

The Universe of Twang in Living Color!



Figure 1. Warner Bros. Records, W1490, 1963, USA.

Overview

By the time that the Shadows and the Ventures broke big on both sides of the Atlantic in 1960, so-called “teenage music” was being taken seriously enough for record labels to put some real effort into the visual appeal of its packaging. The pages that follow are a sampling of the artwork and design that accompanied the music. Most movies and television for teens were still in black and white in those days, but their music could be delivered in colorful packaging as modern as the music.

In the United States, long playing album covers got the most attention from art departments, though young audiences bought far more singles, making many early albums now quite rare. Singles were popular overseas too, but the 7” 45 rpm extended play or “EP” disc that offered four songs in colorful eye-catching laminated cardboard sleeves were also a major format. But this format was not as popular in the States.

Let's go!

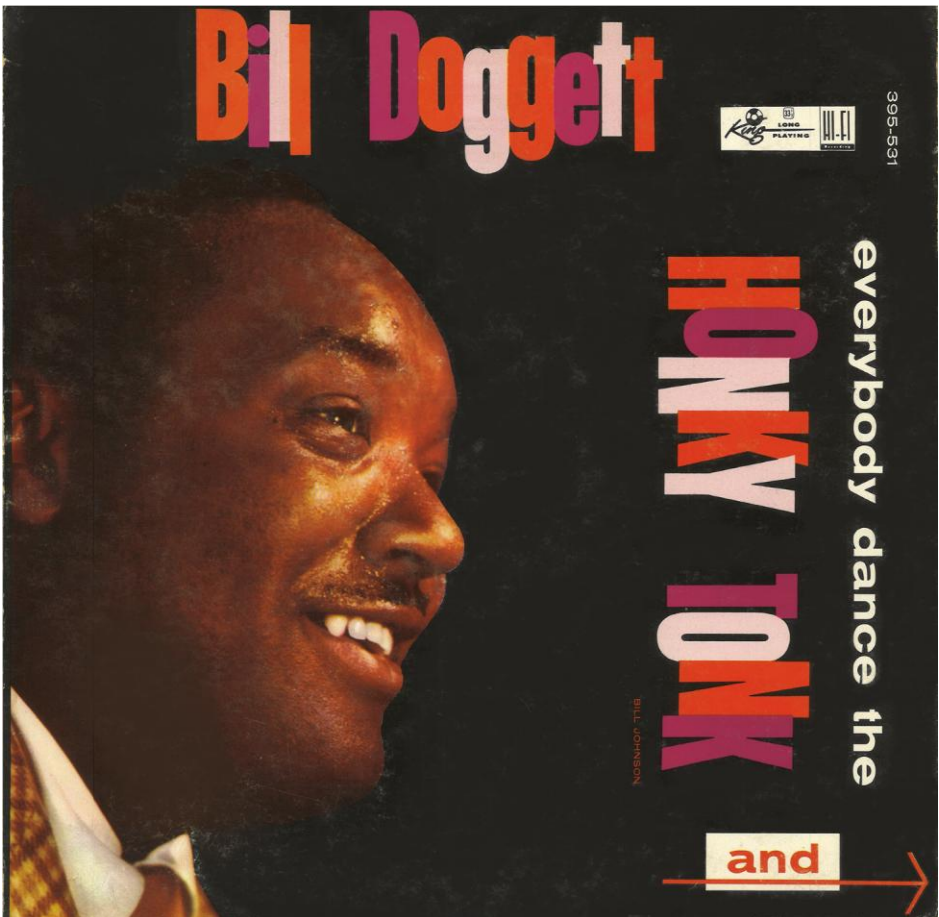


Figure 2. King Records 531, 1956, USA.

