

# THE NEW YORKER

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MAY 26, 2003

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## POP NOTES



After a mid-eighties splash that produced the hit "Jungle Boy" and had critics calling him the new Springsteen, the Virginia-born singer-songwriter John Eddie sank out of sight. Now he has resurfaced with "Who the Hell Is John Eddie?" (Lost Highway), an attempt to reclaim the larger audience he never quite had. While the mid-tempo songs are sometimes uncomfortably close to late-period Springsteen (the two have an almost identical sense of melody), Eddie hasn't lost his knack for bitterly funny roots rock. Near the end of the record, there's a pair of songs ("Forty," "Play Some Skynyrd") that directly address his could-have-been-a-contender status. Both teeter on the edge of self-pity but are rescued by wit and grit, and both are so autobiographical that it's hard to imagine anyone else singing them—except maybe Etta James.

—Ben Greenman

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# Entertainment WEEKLY

June 6, 2003

## discoveries

Yeah, there's great music out there. Like, *out there*...on the fringe. Here's a look at this month's indie platters that most matter. by WILL HERMES

### LISTEN 2 THIS



**JOHN EDDIE**  
**Who the Hell Is  
John Eddie?**  
[Thrill Show/Lost Highway]

→ How can you not root for a guy who sings “I guess I’m f---ing 40/That’s what my mamma said/But Bruce Springsteen’s f---ing 53/And the Stones are almost dead”? John Eddie had his 15 minutes in the mid-’80s, when his blue-collar, Jersey-based roots rock caught the ears of Columbia Records. The results were two LPs that went nowhere, despite a friendship with the aforementioned 53-year-old. *Who the Hell* is a helluva second act, full of songs that play footsie with cliché and make her shine like a honky-tonk angel, e.g., the twangy “Let Me Down Hard” (a perfect riff on breakup pathology) and the self-explanatory “S---hole Bar.” **CLASSIC ROCK BLUES** The strangely beautiful “Play Some Skynyrd” is the sound of a bar-band lifer converting biker-dude hecklers into true believers. **B+**

# NO DEPRESSION



THE ALTERNATIVE COUNTRY (WHATEVER THAT IS) BIMONTHLY

JULY - AUGUST 2003

## JOHN EDDIE

*Who The Hell Is John Eddie?*

*Lost Highway*

In the mid-'80s, the answer to this album's self-effacing title might have been "the new Boss." After all, the Virginia-born New Jersey transplant Eddie played his heartland rockers with barroom ballsy-ness weekly at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park. The real Boss even befriended Eddie and occasionally joined him

onstage. In Bruce-like fashion, Eddie signed with Columbia Records in 1986, but after two albums and just one minor hit — "Jungle Boy" (not to be confused with "Jungleland") — he soon was label-less.

Now on *Lost Highway*, the man in question has surrounded himself with the right people, from producer Jim Dickinson to John Mellencamp drummer Kenny Aronoff. And, no big surprise, a number of the album's tracks ("Place You Go", "If You're Here When I Get Back", "Let Me Down Hard"), sound Springsteen-esque.

But that's not Eddie's only trick pony. On "Nobody's Happy", he rocks with near Replacements-like fervor. Elsewhere ("Jesus Is Coming", "Shithole Bar", "Forty", "Play Some Skynyrd"), he attacks heart-break with a wicked sense of humor.

So who the hell is John Eddie? He's not the new Boss, nor the old Boss, but for some, he may be a worthy substitute until the next Springsteen album arrives.

— CRAIG ROSEN

([www.losthighwayrecords.com](http://www.losthighwayrecords.com))



# Performing Songwriter

JULY/AUGUST  
2 0 0 3

## NEW MUSIC REVIEWS



### John Eddie

*Who the Hell Is John Eddie?*  
[Lost Highway]

Whether he's driving through an acoustic rocker, leading a Steve Earle-style hillbilly rave-up like "Family Tree" or tenderly tearing his heart to pieces on a lament, John Eddie proves that the answer to the question posed in the title of his new record is simple: John Eddie is a badass.

