VOICES IN THE HALL: DUANE EDDY PART 2

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER Welcome to Voices in the Hall, presented by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. I'm Peter Cooper. Right now, Part 2 of my conversation with the Titan of Twang… Duane Eddy.

DUANE EDDY Country and blues got together and they had a baby and called it rock and roll. The other two parents were white gospel and black gospel. Southern.

PETER COOPER It's Voices in the Hall. With Duane Eddy.

"Peter Gunn" – Duane Eddy (Especially for You / Jamie)

PETER COOPER That was Duane Eddy, with "Peter Gunn," composed by Henry Mancini. Duane's version was a Top 10 hit in the UK and a Top 40 hit in the U.S., in 1959.

In Part One of my interview with Duane Eddy, we found out about his early years learning the guitar and his first taste of success. Back then, if you had a hit single, you could get booked on a package show. These package shows toured with a dozen or more different performers, each playing a just few songs. I asked Duane about those days.

PETER COOPER You know you got to know these people and you got to travel with these people on these package tours, where there's multiple artists playing on single shows. When you're taking the bus to these shows with these people, A) who was, who was on with you? And B) did that feel like you were traveling with the New York Yankees or like you were traveling with some J.V. football team or something? Did you feel like champions?

DUANE EDDY I'd never been on a bus with any team so I didn't know. But I just. I knew there was a bunch of acts on their, The Platters, Dion and the Belmonts and me and my group. And trying to think who was on the first one. The Shirelles, the Coasters you know different. There'd be about 12 acts, and they all had hits. And Jimmy Clanton, Jack Scott, they'd only had one or two but they were on they were on those early tours. They were at that time. Bobby Darin was on one. And the first thing I did was an Alan Freed show in New York at the Brooklyn Fox. And all these people were on the show. Bill Haley, Everly Brothers, Jackie Wilson. Oh gosh, he was great. Carl Perkins' cousin had a song called "Tragedy." Thomas Wayne. Sweetest kid.

And they were all kids. I mean most of them. Bill Haley was a little older. Most of them were in their 20s, you know early 20s or late teens. Fabian came along the following year. He was just 15. And Frankie Avalon was probably 19 or 18. I don't know. I was 20. I'd just turned 20, and I'd cut the records when I was 19. But I had my birthday in April, turned 20, and then that summer it came out and I was, that fall I went to Brooklyn Fox and then I got on my first bus tour. Buddy Holly was on it. He'd just gotten married. So

he and the Crickets all drove everywhere because they couldn't bring Maria Elena on the bus because of insurances. They couldn't take family. You could take your group, but you couldn't take a family on the bus. So they drove. And I got to see them at the gigs you know.

We swapped guitars one day. And halfway down the stairway there was a big turn and a big platform, and then we met there. And he was he was coming up I was going down because I'd been on already and he was one of the headliners of course because he'd had two years of hits behind him. So we swapped guitars. I played his Fender and he played my Gretsch. He says, “That's a nice neck.” I says, “I know.” I was really proud of that. I loved that neck on that guitar. Still do. And then he looked at me and started laughing. And I says, “What?” He says, “You look funny with that guitar.” It was a Stratocaster. You know, his Strat. And I said, “Well you don't look so cool with that one either!” You know and we laughed. And so we swapped back and that was the end of that.

But we talked quite a bit about living in the southwest because he, about the studios. I said we figured our studio in Phoenix was comparable to Clovis, New Mexico studio. And we're both out there in the middle of desert cutting records and getting hits. And it was just something we had in common. Of course we became good friends with the Crickets.

PETER COOPER Did you recognize the talent in these people? Did they seem heroic to you? Did they just seem like peers or like curiosities?

DUANE EDDY No, they just. I loved their talents. I mean they were just like buds you know. They were. We were all friends. It's like the Platters, I'd sit with Herbie the bass singer for a while and talk on some trips. And I usually got the second seat back from the front. I kind of claimed that for myself so I could sleep in it because everybody else wanted to go to the back of the bus you know. And Laverne Baker had the one on opposite me on the left side because she always claimed that one. That was her seat. And Charlie the Carpenter who was a, he was a road manager, and Rupert was the bus driver. Rupert Moore. And Charlie was like a black John Wayne. “All right, we're heading out.” You know he says, “The bus'll be there at nine thirty and leaves at ten. So nine thirty for ten. Be on it or get left behind!” And. Well he's herding a bunch of teenagers practically you know and they're out on the road and they're hot stuff because they're having hits. I mean they didn't act like that, but they were actually kind of scared. I think. We all were kind of timid about it. You know.

