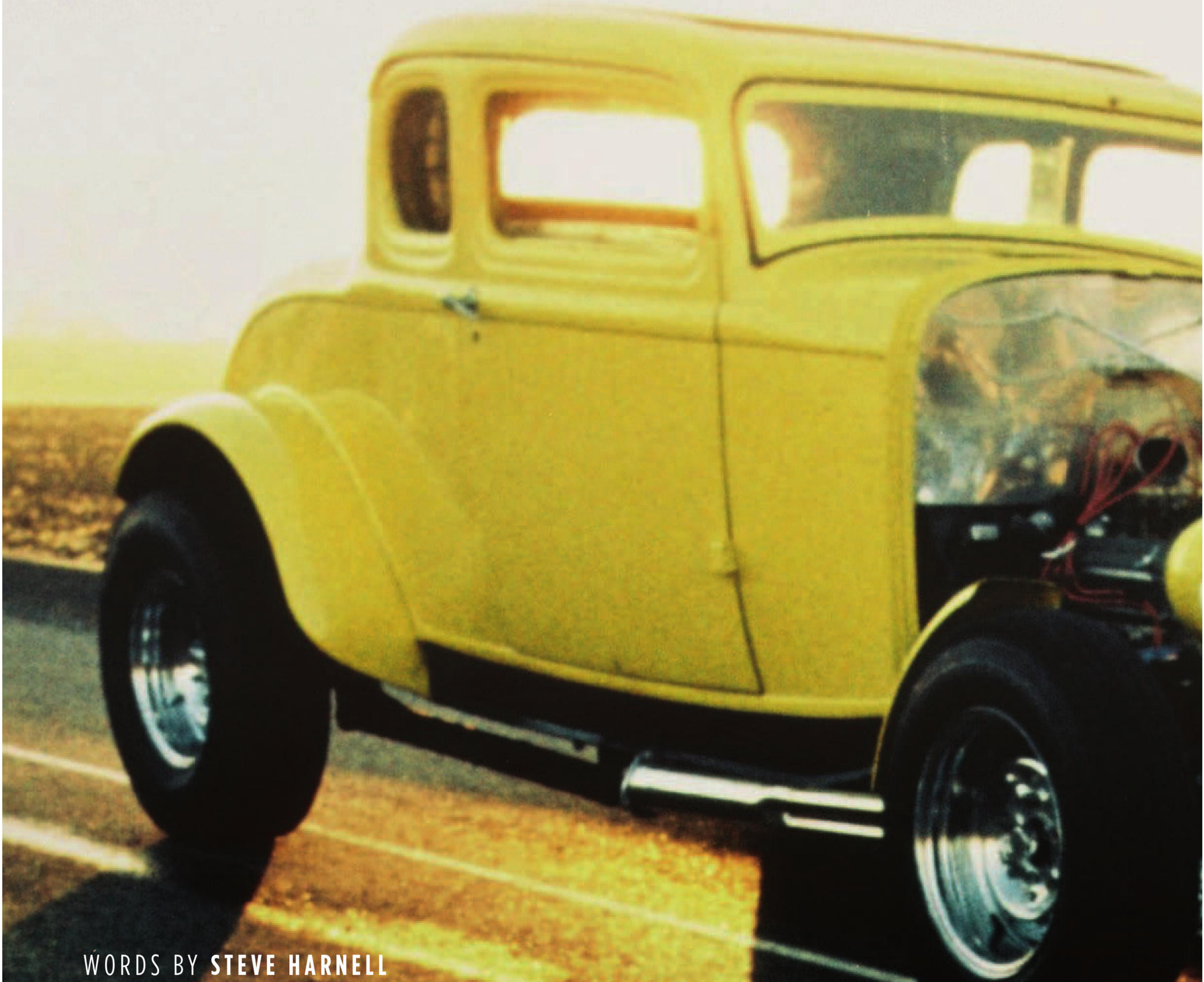


Eddie's Legacy

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



WORDS BY STEVE HARNELL

NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN

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

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

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

combative spirit, if only fractionally, arguably also provides at least some of the fire in the belly of further sub-cultures such as mod and metal.

