steps To Heaven* actually evokes heaven to me; tears fill my eyes when I hear it. He was a very handsome man, like Elvis. He was destined to be an even bigger influence."
PETE TOWNSHEND

Cochran's contribution was the music: a straight up-tempo 12-bar. The lyrics were by Nelda "Ned" Fairchild, who worked for the Capehart-affiliated American Music Publishing. Fairchild's lyrics: 'One flight, two flight, three flight, four / five, six, seven flight, eight flight, more' showed more than a nod to Bill Haley's *Rock Around the Clock*, though the words included some unusual morbidity for its time: "All this climbin' is gettin' me down / They'll find my corpse draped over a rail."

In *The Girl Can't Help It*, Eddie's spot was a short, tongue-in-cheek scene appearing on a TV screen. It's jokey and silly, but Cochran's superb performance stood out and simply pushed him further up the star ladder. Another appearance in the movie *Untamed Youth* cemented his reputation.

THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT WAS A SHORT, TONGUE-IN-CHEEK SCENE, BUT COCHRAN'S SUPERB PERFORMANCE STOOD OUT

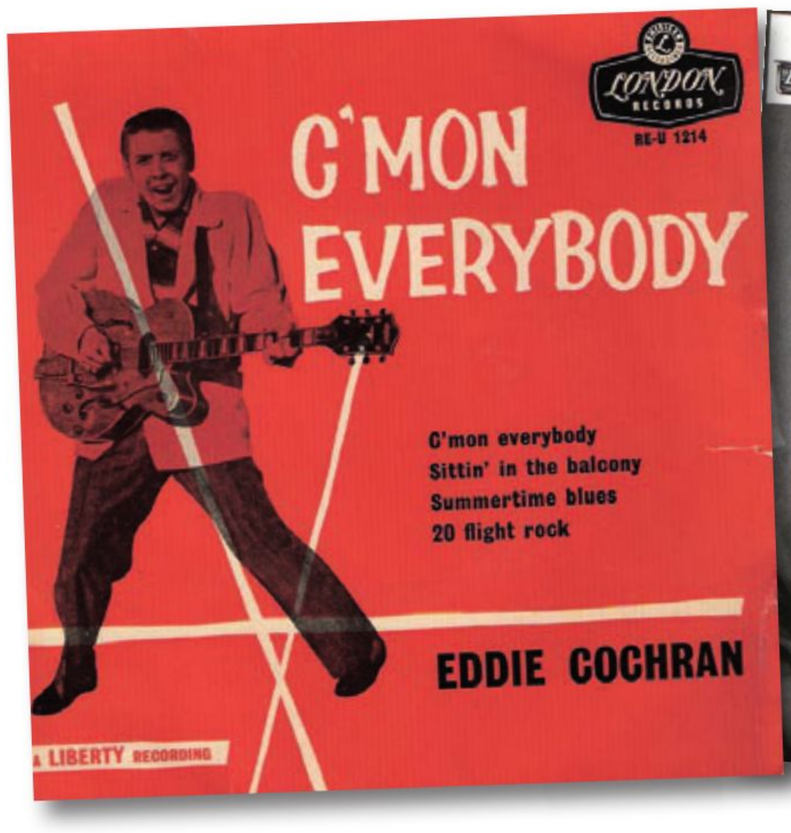
To some youngsters, *The Girl Can't Help It* was a kickstarter for British rock'n'roll. One 15-year-old Liverpool boy saw the film and impressed a friend by knowing how to play *Twenty Flight Rock*, and they bonded. Their names? Paul McCartney and John Lennon... McCartney later noted, "I think what impressed John most was that I knew all the words." Thanks to Cochran's *Twenty Flight Rock*, Lennon's band The Quarrymen had a new member...

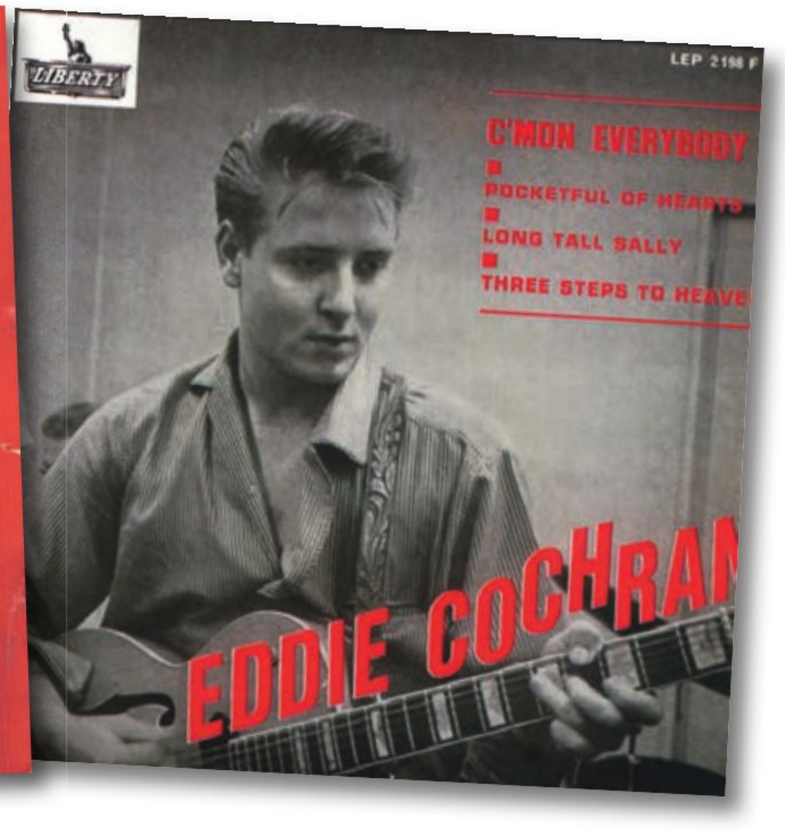
IN NOVEMBER 1957, Cochran released the only album of his lifetime, *Singin' To My Baby*. It was not a 'eureka' moment, mixing proto rock'n'rollers with plenty of ballads (including the staple *Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?*) But it was certainly good. *Sittin' In The Balcony* had not been a massive hit, nor *Twenty Flight Rock*. Still, Liberty supported Cochran in an era where artists could get dropped if they didn't score a massive hit immediately. It was a smart choice on their part – Cochran had many skills, including his wonderful guitar playing. Darrel Higham says, "Eddie was Liberty's ace in the pack. Eddie could deliver his own songs, but he could play sessions and help with arrangements for other artists.

"Some rock'n'rollers are a bit snotty about *Singin' To My Baby* – 'it was just what the record company wanted,'" continues Higham. "But a young man recorded that album, Eddie was 17 or 18. He was bound to toe the line a bit. For its time, it's a beautiful record. It's well produced, and I love his ballad singing. Liberty maybe had a vision of Eddie being a cross between Pat Boone and Elvis."

Playing sessions was part of Cochran's deal with Liberty. Many details of what Eddie actually played on for the Liberty label have been lost, but there are compilation CDs available with certified Cochran cameos. Skeets McDonald's 1959 classic *You Oughta See Grandma Rock* is just one superb cut of Cochran as a session guitarist. "Rock it, but dooooon't ruin it!" shouts Skeets as Eddie tears into a brilliant solo.

Cochran's work as a session player also helped his own growth as a solo artist. He got to know studio techniques – he was one of the first popular exponents of multi-track recording when the norm was to get a perfect 'live' cut. Eddie often played







Had he not had the looks and the voice, Eddie could still have made it as a session musician

GETTY

multiple instruments on his recordings, including drums. By 1958, at just 19, Eddie Cochran was one of the most versatile and talented rock'n'rollers of his era.

Cochran visited manager Jerry Capehart's apartment in Hollywood in March of 1958 to discuss song ideas. Although Eddie's *Singin' To My Baby* LP had done OK and Liberty were happy enough, more solo Cochran hits were desired.

"There had been a lot of songs about summer," Capehart recalled, "but none about the hardships of summer. And of all the seasons there had never been a blues about summer. They had them for winter, fall, spring..."

Capehart was credited with the lyrics for *Summertime Blues* and Eddie the music. But it was Cochran's delivery that catapulted him into legend. Yet, Liberty were still unsure. *Summertime Blues* was at first a B-side, until its hit potential became clear.

Summertime Blues, released in July 1958, is rock'n'roll distilled. Big chords, nothing fancy, but a huge backbeat, and a vocal delivery and teen-angst lyric that resonated. It hit No.8 in the US, No.18 in the UK. Eddie's star was waxing.

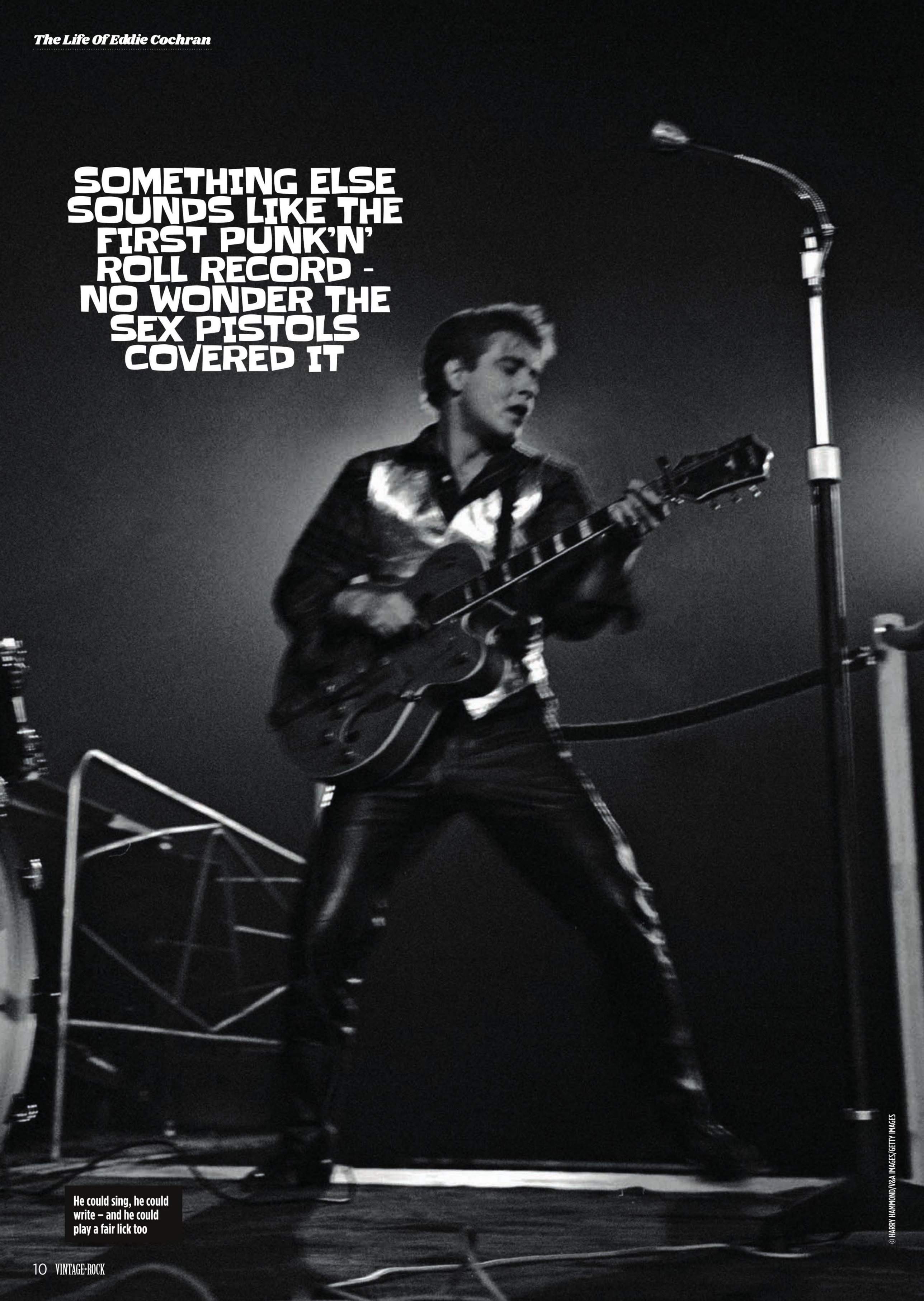
By October 1958, Cochran had another slam-dunk hit. *C'mon Everybody* is a close relation of *Summertime Blues*, but with brighter audio. When Cochran recorded his lead vocal, he also created an alternative version of the song called *Let's Get Together* – eventually released in the 1970s. Cochran overdubbed drums on *C'mon Everybody*.

But his career again faltered. Follow-up *Teenage Heaven* stalled at No.99 on the US charts, and Eddie Cochran was struggling to have back-to-back hits. Many believe Cochran's career was mismanaged. Given his own devices, Eddie could deliver superb, sparkling 45s. But he also had his session duties, and a push-pull relationship with manager Jerry Capehart and his label, Liberty. It was a lot for him to deal with. Eddie Cochran was still barely 20 years old.

DARREL HIGHAM BELIEVES that the young Eddie Cochran was a victim of radio-play scams of the time and the economic strictures of his paymasters.

"Liberty were one of the labels that wasn't involved in the payola scandal. Liberty nearly went bust in late '57 through bad bookkeeping – a lot of their record sellers were fiddling figures," says Higham. "Liberty thought they were doing great, but soon found themselves in trouble. A few records came along in quick succession

SOMETHING ELSE SOUNDS LIKE THE FIRST PUNK'N' ROLL RECORD - NO WONDER THE SEX PISTOLS COVERED IT



He could sing, he could write – and he could play a fair lick too

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Eddie is remembered as a star who was generous with his fans

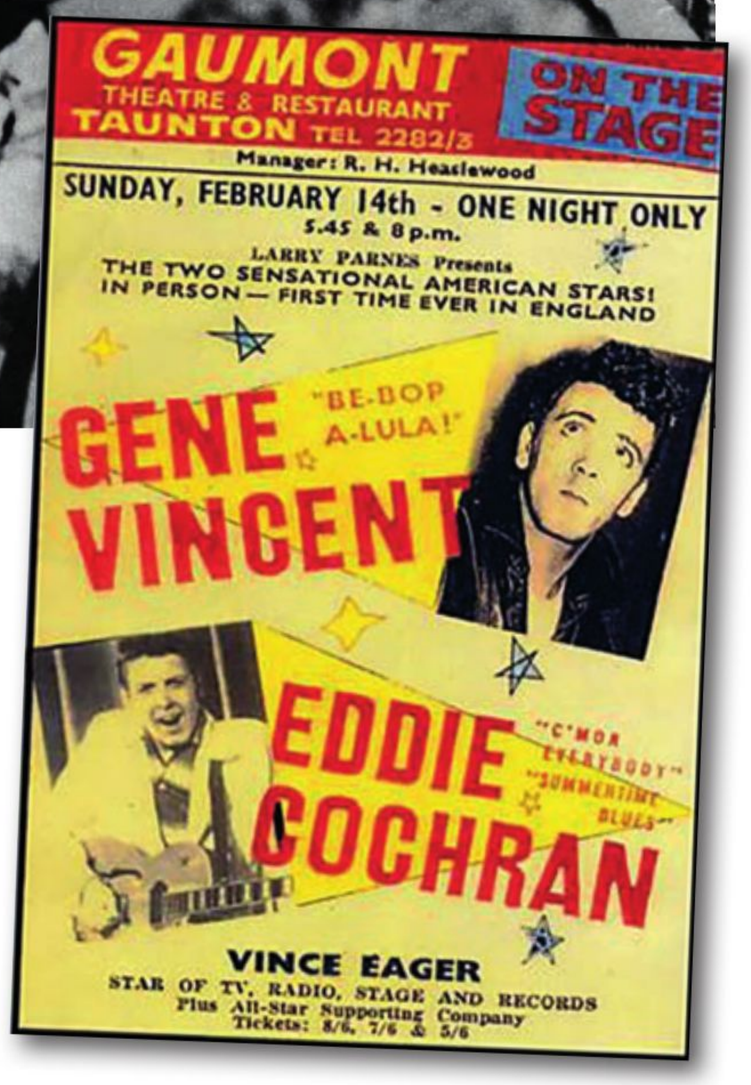
that bailed them out. The first was *The Chipmunk Song* by The Chipmunks, believe it or not a huge hit. The next was Eddie's *Summertime Blues*.

"But then, to keep a reign on expenditure, Liberty were the first label to introduce a credit card scheme. So when their reps were on the road, they didn't have cash, they had a credit card. It stopped any 'payola'. But because of that, Eddie's career stumbled – he wasn't getting the 'help' others were."

Cochran's music remained, though. *Somethin' Else* followed *Teenage Heaven*, and remains as perfect a two-minute rock'n'roll 45 as you will ever hear. Eddie's reverbed vocals sound way beyond his age; the bass thuds, the drums crash. The lyrics were written by Sharon Sheeley, herself an adept songwriter who later dated Cochran. Eddie's guitar is barely heard, but it doesn't matter. *Somethin' Else* sounds like the first punk'n'roll record – no wonder the Sex Pistols covered it. It only reached No.58 in the USA, but got to No.22 in the UK.

Away from the hits, Cochran was proving to be a superb guitarist. *Eddie's Blues*, *Strollin' Guitar*, and *Chicken Shot Blues* were all brilliant instrumentals. But Cochran's bountiful talent could be pulled in lots of different ways. Was Eddie a singer-songwriter? Was he the next Elvis? Was he a guitar wizard? Was he a 'pop' star? He was all of them. And that, maybe, was the problem.

"Eddie's talent went against him, sometimes," opines Higham. "He wanted to write his own songs, he wanted to produce them, he wanted total control. While that worked on *Summertime Blues*, it didn't work so well for *C'mon Everybody* and *Somethin' Else*, record-sales wise. Liberty were not quite convinced, again, that they could let ➡





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From left to right: Gene Vincent, Joe Brown, Billy Fury, Eddie Cochran

Eddie go off and do whatever he wanted. That's why he only did one album."

The classic rock'n'roll era birthed a large number of stars. But many were 'just' singers. Eddie Cochran was also a brilliant musician. Guitars in the 1950s were usually fitted, as stock, with a wound G-string. Eddie didn't like the heavier strings. He fitted an unwound, lighter G-string (a B) to help bendy licks and a livelier fretboard. That string-set is now standard, but back then it was an innovation.

Darrel Higham, a master guitarist himself, concurs. "When I played Eddie's main Gretsch guitar in 1992 at his family's house, sure enough there was a second string on in the third position. No doubt, that was about easier bends." Joe Brown, who supported Eddie in 1960, admits, "I nicked the idea and got lots of session work as a result.

So Eddie Cochran had a double appeal. Teen hitmaker and heart throb to some, guitar wizard to others. "Whenever Eddie's in these 100 greatest guitarist lists, they usually talk about his rhythm playing because of *Summertime Blues* and *C'mon Everybody*," continues Higham. "But on other people's records, he plays like a different guitarist – it sounds like he consciously decided, for his own tracks, that the song is more important than how good he was on the guitar. He knew that people don't want to be blinded by musicianship, they just want a really catchy song with a strong chorus that they can sing along with. A lot of his own records don't even have guitar solos."

Dig deep on compilations and you'll hear what a genius guitarist Eddie Cochran truly was. *Eddie's Blues* remains a masterstroke of proto-shred guitar. Even when covering others' songs, Cochran was astonishing – listen to his own overdubbing version of *Blue Suede Shoes*. Goddamn!

WHEN EDDIE COCHRAN joined Gene Vincent for a UK tour from January 1960, it was a breakthrough. Brits had rarely seen US rock'n'rollers even visit; that two such stars were touring together was a genuine thrill. Vincent was the notional headliner, but support-act Cochran stole the shows.

The tour began at the Gaumont, Ipswich. Eddie came on stage and quipped, "It's great to be here in 'Hipswich'," before gyrating his hips. He'd often start shows with his back to the audience, before turning around and seductively removing his sunglasses. Cochran was an instant hero.

UK rocker Vince Eager, a support act, said that Cochran looked "like a cross between James Dean and Elvis". The young Marty Wilde, another tour support remembered, "The first thing I noticed about Eddie was his complexion. We British lads had acne, and Eddie walked in with the most beautiful hair and the most beautiful skin – his skin

HE WAS ONE OF THE FIRST EXPONENTS OF MULTI-TRACK RECORDING WHEN THE NORM WAS TO GET A "LIVE" CUT

© MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

was a light brown, a beautiful colour with all that California sunshine."

It wasn't just image, though. A 16-year-old Georgie Fame was astounded by Cochran's musicianship. "We were told to report to this club in Soho to meet," Fame recalled. "I remember Eddie playing guitar and we were astounded. He could do all that brilliant fingerstyle stuff that Chet Atkins did. He played this amazing intro to *What'd I Say* and, apart from a few blues enthusiasts who had the Ray Charles record, nobody had heard it before. He played *What'd I Say* every night and within six months, every band in the country was playing it."

The tour got wild. The late 'Big' Jim Sullivan, a hired guitarist for the tour, remembered, "Eddie was so drunk at the Liverpool Empire that we weren't sure that he would make it to the stage. It had one of those microphones that came up from the floor. We positioned Eddie so it would come up between his body and his guitar and he could balance on it."

But the shows were a massive hit. The 1960 Vincent/Cochran tour was poised to earn a quarter of a million pounds – a huge £4.5m-plus in 2013 terms. But tragedy struck after the final date. On 16 April 1960, Vincent and Cochran played the last booked gig of the tour at Bristol's Hippodrome Theatre. Cochran was due to return to the USA to record more songs for his second album. Eddie wanted a lift back to London with support Johnny Gentle, who had driven himself to Bristol, but his car was full. So a taxi was called. Cochran and his girlfriend Sharon Sheeley, plus Gene Vincent and tour-manager Pat Thompkins set off in a hired Ford Consul. Travelling along the A4, from Bristol to Bath and on to Chippenham, the driver reportedly hit speeds of 80mph – utterly reckless on winding A-roads. The taxi appeared to blow a tyre at Rowden Hill on the west approach to Chippenham and smashed into a lamppost after 50 yards of skidding. The devastation was huge.



The memorial at Bath

IN GENE VINCENT'S recollection, "Eddie went out the door... skidded 250 yards on the back of his head. I picked Eddie up and carried him." According to Sharon Sheeley, she and Eddie were singing *California, Here I Come* as the car crashed. Almost too poignantly, Eddie's sheet music was thrown from the car too, his songs left to drift in the wind.

An ambulance took Cochran to Bath's St Martin's Hospital, but it was too late. Fifteen hours later, Eddie Cochran died from severe head injuries. His body was flown to the USA, where he was buried, on 25 April 1960, in Cypress, California.

Eddie was just 21. In early 1959 two of his close friends, Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens, along with the Big Bopper, had been killed in a plane crash. Eddie was badly shaken by their deaths, of course – his own *Three Stars* was a tribute. But family and friends said Cochran developed a morbid premonition that he would also die young.

He was on the verge of huge stardom. Liberty Records had weathered a storm of bad bookkeeping to become a major rock'n'roll force. Darrel Higham reckons, "It was tragically ironic. More movies were definitely a possibility for Eddie – John Wayne wanted him for *The Alamo*." And just when Eddie died, Liberty Records hit big. Johnny Burnette's *Dreamin'* and *You're Sixteen* were huge, and Bobby Vee became huge for Liberty, from *Rubber Ball* onwards.

It wasn't to be. When Cochran was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, music journalist Bruce Eder pronounced him "rock's first high-energy guitar hero, the forerunner to Pete Townshend, Jimmy Page, Duane Allman and, at least in terms of dexterity, Jimi Hendrix." Hendrix had Eddie Cochran music played at his own funeral.

Cochran's death was a major loss. Liberty Records had stuck by him and had songs for him to record. As Darrel Higham recalls of the songs made hits by Burnette and Bobby Vee, "I asked Liberty's Si Waronker: 'If Eddie had not died, what would you have done with him?' And Waronker said, 'You know what? We'd have given all those songs to Eddie first.' His death was a real tragedy. Can you imagine how big Eddie would have been?" ✶



COUNTRY TO BLUES

AND WHAT HE GAVE TO THOSE WHO CAME AFTER HIM...

Cochran soaked up music, from country to blues to hillbilly. In the Cochran Brothers he recorded on the small Ekko label, including *Two Blue Singin' Stars* (country), *Tired And Sleepy* (proto rockabilly, with brilliant EC guitar) and the revered *Pink Peg Slacks*. Pink trousers were an early Elvis trademark, and Eddie adored Elvis – who didn't? He covered *Milk Cow Blues*, as Elvis did, but Cochran likely already knew the song from earlier versions going back to the delta blues. Eddie's *Milk Cow Blues* when played live was heavy stuff – astonishing guitar soloing and a Muddy Waters vibe that shot Elvis out the water. Eddie was also a big fan of Ray Charles – his guitar reworking of *What I'd Say* became something of a signature tune. Guitar-wise, he learned his chops from early Lowell Fulson and BB King. Both jammed with Eddie – BB King said at the time that he thought Eddie was the best white blues guitarist he'd ever heard. As for his influence on others? Massive. The Beach Boys, The Who, The New York Dolls, The Beatles, Tom Petty, Motörhead, The Clash, the Sex Pistols... All of them played Cochran tunes.

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SINGIN' TO MY BABY

Critics haven't always been kind to *Singin' To My Baby* but while the only album released in Eddie Cochran's lifetime lacks the songs that established him as one of the greats, it's still an underrated gem...

WORDS BY **JACK WATKINS**



GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY

In the early years after his death, Eddie Cochran fans got used to compilations of his best-known songs. Just five months after his fatal accident in the UK, *The Eddie Cochran Memorial Album* climbed to No.9 in the British LP charts. Reissued three years later, there was still enough demand for it make No.11. It followed the success of another compilation album *Cherished Memories*, which had charted at No.15 that year. A different sort of product was *Singin' To My Baby*, reissued several times in the 1960s, and briefly charting on a couple of occasions in this country.

First released in the States in 1957, and in the UK a few months later, *Singin' To My Baby* had been the only album to have been released in Cochran's lifetime. With its classy sleeve cover, the beautifully lit images included one of the artist holding his striking Gretsch 6120, and looking pensively into the middle distance. While a lot of people have been a bit sniffy about the choice of songs on this record over the years, it deserves better, not least because, unlike so many albums by rock'n'rollers in that period, it was not some hastily slung together assemblage of a star's big hits, but was genuinely conceived as a studio album, all the tracks laid down in sessions at Gold Star Studios in Hollywood between the early spring and summer of 1957. It is also a fascinating timepiece, reflecting the confusion and dilemma that confronted many studio bosses and performers at the time as to how to present their recorded music to the public.

COCHRAN WAS ONLY 18 when he recorded the songs for this album. As Rob Finnis wrote in his detailed essay to accompany Rockstar Records' *The Eddie Cochran Box Set*, it was "probably as unrepresentative a set" as Gene Vincent's first LP for Capitol Records, *Bluejean Bop!* which had been released the previous year.

Yet the tendency of many writers to disparage both of these albums because of the sedate nature of some of the content stems from a partial misreading of music history. A lot of rock-orientated journalists, contemptuous of the 1950s music scene, have painted the era as just a revved-up prelude to the real hard stuff that was to come from the mid-1960s. But rock'n'roll did not arrive on the block fully-formed, and most of its early exponents grew up listening to pop and country crooners like Perry Como and Eddy Arnold and belters like Frankie Lane and Johnnie Ray, alongside more blues influenced country artists like Hank Williams and a string of R&B performers. They were, within reason, happy to incorporate a few standards in their recorded repertoire, and usually performed them brilliantly, as proven many times over by Elvis Presley and Vincent across their careers. The ability to sing standards at that time was proof of your artistic integrity. Cochran, fractionally younger, was alive to the changing musical climate and was inspired by Presley, but as a consummate musician first and foremost, he would have been across all the styles, even if his instinct was always to add the inflections of rock'n'roll.

COCHRAN WAS ONLY 18 WHEN HE RECORDED THE SONGS FOR THIS ALBUM

All the same, you'd have to say the British got lucky with later versions of *Singin' To My Baby*, licensed for release on the London Records label, because of the inclusion of three extra, high quality tracks which add a little extra zip. Most notably these included *Twenty Flight Rock* which, albeit with a different arrangement, had been the song Cochran performed in the Frank Tashlin-directed satire of the music business *The Girl Can't Help It*. Despite still being hitless at the time, with only one single as a solo artist, *Skinny Jim*, released on the Crest label, behind him, Cochran is introduced in the film as one of America's "top rock'n'rollers," and his slightly mannered performance made a big impression at the time. The version of *Twenty Flight Rock* he performs in the picture was released as a single in this country to coincide with the film's arrival in British cinemas, but the version on *Singin' To My Baby* was a later cut. Many prefer the original with the rockabilly style click of Connie "Guybo" Smith's slap bass more forward in the sound mix, whereas it is hardly noticeable in the second version. But whichever version you prefer, it's still an exciting song, and the lyric about an amorous young guy with a girlfriend who inconveniently lives 20 floors up in an apartment block has helped make it become an accepted Cochran favourite.

However, *Twenty Flight Rock* is not reflective of the overall sound which Liberty were clearly keen to use to present Cochran as at this time, more as a romantic teen lover than as a horny young dude. So the first pressing of the album in 1957 kicks off with *Sittin' In The Balcony*. Instead of putting out *Twenty Flight Rock* to capitalise on the impact of Cochran's film appearance, this was the song Liberty boss Si Waronker had chosen to release as his first single. It was a cover of a song by a young singer Johnny Dee (better known to us as John D Loudermilk) which Waronker had tried to secure the distribution rights for. In failing to do so, he got Cochran to record a note for



TRACK LISTING

SIDE 1

Sittin' In The Balcony
Completely Sweet
Undying Love
I'm Alone Because I Love You
Lovin' Time
Proud Of You

SIDE 2

Mean When I'm Mad
Stockings And Shoes
Tell Me Why
Have I Told You Lately That I Love You
Cradle Baby
One Kiss

GRANT GODDARD/REDFERNS/GETTY





Singin' To My Baby **was the only album Eddie Cochran released during his short lifetime**

note remake, complete with metallic guitar break, and heavy use of echo, including for a big smoochy kiss at the end. They laboured long over getting the sound right, however, and were rewarded when it outsold the Dee original, reaching No.18 to give Cochran his first Top 20 hit early in 1957, though it didn't enjoy the same success in Britain.

Kissin' Cochran must have had some traction, because *Singin' To My Baby*'s closer *One Kiss*, a Cochran-Jerry Capeheart collaboration, had been the follow-up single. It's a none too subtle retreading of similar ground to *Sittin' In The Balcony*, with some more twangy guitar on the bridge. The driving mid-paced rocker *Mean When I'm Mad*, recorded at the same session, was the flip on the poor selling single, and featured more good guitar work, and an aggressive Cochran vocal performance.

COCHRAN DIGS DEEP. INCREDIBLY, LET'S NOT FORGET, HE WAS STILL ONLY A TEENAGER

ONE OF THE most interesting tracks on the album was *Completely Sweet*. The instrumentation on the *Singin' To My Baby* album was always sparse, led by Cochran on guitar. Long-time friend and musical associate "Guybo" Smith was at this stage still playing stand-up bass on Cochran's recording sessions, rather than the electric bass he would switch to on later hits like *Summertime Blues* and *C'mon Everybody*. The veteran sideman Perry Botkin Sr, who'd worked with everyone from Al Jolson, Bing Crosby and Bob Hope to Spike Jones, was on rhythm guitar, and on tracks without Jerry Capeheart's box tapping contributions, there was an unspecified drummer. Then there were the Johnny Mann Singers, a vocal group who were at Liberty under a separate contract. Backing vocal groups have got a bad name over the years. Indiscriminately used on so many 50s' and early 60s records to the point of cliché, they sweetened and softened the edges of many songs, but the Mann Singers were more skilfully deployed on Cochran's recordings.

Completely Sweet, transformed from a more basic earlier Cochran effort at this song which he had penned with Capeheart, is a striking example of the value of the Mann Singers. The vocals add depth to a track that also features one of the mid-song rhythmic shifts Cochran often favoured, in this case from a rhumba rhythm to a shuffle and back again, before closing out with a guitar and slap bass coda, and Cochran dropping his voice into bass mode to sing, "She's so completely sweet."

Cradle Baby, written by a country singer Terry Fell whose real gift was for song-writing, followed the same stylistic model as *Completely Sweet*, with another short, sweet killer guitar break, great backing vocals and cleverly layered, syncopated rhythm. *Stockings And Shoes* was another good song, keeping up the energy levels with good call and response interplay between Cochran



and the Mann Singers, but the same could not be said for the Cochran-Capeheart composition *Undying Love*, which was just plodding, while *Tell Me Why*, which had an embarrassing spoken passage, was even worse. To be fair, while it is usually listed as having been penned by Cochran, he doesn't bear the responsibility for this mournful dirge, which was actually a cover of an earlier song by ballad singer Betty Johnson, *Please Tell Me Why*, first released the previous year.



THE YEAR 1957

BEAR FAMILY RECORDS' RELEASE IS A MUST-HAVE FOR EDDIE OBSESSIVES

Singin' To My Baby was released in the autumn of 1957. Bear Family Records' *Eddie Cochran: The Year 1957* traces the period. An essay from *Vintage Rock*'s Bill Dahl points out that while Cochran probably got signed by Liberty Records because the company saw him as their answer to Elvis, he had several innate talents that even Presley could not match, already being a prolific songwriter, a great lead guitarist and "a natural in the recording studio."

While *Singin' To My Baby* was recorded under the auspices of Liberty boss Si Waronker, the Hungarian émigré who had been a violinist on film soundtracks, knew enough to allow Cochran some leeway when it came to the sound of his records. The gritty sense of rhythmic depth on album tracks like *Cradle Baby* and *Completely Sweet* surely came from Cochran. It would not be until the following year, and the likes of *Nervous Breakdown*, *Summertime Blues* and *C'Mon Everybody*, that Cochran's studio creativity, including his interest in building sound layer by layer would fully bear fruit, but the signs are there in some of his 1957 work.

The Year 1957 also features several interviews by the singer, and some live performances of *Sittin' In The Balcony*, *Twenty Flight Rock* and *Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On*. In interviews Cochran cut an amiable personality. Had he lived he would surely have become a great spokesperson for rock'n'roll at a time when the music really needed articulate advocates.

PROUD OF YOU was a mildly swinging little ditty, with Cochran extolling the delights of his girl over a liberal dose of doo-wahs from the Johnny Mann Singers. One of the main curiosities of this song is that it was written by Dale Fitzsimmons, who'd previously joint-penned with Ray Stanley *Latch On* – one of the best songs Eddie and his unrelated namesake Hank Cochran recorded together during their formative earlier partnership as The Cochran Brothers. *Lovin' Time* had Cochran strumming a ukulele, and qualifies as a pleasant enough filler.

There were two traditional ballads on *Singin' To My Baby*. There's no doubt that Cochran generally struggled to sound convincing on outright slowies, *I'm Alone Because I Love You* being a case in point. Much better was *Have I Told You Lately That I Love You*, however, which Cochran would almost certainly have heard being sung by Presley on his recent RCA album *Loving Time* album. This sentimental song, written by Mac Wiseman, has been performed by many country singers over the years, including Gene Autry and Jim Reeves, whose maturity made them better placed to deliver the lyric with conviction, yet Cochran digs deep to produce a solid new version. Incredibly, let's not forget, he was still only a teenager, and *Singin' To My Baby* remains a monument to a talent who, at 18, had already passed the precocious stage. ✶

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY



V&A IMAGES/GETTY

ROCKY ROAD BLUES

In 1960, Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran co-headlined a 'scream circuit' trek of Britain with an intriguing supporting bill of native talent. *Vintage Rock* chronicles an expedition that turned out to be as tragic as it was triumphant

WORDS BY **ALAN CLAYSON**

The 10-week journey of a "Fast-Moving Anglo-American Beat Show", a tour which ended at the Bristol Hippodrome on Saturday 16 April 1960, prefaced a death that was as stunning for its far-resonating suddenness as those of Buddy Holly, Jimi Hendrix and John Lennon.

Up until this minute in his young career, Eddie Cochran could be forgiven for feeling relatively pleased with how life was going. True, the going had become erratic in his native USA of late, but even if there'd be no more million-sellers like his *Summertime Blues* of 1958, he was well-placed to make his way as, say, a producer, session player, jobbing songwriter – even a full-time movie actor. Since his pal Buddy Holly had perished in an air crash just over a year ago, the prospect of downing tools as a stage performer had seemed rather agreeable.

Gene Vincent was struggling in the US Hot 100, too. Nevertheless, this was mitigated by continuing winning streaks overseas – especially in Britain where, eventually, he'd notch up eight Top 40 strikes as opposed to three in the States, through dogged touring, despite a bad leg constantly pushing stabbing pain into his mind, driving him to drink and to drink again. Also slowly killing him were the non-prescription pills he compulsively swallowed – some to wire him up for the show, others to help unwind afterwards.

Yet even towards the end of March – a time when the first symptoms of what would later be diagnosed as pneumonia and then pleurisy began to manifest themselves – Vincent was still managing to turn on the act when he hit the stage, entering with a glint in his eyes, then swinging a callipered limb over the microphone stand and swivelling in a full circle after his trademark opening howl of, "Weeeeeell..." pitched him into the first song, *Rocky Road Blues*. The ear-stinging decibels climbed highest when Vincent piled into *Be-Bop-A-Lula*, a song that was to "the Screaming End" what *My Bonnie* would be to Tony Sheridan – on which he'd be backed by The Beatles.

A singing guitarist of unusual flair, Tony had been otherwise destined to obscurity largely of his own making. A spot on the ITV pop showcase *Boy Meets Girls* had been cancelled because, in his own publicist's words, Tony "went haywire (failing to be on time, arriving without his guitar etc)". Nonetheless, as a focal point of what may be seen now as one of the earliest British 'power trios', Sheridan was permitted 10 minutes in the moveable feast that was the Vincent-Cochran expedition's all-British supporting programme.

A BAD LEG CONSTANTLY PUSHING STABBING PAIN INTO HIS MIND WAS DRIVING GENE TO DRINK

LISTEN UP!

GENE VINCENT

During the British tour, *Wild Cat* and *My Heart* were Gene's first UK chart entries in four years, and *Crazy Times* reached No.12 in the album list, his only such placing. Most spectacularly of all, *Pistol Packin' Mama* was, during the 1960s' wet summer, his biggest Top 20 strike in Britain. Arranged by Eddie Cochran and taped with The Beat Boys at Abbey Road in May, it was an overhaul of a 1943 million-seller by Texan songwriter Al Dexter and his Troopers, who traded in western swing or 'hillbilly jazz'. The song was also recorded by Bing Crosby in call-and-and-response fashion with The Andrews Sisters.

While *Pistol Packin' Mama* evokes visions of high-stepping cabaret, the fount of its creation was not so exotic. Roadside café proprietor Mollie Jackson's husband and brother operated an illegal whiskey still in the Kentucky mountains. Armed with a pistol for protection, she'd drive the family car out to transport them home. It became customary for her to call them from the road, and Mr Jackson to reply, "Lay that pistol down, Ma, or we ain't coming" – an exchange noted by Al Dexter, who frequented Mollie's place.

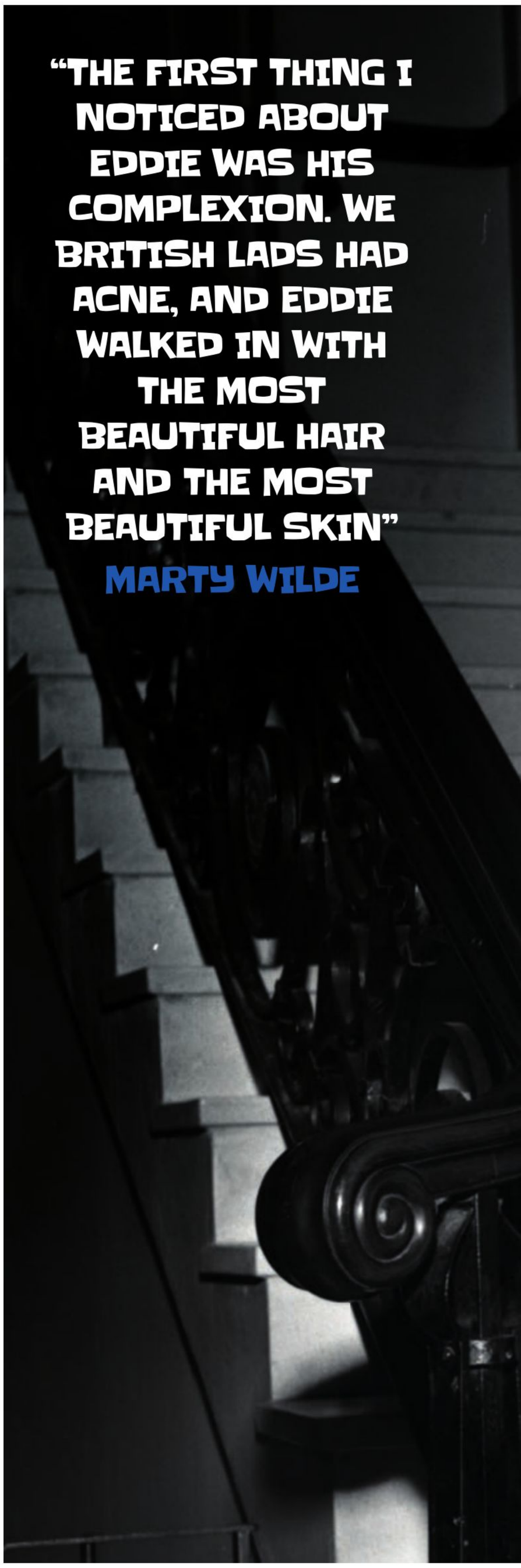
EDDIE COCHRAN

Eddie's previous three singles had each fought shy of the US Top 40. Nevertheless, *Somethin' Else* had peaked at No.6 in the UK, and *Hallelujah I Love Her So* was teetering on the edge of our Top 20 when Cochran joined the tour. Arguably partly, though not entirely, through 'sympathy sales', Eddie's self-written *Three Steps To Heaven* – with assistance from Buddy Holly's Crickets – was to spend a posthumous fortnight in pole position in Britain, while missing completely at home. He'd also be the subject of a tribute disc in 1963's *Just Like Eddie*, a Top 10 strike by Heinz, composed by Geoff Goddard, produced by the legendary Joe Meek... and with Ritchie Blackmore on lead guitar.

On the varying bills were also Johnny Gentle – also soon to have a walk-on role in the saga of The Beatles; Peter Wynne, Sally 'Miss Personality' Kelly, and Dean Webb, each of whom vanished from the pages of history; The Viscounts, a vocal group whose Gordon Mills would have more luck later as manager of Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck; and 16-year-old Georgie Fame, considered by the celebrated svengali Larry Parnes to be the X-factor in The Beat Boys, the all-purpose combo (with drummer Brian Bennett and, on bass, Brian 'Licorice' Locking – who were both to join The Shadows – and Ray McVay, a Scottish saxophonist who refused to dye his hair blond like the others). Their main purpose was to serve Billy Fury, who triggered heckling and worse from youths whose girlfriends had seen beneath his gold lamé suit a little-boy-lost type who just needed mothering.

BILLY FURY WAS a stud from the stable of Larry Parnes – as were Vince Eager and singing pianist Lance Fortune. Larry had decided that artistes of their calibre deserved nothing less than the finest accompanists both in the studio and on tour. These were to include guitarist Big Jim Sullivan and The Quiet Three, who were actually guitarist Colin Green (later to be Shirley Bassey's musical director), drummer Jimmie Nicol – a temporary Beatle in 1964 – and, on bass, Tex Makin; all of whom were to be absorbed, along with Big Jim, into Marty Wilde's Wildcats. Because Marty was busy in a London musical, *Bye Bye Birdie*, The Quiet Three were available to back Gene Vincent. They found themselves supporting Gene on a quasi-regal progression across the kingdom, for Vincent commanded submissive admiration mingled with a touch of scepticism – as if he wasn't quite real.

When chatting with proud familiarity with Gene in licensed premises, the British contingent were content with beer, but Vincent and Cochran quaffed whiskey. It was, in a way, a sign of the typical UK pop entertainer's second-class status. In 1958, The Vipers – second only to Lonnie Donegan in the skiffle hierarchy – had issued a cover of *Summertime Blues*; to Tony Sheridan, "Eddie was everything I wanted to be". In artistic debt to Vincent were Vince Taylor, Johnny Kidd, Shane Fenton – and future politician Neil Kinnock, who joined Gene's fan club when playing in a South Wales outfit, Los Banderos.



From Sheffield, Dave Berry and his Cruisers trooped backstage for a round-eyed audience with Gene, and George Harrison followed the tour to learn what he could about Cochran's guitar technique, such as the employment of an unwound ultra-light third string, the secret of an agile bending of middle-register 'blue' notes. Fellow Beatle John Lennon caught the show at the Liverpool Empire, and it had been *Be-Bop-A-Lula* that The Quarrymen had been playing at the 1957 garden party where Paul McCartney first saw Lennon.

GETTY



Then there was Jeff Beck, whose entrée into pop had come when he teamed up with a school friend. “Our first gig was at a fairground, playing Eddie Cochran stuff,” Beck recalled. Into the bargain, Jeff’s dark locks were bleached then to a fair tousle, just like Eddie’s.

It must have seemed as if all Jeff’s birthdays had come at once a few weeks after Gene’s disembarkation at Heathrow on a drizzly December Saturday for 12 dates plus some TV and radio slots in Britain. Vincent was greeted by a woomph of flashbulbs plus a fanfare of *Be-Bop-A-Lula* by The Firing Squad, an ensemble led by Joe Brown. Next, he was transported to a media reception followed by a rehearsal for a guest appearance at a Marty Wilde recital at Tooting Granada the following evening.

