

## Rockabilly's Legacy

The rough edges of rockabilly had been effectively smoothed over by the end of the 1950's. An authentic "grass roots" music, rockabilly's influence and offshoots far outlasted its short-lived Moment as the truest rock & roll. The instrumental records by influential guitarists **Duane "Mr. Twang" Eddy** ("Rebel Rouser," "Ramrod") and fuzz-tone pioneer **Link Wray** ("Rumble," "Rawhide"), for example, had a distinct rockabilly edge to them. So, too, did Dale Hawkins' 1957 hit "Suzy Q," which featured 15-year-old **James Burton's** stunning swamp-rock guitar.<sup>1</sup> Burton later added a classy rockabilly touch to many of Ricky Nelson's records and was guitarist and bandleader for Elvis' comeback bands.

Wildman **Ronnie Hawkins** had a 1959 hit with "Mary Lou" and carried the spirit of rockabilly into the early sixties with his backing band, the Hawks—later to become The Band. The Everly Brothers' country roots brought a subtle rockabilly feel to many of their records, and Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran each began as Elvis-styled rockabilly singers before forging their own styles. Many mainstream country & western singers, such as Conway Twitty and George Jones, went through a rockabilly period; and on the other side of the Atlantic, nearly all of the English guitar heroes of the 1960's credited the rockabilly pioneers alongside the blues players in their pantheon of heroes and influences. (Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards, for example, once boasted that he never went on tour without a tape of Elvis' Sun Sessions and the inspiration of Scotty Moore.)

Rockabilly was a liberating music for young southern whites, who could now sing and play with an intensity and sexuality that had previously seemed reserved for blues and R&B musicians. A lucky few managed to get recording contracts and national exposure, but for every one that managed to make it there were hundreds of equally spirited singers and bands playing every night in the small clubs, bars and desolate roadhouses that dotted the landscape of the South. Rockabilly's spirit of fun, rebellion and refreshing simplicity remain eternally young, as the many revivals of its sound and spirit have shown. Like the blues, it was a uniquely American music and it remains a crucial continuing impulse for rock & roll.

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<sup>1</sup>Creedence Clearwater Revival had their first hit with a direct cover of Susie Q.