PETER COOPER Was there pressure there to have more hits? Did you feel like, I got to do something or this is going to go away?

DUANE EDDY Yes and no. We always figured the one we've got now could very well be the last. You never knew when it was going to end. I mean Elvis didn't have to worry. He was he was Elvis. He was like a cut above the rest of us. You know I always, I never thought of him as a peer until I met him in '71 and spent a whole night talking with him in Vegas. But he treated me like a peer and liked my music and everything. And said so. And I got to thank him for doing what he did, and I said, “Otherwise I'd have been a side man in a country band down the middle of the Arizona desert.” And he said, “Ah,” said “You'd have found a way.” I said, “I don't, not without you.”

And so anyway I get on the bus. The first thing, that bus first tour with Buddy Holly and all of them, the Platters and Dion. And Dion comes by and he saw I had an acoustic guitar in the overhead rack. I mean it wasn't a bus like they have today, these country acts with beds and sinks and toilets and couches and TVs and sound systems. It was a bus with seats in a row. It was an ex-Greyhound bus that had long lived its usefulness and. So they chartered it and put us all on that.

And Dion took my guitar and he went in the back. And I kept hearing something that sounded familiar but I couldn't place it. And so I got up and I walked back to see what it was. He's back there, [sings] “I can't help it if I'm still in love with you...” And he singing Hank Williams' song. And I says, “How'd a Brooklyn boy get to know country music?” And so he says, “Well I listened to it all my life.” He says, “I listened to WWVA, Wheeling, West Virginia, the Barn Dance there.” He says, “I listened to the Opry, I listened to WCKY, Cincinnati. Late at night they'd have the Chuck Wagon gang and all those people on, and played country and bluegrass. WLS sometimes.” He said, “I could get that at night.” And I said, “I'll be darned. I did the same thing in upstate New York. I was doing that up in Bath and Guyanoga and all that.” I would be listening late at night to these country shows.

PETER COOPER Yeah those Country shows were a huge influence on so many people who wound up being major parts of American music over the next half century.

Duane, you’ve gotten to know and play with a bunch of other guitar greats, like Tommy Tedesco. For those who might not know, Tommy Tedesco was a masterful musician and key member of the group of Los Angeles session players known as “The Wrecking Crew.” He played with everyone from Elvis and the Everly Brothers to Mel Torme and the Monkees, and on TV show themes like *M.A.S.H.* and *Batman*. He played with everybody.

I understand you wound up meeting Tommy in a music store…

DUANE EDDY Yes, I did. I'd met him before in sessions and things. I didn't call him for my sessions. I had Glen Campbell, James Burton, and people like that to play on my RCA sessions, which started in 1962. Never did use Tommy. But he was hostile toward me anyway. He just, he couldn't figure it out.

Some guys, the really good players, got with it. They understood what I was doing, and they thought they wished they'd thought of it, and could do it, or maybe they didn't, because they could play circles around me as far as skill and notes, and they could play a thousand notes while I was playing one. You know, or two. They could make mistakes and you'd never know it, and I couldn't. It would be glaring.

Anyway, he came out of the studio one day, and I'd left my amp there, because I was cutting constantly. Did nine albums, three albums a year, so I was in the studio a lot. So I just left my amp there, one of them. He said, "If I had that amp, I could do that stuff, that junk you do."

I says, "Well help yourself, Tommy. Anytime you need an amp, plug it in. Plug your guitar in and use it." "Ah," he says, he just walked off, you know. Later I ran into him in at a show, and he says, "You know," he says, "I'm really sorry for what I said that time." He says, "It just bothered me." He says, "I had no reason to do that. I was just in a bad mood that day, and you were available." I says, "I understand that." So we parted friends.

And a year later or so, I ran into him in a music store in Studio City. And it was a big store, and I was over in one section. The drums and basses, and I was over there for something, and smaller equipment, and then the other side, where the checkout counter was, was all guitars on the wall and stuff. But I'd looked at some of them and I was over here looking for strings or something. And I turned a corner and I come face-to-face with Tommy Tedesco.