Vincent made his British TV debut on *Boy Meets Girls* after producer Jack Good had insisted on some restructuring. Gene was planning to bring over wife Darlene and their two daughters, transgressing the rule that applied to all male pop idols – which was to play down abiding romantic attachments that would tarnish their appeal to girls. Worse had been the nondescript jeans and jumper Vincent wore at Tooting. Jack dressed Gene head-to-toe in leathers, to which were added a medallion and mascara. He also ensured that the hobbling leg-brace – like Johnnie Ray’s hearing-aid – was invisible on screen. So was created Gene Vincent’s public image for the rest of his life.

Gene’s rampaging before the *Boy Meets Girls* cameras invoked scripted mock-fright amongst the resident Vernon Girls troupe during *Wild Cat*, a single that would



A man possessed: Gene Vincent at the NME Poll Winners Party, 1960

be creeping up the Top 30 when his tour kicked off at Maidstone. However, the charts gave a false impression of his box-office standing, and after a week, Eddie Cochran soared in to co-star on a hastily-extended second leg.

On arrival, Eddie – like Gene – had been as overwhelmed by London as an earthling landing on Mars, gaping at its landmarks like any US sightseer. Frontpaged by *Hit Parader* magazine, Gene reckoned, "I get the greatest kick out of the historical things: Madame Tussauds, the changing of the guard, the Parliament buildings." He liked female traffic wardens calling him "love" and pubs that were more than buildings where guys got drunk.

Darlene, however, couldn't see what was so damned wonderful about our policemen. There was also the cold and rain, only two television channels, and no ice in your Coca-Cola. Within a month she and the girls had returned home, and Gene was witnessed holding backstage court to two women, one squawking, "Oooo, 'e's lovely!" and the other conspicuous for a huge bosom and turned-up nose. After a while, he forewent any cursory chivalry by manoeuvring both into the romantic seclusion of a broom cupboard.

Being a central component in a threesome wasn't an option for Eddie, whose affair with Sharon Sheeley, a songwriter who'd penned hits for both himself and a previous boyfriend, Ricky Nelson, had been disrupted by a public spat in a Hollywood night club. Cochran was startled, therefore, when his placatory long-distance call caused Sharon to jet over to join the tour party. Her honey-blonde prettiness guaranteed that she never lacked for male attention. Her arrival did not, however, disturb Eddie's friendship with Gene, which could accommodate amusement rather than anger towards each other's conduct.

NOWHERE AS heavy a boozer as Vincent, a quantity of whiskey used to wash down some insomnia tablets rendered Eddie so insensible one evening that Big Jim Sullivan had to half-carry him to the microphone for an half-hour spot that closed with him toppling backwards.

Gene was, wrote Jack Good in *Disc*, "the most extraordinary, eccentric and terrifying spectacle on the stage today", but his most eye-stretching antics took place when off-duty. These could feature Hitlerian screeches resounding along hotel corridors, or Gene letting off wild blasts from a pistol in his room before slumping into unconsciousness. On other occasions there were unsolicited monologues swinging from self-reproach to rhapsodies of peculiar exaltation. Gene was suffering road exhaustion. Was this all there'd ever be? A hotel suite in Canada was just like one in Belgium. The Coca-Cola tasted exactly the same. Everywhere was the same. If it's Tuesday, it must be England.

"HE WAS LIKE A LIVING LUNATIC ASYLUM. WE HAD TO GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO KEEP GENE FROM THE PRESS. WE HAD TO HIDE THE THINGS HE DID"

HENRY HENROID, TOUR MANAGER

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY



It's often stated that the 'swinging sixties' started with The Beatles in 1963, but the sixties really started swinging in 1960 with the UK's first rock'n'roll package tour

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY

England in 1960, however, would always be remembered like a clichéd movie sequence of dates being ripped off a calendar to a background of clips. At the second house in Southampton, Gene's trousers brushed against the footlights and start smouldering. There was the hurling of ashtrays, prised from cinema seats, at Billy Fury; Eddie's spiel about how wonderful it was to be in England – at the Glasgow Empire; Eddie demonstrating *Three Steps To Heaven* on acoustic to Vince Eager.

More concerts, more travel... Vincent kicks a door down because he can't be bothered to fumble for the key; in an abrupt lull, a lone female sighs "Oh, Eddie!" to which he responds with an on-mic "Hi, honey," and everybody laughs. There was Sharon's 20th birthday shindig at Glasgow's Royal Hotel; another excuse for celebration in Dundee because Lance Fortune's *Be Mine* has just entered the charts; Gene and Eddie judging a beauty contest at Oldham Carnival Ball; local-boy-made-good Vince playing backstage host to old acquaintances at Grantham's Granada; at Bristol, Georgie Fame performing a one-song solo, Jerry Lee Lewis' *High School Confidential*.

The tour was profitable enough for another one to commence as soon as the end of April, allowing the principals to put in time at the recording studio. Eddie, however, wouldn't be able to make any of the dates, following the fateful taxi journey carrying him, Sharon and Gene from Bristol to London for a few hours slumber before the noon flight to New York.

There may have been a profound lack of retrospective honesty about who could have shared Cochran's fate. Apparently Big Jim Sullivan, who lived in Hounslow, had had first refusal on the front passenger seat – which actually went to Patrick Thompkins from the tour's co-coordinating agency. Ray McVay had been asked too, but chose instead The Beat Boys' Dormobile.

TONY SHERIDAN WAS very glad that there had been no place in the taxi for him. "Instead, I was stranded alone in the dressing room in Bristol when everybody else had gone. For the first and last time in my life I'd bought myself a bottle of whiskey and was trying to vent my frustration at being an inferior British musician by getting sloshed – but the next day, I was still alive."

A starstruck young George Martin was at the wheel when the taxi sped out of Bristol onto the Great West Road. The collision occurred on the outskirts of Chippenham, and the casualties were rushed to the local cottage hospital and then to St Martin's in Bath where Gene was treated for broken ribs and collarbone, Sharon for injuries to her back, and Patrick for a suspected skull fracture – and death took Eddie Cochran without effort. Dave Dee, then a cadet with the Wiltshire constabulary, was on station duty in Chippenham that night, and was entrusted with Eddie's belongings until their shipment back to the States. George Martin, guilty of dangerous driving, was to be fined and disqualified – and, as The Man Who Killed Eddie Cochran, he was reputedly beaten up later by parochial teddy boys.

Gene Vincent expressed no ill-feelings towards George. He honoured the existing British dates, using the microphone stand as a surgical support and paying respects to his friend with a heavy-hearted *Over The Rainbow*. He'd also be surprised in backstage alcoves addressing an unseen Cochran. When called to go on stage, he'd reply sadly, "Tell Eddie... I'll be right out." ✶

OPENING THE DOOR

When Eddie was just 16, he joined forces with fellow teen Hank Cochran (no relation) as half of country singing duo The Cochran Brothers. They may not have had rock'n'roll in their souls just yet, but those records represent Eddie Cochran's first professional steps into the music world...

WORDS BY **RANDY FOX**

When Eddie Cochran's family moved to California in 1952, his parents had no idea they were placing their son on the road to becoming a rock'n'roll legend. Los Angeles and its greater metropolitan area was the proverbial land of opportunity in the 1950s. As the United States' economy surged in the post-war years, Southern California's industrial base grew exponentially and attracted workers from around the country. Unlike their predecessors from the 1930s Dustbowl diaspora, migrants from the Southern and Mid-Western US were greeted with high-paying jobs.

One side effect of the booming economy was an explosion of talent in Southern California's local music scene. In LA proper, African-American nightclubs were filled with jazz cats and blues honkers and shouters, laying down the grooves every night. In the many white suburbs surrounding LA and up through California's Central Valley, well-paid workers with Southern or Southwestern roots packed honky tonks and dance halls, enjoying beer, bright lights and country music.

Originally from Oklahoma, Frank and Alice Cochran had relocated to Albert Lea, Minnesota, by the time their fifth and final child, Ray Edward Cochran, was born on 3 October 1938. Fourteen years later, the bright prospects of Minnesota had dimmed and the "Golden State" beckoned. The Cochran family settled in Bell Gardens, California, a suburb just south of Los Angeles proper. Surrounded by hillbilly music on the radio, the television and in his local high school, and already a fan of Chet Atkins' country guitar style, Eddie quickly added two other hillbilly pickers to his list of guitar heroes.

MERLE TRAVIS WAS a native of Kentucky where he first learned and expanded on a unique style of thumb picking, giving him the ability to simultaneously play a driving rhythm and a lead melody. Travis' early radio appearances influenced a young Chet Atkins to develop his own variation on the style in the late 1930s. After Travis relocated to California following World War II, he became a major session player and a star in his own right, as well as one of the first country guitarists to fully embrace the electric guitar.

Like Travis, Joe Maphis was another relocated Easterner. Hailing originally from Virginia, Maphis played a more traditional flat-picking style and was an incredibly adept and talented player, capable of dazzling audiences with lightning-fast guitar solos.

By 1952, both Travis and Maphis were regulars on *Town Hall Party*, a weekly country music programme airing on KTTV-TV in LA. The young Eddie Cochran fell under their spell as he spent long hours attempting to imitate and fuse their styles into his own.

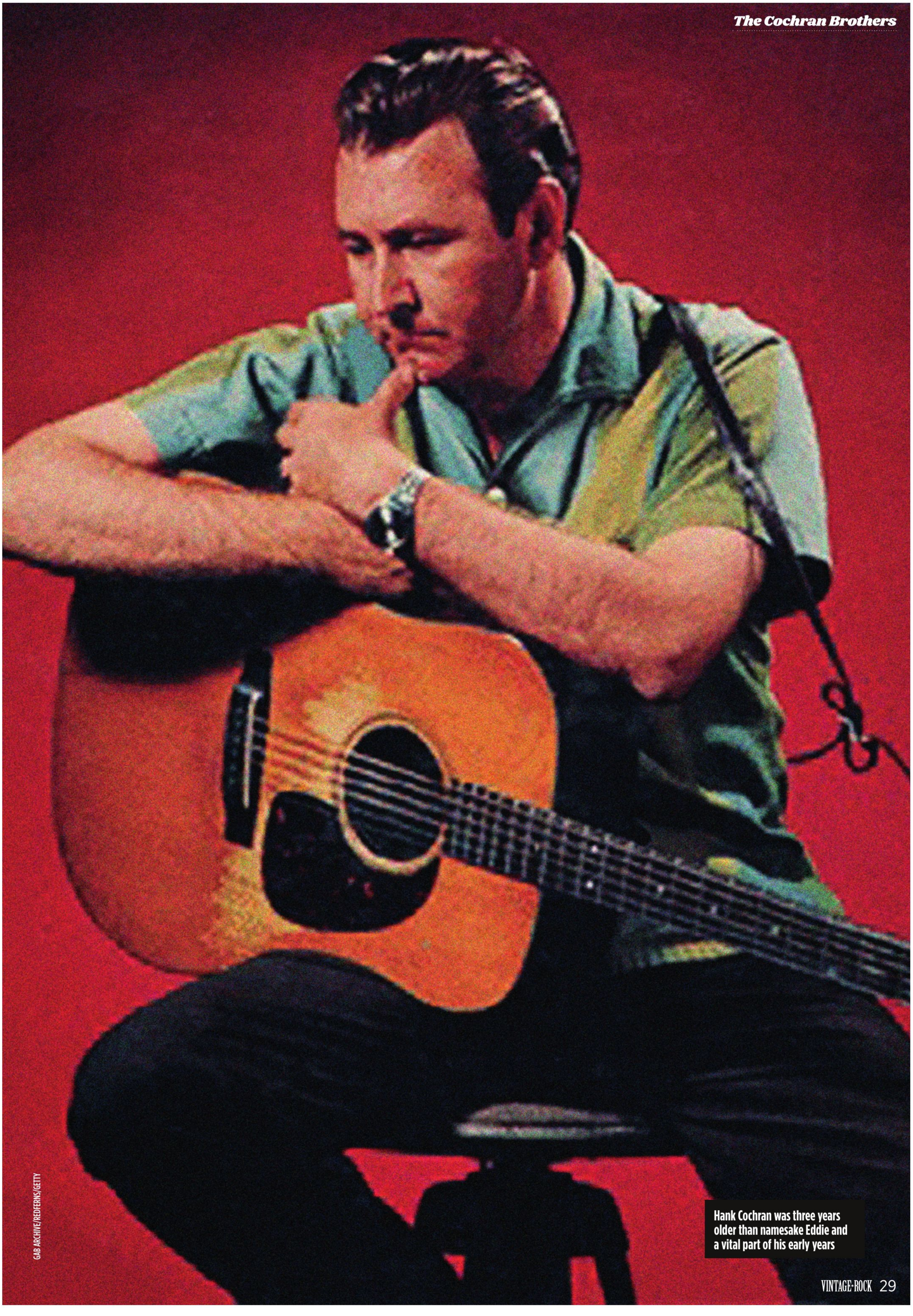
Cochran formed his first country music group, The Melody Boys, in early 1953 with two of his school mates, Connie "Guybo" Smith and Al Garcia. The trio was soon working their way onto the bills of local country music shows. Cochran's ability to quickly mimic other guitarists and build on what he learned attracted the attention of many older musicians.

Local musician Chuck Foreman was especially impressed with Cochran's talent. In the summer of 1953. the pair began recording together on Foreman's simple, two-track recorder. Although Cochran had mainly concentrated on guitar playing to that point, the chance to hear himself sing on the recordings inspired him to step up as a vocalist as well.

Inspired by the innovative recordings of pop guitarist Les Paul, the pair also began experimenting with simple overdubbing. Recording a rhythm guitar track first and then adding vocals and lead guitar. They also worked out a primitive but effective method of adding reverb to their recordings. Such experimentation sparked a fascination in Cochran for recording, continuing through the rest of his life.

While Cochran and Foreman continued their recording experiments, Cochran also found work playing with a number of

COCHRAN FORMED HIS FIRST COUNTRY MUSIC GROUP, THE MELODY BOYS, IN EARLY 1953



GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY

Hank Cochran was three years older than namesake Eddie and a vital part of his early years



The Cochran Brothers toured extensively along the west coast of America and were featured regularly on regional TV

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

country music bands — constantly adding to his chops as a guitar player. In addition to the influence of his hillbilly heroes he began absorbing techniques from jazz and R&B guitarists. The growing popularity of R&B among white audiences led to many country musicians incorporating such influences. Cochran was particularly dedicated to mastering and fusing multiple styles.

In the fall of 1954, Cochran began regularly playing guitar with the Shamrock Valley Boys, a successful local country group that appeared on radio and television programmes, including *Hometown Jamboree* on Los Angeles station KTLA-TV. The group sometimes featured guest vocalist Hank Cochran, an ambitious country music singer and songwriter who was just three years older than Eddie and no relation, despite sharing the same last name.

The pair hit it off immediately and within a few months Hank suggested they form their own act. Taking advantage of the coincidence of their surnames, they called themselves The Cochran Brothers.

"Brother duos" had long been a staple of country music, whether the members were related or not. Although many such acts began specialising in bluegrass during the early 50s there were several popular duos — The Louvin Brothers, Johnnie & Jack, and local California faves The Farmer Boys — that chose another route, fusing the traditional close harmony style with hard-edged honky tonk or hillbilly boogie.

THE COCHRAN BROTHERS initially chose an up-tempo honky tonk style, and with Hank and Eddie's youthful good looks and high-energy performances, they were an immediate hit with audiences. So much so that it pushed Eddie to another decision.

With his mind firmly set on music, Cochran knew a choice needed to be made between school and his career. Despite some initial objections from his parents, in January 1955 the 16-year-old dropped out of high school and began devoting his full attention to music.

Along with his new focus came an investment. If he was going to prove himself as one of the top guitar players in California, he needed an instrument to match his reputation. With a loan from his parents, Cochran purchased a lightly-used Gretsch 6120 hollowbody electric guitar from the Bell Gardens Music Center in early 1955. Priced at $385 (the equivalent of $3,670 in today's dollars) the 6120 was a top-of-the-line guitar. The first in a series of Chet Atkins signature models from Gretsch, it featured two Dynasonics single coils pickups, a metal nut, and a Bigsby cast aluminum vibrato tailpiece.

Cochran immediately made two modifications to his new guitar. First he replaced the neck pickup with a warmer sounding Gibson P-90 "dog ear" single coil. Next he sanded the paint from the back side of the pick guard to remove Chet Atkins' "signature". While he still regarded Atkins as his hero, he wanted the world to know this was Eddie Cochran's guitar alone.

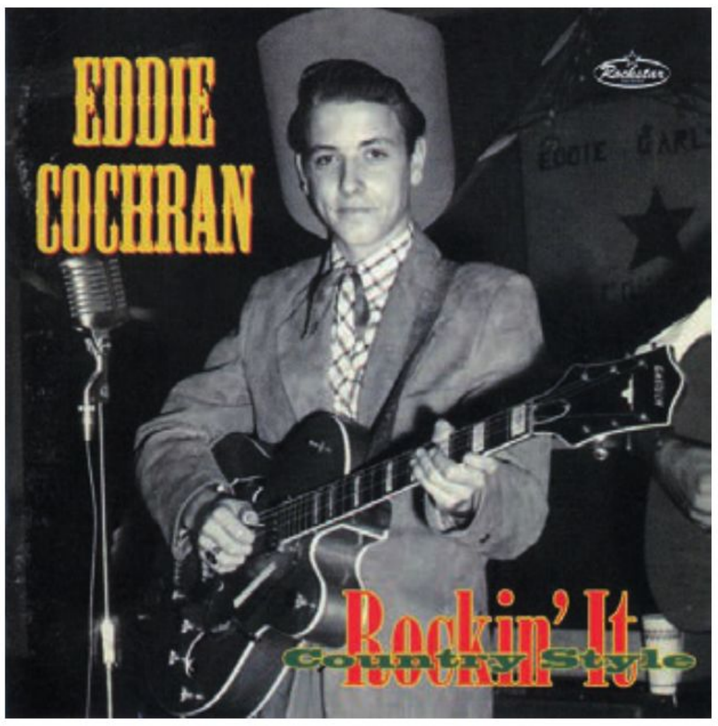
With a new musical partnership in place, his new guitar and no distracting school work, Cochran hit the road with his new "brother". The Cochran Brothers were soon making regular appearances in country music dance halls and local music jamborees across Southern California. They also quickly scored guest appearances on the TV programmes *Hometown Jamboree* and *Town Hall Party*.

In April 1955 The Cochran Brothers signed with the Americana Corporation, a West Coast booking agency run by prominent country music promoter Steve Stebbins. The agreement led to higher paying gigs as well as an audition with Ekko Records.

Founded in 1954, by veteran songwriter Richard Hall and radio producer Ed Bloodworth, Ekko was a Hollywood-based independent record label that initially focused on pop music, but quickly expanded into the country field. In early 1955, prompted by the regional success of Elvis Presley's first releases on Sun Records, Ekko also opened an office in Memphis, Tennessee to scout talent for the label.

Although Ekko was a small label, they had ambitious plans and were eager to promote new talent. Signing with the label in April 1955, The Cochran Brothers' first formal recording session was held the same month at Western Recorders in Hollywood. The four songs cut at the session revealed a desire to target both traditional and progressive fans in their quest for a hit.

WITH HIS MIND SET ON MUSIC, COCHRAN NEEDED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN SCHOOL AND HIS CAREER...



THE EARLIEST EDDIE

SOME OF THE VERY FIRST HOME RECORDINGS EDDIE MADE ARE NOW SADLY LOST

Eddie Cochran's friendship with Chuck Foreman and the home recordings they cut in 1953–55 offer an unparalleled look at Cochran's development as a guitarist, vocalist and performer — as well as peek into his personal musical tastes and early influences. At the time of their first meeting, Cochran was only 14 years old, while Foreman was 20, but their mutual love of music and interest in recording easily bridged the age difference.

Cochran was eager to hone his skill on the guitar and was just becoming interested in singing, as Foreman recalled to Julie Mundy and Darrel Higham: "Eddie was fascinated by his own sound being played back. That's why we recorded many vocal tunes like *Candy Kisses* and *Hearts Of Stone* — he was basically a rhythm-guitar player singing. Within a year we were playing [more complex instrumentals] like *The Poor People Of Paris* and *Jamming With Jimmy*. In a period of one year he learned so fast because he really was intense ... It just got worse, too. You'd go to a party and everybody would be having a few beers and necking — and what was Eddie doing? He was playing guitar."

Due to the high cost of magnetic tape at the time, the majority of these early recordings are lost, as Foreman and Cochran constantly reused tape. Fortunately, Foreman did hang on to several recordings. The surviving recordings were collected and released by Rockstar Records in 1997 as *Rockin' It Country Style: The Legendary Chuck Foreman Recordings 1953-55*.



MARTY ROBBINS

THE COUNTRY SINGER AND NASCAR RACING DRIVER WAS EDDIE'S FAVOURITE VOCALIST

While Eddie Cochran's primary guitar influences was the hillbilly trinity of Chet Atkins, Merle Travis and Joe Maphis, it was another, equally innovative country star that provided the biggest influence on Cochran's vocal style — Marty Robbins.

A native of Glendale, Arizona, Robbins was a true son of the Old West. Robbins grew up hearing firsthand tales from his grandfather, "Texas Bob" Heckle and idolising the singing cowboys of the 1930s, but he did not become attuned to country music until he served in the US Navy in World War II. After signing with Columbia Records in 1951, Robbins began developing the smooth, melancholy style that led to his nickname, "Mr Teardrop" and his first two hits, *I'll Go On Alone* in 1952 and *I Couldn't Keep From Crying* in 1953.

Robbins' talent and musical wanderlust proved to be too immense for only one style. He soon demonstrated that he was equally adept with country blues and honky tonk and when Elvis began gaining popularity in 1955, he was one of the first (and few) mainstream country artists to fully embrace the rockabilly style. Robbins would eventually score hits that dabbled in Hawaiian music, teen pop, mainstream contemporary pop, cowboy ballads and more.

Robbins' forceful, clear vocal delivery and his ability to work across multiple genres clearly had a tremendous influence on Eddie Cochran. The rockabilly singer and Cochran's close friend, Glen Glenn, later recalled that Robbins' first full-length LP, the 1957 release *The Song Of Robbins*, was Cochran's favourite album and one that he would listen to repeatedly.



First up was *Mr Fiddle*, a song written by Ekko A&R Director Red Matthews. The up-tempo tune was typical of the novelty-style songs that were particularly popular on the West Coast and featured harmony singing from Hank and Eddie, along with playful fiddling from prominent session musician and *Town Hall Party* regular Harold Hensley.

The second song cut, *Two Blue Singing Stars*, was another Matthews composition. A slightly-maudlin tribute song to country stars Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams (although they are never named), the recording was a throw-back to the earlier, close harmony style of hillbilly brother duos of the 1930s. A well-performed weeper that could certainly find some traction with more traditional country music fans, Matthews had plans to promote the song at the upcoming Jimmie Rodgers celebration in Meridian, Mississippi.

Hot pickin' and singin' returned on the third number cut. The up-tempo honky tonker *Guilty Conscience* was co-written by Hank and Eddie and was certainly a more typical example of the kind of music they emphasised in their live appearances. Featuring a particularly tasty instrumental break from Harold Hensley and Eddie Cochran, trading off solos on the fiddle and guitar respectively, the record had some real hit potential.

THE FINAL SONG from the session, *Your Tomorrows Never Come*, was written by Lee Hayes and Sonny Harper. It was a straight-ahead honky weeper of the kind that made Lefty Frizzell a star, and, in fact, Frizzell would record his own version just a few weeks after The Cochran Brothers' session.

Ekko chose to pair *Two Blue Singing Stars* with *Mr Fiddle* for the first Cochran Brothers record. Released on 5 May 1955, the single opened doors for more live bookings and *Billboard* lauded the single's merits in their review, but it ultimately sold few copies. In September, Ekko tried again, pairing up *Your Tomorrows Will Never Come* and *Guilty Conscience* for the duo's second release, receiving the same lacklustre response.

Big changes were in the works however. In late April 1955, The Cochran Brothers made their first appearance on the highly popular Dallas, Texas-based *Big D Jamboree* show where they learned of an astounding new musical phenomenon, as Hank Cochran later recalled to Eddie Cochran biographers Julie Mundy and Darrel Higham for their book, *Don't Forget Me: The Eddie Cochran Story*.

THE COCHRAN BROTHERS WERE NEARING THE END OF THE ROAD. EDDIE HAD HIS SIGHTS ON A SOLO CAREER

"[We] met this policeman who was scratched all over," Hank Cochran said. "I asked him what happened and how he got all of these scratches. He said that some guy by the name of Elvis Presley played there and the girls tore him to pieces trying to get to the singer... That was hard for us to believe; young as we were, we weren't too much younger than Elvis."

At that point, Presley had only released three singles, and the pandemonium that followed his live appearances was still primarily confined to the Southeastern United States, but there is little doubt that the various new fusions of





country, R&B and pop — not yet known as rock'n'roll and rockabilly — were a gathering wave.

Throughout the remainder of 1955 and into early 1956, The Cochran Brothers worked a busy schedule of live appearances as well as an ever-increasing number of gigs as session musicians for other Ekko artists and recording songwriting demos by an ambitious young singer, songwriter and would-be producer, Jerry Capehart.

In late 1955, Capehart convinced John Dolphin, owner of the popular record store Dolphin's of Hollywood and head of the R&B labels Cash Records and Money Records, to release a series of country records produced by Capehart. Hank and Eddie Cochran played on several of the sessions and even secured label credit for their backing of Capehart on his January 1956 single *Rollin'*. While the Capehart-produced singles were a failure financially, Capehart and Eddie Cochran forged a bond that became stronger over the next few months.



Hank Cochran photographed in Nashville City in 1962



In early 1956, the growing wave of rockabilly heralded by Elvis Presley broke with a fury when Presley's first RCA release *Heartbreak Hotel* and Carl Perkins' *Blue Suede Shoes* simultaneously shot to the top of the country, R&B and pop charts. With rockabilly and rock'n'roll burning up the charts, Capehart arranged a demo session with The Cochran Brothers for 4 April to record several new songs.

The result was the first example of Eddie Cochran stepping into the spotlight as a lead singer and guitarist. Eddie's performance on *Pink Peg Slacks* offered ample evidence of a budding rock'n'roll star. Hank Cochran also displayed rockabilly chops on the hillbilly rocker *Latch On*.

The rockin' mania continued on The Cochran Brothers' second official Ekko Records session just a few weeks later. Featuring four songs, all co-written by Hank, Eddie, and Jerry Capehart, the session produced two blistering hot rockers, *Tired And Sleepy* and *Slow Down*, and two mid-tempo rockers, *Fool's Paradise* and *Open The Door*.

THE RECORDINGS ALSO revealed Eddie's new-found confidence as a singer. On both *Tired And Sleepy* and the even harder rockin' *Slow Down*, Eddie trades out the lead vocals with Hank on the verses, bringing a particularly forceful delivery, along with shouted exclamations throughout the instrumental breaks. Even the two more mid-tempo cuts deliver the goods, resulting in four cuts of prime, grade-A rockabilly at its finest.

Ekko released *Tired And Sleepy* and *Fool's Paradise* as a single in May 1956. *Cash Box* praised the record, calling the A-side "a tantalising, quick-paced jolter ... that's gonna keep the boxes hoppin' all day long." Notwithstanding the quality of the recordings and the enthusiastic reviews, the single was lost in the deluge of releases from would-be rockabilly cats and disappeared without a splash on the charts. *Open The Door* and the blistering *Slow Down* remained unreleased until the British label Rockstar Records unearthed them in 1982 for a compilation, *The Young Eddie Cochran*.

The single's failure to catch made little difference as The Cochran Brothers were nearing the end of the road. Shortly after a trip to Hawaii as a supporting act for a Lefty Frizzell tour, Hank and Eddie Cochran ended their professional relationship. Eddie had his sights on a solo career as a rock'n'roll and pop artist, a course that was actively encouraged by Jerry Capehart who quickly signed Eddie to a personal management contract. Hank Cochran reset his sights on a mainstream country career, eventually relocating to Nashville where he found success as a prolific songwriter, penning such classics as *I Fall To Pieces* for Patsy Cline and *Make The World Go Away* for Ray Price.

In early July 1956, Capehart negotiated a record deal for Eddie with Crest Records. At Cochran's first dedicated session as a solo artist, he cut the song *Skinny Jim*. Quickly released by Crest, it missed the charts but would be the first in a series of classics by rock'n'roll star, Eddie Cochran. ✶

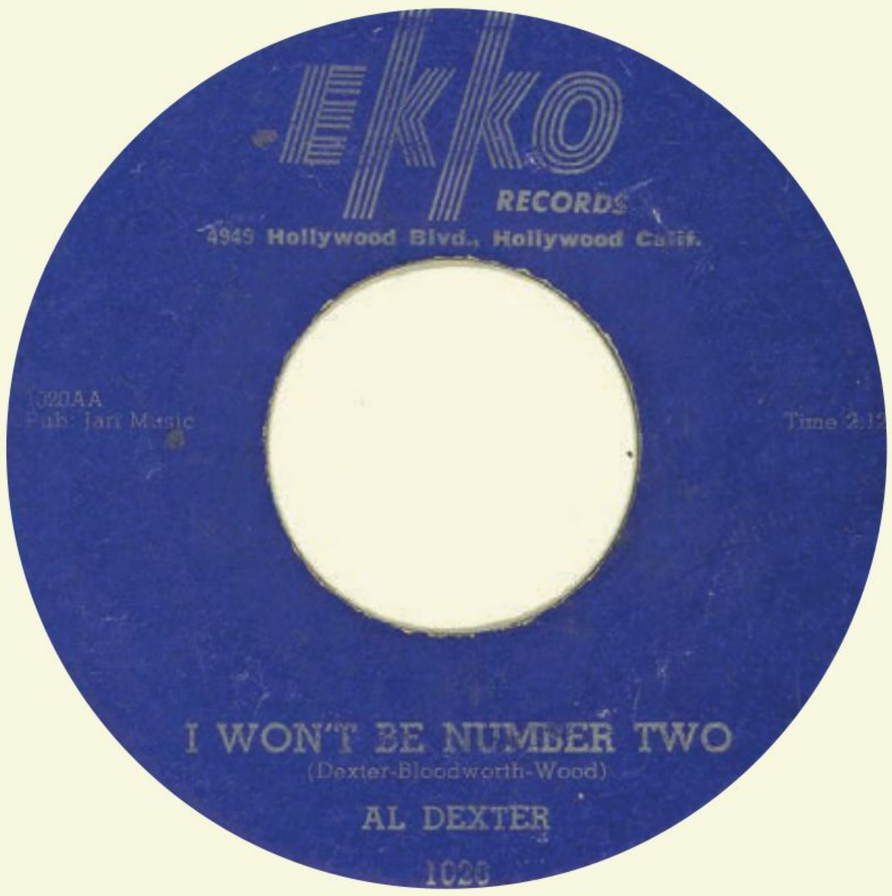
MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

THE SESSION MAN

Some of the most famous names in music, from Jimmy Page to Ry Cooder, started life as session players, and, before he tasted success on his own, Eddie Cochran lent his considerable guitar talents to a whole range of songs by other artists...

WORDS BY **BILL DAHL**

Before he ever had a hit of his own and long after as well, Eddie Cochran was in demand as a session guitarist at Gold Star Recording Studios and other Los Angeles facilities. His rapid-fire licks became as instantly identifiable as the work of Joe Maphis or Merle Travis – and he was a whole lot younger, wide-open to the entire rock'n'roll experience. At the beginning of Cochran's run as a session guitarist, he stuck pretty closely to straight country music, picking behind veteran vocalists Al Dexter and Riley Crabtree and newcomer Wynn Stewart. But as soon as rockabilly exploded, Eddie wasted no time in making the stylistic switch and got to rocking, quickly developing an arsenal of trademark licks that would suit him well in the years to come. 1956 was the year that Eddie assumed his rightful spot among the elite LA rockabilly pickers, thanks to his stunning solos on classic sides by Skeets McDonald and Gene "Bo" Davis. Even after he started posting hits of his own, Cochran lent his guitar mastery to other singers' sessions, notably those of Lee Denson, Troyce Key, and Baker Knight. 12 bars of solo space was all Eddie required to make his mark. Here are some classic examples of Eddie's exploits as a session guitarist...





I WON'T BE NUMBER TWO
AL DEXTER
EKKO 1955

Eddie grew up on country music, so he was right at home on his earliest sideman sessions in 1955 for Ekko Records. Cochran inserted a lovely Merle Travis-style solo on veteran country star Al Dexter's high-stepping Ekko release *I Won't Be Number Two*, boding well for his future. Al's *Pistol Packin' Mama* had been one of the biggest records of 1944, a pop and C&W chart-topper; Ekko had him redo it 11 years later for the single's opposite side, Eddie playing a tandem passage with an unidentified steel guitarist.

EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY
JESS WILLARD
EKKO 1955

An easy swing permeates Jess Willard's hillbilly bopper *Every Dog Has His Day*, another 1955 Ekko country offering. Cochran's elegant solo is one of its many charms, confident and melodic from first note to last. A Texan by birth, Willard had made a dozen early 50s singles for Capitol including the original *Honky Tonk Hardwood Floor* prior to his Ekko one-off. Cliffie Stone was on bass for Willard's Ekko offering, with Hank Cochran manning the rhythm guitar and doubling as co-writer.



MEET ME AT JOES

RILEY CRABTREE

EKKO 1955

Another son of the Lone Star State, Riley Crabtree had been a victim of polio as a wee lad, but he overcame the disease to become a hillbilly singer, adopting Jimmie Rodgers as one of his primary influences. Riley recorded for Star Talent and Columbia during the postwar era before Ekko gave him a shot in 1955. There's an ominous feel to *Meet Me At Joes*, exacerbated by Eddie's growling guitar solo halfway through. Ekko bosses Ed Bloodworth and Red Matthews wrote the piece for Crabtree.



WALKIN' STICK BOOGIE

JERRY CAPEHART

CASH 1956

Not only did Jerry Capehart slap a mean cardboard box as a drum substitute on many of Eddie's early sides, he was the young rocker's manager and frequent co-writer. He tried to do a little singing, too: *Walkin' Stick Boogie*, waxed in early '56, boasts one of Eddie's flashiest solos, full of bends and curlicues. Somehow Capehart convinced Lovin' John Dolphin, the charismatic owner of the blues-and-doo-wop-dominated label Cash Records, to integrate his roster by releasing the single. Supposedly R&B pianist Ernie Freeman tinkled the 88s.



BROKEN HEARTED FELLOW

DON DEAL

CASH 1956

Cash Records' flirtation with country music lasted just long enough to press up Don Deal's *Broken Hearted Fellow,* another early '56 effort with Cochran jumping in at the halfway mark to unleash a very tasty solo. Deal migrated from his home state of Iowa to California in 1952 and was discovered by country singer Smokey Rogers, author of Ferlin Husky's smash *Gone*. He was reportedly going on 18 years of age when he debuted on Cash with this single.



LATCH ON & I'M READY

HANK COCHRAN

UNITED ARTISTS

CUT 1956 AND RELEASED 1972

He may not have been a fan of rockabilly, preferring traditional country, but Hank Cochran waxed two terrific rocking demos for American Music at Gold Star in early 1956 showcasing Eddie's fretwork at its hottest. Hank delivered the stop-time swinger *Latch On* at a relaxed pace. *I'm Ready*, written by the Cochrans and Capehart, was brisker and sported a dazzling two-chorus solo from Eddie.



HEART-BREAKIN' MAMA & YOU OUGHT TO SEE GRANDMA ROCK

SKEETS MCDONALD

CAPITOL 1956

Veteran country artists jumped aboard the rockabilly bandwagon by the boatload in 1956, but few were as convincing vocally as Skeets McDonald on this blazing two-sider. Skeets broke in with the naughty *Birthday Cake* for Detroit's Fortune Records before settling at Capitol in 1951. Eddie stands toe-to-toe with old hand Joe Maphis on both of these sides (waxed 9 May, 1956 at Capitol Tower in Hollywood), the two solo-ing simultaneously on the storming Harlan Howard-penned *You Ought To See Grandma* and the equally torrid *Heart-Breaking Mama*.



LET'S COAST AWHILE

BO DAVIS

CREST 1956

Missouri native Gene Davis gravitated to Los Angeles after recording a few country singles for 4 Star and King. He took the full rockabilly plunge in July of '56 for Sylvester Cross' Crest Records, an offshoot of American Music. Naturally Eddie was there to provide the fret firepower on Davis' self-penned *Let's Coast Awhile*, peeling off a brilliant solo. Crest issued the song as by Bo Davis, a one-time-only alias. He was back to being Gene Davis on his late 50s rocking encores for R-Dell (*Curfew*) and Rosco (*I've Had It, I'm Through*).



I.O.U.

JACK LEWIS

CREST 1956

Part of the creative staff at Crest Records, Jack Lewis could sing a convincing rocker when called upon. *I.O.U.*, written by fellow American Music staffer Ray Stanley and waxed in the autumn of 1956 at Gold Star, fit that bill and then some. Cochran's practically the whole band (Guybo Smith is on bass), his sleek recurring riff providing the backbone of the whole thing. Before he got musically creative, Texas émigré Lewis was an airline pilot, and he certainly flies sky-high here with Eddie's twangy aid.



MY LOVIN' BABY

RAY STANLEY

ZEPHYR 1956

The same stripped-down approach defined Ray Stanley's incendiary self-penned *My Lovin' Baby*, Cochran's vibrato-laden Gretsch finding some welcome solo space midway through as Guybo slaps his standup bass. Arkansas-born Ray's real handle was Stanley Nussbaum; he was another prolific American Music staffer whose work found wide issue. Cut in late 1956, *My Lovin' Baby* emerged on the LA-based Zephyr logo, while his *Over A Coke* somehow found its way to Chicago's Argo label.

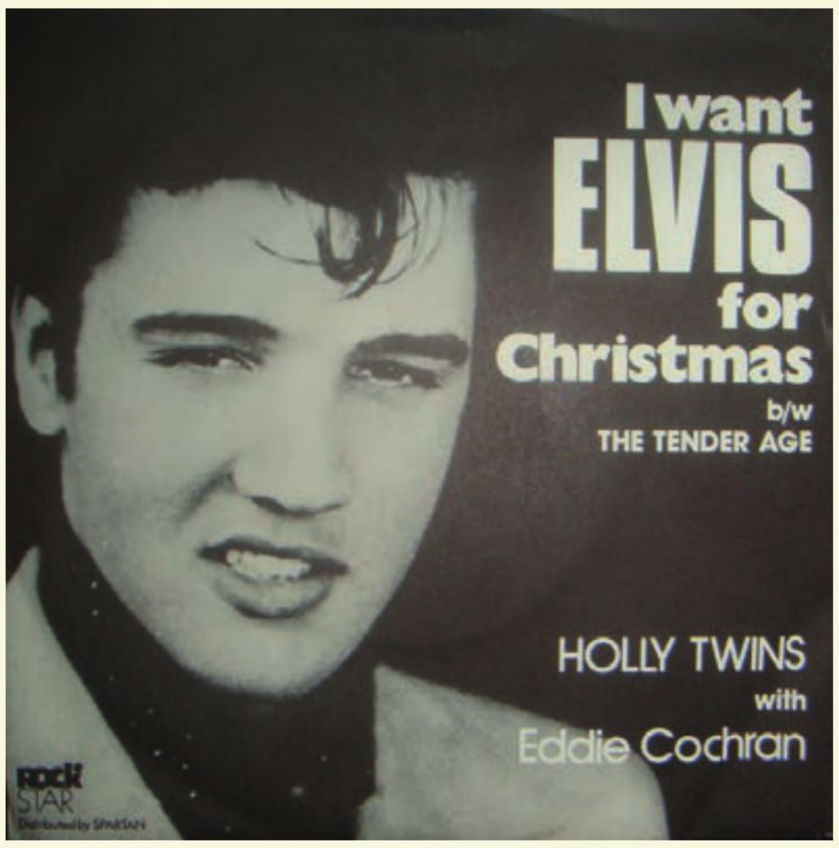


BORROWED LOVE

LYNN MARSHALL

CREST 1956

Lynn Marshall was the daughter of Jack Marshall, the orchestra leader on Peggy Lee's smash 1958 remake of Little Willie John's *Fever*, and Lynn apparently wanted to follow in Peggy's footsteps. Her '56 Crest single *Borrowed Love*, written by Dale Fitzsimmons, came slathered in Cochran's blues-kissed guitar licks and spotlighted the chanteuse's vocal charms quite nicely. Eddie also made his presence felt on the flip, the bouncy Ray Stanley composition *You'll Find Out*.



I WANT ELVIS FOR CHRISTMAS

HOLLY TWINS
LIBERTY 1956

Just in time for Yuletide stocking stuffing came this novelty by the Holly Twins, whose real names were Jonell and Glenell McQuaig. The twins journeyed to Gold Star to record *I Want Elvis For Christmas* for Liberty in the fall of 1956, and Eddie was ready for them, appearing in two capacities. Not only did he play guitar, he popped up several times in an amusing vocal imitation of Elvis growling "Baby, baby, baby!" Written by future star Bobby Darin and his pal, Don Kirshner (who wouldn't do too badly for himself either in years to come), the cute ditty was full of Presley song titles and unexpected tempo changes.



NEW SHOES

LEE DENSON
VIK 1957

Elvis' Memphis neighbour Lee Denson wanted a recording career of his own. He ventured out to LA, booking Gold Star on 27 April, 1957 to cut Ray Stanley's blistering *New Shoes* for RCA Victor's Vik subsidiary. Eddie let loose with a lightning-fast guitar break that elevated the number to another level entirely. Despite this one and the next year's spectacular two-sider *South's Gonna Rise Again* b/w *Red Hot Rockin' Blues* for Kent as Jesse James, Lee couldn't quite match Presley's sales figures.



WILLA MAE

AL CASEY
LIBERTY 1957

Sparks flew when Eddie teamed up at Gold Star in November of 1957 with another standout fretsman, Al Casey, whose precise licks had anchored Sanford Clark's '56 Dot label smash *The Fool*. Casey was part of the Phoenix clique that would play on so many Duane Eddy smashes, but he finds immediate common ground with Cochran on *Willa Mae*, a rare vocal outing for Casey. Al traditionally receives lead guitar credit on the track, but aurally Cochran could just as easily be behind the solo instead.



BIG DOOR

GENE BROWN
4 STAR/DOT 1958

There's some debate as to whether Eddie takes the solo on Gene Brown's rockabilly gem *Big Door*, but the whole second half of the ride is devoted to Cochran's signature whirlwind lick, so this vote can be cast for a cautious yes. The single was released on Bill McCall's notorious LA-based 4 Star label, as well as Randy Wood's better-connected Dot imprint, Gene Brown sharing his writer's credit with McCall under his WS Stevenson moniker, as was so often the case on 4 Star.



GIT IT

GENE VINCENT
CAPITOL 1958

Eddie's golden guitar wasn't the only thing he contributed in the studio. Despite being pacted to Liberty, Cochran moonlighted as the anonymous bass singer of a vocal group otherwise comprised of Blue Caps Tommy Facenda and Paul Peek on Gene Vincent's *Git It*, cut 25 March, 1958 at Capitol Tower in Hollywood. Repeatedly intoning the nonsensical line "Well-oh-well-oh-whop, wip-wip-wip," Eddie did it so authentically that no one could have dreamed he was on the Bob Kelly-penned rocker.



THINKIN' ABOUT YOU

BOB DENTON

CREST 1958

Duets weren't on Eddie's agenda much after he split with Hank Cochran, but he made a notable exception for his close pal Bob Denton, playing lead guitar and supplying vocal harmonies on Denton's *Thinkin' About You*, done in July of 1958 at Gold Star (Crest issued it belatedly in '61). Its slurping bass string lick and choppy chording are as integral as Denton's pleasing lead vocal. Bob had been a friend of Eddie's since the two met as aspiring country performers in Los Angeles and it was Denton that suggested Eddie team up with Hank as a duo.



BABY PLEASE DON'T GO & WATCH YOUR MOUTH

TROYCE KEY

WARNER BROS 1958/1959

Although Warner Bros gave him half a writer's credit, Troyce Key had nothing to do with penning *Baby Please Don't Go* – pre-war blues guitarist Big Joe Williams did that back in 1935. What Louisiana native Key did do, with Eddie's assistance, was transform the blues number into a modern rocker at a late summer 1958 date at Western Recorders on Sunset Boulevard (the vocal group was a nice touch). Eddie was even fierier on Troyce's *Watch Your Mouth*, his solo passages a model of concise precision.



JUST RELAX

BAKER KNIGHT

CORAL 1959

Writing a string of hits for Ricky Nelson (*Lonesome Town*, *Never Be Anyone Else But You*) wasn't enough for Baker Knight – he wanted a few as a singer too. The churning *Just Relax*, done at Gold Star on 15 June, 1959, boasts a short but pummeling Cochran solo and his forceful chording dances around Knight and the vocal group, making for a thick aural stew. Born in Alabama, Knight previously had some fine rockabilly outings on Decca, particularly 1956's *Bring My Cadillac Back*.



GUYBO

THE KELLY FOUR

SILVER 1959

The title should have been a giveaway that Eddie's prominently featured on this instrumental, even if it's credited to The Kelly Four. Waxed on 25 August, 1959 at Gold Star and released on Sylvester Cross' American Music-affiliated Silver logo, *Guybo* pays tribute to Cochran's longtime playing partner, bassist Connie "Guybo" Smith, who's teamed in the rhythm section with drummer Gene Riggio. Eddie's slashing axe, laid over a thundering Bo Diddley beat, is at the heart of the action.