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

Allied to that, Eddie's knack for instantly

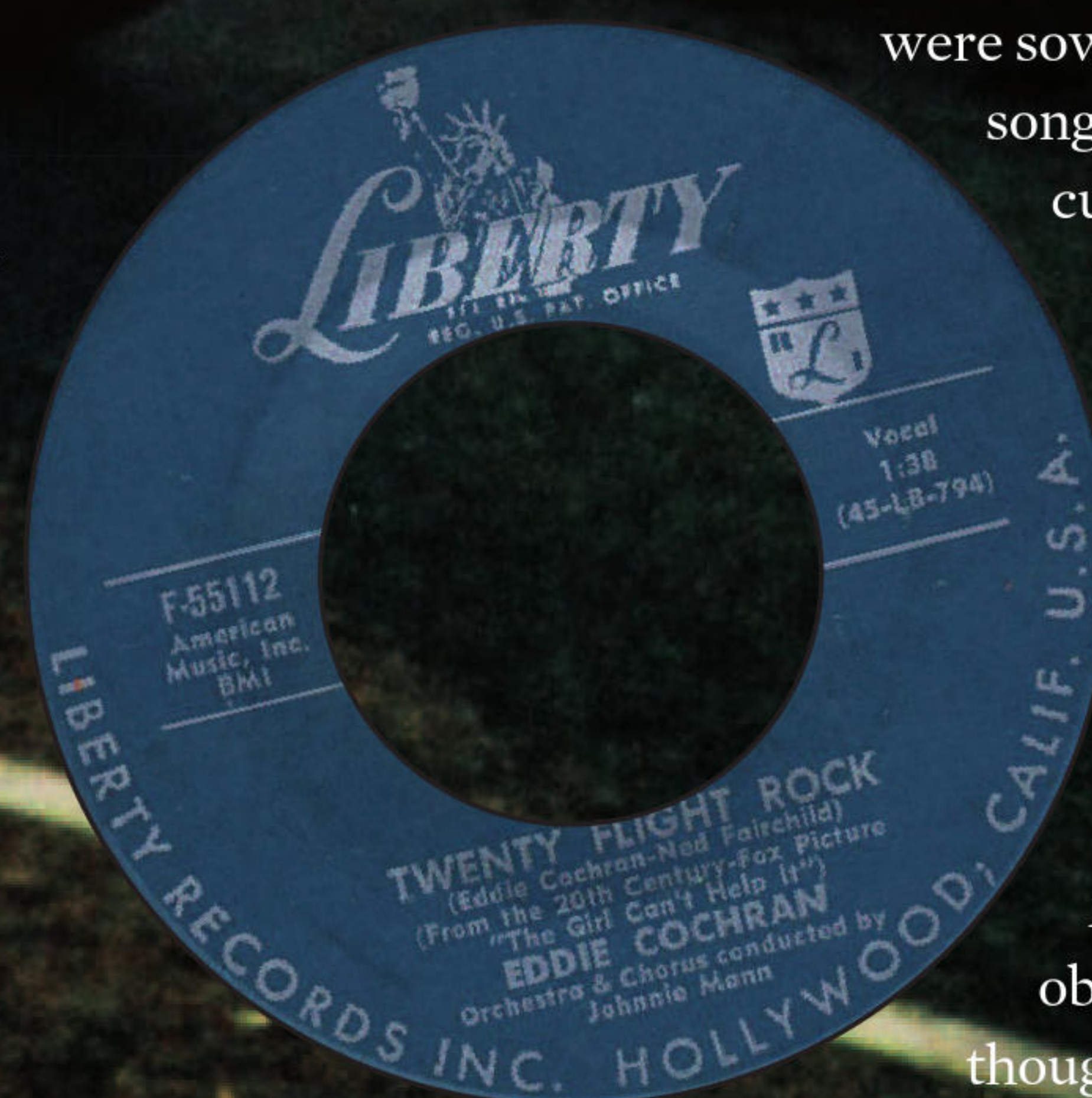
hooky guitar riffs served as the jumping off point for any number of burgeoning axe heroes, from the crunching likes of Deep Purple's Ritchie Blackmore and Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page to the swaggering Marc Bolan.

