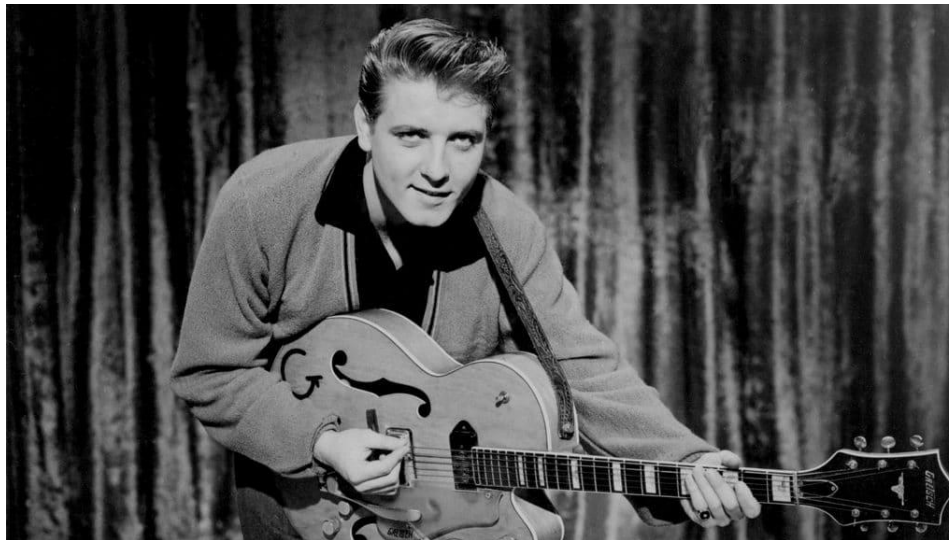


# EDDIE COCHRAN



<i>Recording years</i>	<i>Main genre</i>	<i>Music sample</i>
<i>1955-1960</i>	<i>Early rock'n'roll</i>	<i><a href="#">Summertime Blues</a> (1958)</i>

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*Only Solitaire*

Artist: *Eddie Cochran*

Years: *1957-1960*

George Starostin's Reviews

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# SINGIN' TO MY BABY

Album released:  
Nov. 1957

V A L U E  
2 2 3 1 3

More info:



**Tracks:** 1) Sittin' In The Balcony; 2) Completely Sweet; 3) Undying Love; 4) I'm Alone Because I Love You; 5) Lovin' Time; 6) Proud Of You; 7) Mean When I'm Mad; 8) Stockings And Shoes; 9) Tell Me Why; 10) Have I Told You Lately That I Love You; 11) Cradle Baby; 12) One Kiss.

## REVIEW

Life had been supremely unkind to Ray Edward Cochran: not only did she push him into the embrace of Death at the age of 22, but she also made sure that during his lifetime he would see the release of only one long-playing record — and that none of his well-known compositions would be featured on it. It is understandable that Liberty Records could not fit in *'Skinny Jim'*, his first single on which he sang in a rough, crackling, hideously twisted voice and played a rough, crackling, chaotic rockabilly guitar solo — because that single was, after all, released on a different label (Crest). But why they could not bring themselves to include his first bona fide classic, the immortal teenage anthem 'Twenty Flight Rock' (originally recorded in the summer of 1956 and included into the soundtrack of *The Girl Can't Help It*) is much harder to fathom. It has been suggested that the label was trying to groom him as an early teen idol — which would have made commercial sense a couple years later, perhaps, but in late 1957 kids still had the hots for rebellious rock'n'roll, and only a seriously moralistic record executive would want his guitar-swingin' protégé sing orchestrated ballads instead. Then again, what exactly can we expect from a record label whose biggest commercial success was 'The Chipmunk Song'?



The way I see it, Eddie Cochran had precisely *one* talent which made him somewhat special — he was a gifted and creative songwriter, putting his own special musical and narrative twist on the rockabilly formula whenever Mother Inspiration came down from the sky and cuddled him, which was not *too* often, but often enough for us to fondly remember him even after he became too old for the 27 Club. As a singer, as a guitar player, as a personality he was good, but no Elvis, no Chuck, and no Gene respectively. Therefore, any intelligent talent nurturer would have done the obvious — namely, let the boy write his own songs, and let him write them the way he wanted to. Alas, **Singin' To My Baby** simply miscasts Cochran by (a) having only five of his compositions and (b) way too often featuring him as a young and rowdy crooner rather than a young and rowdy rock'n'roll troubadour.