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EDDIE'S ANGEL

In what would have been her 80th year, we salute Sharon Sheeley. Not only was she Eddie's girlfriend but also a talented songwriter in her own right, not least as co-writer of *Somethin' Else*. So what's Sharon's story?

WORDS BY **JULIE BURNS**

You have to feel massive sympathy for Sharon Sheeley. In April 1960, shortly after her 20th birthday and far from home in a foreign land, her dream trip turned nightmare. In a road accident that should never have happened, she lost her beloved fiancé Eddie Cochran. In a critical condition, she was left, in common with the other crash survivor Gene Vincent, with painful injuries. Thankfully, after a period of hospitalisation, she returned to America to try to rebuild her life.

Well before she was known as Cochran's girlfriend, Sharon, aged 18, was the youngest woman ever to write an American No.1 hit. Before rock'n'roll, female songwriters were virtually unheard of, or not taken seriously. Even in the case of her first two-million-seller hit, Ricky Nelson's *Poor Little Fool*, Sharon felt it necessary to 'con' Ricky into thinking her godfather had written it, and that Elvis was considering recording it on his return from the army. It did the trick. She was now on her way to a successful songwriting career that would encompass Eddie Cochran, and go on to a fruitful collaboration with Jackie DeShannon. The Sheeley-DeShannon pairing subsequently became one of the first and most successful female songwriting partnerships.

After a stint as a teen model, greatly enthused by the explosion of rock'n'roll, Sharon decamped to Hollywood from Newport Beach, California, with a big idea of meeting stars and writing songs. An early acquaintance with Elvis in 1956 proved inspirational to her career. (Likewise, Eddie Cochran had been greatly impressed by Elvis. The two had met in a Memphis radio station as The Cochran Brothers were signed to Ekko. It's debatable, however, whether Eddie actually saw Elvis perform while each were in Dallas. Eddie expert Darrel Higham thinks not). As for Sharon, she recalled how she got to know Elvis in a 1959 article that she wrote for *Photoplay* magazine:

"A few months after my 16th birthday I got a car, and the day I received my license, I suggested to my sister Jody that we celebrate by taking a ride up to Hollywood... I'd read Elvis was staying at the Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel while making the movie *Love Me Tender* and I said to Jody, 'Let's go and visit Elvis'."

SHARON WAS THE YOUNGEST WOMAN EVER TO WRITE AN AMERICAN NO.1

AFTER REPEATED ATTEMPTS, they made friends with some of Elvis' band. "They kept inviting us back to listen to records and talk," she continued. "Then one thing led to another, and finally Jody and I got to meet Elvis... from then on Jody and I had an open invitation to visit him every time we came to Hollywood... Soon we became part of 'the group' that surrounded Elvis.

"Every so often Elvis and I would sit over by ourselves and talk... I used to tell Elvis that I wanted a career, some kind of work in Hollywood so that I could get my family to move to town. I used to get depressed and tell him I wanted very badly to have a career, to do something creative. He used to sit and listen to me for hours. He was never too busy to listen and advise me. He had no idea I was interested in getting into songwriting. I didn't myself at that time, but I'd always loved music and been interested in it. We would sit for hours and he'd tell me about the record business, all the ins and outs... We would discuss trends in music, what made a song popular with the kids. And everything



Sharon Sheeley forged a path for female songwriters by penning a No.1, aged just 18

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY



A Liberty Records promo photo issued to promote Eddie and Sharon

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

he told me I absorbed, never realising that one day I'd take all of what he said and make it work for me."

Two months after Elvis was inducted into the army, Sharon's first song *Poor Little Fool* was published. She received word from Elvis in Germany that he, too, wanted a "Sheeley song". Ironically, he was the one person she never did write for. Instead, contacted by Jerry Capehart, she was invited to supply material for his songwriting partner, Eddie Cochran. She promptly delivered *Love Again*, which went on to back his 1958 Top 10, *Summertime Blues*. *Cherished Memories* and the oft-covered '59 smash, *Somethin' Else* ensued. (Though Eddie didn't write a love song to Sharon, with characteristic humour, he referenced her habit of appearing barefoot in his upbeat anthem *C'mon Everybody*).

BY THE END of '58, thrilled to be invited to Eddie's New Year's Eve party, and keen to dress to impress the singer, Sharon spent much of her savings on assorted new frocks. For the past year or more she'd been trying to get him to notice her to no avail. Fed up, she simply put her hair in pigtails, stuck on a sweatshirt and Levis, and went to the party anyway. Her luck was in. Eddie suddenly seemed to notice her. She later recollected he got straight to the point and asked, "Are you in love with me, Charlie Brown?", his nickname for her. When she replied that was no question to ask, he apparently continued, "You'd better be, 'cause I'm sure in love with you." In a 90s BBC *Arena* documentary, Sharon summed up: 'I'd spent two years basically chasing him, probably to much embarrassment in the record industry, and he noticed me in jeans! I felt like hitting him over the head with my shoe!"

In 1960, a homesick Eddie called Sharon to invite her to accompany him on the fateful UK tour. Longing to marry him, she felt, she later said, compelled to answer the "urgency in his voice". Despite the still conservative times – and her mother saying a nice girl shouldn't go – Sharon's Italian grandmother smoothed the way, and soon Sharon flew to England. Eddie's mother Alice, who had kept a scrapbook of her son's career along with photos of the couple, considered that the two drew closer just prior to the 1960 tour. Certainly, while together in England, they were reported as 'unofficially engaged'.

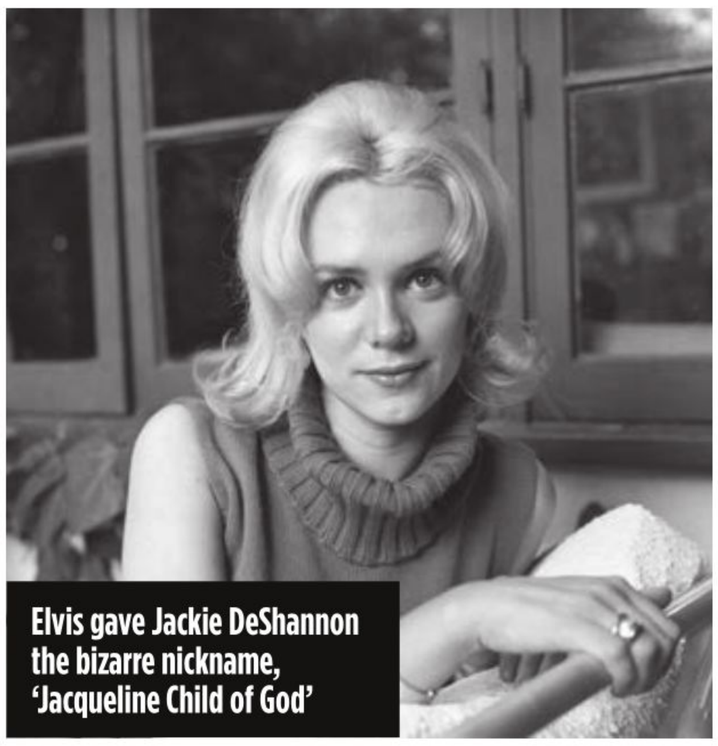
After the accident, and back in the US, for a time Sharon became something of a recluse. According to some accounts, talented and versatile singer-songwriter Jackie DeShannon was already on the radar; her country song *Buddy* (as Jackie Dee) and an inspired interpretation of the Elvis classic *Trouble* had previously come to Cochran's attention. Sharon was introduced to Jackie by LA DJ Jimmy O' Neil, who had a hunch they'd be able to write together. The two women clicked artistically and followed through with a string of hits and popular releases beginning with Jackie's next single, *Baby (When Ya Kiss Me)*.

In common with both Sharon and Eddie, though she'd first made her name in rock'n'roll, Jackie had an appreciation for a diverse range of genres and recorded across rockabilly, rock, folk, R&B, country, gospel and jazz. Most famous for her 60s rendition of Bacharach-David's *What The World Needs Now Is Love* and her own *Put A Little Love In Your Heart*, she also supported The Beatles on their first US tour. Later, Jackie went on to embrace the British Invasion, penning songs for Marianne Faithfull and

SHE RECEIVED WORD FROM ELVIS IN GERMANY THAT HE, TOO, WANTED A "SHEELEY SONG"

The Byrds, as well as having a professional and personal partnership with Jimmy Page. She also received a Grammy award for her 80s Kim Carnes' hit *Bette Davis Eyes*. With a multitude of albums to her name, now aged 78, DeShannon remains musically active.

During their professional time together, Liberty Records' publishing arm, Metric Music, encouraged the two women to make demos. By now, Sheeley was also writing with Mac Davis and Larry Collins of The Collins Kids. She went on to marry DJ Jimmy O' Neil in 1961. Together, they collaborated on Jack Good's ABC TV music series *Shindig!*, on-air from '64- '66, with her husband hosting. As it came to an end, so did Sharon's marriage and she made a decision to move away from Hollywood and the music scene. This relocation also ended her partnership with Jackie DeShannon. Despite this, Jackie warmly remembered her pioneering female creative partner: "We celebrated our hit songs in the early 60s at Tiny Naylor's Drive In, living the Hollywood dream, with the convertible top



Elvis gave Jackie DeShannon the bizarre nickname, 'Jacqueline Child of God'

down, in the warm California sun," she later recalled. "Those memories I will forever cherish."

DESPITE BEING OUT of the limelight, Sharon remained influential in English rock circles and was rated, amongst others, by Shadows' drummer Brian Bennett and The Beatles. The fact that her song *Somethin' Else* remained such an epic – covered by everyone from the Sex Pistols to Tom Petty, the Stray Cats to Led Zeppelin – is testament to her accomplishments. Her last song, 1968's *Runnin' On Back*, was recorded by Del Shannon.

Fast forward to 1988. Exactly 30 years after the start of Sharon and Eddie's romantic connection, art imitated life. In their series of cult TV ads, Levis immortalised the romantic tale of how Sharon and Eddie got together. Showcasing *C'mon Everybody* as the soundtrack, with a subsequent re-release, led to a revival of interest in the star from a new generation. In the early 90s, Sharon ventured out to guest at Cochran conventions, including an appearance in the UK. (There is some poignant footage on YouTube, from the HTV documentary *Cherished Memories,* of Sharon visiting the crash site in Chippenham with The Crickets, and returning to St Martin's Hospital in Bath, where she is plainly overwhelmed. She did so, she said, for 'closure').

Following complications of a cerebral haemorrhage, Sharon died in 2002, aged 62. She was laid to rest next to Eddie, the young man she considered her 'soulmate', at Forest Lawn, Cypress, California. Sharon is survived by her son Shannon Burg. With access to her journal, which she'd intended to publish before she died, Burg compiled his mother's remarkable memoir of her life with Eddie. Cherished memories, indeed. ✶

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

For more than 30 years, Gold Star was one of the most influential and successful commercial recording studios in the world

THE PRICE OF GOLD

A recording studio converted from an old dentist's office isn't the most obvious location for some of the most thrilling rock'n'roll records ever made. *Vintage Rock* reflects on the story and legacy of Eddie's studio of choice, the legendary Gold Star...

WORDS BY **BILL DAHL**

Even before his debut platter sat proudly on music store shelves, Eddie Cochran familiarised himself with the technical ramifications of the recording process itself. He absorbed its intricacies to the point where he could play a studio almost like a separate instrument. His facility of choice was Gold Star Recording Studios.

Located in a former dentist's office at 6252 Santa Monica Boulevard in the heart of Hollywood, Gold Star was founded by and named after Dave Gold and Stan Ross in October of 1950. Born in New York, Ross arrived in Los Angeles with his family when he was 15. He began working at Electro-Vox recording studio, while still attending Fairfax High School, advancing his engineering skills there for four years until its owner turned down his request for a raise. At 21, Ross then teamed with electronics wizard Gold, a native of East Los Angeles, to go into business for themselves, launching Gold Star.

Gold Star started out primarily as a demo studio, where elite pop composers Jimmy McHugh, Johnny Mercer, Frank Loesser and Dimitri Tiomkin honed their brainstorms. Aspiring songwriters laid down renditions of their latest creations, hoping established artists would cut masters of their songs for an actual label. Fred Darian demoed Wayne Shanklin's *Jezebel* at Gold Star and Frankie Laine had one of his biggest sellers with the dramatic theme in 1951. Laine later admitted that if Darian's terrific demo had been released, he wouldn't have bothered to cut the song. Radio and TV jingles provided another steady source of income for the studio.

Once Gold Star added a second room in 1956, dubbed Studio A, the facility branched into making finished masters that were the equal of any. Gold painstakingly built his own recording equipment, Ross developed into an in-demand recording engineer, and Gold Star gained great renown for its massive Studio A echo chamber, rendered legendary by producer Phil Spector's historic "Wall of Sound" hit-making run.

STUDIO B WAS often booked for demo work during the mid-50s. Sylvester Cross' American Music, one of Los Angeles' better-known country music publishers, locked it down every Wednesday to commit fresh material to tape. That's how Cochran entered Gold Star's orbit – making demos for American's prolific staff writers. He set up inside at the behest of Jerry Capehart, who would serve as his manager and co-write many of his best-known copyrights.

EDDIE COULD PLAY A STUDIO ALMOST LIKE A SEPARATE INSTRUMENT

By spring 1956, Eddie had unleashed his distinctive vocals and slashing guitar as a frontman at Gold Star, waxing his original version of *Twenty Flight Rock* that July. *Mean When I'm Mad* and *One Kiss* came in March of '57, and his lickety-split revival of the hoary standard *Am I Blue* was crafted there later that year. In March 1958, he cut his eternal signature song, *Summertime Blues*, at Gold Star. Right down to his final recordings on 8 January 1960, with Crickets JI Allison on drums and Sonny Curtis on the other guitar, Cochran was a satisfied Gold Star customer.

Ross' cousin Larry Levine was another New York native who grew up in Los Angeles He joined Gold Star's staff after returning from serving in the Korean War and ended up engineering many of Eddie's most memorable sessions, including the ones that spawned *Summertime Blues* and its follow-up, *C'mon Everybody*.

Gold Star built a reputation as one of the top studios in LA, especially when it came to rock and roll. An unknown instrumental combo that would be christened The Champs (in homage to Challenge Records' Gene Autry's horse, Champion) entered the facility on 23 December 1957, to record *Train To Nowhere*, a driving instrumental written by its rhythm guitarist Dave Burgess, with Ross behind the console. Also on the recording agenda that day was a zesty Latin-flavoured B-side that everyone concerned envisioned as a throwaway.

GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY



During the 60s, The Wrecking Crew provided the magic for everyone from The Monkees to Frank Sinatra

THE WRECKING CREW

THE LEGENDARY ORCHESTRA ASSEMBLED FOR PHIL SPECTOR'S GOLD STAR SESSIONS REPRESENTED THE CREAM OF THE CROP OF YOUNG LA SESSIONEERS

LA's famous Wrecking Crew, as they came to be known unofficially, often incorporated two or three of the same instruments at each position for Spector's dates, imparting a hair-raising, nearly overwhelming, power christened the "Wall of Sound" – and always in glorious mono.

The main participants included drummers Hal Blaine and New Orleans *émigré* Earl Palmer, bassists Carol Kaye, Ray Pohlman and Jimmy Bond, guitarists Tommy Tedesco and Billy Strange, keyboardists Al DeLory and Leon Russell, and saxman Steve Douglas. Nino Tempo alternated between sax, percussion, and piano. Sonny Bono filled a variety of roles at Phil's Gold Star get-together; his girlfriend, a then-unknown Cher, contributed backing vocals alongside The Blossoms. Jack Nitzsche was Spector's preferred arranger, and Larry Levine handled the engineering.

Although his studio methods were extremely exhausting, Spector's single-minded approach won him intense loyalty from the musical denizens of Gold Star as well as the stars relying on them.

"It really was something. It was new. It was new, and I give him that. He took us to another level that way," said The Ronettes' Nedra Talley-Ross. "Sometimes it was a lot of late nights, a lot of people. That was when it was Cher and Nino Tempo and The Beach Boys around, different people. California was where the real sound was laid down."

Various permutations of The Wrecking Crew worked countless dates for other producers, by no means always at Gold Star. Still, the band and the studio are inexorably linked.

RAY AVERY/REDFERNS/GETTY

"In those days, you had a three-hour session. We spent two hours and 55 minutes on *Train To Nowhere*, and did one take of *Tequila*. Just one take, because it was a B-side," said Burgess. "There were three co-writers on *Tequila* at that time. There was Buddy Bruce the guitar player, [saxophonist] Danny Flores and me. Danny Flores had the little melody line, and the bridge was Buddy Bruce's, and the whole idea and the structure of the song and the riff and everything was mine – and the title and the idea for one of us to stop and say 'Tequila!' on there."

Of course, *Tequila* ended up a monster hit for The Champs, while *Train To Nowhere* barrelled straight into oblivion. Newcomer Ritchie Valens took advantage of Gold Star's sonic superiority too. All five of the teenaged LA guitarist's professional sessions for Del-Fi Records were done at Gold Star, notably his debut date in June of '58 that produced his first hit, *Come On, Let's Go*, as well as the September session where Ritchie blasted out his seminal rendition of *La Bamba*.

Jody Reynolds waxed his eerie, echo-bathed hit *Endless Sleep* at Gold Star, using Al Casey on lead guitar instead of himself. Johnny Burnette cut *Me And The Bear* there, and he and his brother Dorsey crafted demos at Gold Star for Ricky Nelson. Ross and Gold's pioneering use of phasing or "flanging" on Toni Fisher's 1959 hit ballad *The Big Hurt* marked the first time the effect was used on a commercial recording.

Inquisitive local lad Phil Spector took to haunting the studio's halls in 1958, bringing his unknown group, The Teddy Bears, in for three sessions. The last one spawned their softly compelling pop chart-topper *To Know Him, Is To Love Him*. Spector got hooked on the sonic excellence of Gold Star and its engineers Ross and Levine. He returned to produce The Paris Sisters' breathy *I Love How You Love Me*, a Billboard No.5 in 1961. "Those were great days. Gold Star was the place, and we spent a lot of time there," said the late Albeth Paris. "*I Love How You Love Me*, the way Priscilla sang it, the way it was recorded – even though there were other covers of it, ours was always the one that stood out in everyone's mind."

There was nothing overly corporate about Gold Star, its cosy confines allowing Spector to fully indulge his eccentricities. "He was always crazy. He was always in need of the attention, and how to get it, how to retain control," said Albeth. "He would come into Gold Star sometimes, always late, wearing a cape, pretending he was Dracula. And he'd crawl under the console and sit there for an hour. He was just unbelievable."

STUDIO A BECAME SPECTOR'S SECOND HOME AS HE POUNDED OUT ONE SMASH AFTER ANOTHER

STUDIO A, WITH its mammoth echo chamber, became Spector's second home as he pounded out one landmark smash after another with Levine always at the controls and a hand-picked cadre of session musicians, later dubbed the Wrecking Crew, his loyal assistants. *He's A Rebel*, credited to The Crystals but actually featuring Darlene Love, was a No.1 pop juggernaut in late '62, and the relentless *Da Doo Ron Ron*, this time starring actual Crystals lead singer La La Brooks, nearly followed suit the next year.

Then The Ronettes took over as Spector's favourite group, their '63 smash *Be My Baby* driven by Ronnie Bennett's piercing lead, Hal Blaine's thundering drums and Gold Star's unmatched ambiance. Spector worked his troops relentlessly. "Because of the repetition that went over and over, and the volume that went through your head because of being played back in the studio," said The Ronettes' Nedra Talley-Ross, "it made you crazy. Absolutely literally crazy, going, 'Did I do this? Did I not do it? Is my part on? It is on. I hear it in my head. I don't hear it in my head.' So there were just certain songs that you remember more than others."

Unlike most of Spector's protégés, The Righteous Brothers had seen success prior to his cutting their 1965 chart-topper *You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'* at Gold Star. "It was a great experience, and it was great working with Phil," said Bill Medley, the deep-voiced half of the duo. "He worked us real hard, but we didn't mind it because it always got better. We weren't used to working that hard, because we'd just go in and make those albums and have a ball doing 'em, you know. But he was very strict. He knew exactly what he wanted to hear and how he wanted to hear it, and he was right."

Gold Star remained a go-to destination for producers throughout the rest of the decade and during the 70s. It finally closed in 1984, one more victim of changing times. A fire consumed the building shortly thereafter, though its signature echo chamber reportedly survived the blaze.

The many classic recordings made there, on the other hand, are sure to last forever. ✶



EDDIE IN THE STUDIO

GOLD STAR WASN'T THE ONLY STUDIO EDDIE FREQUENTED IN HIS CAREER...

While Gold Star was clearly Eddie Cochran's studio of choice, some of his most memorable songs were taped at competing facilities.

Eddie's first professional session in May of 1955 as half of The Cochran Brothers – a straight country affair for Ekko Records – was held at Western Recorders at 6000 Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. The label brought the unrelated duo with the same surname back there in the spring of '56 for the exciting date that produced the rocker *Tired & Sleepy* and three more in the same vein. Master Recorders at 533 North Fairfax in Hollywood hosted a July '56 date that produced Cochran's first solo single for Sylvester Cross' label, Crest Records, the storming rocker *Skinny Jim*.

Liberty Records boss Si Waronker hustled Cochran into his imprint's own in-house studio in January of 1957 to wax an overnight cover of Johnny Dee's easy-going *Sittin' In The Balcony* that gave Eddie his first trip into the pop hit parade (Billboard No.18). The churning *Jeannie Jeannie Jeannie* was also recorded at Liberty's studio in January of 1958 (together with *Pretty Girl*). United Recording Corporation at 6050 Sunset Boulevard was utilised when Eddie waxed *Weekend* in April of '59.

But Gold Star was where Eddie Cochran did the great bulk of his recording.

DRIVE-IN SHOW

Teenagers were flocking to the movies in the 1950s, so, if you were a young rock'n'roller, where better to showcase your looks and sound than at the flicks? And Eddie blew everyone else off the screen...

WORDS BY **BILL DAHL**

Rock and roll exploded on the big screen in 1956 and '57, one hastily conceived movie after another exploiting the new musical trend for all it was worth and then some. *Rock Around The Clock, Don't Knock The Rock, Rock Rock Rock!* – every one of them scattered irresistible clips of pioneering artists into generally inane plotlines. But one of those now-historic flicks was an altogether different piece of work, written with grace and style and filmed in gorgeous colour: *The Girl Can't Help It*. Of all the legends-to-be gracing the movie's incredible musical cast, none was quite as unknown at the time he filmed his part as Eddie Cochran.

Eddie hadn't even signed with Liberty Records yet when he cut the song that he mimed in the movie. Written by a staffer at Sylvester Cross' American Music, Nelda Bingo, under the alias of Ned Fairchild, *Twenty Flight Rock* detailed the travails forced upon a lad so eager to see his girl that he overcomes a broken down elevator by scaling 20 lofty flights of stairs to reach her apartment.

Cochran cut the tune at a July 1956 demo session at Gold Star Recording Studios with his trusty bassist Connie "Guybo" Smith and his manager Jerry Capehart keeping the torrid beat by slapping a cardboard box in lieu of drums.

Cochran's conduit to cinematic immortality was Russian-born movie director Boris Petroff, who asked the lad if he wanted to perform in a movie being directed by Frank Tashlin then titled *Do-Re-Mi*. Eddie pulled *Twenty Flight Rock* from American's files and laid it down on tape with an incendiary vocal effort and a sizzling guitar solo halfway through. Tashlin must have liked what he heard; on 14 August, Eddie filmed his scene at 20th Century Fox.

MORE THAN ANY other rock and roll movie of its era, *The Girl Can't Help It* wittily incorporated each of its musical guest stars into the plot in some way, rather than just dropping performances willy-nilly into the cinematic action. The way Tashlin and Herbert Baker fashioned the script, Eddie was dubiously introduced as, "one of America's top rock and rollers" by Los Angeles DJ Peter Potter, cast as the host of a TV variety show.

THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT IS THE MOST SATISFYING ROCK'N'ROLL FILM OF ITS ERA

Looking quite a bit like Elvis with a pompadour, long sideburns and elastic legs, a solo Cochran, wielding his red Gretsch 6120 axe, blasts through *Twenty Flight Rock* to the chortling delight of gangster Fats Murdoch (portrayed by Edmond O'Brien), who wants to make his gorgeous but talentless platinum blonde girlfriend Jerri Jordan (Jayne Mansfield) a singing star. Jerri and her lovestruck agent Tom Miller (Tom Ewell) aren't much impressed by Cochran's performance as they also watch Eddie's electrifying performance on the tube, but at least Jerri's housemaid digs him – she dances happily around the living room throughout the number. The only downside: Cochran's slashing guitar solo was edited out of the film.

Tashlin's comedic flair (he'd directed a slew of Warner Bros. cartoons during the 40s before advancing to live-action movies, including *Artists And Models* and *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*), eye-popping colour cinematography, and a stellar cast of rockers headed by Little Richard, Fats Domino, Gene Vincent and The Treniers made *The Girl Can't Help It* the classiest and most satisfying rock'n'roll film of its era. Released on 1 December, 1956, it introduced Eddie to teenagers worldwide. For unknown reasons, Liberty Records didn't release *Twenty Flight Rock* as his first outing



Eddie rocks out in *The Girl Can't Help It*, his most famous movie role

GILLES PETARD/REDFERNS/GETTY

A shot from *Untamed Youth*, one of the lesser films he appeared in



EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

for the label, opting instead for *Sittin' In The Balcony*. Lucky British and Australian audiences were able to buy *Twenty Flight Rock* on wax right away.

If *The Girl Can't Help It* represented the absolute pinnacle of 1950s rock'n'roll moviemaking, *Untamed Youth*, the next film Cochran appeared in, ranked nearer to the opposite extreme, though it was an engaging piece of melodrama all the same. The low-budget black and white potboiler was set on a rural penal farm where two sisters (the voluptuous Mamie Van Doren and Lori Nelson) are sent after being arrested for skinny dipping. The sweaty storyline is akin in some ways to a women's prison flick (the sex-starved inmates also include Jeanne Carmen and nubile Yvonne Lime), but when everyone heads to the cotton fields for some serious picking, it's a coed effort all the way.

Filmed on the cheap in Bakersfield, California by director Howard W Koch, the film cast Eddie as a character named Bong (it was a speaking part). He gets his musical interlude right in the middle of the field, kicking off a defiant *Cotton Picker* a cappella before Guybo Smith's bass line magically floats in and then the girls start clapping in time with the beat and screaming as though they're all in serious heat. Shorn of his Gretsch, Cochran somehow makes do with his cotton sack instead (could this be the birth of the air guitar?). Finally the guard tells them all to get back to work, and the song fades into the ether. Koch managed to better himself substantially later in his career, producing the Academy Awards telecast eight times and serving as president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences from 1977 to 1979.

VAN DOREN PROVED she could rock over the course of the movie, belting *Oo Ba La Baby* (Cochran and his manager Jerry Capehart shared writers' credit on the song with the film's musical director Les Baxter and Lennie Adelson) and *Salamander* with a powerful, rockabilly-styled fervour. Sadly, she didn't seriously pursue a musical career after that, continuing her film exploits instead.

Mamie's four songs from *Untamed Youth* were issued as a soundtrack EP on Prep Records, a fledgling Capitol subsidiary with an intriguing roster that also included Louis Prima's rowdy sax blaster Sam Butera, the Cues, and a young Ray Stevens (Van Doren's EP boasted a hot cheesecake photo on its cover). Liberty, on the other hand, didn't

SMALL SCREEN EDDIE

UNLIKE HIS BIG SCREEN ADVENTURES, MANY OF EDDIE'S TV APPEARANCES HAVE BEEN LOST

Great as Eddie's three cinematic performances were, his television appearances – at least the few surviving ones – offer the most persuasive testimony as to the strength of his onstage skills. None are more indicative of what Cochran could do in front of a crowd than his 7 February, 1959 guest appearance on *Town Hall Party*, a TV show broadcast out of Compton, California. Beaming over KTTV in Los Angeles, the show had graced local airwaves since 1952, broadcasting live country music from the Compton Town Hall Dance Club. When rockabilly blasted off, the programme didn't discriminate against it.

Decked out in a suit and tie, Cochran brought along his recording and touring band, Dick D'Agostin And The Swingers, for the occasion, augmented by Eddie's longtime accompanist Connie "Guybo" Smith on electric bass (he clamps it throughout). During two extended segments, Cochran roars through his hits *C'mon Everybody* (twice) and *Summertime Blues*, but there are surprises – rocking renditions of Chuck Berry's *School Days*, Fats Domino's *Don't Blame It On Me*, and The Drifters' *Money Honey*, as well as two ballads: *Have I Told You Lately That I Love You* and Gene Autry's *Be Honest With Me*.

When he's not pounding the 88s or playing lead guitar on his band's slinky Dot label single *Night Walk*, D'Agostin and saxist Paul Coffman do a nice imitation of Gene Vincent's Clapper Boys as they provide vocal harmonies and dance along on the upbeat stuff. If only veteran country star Johnny Bond had been a competent interviewer, his talk with Eddie between sets would have been more enlightening. The whole thing is available on a Bear Family DVD.

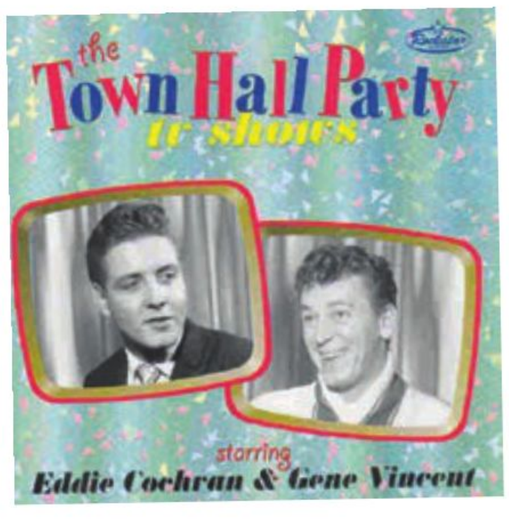
There's not a whole lot of additional TV footage of Cochran in circulation, though Dick Clark's voluminous archives contain two short gems that are on YouTube.

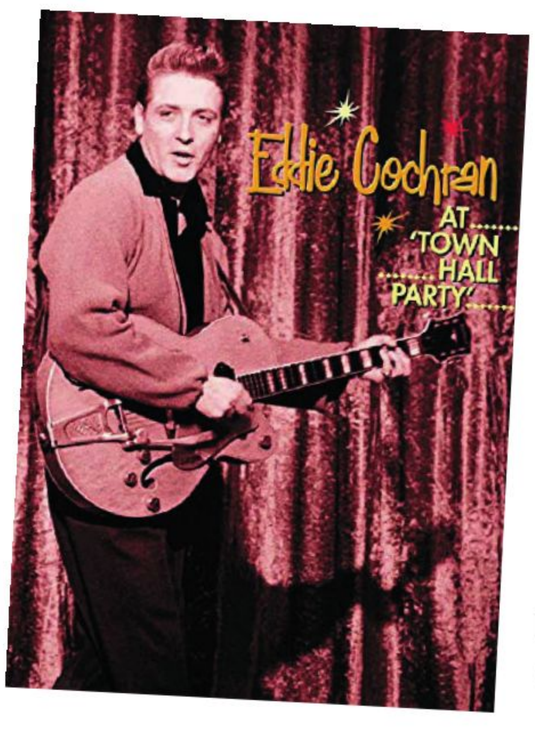
Eddie stepped out of a giant simulated TV screen to lip-synch *C'mon Everybody* as the highlight of his third appearance on *American Bandstand* on 14 November, 1958, looking tremendously self-assured in front of a TV studio full of teens wearing "IFIC" buttons (a tie-in with Clark's sponsor, Beech-Nut Chewing Gum). Cochran's two previous *Bandstand* appearances – he'd mimed *Jeannie Jeannie Jeannie* that January and *Summertime Blues* in August – have yet to turn up anywhere.

The guitarist flew all the way from Wichita, Kansas to New York so he could appear on Clark's prime-time *Saturday Night Beechnut Show* on 10 October, 1959, treating the kids in the studio audience to a lip-synch of his latest Liberty single, *Somethin' Else*.

Unfortunately, no video footage from Cochran's ill-fated final British tour has ever surfaced, although Eddie and touring partner Gene Vincent did plenty of UK television guest shots (apparently all lost). We do have audio clips of Eddie's four January and February 1959 appearances on Jack Good's TV programme *Boy Meets Girls*, hosted by Marty Wilde.

Naturally, Cochran reprised *Summertime Blues* and *C'mon Everybody* (not to mention two versions of Ray Charles' *Hallelujah, I Love Her So*, which he'd recently cut for Liberty). There were also renditions of the pre-war blues classic *Milk Cow Blues*, Chuck Berry's *Sweet Little Sixteen*, Joe Williams' obscure swinger *I Don't Like You No More*, and a rip-roaring duet with Gene on George Jones' Big Bopper-penned hit *White Lightnin'*.







Eddie charms the ladies with his guitar in 1959's *Go, Johnny, Go!*

even bother to press up *Cotton Picker*, again missing an easy movie tie-in. *Untamed Youth* was screened in New York in March of 1957 but quickly faded from theatre screens with few moviegoers any the wiser.

Although he was headed for an imminent fall due to the Congressional payola hearings, Alan Freed appeared to be sitting on top of the rock and roll world as he filmed *Go, Johnny, Go!*, which hit US theatres in June of 1959. It was reportedly filmed in an extremely brief five days at Hal Roach Productions in Culver City, California.

Freed had previously starred in his own very loosely adapted biopic, *Mister Rock And Roll*, and he was front and centre as himself once again in *Go, Johnny, Go!*, joined by no less than Chuck Berry as his loyal sidekick, teenage heartthrob Jimmy Clanton, and an array of singing stars that included Jackie Wilson, Ritchie Valens, The Flamingos, Jo Ann Campbell, The Cadillacs, and Harvey Fuqua. Even with all that star power, Eddie was the only one to merit "Special Guest" billing in the credits.

Cochran filmed two songs for *Go, Johnny, Go!*, but his ballad *I Remember* was left on the cutting room floor. That must have been a last-second decision by director Paul Landres, since the label on Cochran's Liberty 45 of the song read "From the Hal Roach Prod. 'Johnny Melody,'" which was the movie's working title. That left *Teenage Heaven*, the other side of that 45, as Cochran's lone number in the black and white musical. It came during an extended series of musical performances set at a theatrical concert not unlike the one Freed hosted at Loew's State Theatre in New York over Christmas of 1958 where Eddie was a co-headliner.

Dressed casually in a cardigan sweater and open-necked shirt rather than the flashy suits that most of the rockers wore for the movie, Eddie delivered his hip update of the campfire perennial *Home On The Range* as seen from the teenage perspective. *Teenage Heaven* elicited a strutting lip-synch from Cochran; during Plas Johnson's sax solo, he took off his guitar and danced with it as though it was his date at the prom (maybe that's why Freed introduced both Eddie and his "crazy guitar")!

COCHRAN FILMED TWO SONGS FOR *GO, JOHNNY, GO!* BUT *I REMEMBER* WAS CUT

Exposure in *Go, Johnny, Go!* didn't help *Teenage Heaven* much on U.S. pop charts. It squeaked onto Billboard's Hot 100 for a paltry week at No.99 and promptly disappeared. It didn't turn up on the UK hit parade at all.

But few performers appeared in three rock and roll movies during the 1950s, so that was a substantial accomplishment in itself, testimony to Eddie's charismatic good looks and wide-ranging musical appeal. There can be little that doubt more memorable movie bows would have been in Cochran's future had he only lived to make them. ✶

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY



On stage in *Go, Johnny Go!* One of two songs made the final cut

HAL ROACH STUDIOS/GETTY

Eddie was partial to a flashy waistcoat. He wore this one at the NME Poll Winners' concert at Wembley in 1960

ROCKING GOOD LOOKS

A celebration of the singer's inimitable style

WORDS BY **JULIE BURNS**

Visually as well as musically ahead of the curve, Eddie Cochran employed a sharply dressed American rock-star image early on. His look became integral to his act – and how it wowed the crowd.

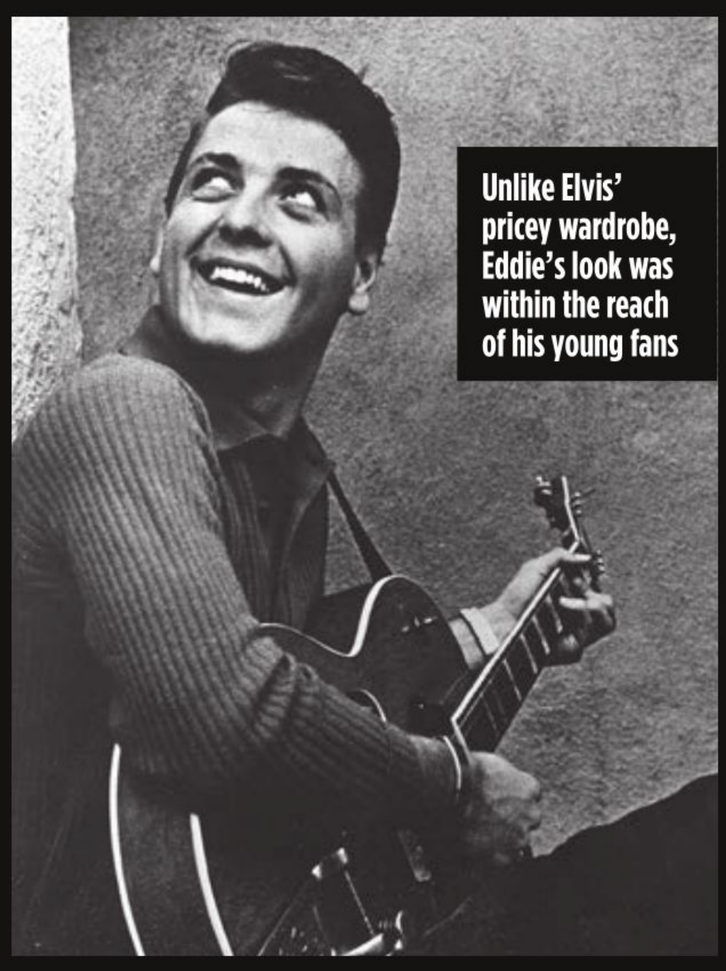
In the cameo for his launch film *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), Eddie's original and hip image of stylish guitar-slinger is instantly memorable, the height of hep-cat cool. He is dressed in pale pink sports jacket, grey peg top trousers and tie-less shirt with collar worn up; this latter style tic alone highlights his signature huddled over, high-holding guitar stance. As music writer David Hepworth remarks in his book on rock gods, *Uncommon People*: "The guitars were less important as instruments than as natural extensions of their cool... the way this new music looked was every bit as important as the way it sounded."

Eddie was photogenic, telegenic – and apparently even better in person. Singer Vince Eager appeared on a series of one-nighters on Eddie's sell-out British tour in 1960. He recalled the young American opening his act with Ray Charles' *What'd I Say*: "Dressed in a flame orange shirt to match his gleaming Gretsch and black leather jeans, he stood with his back to the audience. At the end of the 12-bar intro, he spun round to sing, 'Hey mama, don't you treat me wrong...' and the place erupted. That to me was pure theatre. He looked terrific and we'd never heard that song before. What an inspirational artist."

Equally, musician Mike Tobin caught Eddie in the last week of his tour at the Bristol Hippodrome. Tobin considered: "He was so different to any of the British rock'n'roll acts we'd ever seen. Wearing a red leather waistcoat, he spun round, faced the audience, and a big gasp went up – he was wearing dark glasses – which of course everyone wore subsequently, right the way through rock'n'roll and punk – but at that time, it was the most stunning thing to do. Eddie was just fantastic. We went home and thought we'd better polish up and change our act..."

Eddie's image with its shades and snazzy waistcoats, jazzy shirts and bootlace ties – even an off-duty, rugged leather flying jacket – soon entered the lexicon of 50s rocking style. In contrast to his more flamboyantly-dressed peers such as Little Richard, and Elvis in his Lansky Brothers' threads and Nudie Cohn gold lamé suit, Cochran's brand of cool was effortless, and more attainable.

"EDDIE WAS PHOTOGENIC, TELEGENIC AND APPARENTLY EVEN BETTER IN PERSON"



Unlike Elvis' pricey wardrobe, Eddie's look was within the reach of his young fans

ALAMY / GETTY

Eddie also frequented the teen uniform of jeans (unlike Elvis, who associated them with the sharecropper poverty he'd grown up with). As author David Hepworth comments, "...the look of somebody like Cochran seemed achievable to the kids who were drawn to the music..."

So iconic was Eddie's image that punk maestro Malcolm McLaren would later salute the singer by depicting him on his collectable T-shirts. One such gem spells out a "manifesto of Them-speak" with two long lists: one 'hip', stating from the top the name of Eddie Cochran; the other 'unhip' and proclaiming Mick Jagger. McLaren's first boutique, opened in 1971 with Vivienne Westwood on the King's Road, was originally called Let it Rock – due to his love of more edgy rock'n'roll, particularly an admiration for Eddie (he also favoured Gene Vincent). As well as precious vinyl for sale, he also collected deadstock 50s menswear with a distinct Cochran feel: tailored Hollywood box jackets, Frederick Starke flyaway collar shirts, and studded and decorated Lewis Leathers jackets. The singer was further referenced in McLaren's subsequent, trailblazing punk film with the Sex Pistols, *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle*. With a soundtrack featuring *Somethin' Else* and *C'mon Everybody* via Sid Vicious, it served to showcase the original singer's ongoing influence. Eddie singing *C'mon Everybody* was also used to promote Levis Jeans in their hit 1988 commercial. Themed around the story of his girlfriend Sharon Sheeley having attracted Eddie at a 50s party in said denims, needless to say, the 501s became a cult item for both sexes.

From songs to style, it seems, Ed's always had cred...

Or as Sonny Curtis of The Crickets simply said: "He had tremendous charisma." ✶

LIBERTY HEIGHTS

While Hollywood's Liberty Records wasn't exactly a bastion of rock'n'roll rebellion, it provided a nurturing home for Eddie Cochran, as *Vintage Rock* explains...

WORDS BY **BILL DAHL**

In the wake of Elvis Presley's meteoric rise, America's major labels went on the hunt for an answer to RCA Victor's swivel-hipped superstar. Liberty Records, on the other hand, appeared in no great hurry to enter the rock and roll sweepstakes.

Founded in 1955 by Simon Waronker, the fledgling Los Angeles label got lucky shortly before the year's end thanks to sultry chanteuse Julie London, whose vengeful pop anthem *Cry Me A River* cracked the Billboard Top 10. It turned out to be her only hit single, though she remained on the imprint through 1969, releasing nearly 30 albums in all.

The LA-born Waronker had been something of a child prodigy on violin. After a stint abroad in his teens, he returned to Hollywood and hired on at 20th Century Fox as a staff musician, advancing to an orchestral contractor post. When his cousin Herb Newman approached him about starting a record label, Waronker was dubious but eventually warmed to the idea, only to see Newman back out of their deal to launch Era Records with a different partner. Waronker founded Liberty anyway, naming his enterprise after a dream he had about the Statue of Liberty.

Since Waronker was coming from a formal orchestral background, it's no surprise that much of his early catalogue reflected those stately leanings. Liberty's first single, *The Girl Upstairs*, was by his friend, orchestra leader Lionel Newman. African-American vocalists Nellie Lutcher and Abbey Lincoln brightened Liberty's 1956 release slate, though its biggest hits that year were by the pre-pubescent duo Patience & Prudence, whose *Tonight You Belong To Me* and *Gonna Get Along Without Ya Now* were unapologetically chirpy.

LIBERTY'S FIRST ROCKER (barely) was Johnny Olenn, who previously recorded for the TNT logo in San Antonio, Texas. Olenn waxed a single (*Candy Kisses*) and an album for Liberty and appeared in the rock and roll film *The Girl Can't Help It*. So did Lincoln and London, thanks to Waronker's longstanding connections on the cinematic front (Newman was also involved musically with the movie, which couldn't have hurt).

And so too did Eddie Cochran, miming *Twenty Flight Rock*, which he'd cut in July of 1956 at Gold Star Studios in Los Angeles. His manager, Jerry Capehart, had sold the master to Liberty and it ended up being Eddie's UK debut single on London Records. But that wasn't the case in the US. Waronker brought Cochran into Liberty's studio in January of 1957 to wax a quickie knock-off of John D Loudermilk's *Sittin' In The Balcony*, which its writer had just released on the Colonial label under the handle of Johnny Dee. Eddie's cover, issued just three singles after Olenn's, served as his Stateside Liberty debut and beat the original handily on the charts. Liberty later issued Eddie's less-fiery remake of *Twenty Flight Rock* as a US single.

LIBERTY WAS IN NO HURRY TO GIVE COCHRAN ANY IN-HOUSE COMPETITION

Liberty was in no hurry to give Cochran any in-house competition. The label brought Billy Ward And His Dominoes onboard, but by then they were a pop act, light years from their exciting R&B days on Federal Records when Clyde McPhatter – and then Jackie Wilson – unfurled their soulful pipes as prominent members of Ward's vocal group. That didn't stop The Dominoes from scoring two 1957 pop hits with stately Liberty revivals of the chestnuts *Star Dust* and *Deep Purple* featuring Eugene Mumford's soaring lead tenor.

Cochran nailed his biggest hit for Liberty, *Summertime Blues*, in 1958, following it with another solid seller, *C'mon Everybody*. But Liberty wouldn't hit its full teen stride until Dallas-born Snuff Garrett snagged a post as a 19-year-old A&R man.