And he says, "Duane Eddy," and everybody in the store froze. He says, "I've just got one question for you." He said it real loud and real mad. I said, "What's that, Tommy?" He says, "Anybody ever ask you to play like Tommy Tedesco?" The whole store went up. They were all musicians, you know. They cracked up.

PETER COOPER Most people listening to this don't get inside music studios, but one thing you hear a lot on sessions is, a producer will direct a guitar player, "Hey, can you play something like Duane Eddy?"

DUANE EDDY Oh yeah.

PETER COOPER And they mean melodic runs on the low strings, and the guitar player will inevitably come up with something like that.

DUANE EDDY Yeah.

PETER COOPER And everybody will go, "Cool." But the thing is, when I've been in the studio with you, I've realized they don't sound like Duane Eddy at all. You're playing the

same notes that they are, when they're trying to play like you, but it's a completely distinct sound.

DUANE EDDY I figured that out one day. I thought it's the same with every guitar player. They all have their own sound, their own style. It may be more subtle than mine is pretty blatant, but I think they're like fingerprints, and everybody ... You can learn something from any guitar player, that even an amateur that picks up a guitar, he'll do something, and you go, "Oh, that's interesting."

I had one guy, a session player, he says, "Can I try your guitar?" It was all hooked up. We were working, and I said, "Help yourself." So he sits down, and he sits there, and eventually he plays “Rebel Rouser.” And he says, "I don't get it." He puts the guitar back down, and he says, "I just don't get it." He's all bent out of shape. He says, "I've got Duane Eddy's guitar, his amp, and I sit there, and I still can't sound like him."

I think it's just the attack, the feeling. And I asked Richard Boone one time, when he and I were driving along we heard this song, this beautiful song, and he says, "Is that making it?" He didn't know much about the music business. He just liked music. And I says, "No, it's not. It's a beautiful record, well-produced, well-written, well-sung, but it's not making it." So he says, "Hmm, that's a shame." So we ride along a little farther, and some really pop, catchy thing comes on. You know, that's zooming up the charts, and he says, "Is that a hit?"

I says, "Oh yeah. It's going like crazy." I says, "Why do you suppose that is? I mean here's this beautiful record, and here's this, you know, almost a comic relief record and it's going crazy." He says, "Well that's simple. This one communicates, that one didn't." He says, "That's what you do with a guitar, you communicate with it." I thought, well that answers a lot of questions for me. You know, I always wondered why the heck ... why me? You know? Why me, Lord?

> ***“Because They’re Young” – Duane Eddy ($1,000,000 Worth of Twang / Jamie)***

PETER COOPER From Duane Eddy’s 1960 album One Million Dollars’ Worth of Twang, “Because They’re Young.” Now, let’s get back to my chat with the great Duane Eddy.

PETER COOPER Do you practice?

DUANE EDDY Some.

PETER COOPER There's a famous story about Sam Philips, the Sun Records owner and producer, when Luther Perkins, who played a very simplistic guitar for Johnny Cash…

DUANE EDDY Yes.

PETER COOPER They would get done with a session and Luther would want to take his guitar home to practice, to try to get better, because it would frustrate Cash that he couldn't do certain things. And Sam Philips would say, "No. Leave that here. I don't want you practicing. I don't want you getting any different than you are now."

DUANE EDDY I've thought about that too. I thought, you know, because I realized I was getting better at playing than I had been. I improved all the time, working every night and everything, and it just got easier, and I could do things that. And I tried one at a session one say, and Lee Hazelwood's producing at the time. And I tried just a little fancy thing. And he says, "Duane, I want to play you something." I says, "Okay." So he plays the track we'd just cut. And he'd get to that part where I did the little fancy lick, and it went by, and I realized it was all jumbled up. And I thought, well it's what I played, but why does it sound jumbled up in here, and it didn't out there?

Because with my sound and everything, when I go to play a bunch of fast notes and try to get cute and tricky, it just doesn't work. Now if I softened, if I EQ'd my guitar down to where it was really mellow and everything, I could do all that, and it'd probably be fine. That's what most guys do. So I went back and went, (singing), instead of going, (singing). You know, and something like that. But anyway, I learned as I went along, but I realized that no, you can't get complicated with it. And I loved Luther's work. I imagine Sam was right about that.