The average sound of this album is that of a Gene Vincent on tranquilizers: reverb- and echo-laden guitar and vocal tracks with a country-derived melodic basis, but slower, softer, more «gentlemanly» than the Blue Caps' wild raves. A good example is the album opener 'Sittin' In The Balcony', originally released by struggling country artist Johnny Dee — if you like the track and end up excited by it rather than bored, the rest of the record will be «completely sweet»; but I somehow find this kind of half-hearted «already not quite country, but not yet proper rockabilly» music traitorous to the spirit of both country and rockabilly, and would rather have me some Hank Williams *and* some Gene Vincent instead, rather than an emasculated mish-mash of both. Eddie does play a nice «twirling» guitar solo in the middle, though.

The only song of Eddie's own off this album, I think, which has been occasionally covered by other artists is 'Completely Sweet', with a non-trivial key and time signature change that makes it half-pop, half-blues rock — a quirky little trick, even if the sum of the parts ends up being more impressive than each individual part. The other four songs, however, are doo-wop-influenced pop ditties and ballads which seem to suck up to Elvis *way* too much: 'Tell Me Why' tries too hard to be 'Loving You', 'Mean When I'm Mad' tries too hard to be 'Too Much', 'One Kiss' tries too hard to be 'Teddy Bear', and although 'Undying Love' has no immediate prototype that springs to mind, its overall arrangement and style is still early RCA-era Elvis to the core. The problem is, while Eddie did have a fairly impressive vocal range and could plunge almost to the same trembling depths of warm bass as the King, it did not come as naturally to him as it did to Elvis — Cochran's singing style on 'Twenty Flight Rock' and 'Summertime Blues' is far more *his* than this soulful stuff. And, of course, he never could boast the same studio resources as Elvis when it came to backing bands and sound engineers.

And these are the self-penned songs: predictably, it gets worse when we get to outside songwriters. At least when the songs moderately rock out (Terry Fell's 'Cradle Baby'), the toe-tapping factor and Eddie's nicely shaped guitar solos push back the

boredom factor; but the ultra-slow, reverb-drenched, overdramatic rendition of 'Have I Told You Lately That I Love You' needs to be heard in order to much better appreciate the relatively listener-friendly Elvis version. Worst of all, after a brief while, even if the album itself is mercifully short, all the songs start to fall together — when you use the exact same production style to create the exact same atmosphere, you at least have to be AC/DC and provide memorable distinctive riffs to keep things afloat, and this is not the kind of material that requires distinctive riffs.

The truly cruel thing, of course, is that in the next two years of Eddie's career, when he was putting out a small, but steady flow of really great singles ('Summertime Blues', 'C'mon Everybody', 'Somethin' Else'), his record label never gave him a proper chance — all of his good stuff would appear on LPs posthumously. Perhaps he did not have the musical vision of a Buddy Holly, but he did have the potential to grow into a first-rate rock'n'roll songwriter, and although we certainly cannot blame the executives at Liberty Records for failing to foresee the tragedy of April 16, 1960, we most definitely can and should blame them for misjudging and misdirecting the talents of their most talented artist while he was still alive.





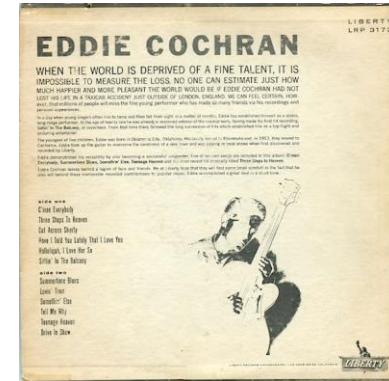
# EDDIE COCHRAN

Album released:

April 1960

V A L U E  
4 3 3 2 3

More info:



**Tracks:** 1) C'mon Everybody; 2) Three Steps To Heaven; 3) Cut Across Shorty; 4) Have I Told You Lately That I Love You; 5) Hallelujah, I Love Her So; 6) Sittin' In The Balcony; 7) **Summertime Blues**; 8) Lovin' Time; 9) **Somethin' Else**; 10) Tell Me Why; 11) Teenage Heaven; 12) Drive In Show; 13\*) Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie; 14\*) Pocketful Of Hearts; 15\*) Don't Ever Let Me Go; 16\*) Teresa; 17\*) Pretty Girl; 18\*) Bo Weevil Song; 19\*) I Remember.