Bill Doggett and his trio scored the first major instrumental hit of the Rock and Roll era with “Honky Tonk, Pt. 1 & 2.” It covered two sides of a disc and immersed listeners and dancers in a wash of new sounds that defined rock and roll instrumentals for years to come: stinging electric guitar, pulsing Hammond organ, wailing saxophone and a firm backbeat high in the mix, with neatly balanced cymbal work shadowing the shuffle rhythm throughout. It’s safe to say that “Honky Tonk” was in the repertoire of nearly all the early “instro” artists.

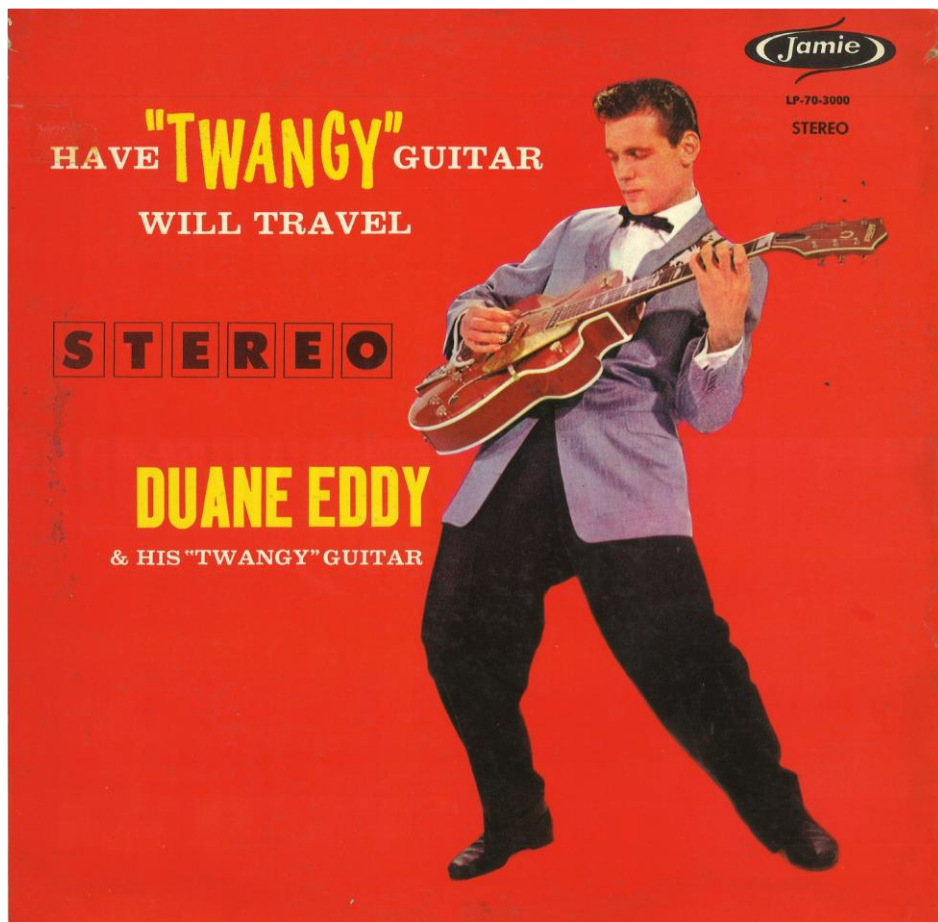


Figure 3. Have Twangy Guitar, Will Travel (stereo version), Jamie JLP 70-3000, 1958, USA.

Duane Eddy added a unique new electric guitar sound to rock and roll, opening up the instrument's lower register for business. In walked Hank Marvin of the Shadows, James Bond via Vic Flick's iconic theme riff, Peter Gunn via Bob Bain's work on Henry Mancini's theme, and Joe Moretti with his menacing opening for Vic Taylor and the Playboys "Brand New Cadillac," to name but a few.

Eddy's accompanists on the sessions for this album included saxophonists Plas Johnson, Gil Bernal and Steve "Shutdown" Douglas, guitarist Al Casey, with yells and backings vocals provided by The Sharps, better known as The Rivingtons.

