

**Duane Eddy was one of the first guitarists to popularise the rock'n'roll instrumental. On the 30th anniversary of his induction into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame, we salute 'The King Of Twang'...**

**TWISTIN'**



**TWANGIN'**

WORDS BY STEVE O'BRIEN

**W**hen Duane Eddy was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame in 1994, it was long-overdue recognition of one of the great guitarists. And as 'The King of Twang' sauntered onto the stage of New York's

Waldorf Astoria hotel to perform one of his most famous numbers, the hypnotic *Peter Gunn*, the audience looked on, entranced by a guitar player who had, over the past three-and-a-half decades, remained devoted to the sound that he'd first forged in the late 1950s.

While many of his contemporaries had watered down their music as fashions changed, Eddy was one of the few who kept the unruly spirit of rock'n'roll alive through the 60s and beyond. Maybe because of that dogged fidelity to a sound that by then was considered passé, America never quite embraced him with the same fervour as we did in the UK, a country that carried on its love affair with the great originators far longer than the US did.

He may not have enjoyed the same level of fame as some of his peers, but Duane Eddy's influence looms large. There's barely an ➔

***Duane Eddy***

The King Of Twang himself,  
the most successful and  
influential instrumentalist in  
the history of rock'n'roll





axeman out there whose work hasn't been informed by the down'n'dirty sounds Eddy originated in the 1950s.

George Harrison, Bruce Springsteen and Mark Knopfler are among those who have sung his praises as well as bassist John Entwistle, while it's hard to imagine The Shadows sounding like they do without those seismic rock'n'roll instrumentals that Duane established in the late 50s.

**REBEL HEART**

Eddy put out his first long-player in January 1958. *Have 'Twangy' Guitar Will Travel* followed a couple of flop 45s, but that record's lead satellite – *Rebel-'Rouser* – would be the disc that made the world sit up and take notice of this New York-born, Arizona-raised fireball. Originally titled *Rabble Rouser*, it got its distinctive moniker when producer Lee Hazlewood renamed it. "Being from Texas," Eddy told *Vintage Rock* in 2018, "everything was a rebel, so he called it *Rebel-'Rouser*."

Six-and-a-half decades on from its release, *Rebel-'Rouser* still sounds as vital and subversive as it did in 1958. Eddy's breakthrough hit, it reached No.6 on the Billboard Hot 100 and earned the newly-turned twentysomething a gold disc.

The single introduced North America to Eddy's trademark twang. Few guitarists have as identifiable a sound as Duane Eddy, and that song laid down his idiosyncratic



By 1963, Eddy had sold well over 10 million records, including 18 UK Top 40 hits and 15 Billboard Top 40s

style, one that he spotlighted in the name of his debut album. *Have 'Twangy' Guitar Will Travel* was a collection of originals and covers of country and blues evergreens, such as Leiber & Stoller's *Loving You* and Ivory Joe Hunter's *I Almost Lost My Mind*. The album would spend 82 weeks on the Billboard chart, eventually peaking at No.5. Duane Eddy had arrived.

**TOP GUNN**

Eddy would release two long-players in 1959, *Especially For You* and *The "Twangs" The "Thang"*, both of which continued the tradition of mingling originals with well-picked covers. It was the first of those two LPs which included the song that, alongside *Rebel-'Rouser*, would become Eddy's signature number, the Henry Mancini-penned instrumental, *Peter Gunn*.

Mancini had written the piece for a then-popular TV detective show. *Peter Gunn* – the series – debuted on NBC in September 1958 and earned its composer both Emmy and Grammy nominations, with a soundtrack album, *The Music From Peter Gunn*, going gold in '59. Listening to Mancini's big band version now, it's easy to see what appealed to Duane Eddy. Its menacing, chugging rhythm was easily adapted to Eddy's style, and his dirtier, seedier take sent the song to No.6 in the UK and No.27 in the US.

In fact, most of Eddy's singles performed better in the UK than in his homeland (in 1960 he was even voted *NME's* World's Number One Musical Personality, ahead of Elvis Presley). The sleazy *Yep!* charted at No.17 here, No.30 in the States. The rollicking *Some Kind-A Earthquake* was No.12 UK, No.37 US. Though he never had a British No.1, two of his 45s would nestle at No.2 – *Because They're Young* and *Pepe*.

And unlike many of his rock'n'roll contemporaries, Eddy even had a major hit in the 70s, with *Play Me Like You Play Your Guitar* (which he waxed with vocal group The Rebelettes) going Top 10 in the UK.

Though in the US, the hits had dried up by the early 60s (his last Top 20 song of the decade was 1962's *(Dance With The) Guitar Man*), Eddy was nothing if not productive, releasing a succession of albums, most of which were titled along the same lines as his early platters – *Twistin' 'N' Twangin'*, *Twangy Guitar – Silky Strings* (both 1962), *"Twang" A Country Song* and *"Twangin'" Up A Storm!* (both 1963), *Twangsville* (1965), *The Biggest Twang Of All* (1966) and *The Roaring Twangies* the following year.