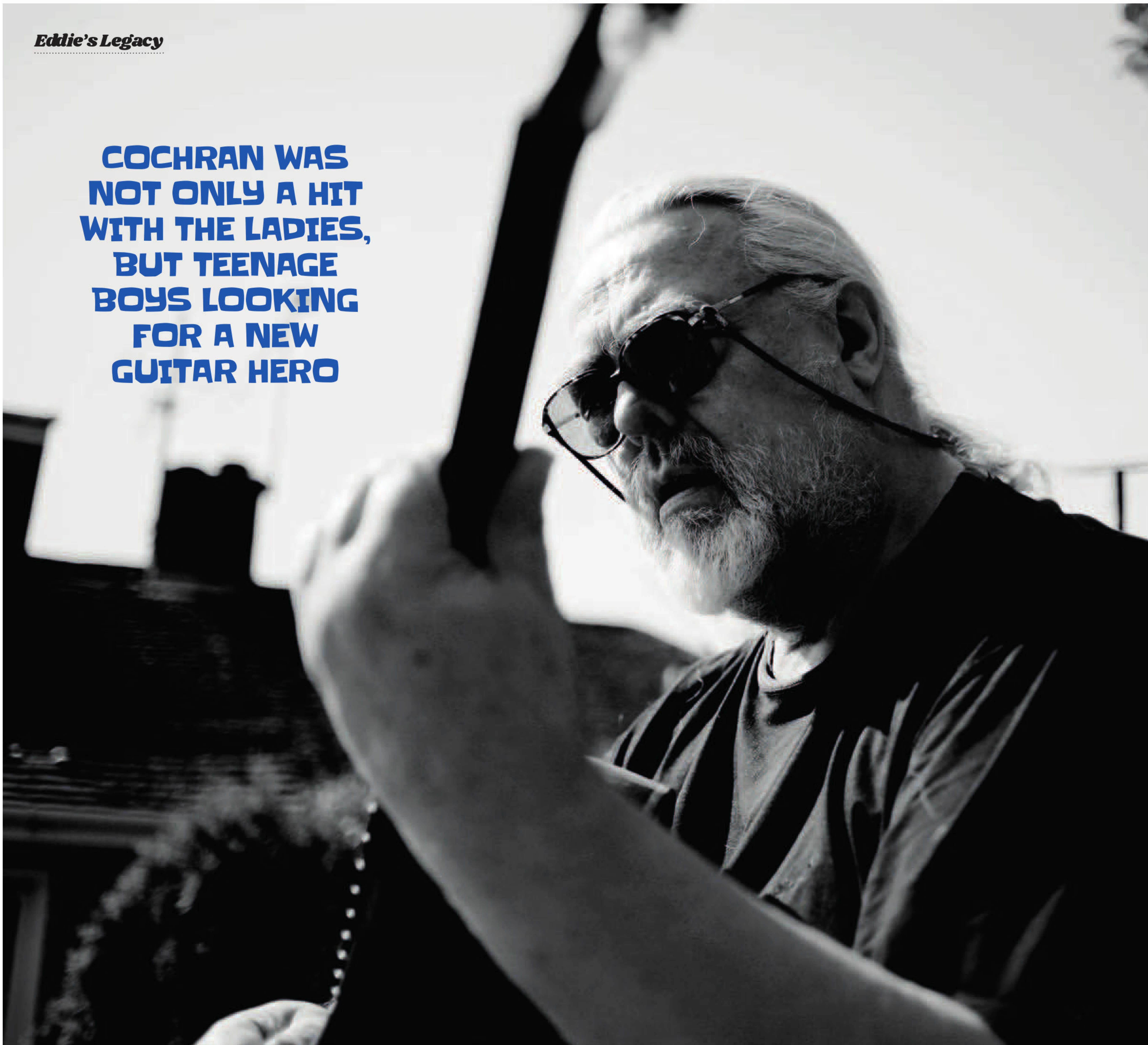
And Cochran's influence is at the heart of the most serendipitous moment in rock history of them all – the meeting of Paul McCartney and John Lennon on 6 July 1957, at the less-than-rockist environs of St Peter's Church Hall in Woolton, Liverpool; Lennon's band The Quarrymen were playing at the church fete. When the skiffle band's leader heard Paul playing Cochran's *Twenty Flight Rock* backstage, the seeds