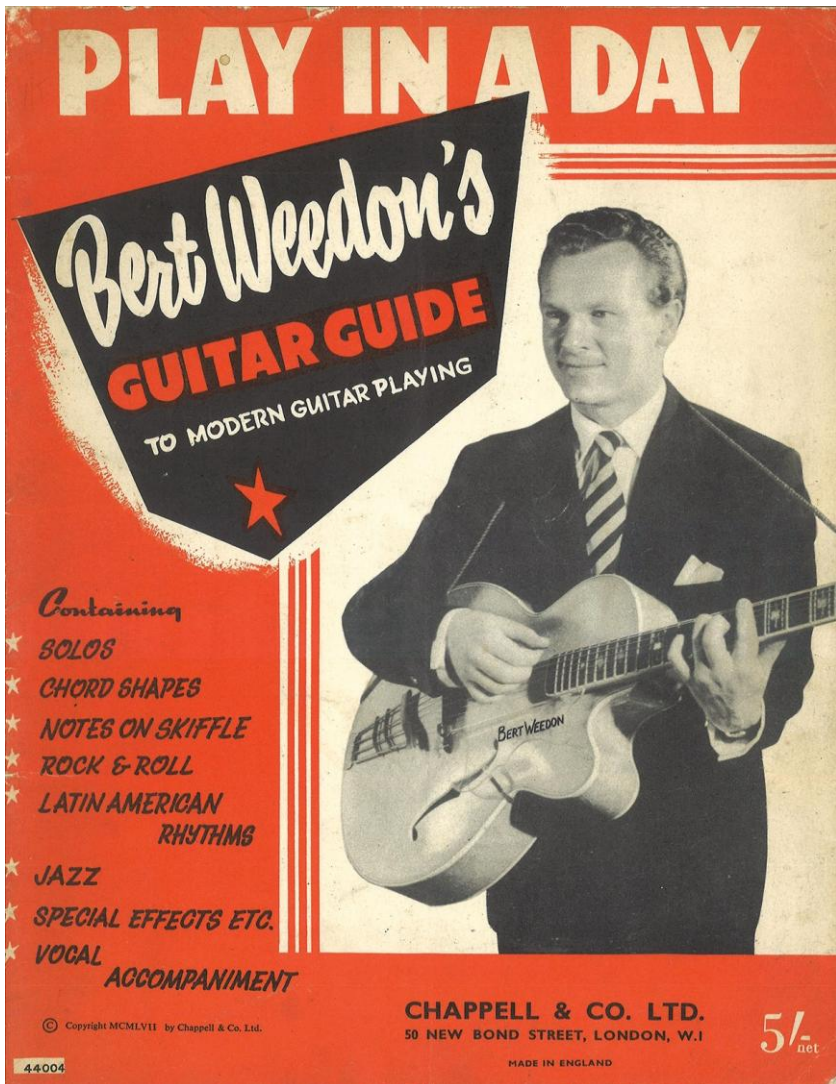


Figure 4. Bert Weedon's *Play in a Day* Guitar Guide, 1957

Many of the young guitarists who led the intro boom of the early 60s in England had learned from Bert Weedon's *Play in a Day* series of instruction books. Weedon himself had several guitar instrumental hits, including "Ginchy," which the Ventures covered on their third album in 1960. His books reached Europe, and one of Denmark's top intro groups even took his name: The Weedons.

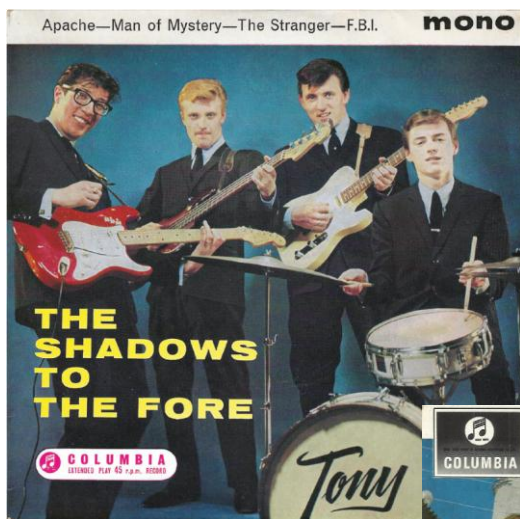


Figure 5. Columbia SEG 8094, 1961, UK.

