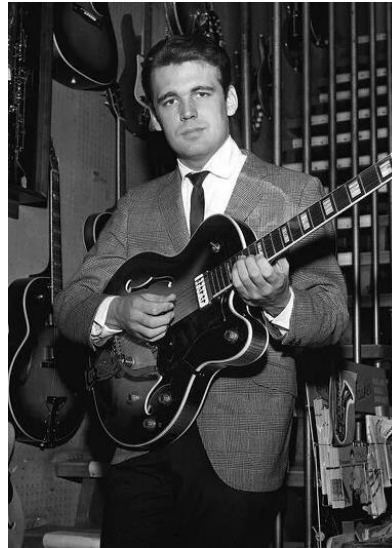


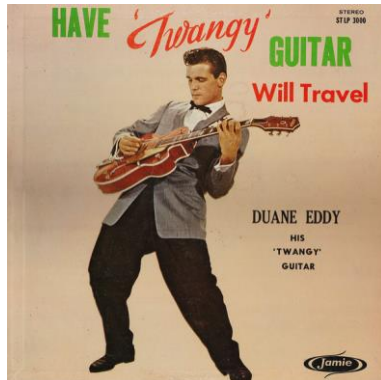
DUANE EDDY



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1955-2011</i>	<i>Early rock'n'roll</i>	<i>Peter Gunn (1959)</i>

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- [Girls! Girls! Girls!](#) (1961)



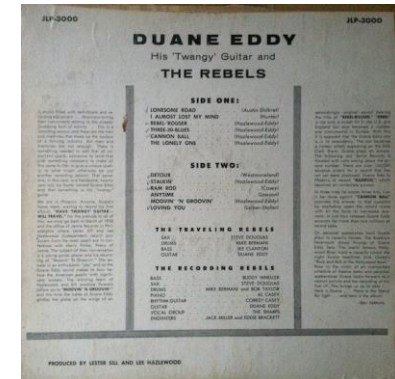
HAVE 'TWANGY' GUITAR WILL TRAVEL

Album released:

1958

V A L U E
3 3 3 3 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) Lonesome Road; 2) I Almost Lost My Mind; 3) Rebel-'Rouser; 4) Three-30-Blues; 5) Cannon Ball; 6) The Lonely One; 7) Detour; 8) Stalkin'; 9) Ram Rod; 10) Anytime; 11) **Moovin' 'n Groovin'**; 12) Loving You.

REVIEW

Once again we are reminded that destiny is a fun kind of lady, when going all the way back to the humble beginnings of Duane Eddy's career — as part of the guitar-vocal duo «Jimmy and Duane», in which he played guitar and sang along with his friend Jimmy Delbridge. Their only single, '[Soda Fountain Girl](#)', released in 1955 when Duane was just 17 years old, is a fairly cute teen-country ditty with a mildly startling tempo change in the middle of the tune — and not a single sign of Eddy's specialness; at this point, he is diligently trying to be Chet Atkins and little else.



Far more important than the single itself was Eddy's lucky acquaintance with Lee Hazlewood, who had only just started a career as a disc jockey in Arizona, where Eddy was living. Hazlewood was almost ten years older than Eddy, but both of them started their musical career at about the same time (Hazlewood used to be a medical student and then served in the Army during the Korean War), so it is quite natural that when Duane recorded 'Soda Fountain Girl' and Lee produced it, neither of the two did a particularly good job. What is nowhere near as natural is that both went on to display remarkable talents — and, for that matter, the role of Hazlewood in shaping the Duane Eddy legend cannot be underestimated; it is essentially comparable to that of George Martin for the Beatles, albeit on a smaller scale, of course.

The innovative instrumental sound that Duane came up with required two ingredients: a special playing technique and clever production. The technique was all Duane's, as he devised the famous «twangy» way of playing lead melody on the guitar's bass strings, making them vibrate like a Jew's harp and achieving a darker, deeper, denser sound without making it feel too aggressive or rebellious. The production was Hazlewood's, as he compensated for the lack of an echo chamber in Phoenix's studios by purchasing a huge used-up water tank and installing it as an adequate substitute — this was used for Eddy's very first single involving the «twangy» technique, 'Moovin' 'n Groovin' (yes, *moovin'* with two o's, as in *moo*; this is the way the title is spelled on both the original single and the LP, though almost everybody now forgets the second o when talking about the song). Together, they created a tiny bit of magic that would often be successfully imitated, but never truly recaptured in the exact same way.

'Moovin' 'n Groovin' may not have invented surf-rock (at the very least, there were obviously no ideas to associate it with surfing in any way, and the state of Arizona is hardly the best location to come up with surfing-related ideas in the first place), but it did invent and even contextualize a new sound. The opening ringing riff was brazenly stolen by Eddy from Chuck Berry's 'Brown Eyed Handsome Man' — which is all the more ironic considering that Eddy later grumbled about the Beach Boys re-stealing it for 'Surfing USA' (a song that, consequently, plunders not one, but *two* Chuck Berry compositions at the same time). But once the riff has delivered its fanfare, the sound quickly changes to Eddy's «twang» — the audio equivalent of watching Chuck Berry duckwalk across a hedgerow of distorting mirrors. The low, quasi-grouchy, wobbly, blurring tone of the guitar gives off a strange, proto-psychedelic effect without seriously lowering the fun quotient. Also of note is the equally quirky distorted sax solo from Plas Johnson: Duane liked the saxophone, and would frequently employ sax players (most often, Steve Douglas, who would later play on **Pet Sounds** and several Dylan albums) to provide nice sonic contrast with all the guitar twang.