An economical lyricist who can write the just-sappy-enough country ballad and quickly turn to write a cutting number like "Play Some Skynyrd" (a song as funny as it is sad because it's so damn true), Eddie writes like a cowboy poet, a rock 'n' roller and a country tunesmith all rolled into one.

Part Steve Earle, part Guy Clark, part Springsteen, John Eddie is one hell of an artist, and if you didn't already know him, you will soon. —CS

#### FOR FANS OF:

Steve Earle — *El Corazón*

6 String Drag — *High Hat*

Bruce Springsteen — *Lucky Town*

RATING: A-

# The Washington Post

62 78 SATURDAY, JULY 5, 2003

## MUSIC



FILE PHOTO/RY BEBERD MATTHEWS—ASSOCIATED PRESS

**John Eddie, shown performing in New York, rewarded fans with a high-spirited show Thursday at Iota.**

### John Eddie at Iota

The rock-and-roll dream is pretty standard. Start young, record a couple of hits, make gobs of money, and after a few years hit the reunion tour circuit. In the mid-1980s John Eddie was tantalizingly close to achieving that dream. A blue-collar, Springsteen-esque rocker, the Richmond native had a loyal following in the Northeast and a regional hit or two as well. But things fell apart, his label dropped him and Eddie joined the legions of the almost famous.

Luckily for the crowd that turned out at Iota on Thursday night, Eddie, now 43, never quite abandoned his career. In fact, he's making a promising comeback with a terrific new country-tinged album, "Who the Hell Is John Eddie?" which was released this year on Lost Highway records, also the home of Lucinda Williams and Willie Nelson.

As his album title suggests, Eddie has a sense of humor about his status in the record bins. But maybe more people should know who John Eddie is. His two-hour-plus show was a roundhouse kick to rock-and-roll cynicism, a high-spirited affair led by a man who seemed intent on giving the audience its money's worth and having a great time doing so.

He smiled wickedly as he sang songs such as "Low Life," a rednecky romp, and "Forty," his expletive-filled anthem to growing older. The simultaneously heartbreaking and hilarious "Play Some Skynyrd" should have been dedicated to put-upon bar bands everywhere.

Eddie also knows the value of a spectacular cover song, and he and his impressive four-piece band worked through several, including Springsteen's "She's the One," Cheap Trick's "Surrender," Elvis Presley's "Suspicious Minds" and a wonderful acoustic take of the Jackson 5's "I Want You Back." But Eddie's own songs, such as "Jesus Is Coming" and "Let Me Down Hard," more than held up in the mix. Rock dreams, it turns out, are hard to kill. It's our good luck that Eddie hasn't let his fade away.

—Joe Heim



# GOLDMINE

JULY 25, 2003

JOHN EDDIE

Who The Hell Is John Eddie?

Lost Highway Records (0000306)

The 1980s didn't deserve John Eddie. That decade of greed, artifice and big hair had no time for an earnest, hard-working musician who regularly blew the roof off local joints on the East Coast, most notably the Philadelphia, Pa., and Asbury Park, N.J., area. His Sony/Columbia 45, "Jungle Boy," a song that's equal parts Elvis, Gary Glitter, and Joey Ramone, was an MTV-ready rock-solid thumper that trickled into the nether regions of the Top 40 in 1986.

For all intents and purposes Eddie was headed for stardom. Then the next album tanked and he was back to the bars, plying his trade for a mixture of the faithful and the indifferent, often selling his own privately pressed recordings out of the back of his car.

Now, there are several ways one can deal with life's bad hand: a) homicide, b) earnest prayer, c) chemicals or d) art. Thankfully for all of us, he chose d. Eddie's roller-coaster ride of a career fuels his latest and greatest record (thus far): *Who The Hell Is John Eddie?* He's back in the majors on the alternative-country imprint Lost Highway.