## REVIEW

Now this is more like it: a compilation, for sure, but one that is much closer to reflecting the *real* legacy of Eddie Cochran than the misguided **Singin' To My Baby**. There may have been plans on the part of Liberty Records to release something like this even before Eddie's death, given how quickly the album was pushed out — yet the original date of release, usually given as simply April 1960, was clearly *after* April 17, considering that the liner notes ("*when the world is deprived of a fine talent, it is impossible to measure the loss...*") read like an obituary. And the LP has a somewhat complicated discographical history. The original pressings came with at least two different sleeves — sometimes simply titled as **Eddie Cochran**, sometimes (rather fictitiously) subtitled **12 Of His Biggest Hits**. A little later still, the album received the more solemn title of **The Eddie Cochran Memorial Album** and was released as such on London Records for the European market — with a seriously modified track listing that made much more sense and ultimately remained as the leading model for subsequent re-pressings and CD editions. (Note that the current Wikipedia entry on the album lists it under the **Memorial** title, but actually gives the track listing for **Eddie Cochran**).



Disentangling the chaotic track listing, we can see that Liberty did indeed try to include here most of Eddie's A-sides that managed to chart during his lifetime — from 1957, 'Sittin' In The Balcony' (#18 — already released on Eddie's first LP) and 'Drive In Show' (#82); from 1958, 'Summertime Blues' (#8) and 'C'mon Everybody' (#35); from 1959, 'Teenage Heaven' (#99) and 'Somethin' Else' (#58); and from early 1960, 'Three Steps To Heaven' (#108, but, ironically, #1 in the UK — apparently, since Eddie perished while on tour in the UK, this was a bigger piece of news for the British public than the American one, and they responded by sending his latest single to the top of the charts, especially since it was so gruesomely and prophetically titled). The most glaring omission in this list of classics is, of course, 'Twenty Flight Rock', which still remains as one of the best-remembered Cochran songs — but since it did not chart (rather, its fame was tied in to the popularity of *The Girl Can't Help It* movie), there is at least some logic behind this which we can understand, if not forgive.

To this was added a cover of Ray Charles' 'Hallelujah, I Love Her So' from 1958 (did not chart in the US, but *did* chart in the UK — actually, I believe *that*, rather than the original, served as the role model for the Beatles' early cover version); 'Cut Across Shorty', the B-side to 'Three Steps To Heaven'; and three more songs taken from **Singin' To My Baby** to pad out the record. The European release wisely deleted all that stuff, replacing it with the somewhat unjustly forgotten 'Jeannie, Jeannie' from 1958 (#94 on the US charts), the non-charting 'Teresa' (also from 1958), and a bunch of additional B-sides, most of them rather lightweight but still a better choice than filling up the empty space with previously released LP tracks that clearly did not belong there.

All in all, if you only threw 'Twenty Flight Rock' into the bargain, this **Memorial Album** would likely be the only Eddie Cochran album to own for a general lover of Fifties' rock, as opposed to a particular admirer of Eddie as an individual genius of his generation. While he did leave behind a surprisingly bulky body of material, allowing Liberty Records to feed off his hard-working ethics for another half-decade (in much the same way that Coral Records would go on feasting on Buddy Holly's legacy), I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that pretty much everything that truly matters about Eddie is to be found here — at the very least, do not expect to find any additional depth or breadth to his talent while rummaging through all those other posthumous albums. But then again, you can more or less fit everything that truly mattered about guys like Little Richard, Carl Perkins, or Gene Vincent onto one CD as well — and none of *those* guys died in a car crash when they were just 21 years old, so Eddie at least can be excused.