If his recording career wasn't exactly on fire, Eddy was never short of work, having carved himself a side hustle in the movies.

He starred alongside Richard Boone and George Hamilton in the 1961 western *A Thunder Of Drums*, with Robert



Duane poses for a portrait in New York in 1958, the year he arrived via his seminal instrumental *Rebel-'Rouser*

**There's barely an axeman whose work hasn't been informed by Eddy**



# THE WAY OF WATER

## Duane and his guitar get tanked up

In November 1957, Duane Eddy recorded *Movin' n' Groovin'*, co-written with Lee Hazlewood, who was also producing. As the studio they were working in had no echo chamber, Hazlewood bought a 2,000-gallon water storage tank – (about the size of a bus, according to Eddy) to accentuate the guitarist's trademark low 'twangy' riffs.

As Eddy told *Vintage Rock* in 2018: "Floyd Ramsey's recording studio in Phoenix, which was called Audio Recorders, didn't have an echo chamber, so one day Lee said, 'Let's go and look at some big water tanks.' We spent an hour yelling into these tanks until we found one where we liked the echo. Floyd had it trucked back to the studio and set up on a stand in the parking lot. We put a speaker in one end and a microphone in the other. I played my guitar through that and that was our echo chamber."

The duo then took the tape to Gold Star Studios in Los Angeles for mixing. "So we combined the two and that's how we got that beautiful echoey sound," he says.



Lee Hazlewood, producer of Eddy's *Have 'Twangy' Guitar Will Travel* LP

Walker Jr. in the 1968 teen exploitation flick *The Savage Seven* and made two appearances on the television series *Have Gun – Will Travel*. Despite the lack of hits, Eddy was still a regular face on TV as a performer, becoming a frequent act on ABC's *The Dick Clark Show*.

### THE ART ROCKER

By the 1970s, Eddy had moved largely into production, working on albums for Phil Everly and Waylon Jennings, among others. Despite not releasing any of his own LPs that decade, he was still accepting offers to guest on other people's recordings, playing guitar on BJ Thomas' *Rock And Roll Lullaby* (1972) and, of course, his turn on the Keith Potger and Tony Macaulay-penned *Play Me Like You Play Your Guitar* in '75.

But it wasn't until 1986 that Duane Eddy made his most impactful comeback. The Art Of Noise weren't the most obvious collaborators for a then 48-year-old rock'n'roll veteran. An avant-garde electronic dance outfit, Eddy came into the band's orbit after one of his friends found himself having tea with China Records head Derek Green. After the friend mentioned that he knew Duane Eddy, Green had a lightbulb moment. "It was really weird," the guitarist told *Vintage Rock*, "but I knew it was also cutting edge and they were doing great in the dance chart in those days."



Magic bullet: When 80s avant-garde met 50s rebel rock

The resultant single was a gussied up version of his 1959 hit, *Peter Gunn*. There's still as much Duane in this reloaded Gunn, but it's garnished by the Art Of Noise's eccentric electronica. This unlikely hybrid of 1980s art-dance and 1950's rock'n'roll earned the band and Eddy a Grammy for Best Rock Instrumental Performance and the single peaked at No.8 in the UK. For long-time Eddy fans it was a joyous moment, to see their hero on *Top Of The Pops* and *The Tube*, looking like the coolest man on Earth in his Stetson and fringed cowboy-style jacket.



On stage at Marty Stuart's 15th Annual Late Night Jam at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in 2016



Duane takes to the stage at the 2023 Music City Walk Of Fame Induction ceremony in Nashville, Tennessee