Unfortunately, the composition stalled at #72 on the charts, and it was not until the next release that Duane Eddy became a national sensation — although, as is often the case, that next release would be, in my opinion at least, quite inferior to its predecessor. 'Rebel-'Rouser', which, according to Eddy himself, was loosely based on a sped-up interpretation of Tennessee Ernie Ford's 'Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet', is a melodically trivial country dance number, whose main point of attraction — a «battle» between Eddy's twang and Gil Bernal's sax blasts — is utterly minimalistic in nature, and quite repetitive. But maybe because it was faster, and featured overdubbed handclaps and cheer-up vocals from the Sharps (soon to be known as the Rivingtons of 'Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow' fame), it did a better job of capturing the public interest, climbing all the way to #6 on the charts and even achieving commercial success across the Atlantic, starting off the UK's lengthy and

loyal romance with Duane Eddy. Maybe this simply means that sometimes less means more; maybe it means that people are downright strange; maybe they did a better job with promotion that time around — or, maybe, all three reasons.

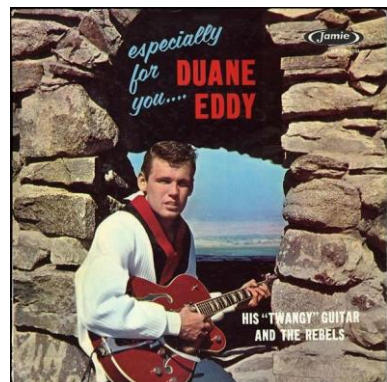
At the very least, Eddy has to be commended for refusing to release the oddly mistitled 'Mason Dixon Lion' as the sequel to 'Rebel-'Rouser' against Hazlewood's advice, claiming that the song sounded way too similar to its predecessor. Indeed, each of the next three singles, all of which are included on his first LP, have their own specific features. 'Ramrod' (a re-recording of an earlier version credited to «Duane Eddy and his Rock-a-billies» in 1957) is straightforward, insistent rock'n'roll in the vein of people like Eddie Cochran; 'Cannonball' is more of a nod in the direction of Bo Diddley, albeit with a rather poppy smoothing out of the Bo Diddley riff and comic yakety-sax thrown in for good measure; and 'The Lonely One' is a light-epic country-western ballad, gently nudging you in the direction of the rising sun on the horizon. All three exploit the «twang» style in slightly different ways, and all three are fun, if not particularly earth-shaking.

From a certain point of view, Duane Eddy was a one-trick pony, and he and Hazlewood were never shy about exploiting that pony — many of the singles were directly credited to «Duane Eddy and his 'twangy' guitar», and they even inserted the word 'twangy' into the title of the LP, despite it breaking the perfect symmetric balance of **Have Guitar Will Travel**. But it is also worth your while to take a listen to the entire album, which shows that Eddy's musical preferences extended well beyond what was showcased on the A-sides of his singles. Thus, he was no stranger to slow, soulful blues in the vein of Ray Charles — 'Stalkin', the B-side to 'Rebel-'Rouser', takes the opening riff of 'Sinner's Prayer' as reference and builds up a deep groove of hysterical distorted saxes, pianos, and gospel background vocals. On the other side of the spectrum, 'Three-30-Blues' is more of a regular 12-bar blues-de-luxe, sort of a «B. B. King goes twangy» vibe and, honestly, not at all inferior to whatever B. B. himself was playing at the time. Ivory Joe Hunter's R&B classic 'I Almost Lost My Mind' is given an upbeat pop flavor; and for the sakes of sweet romance, there is a twangy instrumental cover of Elvis' 'Loving You', with Eddy's low-pitch guitar notes a perfect fit for the King's deep voice. (In a way, you could probably call that cover the big old grandmother of all surf-pop ballads).

Admittedly, not even the best songs on this album could be said to take my breath away — Duane Eddy had good taste, did not like to repeat himself too much, and invented his own style of playing, but that same style also had him chained and prevented from seriously letting his hair down even when the rambunctious nature of the performed tunes demanded it; besides, his playing technique was limited and he was much better at rigidly churning out repetitive riffs than taking off and going into some less predictable direction — a solid prototype for the Ventures or the Shadows (actually, I think Nokie

Edwards would beat him in a creativity competition). But you can still feel the freshness of the playing style even sixty-plus years after the fact — and there is a certain aura of «dark sweetness» to Eddy's twangy tone which you could hardly get from anybody else. Taken in small dozes, Duane Eddy is fun — and I'd say that a 12-song LP running for less than 30 minutes is precisely the kind of small doze that might endear the guy to you, if you give it a chance.





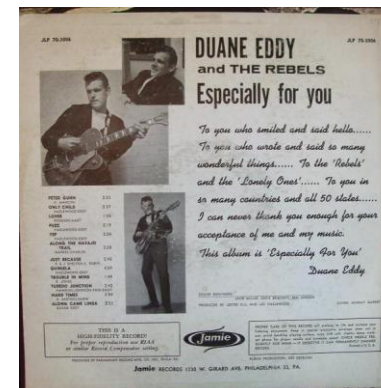
ESPECIALLY FOR YOU

Album released:

May 1959

V A L U E
4 3 3 3 2

More info:



Tracks: 1) Peter Gunn; 2) Only Child; 3) Lover; 4) Fuzz; 5) Yep!; 6) Along The Navajo Trail; 7) Just Because; 8) Quiniela; 9) Trouble In Mind; 10) Tuxedo Junction; 11) Hard Times; 12) Along Came Linda.

REVIEW

You know, maybe you should just ignore whatever was written in my review of Duane Eddy's first LP: the more I listen to his early records, the more I am convinced that *nobody* played instrumental rock'n'roll better than Eddy's Rebels at the tail end of the 1950s. Just because it was all so low-key, and because Eddy's twangy guitar rarely gets square in your face, and because the sound is comparatively clean and glossy next to, say, Link Wray, does not take away the tightness, classiness, and unpredictability of the music. It's just that most of it gives off an «evening vibe», best listened to in darkness and solitude, rather than the «endless party vibe» of the Ventures — but if you manage to get in the mood, 30 more minutes of Duane Eddy at his peak is the epitome of modestly-sublime.