It's a perfect match. The 12 tracks (plus two unbilled extras) were produced in Memphis by the legendary Jim Dickinson, who has also twiddled the knobs for The Replacements and Big Star. Dickinson's nonsense production approach fits Eddie perfectly. The result is a bracing song cycle that wears its jaded heart on its sleeve (and sometimes on its pant leg).

*Who The Hell Is John Eddie?* pulls the listener in every conceivable emotional direction; from heartfelt to humorous to morally reprehensive, oftentimes all at once. What didn't kill Eddie only made him stronger; the proof is in this recording. Along his journey, the Virginia-born rocker has wrestled with his fair share of demons, be it a lost love or a dude with a gun rack.

On the raucous "Low Life" the singer "...takes strippers out to breakfast. You can add that to the checklist." Referring to the song as "me trying to be Randy Newman fronting The Rolling Stones," Eddie hits the mark with a sledgehammer. He channels the eccentric storytelling of John Prine with his hilarious "Jesus Is Coming": "Jesus, if you're coming, could you hurry please? I've been praying forever. It's getting hard on my knees." Among the song's mildly blasphemous imagery is Christ in a blue business suit hanging out with Santa Claus at the airport. The song begs to be made into a video. Pray that it never will be.

With "Forty," Eddie realizes the important things in life are starting to pass him by: "I never dated Winona Ryder, and I guess I never will." The song contains a recurring undeleted expletive that is sure to guarantee zero radio play. That's a pity, since it's a brilliant rumination on the arrival of middle age and the realization that, well, maybe we aren't as immortal as we thought we were.

The album's cornerstone is "Play Some Skynyrd," which takes every down-and-out singer's nightmare of playing before drunken hecklers and turns it into an solemnly side-splitting anthem: "Who the hell is John Eddie? That's what the redneck said." Well, with the release of this record, that redneck will find out soon enough. *Who The Hell Is John Eddie?* is a work of intelligent immaturity. It's also so damn good it hurts.

— Ed Kaz





Journal/Jennifer Armstrong

JOHN EDDIE performs Thursday at Martyr's club in Chicago.

## The Boss was right: John Eddie remarkable

By Jennifer Armstrong, Journal correspondent

CHICAGO — During the 1980s, John Eddie was poised to become a star. Uprooting himself from Virginia and settling in New Jersey, Eddie became a local favorite on the Jersey show circuit. Bruce Springsteen, who is a big fan of the singer, would often join him on-stage for impromptu jams at the Stone Pony club in New Jersey.

The recording industry began to take notice, and before long, he found himself in the middle of a contract bidding war between some of the industry's giants. Columbia Records won the war, and soon afterward, John Eddie's first hit "Jungle Boy" was released.

More than a decade and a few record companies later, he is still poised to become a star, although the path to getting there hasn't been direct. With the recent release of the aptly-titled "Who The Hell Is John Eddie?," containing songs in the same vein as Springsteen, Steve Earle and John Mellencamp, it appears that this is the second coming in Eddie's career.

Eddie has a reputation for being a dynamic performer on-stage, and he lived up to that during his solid hour set on Thursday night at Martyr's in Chicago. His honest delivery, laced with both humor and heartache, grabs you right from the beginning. Backed by an impressive trio of musicians, Eddie's rockabilly sound, flavored with country and soul, filled the venue and pleased the scores of fans in attendance.



Enduring his share of hard luck over the years hasn't taken the edge off Eddie's songwriting. If anything, it has given him more ammunition. He is a master at writing a song that simultaneously beckons you to stomp your feet and clap your hands, all at the expense of his misfortune. The bittersweet "If You're Here When I Get Back" was described by Eddie "wishful thinking put to music." Favorites from the evening included "Low Life," "Jesus is Coming" and "Let me Down Hard." But the highlight of the evening was "Forty," which is both a brutally honest and angry realization about reaching middle age.

The night was capped off with the anthem-ish "Play Some Skynyrd," a nod to the bar patrons who have heckled Eddie over the years to play comfort tunes instead of original material.