Figure 6. Columbia, SEGJ 8278, 1963, UK.



Bert Weedon had recorded a version of “Apache” that composer Jerry Lordan found wanting, but when he pitched it to the Shadows, Cliff Richard’s backing group, their version hit big and launched their parallel career as major hitmakers in their own right, even as they continued to accompany Cliff from success to success. The EP “Shadows to the Fore” was one of the best deals of 1961, offering fans all four of the Shadows first Top Ten hits, and topped the EP charts on its own three separate times during its 15 month run on the British EP charts. The group at this time consisted of Hank Marvin and Bruce Welch on guitars, Jet Harris on bass, and Tony Meehan on drums. By the time of the *Los Shadows* EP in 1963 Harris and Meehan had moved on, replaced by Brian “Licorice” Locking and Brian Bennett.



Figure 7. Metronome MM 30.501, 1963, Denmark.

Figure 8. Metronome B 1708, 1968, Denmark.



Danish guitarist Jørgen Ingmann was an unlikely American hitmaker, but it was his version and not that of The Shadows that broke big in the United States and Canada. Ingmann was well known in Europe and thought that his own composition “Echo Boogie” could be a hit in the US, but the ATCO label overruled him and made that the B side of his first single, upgrading “Apache” to the A side to great effect. Inspired by Les Paul’s multitracking methods, Ingmann played all the parts on his instrumental records, attributing them to his little “Ing-Men.” He also recorded with his wife Grethe, and together they won the Eurovision song contest in 1963.



Figures 9, 10, 11L-R, London 45-HL 9232, 1960, UK; London HL 7113, Denmark; Liberty LIB 300, 1964, Sweden.

Like The Shadows, The Ventures soon found loyal audiences overseas and toured extensively. These releases are from England, Sweden and Denmark. These three discs packaged in these sleeves dated from 1960, 1961 and 1964, and were released in England, Denmark and Sweden. Although the 1960 and 1964 sleeves used the group photo, things had changed significantly in the group by 1964 with Mel Taylor replacing Howie Johnson on drums, and bassist Nokie Edwards switching instruments with guitarist Don Wilson. They were especially popular in Japan, where they starred in a feature-length documentary of one of their tours, *Beloved Invaders*, in 1966.



Figure 12. The Sounds: “Mandschurian Beat”/“Emma,” Philips FL-1095, 1963, Japan.

Figure 13. The Ventures: “Manchurian Beat”/“Sugar, Sugar.” Liberty. LR-2757, 1969, Japan.



With a lack of language barriers, and a bit of luck, an intro record or artist could find an audience far from home. Japanese fans embraced instrumental artists like The Ventures, The Shadows, and Sweden’s Spotnicks. The Sounds were part of Finland’s *Rautalanka* instrumental scene. The word means “iron wire” in Finnish, and the style draws heavily on Finnish and Russian songs. “Mandschurian Beat” was based on the 1906 song “On the Hills of Manchuria” by the Russian military musician Ilya Schatrov in tribute to the Russian Army’s fallen at the Battle of Mukden in the Russo-Japanese War.

Finland was a duchy of the old Russian empire at this time, and the dead included many Finns. Even after Finland’s subsequent wars with the Soviet Union, the song remained popular there and in 1963 the Sounds adapted the melody in the *Rautalanka* style. Trading the old waltz melody for a rocking 4/4, they soon had a hit in Finland, and to their surprise, in Japan, where they toured subsequently. In 1969, The Ventures recorded a version of it released only in Japan.