"I think Snuff really liked those Buddy Holly tunes that he'd recorded at the Pythian Temple in New York with a big string section," said the Crickets drummer Jerry Allison, "like *It Doesn't*

Eddie's debut single for Liberty went to No.18 on the Billboard charts

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY



THE CHIPMUNKS

THE CHIPMUNK SONG WAS A GRAMMY-WINNING FESTIVE HIT FOR LIBERTY

Liberty's biggest group of 1958 didn't really exist at all except in the fertile creative mind of Ross Bagdasarian, whose career harked back to penning Rosemary Clooney's 1951 smash *Come On-A My House* with his cousin, novelist William Saroyan.

Bagdasarian was already a Liberty artist when he mapped out the humorous *Witch Doctor*, released in March of 1958 and credited to *The Music Of David Seville*. The novelty rocker sported a nonsensical chorus sung by Bagdasarian, vastly sped up via tape trickery, and it sailed to No.1 that spring.

When the holidays neared, Bagdasarian was back with another novelty, *The Chipmunk Song*. Along with comically exasperated narrator Seville, the pesky Chipmunks were voiced by an accelerated Bagdasarian, now in high-pitched three-part harmony. The Chipmunks were named after Liberty bigwigs: 'Simon' for Si Waronker, 'Theodore' for recording engineer Ted Keep, and 'Alvin' for honcho Al Bennett.

A Yuletide perennial from the minute it hit the snowy streets, *The Chipmunk Song* perched at the peak of the pop charts just before Santa made his annual rounds.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

Matter Anymore and *True Love Ways*." Garrett imparted that lush approach on his productions (veteran LA pianist Ernie Freeman served as Snuff's primary arranger), including some by The Crickets.

Former rockabilly Johnny Burnette had toned down his riotous attack by the time he signed with Liberty's short-lived Freedom subsidiary, headed by Capehart, in 1958. Garrett inherited Burnette as his first assignment and rolled out the strings for Johnny's '59 remake of Hank Williams' *Settin' The Woods On Fire*, Burnette's first release on Liberty proper. The formula clicked fully the next year when Burnette registered back-to-back Liberty blockbusters with the violin-enriched *Dreamin'* and *You're Sixteen*.

Acquiring a 1959 regional hit from the Soma label brought Liberty a star when Bobby Vee's *Suzie Baby* caught the ear of one of the logo's promotion men. "They were looking for regional records that they could pick up the masters on and *Suzie Baby* was No.1 in Minneapolis," said the late Vee. "He sent it out to California, to Liberty Records, and Snuffy Garrett got a hold of it. He was a young producer there. And about that time, we were getting calls from other labels that were picking up on the impact of the song in the upper Midwest.

"But when I spoke with Snuffy, he said to me, 'Jerry Allison was in my office yesterday,



Si Waronker (far right) used his house furniture as collateral for the bank loan that funded Liberty's first releases

and I played it for him, and he got a tear in his eye.' And it just blew me away: 'Oh my goodness, isn't that something?' So as we spoke, we spoke the same language. We liked a lot of the same music. It was a great 10-minute phone call for me. I came off the phone, and I was pumped. I thought, 'Man, Liberty Records! That's where I want to be!' We sold them the master. They did a really good job on it. They put it out and promoted the thing."

THAT PROMOTIONAL MUSCLE

and Garrett's innovative production skill helped Bobby score his first major Liberty hit in 1960, a remake of The Clovers' *Devil Or Angel*. "I loved the whole idea of doing the strings," said Vee. "But I also liked the 50s and 60s rock and roll. And Snuffy did too." Vee's non-stop string of early-60s Liberty hits included *Rubber Ball*, the pop chart-topper *Take Good Care Of My Baby*, and *The Night Has A Thousand Eyes*.

Garrett was on a roll. "When he got into the business, he did something very smart, I think. He surrounded himself with his friends," said Vee. "He signed Johnny Burnette. He signed The Crickets to the label. Nobody cared about The Crickets after Holly died. And Snuffy gave 'em a deal, and they had some success with it. They had a major hit in England. And he signed Buddy Knox, another Texas guy. Buddy's career for all intents and purposes, as far as

"SI WARONKER WAS THE HEARTBEAT OF THAT COMPANY. HE LOVED MUSIC"

records went, was over with. And Snuffy gave him a deal. I tell you what – it was one big, happy family."

While Knox didn't pace the hit parade for Liberty as he had in 1957 for Roulette with *Party Doll*, he just missed the pop Top 20 in late 1960 with his remake of The Clovers' *Lovey Dovey*. The reformed Crickets didn't crack the US pop charts, but they had a major UK hit in 1962 with *Don't Ever Change* and three more charters, all for Liberty's British arm.

POWERFUL VOCALIST GENE

McDaniels, once a doo-wopper, went pop for Liberty under Garrett, nailing huge hits with *A Hundred Pounds Of Clay* and *Tower Of Strength* in 1961, and *Chip Chip* and *Point Of No Return* the following year. Female singers were another strength; Jackie DeShannon first landed on Liberty in 1958, and she charted with the original 1963 version of *Needles And Pins*. Timi Yuro's tremulous ballad *Hurt* went to Billboard No.4 in 1961.

Liberty attempted to crack the early-60s country market with Willie Nelson, ex-Sun rockabilly Warren Smith, Hank Cochran, and Little Joe Carson. They finally tracked down a stellar R&B vocal group in the Rivingtons, whose raucous *Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow* and *The Bird's The Word* were impressive 1963 sellers.

Southern California was all about surf music in 1963. In Jan & Dean, Liberty boasted one of the genre's top acts; their 1963 chart-topper *Surf City* saw producer Jan Berry collaborating with The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson. The suntanned duo encored with *Drag City*, *Dead Man's Curve*, *The Little Old Lady From Pasadena* and *Ride The Wild Surf*, before a horrific car crash sidelined Berry.

Liberty weathered the British Invasion in large part thanks to Gary Lewis And The Playboys, whose cover of R&B singer Sammy Ambrose's *This Diamond Ring* was a No.1 hit in early 1965. A half-dozen more pop smashes quickly followed for Lewis, all but the last helmed by Garrett (by that time an independent producer) and all arranged by Leon Russell.

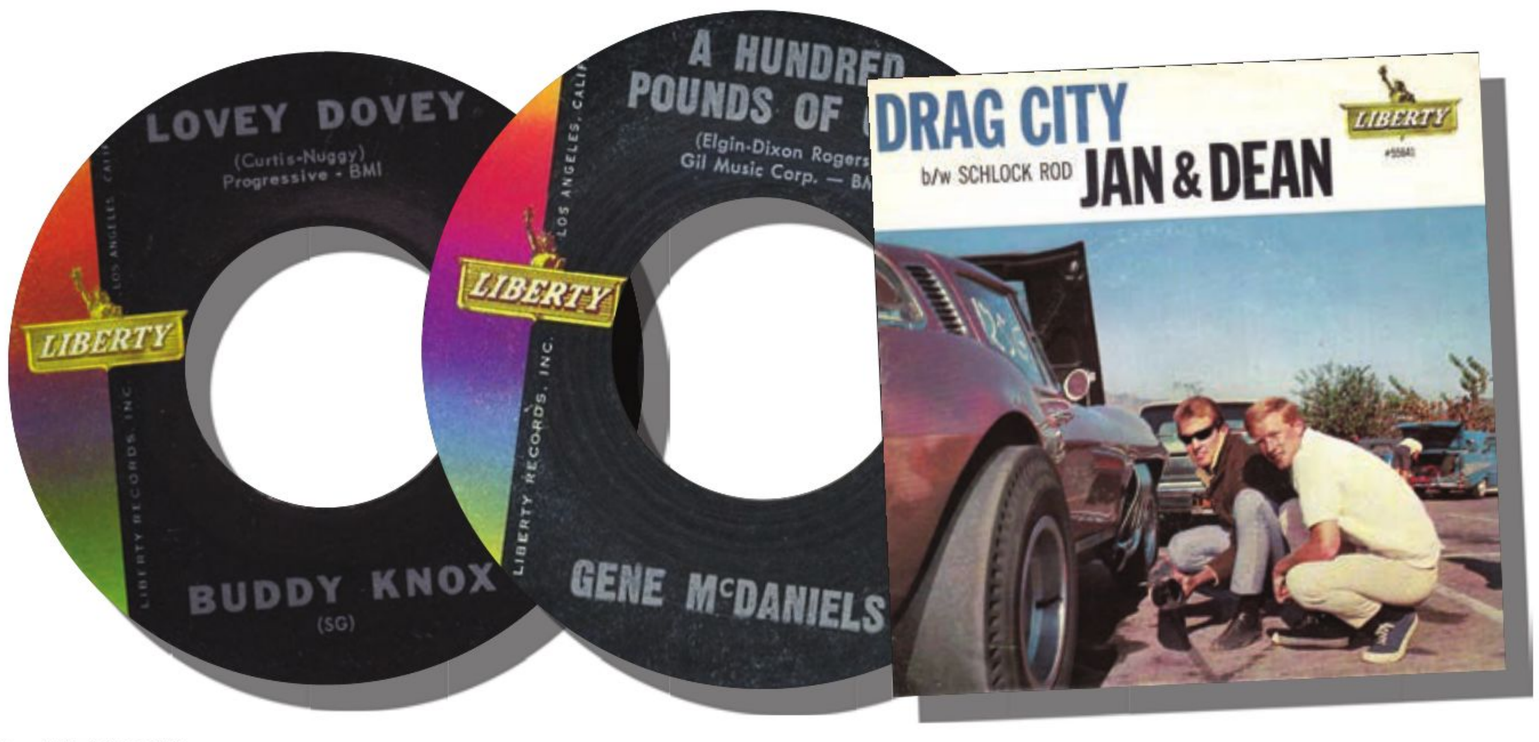
Garrett's departure altered the atmosphere at Liberty, as had Waronker's acrimonious 1963 exit. Label president Al Bennett reigned as Liberty purchased Imperial Records, the former home of Fats Domino and Ricky Nelson.

Said Vee: "The first four years that I was there, up until about 1964, it really was one big happy family. It was a small company. Job descriptions were clear. There was no fogginess there. And the label started growing. They sold the company. Si Waronker left. Si Waronker was the heartbeat of that company. He was the guy that loved music.

"When Si left, all of a sudden it became... you started getting that accountant feel to it, and that merchandising marketing feel to it. They sold the company to Avnet Electronics in New York, and then Al Bennett, a couple years later, bought it back for 20 cents on the dollar, or something like that. It was just getting kind of goofy."

That didn't stop Liberty from releasing hits. Everyone from Nitty Gritty Dirt Band to Canned Heat to Ike & Tina Turner enjoyed success on the imprint before United Artists bought it in 1971.

But Liberty's legacy rests primarily within the early 60s and, even before that, when Eddie Cochran was its lone rock and roll luminary.✶





DOLTON RECORDS

BOB REISDORFF TRANSFORMED SEATTLE INTO A HIT-MAKING DESTINATION WITH HIS DOLTON LABEL

Dolton Records commenced operations in early 1959 as Dolphin Records with distribution by Liberty. The inaugural release, The Fleetwoods' ethereal vocal group charmer *Come Softly To Me*, was a No.1 smash. That brought another Dolphin logo out of the woodwork, necessitating a name change for the label's encore that spring, The Frantics' instrumental *Straight Flush*. Before 1959 was over, The Fleetwoods had another pop chart-topper on Dolton in the equally gentle *Mr Blue*. But an instrumental quartet from Tacoma, Washington, The Ventures, emerged as Dolton's flagship act with guitar-driven 1960 smash *Walk, Don't Run*, first released on their own Blue Horizon label and then acquired by Reisdorff.

"He heard it on the radio, and he called my mom and said that he wanted to have a meeting with us," said Ventures guitarist Don Wilson. "He picked it up, sent it down to Liberty Records, and that guy – the president of Liberty Records – said, 'No, that's not a hit. I don't want it.' And Bob Reisdorff said, 'I think it is. I think it's a natural No.1 hit. I'll guarantee any money that you lose on it!'" The Ventures' voluminous Dolton output, especially on album, proved monumentally influential to the surf music movement.

Liberty eventually purchased Dolton from Reisdorff, but he continued to produce his small but select roster, which also included crooner Vic Dana (Dick Glasser helmed Dana's '65 Dolton hit *Red Roses For A Blue Lady*).

Gary Lewis was the son of Jerry Lewis, one of the most popular entertainers of the 1950s



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

TOP 20 ESSENTIAL EDDIE COCHRAN TRACKS

Eddie Cochran cut more quality rock'n'roll in the space of a few years than most singers with five decades behind them. To mark 60 years since his tragic death, we've sifted through his back catalogue to bring you our Top 20 tracks...

BY **RIK FLYNN**

Despite the comparably small catalogue left us by Eddie Cochran before he was so cruelly struck down, it's disproportionately good. In his short life, Eddie conceived a rare portfolio that stood him apart and, furthermore, he was by no means a one-trick pony. This, of course, makes it almost impossible to slim down to just 20 songs, let alone put them in some kind of discernible order of merit.

Aside from the God-given skills that singled him out as one of his era's finest songsmiths, listening through Eddie's solo material in its entirety reminds us of his astounding agility as a guitarist. Ask any one of the respected musicians of the 50s and 60s who are still with us – or indeed any musician in the world today – and they'll doubtless share our admiration for Cochran's jaw-detaching ability to thrill with a six-string. The sound of Eddie nonchalantly dancing up and down the fretboard of his iconic Gretsch 6120, or strumming out those instantly recognisable rhythms on his Martin acoustic, is one of life's simple pleasures. As such, any listing of Eddie Cochran tunes, in any order, is guaranteed to bring joy to anyone who calls themselves a fan of rock'n'roll – this is just one of those rundowns... Enjoy!



20 TERESA
LIBERTY (1958)

While we're generally more inclined towards his rockier fare, Cochran could certainly handle a ballad and this is our pick of his woozier fare. A simple, charming love song in every sense, housing the quirkiest of honey-hued hooks from (unknown) female accomplices who flirtatiously echo his words, we're certain this crooner made many-a teenage girl go instantly weak at the knees. *Billboard*'s reviewer was a little more flippant, writing, "This is a rhythmic, folk-type ballad with a chick chorus in the backing. Comes thru for okay results but flip may be stronger." Frustratingly for Eddie, then searching for another hit to match 1957's *Sittin' In The Balcony*, the public agreed and *Teresa* didn't trouble the charts.



19 TEENAGE HEAVEN
LIBERTY (1959)

By the time of the 1959 Liberty session that spawned this modest hit, Eddie was well established and, as a result, *Teenage Heaven* was augmented by a much fuller production, more boogie-woogie fun than the menacing rock'n'roll of his earlier sides. While two versions were cut at that January session in Hollywood, the ample talents of bop saxophonist Plas Johnson were very much to the fore when Alan Freed introduced Eddie and his 'crazy guitar' for an on-screen performance aired to movie-goers as part of rock'n'roll exploitation movie *Go, Johnny Go!* The swaying melancholia of *I Remember* was a sweet-sung contrast on the flip (and edited out of the film), but didn't help the chart trajectory – *Teenage Heaven* stalled just inside the Billboard Hot 100.



18 AM I BLUE
LIBERTY (1957)

Between Eddie's fretting prowess and Bing Crosby's equally proficient guitarist Perry "Bunny" Botkin, this stonking rockabilly take on an old movie standard put the musicianship upfront. Beginning with a rising four-part vocal harmony from the Johnny Mann Chorus, this burst out of the gates via a rat-a-tat snare that introduced the supple jazzy inflections that line the verses – a clever contrast to Eddie's searing solo, that erupts from out of its midst. Completing Eddie's third Liberty offering, A-side ballad *Drive-In Show* also makes plenty of Best Of lists, distinct for the fact that it featured Eddie on ukelele. However, when Eddie sung "Bet my peanuts to a candy bar", listeners heard something else entirely (!), perhaps halting its rise up the charts...



17 CUT ACROSS SHORTY
LIBERTY (1960)

Written in Nashville by Wayne Walker and Marijohn Wilkin, and made famous by 'Mister Country' Carl Smith, Eddie's spruced up recasting of *Cut Across Shorty* found him revisiting his country days with noticeable relish. In the esteemed company of Sonny Curtis and Jerry Allison from The Crickets, Eddie first cut a version at the original tempo, but it was the rockier, speeded-up take that found favour as choice plattermate to his first posthumous single *Three Steps To Heaven*, also recorded during that session. With this final track in the can, producer Snuff Garrett remembers Eddie departing the studio for the airport to catch a flight for the UK. *Cut Across Shorty* was to be the last song ever recorded by Eddie Cochran.



16 PRETTY GIRL
LIBERTY (1958)

A marvellously unrestrained rockin' pedestal for his aesthetically pleasing female company of the time, *Pretty Girl* could be found nestled on the flip of the aforementioned doe-eyed ballad, *Teresa*. Eddie's manager and pal Jerry Capehart had a hand in the writing and, once installed at Liberty Record's own Custom Recorders studio in September 1957, Eddie, bass fiddle player Connie "Guybo" Smith and drummer Earl Palmer amassed over 30 failed attempts at differing tempos before they eventually gave up. It wasn't until January the following year that they returned to the track, finally nailing it with the addition of some spritely work on the 88s – likely from Ray Johnson (brother of sax player Plas Johnson).



15 SWEETIE PIE
LIBERTY (1960)

Eddie made a friend in co-star Johnny Russell while filming *Untamed Youth* in 1956 and the two ended up co-writing a few tunes together the following spring including the jaunty single *One Kiss*, and this rather more excitable offering. It was during a long summer holed up in Gold Star in 1957 that *Sweetie Pie* was laid down alongside a host of other winners including *Drive-In Show*, *Am I Blue* and *Twenty Flight Rock*. The Johnny Mann Chorus were in fine voice and "Bunny" Botkin once again augmented Guybo and Cochran on rhythm. Shelved at the time, *Sweetie Pie* was finally issued via Decca-imprint London soon after Cochran's death and, complete with its unique humming hooks, overtook the A-side (*Lonely*) to squeeze into the UK Top 40.



14 WEEKEND
LIBERTY (1961)

A two-minute ode to the simple wonders of the weekend, this Snuff Garrett-produced confection celebrates staying out late, cat clothes and moonlit views, yet makes sure to snarl at authority, in this case a nosy policeman whose flashlight tries to ruin the fun. Guybo had assembled a regular band by the sessions in April 1959, and The Kelly Four assembled at United Recording Corporation Studios on Sunset Boulevard. "[Eddie] could play anything: jazz, country, blues, rock and roll – slow, fast, anything you want," remembered bass player Dave Schrieber. "I was amazed." It wasn't until after Cochran's passing that Decca rediscovered this track and issued it, backed up by Sharon Sheeley's marching ballad *Cherished Memories*. It reached UK No.15.



13 HALLELUJAH, I LOVE HER SO
LIBERTY (1951)

While it floundered in the States, Cochran's luxuriant string-drowned recasting of this Ray Charles album track soared to No.22 in the UK. Perhaps it would have fared better at home had he dispensed with those overbearing strings, overdubbed as an afterthought a few months later and no doubt added to increase its selling-power. We have a hunch they had the opposite effect. The original, recorded in August '59 together with The Kelly Four, is leagues ahead. Who needs strings when you've got the tasteful pitter-patter of a flighty piano line and Eddie's equally playful fretwork as he spars delightfully with the horns midway through – utter magic. Cochran performed this during his fateful trip to the UK on the Marty Wilde-fronted TV show *Boy Meets Girls*.



12 PINK-PEG SLACKS
UNISSUED (1956)

First demoed with Hank Cochran at Gold Star's modest $10-an-hour studio B in April 1956, *Pink-Peg Slacks* was Cochran's first proper stab at the newfangled rockabilly sound and clearly gave a sizeable nod to Carl Perkins' *Blue Suede Shoes*, released a month or so earlier (and rapidly rising up the charts at the time). Eddie took on lead vocals for that session and cut it again solo that summer. It's as impulsive as his catalogue gets and remains one of his early unschooled triumphs, preceding a busy run of session work that saw him quickly gaining traction. With its nimble-fingered licks and chatty narrative, it boded extremely well for things to come. While unissued at the time, the track was released by RockStar in 1981, and appears on Bear Family's *Somethin' Else: The Ultimate Collection*.



11 SKINNY JIM
CREST (1956)

When Eddie first broke out on his own, his manager and co-writer Jerry Capehart managed to snag him a one-single deal with Crest Records, and this 45 was the rousing end product. Cut during a money-saving joint session with fellow Crest alumnus Gene Davis, this bristles with the adolescent brio that has ensured its enduring status as a stone-cold rock'n'roll classic. The excitable Jerry Lee-esque piano overdubs hammered down by Ray Stanley added a hot streak of class, but for us there was frankly no need and we favour the simpler piano-less version. Backed by the solid balladry of *Half Loved* – a co-write with Stanley – *Skinny Jim* spotlighted the teenager's monumental guitar skills as he tears up and down the fretboard.



10 MEAN WHEN I'M MAD
LIBERTY (1957)

Billboard's preview hardly waxed lyrical about this skulking rockabilly side, merely dubbing it "an effective rock and roller". Nonetheless, Liberty hoped Johnny Mann's clever vocal arrangements and Cochran's infectious snarls would help smoochy plattermate *One Kiss* follow *Sittin' On The Balcony* into the Top 20. Alas, no such luck. While the fuller, slinkier single production has undergone many-a spin on the *Vintage Rock* stereo, it's the simplistic, head-on demo version of this track that we keep going back to. Cut at the end of 1956, and found on an acetate in Eddie's private collection, this features Jerry Capehart slapping out the rhythm on a box. Both versions can be found on Bear Family's *Somethin' Else: The Ultimate Collection*.



9 MY WAY
LIBERTY (1963)

Laid down in the same January 1957 session as his *Teenage Heaven* single, *My Way* is another to feature the largely unsung, yet quietly ubiquitous, tenor sax sessioneer Plas Johnson, here engaged in a bristling duel with Eddie's wandering licks. *My Way* is a propellant rocker in amidst the catalogue with the requisite parent-baiting lyrics to maintain that rebel aura (and somewhat misogynistic when reexamined in 2020). It's lip-curling stuff, as Eddie slurs, "I was born a tiger, I always had my way/ Nobody's gonna change me, this or any other day." The US gave this posthumous release the cold shoulder, but UK rock'n'roll fans welcomed it for a 10-week stay in the charts, settling at No.23.



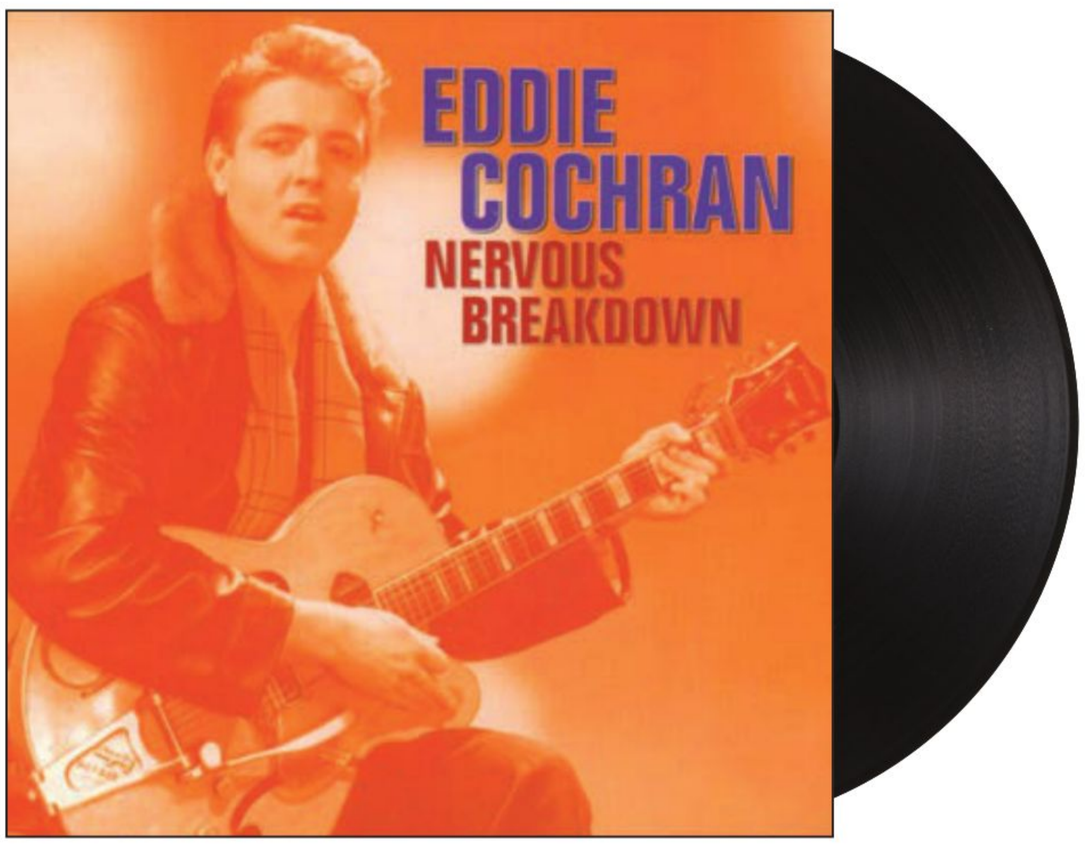
8 JEANNIE, JEANNIE, JEANNIE
LIBERTY (1963)

According to the song's co-author and one-time Liberty recording artist Ricky Page (who wrote it with husband George Motola), Eddie was hired by Guyden Records to play guitar on a session for sister-trio The G-Notes, who were recording an earlier version of this track, titled *Johnny, Johnny, Johnny*. Eddie immediately fell in love with the tune and asked it he could record it himself, but by the time his own *Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie* had reached the racks in January 1958 (The G-Notes released theirs in March 1959), there were plenty of new rival rock'n'rollers jostling for position, which explains his poor Billboard placing at No.94. Still, a posthumous release in the UK fared better, finding the Top 40 in 1961.



7 THREE STEPS TO HEAVEN
LIBERTY (1960)

A lucrative Gold Star session in January 1960, with Liberty staff producer Snuff Garrett again manning the controls, got the new decade off to an effervescent start when *Three Step To Heaven*, the first track on the agenda, was nailed fifth take. This time Cochran and the ever-present Guybo (on electric bass) were again ably aided by The Crickets' Sonny Curtis on guitar and his bandmate Jerry Allison stamping out their intuitive Tex-Mex-influenced rhythm. But none could have known how poignant a recording it would be. Just over three months later, Eddie was killed in an horrific car crash in England. Released in tribute soon after, *Three Steps To Heaven* went to the summit of the UK charts, unsaddling The Everly Brothers' *Cathy's Clown*.



6 NERVOUS BREAKDOWN
LIBERTY (1963)

The secret weapon that made this track so utterly moreish came from the interplay between Guybo's creeping bassline, Cochran's *Summertime Blues*-esque acoustic guitar strums, and his shivering, vocal delivery – all mirroring a fragile mental state. First demoed via several takes in 1958, and then recut in November of that year, *Nervous Breakdown* was reportedly put together line-by-line with soon-to-be TV star Mario Rocuzzo, who detailed the doctor's worrying diagnosis as Eddie fired off guitar riffs. The duo's meticulous work would go to waste, however, when Liberty decided it was too weak to follow-up *C'mon Everybody*. Wanda Jackson had a go in 2011 too, for her Jack White-produced album *The Party Ain't Over*.



5 C'MON EVERYBODY
LIBERTY (1958)

Wrapped up in just three hours in October 1958 with the usual line-up of Guybo and Earl, plus Ray Palmer on the 88s, this rockin' perennial began its life as *Let's Get Together*, until – sensing something wasn't quite right – Eddie re-tracked the vocals with his now infamous rallying cry, snatched from the song's opening lyric. The tempo was nudged up and another huge hit was surely on the cards, particularly after TV exposure on both *American Bandstand* and *Town Hall Party* brought it to millions. Alas, for some reason or other it didn't catch as *Summertime Blues* had a few months earlier, just squeezing its way into the US Top 40. It fared better in the UK, storming to No.6, Eddie's highest placing over here. Now, of course, it's a standard.



4 SITTIN' IN THE BALCONY
LIBERTY (1957)

Having lost out to ABC-Paramount in his bid to purchase the distribution rights for Johnny Dee's red hot regional hit *Sittin' In The Balcony*, Liberty Records co-founder Si Waronker set his rival campaign in motion and commissioned his newly signed rebel rocker Eddie Cochran to do the business – and in a hurry. Within a few days Eddie had made the track his own and, in spring 1957, the two tracks went one-on-one in a closely-fought contest for Billboard glory. Cochran's take eventually won out, landing at No.18, while – no doubt gutted – Dee floundered at No.38. "I cut *Sittin' in the Balcony* and didn't like it at all," Cochran told *NME* at the time. "But it went on to sell a million – and I was the most surprised of all." Eddie was on the upsurge.



3 SUMMERTIME BLUES
LIBERTY (1958)

Centred around one of rock'n'roll's most simplistic – yet refined – acoustic guitar motifs, and given its attitude by Eddie's rebel tear, it was left to Guybo's penetrating upright and Earl's crackling rhythm to bring it home. Penned together with Jerry Capehart, keen to introduce a song about "the hardships of summer" as opposed to the norm, *Summertime Blues* became (somewhat contrarily) the feel-good hit of Summer '58 – and Eddie's biggest Billboard success, reaching No.8. This much-revered 45 was recorded when Eddie was a mere pup at only 19 years old. Unbelievably it was originally lined up to play second fiddle to Sharon Sheeley's far less offensive *Love Again*, but when DJs favoured the former it took its rightful place as the main event.



2 TWENTY FLIGHT ROCK
LIBERTY (1957)

Eddie famously mimed this track in 1956 rock'n'roll flick *The Girl Can't Help It*, a role secured when director Boris Petroff approached him in the studio. Cochran was flabbergasted at his good fortune. Penned by Eddie together with Ned Fairchild, this stair-climbing rocker was first cut in L.A. in the summer of '56, with right-hand man Guybo providing his watertight rhythm on the upright, while Jerry Capehart bashed out a rudimentary beat on a soup carton. Cochran recorded a second version the following year and this was the one that Liberty issued as a single, with slick rocker *Cradle Baby* holding up the flip. It was, of course, thanks to a rendition of this song that a youthful Paul McCartney found favour with John Lennon and was let into The Quarrymen, soon to morph into The Beatles.



1 SOMETHIN' ELSE
LIBERTY (1959)

Written by Cochran's significant other Sharon Sheeley together with his elder brother Bob, this all-time Cochran classic is an ode both to the fairer sex and the automobile. Here, we find our protagonist skint and admiring his dream girl from afar, before finally summoning the courage to make his move having acquired the keys to a '41 Ford. This plenty-spun perennial was recorded with Eddie providing both bass and guitar over a corking rhythm supplied by regular sticksman, Earl Palmer, one of New Orleans' finest. UK audiences fell hard for its charms, elevating it to No.22, while it managed No.58 in Eddie's homeland. Notable admirers included Gallic rock'n'roller Johnny Hallyday, whose rework (*Elle Est Terrible*) made No.1 in France, while in Blighty, punk legends the Sex Pistols paid their respects with a No.3 in 1979.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS

Every musical genius needs his collaborators. Here we celebrate the contributions from the various sidemen Eddie came to rely on over the course of his tragically short career

WORDS BY **BILL DAHL**

Eddie Cochran was such a forceful presence in the recording studio that the contributions of his sidemen to his lasting legacy are too often overlooked.

Fred Conrad Smith, better known as "Guybo" Smith, was the longest lasting and most important of Cochran's musical collaborators. Born in 1939 in Los Angeles, Smith met Cochran at Bell Gardens Junior High School in the autumn of 1951, shortly after Eddie's family migrated to California from Minnesota. The two lads shared a deep love for country music and quickly located plenty of common jamming ground. Guybo was already fluent on upright bass (he played it in the school band), steel guitar, and mandolin, while Eddie's skills as a vocalist and guitarist were growing fast. One of the duo's earliest performances at a local elementary school in March of '54 saw them doing a pair of country numbers, including Webb Pierce's *Walking The Dog*, with Guybo manning the steel.

There weren't many Cochran recording sessions where Smith wasn't right there beside him providing a propulsive bottom. Guybo slapped his stand-up bass when Eddie, his unrelated singing partner Hank Cochran, and manager-songwriter Jerry Capehart entered Gold Star Recording Studios in early 1956 to cut a series of demos, notably Eddie's snarling rocker *Pink-Peg Slacks* and Hank's careening *Latch On*.

GUYBO WAS AGAIN on hand for The Cochran Brothers' final round-up that spring at Western Recorders, when the pair tackled four jumping duets led by *Tired And Sleepy* and its flipside *Fool's Paradise*. That July, when Eddie stepped out on his own at Gold Star, Guybo kept the bottom supple once more for Eddie's superior first rendition of *Twenty Flight Rock* (the same one he mimed in the seminal movie *The Girl Can't Help It*).

GUYBO UNDENIABLY EARNED THE TITLE OF COCHRAN'S TOP SIDEMAN

As Eddie moved up the rockin' ladder, Guybo settled in as a fixture by his side onstage and in the studio, undeniably earning the title of Cochran's top sideman. He was on Eddie's first chart entry for Liberty Records, a cover of Johnny Dee's *Sittin' In The Balcony*, as well as the less successful follow-ups *One Kiss* and *Am I Blue*. In early 1958, Guybo switched over to electric bass for the pummeling *Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie*. That was his axe of choice for Eddie's immortal *Summertime Blues* in March, as well as the similar-sounding encore *C'mon Everybody* and a thoroughly crunchy *My Way*.

Guybo's basslines always framed Eddie's vocals and slashing guitar work perfectly without ever becoming showy or drawing attention away from the spotlight shining on his boss. His distinctive nickname was immortalised on 25 August 1959 at Gold Star with the Cochran-led instrumental *Guybo*, a Cochran-Capehart co-write that emerged on Sylvester Cross' fledgling Silver logo, under the name of The Kelly Four.

Smith wasn't the first musician to accompany Cochran on tape. That ➡



Eddie in full flight with his right-hand man, bassist Connie "Guybo" Smith

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

One of New Orleans' finest rhythm-keepers, Earl Palmer

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY


KIRK WEST/GETTY

HANK COCHRAN

EDDIE'S ONE-TIME MUSICAL PARTNER WAS ALWAYS MORE COUNTRY AT HEART

Mostly a vocal contributor as Eddie's early duet partner, Hank Cochran was also a competent rhythm guitarist who deftly accompanied the duo behind Eddie's flashy lead work. They weren't fated to stay together for long – Hank was country through and through, not swayed by rock'n'roll stardom in the slightest. Yet just before they split, they made a single for Ekko Records that rocked like crazy.

Although he was only three years older than Eddie, Garland Perry Cochran seemed from an earlier generation altogether. Born in Isola, Mississippi, he grew up poor, toiling in the oil fields of Hobbs, New Mexico when he was 12. Cochran ended up in LA at 16, swapped his Garland moniker for a tougher 'Hank', and started singing country in 1953. He met Eddie the next year and they formed a country duet act, adopting the billing of the Cochran Brothers though their only connection was a shared surname.

Ekko honcho Red Matthews handed the boys both sides of their 1955 debut, but it was '56 encore, *Tired And Sleepy*, that remains their rockabilly masterpiece. For a while after they split, Hank dabbled in rock'n'roll, waxing *Goofin' Around* for Doré in 1958. But once signed as a songwriter with Pamper Music in '59, Hank's future career path was assured. He moved to Nashville and wrote country classics *I Fall To Pieces* (with Harlan Howard), *She's Got You* and *A Little Bitty Tear*. And that was just the beginning.

honour went to steel guitarist Chuck Foreman. Five years older than Eddie, Foreman owned his own magnetic recorder, and the two got together at Foreman's home during the summer of 1953 to tape a handful of instrumentals that boded well for Eddie's future as a fretsman.

IF A RECORDING engineer was worth his salt during the 1950s, he knew how to mic up a cardboard box with enough presence to approximate the sound of a snare drum — thus rendering just about anyone capable of laying down a rudimentary beat on tape. Jerry Capehart wasn't a trained drummer, concentrating his energies primarily on writing songs both with and without Eddie, and managing his talented protégé. But his basic box backbeat was all Cochran needed to rock the house on quite a few of his early solo sides, from demo covers of *Blue Suede Shoes* and *Long Tall Sally* to the first *Twenty Flight Rock*, *Pink-Peg Slacks*, and even Cochran's hit cover of *Sittin' In The Balcony*. No one back then was any the wiser.



When it was time to graduate to a professional drummer, Cochran hired nothing but the best – including two R&B timekeepers who were veteran masters of their craft. Jesse Sailes got the call for the July '56 date at Master Recorders on Fairfax Avenue that produced Cochran's blazing rocker *Skinny Jim,* cut for Sylvester Cross' Crest Records. Sailes was more accustomed to backing Lowell Fulson, Smokey Hogg, BB King and other blues giants in the studio than teenaged rock and roll guitar prodigies, but he acquitted himself admirably on Eddie's sides.

Earl Palmer was a recent arrival in Los Angeles in January of 1958, when he backed Cochran on the recording session at Liberty's in-house studio that elicited *Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie* and *Pretty Girl*. Palmer had arrived after firmly establishing himself as New Orleans' first-call R&B studio drummer, working with bandleader-producer Dave Bartholomew and most of the Crescent City's hit-making royalty. Palmer brilliantly incorporated second-line influences into his timekeeping as he backed Little Richard on most of his Specialty hits and played on classics by Fats Domino, Smiley Lewis, Lloyd Price, Shirley & Lee, the Spiders, and virtually every other R&B luminary that passed through Cosimo Matassa's New Orleans studio in search of a hit.

"[EARL] WAS PHENOMENAL," SAID MATASSA. "HE'S GOT A CLOCK IN HIS HEART!"

"The guy was phenomenal," marveled the late Matassa. "He's got a clock in his heart!"

Palmer's February 1957 defection to LA was a huge loss for New Orleans' recording scene, the City of Angels welcoming the former tap dancer into its studio clique with open arms. "We were also happy for him," said Matassa. "When he got there, he was recognised immediately. In no time at all, he was in studios almost exclusively."

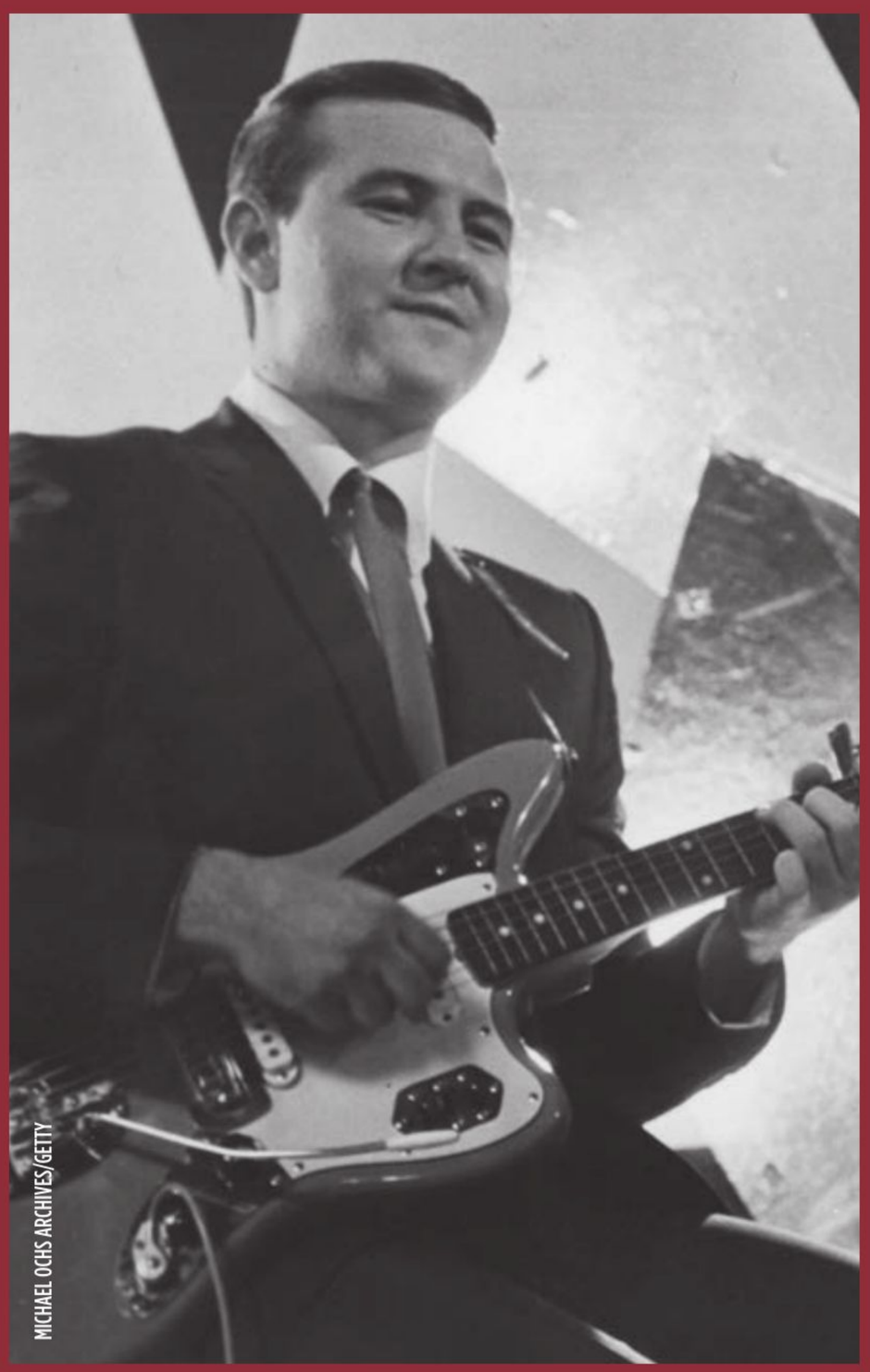
Cochran was no doubt happy Palmer made his move. Earl played on *Summertime Blues*, *C'mon Everybody*, *My Way* and *Somethin' Else*, the extremely versatile Palmer sounding totally transformed from the Big Easy R&B drum master he'd been only a short time earlier to a dyed-in-the-wool rock and roller behind the kit.

Eddie never used a more R&B-oriented recording combo than on the 17 January, 1959 Gold Star session that gave us the macho *My Way* and *Rock'n'Roll Blues*. In addition to Guybo on bass and Palmer on drums, Cochran was backed by former Nat King Cole fretsman Irving Ashby on the other guitar, pianist Ray Johnson (another New Orleans import), and a sax section ➡

Saxophonist Plas Johnson and his pianist brother Ray both played alongside Eddie



PAUL NATKIN/GETTY


MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

SONNY CURTIS

IT WOULD BE A ROSY FUTURE FOR THE CRICKETS' GUITARIST AND VOCALIST...

The future of Sonny Curtis also revolved around songwriting; among his most lucrative songs are *I Fought The Law* and The Everly Brothers' *Walk Right Back*.

"I got started real young," said the Meadow, Texas native. "We were doing mostly country music, and of course we were all playing with various bands in various clubs and all that, and whatever in Lubbock with whoever. But Buddy [Holly] and Bob Montgomery and Don Guess, who was the bass player at that time, and JI [Allison] and me, anyway, when Elvis came through town, well, it just started. The next day, we started kind of doing Elvis songs."

Curtis played slashing lead guitar on Holly's 1956 blaster *Rock Around With Ollie Vee*, but there was a long break after that before he reunited with his pals. "When Buddy moved to New York, I guess that was summer of '58 or near fall or whenever that was, when JI called and said, 'Hey, man, how about coming back into The Crickets?'" said Curtis, who penned *I Fought The Law* and played lead guitar on the 1959 original for Coral, fronted by Earl Sinks.

"I was just sittin' in my living room one afternoon. I was by myself. I remember one of those West Texas sandstormy afternoons, and I was just always trying to write a song, just for the fun of it mostly. And I wrote that in probably 20 minutes," said Curtis. "I wrote it as a country song, and when we recorded it in New York for *In Style With The Crickets*, we needed rock and roll. So I transcribed it to a rock and roll song, with that eights feel, and JI put those gunshot licks on the front with his triplet lick.

"All of a sudden, voilà! It was a rock and roll song!"

comprised of Ray's brother Plas Johnson, whose blazing solos graced countless LA R&B and rock and roll hits, the nearly-as-prolific Jackie Kelso, and Jewell Grant (likely on baritone).

Johnson may be best known for his slinky solo on Henry Mancini's '64 hit recording of *The Pink Panther Theme*." Plas' wailing horn also copped the solo space on Eddie's clever *Teenage Heaven*, also notable for introducing Cochran's new band, initially billed as The Hollywood Swingers before they switched their moniker to The Kelly Four. They were basically an outgrowth of Dick D'Agostin and the Swingers, a local group that cut *Nancy Lynne* for Dot in 1958, as well as an encore, *Give Me You* (they'd had two platters on the tiny Accent logo before that).



PLAS JOHNSON'S WAILING HORN COPPED THE SOLO SPACE ON EDDIE'S TEENAGE HEAVEN

When Eddie had assembled a group for a Canadian jaunt in late '58, he borrowed Swingers drummer Gene Riggio to augment Guybo, added pianist Jim Stivers and saxist Jimmy Seals, and hit the road. Eventually he hired D'Agostin's entire combo to be his gigging outfit.

RIGGIO, STIVERS AND electric bassist Dave Shriver were all on *Teenage Heaven*. Palmer and Riggio shared drum duties at the June '59 session that elicited *Somethin' Else*, with D'Agostin replacing Stivers on the 88s for Eddie's update on Tex Ritter's *Boll Weevil Song*.