were sown for the greatest

songwriting partnership in pop cultural history. A fresh-faced Paul, then just 15, turned John's head by performing Eddie's classic 1957 single. In the *Anthology* book, Lennon recalls: "I was very impressed with Paul playing *Twenty Flight Rock*. He could obviously play guitar. I

thought to myself, 'He's as good as me.' I'd been kingpin up to then. Now, I thought 'If I take him on, what will happen?' It went through my head that I'd have to keep him in line if I let him join. But he was so good, so he was worth having. He also looked like Elvis. I dug him."



Eddie's Legacy**COCHRAN WAS NOT ONLY A HIT WITH THE LADIES, BUT TEENAGE BOYS LOOKING FOR A NEW GUITAR HERO**

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

COCHRAN'S DASHING GOOD

looks, wit, blond hair, blue eyes and on-stage instrumental theatrics meant that he was not only a hit with the ladies but also fitted the bill for teenage boys looking for a new guitar hero. George Harrison was one of the latter. The Beatles' lead guitarist bought his

own Gretsch guitar because of Chet Atkins, but was impressed by the charismatic fellow Gretsch player Cochran, singling out a live date in Liverpool as one of the best gigs he'd seen as a youngster. In the *Anthology* book he explains: "[Eddie] was backed up by an English band. I remember [him] well: he had this black leather waistcoat, black leather trousers and a raspberry-coloured shirt. He came on doing *What I'd Say* and as the curtains opened he had his back to the audience, playing the riff. I was watching his fingers, to see how he played. He had his Gretsch guitar, the one in all the pictures, with a black Gibson pick-up and a Bigsby tremelo. It was the orange Chet Atkins 6120, like the one I later used on the Carl Perkins TV special, with the 'G' branded in the wood."

Cochran's beloved Gretsch rarely left his side and was recovered undamaged from

the boot of the car after the fateful crash that claimed his life and was later returned to his family before its final resting place at the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame in Ohio.

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

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



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

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

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

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

A prodigious production talent, his knowledge of overdubbing techniques was



THE MARC OF GREATNESS

AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN ICONS...