PETER COOPER Yeah. Yeah, and I've heard people say, well anybody can go (singing). It's like, well yeah, but-

DUANE EDDY And everybody did.

PETER COOPER Nobody did until he did it. That's right.

DUANE EDDY No. But everybody's done it since.

PETER COOPER: Yeah.

DUANE EDDY Including myself.

PETER COOPER That's right. Now, it seems to me that you use the guitar more like a voice than most guitarists do. You know, there are vocalists who can try and mimic

whatever they hear, and sing a bunch of curlicues, but there are also people like Willie Nelson and Bob Dylan, who have voices that wouldn't last for six seconds on American Idol, but we hear that and we know that it's them, and we know that it's right and true. And that's what you've done your whole career.

DUANE EDDY I learned that kind of from the country, from Hank Williams and Buck Owens, and Lefty Frizzell. Hank Snow even, I could hear an intro of a brand new record in country music on a country station, and just hearing the intro I'd know who was going to sing, even if they hadn't said who it was going to be. Because you hear Don Helms, you know it's going to be Hank Williams. Or you hear that soft, mellow steel that was on the Hank Snow records, you knew instantly. And the acoustic guitar, you knew it instantly it was going to be Hank Snow.

And (singing) Lefty Frizzell. You know? And it just, they all had their own sounds, their own distinct musical sounds, and then of course their style, and their singing was all very unique. So I thought that's what I had to do. I had to come up with a style and a sound, and do something different. And play a melody, because it's got to make sense, and a riff. I mean I can play a riff, if you get the right riff, like on “Peter Gunn,” but not often.

PETER COOPER You've come up with some doozies.

DUANE EDDY Yeah. That's for sure.

PETER COOPER One advantage that you have over vocalists is that people's voices change with age, over the decades. And there are people who use that to their advantage. Merle Haggard, you know, my favorite Haggard tracks were often from the early to mid-1980s. He had this kind of resonant whisky-mellowed voice there versus his really strong, wonderful singing in the '60s. But the voice changes. Your sound has never had to age one minute…

DUANE EDDY I know.

PETER COOPER …since the first notes you put on record.

DUANE EDDY I was doing a radio show in England, and the arranger was going to write charts for the guys, to play with me. He says, "You want to lower this a key?" I said, "No, I don't really need to. I can still play it in the same key as I always did." He's just so used to older singers, you know, that would lower their songs a key so they could sing them easier. I just don't have that problem, obviously. But I just saw Jerry Lee Lewis, in Vegas. I did a Rockabilly festival last April.

I went out to listen to him a little bit, when he was on, and his voice, he's a couple years older than me, and his voice was getting a little raspy and reedy. I mean it still sounded, you could tell it was his voice, but it was kind of weak, you know. (singing) But his keyboard, his piano playing was just, oh, sweet. It was just perfect. It was just, sounded just like him. He still had the sound on the piano. You couldn't miss it. I loved it.

PETER COOPER And both he and you were an influence on so many artists including The Beatles. And you got to know them.

DUANE EDDY I met three of them. I never met John. He was a fan though because I heard in the studio they just left the tape running, whatever he was doing. And one day he was playing “Shazam,” one of my hits, and singing the sax solo, and then he got back to (singing) "Duane Eddy!" He yells. So I was like, "Oh, that's so cool." You know. I have that at home.

PETER COOPER Were you closest with George?

DUANE EDDY George, yeah. And Paul. Paul's been… I went and did his thing at, the Grammys have a thing where they raise money for music-

PETER COOPER MusiCares?

DUANE EDDY Yeah, MusiCares. And they honored Paul one year, and somebody asked me to go play a song, a McCartney song. And that was fun. And I did that, and I finished up, and he's standing up in the audience, thumbs up, and all that. And I talked to him afterwards, and then he wrote me a really nice note, thanking me for it and saying, "Well, we're getting ready to go back home." It was a very chatty little note, letter. I'd done his radio show when Linda was alive, and he played on my Capitol album, 1985. I went to his studio over there and did “Rockestra.” That was a kick to look around and see Paul McCartney with his Hofner bass, just dancing around and playing, rocking out, you know. And I worked with George at his place.