Joined by saxists Mike Henderson and Mike Deasy, Stivers, Shriver, and Riggio remained Cochran's preferred rhythm section, both in the studio and on the road.

But Eddie's final trip to record under his own name at Gold Star on 8 January 1960, produced by recently hired Liberty A&R man Snuff Garrett (the young Texas import enjoyed great success working with Bobby Vee and Johnny Burnette there but raised Cochran's ire by overdubbing a string section on his remake of Ray Charles' *Hallelujah, I Love Her So* without Eddie's knowledge or consent), brought in a fresh rhythm section with a storied past: guitarist Sonny Curtis and drummer JI Allison of The Crickets, just arrived in Los Angeles from Texas. The date included Cochran's *Three Steps To Heaven* and *Cut Across Shorty*, paired that March for what turned out to be Eddie's last Liberty single while he was alive.

"Eddie Cochran was one of our real favourite guys and favourite artists. That was actually the last session that Eddie did. He went to England shortly after that," said Allison. "Eddie was just a great guitar player and a good rocker. *Summertime Blues* is one of my all-time favourites."

All in all, quite a varied line-up of musicians shared recording studios and bandstands with Eddie Cochran over the course of his tragically truncated career. ✶

Eddie's Journey: A Fan's Pilgrimage

In the summer of 2019, long-time Eddie Cochran fan Dave James set off on a journey-of-a-lifetime to follow in the footsteps of his musical hero

WORDS BY **VINCE EAGER**

The year was 1959 and Eddie Cochran had co-written and recorded a song that, two decades later, would determine the future and lifestyle of one Dave James of Coventry in England. At age 10, music was fast becoming an integral part of Dave's life when he discovered the Sex Pistols' recording of *Somethin' Else*. Following his efforts to discover more about the song, his uncle had bought him his first Eddie Cochran album which featured the original, and far superior, version. Over the coming months David became obsessed with Eddie's music, prompting him to buy a Hofner Committee guitar in order to try and emulate his new-found hero.

During the following years Dave's appetite for Eddie's lifestyle and music prompted his father Bob to support him in his quest. It wasn't long before Dave formed his own group, The Eager Beavers. His father contacted promoters and bookers nationwide in order to get the group work and it culminated in them being booked for three Eddie Cochran festivals in Chippenham, the town where Eddie's fatal crash took place in 1960.

During Dave's 20-year tenure with the band, Bob managed to make contact with Sharon Sheeley, Eddie's girlfriend and co-writer of various Eddie and Ricky Nelson recordings. Always keen to learn more about his hero, Dave kept in touch with Sharon to the extent that she invited him to visit her in California, but Dave being a happily married man thought better and the visit never materialised.

OVER THE COMING MONTHS DAVID BECAME OBSESSED WITH EDDIE'S MUSIC

Following a successful two decades as The Eager Beavers, Dave reassessed his situation and took time out during which he purchased what had been his dream for many years: a Gretsch 6120, Eddie's favourite guitar. It wasn't long before he got itchy fingers and formed 6120, his new group.

2019 was the year in which Dave and his wife Jacqui celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. Dave's father Bob, along with Dave and Jacqui's children, Tom and Hanna, wanted to give them something very special to celebrate the occasion; unbeknownst to Dave and Jacqui a pilgrimage to follow in Eddie's footsteps was planned.

On 4 June, 2019 Dave and Jacqui set off from Heathrow. Their first stop would be Albert Lea in Minnesota, Eddie's birthplace, and then onto California and Eddie's final resting place.

The following is part of the visual diary Dave made for the readers of *Vintage Rock* in memory of Eddie.



Dave James fell in love with Eddie's music at an early age

Albert Lea, Minnesota

First up, Eddie's birthplace...



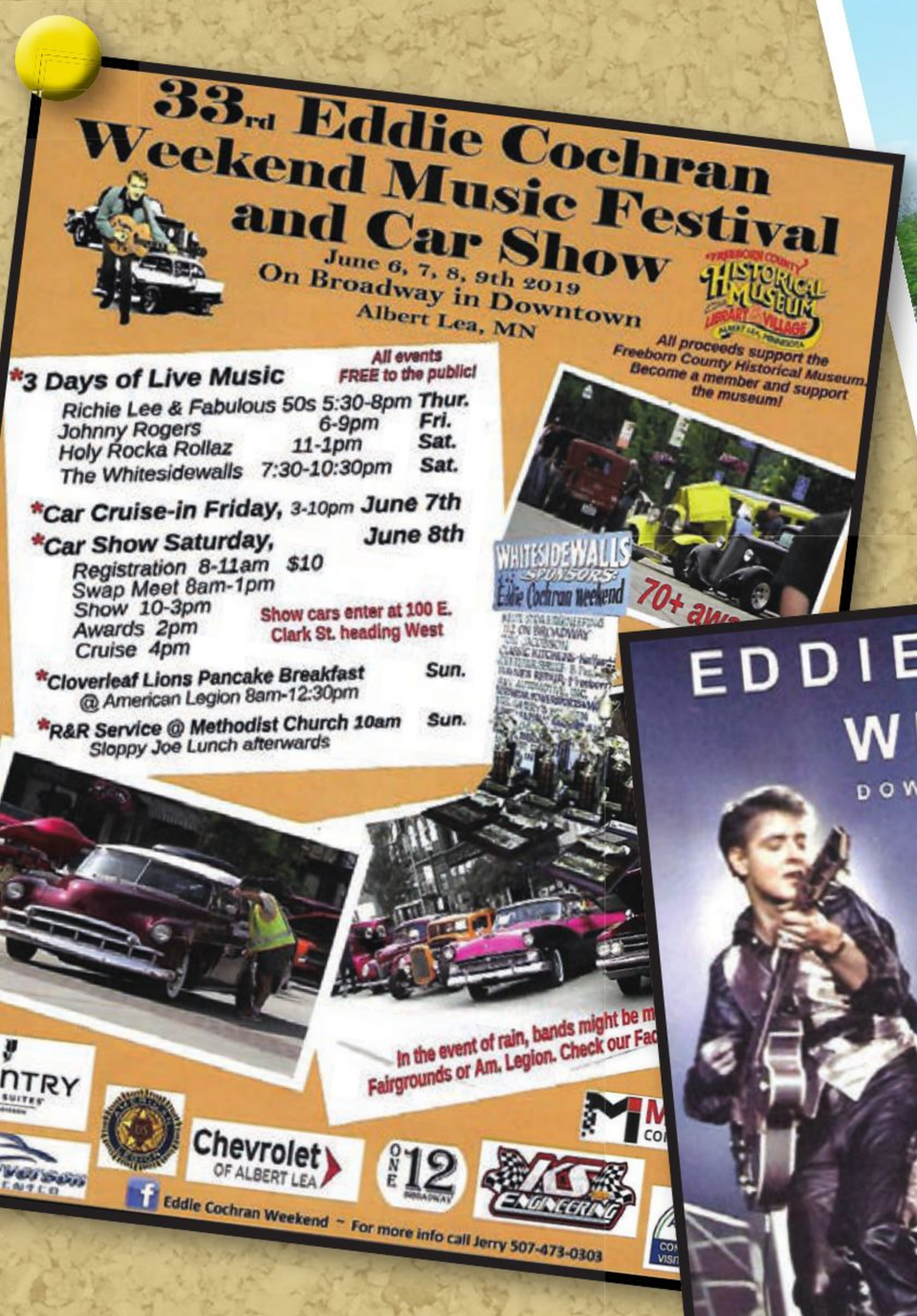
Eddie's family home was in Charles Street and although the house has been long since demolished there is a special memorial to him



Every June Albert Lea hosts The Eddie Cochran Weekend in the city's downtown area



Eddie dropped out of high school to become a professional musician







The annual Eddie Cochran Weekend is organised by Jerry Monson and Tom Jacobson and usually runs from a Thursday evening through till Sunday lunchtime every June

The hospital in Albert Lea where Eddie was born is still there today

Freeborn County Museum has an area dedicated to Eddie. Here, Dave stands next to the outfit worn by Eddie at 1960's *NME* Poll Winners party at Wembley Empire

Shortly after arriving on 5 June Dave met up with Terry Cole, a close childhood friend of Eddie's

7 June was extra-special as Dave and Jacqui had the pleasure of meeting Patricia Hickey, Eddie's sister (centre)

The Eddie Cochran Weekend not only attracts Cochran fans, it's also a must for classic car enthusiasts

The house of Eddie's schoolfriend, Johnnie Berry Raines

Downey and Bell Gardens, California

On to Los Angeles...!



Eddie's first house located on Gage Street in Bell Gardens



Eddie started at Bell Garden School when he was 13



While at school Eddie met Connie 'Guybo' Smith. Connie was to become Eddie's bass player, touring extensively with him and featuring on many of Eddie's recordings

On 13 June Dave and Jacqui were collected from their hotel by Con and taken to Eddie's final resting place at Forest Lawn Cemetery

Southgate Auditorium – the site of Eddie's first 'proper' gig

The American Legion Hall is where Eddie's career started to take off, with him using it to play and practise. The Hall still holds an Eddie Cochran night there every month





Still standing in Buena Circle, Bell Gardens, is the home Eddie bought for his family not long before he started touring the UK

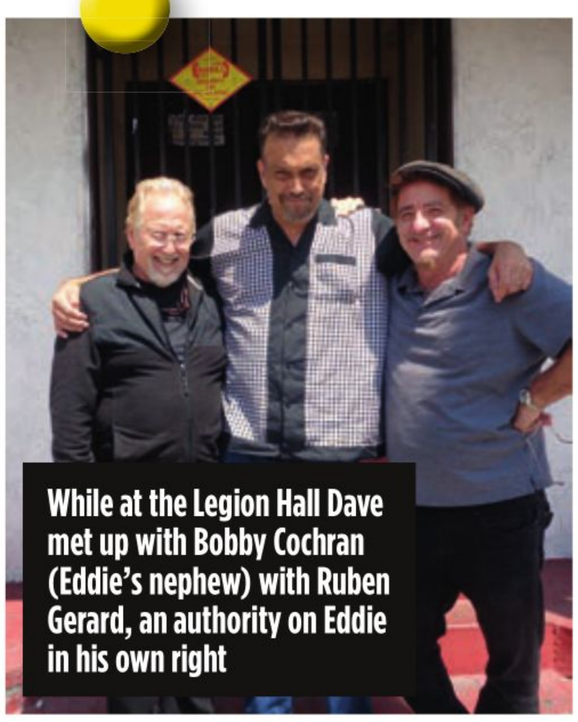


Connie still has his original musical equipment, including both his double bass and electric bass along with his amp



Posing with Con's bass guitar!





While at the Legion Hall Dave met up with Bobby Cochran (Eddie's nephew) with Ruben Gerard, an authority on Eddie in his own right



Downey is home to the oldest operating McDonald's, often frequented by Eddie and Connie. It was built in 1953 and has kept its original look



THE EDDIE COCHRAN MEMORIAL ALBUM

Hastily retitled and released as a tribute following Eddie's death at the age of just 21, this long-player features four of his trademark hits. Join us for a closer look...

WORDS BY **JACK WATKINS**



GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY

In February 1959, Eddie Cochran walked into the Gold Star recording studios in Hollywood to cut a new track called *Three Stars*. The song's simple, sentimental lyrics had been penned by a local DJ, Tommy Donaldson, shortly after the tragic death in a plane crash of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper. Distressed listeners had been calling up Donaldson's radio show after he had announced the accident and the DJ had been so shocked by the raw emotions expressed that he wrote the lines almost immediately after he came off air.

However, the experience of making the recording proved painful for Cochran. He counted Holly and Valens as friends, and after a few takes he left the studio in tears. Ultimately, his record label Liberty felt his version of the song was unreleasable, and it was left in the can, a composite of the takes only emerging some years later.

Listening to *Three Stars* today makes for a slightly eerie experience. It's not a great song, and Cochran, never a strong balladeer, is certainly not on top form – but a chill runs down the spine at the realisation that only 14 months later, Cochran himself would be joining those "three new stars brightly shining forth" in the heavens, after his death in a road accident while touring Britain alongside Gene Vincent.

It's often been written that, at the time of his death at the age of 21 in April 1960, Cochran was merely a middling sort of rock star in his native America, his level of commercial success several rungs below rock'n'roll icons like Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Little Richard; it was only in the tragic manner of his passing that he became an icon, a rock'n'roll James Dean, leaving us while he was still young and beautiful.

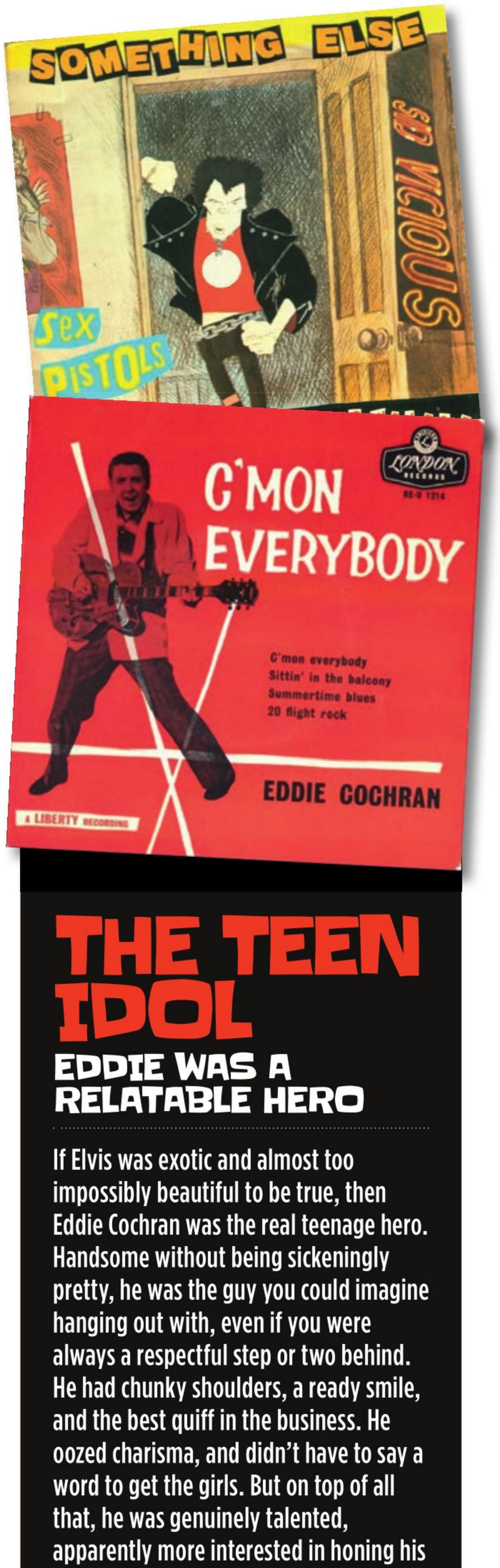
But already on that tragic British tour his following had developed to hero-worship levels, and posthumous releases of his material found a ready market. Not least of these was the *The Eddie Cochran Memorial Album*, released on Decca's London label, the UK distribution arm for Liberty, in September 1960, which climbed to No.9 on the album chart in a matter of weeks.

Originally set for release by Liberty as *12 Of His Biggest Hits* prior to Cochran's death, it's more than a fair round-up of his output, featuring a lot of his notable chart entries and some material from the vaults. True, it's not faultless, and omits gems no later compilation of Eddie's best would leave out, like the charming early Liberty singles *Sittin' In The Balcony*, *Drive-In Show* and *Twenty Flight Rock*, not to mention *Completely Sweet*, *Nervous Breakdown*, *Weekend* and *Rock'n'Roll Blues*. But as an overview of the artist's attempts to make it as a major chart player, it's a good one, with hints of his love of country music, and the blues guitar skills which would have BB King tell of how it was Cochran who was "the only white artist who could play the music with any skill or feeling".

MOST IMPORTANTLY, HOWEVER, *The Eddie Cochran Memorial Album* contains a quartet of songs with which he will forever be associated – *Summertime Blues*, *C'mon Everybody*, *Somethin' Else* and *Three Steps To Heaven*. *Summertime Blues* was actually the song that rescued Cochran's recording career after a stuttering start. It helped define him as a street poet of a very good-humoured form of teenage angst and boredom, much as Chuck Berry's songs like *Schooldays* and *Rock 'n' Roll Music* had done for him. It also set the rhythmically-driven focus of many of his classic tracks – somewhat surprising given his skills as a guitarist, which had enabled him to carve out a considerable niche as a versatile session man for other recording artists.

Although only released as the flipside to *Love Again*, written for Cochran by Sharon Sheeley, with whom he'd later be romantically associated, *Summertime Blues* quickly out-performed that A-side on its US release in June 1958. It's easy to see why: *Love Again* was a likeable if stolid ballad, typical of a lot of the material Cochran had been recording as Liberty uncertainly tried to market him as a crooner-cum-rocker, an uneasy mix of Pat Boone and Elvis.

On *Summertime Blues*, however, written by Cochran with the help of his long-time manager Jerry Capehart, he at last found his range. Perfectly suited to his deep raspy voice, which sounded older than his 19 years, the words made faintly satirical jibes at politicians and parents, but the key was the stop-time syncopated beat, with



EDDIE WAS A RELATABLE HERO

If Elvis was exotic and almost too impossibly beautiful to be true, then Eddie Cochran was the real teenage hero. Handsome without being sickeningly pretty, he was the guy you could imagine hanging out with, even if you were always a respectful step or two behind. He had chunky shoulders, a ready smile, and the best quiff in the business. He oozed charisma, and didn't have to say a word to get the girls. But on top of all that, he was genuinely talented, apparently more interested in honing his musicianship than in the trappings of fame. So where other 50s teen idols were ultimately destined to fade, despite his short life, Cochran has remained an inspiration to subsequent, similarly intense and talented performers. Brian Setzer and Darrel Higham are among great modern day rock'n'roll exponents who were originally fired up by the magic of Eddie Cochran, and the image of him hunched over his beloved Gretsch 6120 guitar.

SOMETHIN' ELSE WAS TOUGHER - IN LATER YEARS COCHRAN WOULD BE DUBBED "GRANDFATHER OF PUNK"



Eight tracks from *Memorial Album* were released as singles, with *Three Steps To Heaven* appearing as a B-side

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

the great Californian session drummer Earl Palmer leading the way, along with Cochran strumming a Martin D18 guitar, and Connie "Guybo" Smith on electric bass, with overdubbed handclaps from Capehart and, possibly, Sharon Sheeley. The song gave Cochran his first Top 10 hit in the Billboard Hot 100.

As was typical of the period, when Cochran and Capehart strove for a follow-up they tried to repeat the formula, but *C'mon Everybody* with its more outgoing exhortation to party still managed to be distinctive in its own right. If it had just sounded like a repeat of *Summertime Blues* then it wouldn't have lasted as long as it has. In fact, to begin with, the song had the refrain "let's get together" repeated at the end of each verse. However, as the track was played back in the recording studio, everyone agreed something was lacking, and a later take – featuring a nifty insertion of the call "c'mon everybody" in place of "let's get together" – seemed to do the trick.

Once again, Cochran was on acoustic guitar, with Guybo Smith on electric bass guitar providing the memorably driving, suspenseful intro. Instead of handclaps, this time Capeheart's contribution to the syncopated rhythm was to shake a tambourine. Surprisingly, this good-time song only reached No.35 on the American charts, but when released in the UK in 1959, it climbed to No.6.

If these two unforgettable songs sealed for eternity the image of Cochran as a handsomely bequiffed teen pack leader in an innocent, untroubled land where it's always summertime, the guys drive big cars and the girls chew bubblegum, *Somethin' Else* was tougher – so much so that in later years Cochran would be dubbed "grandfather of punk" after the Sex Pistols had a massive hit with their recording of the song in 1979.

The number was penned by Sheeley and Bob Cochran, Eddie's used car salesman brother. Cochran described how he overdubbed himself playing the throbbing bassline, while either Earl Palmer or Gene Riggio, from his road band, thrashed away on the drums. Once again the lyric was a spot-on encapsulation of the obsessions of the young all-American male of the late 50s – yet, remarkably, the song was not a smash. As Julie Mundy and Darrel Higham wrote in their book *Don't Forget Me: The Eddie Cochran Story*, maybe it was just too hard-hitting for 1959.

By contrast, *Three Steps To Heaven* reflected a more tender side of Cochran's character. If his male fans tend to favour *Somethin' Else*, females might have a weakness for the later track. Issued three months after his death, it became his biggest hit. Of course, the reference to "heaven" by then had an awful irony, but the track really traded on Cochran's self-assured manner, a dude with a truly magnetic appeal for the



Suave as ever, Eddie kicks back while rocking in the United States

ladies. Doo-woppy backing vocals and a Spanish-sounding acoustic guitar combined to deliver an upbeat soft rock ditty which fitted the poppier musical climate of 1960, as out-and-out rock'n'roll was no longer in favour, chartwise.

OTHER TRACKS ON *The Eddie Cochran Memorial Album* illustrate different facets of his music. While *Teenage Heaven*, released as the follow-up single to *C'Mon Everybody*, seems pretty unmemorable now, despite being another essay in teenage priorities, *Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie*, which had been released in early 1958, is much more interesting. Up to that point, Cochran's Liberty releases had been quite light in tone, but on this song you hear him striving for something much more frantic and hard-edged, as if trying to capture an element of the breathless energy of Little Richard. Earl Palmer whips up the pace on the drums, while Cochran's electric guitar is heard to good effect. On *Hallelujah, I Love Her So*, a Ray Charles song, you get a flavour of Cochran's blues side, though he was apparently horrified when producer Snuff Garrett overdubbed the strings.

Two other tracks remind listeners of the fact that Cochran had started out as an honest-to-goodness country performer (had he lived, doubtless he would have returned to that field much as the likes of Ricky Nelson and Jerry Lee Lewis would do). *Boll Weevil Song* came out as the B-side to *Somethin' Else*, and it's a charming adaptation of an old folk number. Cochran added the line: "Well, if anybody should ask you who it was who sang this song / Say a guitar picker from a-Oklahoma City with a pair of blue jeans on just a-lookin' for a home". Although he had been born in Minnesota and had grown up in Bell Gardens, a suburb of Los Angeles, the reference played on his family's dustbowl Okie origins.

Cut Across Shorty has another entertaining lyric and alternates its rhythmic feel between a rockin' beat for the chorus, and a hillbilly two beat on the verses. Recorded in Hollywood in January 1960, ahead of that final, fateful British tour, it's a joyous reminder of the days when, before he decided to become a rock singer, with his friend and namesake Hank Cochran, Eddie Cochran was cutting a rug on the country circuit of the American West Coast. ✶

SOMETHIN' ELSE WAS TOUGHER - IN LATER YEARS COCHRAN WOULD BE DUBBED "GRANDFATHER OF PUNK"



TRACK LISTING

SIDE 1

C'mon Everybody
Three Steps To Heaven
Cut Across Shorty
Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie
Pocketful Of Hearts
Hallelujah, I Love Her So
Don't Ever Let Me Go

SIDE 2

Summertime Blues
Teresa
Somethin' Else
Pretty Girl
Teenage Heaven
Boll Weevil Song

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

VINTAGE ROCK PRESENTS

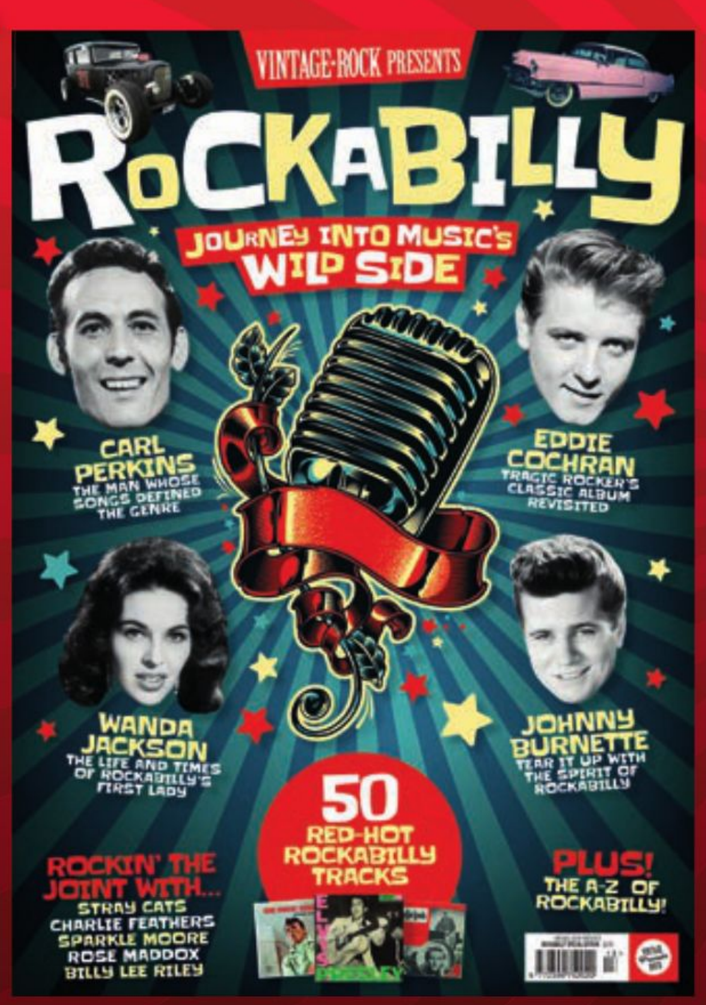
SPECIAL EDITIONS

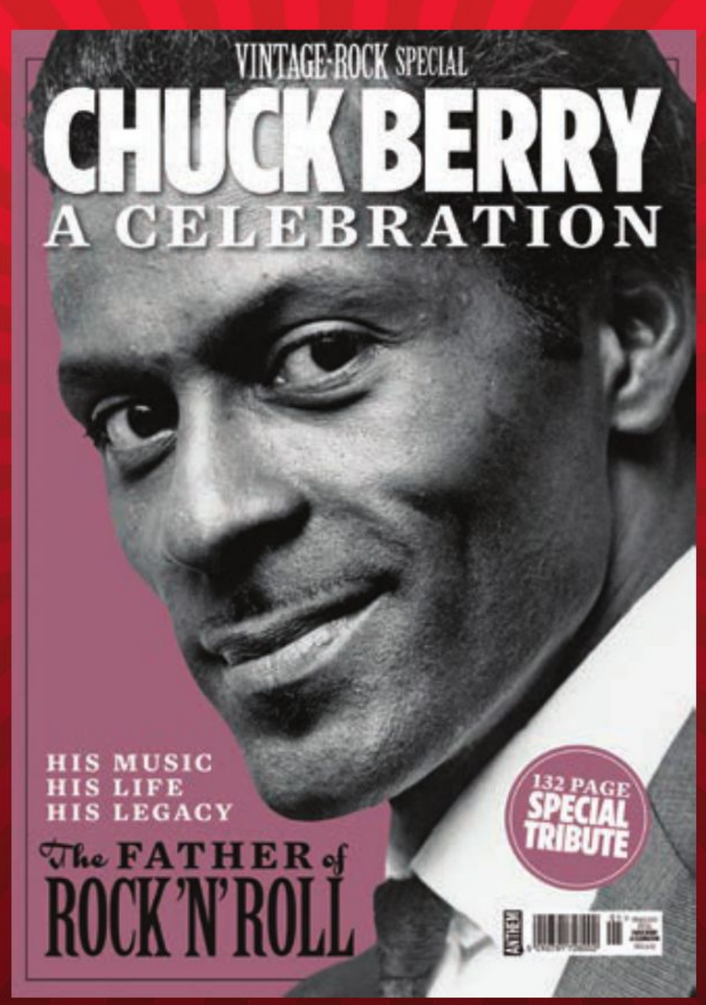
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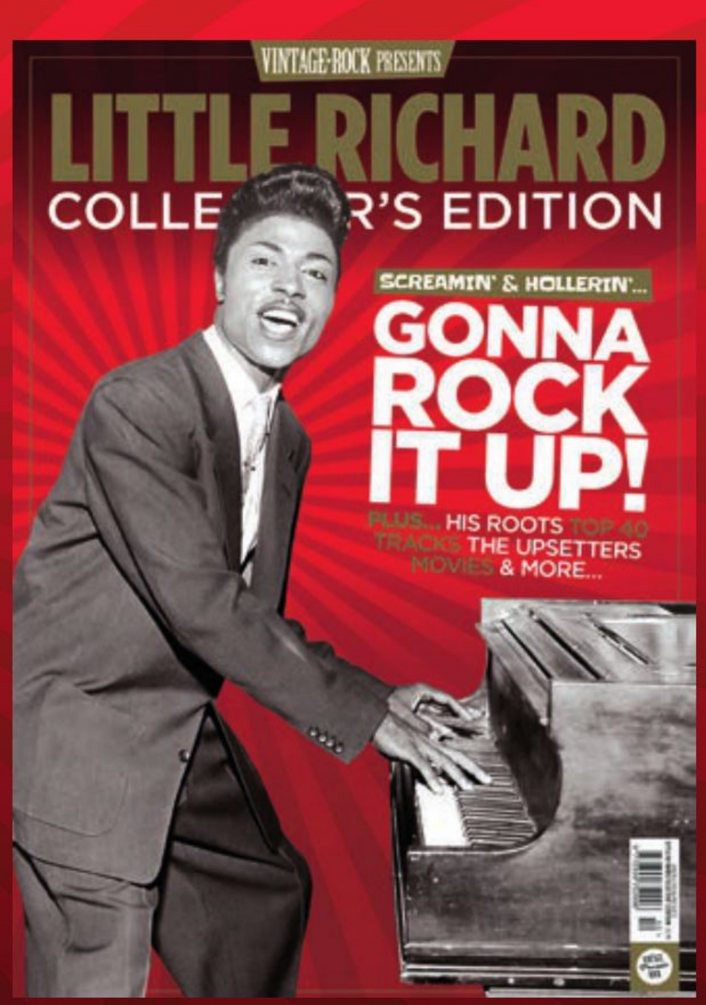












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THE WORD ON EDDIE

Discerning biographies, page-turners from the road and some unique compositions in between – *Vintage Rock* sorts the Top 10 Cochran-related reads fit for any fan...

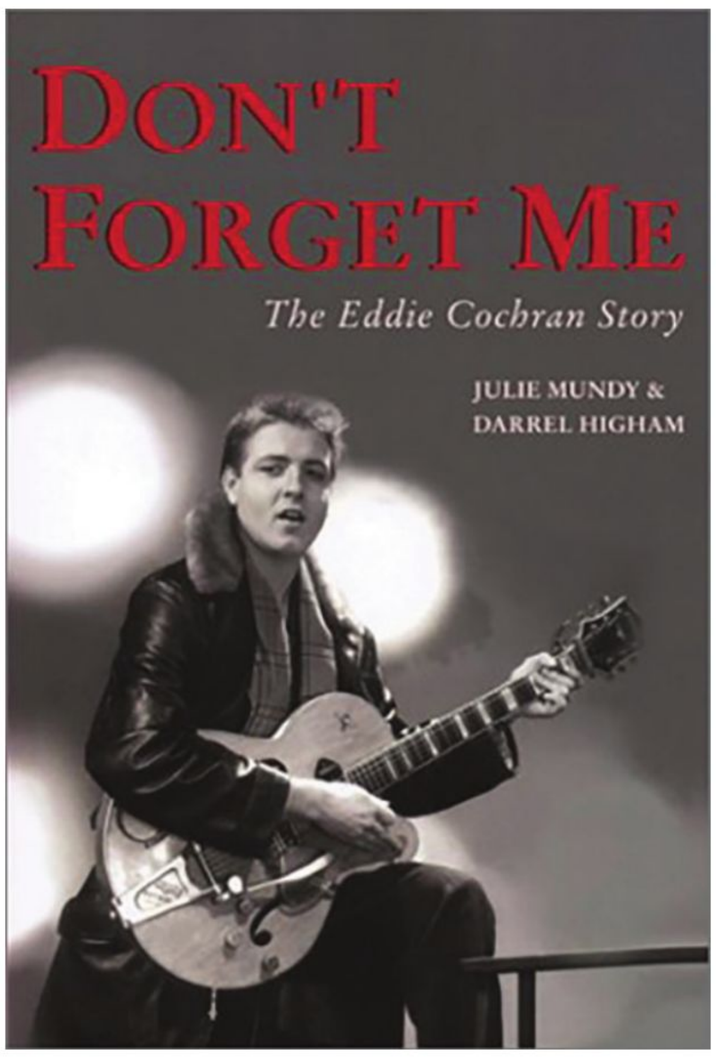
WORDS BY **JULIE BURNS**

THE DEFINITIVE BIO

DON'T FORGET ME

JULIE MUNDY AND DARREL HIGHAM

Remarkably, though the first biography on the singer, it still stands as the best. Coming from two British Eddie experts, you can expect the real deal. (Guitarist Darrel stayed with the Cochran family and played with Eddie's road band). The tone throughout walks a great line between restrained respect and objective review. A thorough narrative takes in Eddie's formative teenage years playing lead guitar and singing harmony with Hank Cochran in hillbilly duo The Cochran Brothers, before becoming one of the most in-demand guitarists on America's West Coast scene, and maturing into a multi-faceted talent. *Don't Forget Me* clarifies how Eddie conquered various musical genres – country and western and the blues – before finding fame in rock'n'roll. It also intrinsically details his last tour. Adding further colour and unique insight are contributions from Cochran's family, friends and fellow musicians – plus the added bonus of 100 rare photographs!

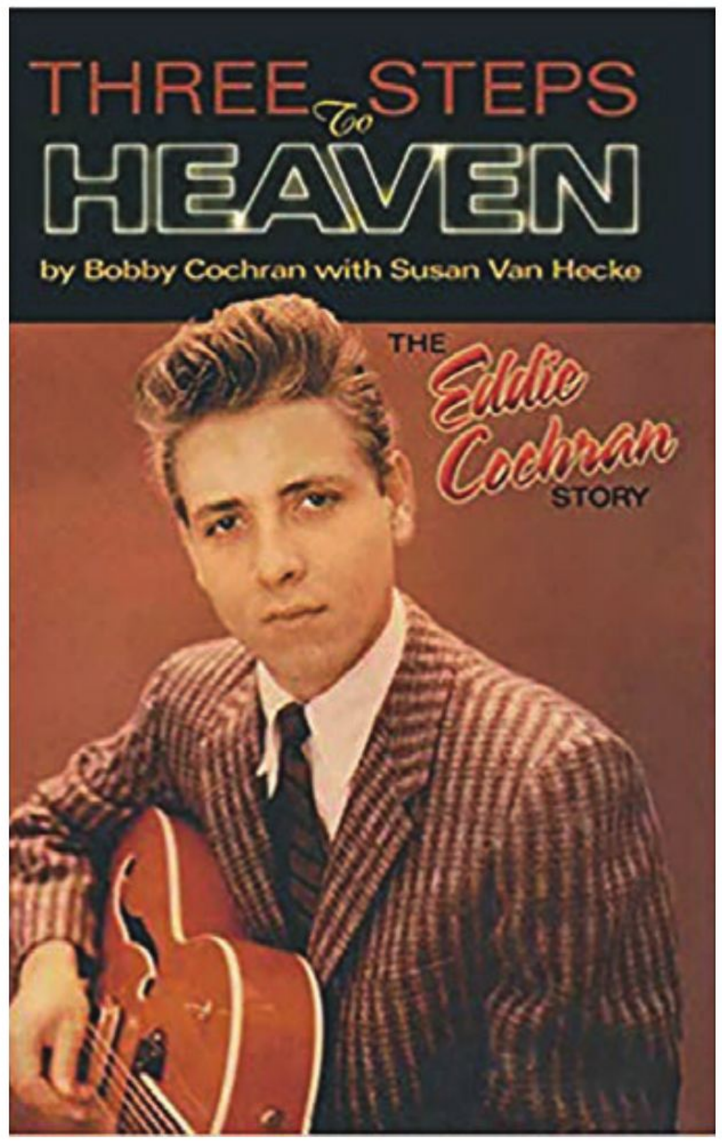


THE FAMILY MEMOIR

THREE STEPS TO HEAVEN: THE EDDIE COCHRAN STORY

BOBBY COCHRAN WITH SUSAN VAN HECKE

The only relative to have written about Eddie, Bobby Cochran does so as both his nephew and as an experienced guitarist in his own right. *Rolling Stone* considered it "a biog that benefits from memory and family lore as well as interviews and research." Though Bobby was only 10 when Eddie



died, we get a privileged glimpse behind the scenes into Cochran's background and family life. The book offers a well-rounded portrait of Eddie as a person rather than an idol, and it uniquely reveals insights on his musicianship. We find out much about Bobby's own journey helping in his father Bob's recording studio (and escaping the expectation that he would become 'another Eddie'). Extraneous to Eddie? Maybe. But *Three Steps to Heaven* also paints an honest picture of how it feels to follow in the family footsteps of a music star on your own terms. This may be of special interest to budding rock guitarists...

THE GIRLFRIEND'S ANGLE

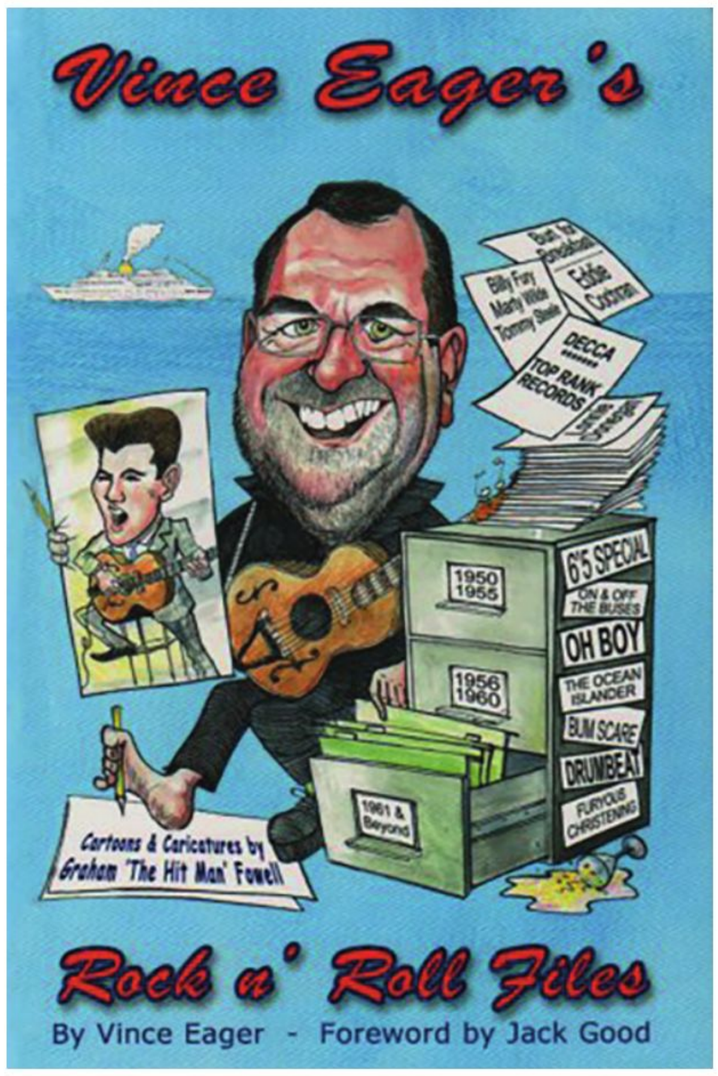
SUMMERTIME BLUES

SHARON SHEELEY

You couldn't really invent Sharon's incredible story. Often misportrayed as Eddie's tag-along other half, Sharon was already a big songwriting success, aged just 16 – against the (male-dominated industry) odds. In Hollywood, she lived the life most other girls her age could only dream about. Growing up in the carefree, heady days of the 50s alongside the birth of rock'n'roll, while writing hits for such as Ricky Nelson, plus dating Don Everly and Elvis, are all vividly related. Then she met Eddie. Though not overly informative on his life, *Summertime Blues* offers wry revelations and explains how writing for Eddie turned to romance. At times it's laugh-out-loud funny, though the moving sequence of events leading up to Eddie's fatal crash, in which Sharon survived, is unflinchingly depicted. Above all, it's a tale of hope after loss, and a heartfelt tribute to Cochran through the interesting prism of his girlfriend's life.



AT TIMES IT'S LAUGH-OUT-LOUD FUNNY, THOUGH THE MOVING SEQUENCE OF EVENTS LEADING UP TO EDDIE'S FATAL CRASH, IN WHICH SHARON SURVIVED, IS UNFLINCHINGLY DEPICTED



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A POP PEER'S TALE

VINCE EAGER'S ROCK'N'ROLL FILES

VINCE EAGER

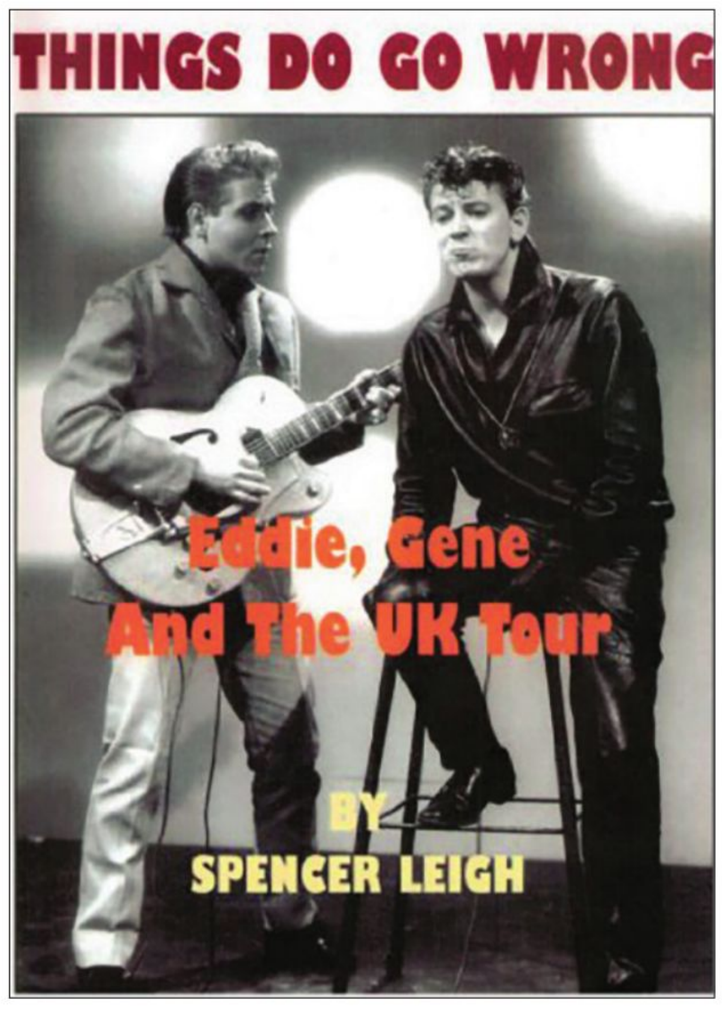
Vince, aka Roy Taylor, first came to attention in the late 50s as a leading figure in Jack Good's groundbreaking *Oh Boy!* TV series, and was one of the Larry Parnes stable of singers. Of all the artists appearing as support on the 1960 tour, Vince (along with his friend Billy Fury) seemed to have gotten closest to Cochran. When he wasn't ferrying the singer around, he was taking him incognito to a local party, or back home to his mum's house for some much-needed apple pie. Their time as buddies together was cut painfully short, but that is just one aspect of the book as a whole and – significantly – it is an authentic account. Eager's recall of the early days of rock'n'roll is a riot of a read. An entertaining, fun and informative chronicle of the 1950s, and beyond, written like you're in the pub with Vince himself.

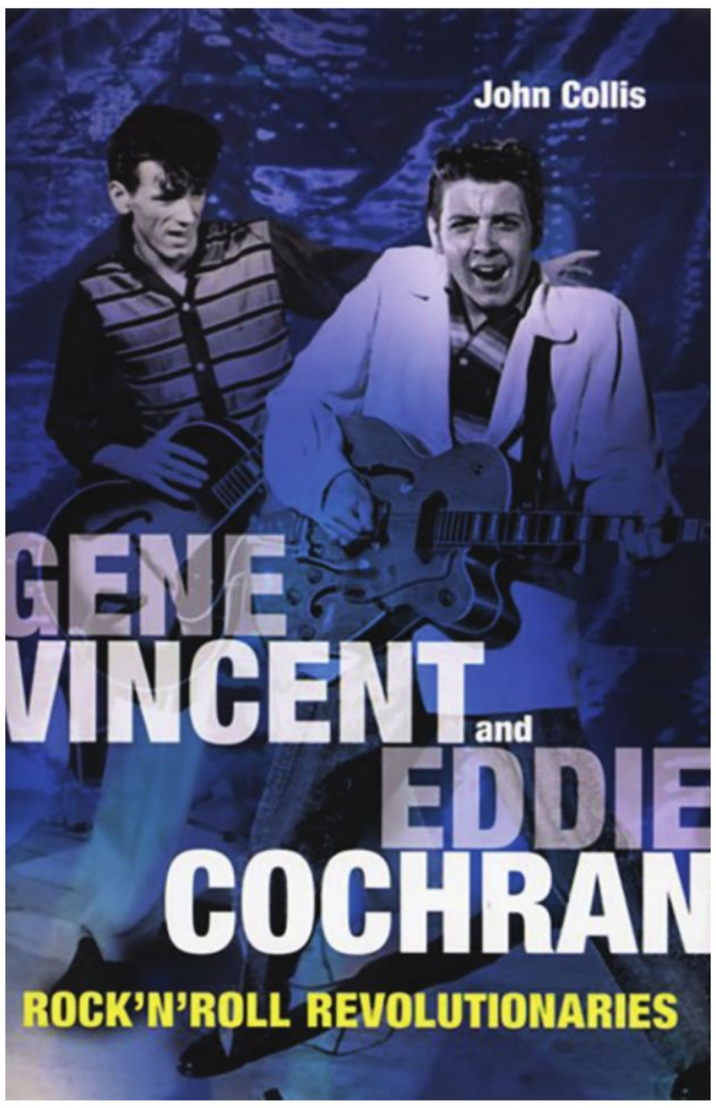
THE TOUR TRUTH

THINGS DO GO WRONG: EDDIE, GENE AND THE UK TOUR

SPENCER LEIGH AND JOHN FIRMINGER

This slim document is itching to be made into a screenplay. Altogether it's one great big cultural eye-opener. In the UK, where rock'n'roll was hugely popular, but visits by its American stars uncommon, Eddie Cochran's 1960 tour represented a massive coup. For the US record labels, where rock'n'roll was seen as renegade and on the wane, sending their stars to Europe was viewed as a means of generating record sales and options back home. Testimonies from those who were on the tour offer a strong taste of what really went on, both on and off stage. While Gene Vincent performed well but was in decline, Cochran, in contrast, was on the up. British backing musicians and bill-sharing Larry Parnes acts plainly adored him. Glittering memories are delivered by the likes of Georgie Fame, Tony Sheridan, Vince Eager and Joe Brown. Touring the UK in the 50s must have been a torment, and there's a great sense of 'backwards' Britain back then, with its lack of amenities – and motorways.