Instead of listeners wondering "Who The Hell Is John Eddie?," the crowd left happy knowing that they had found out.

## John Eddie puts down some new roots

Saturday, June 14, 2003 Posted: 9:49 AM EDT (1349 GMT)

**NEW YORK (AP) — It's a long way from New Jersey to Nashville — especially via the winding route taken by John Eddie.**

Back in the mid-80s, Eddie was a rising star on the Jersey shore, headlining the renowned Stone Pony and jamming with local hero Bruce Springsteen. Eddie signed a record deal with the Boss' label, CBS, and quickly scored a hit single.

But things fell apart, and CBS released Eddie after his second album in 1989. He signed another record deal — but that fell through, too. Rough times ensued through much of the '90s, including \$75 gigs for indifferent audiences.

Eddie soldiered on, started rebuilding his career — and his diligence paid off. He recently signed a deal with Nashville-based Lost Highway Records, and released his first major label album in 14 years.

"I realize I'm very fortunate at my age to have a record deal with a major label," the 43-year-old Eddie said over lunch at a Manhattan restaurant. "I'm not a big star. I'm just a working class musician.

"This is my job."

Despite his arduous odyssey through the music business, Eddie retained both his songwriting skills and his sense of humor. The new album's self-deprecating title: "Who The Hell Is John Eddie?"

It's a line that Eddie once heard before a show where he was the opening act. The offending party stood about three feet away, oblivious to his presence.

"It was kind of funny and sad all at the same time," said Eddie, who incorporated the melancholy moment into his anthemic song "Play Some Skynyrd" — a musical tribute to all bar band troubadours forced to crank out cover tunes.

"I've definitely had the 'play some Skynyrd' thing thrown at me," Eddie related. "But it could be 'Play some Creed.' Or 'Play some Limp Bizkit.'"



John Eddie



"Hey, we're going to disappoint someone somewhere."

## 'Psychotherapy for people with guitars'



John Eddie warms up during a sound check in New York.

Not if they listen to the new album. More country-tinged than Eddie's past rock 'n' roll work, the album showcases the singer-songwriter's facile lyrics and touch with a tune.

"Let Me Down Hard" is a jilted lover's tale, while "Low Life" is a Randy Newman-esque tale of the redneck life. "Forty," Eddie's comedic take on hitting the big 4-0, contains a middle-aged lament: "I never dated Winona Ryder, I'm guessin' I never will."

Most of the material was generated during 18 months of touring that preceded last year's recording sessions, and Eddie acknowledged that the record reflects his life.

"I'm not the first person to say it: Songwriting is psychotherapy for people with guitars," Eddie said.

At Lost Highway, Eddie's label mates include Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash and Lucinda Williams — a change of pace for the guy who's lived in the land of Springsteen for the last two decades.

"My whole rep is I'm from the New Jersey area, and that's cool, I'll take it," Eddie says. "But I feel like I fit in with Lost Highway, as far as singer-songwriters. I hope some of their credibility rubs off on me, because they're the cream of the crop."

For the new album, Eddie headed south to Memphis and joined legendary producer Jim Dickinson, whose previous work included sessions with artists from Screamin' Jay Hawkins to the Replacements.

Dickinson contributed keyboards to the album as well, as he did on the Rolling Stones' classic "Sticky Fingers."

## 'A "Twin Peaks" quality'

Eddie and company spent three weeks in Memphis, including the week marking the 25th anniversary of Elvis Presley's death. It was a whole new experience — particularly one day when they arrived in the studio to find a camera crew.

"We're wondering what's going on, 'cause we knew it wasn't for us," Eddie related with a laugh. "And it turned out the 'Elvis of Sweden' was recording with Elvis' TCB band.

"Just this bizarre, surreal thing going on. There's a 'Twin Peaks' quality to the whole thing."

Eddie had one last tale to tell. When he first signed with CBS back in 1986, he was scheduled to make a video for his debut album's first single, "Jungle Boy."