I was supposed to go on their first major tour, but my manager messed that up. He liked to get money under the table, I found out later. And they wouldn't play with him, so he said, "Well then you don't get Duane." So I didn't. So Roy Orbison got it. And Roy thought, for some reason he was under the impression that I had turned it down, or gotten sick, or had recommended him, or something. Because I had an eerie thing happen. I just happened to be in England when Roy passed away. And of course they came out and interviewed me. "What about Roy?" I say, "Oh, he was a great singer." Blah, blah. You know.

It was almost Christmas, and I was there doing something. After the interview I just walked outside. I just wanted to get away from everything. And I didn't know Roy all that

well, but I knew him and had talked to him. We had mutual friends, and I mean, even from Phoenix. We talked about a lot of stuff. But he thought that I had recommended him for that tour, and they were playing an interview, and I came out of the hotel, which was at Piccadilly Circus. It was a nice hotel. I walked up Regent Street, and over there they just have the radio. Radio's a big deal in London. And they had their speakers on in a lot of the stores, and the taxis would have them, and they all listening to the BBC, one station. So Roy's echoing through Regent Street, the interview. And sometimes I'd lose it for a little bit, as I walked, and then sometimes I'd be listening as he was saying something interesting. So I'd stop and listen for a minute and then I'd walk on.

So I'm walking along, and he's talking about that tour. He says, "I got to do it because Duane Eddy didn't do it." And he says, "Of course after that whole thing, it rejuvenated my whole career. It was dying a death. After that, I did 'Pretty Woman,' and I was back." And he says, "I was always grateful to Duane, and I'll just say again, thanks Duane! Thanks Duane…" It echoed off in the street, and that was the end of the interview, and I heard it echoing, "Thanks, Duane. Thanks Duane. Thanks Duane…" I just got cold shivers, because it was freezing out there. It was a sad, sad, sad moment.

PETER COOPER Duane, you can sing. Why didn't you sing on records?

DUANE EDDY I didn't have the voice for it, I didn't think. I could sing, but I just never ... I sang with a friend of mine, Jimmy Delbridge. He changed it to Dell later. We cut a record together, but it never came out, because he came over to the house one day and said, "I can't sing with you anymore." I said, "What?" He says, "I got saved." I said, "Saved from what?" He said, "No, saved in church." I said, "Oh, congratulations. Great." I says, "What's that got to do with us singing together?" He says, "Well, I can't sing worldly music anymore." I says, "Well we're doing country." He says, "No. Worldly music is any music that's not church music." I says, "Oh." Lee had already sent off and ordered 500,000 copies in 78s and 45s, and they ended up stacked up in his garage. I don't know where people got them. They turned up later, after I had hits. So I'd see one every once in a while. Somebody got hold of them. One of the musicians, I think, and were selling them out of the trunk of their car or something. Or somehow advertising them as my first record.

PETER COOPER Duane Eddy, thank you so much for being here on Voices in the Hall. It's such a pleasure to have you in this place. It's such a pleasure to have you in this town. It's a pleasure to know you, and you're a good dude.

DUANE EDDY Well, Peter Cooper, I don't know what to say to all that. You're just a silver-tongued devil.

"40 Miles of Bad Road" – Duane Eddy ($1M Worth of Twang / Jamie)

VOICES IN THE HALL: DUANE EDDY PART 2

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

PETER COOPER In music there's really no greatest, but that's maybe my favorite rock & roll instrumental. Duane Eddy "40 Miles of Bad Road." That was released in 1959. Duane Eddy and Al Casey wrote the song after Duane's producer, Lee Hazlewood, heard someone say, "Your girl has a face like forty miles of bad road."

Now in his 80s, Duane Eddy has traveled plenty of bad roads and millions of highway miles. His guitar changed rock 'n' roll, and it carried country sounds to new audiences.

Every day, some session guitarist is asked to make his instrument sound more like Duane Eddy. Yet no one sounds exactly like Duane Eddy. He is indelible. He's impossible to replicate. I'm honored to have him come by the audio lair at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and to talk with him about his journey.

Special thanks to his wife, Deed, who accompanied him to the museum and is a fierce and loving protector of all things Duane Eddy.

Voices in the Hall is presented by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, and it's produced by Ben Manilla and Jennie Cataldo of BMP Audio. Master engineer Alan Stoker recorded this show in the museum's audio lair. I'm Peter Cooper and I appreciate you being with me as we explore the lives and the careers of the fascinating folks who make music history. Come see us in beautiful downtown Nashville, Tennessee.