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

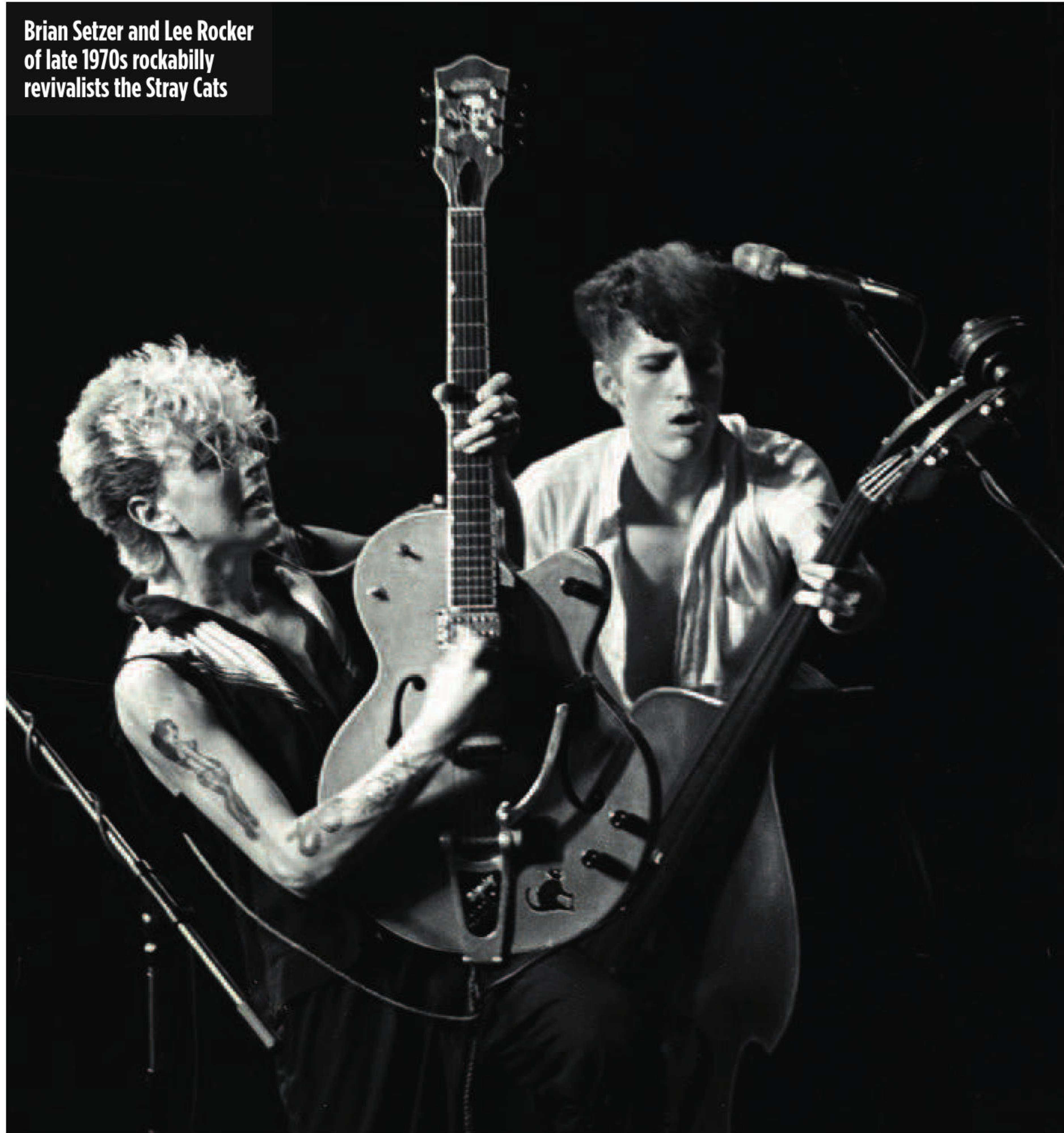
also cribbed by numerous other musicians and industry insiders. His skill as a musician shouldn't be underestimated – he was also proficient on drums, bass and piano. When employing UK backing bands, Cochran was keen to improve their skills and taught drummers his new rhythms and guitarists the correct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

During Eddie's Spring 1960 UK tour, Marty Wilde's band The Wildcats – guitarists Big Jim Sullivan and Tony Belcher, bassist 'Liquorice' Locking, and drummer Brian Bennett – accompanied Cochran on the majority of the gigs and Sullivan recalls