When it came time to pick a producer, he wound up turning down ... "Spinal Tap" co-creator Christopher Guest. A generic video followed, and Eddie was left with just the memory of a telephone conversation with Guest's wife.

"Jamie Lee Curtis would answer the phone," he recalled. "Jamie Lee Curtis said, 'I like your song. I like 'Jungle Boy.'"



# PANORAMA

D6

## HIGHWAY TO 'HELL'

*The continuing saga of John Eddie*

By **ED CONDRAN**  
CORRESPONDENT

**S**olid second chances are few and far between in the music industry. Rockers serious about making a big splash are akin to milk cartons — both have expiration dates.

John Eddie is well aware of how the biz works. The veteran rocker knows he is fortunate enough to have another shot courtesy of a record deal with the respected label Lost Highway, which on Tuesday released his comeback album, "Who the Hell is John Eddie?"

The gritty, spare tunes are a stark contrast to the material that graced his first two major-label albums, an eponymous effort released in 1986 and the 1990 effort "Hard Cold Truth." Both of those albums, released by Columbia Records, were big productions, with arena-rock sheen, except Eddie never performed at the airplane hangars. Instead, for much of his 23-year career, Eddie has been a club staple, particularly in New Jersey.

After the release of his first album, the Richmond, Va., native, who grew up in Maple Shade, hoped for more.

"I tried to be a rock star," Eddie said. "I tried to be a pop star. It just didn't work out. But I learned a lot. I learned that you have to be true to yourself. You can't chase a sound. What works best for me is just an acoustic guitar and a band

along with me. Simplicity is the key for me. I'm in a good place now with Lost Highway."

During a performance at the Texas music confab South By Southwest, Eddie, 43, was on an enviable bill at the Austin Music Hall. The charismatic singer-songwriter opened for the acclaimed Tift Merritt, the well-respected Jayhawks, alt-country darling Lucinda Williams and the venerable Willie Nelson. The common denominator among the performers: All are on the Lost Highway roster.

"If just some of the credibility from those performers rubs off on me, I'll be fine," Eddie said. "Aside from the artists, what's great about Lost Highway is that people know you must be at least decent if you're on the label. People have come out to my shows even though they had no idea who I was, just because I'm on Lost Highway. It's a great label, and they realize that I have come a long way."

Eddie's career started with the Front Street Runners in 1980. After two years of slugging it out on the Philly circuit, Eddie looked northward. "I knew there were some clubs on the Jersey Shore," Eddie said. "But I had to convince the Stone Pony (in Asbury Park) I was good enough to play there."

Eddie did more than that. He attracted the attention of Bruce Springsteen. "I remember the first time Bruce jumped up onstage with us," Eddie recalled.



The Lost Highway label on Tuesday released John Eddie's latest CD, "Who the Hell is John Eddie?"

"It was Easter Sunday 1982. There were 11 people in the club (Clarence Clemons' Big Man's West in Red Bank). He jumped up onstage with us and played. The next week there were 300 people out there to see us. His vote of confidence means so much."

The Boss has popped up onstage with Eddie a number of times. A few years ago Springsteen surprised Eddie at the Stone Pony.

"I remember standing at the mike and we were playing 'Suspicious Minds,'" Eddie said. "I had my eyes closed, and all of a sudden I heard this big roar. I figured, 'Boy, I must be doing something right.' Bruce jumped up onstage and grabbed a guitar. He's so generous. He's so wonderful it's sickening."

Eddie, who will perform Saturday at KatManDu in Trenton, has been compared often to Springsteen, thanks to his passion and wordplay. Eddie's songs are clever and exciting.

"I put a lot into what I do," Eddie said. "It's not a problem, since it's what I love to do. I never stopped doing it since I started. I never had a regular job and I don't want one now."

### JOHN EDDIE

9 p.m. Saturday

• KatManDu

• 50 River View Park,  
Trenton • \$7

• (609) 393-7300