By this time, Gerry McGee had replaced Nokie Edwards, and keyboardist John Durrill had joined. McGee was the son of Cajun fiddler Dennis McGee, who made some of the most important discs of Cajun music in the 78 era, including historic sides with accordionist Amédé Ardoin.

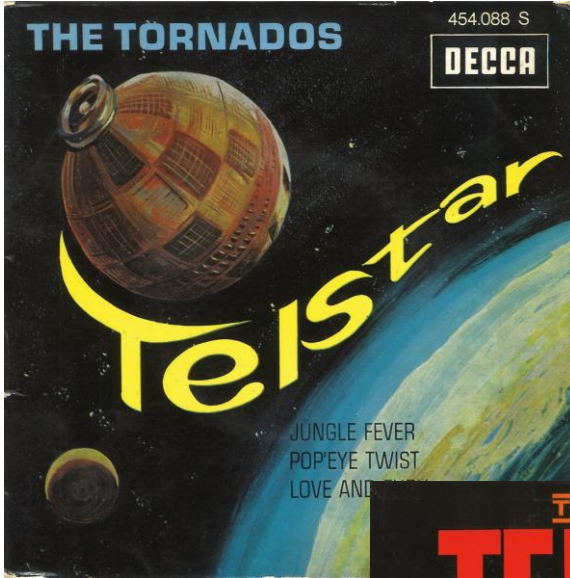
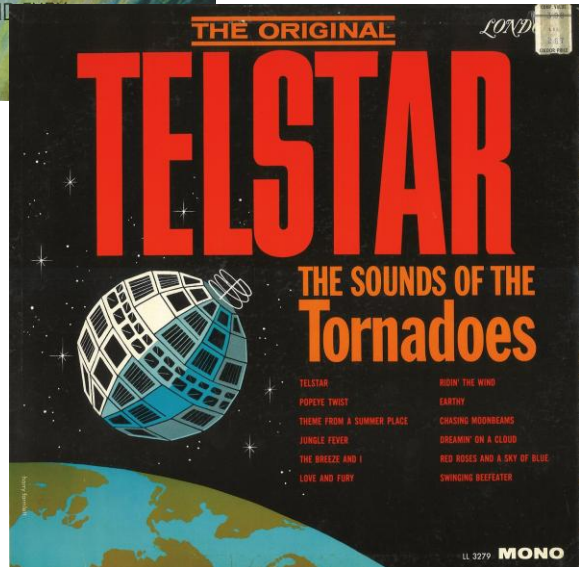


Figure 14. Tornos EP: Decca, 454.088 S, 1962, UK.

Figure 15. Tornos LP: London, LL 3279, 1962, USA.



The instro era was concurrent with the early space age, and it was well suited to capture the excitement and wonder of it all. While songs like Billy Lee Riley's "Flying Saucers Rock and Roll" and Sheb Wooley's "Purple People Eater" played the subject for laughs, the new sounds made possible by electrified instruments and modern recording technology could groove with the brave new world on its own terms. "Telstar" was a soaring celebration of the historic communications satellite launched on July 10, 1962. It began with the sound of a rocket launch yielding to a multi-layered array of futuristic tones unheard before on a pop record created in producer Joe Meek's home studio in England with his session band The Tornos. The success of the satellite represented the work of several nations, including the UK and USA, and fittingly, the record was a major international hit.

Figure 16. Pr sident PRC 306, 1962, Sweden.



Figure 17. Karusell KALP-1012, 1963, Sweden.

After The Shadows and The Ventures, The Spotnicks may have been the most consistently successful instrumental band of the era, scoring hits outside of their native Sweden and touring internationally in Europe and Asia with many reunions until the death of Bo Winberg, the leader, in 2020. Once they took their foam-rubber helmets off, they looked quite sharp in their astronaut gear and Winberg's own technical innovations gave their music unique futuristic qualities that must have seemed quite other-worldly at the time and which still command attention.