It is doggone difficult to even properly reconstruct the lineup of the Rebels at the time: original LP and even early CD issues list none of the players other than Duane, and to procure a proper sessionography for the man, you still need to go to the library or do some super-sleuthing. But at least the back cover of the latest LP re-issue tells us that in March 1959, when these tracks were recorded, the band included Corkey Casey on rhythm guitar, Buddy Wheeler on electric bass, Jimmy Simmons on upright bass, Al Casey on piano, Mike Bermanni on drums, and Plas Johnson and Steve Douglas on saxes (no



idea who plays on which track, though). Lee Hazlewood still took care of production, and co-wrote most of the material with Duane. It's all relevant, because these tracks are a collective work, and the wholesome groove worked out by the band is no less important than Eddy's guitar presence — in fact, I would say that Eddy's guitar presence is almost surprisingly modest, seeing how often he cedes the spotlight to his sax players (and, less often, his piano and bass players). Formally, this should be more like *The Rebels Featuring Duane Eddy* than *Duane Eddy and The Rebels*.

And nowhere more so than on the opening track, which is probably still one of Eddy's best-remembered hits — Duane and Lee's reworking of Henry Mancini's 'Peter Gunn' theme. While [the original version](#) (which, by the way, also featured Plas Johnson on sax, though some sources say that on Duane's version it is actually Steve Douglas blowing the instrument) was certainly no slouch, Eddy's deep, grumbly twang, multiplied by the bassline-in-unison, takes it even closer to proto-heavy metal territory — and as for the sax part, it is much more pronounced in his version, actually giving it its own voice rather than drowning it in the mix (the original had the main theme played by a big brass section, but here the saxophone takes care of both the theme and the improvised soloing). Basically, Eddy and Hazlewood just took this superb piece of swaggy, but humorous musical menace and gave it its independence from the status of a TV show theme; in their hands, it sounds almost ahead of its time, just a mammoth jazz-metal groove predating a lot of mid-to-late Sixties prog-rock excitement.

Consequently, the easiest, and most natural, thing in the world is to define **Especially For You** as «that album with 'Peter Gunn' on it and some forgettable stuff», as most people who actually took the trouble to spin the entire LP usually do. Even the album's second-best known track, the Eddy-Hazlewood original 'Yep!', which was originally released as the B-side to 'Peter Gunn' and then as its own A-side, feels like a slight, joyful party-style piece of fun in comparison — although it largely follows the same formula, establishing a firm mid-tempo guitar / bass groove over which the sax player is given full licence to do his thing. But unlike Mancini's theme, this one is nowhere near as aggressive — even despite all the «twang», the theme in general is more reminiscent of vaudevillian R&B: speed it up and you get a good backing track for a good old Coasters comedy number. It's loud, rambunctious, a lot of fun, but you don't exactly punch holes through brick walls with it the same way you do with the 'Peter Gunn' jackhammer.

But if you persist long enough to give **Especially For You** two or three listens, eventually it may begin to win over you, like it did over me, through the sheer power of its diversity and imagination. Just look at this: 'Peter Gunn' is followed by 'Only Child', a slow, soulful blues tune with guitar, sax, and piano taking solo turns, competing with each other in who can come out with the sharper and shriller sound (well, actually, only the guitar and sax; Al Casey on piano plays it smooth and

subdued in contrast). Then, out of nowhere, jumps out 'Lover', a short jazzy bit with lightning-fast and oddly processed guitar playing which immediately brings to mind the style of Les Paul's early 1950s sonic experiments (one of the weirdest guitar sounds ever invented — while most people only remember Les Paul as a guitar builder, for obvious reasons, he was also an inimitable musical innovator... well, scratch «inimitable», since Duane here does a note-perfect imitation of his style on 1950's **The New Sound**). Then it's on to 'Fuzz', a rhythmically complex and confusing mix of R&B and kiddie music; on to 'Yep!', which I already described; and, finally, an instrumental take on the old country ditty 'Along The Navajo Trail', with a strings-and-backing-vocals shift from the perennial sax for a change. And that's just Side A.

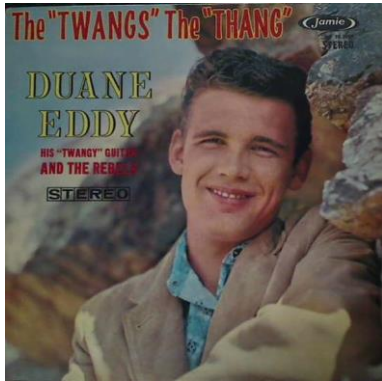
Individually, each of these five tracks does not amount much to anything, but together, they work a bit of strange magic (think ahead to the **Abbey Road** suite or something like that) — Duane's moody «twang» is the glue that keeps it all together, but even without focusing on the twang, it feels like a small, dollhouse-ish musical universe where jazz, blues, pop, country, and R&B all come together in a light-hearted, but adorable synthesis. I am pretty sure that this achievement would be unachievable without the vision of Lee Hazlewood behind the controls, but this should hardly be surprising: few, if any, great albums made by great guitarists are able to pass into legend on the creative strength of the guitar playing alone. And if Lee Hazlewood could even make the usually more-wooden-than-wood-itself Nancy Sinatra come alive, what *wouldn't* he be able to achieve in collaboration with a real talent such as Eddy's?