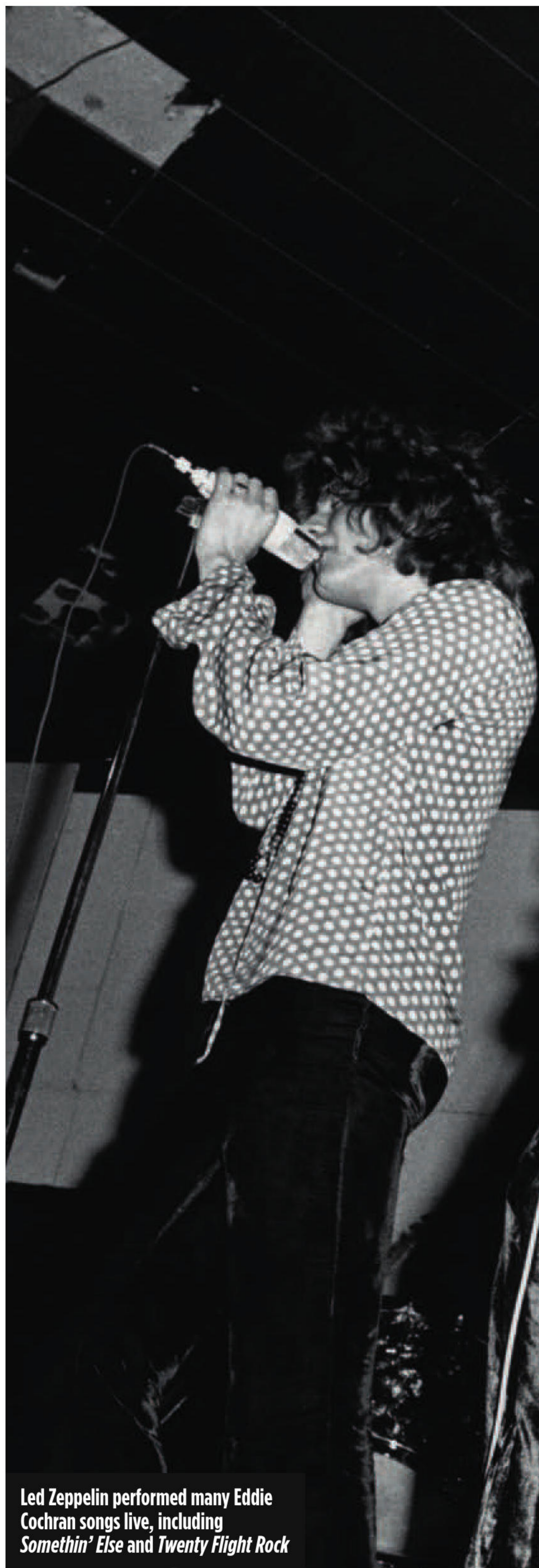
that multi-instrumentalist Eddie would be able to show the collected musicians their own individual parts. These individuals became central to the British blues and pop boom of the 60s either as session musicians or as members of Cliff Richard's Shadows.

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

Eddie's Legacy



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



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

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

Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page was an avowed fan of Cochran. A session veteran while still a teenager, Page picked up tricks from Eddie's technique and utilised them on countless recording sessions before forming Zeppelin in 1968. And, as the band gradually worked up enough original material to fill their setlists, they regularly dipped into

Cochran's back catalogue during their early years to bolster shows. Zeppelin covered *Somethin' Else*, *C'mon Everybody*, *Twenty Flight Rock* and *Summertime Blues*. Their 1970 Albert Hall version of *C'mon Everybody* and *Somethin' Else* is gutsy proto-punk, with a relentless thudding groove later to be made into a trademark sound by the Ramones.

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

An endless catalogue of legendary guitarists has tapped into the same concept that Cochran arrived at as a teenager, whether it be the raunch of Jimmy Page and Ritchie