And the first thing that truly mattered about Eddie on this particular album is, of course, 'Summertime Blues'. Prior to that one, all of Cochran's singles were strictly about the ladies, either in terms of achievement ('Drive In Show') or temporary

failure ('Twenty Flight Rock'); 'Summertime Blues' single-handedly established him as the leading rock philosopher of the teenage mind set — what Mose Allison said in a more generalized manner with "a young man ain't got nothin' in the world these days", Eddie was professing with more specific examples, pointing out how the entire world, from his parents to his employers to even his politicians seems to be conspiring to keep him away from his girls and his fast cars. Musically, too, 'Summertime Blues' remains his highest achievement, with a boogie bass line from the rockabilly stock, a swingin' acoustic riff from the Buddy Holly pop textbook, and the comic deep vocal response by the song's antagonists (allegedly inspired by the Kingfish character from *Amos 'n' Andy*, although the most obvious musical associations would probably be with the vaudeville bits from the Coasters).

It's a bit sad how the original recording has been pretty much obliterated by the heavy versions of the Sixties — Blue Cheer, T. Rex, and especially The Who, downplaying the song's original lightweight humor in favor of emphasizing its rebellious-aggressive potential. The cheery Buddy Holly vibe would be completely wiped out, replaced by distorted power chords, and while T. Rex and Blue Cheer would at least preserve the original riff, Townshend shifted the accent from its last beat to the first one, thus completing the song's transformation into an *in-yer-face-motherfucker!* rock anthem. Naturally, I'm a simple man and I'll take the Who's version over Eddie's any time (if anything, there is simply no competition for John Entwistle's handling of both the bass melody *and* the "*no-dice-son-you-gotta-work-late*" bass vocals), but I do somewhat miss the easy-going nature of the original (actually, T. Rex's version still retains some of that — of all the classic rockers, Marc Bolan was perhaps the most nostalgia-bound when it came to modernizing the golden oldies).

One shouldn't perhaps forget that the actual lyrics to 'Summertime Blues' were credited not to Eddie, but to his manager, Jerry Capehart — ten years older than Eddie, with *his* teenage years largely falling on World War II — and it was he who also wrote the words to the song's two most obvious «sequels». The first one was 'C'mon Everybody', clearly intended as a stylistic follow-up to the success of 'Summertime Blues' — exact same bass line, similar acoustic riff, similar vocal melody, similar stop-and-start structure, though without the deep vocals — but this time, Eddie wants to be the solution rather than the problem: since none of the grown-ups in this world are available for assistance, let's just fuck it and party all night long. *Who cares? C'mon everybody!*

It's a fun little romp alright, but, let's face it, it is essentially just a «sunny-side-up» rewrite of 'Summertime Blues' in the end, which obviously explains its relative drop in the charts (#35 after 'Summertime's #8) and its relative failure to be as much of an influence on future generations — I think the most (in)famous cover version this time would be by the Sex



Pistols on the **Great Rock'n'Roll Swindle** album, which is sort of telling. You'd think that people would be generally easier to lure in with a nonchalant happy vibe than a bitter one, but not this time — seems like 'Summertime Blues' really struck a nerve with both the American and the trans-Atlantic teen, whereas 'C'mon Everybody' might have hit the same teen as somewhat less realistic. I mean, just how many of them could actually experience that lucky moment of "*the house is empty and the folks are gone*", so that "*the house'll be a-shakin' from the bare feet a-slappin' on the floor*"? Looks more like a wet dream to me — and there's something a little disconcerting about that "*hoo! c'mon everybody!*" call to action that gets no response whatsoever. (Perhaps what the song really needed was a Phil Spector production and tons of backing vocals from boy and girl choirs alike).