On to the second side of the album, which greets us with another Coaster-sized version of a country-rock'n'roll classic ('Just Because', which we mostly know in the Elvis version), throws in another bit of playful, but melancholy blues ('Trouble In Mind'), travels through a downhome reinvention of Glenn Miller's big band standard 'Tuxedo Junction', and ultimately winds down on a soft, romantic note when the rhythm section goes home and only the strings and backing vocals remain to accompany Eddy's little good-night-style serenade of 'Along Came Linda'. The major highlight on Side B, however, is the oddly-titled 'Quiniela' which, as can be seen from the alternate take included in the bonus tracks on the CD edition, began life as a variation on the old blues of 'St. James' Infirmary', but ended up becoming a lengthy Latin-tinged jazz workout, with Eddy delivering a sparse, but beautifully bitter and gloomy passage (sax, piano, and bass solos are also decent, but they don't seem to get that much payoff from their hush-hush attitude here as Duane does).

In short, one thing this record can never be accused of is monotony — an accusation which is usually hard to evade for an instrumental pop album, and would seem to be even harder to evade for a guitar player known for some particularly idiosyncratic style or technique, like Eddy. I am actually pretty sure that these albums would have more recognition, as

actual *albums*, had they been credited to «Duane Eddy and Lee Hazlewood», given the critical reverence typically paid to the latter (as such, I'm pretty sure a lot of people do not even remember the close partnership between the two — I certainly knew nothing of it when I had my first share of Duane Eddy listening). But even without it, all you have to do is not try to focus as hard on the individual tracks as on the *transitions* between them, which really give the impression of Duane and Lee as Don Quixote and Sancho on some unpredictable journey, never knowing where the road is going to take them the very next minute.





THE "TWANGS" THE "THANG"

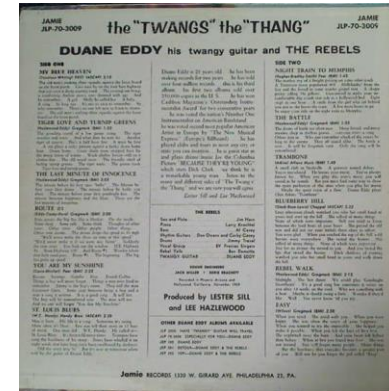
Album released:

V A L U E

November 1959

3 3 3 2 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) My Blue Heaven; 2) Tiger Love And Turnip Greens; 3) The Last Minute Of Innocence; 4) Route No. 1; 5) You Are My Sunshine; 6) St. Louis Blues; 7) Night Train To Memphis; 8) The Battle; 9) Trambone; 10) Blueberry Hill; 11) Rebel Walk; 12) Easy.

REVIEW

Eddy's third LP for the Jamie label tends to get the shaft from retro-reviewers because (a) it doesn't really do anything that had not already been done before and (b) it is not distinguished by any stand-out singles, such as 'Moovin' And Groovin' or 'Peter Gunn'. In fact, when it was released some time around the Christmas season of 1959, it did not have any tracks on it that were previously released as singles — although 'My Blue Heaven' did end up as an A-side next year, and both 'Rebel Walk' and 'The Battle' would also appear on 45"s throughout the early Sixties.



This disappointment is understandable, but only inasmuch as one might hold unrealistic expectations for Eddy to keep on revolutionizing the sound of the electric guitar for ever and ever, which is not the way it worked in the Fifties — once you got your signature sound that separated you from everybody else, you usually stuck to it, milking the potential of the formula to the very last drop. Bottomline is, Eddy's discography past his original line of great singles is *only* worth exploring if you seriously dig his style and want to savor its various nuances — but if you do, it's not a particularly ungrateful task, since there are plenty of such nuances, even on such formally undistinguished albums as this one.

The oddly titled "**Twangs**" **The "Thang"** did at least mark some important changes in the Rebels' lineup — changes that will be of interest to genuine aficionados of the classic rock era, since they involved adding Larry Knechtel on piano and Jim Horn on saxophone, both of whom would go on to become some of the most in-demand session players through the next decade. Not that this radically shifts the sound or anything: Horn plays in much the same paradigm as Steve Douglas, providing a lively, comically tinged high-pitched counterpart to Duane's grumbly guitar twang, and it would take a very acute ear to spot any stylistic differences from earlier times. However, he does switch to flute on several tracks, particularly the relaxing midday-walk shuffle of 'Trambone', which adds a bit of variety.

Another important addition is the gospel choir of the Evelyn Freeman Singers, regularly featured throughout the album; Eddy had always loved his female backup singers, and this time around he almost goes overboard with them, though there is certainly no danger of turning the record into a gospel album — the man loves his rock'n'roll heart too much for that. One of the ladies occasionally takes lead vocals, most notably on the weird waltz 'The Last Minute Of Innocence', with an ecstatic vocal performance that sometimes lands in the whistle register — if one so desires, one might think of it as a great-grandfather to 'The Great Gig In The Sky', except that the vibe here is undeniably positive rather than epic-tragic... hmm, what could that title *possibly* mean, I wonder? Was Eddy trying to convey... something dirty?

On the really rockin' front, we have 'Tiger Love And Turnip Greens' (trust Lee Hazlewood to come up with a title like that!), with its breakneck-jumpin' Benny Hill vibe and particularly thick, proto-Motörhead «guitar-as-bass» tone; 'Rebel Walk', a dark bluesy promenade probably drawing its influence from the Chicago scene, but adding some macabre vaudeville to the atmosphere with more of those ghostly banshee lead vocals; and a pumped-up version of the country classic 'Night Train To Memphis', which sets the same vibe as 'Tiger Love' but without any particularly memorable guitar lines. However, on the whole the record feels relatively relaxed — and even more than on the previous two, you can feel the steady country hand of Hazlewood pointing out most of the directions in which his good friend Duane should be going.

