

DUANE EDDY 'ROAD TRIP' BIOGRAPHY

It starts with a crazed-and-cantering guitar salvo. Then comes an unmistakable low-string, spy-theme twist – a twang, if you will - that announces the fantastically titled *The Attack Of The Duck Billed Platypus*, the opening track on *Road Trip*. It is a track that serves as confirmation enough that one of the truly legendary guitarists of our time is back. Twenty five years after releasing his last record, Duane Eddy has returned to reclaim what is rightfully his...

In many ways, *Road Trip* showcases everything that is unique about Eddy's guitar playing. When it rocks, it rocks hard (check out the aforementioned *Platypus*, the raunchy *Curveball* or the juddering *Primeval*). But above all it is a record that is defined by the man's elegant playing and the space within its sound. Space is something that Duane constantly refers to. It stems back to the time when his family relocated from the East Coast to Phoenix, Arizona, when he was 13.

"I fell in love with the desert," says Eddy, recalling his teenage years. "It was so open and big and beautiful. I'd just spend my time wandering around in it. Musically, I could always go out with just an acoustic guitar and write a song."

There, with the desert as a backdrop and with country legends like Jimmie Rodgers, Gene Autry and Hank Williams on the airwaves, Duane formed a high school band before becoming something of a gun for hire, learning his craft in assorted clubs and honky tonks in the process, and developing his own sound.

"I'd done a few sessions so I knew the low strings were more powerful than the high strings, and I knew that you needed a melody, or a very strong riff with a melody, to make an instrumental," he recalls, explaining just how he arrived at his trademarked style. "So I went down on the low strings and wrote *Movin'n'Groovin'* in November 1957. I thought it was a dumb little song but Lee Hazelwood liked it and decided we should put it out as a single. It did quite well so we did another track."

The mercurial figure of Lee Hazelwood looms large in Duane Eddy's early recording career. While he would go on to work with Nancy Sinatra and enjoy a career of his own as a solo artist, the work he did with Eddy proved to be without compare. Eddy's second single was *Rebel Rouser*, a US Top 10 smash in late '58. Featuring doo wop outfit *The Rivingtons* on backing vocals and "rebel yelps" and championed by legendary television impresario Dick Clark (whose patronage allowed Eddy many a prime time TV slot) , it preceded a further 32 charting singles and over 25 albums that would see the man sell in excess of 100 million records.

Eddy's singles were unlike few others. Tunes like Forty Miles Of Bad Road, Shazam, Some Kind-A Earth Quake, Yep!, Cannonball and Ramrod kept rock'n'roll's unruly spirit alive just as the genre found itself in danger of being tamed, their titles matching the music on offer. An uproarious cover of Henry Mancini's Peter Gunn theme in '59 would provide Eddy with one of his most lasting tunes, the track being resurrected in 1986 when he re-recorded it with the Art Of Noise and scored a hit with it for a second time.

But Duane's playing was not confined to rambunctious floor-fillers. While his first three albums – Have Twangy Guitar Will Travel, Especially For You and The Twang's The Thang – collected his increasing number of hits, his fourth album, 1960's Songs Of Our Heritage, offered something entirely different. For a start it was an acoustic affair. Secondly, it saw the man delve back into American music and cover classic tunes like John Henry, The Streets Of Laredo and On Top Of Ol' Smokey. Moreover, it showcased Eddy's dexterity in a different kind of way. So too did the lush orchestration of 1960's Because They're Young – a track which accompanied the movie of the same name and in which Duane also starred. The man's biggest hit (Number Four in the US, Number Two in the UK), it also saw Eddy depose Elvis Presley in NME's end of year reader's poll when Duane was voted The World's Number One Musical Personality.

"I didn't meet Elvis until 1971," chuckles Eddy. "And he never mentioned the poll. But he did ask one of his guys to fetch a briefcase that had a clipping in it from Disc magazine. He showed it to me and it said he'd won Number One artist and Number One album in the magazine for the last 15 years. But he was great to me. He treated me like a peer, which I didn't feel I was."

Alongside his playing, modesty is one of Eddy's most remarkable qualities. It is a point that hasn't been lost on Richard Hawley. Weaned on rock'n'roll in Sheffield, Richard has served his time in The Longpigs and Pulp, and emerged as one of the most respected British musicians of his generation. Despite this, Hawley was flabbergasted when his manager informed him that the Nashville-based Eddy had heard of him and that the genial 72 year-old had bought his records.

"I heard Richard's records before I met him and I thought they were terrific," enthuses Eddy. "And I also thought that it would be interesting to make a record with him. I loved the way his records sounded, especially the big ballads, and I kept on thinking, 'There's a space in there! My guitar could really soar in that space!'"

After several phone conversations the two musicians finally met in the summer of 2010 and struck up a fine friendship. It is that friendship that lies at the heart of Road Trip. Produced by Richard Hawley and Colin Elliot at Yellow Arch in Sheffield, the album features 11 tracks cut at breakneck speed.

“We worked so fast, it was amazing,” comments Eddy. “It could have turned into a total mess, but Richard and the guys pulled a rabbit out of the hat. It meant we wrote, demoed and recorded all the songs in 11 days.”

The recording process itself also proved to be hugely organic, the texture and richness of the album being enhanced by the presence of Richard Hawley’s own band – Shez Sheridan (guitar), Jon Trier (piano), Dean Beresford (drums) and co-producer Colin Elliot (bass), augmented by LA-based sax player extraordinaire Ron Dziubla.

“If someone came in with an idea, we’d all work on it to see where it got to. All the guys pitched in,” says Eddy, “Richard really wanted me to make a record that covered all the different moments from my career so that’s what we did. So there are things that are rocking with a wailing sax, and there are some pretty things too. There are echoes of the past, but it sounds new.”

Indeed, Road Trip genuinely does illustrate the breadth of Eddy’s stylistic acumen. Twango, for instance, nods to Duane’s past and echoes the man’s love of the great Django Reinhardt and of jazz guitar as a whole; Bleaklow Air is a measured and theme-like atmospheric reflection on the Derbyshire moorland that gives the track its name, and features seductive single-note picking; the title of the beautiful Kindness Ain’t Made Of Sand says a lot about Duane’s view of life while the lush nature of the music ripples with Hawley’s effortless classicism; Franklin Town recalls the softer mood of the underrated Songs Of Our Heritage and evokes the ghosts of battles long fought; the title track itself, meanwhile, is a languid country waltz. Put simply, all 11 tracks frame Eddy’s playing quite magnificently, something which Hawley was conscious of.

“Duane’s sound as a guitar player is unbelievably unique,” comments Hawley on the recording process. “If you hear one note played by him you know that that’s Duane. His sound is so low and deep. And there’s an elegance and sophistication to what he does that is really very special.”

Eddy’s elegance and sophistication animate Road Trip. But the album is more than a restoration; it is a journey of a lifetime, and one of which its creator is justifiably proud.

“It will be the first time in a long time that I will have a record out that people will have a chance of hearing,” concludes Duane. “With my last album I put out in 1986, the label just threw it up against the wall and didn’t even wait to see if it would stick. This time it’s nice to know that this one will be looked after, because I never thought that it would happen again and I am eternally grateful for that.”

Phil Alexander, April 2011.