For their next single, then, Cochran and Capehart tried a slightly different approach. 'Teenage Heaven' is nowhere near as musically innovative or interesting as 'Summertime Blues' — essentially, it sounds like a mid-tempo country-rock song à la Bill Haley — but at least it *does* go into another musical direction, throws in a lively saxophone solo, and features two verses of fantasy lyrics that get straight to the point and remain relevant well unto the 21st century (I can kind of imagine Jimmy De Santa from *Grand Theft Auto V* adopting them as his personal anthem — "*I want my own Coupe de Ville, make my Dad pay the bill...*"). It's kinda cute that the protagonist wishes for just "*shorter hours in school*" — you can tell that we're still a long way away from the age of Alice Cooper — but on the whole, the expressed sentiments here are even more rebellious than in 'Summertime Blues'. However, I don't think the single flopped because Eddie's teenage fans all shared a strong work ethic and were deeply ashamed of sharing the song's fantasies; I think it just lacked a strong musical hook, instead putting most of its attractive power into the lyrics.

And then it all came back together again for the last part in Eddie's four-part teenage symphony: 'Somethin' Else', which was actually co-written by Eddie's brother Bob and Eddie's then-girlfriend Sharon Sheeley (Sharon already had a reputation of a professional songwriter before she met Eddie, with 'Poor Little Fool' for Ricky Nelson and other stuff). The song is quite firmly rooted in Little Richard's arrangement of 'Keep A-Knockin', right down to the opening drum-and-bass «knocking» intro, giving it a deep, rumbling, steady rock'n'roll energy that had up till then been lacking in Eddie's recordings — clearly the hardest-rocking number in all of his catalog — but what is just as impressive is its lyrical structure, in which the two first verses continue the subject of teenage fantasy (get the girl, get the car), the third verse outlines a strategy for making that fantasy come to life ("*work hard and save my dough*", nothing too outrageous), and the fourth verse triumphantly presents the results of realizing the American Dream (well, *partially* at least — "*just a '41 Ford, not a '59*" — I like that struggle for accurate realism in the lyrics). So here, at the end of things, is Eddie being both the problem *and* the solution in just slightly

over two minutes, with a pumping groove to boot that must have been one of the top candidates for «best highway speedin' song of all time» before Deep Purple's 'Highway Star' (which was, without a doubt, both musically and lyrically influenced by 'Somethin' Else', essentially «upgrading» it for the next generation of rockers). Also, unlike all the other Eddie Cochran songs, 'Somethin' Else' was *never* covered by anybody in a better way than the original (I like the Move and the Flamin' Groovies versions, but they really add nothing to Eddie's; and I absolutely abhor Robert Plant butchering it on the Led Zeppelin live cover — his vocal style simply does not fit the mood one bit).

Perhaps Eddie, too, felt that with 'Somethin' Else' he'd taken the «Teenage Dream Fantasy» genre as far as it could go, and perhaps it isn't even a coincidence that the teenager anthems stopped appearing right after he turned 21 — that was on October 3, 1959, and a little over a month later he came out with a significantly more «grown-up» sound, exemplified by a cover of Ray Charles' 'Hallelujah, I Love Her So'. It's not a complete waste of vinyl — there's something odd about how the corny, syrupy string arrangement contrasts with the surprisingly tough, rocking electric guitar solo, and Eddie's passion for the song clearly comes out in the vocal delivery — but if you're really going to put 'Hallelujah' on the white boy market, you'd at least need somebody of, say, Eric Burdon's caliber to make it work. All I really can say here is — well, thank God he did not take the alternate decision to celebrate his 21st birthday with 'When You Wish Upon A Star'.

Those who sincerely believe in Fate and ill omens shall, of course, grieve over Eddie's inauspicious decision to team up with the remainders of the Crickets in order to record the very Buddy Holly-esque bouncy ballad 'Three Steps To Heaven', on which he plays a fairly tight, crunchy, almost martial acoustic riff (various sources like to mention how Bowie would later appropriate it for 'Queen Bitch', but I actually hear just as much, if not more, similarity with the anthemic acoustic riff played by Townshend at the beginning of **Tommy's** 'Overture'!) while Jerry Allison weaves his ringing electric 'Words Of Love'-like lead in and out of it. It's not particularly complicated or original, but the idea of using a very Holly-style guitar melody with decidedly non-Holly-style vocals is interesting (even if the vocal melody itself feels a bit old-fashioned and croony, not to mention the lyrics which, this time around, read more like a parental lecture to the young offspring rather than the young offspring's personal take on life — "*step one, you find a girl you love, step two, she falls in love with you...*" — scratch that, that's not even a parental lecture, it's a ChatGPT recommendation!).