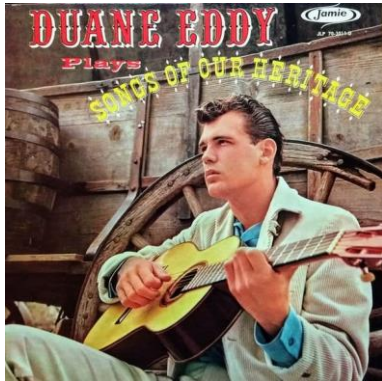
Some of these directions are utterly predictable (it doesn't take a lot of imagination to understand how 'My Blue Heaven' or 'You Are My Sunshine' would sound given the Duane Eddy treatment), others slightly less so — 'Route #1', co-credited to Eddy, rhythm guitarist Corkey Casey, and Jim Horn, starts off with a cheerful pop riff, then proceeds into more jazzy territory, not unlike something you'd hear on a Roland Kirk or a really early Jethro Tull record (largely due to Horn actively dueting on flute with Eddy — it's quite a sonic delight to hear them play in unison). The same flute adds an extra dimension to 'Blueberry Hill': Eddy does the main melody on twangy guitar, with Horn taking over the bridge section on flute, *then*

annexing the main melody again — only on sax this time, *then* Eddy takes over once again but in a much higher pitch, with Knechtel supporting this entire battle on piano and the ghostly female vocal providing backup... say what you want, but this is a pretty dang creative approach to an ultra-familiar tune.

Overall, as the conclusive block to Eddy's early trilogy of LPs, **The "Twangs" The "Thang"** has much more to offer than immediately meets the eye. The new kinds of arrangements, flutes and vocals and all, add a much-needed whiff of artsiness and may, indeed, be more important to the understanding of Lee Hazlewood's artistic development rather than Eddy's; and even if this is still formula, as is most explicitly indicated even in the title of the LP, it's got taste, class, commitment, and a willingness to be open to outside influences. One can only wonder why Eddy's last single to be released in the Fifties was not one of the better tracks from this record, but a fairly generic instrumental take on 'My Bonnie' (re-titled 'Bonnie Came Back' for a more optimistic vibe) — maybe there was some unwritten law about every rocker on Earth having to cover 'My Bonnie' before the clock strikes twelve on December 31, 1959.

One last word about the album — it's got some *really* bizarre original liner notes to it, with each song title accompanied by an impressionistic modernist verbal description, stream-of-consciousness style, something you might expect to find on a Dylan record but hardly on an innocent little record of instrumental «twang-pop». Again, I ascribe this twist to the odd workings of Lee Hazlewood's unpredictable mind; maybe he thought this could count as a small step in the direction of bridging the gap between simplistic pop music and Art. I mean, anybody who'd look at the front cover of the LP would only see the friendly face of a smiling rock'n'roll chap; but look at the back and you'll feel like you're staring at an avantgarde jazz record, trying to find the perfect verbal reflection for the moods and vibes of each track. It's a little inadequate in that most of the tracks do not really qualify for such «exclusive verbal treatment» — but still a fairly unprecedented approach to a simple pop album in a decade when simple pop hardly ever tried to become anything other than simple pop.





SONGS OF OUR HERITAGE

Album released:

1960

V A L U E
2 3 3 3 3

More info:



Tracks: 1) Cripple Creek; 2) Riddle Song; 3) John Henry; 4) Streets Of Laredo; 5) Prisoner's Song; 6) In The Pines; 7) Ole Joe Clark; 8) Wayfarin' Stranger; 9) Top Of Old Smokey; 10) Mule Train; 11) Scarlet Ribbons; 12*) **Kommotion**; 13*) Theme For Moon Children; 14*) **The Girl On Death Row**; 15*) Words Mean Nothing; 16*) Pepe; 17*) Lost Friend.

REVIEW

1960 promised to be a good year for Eddy: although the very nature of his output usually prevented his recordings from top chart positions, demand and admiration for them in the era when soft and melodic rock'n'roll completely won over its rough and rowdy variant kept at a steady level. Thus, in December '59, Duane jumped on the already crowded 'My Bonnie' bandwagon, releasing a spirited version of 'Bonnie Came Back' with a classy twang guitar / Jim Horn-powered sax duet, propelled by mini-drum solos; the song climbed all the way to #26 despite most of the population probably already knowing that melody by heart through countless versions (the most recent being Ray Charles').



Next came a bit acting part in the teen-and-teacher drama *Because They're Young*, a movie that was somewhat daring for its time for its mildly daring (for 1960, probably *smashingly* daring) depiction of sexual relations, especially when one considers that the main role was played by Dick Clark (then again, Dick Clark did have a fully conventional image, but was very well known for using it to his advantage while promoting all sorts of unconventional artists). The movie has preserved for us a very rare piece of footage of a young Duane Eddy playing his guitar on '[Shazam!](#)', another minor hit from the tune smithery of Eddy and Hazlewood, though hardly original, as it is basically just another yakety-sax oriented country-rock

dance tune without a particularly outstanding hook. Even more lucrative for Eddy was the title track to the movie, a lushly orchestrated pop ditty co-written by a bunch of guys including Aaron Schroeder (one of Elvis' primary composers); I think that Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman later nicked both the main rhythm and the main twangy riff for their own 'Little Sister', which takes a little effort to notice because atmospherically, 'Little Sister' is gritty and «dangerous» (one of the very few cases where we get to see a post-Army Elvis actually bare his teeth), whereas 'Because They're Young' has a celebratory atmosphere throughout, and Eddy merely acts here as the proverbial «first violin» within the defined limits of a symphonic orchestra. Stilted as it is, it goes without saying that Duane Eddy's instrumental version of 'Because They're Young' is far preferable to the milk-and-honey vocal version of James Darren from the same year (as featured in the movie), or the later UK cover by Helen Shapiro — yet at the same time, it is only with bitter irony that one might be allowed to react to the fact that 'Because They're Young' became the biggest commercial hit of Duane Eddy's entire career.