ODE TO TWO HEROES

GENE VINCENT AND EDDIE COCHRAN: ROCK'N'ROLL REVOLUTIONARIES

JOHN COLLIS

In a retelling of the UK tour from the perspective of its two main protagonists Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochran, Collis puts his subjects firmly under the microscope. Compiled as a result of research for an original stage show which never quite made it to London's West End, it's suitably compelling in book form. (Collis also co-authored an earlier volume *Race With The Devil: The Legend Of Eddie Cochran And Gene Vincent*, which led to this reversioning.) In addition, the book contains an interesting array of press comments, but more pertinently, it details Eddie's pre-tour back-story and tales of Gene's before and after life. Collis contrasts and compares the backgrounds of both men, and considers their immense impact and musical legacy. The effect they exerted on British musicians and audiences alike cannot be overstated. Collis locks it down and creates a sound snapshot of a defining moment in British popular culture.

ESSENTIAL LISTINGS

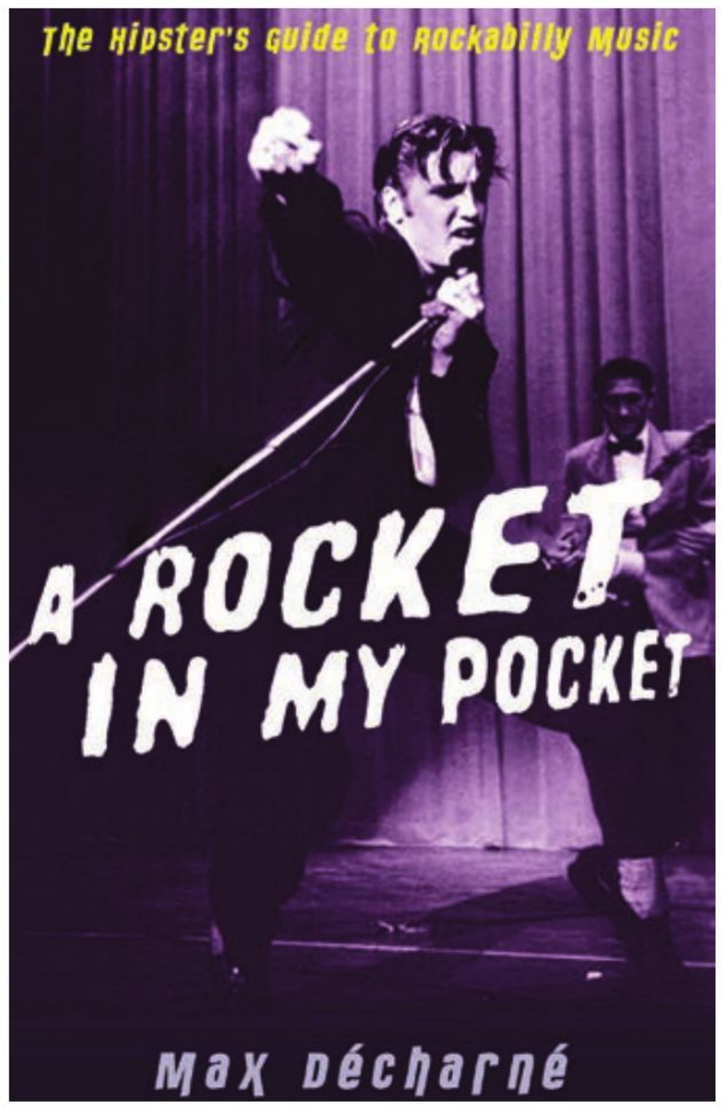
AMERICAN ROCK'N'ROLL: THE UK TOURS 1956-72

IAN WALLIS

As the first serious attempt to document every visit to the UK by American (and Canadian) rock'n'roll artists, this anthology shows at a glance who played where, what and when. In Eddie's case, of course, it's the UK tour dates plus TV appearances from *Boy Meets Girls* to *Lunch Box*. That's not all. Wallis tracks the tour and details how Eddie and Gene came across throughout. Including full itineraries and support acts to show reports, it's also illustrated with original programmes, vintage ads and evocative black and white live shots (some previously unpublished). Add to that in-depth indexes of venues and artists, songs and album titles, as well as film and show details, and it becomes an indispensable reference book. Having played a part in the organisation of several European tours for American acts, and as joint promoter of Reading's annual Rocker's Reunion Party, this is a labour of love from Wallis, while for fans it's a much-needed gap filler.



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THE REBEL YELL

A ROCKET IN MY POCKET: THE HIPSTER'S GUIDE TO ROCKABILLY MUSIC

MAX DÉCHARNÉ

Rockers! Don't be put off by the dreaded 'hipster' word in the title. After all, this concise, yet comprehensive – and compelling – history of rockabilly comes recommended by notable rock'n'roll purist and *Now Dig This* author Trevor Cajiao. As one Amazon reviewer noted: "An authoritative guide to the music from someone who has clearly lived the lifestyle." Indeed, with his lively turn of phrase, author Décharné first got into the rockabilly scene in the late 70s (and has fronted the band The Flaming Stars since 1995). His enthusiastic knowledge outlines both the originals and the revivalists. True legends of rockabilly such as Cochran are given fair comment, and their place in the musical firmament fully explained. Whether you're new to rockabilly or rather religious about it, this book will surely rock your interest, while increasing your appreciation of the music's Cochran-related aspects – from studio production to echo effects.

THE GOLDEN YEARS

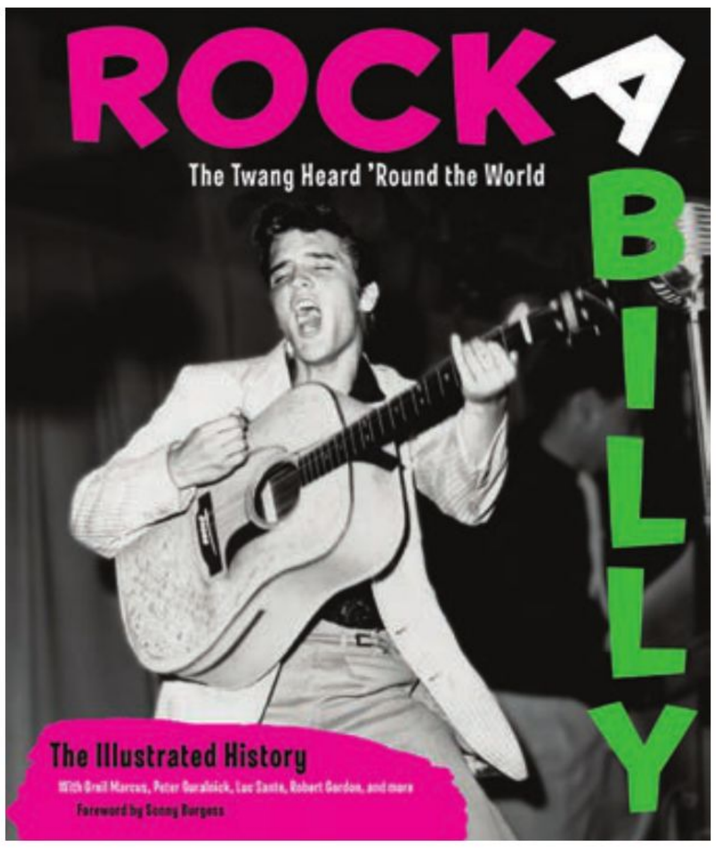
ROCKABILLY: THE TWANG HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD

EDITOR MICHAEL DREGNI

Though its section on Eddie is admittedly



slim, with this book it's the context that counts. If you're after a handsome, collectable 'concept' book that's a celebration of everything rockabilly – including Eddie's part in it – then this is it. Lavishly illustrated throughout, the EC pages feature bill posters and memorabilia to snippets about his '57 Australian tour.



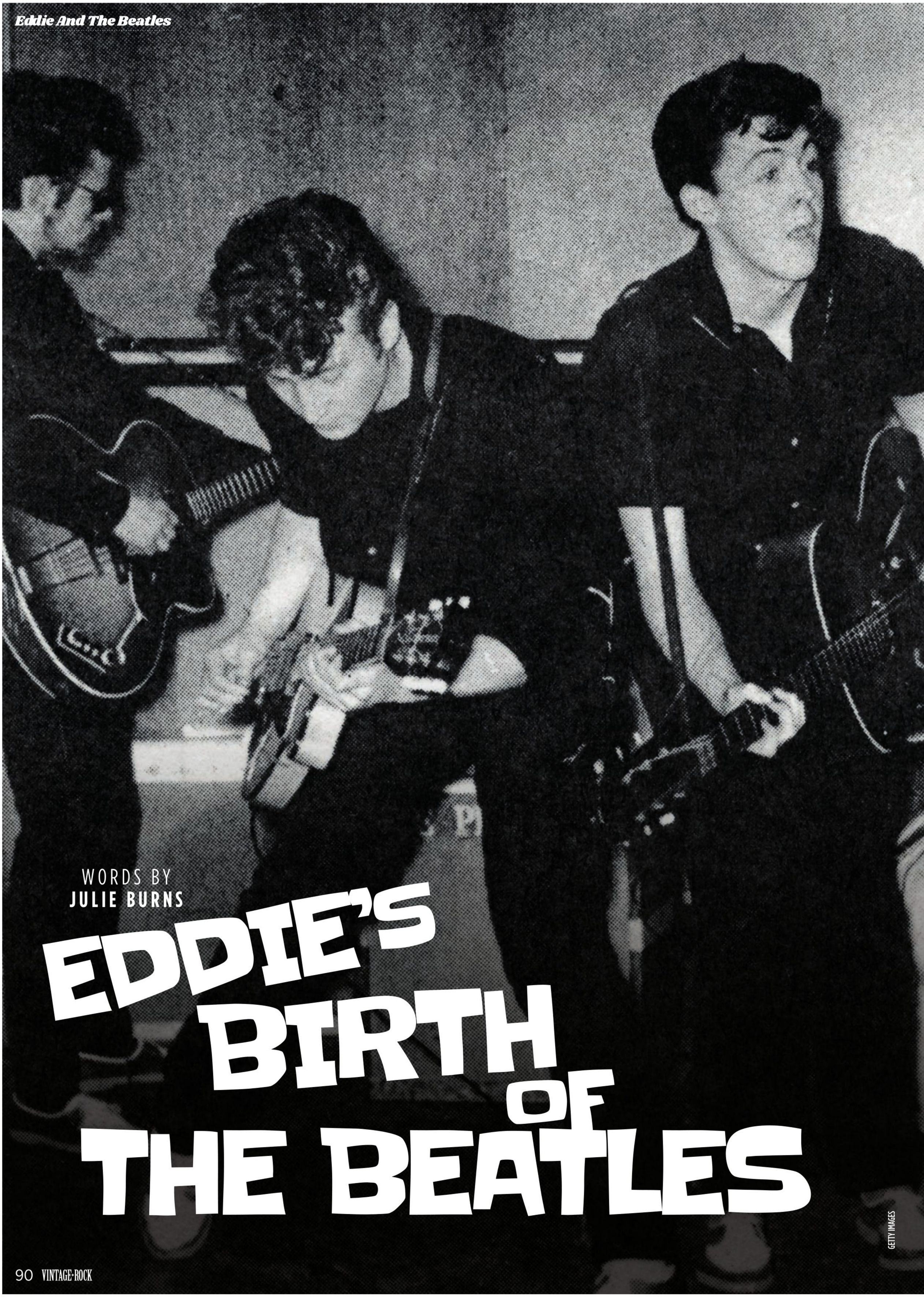
Some chapters obliquely cross-reference Cochran with coverage of early recording techniques and profiles of instruments such as the famous Gretsch 6120. With a foreword by Sonny Burgess, it also contains essays by luminaries including Greil Marcus and Peter Guralnick, plus retro-loving musicians such as Robert Gordon. Eddie is cemented amongst a pantheon of rockabilly greats here, from the golden age of '55-'59. In addition, the book goes on to show how those original hot rockers inspired today's worldwide rockabilly revival. A comprehensive compendium published by Voyageur Press that's as cool and atmospheric as the music it encompasses.

BOOK-END THE MUSIC

SOMETHIN' ELSE: THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION (2009)

BEAR FAMILY

And now for something different. Even if you already own the musical material that this box set contains (such as Rockstar Records' previous releases of similar output), this is probably worth the splurge for the beautifully produced book alone. As well as curating the (260!) tracks, the late, great rock'n'roll radio buff Stuart Colman produced a masterwork on Eddie Cochran and his life, not least in that 192-page tome that complements this deluxe LP-sized, 8CD box set. The killer selection of recordings aside (all vocal recordings by Eddie as a soloist and as part of The Cochran Brothers, plus select demos, outtakes, instrumentals, live tracks, session work and interviews), this glossy coffee-table hardback makes a great keepsake. Happily, it's as solid editorially as pictorially. Copy-wise, there's an extensive biography by Mr Colman, plus a painstaking discography. Images are rare and many, alongside hundreds of label and cover reproductions. A quality offering befitting its subject, from the always dependable independent label Bear Family. Perhaps the most covetable tribute to Cochran so far. ✶



WORDS BY
JULIE BURNS

EDDIE'S BIRTH OF THE BEATLES

GETTY IMAGES



The embryonic Beatles, with Johnny Hutch sitting in on drums

Not just an inspiration in his own era, Eddie Cochran would influence different genres of music to come. Most famously, he was instrumental in bringing the prototype Beatles together…

In the 50s, the difference between colourful, musically blooming America and drab, post-ration Britain was dramatic. Stateside, the latest and greatest rock'n'roll was shaping the nation's youth culture. The UK, meanwhile, was still emerging out of a more strait-laced swing era. The 'old guard' of musicians were, generally speaking, neither willing nor able to play the new rock'n'roll music. It took a lot of trial and error to even get to the first British touchstones: Tommy Steele and Terry Dene, and a swift swerve into skiffle. It was all a bit down-home and diluted.

More than 60 years after his heyday, *The Guinness Who's Who Of Fifties Music* credits Cochran as, "one of the greatest exponents of 'progressive' rock'n'roll". British musicians looked at such exotic rockers in awe, and soon caught onto him. As Professor of Music, Gordon Thompson, writes in his book *Please Please Me: Sixties British Pop, Inside Out*: "It would take American mentors to help the Brits find their mojo. Of the various candidates eligible for that status, few can rival Eddie Cochran."

Although much of the action was going on in London, musical inspiration was also sweeping Liverpool. Like many other teens of the time, Paul McCartney was greatly influenced by the exhilarating sight and sound of Eddie Cochran. Reminiscing in 1999 on the *Geoff Barker Rock'n'Roll* radio show, Paul said: "One of the people I loved in the early days was Eddie Cochran. Why we loved him was because he's such a ➡

George, John and Paul were all massive Eddie Cochran fans



GETTY IMAGES

good guitar player. A lot of the guys would just stand up and swing their guitars around. We looked to see if they could actually play. When you looked at Eddie, he could really play – and he was writing his stuff."

He went on, "Finally, a film came around – *The Girl Can't Help It*. One of my favourite moments was when we got to see the Eddie Cochran song *Twenty Flight Rock* – one of my really favourite songs from 1956. Why it remains special to me, I think, was that I had a friend called Ivan Vaughan – he was my best mate. He was from a place called Woolton, where I didn't go to much, it was a bit posh. He said he had a mate up there with a group. His mate was called John. He said he'd be playing shortly at the Woolton village fête, so he invited me along."

Without question, *Twenty Flight Rock* was the bridge that brought teenagers Paul McCartney and John Lennon together. In effect, the song was the link that would forge the most successful songwriting partnership of the 20th century. Paul confirmed this fact in *The Beatles Anthology* as well as to Barker.

To the latter, Paul recalled: "I remember clearly walking into the grounds of this open-air do, and on the back of a lorry the band was set up, and they were called The Quarrymen. They were singing a song called *Come Go With Me* and making up some of the words was John – John Lennon. Later, I went back to the church hall behind Woolton church and someone had a guitar and at some point I thought, 'I've got to have a go at this.' (What I had to do, being left-handed, was turn it upside down, because no one would ever let me change the strings). So I played *Twenty Flight Rock*, and the great thing was, I knew all the words to it... and this was true status. Anyone who knew all of the words to the thing was quids in. So I remember John looking at me as if saying, 'Wow, this guy's got something here.' I think that was actually my intro to The Beatles because a few days later, one of my mates, Pete, came cycling up to me... he said, 'Hey, they want you to join the group'. I said, 'Well, I'll have to think about it'. A couple of days later, I agreed. And there I was – on the road to fame!"



A Grundig reel-to-reel tape recorder, EMI tape and the programme for a performance by The Quarrymen at Woolton Parish Church in Liverpool on 6 July 1957. At this performance John Lennon met Paul McCartney and the rest is history...

LAUNCHING HIS IMPROMPTU

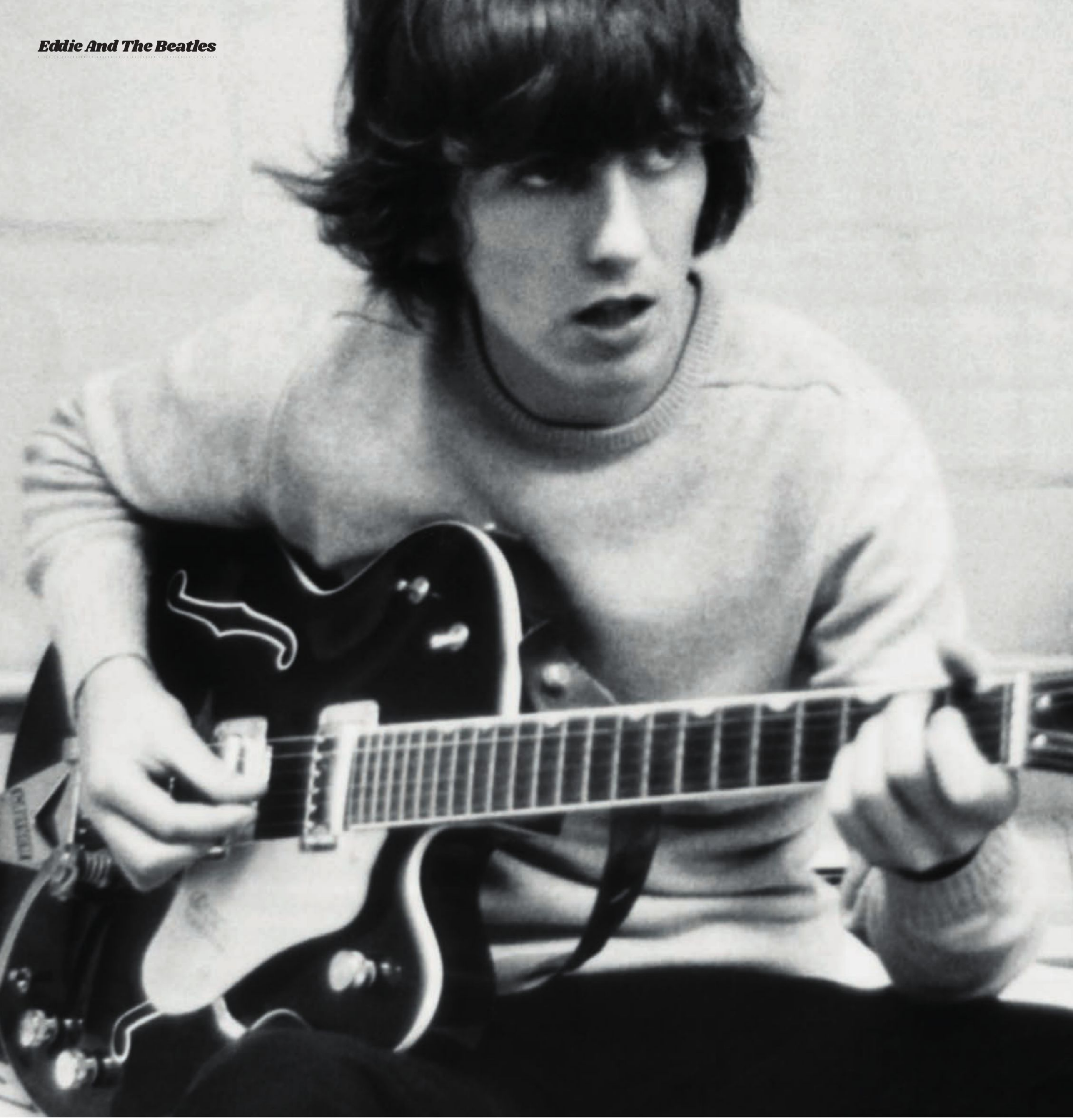
audition with Cochran's *Twenty Flight Rock* proved significant. More complex than anything in The Quarrymen's set, it sealed an historic deal. As David Hepworth writes in his book *Uncommon People*, "More than 60 years later, 6 July 1957 is still remembered for the consequences that flowed from that Liverpool meeting between two teenagers who were obsessed with rock'n'roll. For years afterwards, each was asked what had impressed him the most about the other. Lennon said he was struck by how well McCartney had managed to imitate the American acts. He knew McCartney was better than he was and realised he would never improve unless he played with somebody who was better. In his company they might be able to produce something worth hearing. For his part, McCartney said he was most impressed by Lennon's confidence, the way he adapted the songs he sang to include references to the name of the vicar. Together they could first of all copy things and then change those things in all sorts of interesting ways.' Certainly in their first 1957 Cavern appearances, and beyond, along with Chuck Berry and Little Richard, several Eddie Cochran numbers featured in their early rock'n'roll repertoire.

Then, in 1960, the Gene Vincent/Eddie Cochran tour hit Britain. On the first leg, both stars really rocked, but with his unexpected, exceptional guitarmanship, Eddie stood out. He fast became like catnip to many upcoming local musicians hungry for somethin' else. Marty Wilde's Wildcats, his main UK backing band, furthered their instrumental craft through Cochran, who happily taught them everything from string-bending to American styling. As they moved on to become session musicians and members of Cliff Richard's groundbreaking Shadows, they used what they had assimilated in Cochran's company to revolutionise British rock'n'roll.

EDDIE STOOD OUT AND FAST BECAME CATNIP TO MANY LOCAL MUSICIANS

PAUL MCCARTNEY NEVER got the chance to see Eddie perform live, but John and George did. Both were thrilled to witness Eddie playing locally in March 1960. Said George some years later: "I loved Eddie – quite apart from the fact that he then later came to England and I saw him. There is one moment that will always represent Eddie to me at the Liverpool Empire show that I saw. Maybe he did it every night, I don't know. It seemed spontaneous at the time. But he just finished a tune amidst the screaming and clapping. He stepped up to the mic and before he said something he just put both his hands back and pushed his hair back. This girl in the audience went 'Eddie!' And he said, 'Hi, honey!' Brilliant."

Soon, it seemed as if any would-be guitarist had acquired an Eddie-style ➡



Gretsch: if not his beloved 6120, then the models more in common. George Harrison was no different. The Beatles first performed together officially in 1960 – the lineup: John, Paul, George and Pete Best – at the Casbah Coffee Club, Liverpool. On 9 February 1961, the band debuted at The Cavern. As the club's showcase act from '61-'63, they would perform a total of 292 times. George played a black Gretsch Duo Jet, changing to a Gretsch Country Gentleman and Gretsch Tennessean, mid '63. (Lennon, incidentally, would later play a Gretsch 6120 for the 1966 *Paperback Writer* session).

The fledgling Beatles were familiar with the sound of R&B, thanks to the port of Liverpool being well placed for the dockers to ship records back to the city from the US. They favoured 'rhythmic rockers' such as Little Richard and Larry Williams; so when Cochran started his 1960 show with *What'd I Say*, a '59 barnstormer from Ray Charles, they took note, and integrated it into their act. Many musicians around then believe that the singer effectively brought the blues to mainstream Britain. The Beatles, as well as The Rolling Stones, soon adopted his bluesy trailblazing.

EDDIE, OF COURSE, sadly didn't live to see The Beatles. Despite his shock passing at the end of the first stretch of the 1960 tour, Larry Parnes recalled his comrade, a shaken Gene Vincent, back for the second leg, billed as an Eddie Cochran tribute. The void left by Cochran was filled by local acts – notably not The Beatles, as promoter Allan Williams did not consider them good enough. Instead, on what would be their first ever concert tour, John, Paul and George would tribute Eddie in Scotland. Having heard them in Liverpool, Larry Parnes booked them to back Johnny Gentle

GETTY IMAGES

THE BEATLES, AS WELL AS THE ROLLING STONES, SOON ADOPTED HIS BLUESY TRAILBLAZING



George Harrison remained a fan of Eddie's for the rest of his life

JUST LIKE EDDIE
THE BEATLES SING COCHRAN'S CLASSICS

TEENAGE HEAVEN
As featured in Eddie's third and final 1959 movie, *Go, Johnny Go!*, an early Beatles inclusion. Likewise its B-side *I Remember*.

SWEET LITTLE SIXTEEN
Eddie sang this Chuck Berry song in 1960 on UK TV show *Boy Meets Girls*. The same year, he also sang it on his British tour. The song was added to The Beatles' repertoire, using the same arrangement as Eddie. A live version recorded in 1962 was released on their 1977 album *Live! At The Star-Club in Hamburg*, Germany. They also recorded a version for BBC radio in 1963, later released on *Live At the BBC* in '94. John Lennon rated the song so much, he recorded his own version for his 1975 album, *Rock'n'Roll*.

WHAT'D I SAY/HALLELUJAH, I LOVE HER SO
The Beatles adopted Eddie's show-opener *What'd I Say*, while in 1960, Paul McCartney bought *Hallelujah*, the other Ray Charles number Eddie recorded b/w *Little Angel*. The song became part of The Quarrymen's and The Beatles repertoire. Recorded on a private tape, it was released on *Anthology 1* in 1995. A '62 live version was also released in 1977 on their *Star-Club album*. They also played the song in 1969 during the *Let it Be* sessions (along with *Somethin' Else*).

SINGIN' TO MY BABY
In 1960, George bought a re-released copy of this, Eddie's debut album. Released in the UK on London records in 1958, it additionally included three songs – and notably *Twenty Flight Rock*.

C'MON EVERYBODY
First played by The Beatles – or Silver Beetles as they were – while backing Johny Gentle during his tour of Scotland in 1960. Gentle sang it in tribute to Eddie's shock passing earlier that year.

SUMMERTIME BLUES
A favourite early Cavern rocker.

THREE STEPS TO HEAVEN
Eddie's posthumous single was also embraced.



– who'd recently appeared with Eddie, and now dedicated songs to, the much-missed star. Hamburg swiftly ensued thereafter, and the rest is musical history. From their first 1962 single release *Love Me Do* – with Ringo as resident drummer – the band rapidly transformed from replica rockers to legendary pop chart-toppers. Ironically, in spearheading the 'Liverpool Sound', and helming the British Invasion, the careers of many American rock'n'rollers were dramatically changed in their wake.

As for John and Paul's original catalyst, Eddie Cochran is forever cast in fans' minds as the ultimate rocker: his last numbers such as *Somethin' Else*, *My Way* and *Nervous Breakdown* were, after all, far apart from the softer pop coming in. It's interesting to consider that had he survived the 60s and onwards, Eddie may well have chosen to keep pace with the changing musical times... Like the Fab Four, his sound may have gone on to enter more experimental realms: from pop to heavier, guitar-oriented rock; if not The Beatles' later far-out trips in psychedelia and hippiedom.

The Liverpool band shared Eddie's taste for multi-tracking, dubbing and distortion techniques. Just one example: Lennon's mid-60s Epiphone Casino guitar was double-tracked to create a distinct distorted intro for *Revolution*.

In their time, the Beatles created a rock'n'roll revolution. They became, as their Cavern club inscription states, 'Four Lads Who Shook the World'. Perhaps a PS should read: Thanks in part, at the very start, to Eddie Cochran. ✶

EDDIE COCHRAN WAS KNOWN FOR HIS AGGRESSIVE AND RHYTHMIC ROCKABILLY STYLE, BUT HE WAS A FAR MORE VERSATILE GUITARIST THAN THAT

JOSEPH BRANSTON/FUTURE/SHUTTERSTOCK

STAR GUITAR

Few 50s rock and rollers were quite as accomplished on the guitar as Eddie Cochran, who 'hot rodded' his iconic Gretsch to create a style and a sound that would inspire a generation of young players

WORDS BY **NEIL CROSSLEY**

In the early hours of 17 April 1960, a young police cadet called David John Harman arrived at the scene of a car crash outside Chippenham that would claim the life of 21-year-old Eddie Cochran. As the fatally injured Cochran and fellow passenger Gene Vincent were rushed by ambulance to St Martin's Hospital in Bath, Harman and his colleagues attended to the wreckage of the Ford Consul taxi that had been carrying the two stars back to London. Lying on a nearby grass verge, amid scattered publicity photos, was a large guitar case containing Cochran's trademark orange Gretsch Chet Atkins 6120 hollow body guitar.

Harman took the instrument back to the police station, where it was stored before being claimed by Cochran's estate. "I was a big Eddie Cochran fan," recalled Harman, who would go on to change his name to Dave Dee and form the band Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick And Tich. "His guitar was there for two months and I used to play it from time to time."

Six decades on, Eddie Cochran's Gretsch 6120 is now on display at the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio. Its distinctive tones helped define Cochran's music and had a profound influence on guitarists such as Pete Townshend, Jimmy Page and Brian Setzer. Cochran was an assured and pioneering player, using styles and techniques that had never been seen in the UK before. The young George Harrison was a fan and attended Cochran's shows on the 1960 UK tour. Another was 13-year-old Marc Feld – later known as Marc Bolan – who was awestruck when allowed to carry Cochran's guitar from the Hackney Empire's stage door to a waiting limousine.

Cochran purchased his Gretsch 6120 in 1955 from the Bell Gardens Music Center in his hometown of Bell Gardens, California. His parents helped their 16-year-old son to buy the instrument, which carried the serial number #16942. The three-ply arched maple top featured two double bound F-holes and a strident black Gretsch logo, while the 22-fret rosewood fingerboard featured western-themed pearloid inlays. The instrument also boasted a Bigsby B6GBVF vibrato tailpiece, a translucent plexi pickguard and gold-plated Gotoh tuners.



Eddie's guitar now resides at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, Cleveland, Ohio

FROM THE OUTSET, Cochran started to 'hot rod' his new instrument. He was one of the first guitarists to swap the factory-equipped round-wound third string for a plain G-string, enabling him to bend strings easier. But the most visible change occurred when he replaced the DynaSonic bridge pickup with a P-90 'dog-ear' pickup, resulting in a fuller sound.

Cochran was known for his aggressive, rhythmic rockabilly style, but he was a far more versatile guitarist than that. "He was really into his jazz and really into his big jazz chords at the end of a song," said British guitarist Darrel Higham in 2011, "and the P-90 really helps, it brings out the sound even more". At the time, Higham was reviewing the Gretsch G6120 Eddie Cochran Tribute model, created in 2010 by Gretsch's Custom Shop in the US, a limited edition model that perfectly replicates every scratch, ding and smudge from Cochran's original guitar.

Higham was well placed to judge the Tribute model and the Signature model G6120EC that followed it in 2011, because he is one of the few guitarists to have played Cochran's original Gretsch. "What I remember about it more than anything was that because it had been sitting in a glass case for 40s years, it had really faded. Also it still had the strings on it from the last time he played it," he said. "Obviously, I was expecting the clouds to part and some sort of heavenly voice to bestow some greatness upon me and it didn't quite happen. But it did have the sound and it was a piece of magic. Having idolised him, to end up playing his guitar was really quite something." ✶



SINGLE STORIES

Vintage Rock unearths some of the lesser-known, and quirkier stories behind an eclectic selection of Eddie classics...

WORDS BY **JULIE BURNS**

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

JEANNIE, JEANNIE, JEANNIE

A CASE OF HIS TO HERS...

A rollicking, jaunty jiver, still a dancehall favourite today, and one of the few Cochran classics that Eddie didn't compose, was written in 1956 by husband and wife team George Motola and Ricky Page. Entitled *Johnny, Johnny, Johnny*, it was originally recorded from a girl's point of view. Ricky was a prolific recording artist with several aliases, notably as the lynchpin of doo-wop girl group The Georgettes. However, she never recorded it, and instead Kay Cee Jones released the first version (1957, Dot 15694). (The G-Notes also recorded a version for Guyden on which Eddie played guitar). Next, DJ Jimmy Maddin reportedly performed 'gender reassignment' on the song and by January '58, the 'new' ode to a girl was Eddie's definitive take. Some intriguing interpretations have ensued: a va-voom *Jenny, Jenny, Jenny* by Vince Taylor And The Playboys; and *Jeanie, Jeanie Et Ta Sœur*, a brave French translation performed by Johnny Hallyday. As *Jeanie, Jeanie, Jeanie*, the Stray Cats' early 1981/82 versions are most notorious. On their albums *Stray Cats* and *Built For Speed*, songwriting credits are incorrectly attributed. Added to which, a raunchy rewriting of the lyric made them fall foul of the writers, who sued for copyright infringement: specifically, a perversion of the lyrics with reference to loud parties, free booze and sex. Needless to say, in later renditions, the trio reverted back to Liberty Records' 55123 territory, that of Eddie's original, with its more wholesome content.





HURRY UP

MEANT FOR EDDIE, RECORDED BY RITCHIE

While supposedly written by Eddie's girlfriend Sharon Sheeley as a wry message specifically for Eddie, who had a habit of turning up late, he reportedly thought the song better suited to his friend Ritchie Valens. Sharon adapted the lyrics and Ritchie promptly made it his own. The lyrics still reference both: 'C'mon, let's go' name-drops one of Ritchie's biggest hits, while 'the very last row' comes from Eddie's, *Sittin' In The Balcony* (in the very last row).

It was recorded in January 1959, after Ritchie and Eddie's appearance in the movie *Go, Johnny, Go!* The next month, aged 17, Ritchie died in a plane crash alongside The Big Bopper and Buddy Holly. The song was released on *Ritchie*, the second of three posthumously released original albums, and included his unissued masters from Gold Star, plus demos and his last charted single, *Little Girl*. Not surprisingly, Eddie was distressed by the crash and was reluctant to fly to England on tour in 1960. On hearing that he'd only need one main flight to get to the UK, and would thereafter travel by rail and car, he agreed. Eddie's equally premature passing came just over a year after Ritchie's. ➨

JAM SANDWICH

SWEET BLUES INSTRUMENTAL WITH A SPOOKY BITE!

In August '59, around the time of working on *Guybo* and *Strollin' Guitar*, Eddie was in a major instrumental mode. He cut *Eddie's Blues* and *Chicken Shot Blues* along with his version of *Milk Cow Blues*. He would regularly jam with BB King and Lowell Fulson and his blues were often recorded at the end of sessions when the tape was left running. This catchy jam hails from a subsequent session. Having played on *Who Can I Count On* by The Four Dots' Jewel Akens and Eddie Daniels, Eddie laid down rhythm guitar on The Kelly Four's *So Fine, Be Mine* and *Annie Has A Party*. They then let rip with fun Halloween number, *Have An Apple, Dearie*, aka *Jam Sandwich*. This 12-bar ride appears on Eddie's '64 UK album *My Way*. He added to his instrumental repertoire with a tongue-in-cheek take on Anton Karas' zither theme from *The Third Man* and other 'for the fun of it' instrumentals such as *The Scream* and *Hammy Blues*.



WITH HALLELUJAH, EDDIE INTRODUCED THE BLUES TO THE BRITISH AUDIENCE



HALLELUJAH, I LOVE HER SO

A BRAND NEW STYLE FOR A BRAND NEW VENTURE?

In 1959, Cochran was interested in creating a possible 'get out of touring' clause by formulating a slick new nightclub show, in common with other big-name entertainers. It coincided with an appreciation of the jazz-blues sophistication of Ray Charles. Charles' album track *Hallelujah, I Love Her So* had long been a fixture in The Kelly Four's set and now they backed Eddie's interpretation. As John Collis, author of *Gene Vincent & Eddie Cochran*, states: "There is evidence that he was interested in developing a nightclub set as an alternative to the risky road – and *Hallelujah* would have been a natural candidate for inclusion in the set. As when Buddy Holly made a similar move and recorded Bobby Darin's gospel-influenced *Early In The Morning*, Cochran was confidently at ease with a song a long way from rock'n'roll. According to Sharon Sheeley, *Hallelujah* represented the kind of musical direction he would have liked to pursue." Though Snuff Garrett ladled on the strings, contrary to Cochran's small-combo sound, his spirited solo remains intact. Following Buddy's demise, at least Garrett brought The Crickets over to Liberty. Sonny Curtis and JI Allison proved a great fit on Eddie's last session before he left for Britain. *Hallelujah* was the song that he was promoting during his UK tour. With it, he effectively introduced the blues – and Charles – to a mainstream British audience.

SOMETHIN' ELSE

FROM HOT ROCK TO DIGITAL REGGAE RHYTHMS



Eddie's musical influence knows no bounds, it seems. Apparently not just some urban myth, Eddie aficionado Darrel Higham quotes the theory that reggae originated out of Jamaican artists trying to copy Cochran's rhythmic anthem, *Somethin' Else*, and ending up with reggae. Indeed, in June 2011, in its series covering 50 key events in the history of world and folk music, *The Guardian* reported the very same: "New technology has always driven new styles of music, and while authorship of the 'sleng teng' rhythm has been disputed, it seems likely that it was Wayne Smith himself who found the sound as a built-in pattern on a Casio MT-40 home keyboard. The rhythm was apparently an attempt to re-create Eddie Cochran's *Somethin' Else*. Subsequently, producer King Jammy added a clap to it, and thus the rhythm – or riddim, more properly – was born. Smith's *Under Mi Sleng Teng* – the first digital reggae tune, became the progenitor of ragga and so much else that followed." Wonder what Eddie would have made of that?

THREE STEPS TO HEAVEN

A GAME-CHANGER FOR BOWIE







From Eddie's almost prophetically titled last release, David Bowie used the distinct, choppy guitar riff for his 1971 song *Queen Bitch* on his album *Hunky Dory*. (The Velvet Underground's *Sweet Jane* also features a similar riff.) Considered both glam rock and proto-punk, as a single release it aptly backed the rock-oriented song *Rebel, Rebel*. Bowie would later reference – with a twist – Cochran's *Three Steps To Heaven* on the lyrics of *It's No Game*, from his 1979 album *Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*. An intense and screaming rant of a song, verse two reads: 'Silhouettes and shadows/ Watch the revolution/ No more free steps to heaven/ It's no game.'

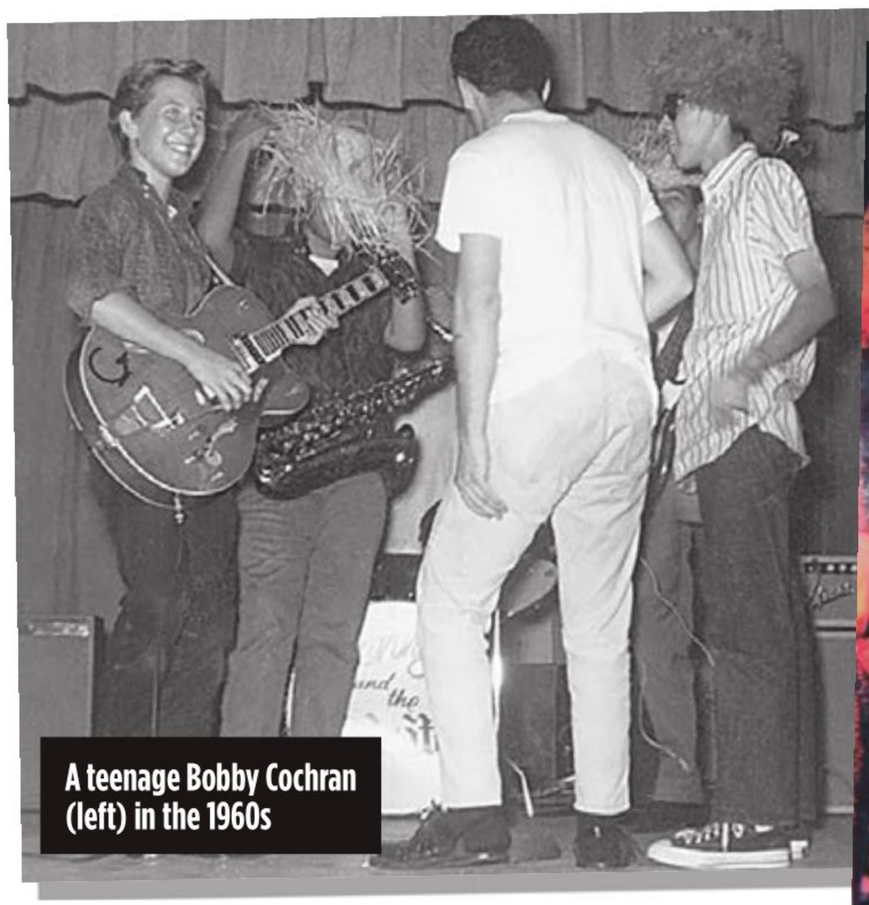
Bowie mixed up elements of rock'n'roll in his 70s work. In the book *David Bowie: Starman*, author Paul Trynka claims that the *Ziggy Stardust*-era sessions of October '71 were, "more like 1950s rock and roll. A cover of Chuck Berry's *Around And Around* was in the early tracklisting and the song *Hang Onto Yourself* featured quotes from Eddie Cochran and Chuck Berry, as well as shades of Gene Vincent and Vince Taylor. The straight-ahead rockers – *Hang Onto Yourself* and *Suffragette City* – took Eddie Cochran's teenage rebellion as a model, using the same mix of acoustic and electric guitars as well as liberal musical quotes from *Somethin' Else*. But where Cochran's songs spoke to kids breaking the parental bonds, *Ziggy Stardust*'s message was explicitly about sexual liberation." ✶

MY UNCLE, MY IDOL

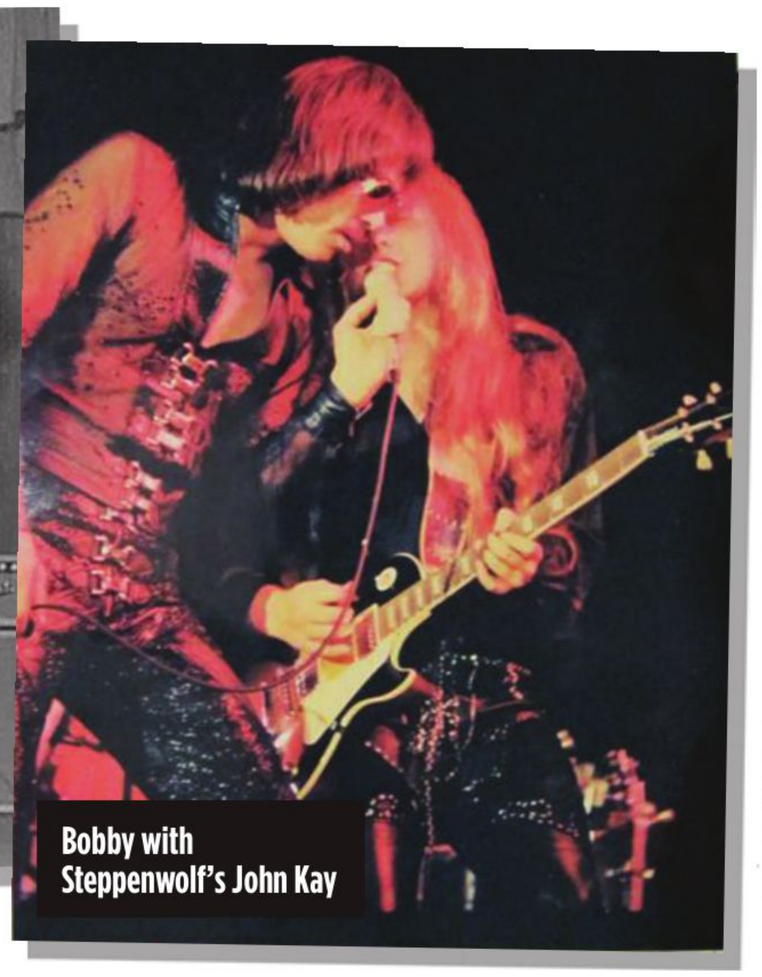
INTERVIEW BY **JULIE BURNS** PHOTOS PROVIDED BY **BOBBY COCHRAN**

Bobby Cochran tells *Vintage Rock* about growing up as Eddie's nephew and carving out his own distinct musical career

Guitarist, singer, author, engineer, songwriter and record producer, Bobby Cochran



A teenage Bobby Cochran (left) in the 1960s



Bobby with Steppenwolf's John Kay



Cochran genius lives on—in his nephew!