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



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

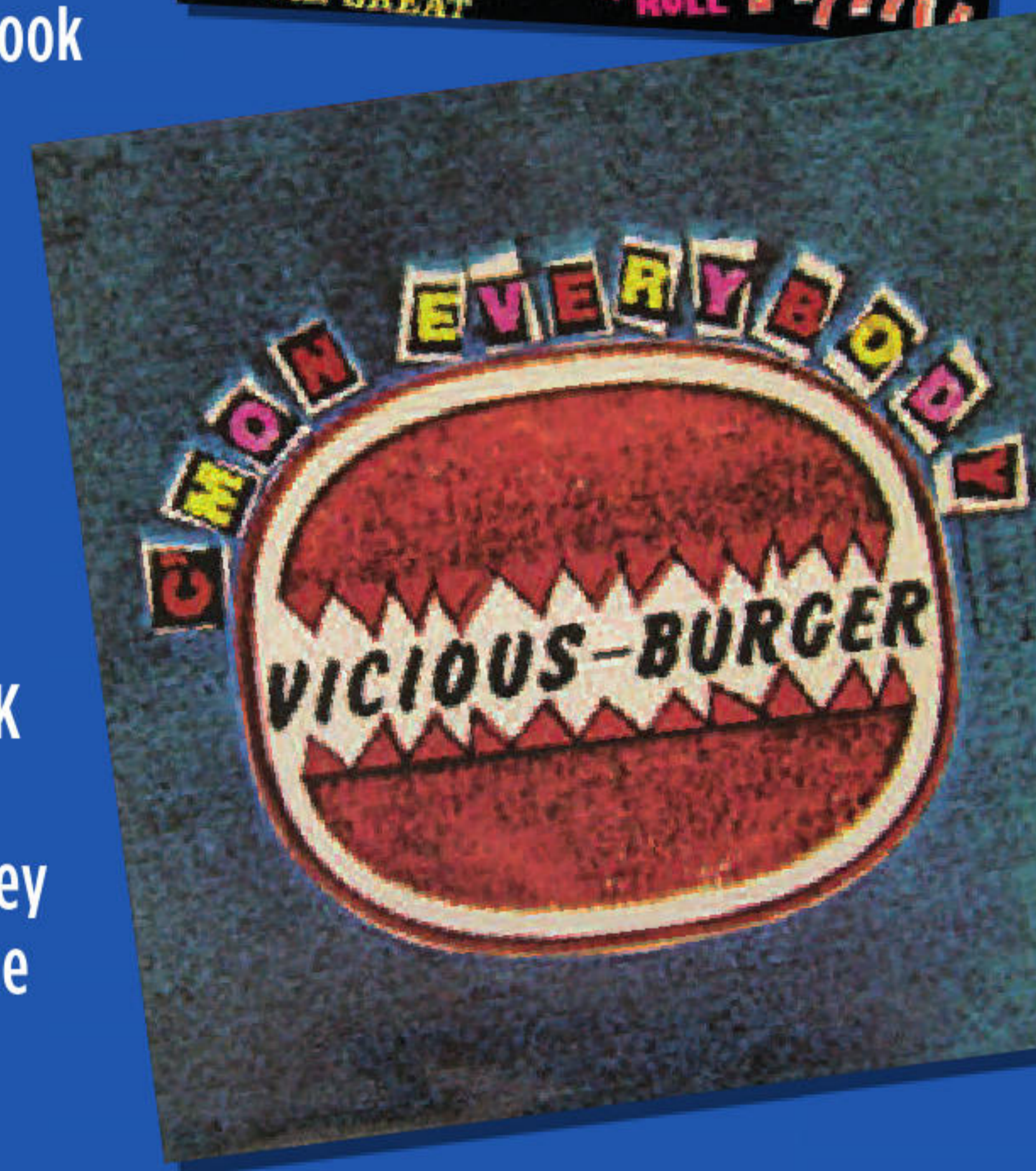


ROCK'N'ROLL SWINDLING

HOW EDDIE BECAME THE GODFATHER OF PUNK

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

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



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

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

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

In the 80s, Cochran's biggest – and most influential – supporter was Brian Setzer from the Stray Cats. Although as a guitarist Setzer was arguably more inspired by the dazzling finger speed of Gene Vincent & His Blues Caps guitarist Cliff Gallup, Setzer

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

believed that Cochran was the ultimate rock'n'roll package: "It wasn't just music with him; it was his guitar playing, his look, his singing, I'd say that, all things considered, he's probably my favourite 'cat' of all time."

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

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