Although the next single, 'Kommotion', released in August 1960, only went to #78 where 'Because They're Young' reached #4, I would insist that in a perfect world those numbers should be reversed — for one thing, the use of strings on *this* instrumental is nothing short of breathtaking, as opposed to the highly conventional orchestration of the movie tune. Here, the guitar is holding an actual dialog with the strings (*trialog* if you throw in the hyper-active saxophone, which simply refuses to shut up and go away even after it's had its mid-section spotlight), and in between the three, they really create a busy atmosphere of hustlin' and bustlin', with the guitar as a fat old bumble-bee flying around its business on the lawn and the strings as a herd of dragonflies flanking the bumble-bee from all sides. It's fast, fun, unpredictable, and creative as heck, easily *the* best song of the year to come out of the Eddy-Hazlewood workshop. The slower, bluesier 'Theme For Moon Children' on the B-side is also a somewhat weird combination of stinging blues-rock guitar and odd orchestration that regularly fluctuates between generic sentimental Hollywood and proto-psychedelic Eastern vibes — just wait past the deceptive quasi-Tchaikovsky opening and you're in for another creative and puzzling arrangement.

All of this preludial information is important to understand just how serious a contrast all of that single-oriented activity makes with Duane Eddy's fourth LP (and, temporarily, the last to be produced as a collaboration with Hazlewood). Fans were most likely expecting another collection of danceable twang-guitar instrumentals; but Duane and Lee had something completely different in store for them. Not only does **Songs Of Our Heritage** consist completely of «oldies», reimaged and rearranged in accordance with the artists' more «contemporary» vision — but it also bypasses Eddy's usual twangy formula, instead featuring the artist almost entirely switch to acoustic guitar and... uh, *banjo? Really?*

It is this initial impression, I suppose, that is responsible for the album being almost completely bypassed and disregarded in the (already seriously overlooked) Duane Eddy discography as a whole. As in, who would ever want to hear Duane Eddy raising banjo hell on 'Cripple Creek', or leading us in an ultra-slow, pensive, gently picked acoustic rendition of 'On Top Of Old Smokey'? Isn't that, like, Pete Seeger's turf or something? We thought we were in Phoenix, Arizona; why are we in Greenwich Village all of a sudden? And why the hell are more than half of the songs featuring Jim Horn on *flute* rather than saxophone? ("*Apparently flute is a big part of our heritage*", cynically comments one of the mini-reviewers on RYM).

Needless to say, upon my first listen to the record I was tempted to dismiss it for good as one of those failed experiments in «broadening one's horizons» that so frequently mar the careers of solid one-dimensional artists who are incapable of working outside an established formula, but occasionally try to do so just to confirm the rule. But then I thought, well, it is *still* a Lee Hazlewood production, and Lee Hazlewood is not really one of the guys with a generic and conventional approach to everything he does — surely there must be *something* special about these arrangements. And subsequent listens proved that there is indeed; you just have to let it sink in, soak up, and settle down. It doesn't hurt, either, to actually pay attention to at least a few of the tracks instead of just letting them serve as background music for chores, which, I think, is precisely how most people who ever put this album on must have always treated them.

As a typical example, take Eddy's and Hazlewood's arrangement of the traditional 'In The Pines', which most of us probably know as Nirvana's 'Where Did You Sleep Last Night?' prior to checking out Leadbelly's version. It begins with a somber one-note bass riff and an equally ominous circular little melody played by the flute, before plunging into the main melody, lazily picked by Eddy on the banjo and echoed by a minimalistic vibraphone part, whose lightness complements the darkness of the bass. After one verse, the banjo melody is taken over by the flute, while the bass suddenly switches from slow one-note pinging to a frenzied circular run — echoing the flute opening of the song. Then, for the *third* verse, you have the main melody switching over to formerly silent acoustic guitar, while the banjo recedes into the background, the bass reverts to minimalistic pinging, and the flute reprises the circular waltzing (!). Finally, for the last verse it's back to banjo, with the flute and vibraphone saying their own subtle goodbyes as well. And it's all over in about two minutes.

It would probably be a bit of a stretch to call this a true masterpiece of creative arrangement, but the very fact that there is so much going on shows that **Songs Of Our Heritage** is not to be taken lightly. It may be so that people expect Duane Eddy to show his virtuoso technique of playing acoustic guitar (and banjo?), and leave disappointed when they find out he is not exactly Jimmy Page; but that is a mistaken way of assessing the LP, which should instead be held to the same type of

standard as, say, **Pet Sounds** — a creative, wholesome product of musical reinterpretation and arrangement. All of Duane's classic records should, in fact, be viewed as the product of *collective* rather than *individual* work, but **Songs Of Our Heritage** most of all — on here, the flute, the bass, the keyboards, and the string instruments are all equi-important parts of a single whole, masterminded by the quietly burgeoning genius of Mr. Hazlewood.

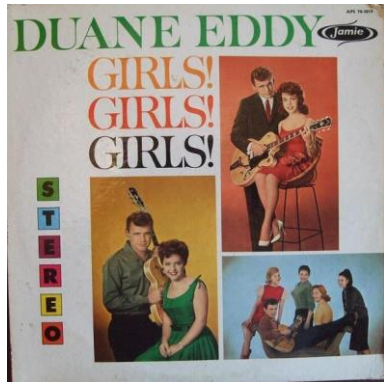
I shall not go into comparable details on the other songs, because Hazlewood's formula of using banjo, acoustic guitar, vibraphone, flute, and melodic bass remains more or less consistent throughout, and he uses comparable tricks for most of these old chestnuts, be they fast or slow, playful or melancholic, technically challenging or minimalistic — but since there is enough mood variety between the tracks, the record never becomes boring once you've figured out the key to appreciating it. Extensive commentary on 'Cripple Creek' or 'John Henry' is simply not required, because the basic melodies remain the same — this is indeed a celebration of the heritage, not a deconstruction of it — but the way they are treated is creative and fresh, and in some departments, unique; at the very least, I would much rather listen to this for the rest of my life than The Kingston Trio or The Weavers, thank you very much.