EDDIE COCHRAN fans will certainly enjoy having a new album available ("Cherished Memories," out this month), particularly as it will feature more than the usual quantity of Cochran guitar. There never was—and probably never will be—a rock 'n' roll guitarist as good as Eddie, although over here very few people know about this aspect of his work. But the Cochran feel is not entirely extinct.

Eddie's brother Bob runs an independent recording studio in Los Angeles, and a regular guitarist at sessions is Bob's son, Bobby, who has just reached 13.

Bobby started playing the guitar two years ago. After six months he was playing so well that it was just incredible. And now Bobby is on the threshold of the Cochran brilliance.

He is lucky to be able to study demonstration instrumentals that Eddie made and which are jealously guarded by Mrs. Cochran, who apparently, won't even let them out of the house to be duplicated.

Another guitarist with something of the Cochran look as well as the Cochran "feel" is Glen Campbell, and although he hasn't had a hit in Britain he's always a strong contender—because he's a good singer.

EDDIE COCHRAN Nephew's turn

SHARON SHEELEY tells NME's MIKE HILLICAR about her Hollywood adventures. She is now almost fully recovered from injuries received in the car crash in which her fiancé, Eddie Cochran, died.

CRICKETS

The Crickets were close friends of Eddie. "They came up in show business together and had a genuine interest in each other's breaks," she said.

"When Eddie was due to record "Three Steps To Heaven" he ran into The Crickets in Hollywood and asked them to back him on the session. Of course, they readily agreed.

"I don't think it is generally known what a famous backing Eddie has on the disc, though it's particularly tragic they should be so closely associated with Buddy Holly, too."

Sharon knows about some of our British rockers, too. She confessed to me that though she had been told and read a great deal about Cliff Richard, she had never heard him sing.

"I'm in the same boat with Marty Wilde," she said. "Here are two boys who have even been to America, but I have not consciously been aware of hearing either of them sing.

"I write a column for an American magazine, and I know the readers would be interested in hearing about Cliff, Marty and a few others, like Adam Faith (whom I have heard). When I come to London soon I want to meet them.

"Sharon will be meeting Cliff, Marty, Adam and any other British rock star. I have promised to introduce her to them myself. And judging by the interest everyone has shown in her, it should be easy!

EDDIE COCHRAN'S LAST RECORD

"THREE Steps To Heaven" is the song sung on a new London release by Eddie Cochran, the American singer who was recently killed in a car crash in the South of England.

It's a [illegible]-paced song with an attractive [illegible] chorus. Accompaniment is [illegible], aided by a vocal group.

"Let Me Be The Above" is a lively and [illegible] rock number about some [illegible] a girl's affections—but the girl [illegible] already made up her mind that [illegible] her man.

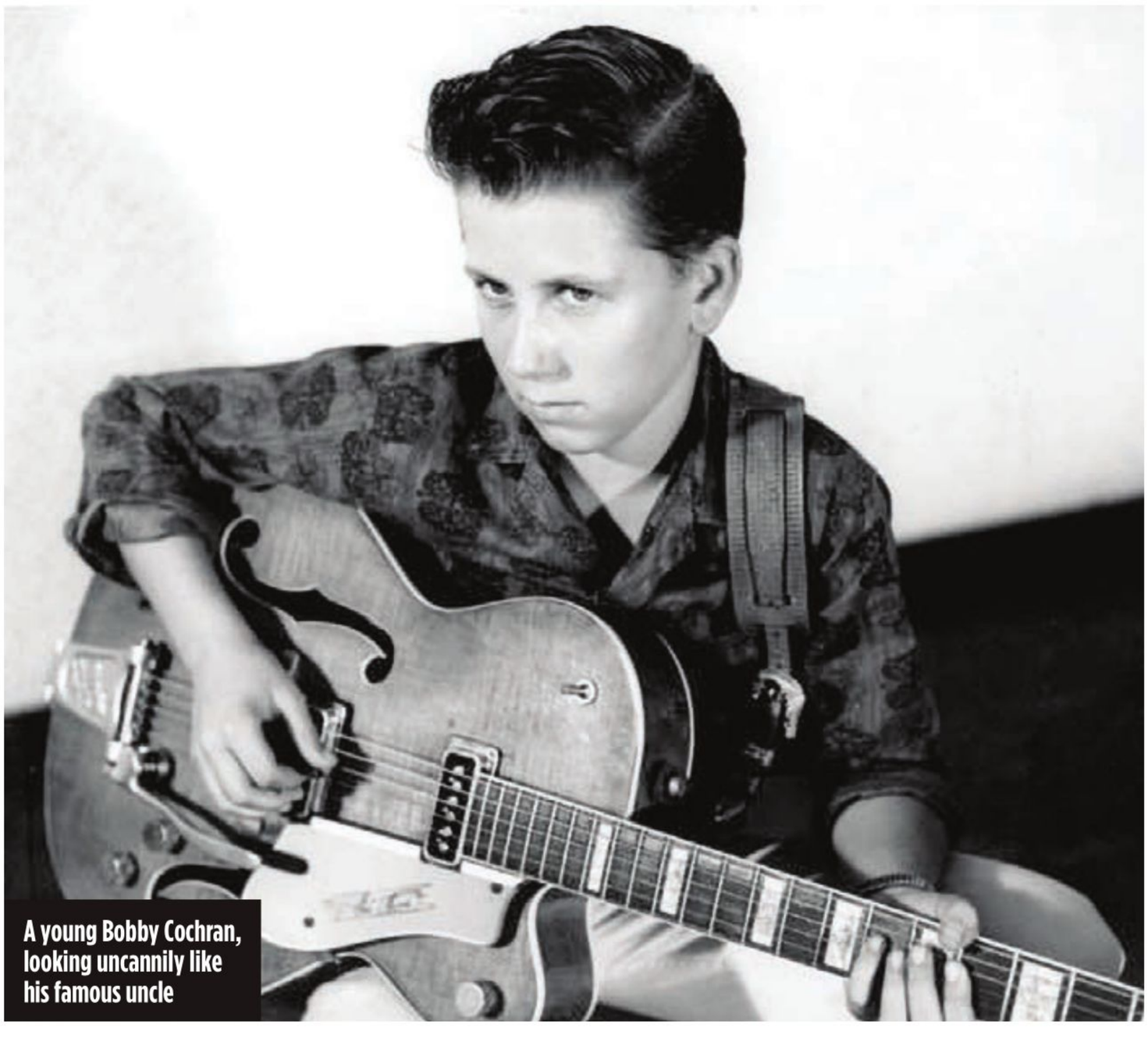
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Bobby was inspired to pick up a guitar because of his Uncle Eddie

Bobby was just 10 years old when his beloved uncle Eddie tragically lost his life in a road accident in England in 1960. Inspired to follow in the family's tradition, Bobby swiftly made his mark as an outstanding acoustic and fingerstyle picking guitarist. At 14, he was the staff guitarist at his father Bob's LA recording studio; by 15, he was testing amps, guitars and effects for Fender; aged 16, teaching a guitar class at school. His work went on to span rockabilly, rock'n'roll, surf, classic rock, blues, and country. He has subsequently been called one of the 12 best guitarists in America.

From the 60s, Bobby worked with many acts, including Leon Russell, Steppenwolf, and The Flying Burrito Brothers. In the 80s, his own combo, Bobby And The Midnites, featured The Grateful Dead's Bob Weir. On his 1998 album *Private Edition*, Bobby tributed Eddie's famed repertoire with his songwriting partner and manager Jerry Capehart.

A year later, Bobby sadly lost his daughter Breeannon Mikalia Cochran on the same day as her great-uncle Eddie, again in a car accident. In 2003, Bobby authored *Three Steps To Heaven: The Eddie Cochran Story*. More recently in 2016, he toured Europe with his new band, Somethin' Else. His producing credits span artists as diverse as Neil Diamond, The Blue Moon Boys, The Knack and Kim Carnes. In July 2017, in a unique ceremony, both Eddie and Bobby were inducted into the International Rockabilly Hall Of Fame.



A young Bobby Cochran, looking uncannily like his famous uncle

Though still a child when Eddie sadly died at 21, have you any family memories of him?

He was the baby of his family, and thought of as like a god in ours. As a kid, I'm glad that I got the chance to hang out with him a little. Often my dad was away gadding about with Eddie, they were real close brothers. My dad would even fight his fights at the bar, when guys wanted to punch Eddie for being a rock star...

One of my most vivid memories was when he, my dad and I were lying in the backyard at my aunt's house. I was next to Eddie, feeling like one of the guys, and we were all looking up at the sky. Suddenly, a bunch of coins slid out of his pockets. I said, "Hey Uncle Eddie, you dropped your money." He said, "Oh thanks, you can keep it. That money is for you." It was typical of how generous he was – almost to a fault. He would oftentimes run out of money in the middle of a tour because he was buying too many people dinners!

"I WAS INSPIRED BY EDDIE TO USE MUSIC TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE. HE WAS MY IDOL"

BOBBY COCHRAN ON RECORD

FROM STEPPENWOLF TO BOBBY AND THE MIDNITES TO HIS SOLO ALBUMS, BOBBY'S CAREER HAS TOUCHED ON MANY GENRES

Bobby didn't play on Steppenwolf's original 1968 mould-breaking track *Born To Be Wild* but his distinct guitar work and vocals did grace 1991's *Born To Be Wild: A Retrospective* and the band's *Slow Flux* ('74), *Hour Of The Wolf* ('75), and *Skullduggery* ('76) albums. On 1981's *Bobby & The Midnites* and '84's *Where The Beat Meets The Street*, he teamed up with The Grateful Dead's guitarist Bob Weir.

In 1999, some killer guitaring of a more familiar vein is showcased on *Memories Of Eddie Cochran* by Alan Clark & The Kelly Four. The year before, Bobby famously hooked up with Eddie's songwriting partner Jerry Capehart on the album *Private Edition*, where Bobby revisited – and put his own spin on – classics such as *Milk Cow Blues*, *Somethin' Else* and *Twenty Flight Rock*. Not forgetting some lesser known gems, plus memorable personal tributes. To honour the memory of lost loved ones, he wrote instrumental *My Blues For Eddie* and a second poignant composition, *This Moment Without You*, as a nod to his late daughter Breeannon Mikalia Cochran.

"I always played acoustic on sessions but not very often live," says Bobby of the change of style that came around that time. "After Bree passed away, I found myself playing the acoustic guitar that she had not long bought. Playing it felt cathartic in processing the loss. Ironically, I also wrote a bunch of happy songs on the acoustic guitar. It really resonated how music helps us access our emotions. It's a truly transformational thing."



As a fellow musician, what's your opinion on him as a performer?

As a performer, he stands out because when he played, there was an intention to the rhythm, no deviation. His right hand was like a locomotive, a freight train [hums intro to *Summertime Blues*]; the muting, the click, the tone of the guitar, the type of strings. Everything was integral in causing an intimacy to his records that was uncommon. On Eddie's records, there's an amazing discernment on the reverb and echo on the instruments. You really get to hear how they were in the studio. The subtlety was special. More than all that, it's the feeling of his music that's important.

How did your musical journey begin?

Originally, the family was from Oklahoma, then they migrated to Minnesota, where both Eddie and Bob were born. Our family followed Eddie and the rest of the family out to California when I was two. My dad built a recording studio, and at a young age I was like his staff guitarist. I was able to play with many tremendous players. I remember Del Shannon of *Runaway* fame turned up once. However, when Eddie had gone, my dad wanted me to play like the next Eddie.



Bobby Cochran (right) with his band



Bobby (front, in blue shirt) also devised the award-winning *Rock Around The Clock* revue show

He urged me to learn how to use multiple strings, like Eddie, and also pushed me into singing. My mum also helped me. She was a trained opera singer, and Eddie liked her voice so much he cut some demos to show her as an artist in the style of Julie London. Her recordings were later released on one of his discs. She turned me onto blues and jazz – Lionel Hampton, Gene Krupa, Eartha Kitt, Etta James, Ray Charles. Eddie was a fan of Ray Charles. Eddie loved the blues, as you can hear on *Milk Cow Blues* and two of his early blues instrumentals.

Despite inevitable comparisons with Eddie, how did your career progress?
Though he contributed to my artistic development and people wanted me to sound exactly like him, I always wanted to be my own person. I had special access to Eddie's demonstration instrumentals but went on to teach myself.

At the same time, I was inspired by Eddie to use music to connect with people. He was my idol since I was a little kid. After he passed, Eddie started to appear to me in lucid dreams, in effect teaching me how to play guitar. I first picked up the guitar at 12-and-a-half, two years after he'd died. My family went to a drive-in movie and I got hold of a little acoustic guitar on the back seat. I started picking along to the western melody playing. Later that night, I asked my dad to show me the chords he'd taught Eddie. I committed to practising every day for hours on end. I played across every style: starting out in folk and country, onto surf, then blues, before rock'n'roll and R&B. With my first group in junior high, one of the songs we performed was *Milk Cow Blues*. My first real band was Kelly And The Midniters, and Guybo [Conrad Smith, Eddie's bass player] used to loan us his amp and Fender bass. On moving to Long Beach and Cudahy, I joined Benny And The Midniters – which became Little Willie G And Thee Midniters. I went on with Midniters drummer Danny LaMont to play early surf music as The Vesuvians, and aged 14, got to play pretty big gigs like the Teenage Fair at the Hollywood Palladium and Pacific Ocean Park. At 16, I was with a group called The Emperors. We did a private party for The Yardbirds in the Hollywood Hills – Jeff Beck was a total inspiration! So I bought a Fender Esquire guitar. It became my 'Frankenstein', and I started hot-rodding it, which helped me find my own sound.

Eddie's guitarmanship aside, who were you most influenced by?
My early albums were by Chet Atkins and Duane Eddy. I also liked Buck Owens and his guitarist Don Rich. Very influential was Jackie DeShannon. One time she came round when we were visiting Sharon Sheeley, Eddie's girlfriend, up in Hollywood. She taught me this special G to C guitar thing, that I still use now, and told me to listen to one of Eddie's favourites, BB King. I got to meet him and talk about vibrato techniques. In the 60s, Jeff Beck performing with The Yardbirds at that Hollywood party was so great that when he later played with Jimmy Page, it paled in comparison. In addition, I always liked the playing of James Burton, another friend of my uncle. Overall, I feel I'm a cross between Eddie, BB King, Jeff Beck, Chet, Albert Lee, and every other great guitarist I've heard! There are so many!

How did it feel to play one of the first Eddie Cochran festivals in the UK?
The fan reaction was pretty amazing, and some of it incredulous! I love their energy and enthusiasm! I love that they remember Eddie, and do their best to honour him. Sometimes I wish they would show us their original side more... maybe show us the next Ray Charles or Stevie Wonder, the next Nirvana, or Dick Dale, BB King, Freddie King etc.

One of the things that disappoints me is when Eddie is perceived as 'only' a rockabilly guy. Eddie was truly multifaceted and it dishonours his incredible legacy to negate his contribution to rock, blues, country and jazz. Eddie's tastes were broad and refined. He loved ALL music!

I had guys in the band who had been in Eddie's band, had played all their lives to worldwide audiences. I said, as an encore, let's do *I Saw Her Standing There* by The Beatles and *Born To Be Wild* by Steppenwolf. They said, no way, we'll get booed off stage. We played them and some 2,000 people were going mad for it – in the right way! What the band meant was that a lot of rockabilly fans and bands don't want to know about The Beatles or hard rock. However, like it or not, this is part of Eddie's – and my own – heritage and legacy. Those bands were truly innovative and progressive. How they came to be was partially because of Eddie Cochran. In their early days, John Lennon was impressed by Paul McCartney's rendition of *Twenty Flight Rock*. It's pivotal that Paul's said that playing that worked like magic for him. Equally, I think that Eddie would have loved the evolution of 'new' music: it's about celebration. He would have cheered us on!

"PEOPLE WOULD COMPARE ME TO EDDIE AND WANTED ME TO SOUND EXACTLY LIKE HIM"

On stage at the El Portal Theatre, North Hollywood, for A Concert For Hurricane Relief, September 2017

MICHAEL SCHWARTZ/GETTY



Cochran regularly performs his uncle's hits. But expect a few musical surprises too

THE HOT-RODDING GUITAR ROCKER MK II

OF SOUND MIND

Multiple string guitar master and guitar/amp innovator, Bobby also helps design and test equipment and effects for many brands including Fender, Yamaha, Ibanez, Peavey, Digitech, Ampeg, RMC, La Bella and SanGreal.

Notable examples include helping to design the Yamaha SG2000 – a Tele/Strat/Les Paul combo in one guitar; testing the Fender Blender, an early distortion unit, and his own personal highlights: "The rosewood Telecaster that I found out went to George Harrison during the Let It Be era and a rosewood Strat for Jimi Hendrix... sadly it wasn't done in time to present to him before his death."

Bobby is known for his own signature sound and effects. During one 2016 UK appearance, a press reviewer raved: "He drove the crowd wild playing *Somethin' Else* on a Gretsch Eddie Cochran model guitar played through a Peavey Valve twin amp with spring reverb". Such motley hot rodding runs in the family: Eddie Cochran famously altered his guitars and amps, while his brother – Bobby's dad Bob – built and raced hot rod cars in the 50s. Not forgetting his invention of "a very early, weird weed eater" – an old upright vacuum cleaner, bespoke with hack-saw blades. "He used it to cut our back yard grass which was about two feet high," recalls Bobby. "It was amazing!"

How was playing and singing with the likes of Leon Russell, Steppenwolf and Bob Weir?

In the early days of Steppenwolf, it was like playing under fire for 18 hours a day – constant sessions, rehearsals, and gigs. To sustain this, I never did drugs, drank, or smoked. I was dedicated.

I have always used a hybrid picking style for all my music, electric or acoustic. I feel like I played differently on the Tele [Fender Telecaster]. I could turn it up louder than my previous Gretsch 6120.

From my time playing with Bob Weir, I was into the Ibanez. I didn't really know his music before I played with him on these projects away from The Grateful Dead. Weir's a great talent and we had the best musical chemistry. It was the Ibanez marketing director Jeff Hasselberger who first introduced me to Weir, before Billy Cobham and Alphonso Johnson.

We were hired to play 12 shows at the Frankfurt Messe [Europe's National Associaton of Music Merchants show]. We had never played a lick together and it was total spontaneity. This led to Jeff putting together the Ibanez Tama Allstar band, which originally included myself, Weir, Alphonso Johnson on bass, Billy Cobham on drums and Steve Miller on guitar.

What can you tell us about your more recent projects?

After touring throughout the 70s-90s, I relocated to Nashville. I now have different line-ups of my own band in Nashville, the West Coast, Sweden and the UK.

In 2016, I toured Europe with [founder members of Albert Lee and Hogan's Heroes] Brian Hodgson and Mike Bell, as Somethin' Else. It was to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Eddie's first ever single [*Skinny Jim*, 1956, Crest label]. The reception was tremendous. I also created *The Rock And Roll Forever Show*.

In addition, I perform solo acoustic guitar gigs, and continue as an equipment and recording consultant, run masterclasses and produce different artists.

"EDDIE'S PLAYING WAS INFUSED WITH ROCK, BLUES AND COUNTRY EXCELLENCE"

You must feel proud of your unique 'double' induction into the International Rockabilly Hall of Fame?

It was phenomenal, a thrilling honour for me, and for Eddie. When I got the call I thought they were asking me to perform at the event, and was told, "You've had a staggering career, we're inducting you and Eddie both." It was a great day. Even Eddie's girlfriend from high school came. Hall Of Fame founder Henry Harrison told me that the Cochran family is like the Kennedy family in history... and that rockabilly music's all about feeling good. So true. When you hear music being played, it should make your heart flutter and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Nothing less. ✶

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THE END OF THE LINE

Don McLean would have it that 'the day the music died' coincided with the demise of Buddy Holly, but for many UK rock'n'roll fans it would be 17 April 1960 when Eddie Cochran's tragic end first became public knowledge

WORDS BY **STEVE HARNELL**

It was never meant to end this way. Eddie Cochran had the world at his feet and was looking forward to a long and illustrious career in rock'n'roll. Little did he know he'd be robbed of all that one night on an unprepossessing A-road in a Wiltshire town.

It's a bitter irony that if Cochran's wishes were acceded to, he would never have been in the UK at all on tour in the spring



The wrecked Ford Consul MkII post-crash – Eddie Cochran was the only fatality



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY



Eddie and Gene's decision to celebrate the end of their UK tour proved a fateful one

of 1960. Such was the emotional impact of Buddy Holly's death on Eddie that he developed a morbid preoccupation that he, too, would die young. It was a premonition that was unfortunately soon to become a tragic reality.

A further irony was that Cochran almost made it back to the States. The UK 1960 spring tour – extended from five weeks to an exhaustive 15 due to its success at the box office – was done and dusted. The last stop-off on the joint tour with Gene Vincent billed as "a fast-moving Anglo-American beat show" was a five-day residency at the Bristol Hippodrome that also featured Hamburg-era Beatles collaborator Tony Sheridan and Georgie Fame, the latter billed as a "new singing pianist" in the programme.

After the final date on 16 April, the travelling group of Vincent, Cochran, his 20-year-old fiancée Sharon Sheeley, plus his agent Patrick Thompkins decided to take an unlicensed cab from Bristol to London; they were due to fly from Heathrow Airport to Los Angeles the following afternoon. Originally the group had intended to travel to London by rail, but with Gene and Eddie fancying a few end-of-tour drinks and likely to miss the last train out of the city, Vincent suggested that they should make the trip via taxi instead.

Driven by 20-year-old George Martin, from the nearby south Bristol suburb of Hartcliffe, the cab was a Ford Consul MkII – a British imitation of the flamboyant US vehicles featuring tail fins and a bench seat. The car had been used earlier that same day for a local wedding, with confetti still laying on its floor.

Setting off for London, Eddie, Sharon and Gene sat in the back while Thompkins rode shotgun. The passengers were in good spirits: reportedly Cochran and Sheeley were singing *California Here I Come* from the back seat.

COCHRAN AND SHEELEY WERE IN GOOD SPIRITS, SINGING FROM THE BACK SEAT

En route to London they were due to meet singer Vince Eager, but never made it that far. Initially their cab was to take them on the A4 through Bath, but as the route was a tricky one at night, Martin instead opted to take a shortcut via Wiltshire.

While speeding at more than 60mph on the A4 through Chippenham, a tyre on the Consul blew out. Martin lost control of the car and the vehicle crashed into a concrete lamp post at Rowden Hill. No other vehicle was involved in the crash.

Thompkins later recalled of the fateful night in Chippenhan: "You come out from under the viaduct and across a bridge in front of you. On your right is the A4 and then the bridge. On your left is the A4 to London. Well, [Martin] saw the A4 and turned right, going the wrong way. When he saw the milestone, he realised he was going the wrong way and hit the brakes."

It's thought that Cochran, who was seated in the centre of the back seat, threw himself over his fiancée Sharon in a bid to protect her from the impact. But the crash catapulted Eddie into the roof of the car, then forced a rear door open throwing

HARRY HAMMOND/V&A IMAGES/GETTY



Sharon Sheeley flew to the UK in early April to join Eddie for her 20th birthday

SHUTTERSTOCK



Chippenham resident and Eddie fan Adam Gittings organised the revamp of Eddie's memorial, which now features three steps, each engraved with a lyric from his posthumous hit

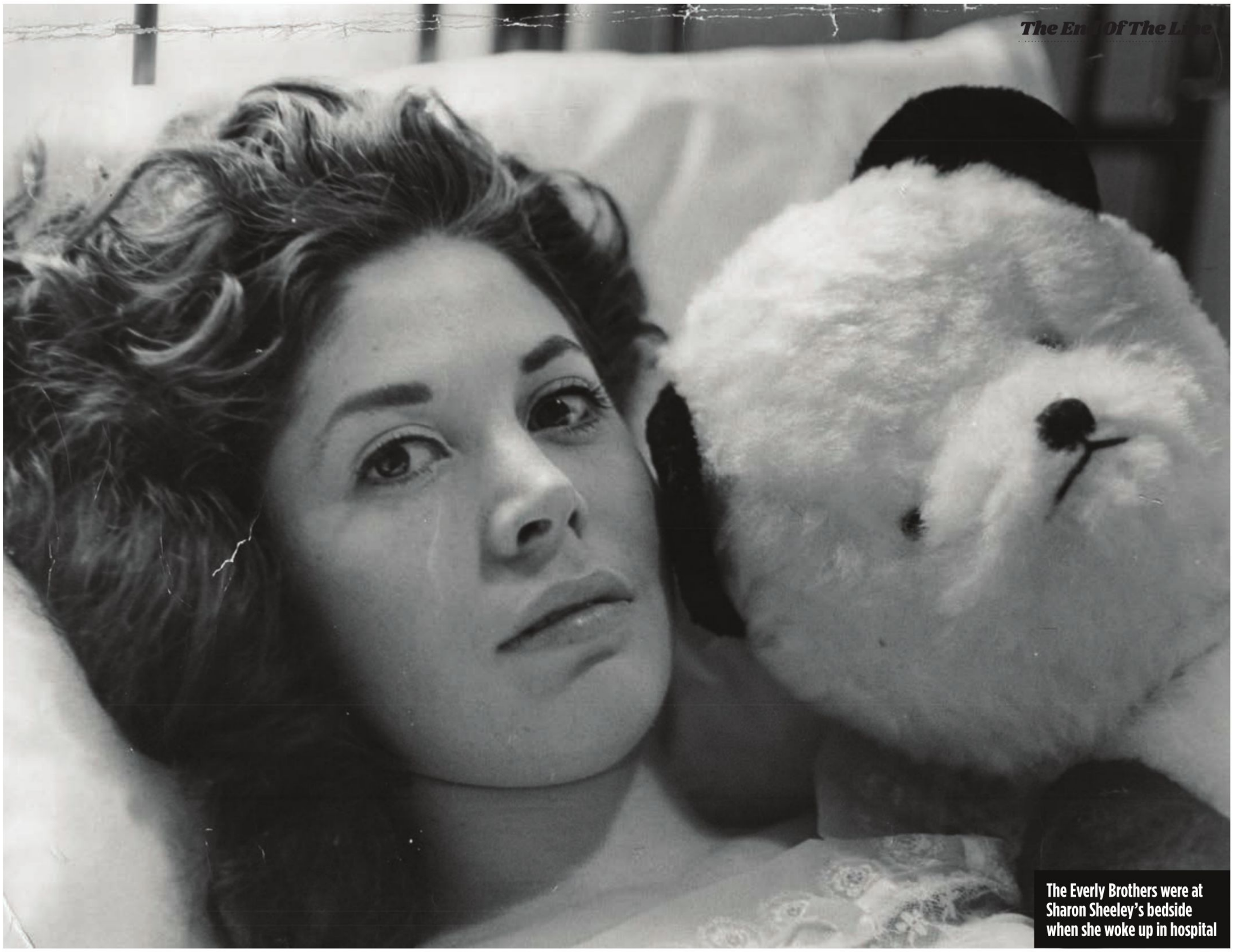
ANDY McGREGOR

NEVER FORGET

A ROCK'N'ROLL LEGACY, SET IN STONE

Two memorials mark the final tragic passing of Eddie Cochran in the UK. The first is located at the crash site on Rowden Hill in Chippenham. It began as a simple plaque featuring the words 'Cherished Memories' and with Eddie's birth and death year shown alongside an illustration of his Gretsch guitar, but was transformed into a larger three-step monument, unveiled on 3 October 2018, what would have been Eddie's 80th birthday.

A second memorial stone can be found in the grounds of St Martin's Hospital in Bath. It was restored on the 50th anniversary of Cochran's death in 2010. A memorial bench and sundial are also found in the chapel's grounds. Inscribed with the words 'Never To Be Forgotten' and 'Three Steps To Heaven', the chapel memorial gives a description of the facts of the car accident, but also outlines Eddie's tenure as a performer and his short-lived Hollywood career.



The Everly Brothers were at Sharon Sheeley's bedside when she woke up in hospital

GEORGE ELAM/ANL/SHUTTERSTOCK

the singer, along with Gene and Sharon onto a nearby grass verge. Wreckage was strewn 200 yards up the road. Vincent told reporters: "I was asleep in the back of the cab. I had taken some sleeping pills. The next thing I knew was when I was being put into the ambulance."

The noise brought locals rushing to the scene. In a report carried by the *Wiltshire Times*, resident Dave Chivers explained, "I was getting into bed when I heard a whistling outside, followed by a series of bumps and smashes. My first reaction was that it was a plane crash.

"I went outside and saw the wrecked car, several people lying about, a large guitar and scattered photographs, which had come from the open boot. I telephoned for an ambulance from the kiosk nearby."

The time of the accident was pinpointed at just before midnight. Street lights went out at midnight and by the time the ambulance had arrived the area was in complete darkness.

AMONG THE FIRST responders on the scene was a young police cadet called Dave Harman. In a bizarre twist of fate, he was later to find fame as Dave Dee, of Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich, who would score a UK No.1 with *The Legend Of Xanadu*.

All of the occupants of the car – with the exception of George Martin – were taken to Chippenham Hospital, then transferred to St Martin's Hospital in Bath. Cochran never regained consciousness and died of severe head injuries the following day at 4.10pm.

Speaking to reporters from his hospital bed, Thompkins told the *Daily Mirror*: "The crash happened so suddenly that I don't think any of us knew much about it."

Gene Vincent broke his collarbone, several ribs and reportedly broke the same leg that was already damaged by a previous injury – the effects of the crash would go on to have severe implications for the rest of his career until his own untimely death in 1971.

EDDIE THREW HIMSELF OVER SHARON IN A BID TO PROTECT HER FROM THE IMPACT

Sheeley suffered minor injuries, but the driver of the vehicle emerged from the crash unscathed. Martin was later convicted of dangerous driving and fined £50 by the Bristol Assizes court, to be paid off at £5 per year. Although he was sentenced to prison for six months for the driving offence, many reports state he served no jail time whatsoever. He was originally disqualified from driving for 15 years, but it's reported that his licence was reinstated by 1969.

Vince Eager, then just 19 years old, was due to catch the same flight to Los Angeles with Vincent and Cochran. "I was going to travel across for a holiday and do some recording with Eddie," Vince explains. "Eddie was surprised that I hadn't had a hit and was always out to help everybody. It was a case of 'I'll take you back to the States and we'll do something that'll knock people's socks off'. He was very pally but also very businesslike. The idea was that we'd meet up before the flight at a flat in London where Gene was staying.

"Gene had got it on a long-term basis because he was coming back, but Eddie was mostly staying in hotels. I'd driven down from Scotland the day before and was



Rock'n'Roll Singer Killed In British Taxi Crash

BATH, England (AP) — American rock 'n' roll singer Eddie Cochran, 21, was killed in a taxi crash Sunday, a few hours after his last bow before screaming teen-agers.

With fellow singer Gene Vincent, he was dashing by cab to London Airport for the trip home to Los Angeles at the end of a 13-week British tour.

A tire blew out, sending the cab swerving crazily from side to side of the highway before it smashed backwards into a lamp post.

Cochran and Vincent were thrown out with their fellow passengers, Patrick Tompkins, manager of their British tour, and Sharon Sheeley, 20, Hollywood song writer.

Wreckage was scattered 200 yards up the road. Cochran and Vincent were stretched out side by side. Not far away, Miss Sheeley lay moaning.

All were taken to a hospital. Cochran, with head and internal injuries, died on the operating table.

Earlier Cochran was singing "C'mon Everybody" to a wildly cheering audience of youngsters packed into the Hippodrome Theater at Bristol.

Vincent, 25, former merchant seaman from Norfolk, Va., suffered a fractured collar bone.

"I was asleep in the back of the car after taking some sleeping pills," he said in the hospital. "I didn't get any warning of the crash." He hoped to be out of the hospital in a few days.

(UPI Telephoto)

EDDIE COCHRAN

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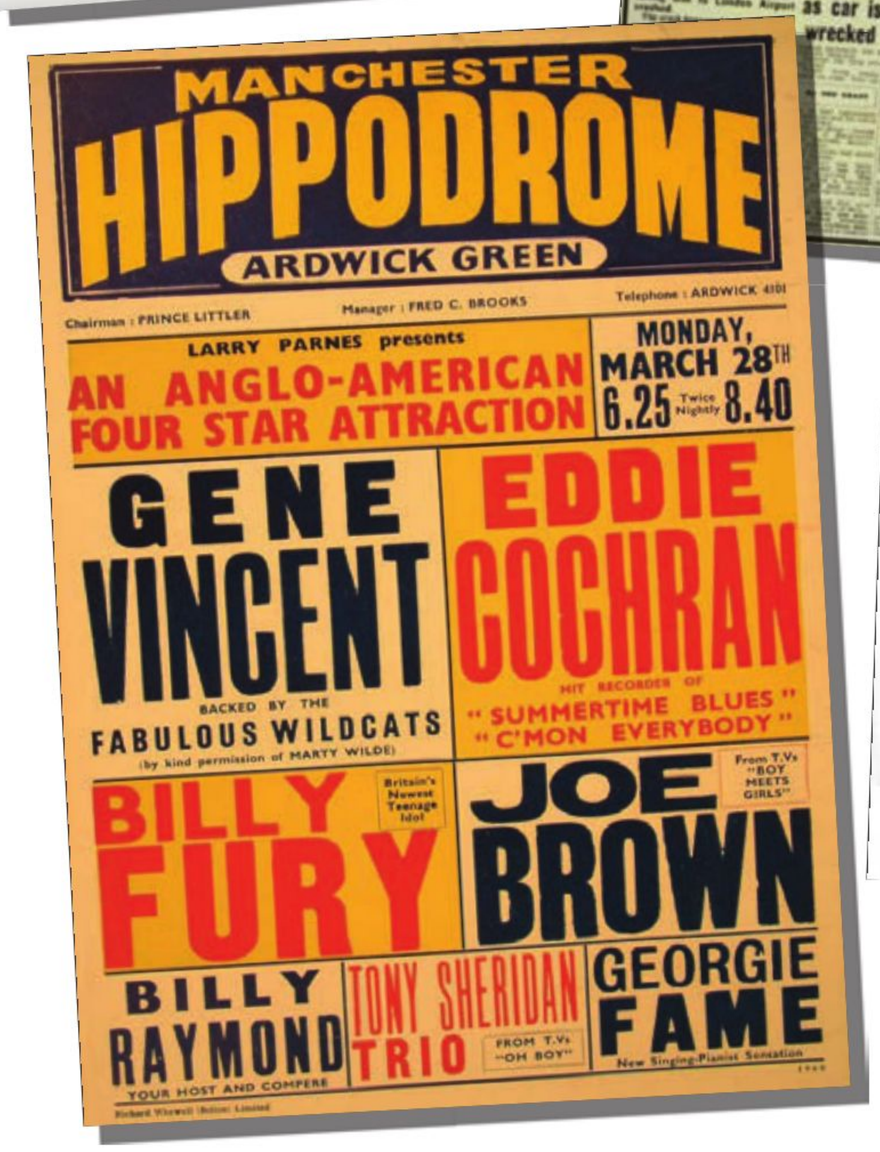
Daily Mirror

'ROCK' STAR DIES IN CRASH

Flung out as car is wrecked

TEDDY BOY

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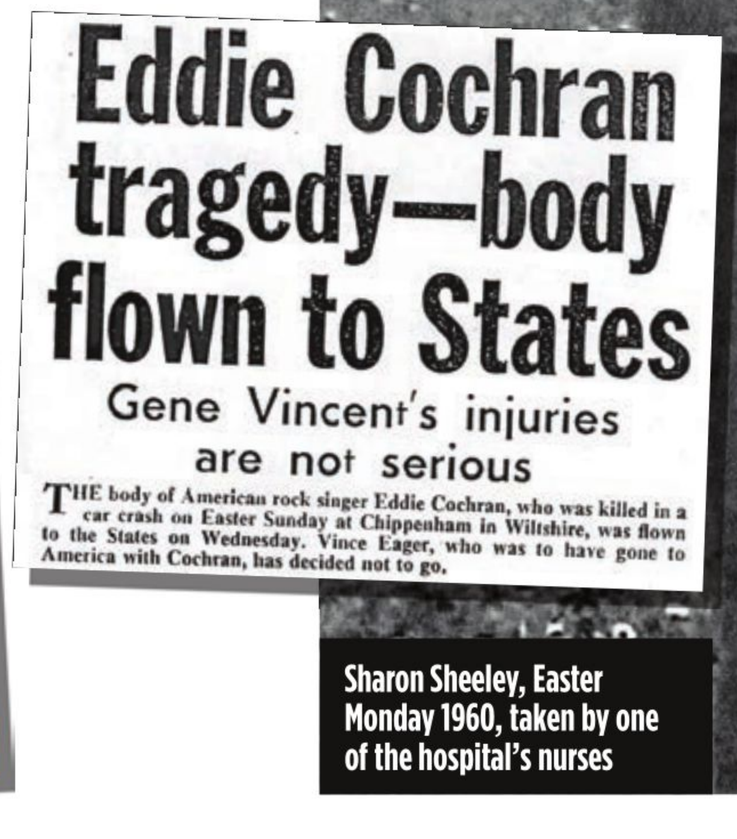
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Eddie Cochran tragedy—body flown to States

Gene Vincent's injuries are not serious

THE body of American rock singer Eddie Cochran, who was killed in a car crash on Easter Sunday at Chippenham in Wiltshire, was flown to the States on Wednesday. Vince Eager, who was to have gone to America with Cochran, has decided not to go.



Sharon Sheeley, Easter Monday 1960, taken by one of the hospital's nurses

News of the crash was splashed across the front pages of the British tabloids, but *The Times* made no mention of it

due to meet them on at 8am in Fulham on 17 April."

By 8.30am, and with no sign of the travelling party, Vince contacted Eddie's manager who was staying at the Stratford Court Hotel on Oxford Street. Eddie's manager explained that, as it was the last night of the tour, the pair had probably been partying to celebrate.

Eager was told to go on ahead to the airport and wait for them there. Vince agreed, checking in for the 1pm Pan-Am flight three hours earlier, with his driver-cum-roadie Noel waiting to see if there were any last-minute hitches.

Vince takes up the story: "When I checked in, strangely enough, I was sat next but one to Count Basie. He was in the middle of a European tour but his father had just passed away. He was going back to Chicago because his father had died. There was only the two of us in the departure lounge initially, so the atmosphere was a bit solemn.

"Then at about 11am, there was a phone call for me at the VIP desk. It was Larry Parnes' press manager Dennis Atherton. He told me that the boys wouldn't be making the flight as they'd been involved in an accident. He said Gene was really badly injured but Eddie was OK, he just had a slight cut and a slightly damaged shoulder. He also said that Sharon could travel. He said, 'You stay there, they'll come to you. We'll have to see about Gene because he's very poorly.'

"Then, 15 minutes later, I got called across to the desk again, this time it was Larry Parnes. He screamed at me, 'What the hell are you doing there!?' You should be on your way to St Martin's Hospital in Bath!' He went on to tell me it wasn't Gene who had come out worse, it was Eddie.

THE CRASH MADE THE FRONT PAGE OF TABLOIDS, INCLUDING THE DAILY MIRROR

"Heathrow was a lot smaller back then so we weren't long getting away. In those days there was no M4, but there was the A4 which went down to Chippenham and Bath. We got there at about 1pm. When I walked in, a nurse at the reception area recognised me and asked if I'd come about Eddie. We were taken to a private room and spoken to by a surgeon. He broke the news to me that unfortunately Eddie was so badly injured that he didn't think he'd make it. I was obviously distraught.

"Noel and I then left and we came out of the Casualty entrance. Standing outside was Larry Parnes, Eddie's manager Norman Riley, Billy Fury – it was his 20th birthday – and Dickie Pride. There were also three or four press guys there with cameras.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VINCE EAGER

"Then Larry took over. He was publicity-primed. He didn't care what it was, publicity was his mantra. The highest-paid people in his whole organisation were his press agents. Without asking anybody – and I was the only one who had seen the surgeon – Larry told the press, 'Oh, it's ironic that Eddie's next record is *Three Steps To Heaven*'. That really did it for me. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. *Three Steps To Heaven* had not previously been confirmed as the A-side, it was going to be *Cut Across Shorty*. Eddie used to sing that song in the back of my car. Sometimes he'd play his Gretsch or at others he'd play my Levin.

"One time he played it and told me, 'That's my next A-side!'. He never mentioned *Three Steps To Heaven*. He did play it in the back of my car – and I think that's the only place he ever played it in the UK as a matter of fact – he never performed it on tour.

"I was just so upset with Larry that I had to walk away. I went to stay with friends for a few days in Cheam and made myself uncontactable. I refused to speak to anybody. My dad warned me not to talk to anyone when I was in the wrong frame of mind, so I kept my mouth shut."

The crash made the front page of tabloids, including the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Sketch*, but such was the ambivalence – and at times outright hostility – from the establishment towards the rock'n'roll counterculture that the incident was omitted entirely from *The Times*.

"When the papers came out on the Easter Monday and Easter Tuesday they were full of the story," adds Eager. "They mentioned that I was going to fly to America with Eddie's coffin. This was another stunt of Larry's to get more press. I refused to go. Now I've lived to regret it. I was very close to Eddie. About six weeks after he died, a magazine ran a Q&A with him where he mentioned me alongside Buddy Holly, Gene Vincent as his dearest friends, which resonated with me. I've always regretted not going to America for his funeral."

Despite being injured and emotionally traumatised by the road crash, Gene Vincent was brought back to the UK within a fortnight by promoter Larry Parnes for a 'tribute tour' to Eddie. "It was crackers," says Vince. "The guy Larry picked to replace Eddie was just ridiculous. Jerry Keller was his name who did *Here Comes Summer*. He was a weak act. Eddie was dynamic. It was an insult to Eddie to book someone like Keller in his place. It should have been someone like Jerry Lee Lewis or Little Richard – a rocker."

AFTER A SHORT and unassuming funeral, Eddie's body was laid to rest at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Cypress, California, on 25 April 1960. Hundreds of mourners attended the funeral, which was officiated by Reverend C Sumner Reynolds of the Maywood Methodist Church. Among the mourners was Ritchie Valens' mother Concepcion. Cochran's family laid a wreath made out of red and white carnations shaped into a guitar on the grave.

As Parnes had predicted outside the hospital in Bath, Cochran's first posthumous release would be *Three Steps To Heaven*, featuring Buddy Holly's Crickets as his backing band. Cochran's record company, London, wrung every last drop of emotion out of the situation and it would reach the summit in the UK singles chart.

Sharon suffered minor injuries in the crash and, after a short time in hospital, returned to the US. Fans deluged her with gifts, St Christopher medals and spiritual tokens. One young girl even sent Sheeley her most prized possession, a scrapbook of photos of Eddie.

She later returned to the UK to make an appearance on stage with Billy Fury. In Bobby Cochran's autobiography *Three Steps To Heaven* he recalls the scene: "Fury introduced her as she hobbled out onto the stage, and the crowd, roaring with compassionate applause, rose to their feet. They were sharing her pain. Sharon began to cry. She didn't want to deal with any of it. It was Gene's show – the Anglo-American package tour had been transformed into a memorial to Eddie – but Sharon just wanted to go home.

"She needed to see Gene, though, to give him a hug, to say hello and let him know that, no matter their differences, he was in her heart. They were, after all, now joined by their cataclysmic sorrow."

Vincent would never be the same after the crash. The psychological trauma left him using alcohol as an emotional crutch more than ever. He toured the UK successfully in 1961 on the invitation of promoter Don Arden, and permanently moved here in 1963 for a period.

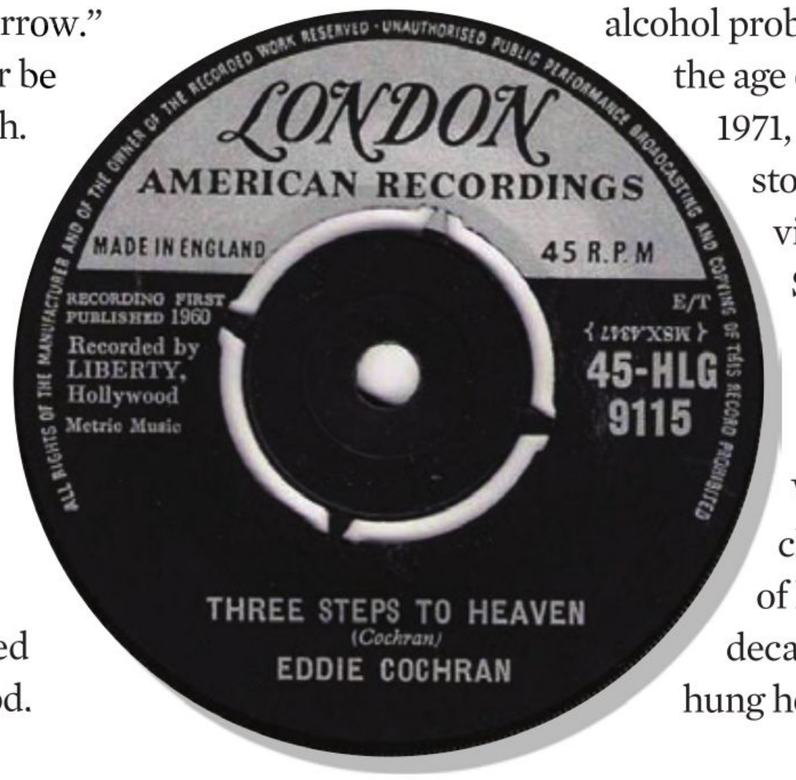
A CRUCIFIX OF LIGHT

VINCE EAGER'S EMOTIONAL RETELLING OF LOSING EDDIE COCHRAN TOOK ON ADDED EMOTIONAL PUNCH MORE THAN A DECADE AFTER THE TRAGEDY

"It's one of the weirdest things that's ever happened to me," Vince explains. "10 to 15 years after the accident I got a call from the people behind the BBC's *Arena* documentary show who were making an episode about Eddie. They wanted to interview me at the Bristol Hippodrome. I was walking into the theatre and was approached by a guy dressed a bit Teddy Boy-ish. He showed me a photograph that was taken just a few minutes before Eddie got into the taxi. It's believed to be the last one ever taken of Eddie. It was shot backstage in the dressing room near one of those mirrors that are dotted with lightbulbs, the kind that performers use to put their make-up on.