In any case, 'Three Steps To Heaven' came out in March 1960, and the very next month some stupid idiot in God's personal bureaucratic chancellery took the title too literally and arranged for Eddie to take the third step — "*you kiss and hold her tightly*" — as it's been reported that he actually threw himself over Sharon Sheeley during the car crash to protect her,

saving her life at the cost of his own, a very simple formula for Heaven indeed. Of course, the song itself implies nothing of the kind, and today, only those who know their rock'n'roll history well enough shall be intrigued by the eerie coincidences; back in April 1960, though, I dare say this was quite an event in people's minds, directly confirmed by the already mentioned huge popularity of the single in the UK.

Was 'Three Steps To Heaven' indicative of any major changes / breakthroughs in style, though, and did Eddie's untimely death deprive us of a major songwriting career? This question is even more difficult to answer than the identical one about Buddy Holly himself — because Buddy had a very definite personality and an immediately recognizable songwriting style, whereas Eddie was less distinctive and more diffuse. Clearly, those last few months of his life show that he wanted to expand and grow beyond the «teenage troubadour» status; whether he would have been truly capable of that is something we shall never know for sure.

The remaining, not yet mentioned «lesser» A- and B-sides sitting on this record are of widely varying quality; they show that Eddie was quite a Renaissance rocker indeed and wanted to be a little of everything — and, as it often happens in such situations, ended up somewhat mediocre in most of these initiatives. Sometimes, for instance, he wanted to be a bit of a folk-bluesman, recording his own version of the classic 'Bo Weevil Song' reinvented as a Coasters-like pop ditty with supporting doo-wop vocals. It wasn't very good, but Eddie did not despair and later made a similar, a bit more convincing attempt with 'Cut Across Shorty', another whimsical tale of country life whose ridiculous pointlessness, for some reason, brings on associations with 'Rocky Raccoon' (another long-winded tale that ultimately amounts to nothing), except 'Rocky Raccoon' is a flat-out goof, whereas 'Cut Across Shorty' is kind of sung with conviction. (Rod Stewart later made an entire epic out of it on **Gasoline Alley** — but the overall message more or less remained similarly bizarre).

Sometimes, on the other hand, Eddie wanted to be a suave, honey-drippin' crooner, as he was on 'Teresa', his only single from 1958 that did not chart at all. The gimmick of 'Teresa' is that almost each bit of Eddie's corny serenade is picked up by a sex-kitten-purr-mode choir of girly backing vocals — the idea, I suppose, being that of a lady swooning over her seducer's every compliment (because how can a girl truly withstand lines like "*you're a honey, worth more to me than money*"?). I can only presume that even the average horny teenager of 1958 was embarrassed to play something like this for his sweetheart — although, in retrospect, 'Teresa' comes across as quite a hilarious experience.

And sometimes Eddie wanted to be Elvis — not only on the ballads, but on the pop-rockers as well: 'Pretty Girl', the B-side to 'Teresa', is Cochran in full-on rockabilly Presley mode, lowering his voice, hiccuping, putting the bass hooklines on the

«stop» moment of the stop-and-start structure, the works. Given that Elvis had temporarily left the building and all, I can certainly see the commercial sense in this (although it didn't work — nobody really ever bought into the idea of Eddie becoming the new Elvis), but in the long run, this chameleonesque nature of Eddie's, when he would be Buddy Holly on one day, Carl Perkins the next one, and Elvis the day after that, did him a serious disservice.

In the end, despite all the diversity of approaches and the somewhat fascinating story of self-searching that emerges from this general retrospective of Eddie's brief career, we still inevitably come back to his «teenage quadrilogy», from 'Summertime Blues' to 'Somethin' Else', as *the* sweet short stretch that gives Eddie Cochran his own unique imprint — the simple, but sharp and «superficially deep» vocalization of the dreams and insecurities of the late Fifties' American teen, sung and played with enough wit and feeling to remain relevant for the American — heck, I'd say the worldwide, or at least the «first world» — teen even today. Who knows, perhaps the fact that Eddie was taken away from this world so early was just meant to signify that he should not have even *tried* to overstep those boundaries?..