The bottomline, though, is that **Songs Of Our Heritage** should rather be recommended for big fans of Lee Hazlewood rather than those of Duane Eddy — regardless of the humble liner notes by Lee and Lester Still, whose purpose almost seems to be to dissipate certain doubts that fans could have about the nature of the record ("*we have been asked many times... 'what is Duane Eddy really like?'... this album will perhaps answer part of the question... it shows the quiet... sometimes lonely... often beautiful... and most certainly talented touch... of this young man*"). The one sentence from these notes that most definitely still holds true today the same way it held true back in 1960 is "*This is the 'Duane' that less than a dozen people know*". Here's hoping that this review might go a little way toward rectifying this undeserved situation — even if I would be the first to admit that even the fully recognized prettiness and originality of these arrangements might not be enough to elevate them to any sort of awesome-cathartic status.

Note that the album has, in recent years, been finally re-released several times on CD; some versions include a bunch of alternate takes for some of the songs as bonus tracks, but there is also an excellent European release that includes some of the 1960 singles instead (e.g. 'Kommotion'), and, most importantly, the hard-to-find single credited to Duane Eddy And His Orchestra and containing two songs written by Hazlewood for the poorly remembered and artistically insignificant (but socially relevant) low budget movie *Why Must I Die?*. Of these, 'The Girl On Death Row' is a particularly stunning highlight: because it is officially credited to Duane Eddy, there is some misinformation on the Web that it is a rare example of Eddy's

vocals, but, in fact, this is the earliest example of a vocal part as sung by Lee Hazlewood in person (and it quite expressly says so on top of the record itself!). Not only that, but it is clearly an important milestone in the development of what might be known as the «Gothic Western» style — Eddy's brief twang in the intro and outro is downright threatening, Lee's vocals are deeply mournful, the strings rise and fall in a deeply agitated manner, and the lyrics, reflecting the plot of the movie, are quite a bit chilling ("*her eyes were once so full of dreams / her young heart filled with lover schemes / now every second she must borrow / they take her life tomorrow*"). Quite a symbolic career beginning for the father of «cowboy psychedelia» — and a rather natural early predecessor for later moody masterpieces such as 'Some Velvet Morning'.





GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!

Album released:
1961

V A L U E
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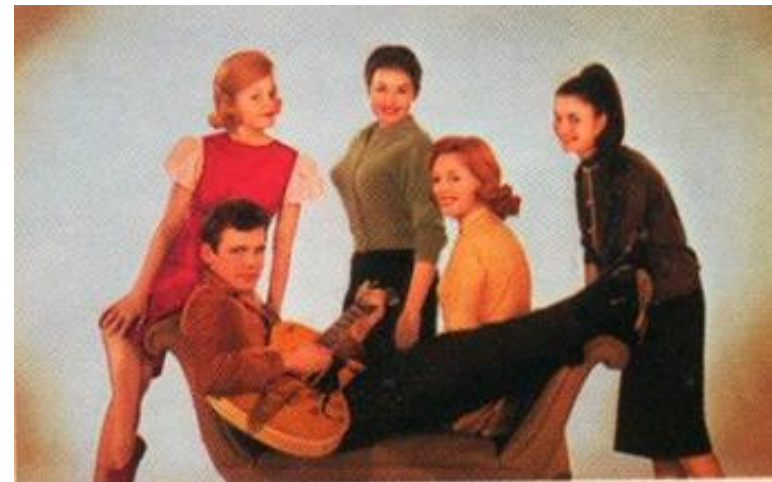
More info:



Tracks: 1) Brenda (Medley: I Want To Be Wanted / That's All You Gotta Do / I'm Sorry); 2) Sioux City Sue; 3) Tammy; 4) Big 'Liza; 5) Mary Ann; 6) Annette; 7) Tuesday; 8) Sweet Cindy; 9) Patricia; 10) Mona Lisa; 11) Connie; 12) Carol.

REVIEW

Well... this ain't exactly a tale of *long legs and burgundy lips, dancing down on Sunset Strip*, though I'm sure a healthy, red-blooded all-American guy like Duane Eddy would not be completely alien to the values espoused by his long-haired hedonistic successors in the mid-Eighties. It does seem less of a coincidence that this LP was released at around the same time that The Coasters put out their own 'Girls! Girls! Girls!', written for them by their usual patrons Leiber and Stoller and later turned into the theme song for an Elvis movie in 1962. Maybe it was that single which provided the inspiration for Eddy's follow-up «concept» album: now that he'd dealt with the American heritage of yesterday, it was time to pay one big collective tribute to the ladies of today, both real and imaginary.



Before that, however, came the single most disastrous event of Duane's artistic career — the rift with Lee Hazlewood. Details of the spat are hard to reconstruct, but apparently they fell out over business matters when Duane was renewing his contract with Jamie Records, and until the end of that contract and Eddy's move to RCA, Lee would no longer work with

him. By 1963, they would have that patched up, but the damage was done: in 1961, the world saw that, without Hazlewood's songwriting and arranging to ascend Eddy's recordings to the next level, all that the King of Twang really had to his name was... uhm, *twang*?

Not that it was «nothing» or anything like that. The first of Eddy's A-sides for 1961, 'Theme From Dixie', was fast, fun, most certainly twangy, and about as catchy as a version of 'Dixie' can ever be. But it wasn't particularly imaginative, except for a little trick where Jimmy Troxel, the drummer, gradually increases the tempo, until the song fully transitions from its bearded Civil War martial pattern to a danceable country-rock beat. By contrast, the B-side was 'Gidget Goes Hawaiian', Eddy's contribution to the 1961 romantic beach comedy of the same name — as fluffy as can be, a piece of harmless and quickly forgettable surf-twist that pretty much sells out Duane Eddy to the corporate vision of teenage aesthetics without offering anything exciting or unusual in return.