"The camera flash hit one of the lightbulbs – which were off at the time – and bounced back to form the most perfect crucifix over Eddie's right shoulder. I couldn't believe it. I asked the guy for the photograph but I never received it. It was the most surreal moment of my life."

A tour that year with The Outlaws as his backing band – including guitarist Ritchie Blackmore – was marred by Gene's alcohol problem. He died at the age of 36 on 12 October 1971, from a ruptured stomach ulcer, while visiting his father in Saugus, California. In part, that traumatic incident on an A-road in Wiltshire, that claimed the life of his close friend a decade before, forever hung heavy in his heart. ✶



PAYING TRIBUTE

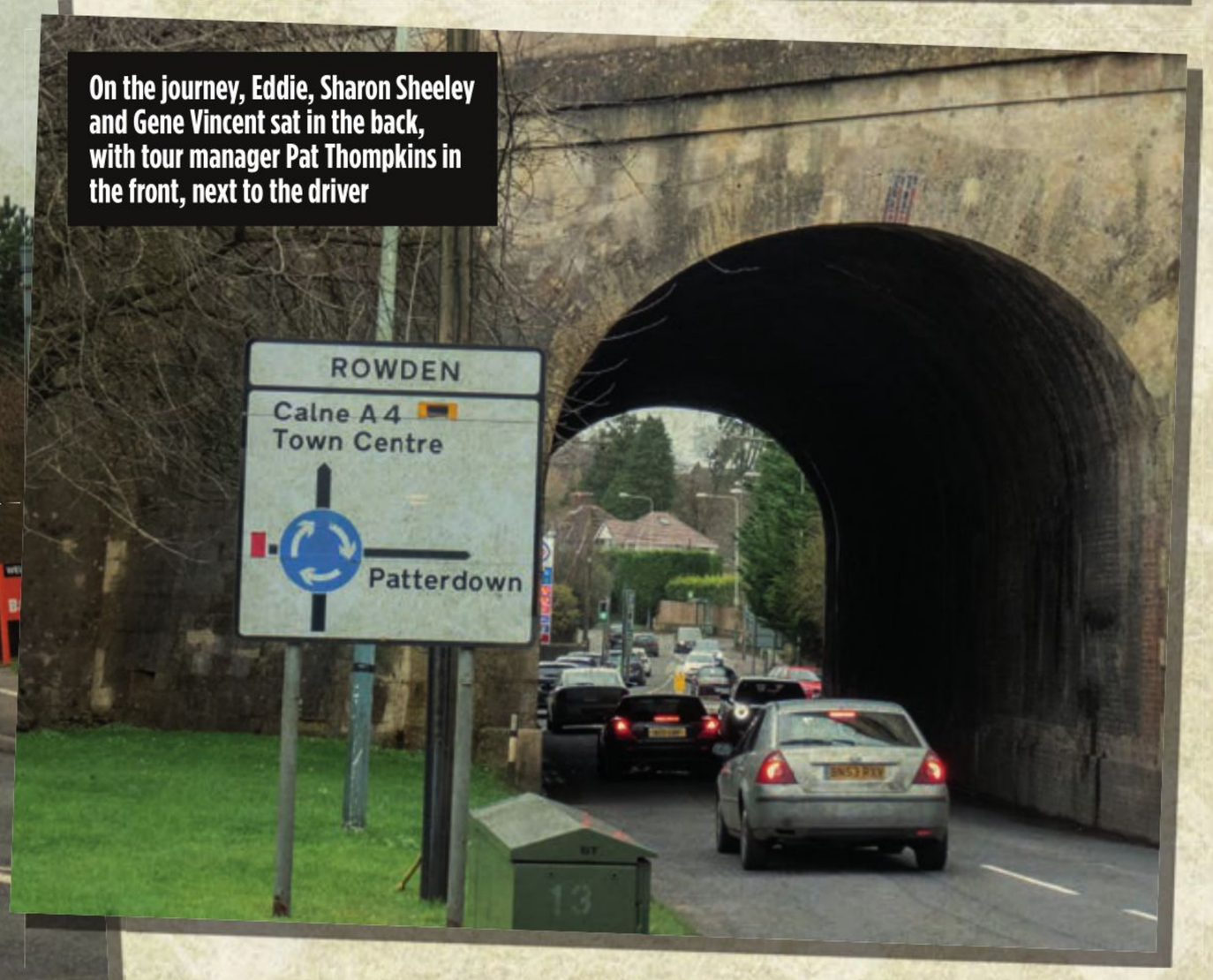
Though American born-and-bred, Eddie Cochran would end his days in the UK's west country. For the past six decades, Eddie fans all over the world have journeyed to Chippenham in Wiltshire and nearby Bath to pay their respects to their late hero...



The taxi arrived at Chippenham via Bath Road



Eddie entered Chippenham in a Ford Consul driven by taxi driver George Martin



On the journey, Eddie, Sharon Sheeley and Gene Vincent sat in the back, with tour manager Pat Thompkins in the front, next to the driver



The Rowden Arms pub sits just up the road from the crash site. In past years, it's hosted several Eddie-inspired events



The accident spot on Rowden Hill

ANDREW McGREGOR BRITT O'BRIEN



The refurbished plaque on Rowden Hill in Chippenham was unveiled in October 2018

IT WAS FANS WHO CAMPAIGNED FOR THE EDDIE COCHRAN MEMORIAL PLAQUE TO BE PUT IN PLACE



The old entrance to St Martin's Hospital (the building has since been redeveloped as flats)



The Eddie Cochran Memorial Plaque next to the chapel in the grounds of St Martin's

Aside from the plaque, a sundial was also erected in memory of Eddie

Darrel Higham has been helping keep rockabilly alive for over 30 years now

TONY BRUCE

"HE'S SEEN AS 'THE GRANDFATHER OF PUNK'"

UK rockabilly scene linchpin Darrel Higham salutes his hero and reveals his Top Five Eddie Cochran tracks

INTERVIEW BY **JACK WATKINS**

Rockabilly hero Darrel Higham has been a fan of Eddie Cochran for a very long time, with his music a clear influence on his work with acclaimed bands such as The Enforcers. He even played with Cochran's last band, The Kelly Four, in the early 90s for six months. We caught up with Darrel to find out more about his life-long fandom.

What first turned you on to Eddie?
Flicking through my Mum and Dad's record collection when I was about five, there was this album called *Singin' To My Baby* which had belonged to my Aunt Kyra, my Dad's sister. She'd written all over the back cover with love hearts and "Kyra loves Eddie" and all this typical fan-girl gush! I thought that if this Eddie Cochran chap had made such a huge impression on Kyra, it was best I take this seriously. What struck me first was the front cover with the three shadowy photos of Eddie – two headshots and then the photo of Eddie holding his Gretsch 6120. That guitar affected me profoundly... the most beautiful guitar I'd ever seen. I still get very nostalgic whenever I pull that LP out and see that cover.

You've also spoken highly of the album's content...
It's a rare record where the music matches the image the cover projects. The songs have copious amounts of echo added; haunting ballads with beautiful backing vocals by The Johnny Mann Chorus; cool rockers like *Am I Blue, Twenty Flight Rock, Stockings And Shoes, Mean When I'm Mad* (one of my all-time favourite Cochran tracks). I consider the whole album to be a masterpiece. It may be maligned by rock critics these days but considering this was Eddie's debut and that he was only 18 years old, it deserves a much better reputation.

Eddie and Gene Vincent have a special place in UK hearts, yet Eddie's rep seems to be higher. Why do you think this is?
We live in an age where artists must be – or feel they must be – very open and honest and engage personally with their fanbase. Gene sometimes came across as quite withdrawn, whereas Eddie was much more articulate and personable. That resonates today with music fans. Gene recorded many of the greatest rock'n'roll and rockabilly songs ever and his music will always be cherished. Eddie's music was much more polished in comparison, but it's his musicianship and songwriting that continually appeals to every new generation of music fan. Eddie wrote some of the most enduring rock'n'roll songs and created his own style within the genre that has never really gone out of fashion. He's seen, correctly, as the 'Grandfather of Punk' and a huge number of stellar musicians that came out of the 60s have cited him as an influence. Gene will always be the ultimate rocker, I don't think that can be contested. Eddie was a rocker but his appeal was perhaps always broader, even back during his lifetime.

> "EDDIE WAS MUCH MORE ARTICULATE AND PERSONABLE. THAT RESONATES WITH MUSIC FANS"

The Chippenham site of Eddie's fatal car accident in 1960 must have a special poignancy for you... Have you been involved with the memorial restoration/campaign for a statue?
Back when I was in my 20s – this would've been the early 90s – I owned a 1957 Ford Consul. One of the anniversaries of Eddie's death back then fell on the actual day the car crashed in Chippenham, which was a Sunday, very late at night/early hours of Monday morning. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing, but I decided to jump in the Consul and drive from Bedford to Chippenham – a fair way to travel. I got there around midnight and parked up in a lay-by on the road where the crash happened. I sat there for about an hour and then drove back to Bedford! It seemed very important to me at the time, all part of growing up and trying to understand ➡

TOP OF THE ROCKS
DARREL HIGHAM'S FIVE ESSENTIAL EDDIE COCHRAN TRACKS

JEANIE JEANIE JEANIE
"I've rediscovered this recently. Funnily enough, I play it nearly every week with my band, but had stopped listening to Eddie's version maybe because of this. But it's been getting played a lot recently and it's fair to say it's been moving me."

MEAN WHEN I'M MAD
"'Ya tantalise me, baby. Ya hypnotise me, baby. But don't defy me, baby cos I'm mighty, mighty mean when I'm mad.' You can't knock a song with lyrics like that, can you?!"

DARK LONELY STREET
"Perhaps Eddie's most underrated song? Great lyrics and chord structure. A bit miserable, yes – but magical as well. Don't play it if you're feeling a tad unhappy."

SUMMERTIME BLUES
"Eddie to Jerry Capehart: 'Summer is lovely. Sun, holidays and beaches. So let's write a song about how miserable it can be!' Winner!

"Second greatest song ever recorded. Second greatest rock'n'roll song of all time. All the above is my own humble opinion. But as Mrs Slocombe used to say in *Are You Being Served?*: 'I am unanimous in my opinion!'"

SOMETHIN' ELSE
"The greatest rock'n'roll song ever recorded. The greatest rock'n'roll vocal performance ever. The greatest cymbal smashes and bass lines in rock'n'roll history. Instant air guitar and head banging. No other song comes close."

one's own thoughts and how my life was changing back then. I didn't tell anyone at the time that I'd done it. But I think Adam Gittings [of The Eddie Cochran Memorial Project] has done a great job in getting the memorial restored and Eddie's fanbase deserve a huge pat on the back for their donations. It's important there is a respectful memorial to this great artist.

What way do you think Eddie's music would have gone had he lived?
I'm fairly convinced Eddie would've moved in whatever direction popular music was going. Si Waronker told me that, had Eddie lived, he would've been offered many of the songs that wound up as hits for Johnny Burnette and Bobby Vee – both Liberty artists. The label hit a purple patch after Eddie's death. I think Liberty felt Eddie's huge success in the UK would have had a knock-on effect in the US and it might well have done. We'll never know for sure, but I'm certain whatever way Eddie would've gone, musically speaking, his music would have always had balls to it.

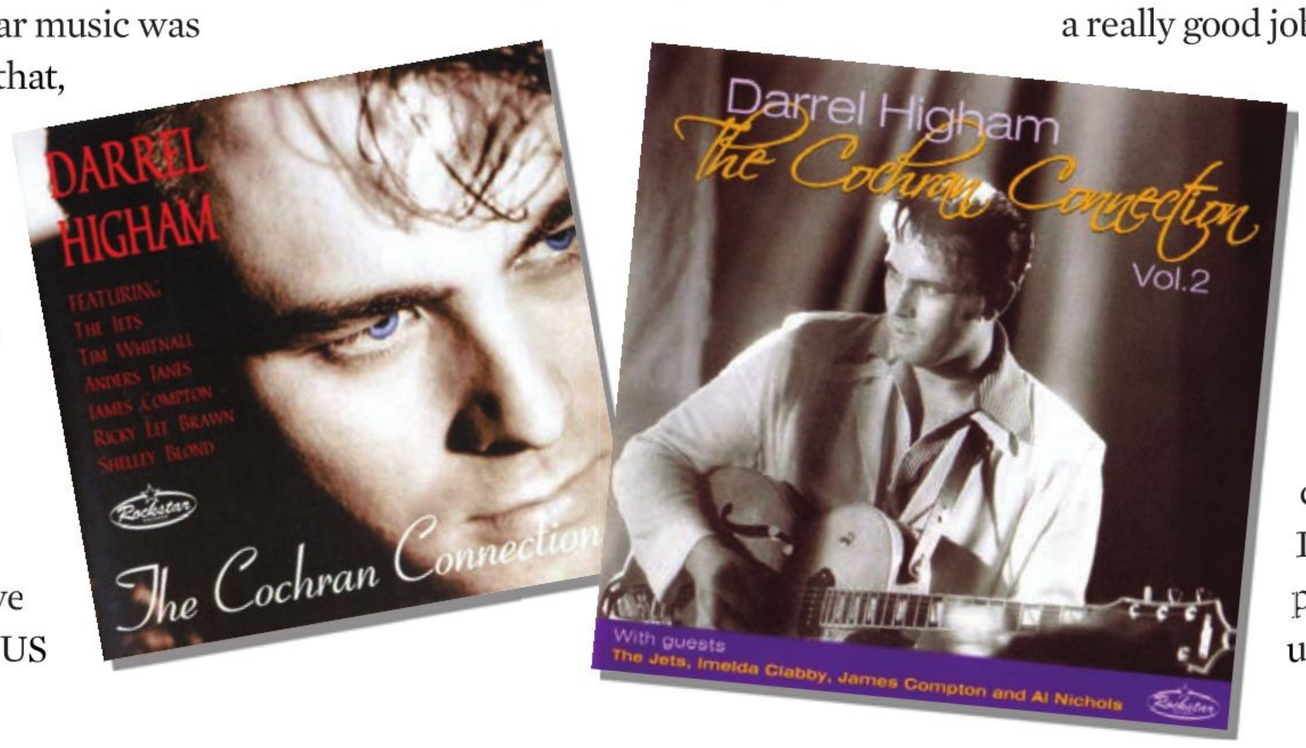
Eddie's best-known songs are rhythm-driven, very syncopated, with no huge guitar solos. When you recorded your *Cochran Connection* albums for Rockstar, was it a surprise to discover the variety of styles he mastered?
I grew up obsessed by Eddie, but strangely, I'd never really tried to pick apart and analyse his guitar playing. When it came to recording those tribute CDs for Rockstar Records, I was shocked at how little I really knew about his technique. He down-tuned a lot during the period he was recording the *Singin' To My Baby* LP – the top and bottom strings were tuned down to a D instead of the higher E, and the rest of the strings were also tuned down accordingly. This meant he had a much deeper sound. I had to work it all out before I could get the songs sounding even halfway authentic. I still believe he never recorded anything that truly showed how great a player he really was.

Which was most fun to record – Volume 1 or Volume 2?
The first CD covered his early work and I wanted that to be quite authentic. I had a lot of great guests involved, including The Jets and Anders Janes and Ricky Lee Brawn from The Stargazers, another band I loved. The album was recorded by Ricky on his vintage recording equipment, so it was all tape and analogue gear, and we had to record everything live.

The second CD was recorded by Boz Boorer at his studio in Hampstead in London, and it took a lot longer to do as I couldn't make up my mind whether I wanted it to be a bit less authentic. I did mess with a few of the songs in the end, but not by much.

Why do you think the biography you wrote with Julie Mundy, *Don't Forget Me*, still stands the test of time?
Julie and I wanted to showcase Eddie's music and get across how influential he was, rather than spend time on his personal life. We felt his music was more important and thought that people probably didn't know much about his legacy and his influence on the likes of The Beatles, Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, Pete Townshend and Brian Setzer. We wanted to get that across and work out why his career was so patchy. I think we did a really good job of presenting his career in a very matter-of-fact way.

Interviewing Simon Waronker, who founded Liberty Records, was a real coup because he was able to recall, quite vividly, his first impressions of Eddie and why a lot of things in his career didn't go as planned. It mainly boiled down to poor management, which is usually the case! ✶



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A still from director George Lucas' iconic 1973 teenager classic, *American Graffiti*

WORDS BY **STEVE HARNELL**

NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

He's been called the 'complete package' as a rock'n'roller. Eddie Cochran's natural-born rebel persona, songwriting ability and guitar-playing prowess has influenced a generation of performers, axe heroes, movie directors and more...

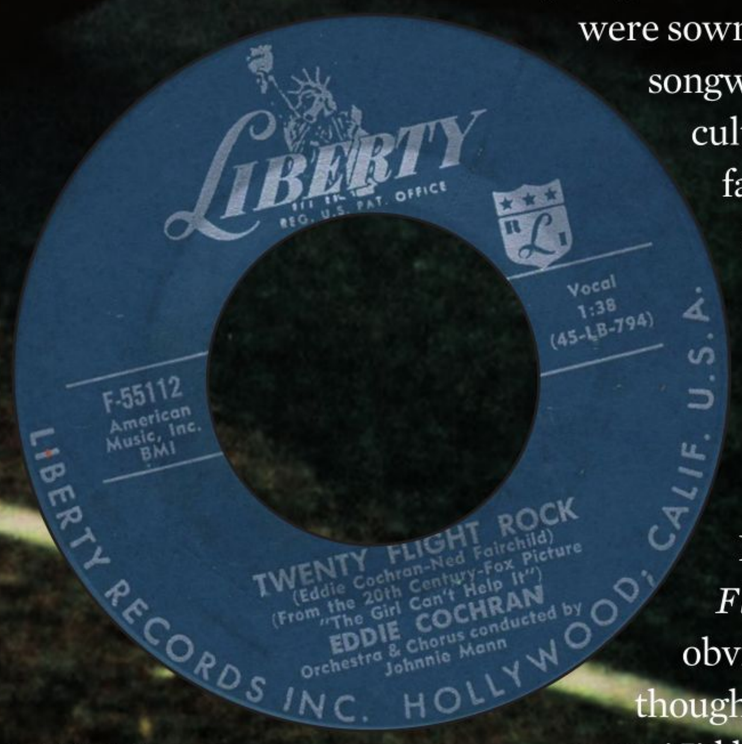
EDDIE COCHRAN'S SHOCKWAVE IMPACT ON THE HISTORY OF POPULAR CULTURE HAS REVERBERATED DOWN THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

His time in the public eye was but fleeting, but Eddie Cochran's shockwave impact on the history of popular culture has reverberated down the generations. A totemic figure in music equivalent in scale and range to Hollywood icon James Dean, Cochran's tragic death at the age of just 21 has forever preserved his memory as a quintessential figure of anti-authoritarian teenage rebellion – the very lifeblood of countless movements from rock'n'roll and rockabilly to glam and punk. His themes of teenage isolation and frustration would be endlessly revisited. While he can't claim the monopoly on the spirit of youthful restlessness, there's little doubt his combative spirit, if only fractionally, arguably also provides at least some of the fire in the belly of further sub-cultures such as mod and metal.

He's a perfect example of the disaffected teenager, a trope endlessly played out on the big screen in movies such as *West Side Story*, *American Graffiti* to the fun of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *The Breakfast Club*.

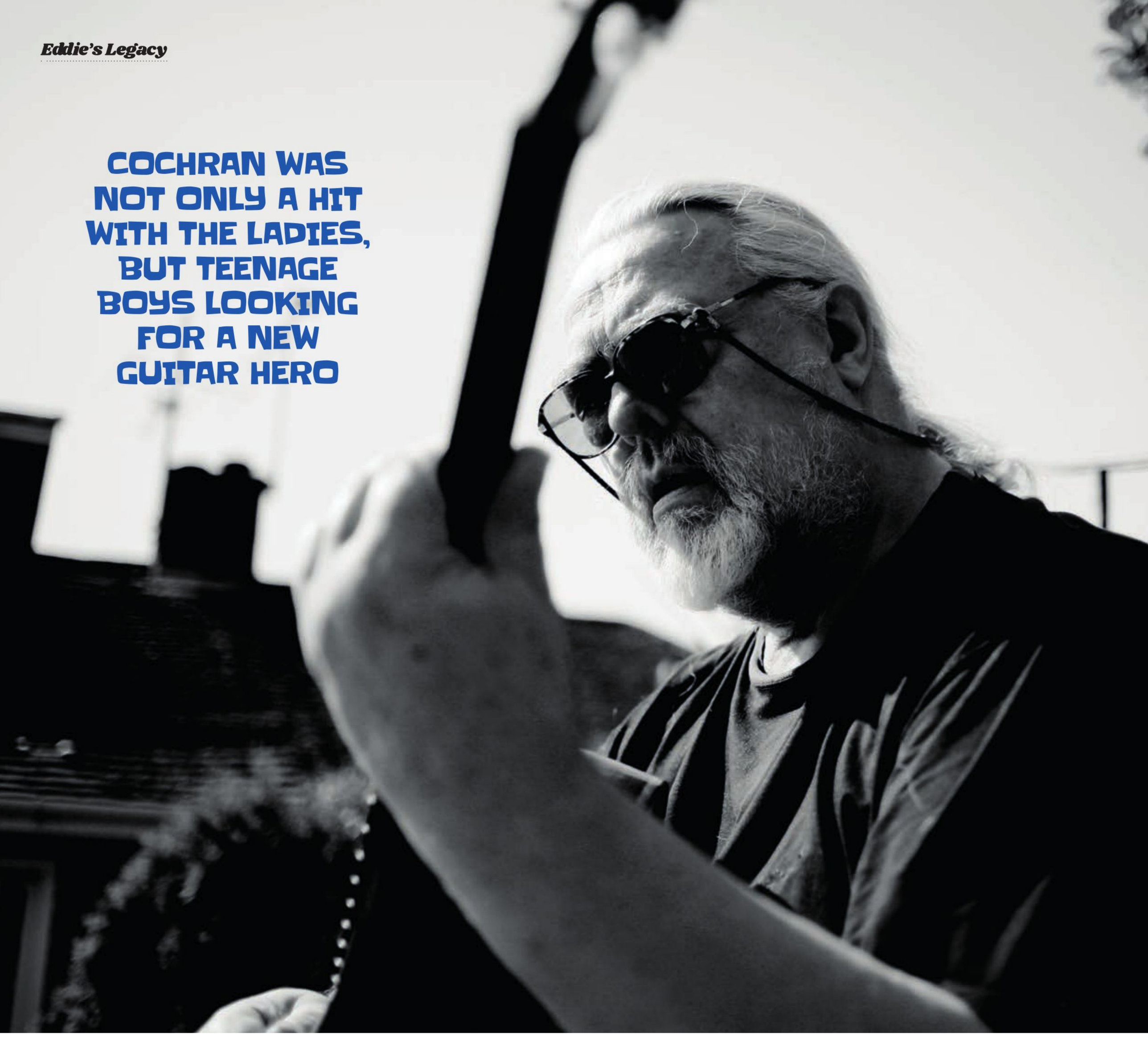
Allied to that, Eddie's knack for instantly hooky guitar riffs served as the jumping off point for any number of burgeoning axe heroes, from the crunching likes of Deep Purple's Ritchie Blackmore and Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page to the swaggering Marc Bolan.

And Cochran's influence is at the heart of the most serendipitous moment in rock history of them all – the meeting of Paul McCartney and John Lennon on 6 July 1957, at the less-than-rockist environs of St Peter's Church Hall in Woolton, Liverpool; Lennon's band The Quarrymen were playing at the church fete. When the skiffle band's leader heard Paul playing Cochran's *Twenty Flight Rock* backstage, the seeds were sown for the greatest songwriting partnership in pop cultural history. A fresh-faced Paul, then just 15, turned John's head by performing Eddie's classic 1957 single. In the *Anthology* book, Lennon recalls: "I was very impressed with Paul playing *Twenty Flight Rock*. He could obviously play guitar. I thought to myself, 'He's as good as me.' I'd been kingpin up to then. Now, I thought 'If I take him on, what will happen?' It went through my head that I'd have to keep him in line if I let him join. But he was so good, so he was worth having. He also looked like Elvis. I dug him." ➡



SILVER SCREEN COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

COCHRAN WAS NOT ONLY A HIT WITH THE LADIES, BUT TEENAGE BOYS LOOKING FOR A NEW GUITAR HERO



McCartney's ability to not only play the song's chords but the fact that he'd memorised all of the lyrics was the clincher for Lennon. Cochran was a defining influence on Paul. In the *Anthology* book, the bassist reminisces: "I saw Eddie Cochran on television. *Oh Boy!* I think it was. Most of the other guys like Cliff Richard and Marty Wilde were good singers but Eddie was suddenly the first one that played guitar. He was playing *Milk Cow Blues* and had a Gretsch guitar with a Bigsby vibrator [tremelo] – it looked very glamourous."

COCHRAN'S DASHING GOOD

looks, wit, blond hair, blue eyes and on-stage instrumental theatrics meant that he was not only a hit with the ladies but also fitted the bill for teenage boys looking for a new guitar hero. George Harrison was one of the latter. The Beatles' lead guitarist bought his own Gretsch guitar because of Chet Atkins, but was impressed by the charismatic fellow Gretsch player Cochran, singling out a live date in Liverpool as one of the best gigs he'd seen as a youngster. In the *Anthology* book he explains: "[Eddie] was backed up by an English band. I remember [him] well: he had this black leather waistcoat, black leather trousers and a raspberry-coloured shirt. He came on doing *What I'd Say* and as the curtains opened he had his back to the audience, playing the riff. I was watching his fingers, to see how he played. He had his Gretsch guitar, the one in all the pictures, with a black Gibson pick-up and a Bigsby tremelo. It was the orange Chet Atkins 6120, like the one I later used on the Carl Perkins TV special, with the 'G' branded in the wood."

Cochran's beloved Gretsch rarely left his side and was recovered undamaged from the boot of the car after the fateful crash that claimed his life and was later returned to his family before its final resting place at the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame in Ohio.

George was not only impressed by Cochran's original material and guitar-playing ability, he also noted Eddie's way with cover versions, including Ray Charles's *Hallelujah I Love Her So*. George added: "There was a funny break in-between songs. He was standing at the microphone and as he started to talk he put his two hands through his hair, pushing it back. And a girl, one lone voice, screamed out 'Oh, Eddie!' and he coolly murmured into the mike 'Hi, honey!' I thought, 'Yes! That's it – rock'n'roll!'"

Eddie's use of an unwound light-gauge third string on his guitar – a trick he learned from Joe Brown who had toured with Cochran – was a key influence on the

RICHARD ECCLESTONE/REDFERNS/GETTY



Big Jim Sullivan was one of the most in-demand session musicians of the 60s and 70s



THE MARC OF GREATNESS

AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ICONS...

He'd go on to hotwire simple boogie riffs and transform them into glam anthems, but T.Rex's first brush with rock'n'roll royalty had a profound effect on him. As a 13-year-old Cochran fan, the-then Marc Feld met Eddie outside the Hackney Empire in London after the star had just performed there in concert. Cochran allowed the boy to carry his guitar out to his limousine. As the shape-shifting Marc searched for an identity he would rename himself Dib Cochran as he fronted The Earwigs in homage to his favourite rock'n'roller. Bolan also later had his main Gibson Les Paul guitar refinished in a transparent orange colour to mimic the trademark look of Cochran's Gretsch 6120.

sound of early Beatles recordings. It allowed Harrison to bend notes with ease, George explained: "In those days, I wasn't smart enough to think 'I'll put a second string on in place of the third, so I can bend it.' But Eddie Cochran had all that sussed out."

The Beatles always had Cochran as a touchstone of success, as Lennon proffered: "At first, we wanted to be Goffin and King, then we wanted to be bigger than Eddie Cochran, then Buddy Holly, but finally we arrived at wanting to be bigger than the biggest – Elvis Presley."

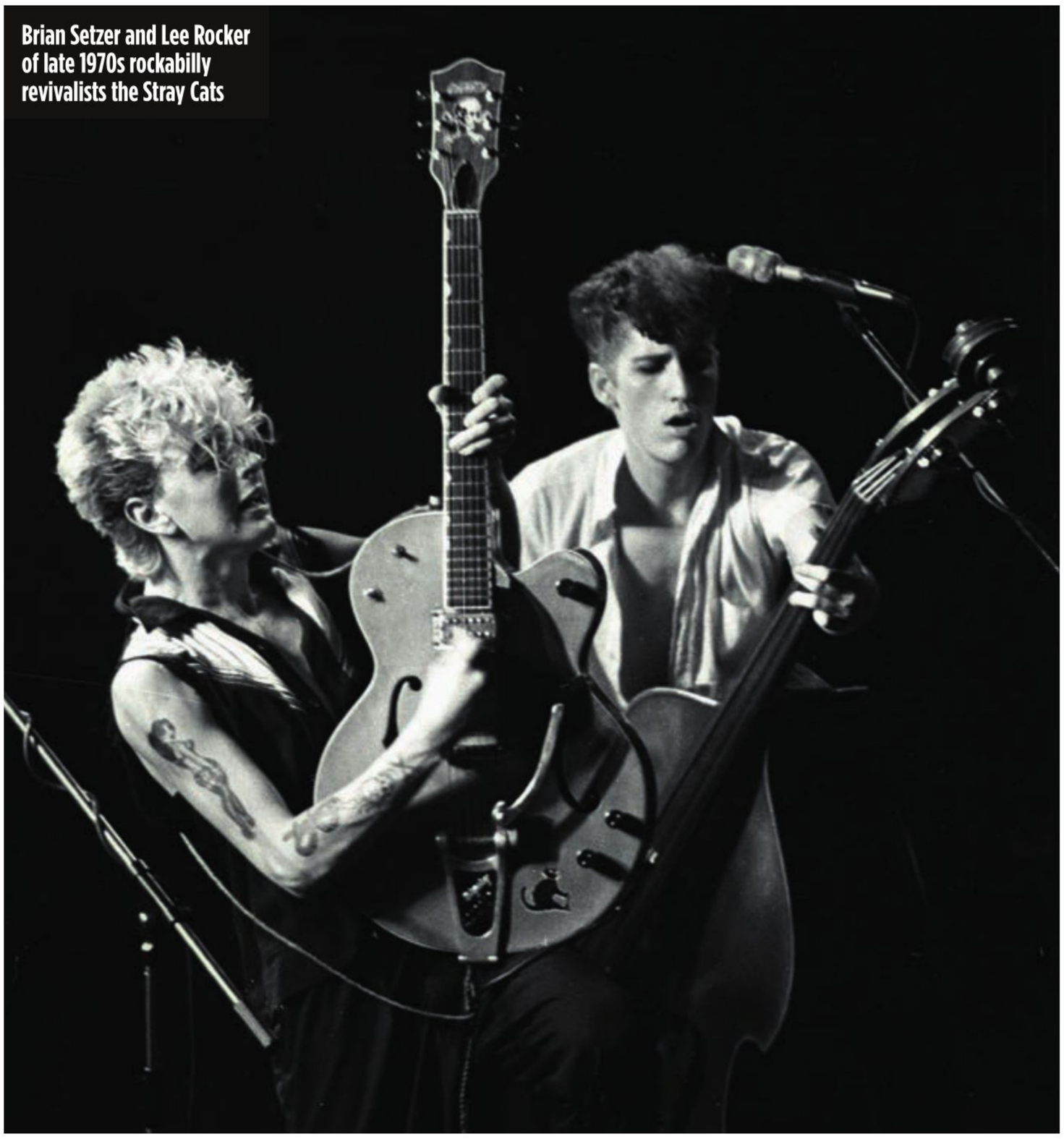
AS ONE OF the first US rock'n'roll artists to come to the UK, the British public took Eddie to their hearts to the point that he's now more revered here than in his homeland.

A prodigious production talent, his knowledge of overdubbing techniques was also cribbed by numerous other musicians and industry insiders. His skill as a musician shouldn't be underestimated – he was also proficient on drums, bass and piano. When employing UK backing bands, Cochran was keen to improve their skills and taught drummers his new rhythms and guitarists the correct fingerings for his nuanced chords.

During Eddie's Spring 1960 UK tour, Marty Wilde's band The Wildcats – guitarists Big Jim Sullivan and Tony Belcher, bassist 'Liquorice' Locking, and drummer Brian Bennett – accompanied Cochran on the majority of the gigs and Sullivan recalls that multi-instrumentalist Eddie would be able to show the collected musicians their own individual parts. These individuals became central to the British blues and pop boom of the 60s either as session musicians or as members of Cliff Richard's Shadows.

Sullivan picked up a host of instrumentalist ideas from Eddie including his soloing tricks, country-style fingerpicking technique and soulful blues inflections. He'd later pass them on to fellow session guitarists Ritchie Blackmore and Jimmy Page – later to find fame in Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin respectively, of course – as well as Jeff Beck. The trio

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/REDFERNS/GETTY

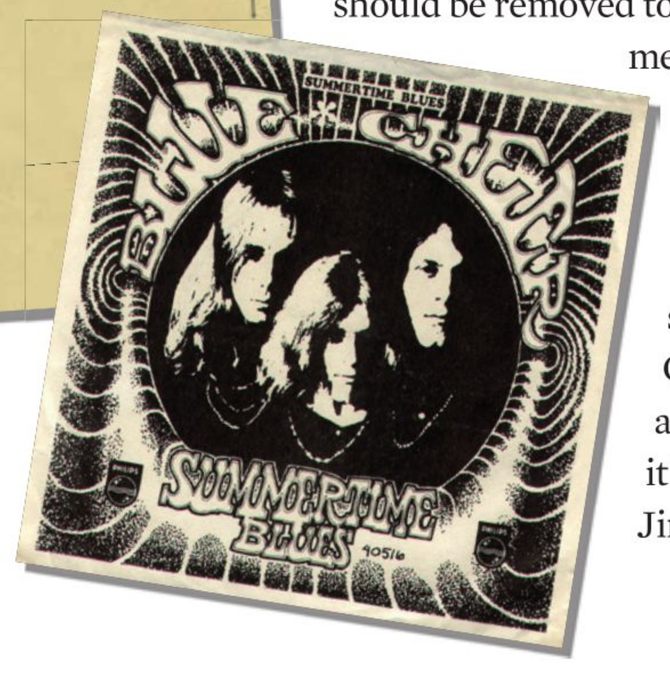


Brian Setzer and Lee Rocker of late 1970s rockabilly revivalists the Stray Cats

would lead the charge of British rockers during the 60s and 70s.

Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page was an avowed fan of Cochran. A session veteran while still a teenager, Page picked up tricks from Eddie's technique and utilised them on countless recording sessions before forming Zeppelin in 1968. And, as the band gradually worked up enough original material to fill their setlists, they regularly dipped into Cochran's back catalogue during their early years to bolster shows. Zeppelin covered *Somethin' Else*, *C'mon Everybody*, *Twenty Flight Rock* and *Summertime Blues*. Their 1970 Albert Hall version of *C'mon Everybody* and *Somethin' Else* is gutsy proto-punk, with a relentless thudding groove later to be made into a trademark sound by the Ramones.

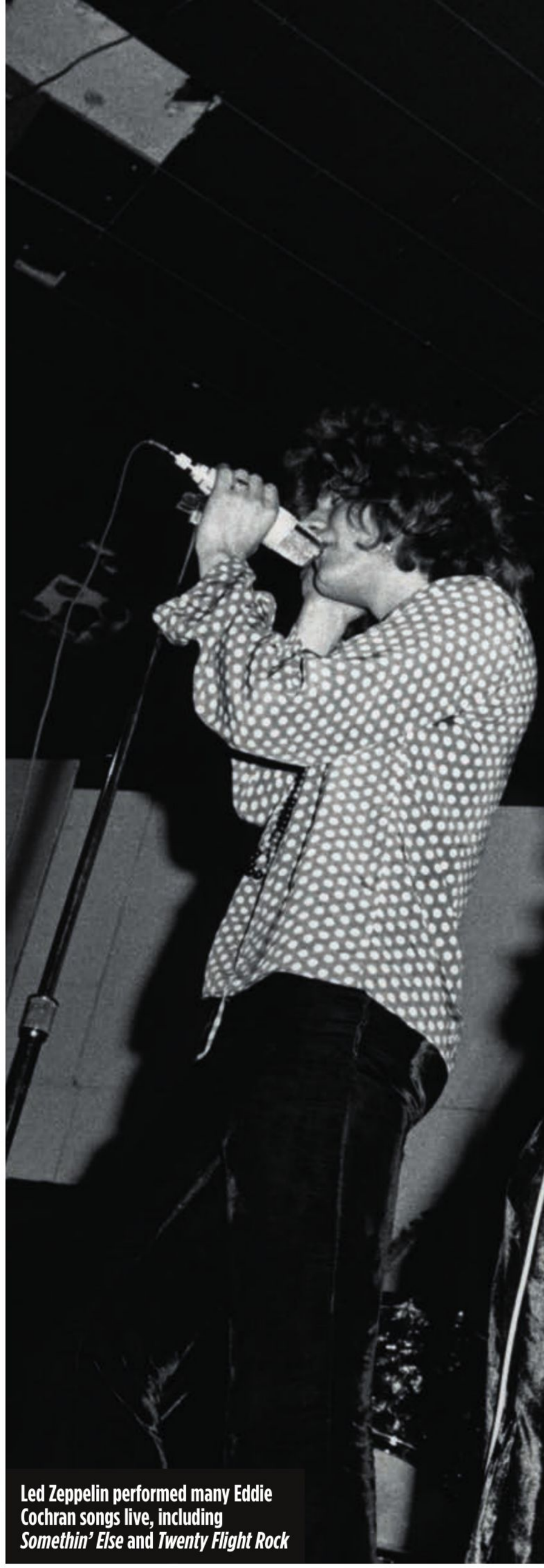




Eddie had a powerful influence on the hard rock bands of the late 1960s

COCHRAN'S KNACK FOR stripped-back earworm hooks, best evidenced by the polyrhythmic and acoustic guitar-driven *Summertime Blues* and *C'mon Everybody*, cannot be underestimated in the evolution of rock. The finest exponents of the guitar riff have all understood one basic principle – that simplicity is key. All extraneous detail should be removed to make a riff melodic, memorable and snappy.

An endless catalogue of legendary guitarists has tapped into the same concept that Cochran arrived at as a teenager, whether it be the raunch of Jimmy Page and Ritchie Blackmore or the unadorned bareness of Angus Young and Tony Iommi. Even inveterate conceptualist Pete Townshend realised that when it comes to riffs, less is more. You'll hear Townshend's use of a Gretsch 6120 all over the likes of classic Who long-players such as *Who's Next* and *Quadrophenia*. It wasn't quite a case of love at first sight for Pete, though. Speaking about the gift of a Gretsch he received from James Gang guitarist (and later Eagle) Joe Walsh, Pete told *Guitar Player* magazine in 1972: "I opened the case and it was bright orange. I thought, 'Ugh! It's horrible, I hate it.' I went home and went into my studio and plugged it in and it totally wrecked me



Led Zeppelin performed many Eddie Cochran songs live, including *Somethin' Else* and *Twenty Flight Rock*

HOWARD BARLOW/REDFERNS/GETTY



ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVEREDFERNS/GETTY

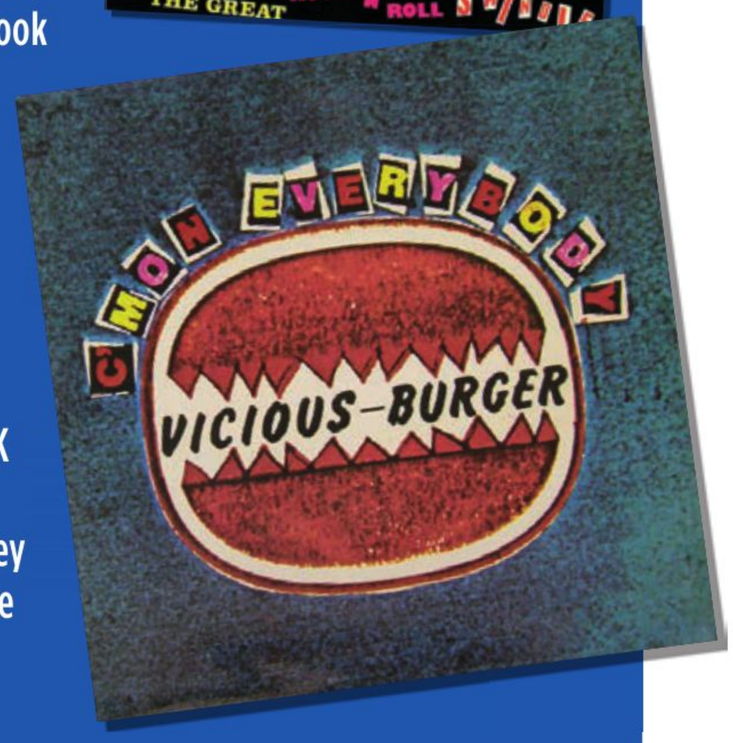
ROCK'N'ROLL SWINDLING

HOW EDDIE BECAME THE GODFATHER OF PUNK

While Cochran may no doubt have raised an eyebrow at their pointed lack of skill as instrumentalists, it's interesting to note how influential he became in the burgeoning punk movement. While The Clash and Ramones covered Eddie's work, it's the Sex Pistols who would have the most high-profile connection with his music.

With Johnny Rotten refusing to take part in *The Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle* mockumentary project directed by Julien Temple, the hunt was on for material to bolster the tracklisting of the accompanying soundtrack album. Rotten's contributions were used against his will but Sid Vicious stepped into the breach for three tracks, a now-notorious mickey-taking slur through Sinatra's *My Way*, plus two Cochran hits, *Something Else* (the band reinstated the missing 'g' in 'Something', how very British of them) and *C'mon Everybody*. Sid Vicious took the Cochran covers seriously, and bolstered by Steve Jones' blistering guitar, they're packed with brattish abandon. Both were released as singles and made the UK Top Five in 1979. After *God Save The Queen*, they were the biggest hits the Sex Pistols ever had on their home turf.





out, it's the best guitar I've got now." The Who also famously covered *Summertime Blues*. Their corrosive version is a highlight of their *Live At Leeds* LP.

Cochran even became beloved of heavier riff-based bands. Blue Cheer covered *Summertime Blues* and you can hear his influence in Vanilla Fudge, Steppenwolf and early Black Sabbath.

Although it wasn't written by Cochran, the singer's version of C*ut Across Shorty* became arguably the most famous. Rod Stewart, then in his pomp as an interpretative singer, revisited it for his *Gasoline Alley* album in 1971, it's a classic slice of storytelling songwriting.

In the 80s, Cochran's biggest – and most influential – supporter was Brian Setzer from the Stray Cats. Although as a guitarist Setzer was arguably more inspired by the dazzling finger speed of Gene Vincent & His Blues Caps guitarist Cliff Gallup, Setzer believed that Cochran was the ultimate rock'n'roll package: "It wasn't just music with him; it was his guitar playing, his look, his singing, I'd say that, all things considered, he's probably my favourite 'cat' of all time."

COCHRAN HAD A KNACK FOR EARWORM HOOKS, EVIDENCED ON SUMMERTIME BLUES

Fellow Stray Cat Slim Jim Phantom was equally convinced of Cochran's legacy stating: "The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Sex Pistols, Motörhead, none of them exist without Eddie Cochran."

Jimi Hendrix even requested that Cochran's music should be played at his funeral. Could there be any bigger compliment from the greatest guitar player of all time? ✶

EDDIE COCHRAN IN NUMBERS

1 NUMBER OF STUDIO ALBUMS EDDIE RELEASED DURING HIS LIFETIME

1:42 TIME IN MINUTES AND SECONDS OF THE CLASSIC TWENTY FLIGHT ROCK

45 MINUTES AMOUNT OF TIME IT TOOK EDDIE AND JERRY CAPEHART TO WRITE *SUMMERTIME BLUES*

1987 YEAR EDDIE WAS ADMITTED TO THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME

18 CHART POSITION IN THE UK OF *SUMMERTIME BLUES* WHEN IT WAS RELEASED IN 1958

3 ...STEPS TO HEAVEN, ACCORDING TO EDDIE

21 AGE EDDIE WAS WHEN HE DIED

14 CHART POSITION OF *C'MON EVERYBODY* WHEN IT WAS RE-RELEASED IN 1988 AFTER ITS USE IN AN AD FOR LEVI'S JEANS

1 NUMBER OF NO.1S EDDIE HAD IN THE UK

3 OCTOBER 2010 ON 27 SEPTEMBER, 2010, THE MAYOR OF BELL GARDENS, CALIFORNIA (WHERE EDDIE HAD BEGUN HIS CAREER) DECLARED 3 OCTOBER, 2010 TO BE "EDDIE COCHRAN DAY"

1 NUMBER OF TOP 10 HITS EDDIE HAD IN HIS NATIVE US (*SUMMERTIME BLUES* PEAKED AT NO.8)

VINTAGE ★ ROCK PRESENTS



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