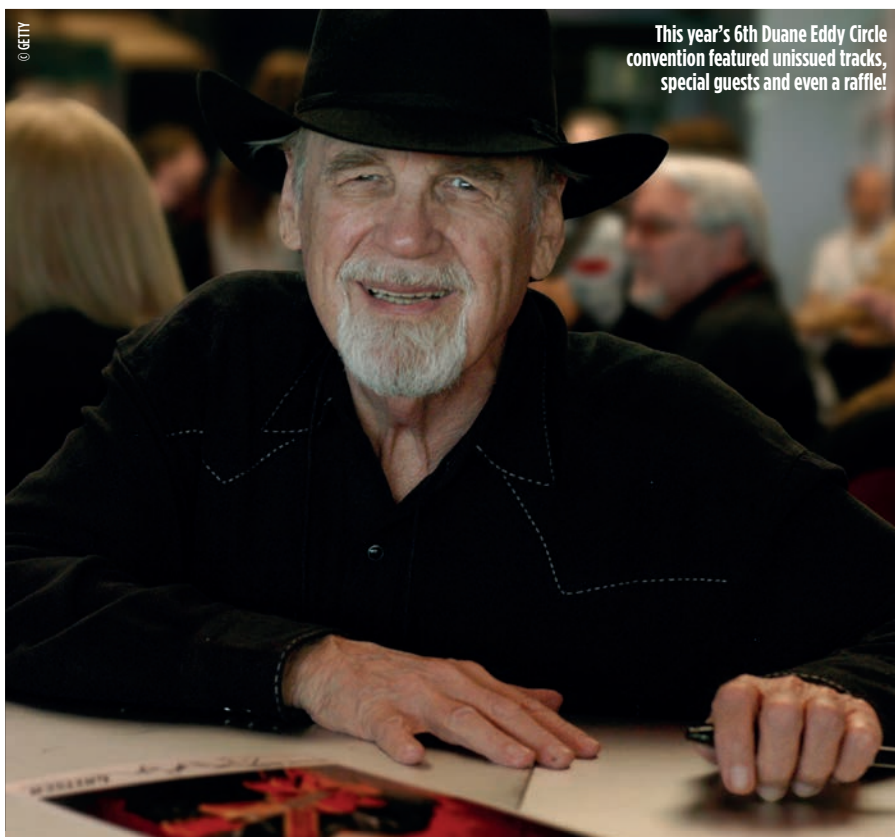
“They’re both different,” Eddy told *Penny Black Music* about comparing the original to the ’86 pimp-up. “They’re so different from each other, I listen to the old one and there were good things about that and then I listen to the Art Of Noise one and I think it’s very clever, what they did with that.”

### BOSS GUITAR

The next year he recorded a new LP, *Duane Eddy* (his first release in 20 years), with Paul McCartney, Jeff Lynne and Ry Cooder among its starry guests. Even Hollywood was taking note of Duane Eddy once more, with Oliver Stone soundtracking *The Trembler* in 1994’s *Natural Born Killers* and *Rebel-’Rouser* popping up in the Oscar-hoovering *Forrest Gump*. In 1992, he contributed music for a movie, playing on Hans Zimmer’s score for the John Woo action-thriller *Broken Arrow*.

And it was in 1994, of course, that the Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame came knocking. It was Foreigner’s Mick Jones who introduced the guitar legend before Eddy took to the stage for a blistering performance of – what else? – *Peter Gunn* and *Rebel-’Rouser*. He would play *Peter Gunn* again 14 years later at his induction into Nashville’s Musicians Hall Of Fame. Two years on, he performed to a sold out Royal Festival Hall and in 2011 released a new LP, *Road Trip*, with uber-fan Richard Hawley in the producer’s chair.

Eddy last toured in 2018 to mark his 80th birthday, and there’s been no hint of a fresh album since the critically-adored *Road Trip*. Don’t write off Duane Eddy just yet, though. The man who’s had more comebacks than anyone else in rock’n’roll may be 85 years old, but who knows what’s around the corner in twang-land? The Guitar Man may yet surprise us one more time. ★



This year’s 6th Duane Eddy Circle convention featured unissued tracks, special guests and even a raffle!

## THE FAN VIEW

### Jim Grant of the fan site Duane Eddy Circle speaks...

#### How long have you been a Duane Eddy fan?

Since the first UK release of *Rebel-’Rouser* back in 1958. I’ve still got my original London copy, a most cherished item as Decca engineers really knew how to master rock’n’roll records – always delivered with a punch.

#### What’s Duane Eddy fandom like? Do you have conventions, meet-ups, fanzines etc?

There have been several UK fan clubs over the years but the Duane Eddy Circle was started in 1975 and has grown ever since. In 1978, we started our annual conventions held at London venues such as Ronnie Scott’s in Soho with visitors from Europe, Australia and the US attending. Included were contributions from Duane often featuring unissued material. Each convention also featured a live band with a visiting Steve Douglas [original sax player on *Cannonball, Yep!*, *Peter Gunn* and *Forty Miles Of Bad Road*] in 1979 as well as many other luminaries over the years. The pandemic brought about a change with the convention moving online using Zoom. Our seventh online convention is being planned for May 2024.

#### Twangsville is our regular newsletter

issued three to four times a year, always with the full support of Duane. Membership reached a peak of over 1,000 and visitors to our website and Facebook pages exceeded 10,000 for Duane’s 2018 tour!

#### Have you ever met Duane?

I’m very lucky. I first met him back in 1960 during his first visit to the UK and also almost every time he has visited the UK since. He invited me to the Ronco recording sessions back in November 1978 and to his home in Nashville in 1997 cooperating in compiling his extensive discography. I’m privileged to have been asked to compile many of the reissues including the Bear Family boxsets and entire US Jamie re-releases. We keep in regular email contact and right now we are working together preparing the content of the next convention. Duane regards the circle as a circle of friends. He finds time to talk to everyone and always answers fans’ questions.

• For more information, visit [duaneeddycircle.com](http://duaneeddycircle.com)