The single was not a complete commercial loss, but it fared worse than the preceding 'Pepe', and might have easily given the impression that, without Hazlewood's guidance, Eddy would soon degenerate into a troubadour of generic Hollywood fluff; an impression that would only be confirmed when his *next* single, 'Ring Of Fire', would turn out to be the theme for yet another long-forgotten flick of the same name — nothing to do with the Johnny Cash song, but actually a movie about the dangers of forest fires. Yes! Smokey Bear has replaced Lee Hazlewood as our best friend now, and 'Ring Of Fire' matches our furry friend's inspirational potential bit-by-bit. Saxophones! Strings! Choral harmonies! Twangy leads! We take everything that made 'Theme From Dixie' so great, mix it in different proportions, and use it to help save lives. Or just to destroy them with well-calculated boredom.

Somewhere in the middle between these two singles, Eddy and his band had time to put together enough material for a brand new LP, whose central theme this time around would be the opposite sex, and whose central message is that a twangy serenade is a much better gift than a diamond ring. Actually, the concept of having each tune on your album bear a different lady's name was hardly new — Bill Haley, at the very least, had done it two years earlier with **Bill Haley's Chicks** (and *those* songs at least had vocals, so the names actually «meant» something!), and I'm sure there must have been other examples as well. But thematic instrumental albums were all the rage in 1961 (The Ventures released their first such LP, **The Colorful Ventures**, around the same time, and from there on there was no going back), and without Hazlewood to provide the originality of approach, I suppose Eddy just did the most natural thing he could do.

Do not be fooled by the horrendously low ratings **Girls! Girls! Girls!** get on RateYourMusic or in other such places; they

are more reflective of the overall forgotten status and uninspiring nature of the record than its general technical or entertainment-related aspects. As background dance music, it's perfectly fine, and I am not even offended by the gimmicky opening medley of several of Brenda Lee's recent hits — for that matter, the rollickin' 'That's All You Gotta Do' *and* the torchy 'I'm Sorry' are very smoothly integrated into each other — although something tells me that taking that photo with Brenda on the front sleeve was probably a more enjoyable experience for young Mr. Duane than producing the actual recording. It's just that there is nothing unpredictable, surprising, or worth-writing-about in most of these tracks. Close your eyes and remember 'Mona Lisa' as sung by Nat King Cole; now try to erase the vocals in your head and replace them with a clean, low-pitched, twangy recreation of the vocal melody. Add a few crooning angelic backing vocals for good measure if your imagination allows you to. There, you don't need to hunt for the recording at all.

A few points can be given for the relative diversity: Eddy casts his net fairly wide, from the old-fashioned crooner ballad like 'Mona Lisa' and 'Tammy' to syncopated R&B (Ray Charles' 'Mary Ann') to Cuban mambo ('Patricia') to yer olde Negro folk song ('Big 'Liza', rather arrogantly re-christened from 'Lil' Liza Jane' and credited to Duane himself — I don't know why he did it, but most likely out of conventional practice with all «traditional» material at the time). This makes it a reasonably fun choice for an old-fashioned dance party where you never know which upcoming style is going to tax your feet even more in the next two minutes. But diversity is no big help when it is not perfectly matched with creativity.

At least five numbers *are* formally original, credited to either Duane solo or himself in cooperation with Larry Knechtel; but they all follow formula. 'Annette' is a slow tango with a rather corny violin part on top (not surprising, as it is inspired by equally corny teen pop star Annette Funicello, who is also seen with Eddy on the front sleeve); 'Tuesday' is slow, echoey 12-bar blues, surprisingly turning into piano-driven lounge jazz for the bridge section; 'Sweet Cindy' seems to be a very slightly altered variation on 'Oh Susannah'; 'Connie' is catchy, upbeat country-pop, most likely dedicated to Connie Francis (but I cannot identify the actual music link, not being a major country connoisseur); and 'Carol' is a slow Western waltz rather than (as you could probably hope) a nod to Chuck Berry... wait, no, what am I saying? 'Carol' is actually a *carol*, because it pretty much steals away the melody of 'White Christmas'. In slow, waltzing, Western-ey fashion, that is.

From an optimistic point of view, **Girls! Girls! Girls!** proves that Eddy does not need Hazlewood in order to entertain his fanbase — which, theoretically, he could do with this approach for years and years, since all it requires is applying the Eddy / Hazlewood formula of twang guitar, yakety sax, and angelic backing vocals to whatever material comes along, be it country, blues, jazz, Latin dance, or Klingon acid punk. From a pessimistic point of view, just repeat the entire preceding

sentence slowly while banging your head against the wall. The best news, as usual, is that the two points of view supplement rather than contradict each other. As for myself, I certainly had more fun listening to the record than trying to write about it — also, it prompted me into refreshing those great Brenda Lee tunes in my mind, so at least it's motivating.

To dispense with 1961 for good, the last two singles Duane put out that year were a cover of 'Caravan' (with an unusually thin guitar sound) and 'The Avenger', probably the single most genuinely «Eddy-esque» recording of the year — with an actual overtone of grim badassery instead of the «Hawaiian cowboy» vibes we'd been getting all through the year. But it was too slow, too lumpy, too hookless for the general listener, and the aggressive vibe of the main riff was not much help. Additionally, I'm not sure which particular *Avenger* Eddy is referring to: the iconic comic series would not be launched until 1963, and although the slightly less iconic British spy-fi series did have its first season in 1961, it is unlikely that Duane had the opportunity to catch it over in the US that year. So either I'm missing out on yet another obsolete pop culture reference, or the guy had a premonition that came several years too early for commercial success, what with the single not even making it into the Top #100.

In short, 1961 was not really a good year for Duane Eddy by any accounts — however, this is still far from the end of the relevant part of the Duane Eddy story, even if, at the time, it might have very well felt like the days of twang guitar as the focus of attention were numbered.

