

Eddie Low MNZM

14 May 1943 – 21 Sept 2024



Eddie Low has toured as 'Roy Orbison' and his voice is likened to Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck. One of the foremost imitators of Elvis Presley, he has been billed alongside top country artists like Charley Pride, Johnny Cash, Freddy Fender, and has toured with New Zealand greats Toni Williams MNZM, Jodie Vaughan, and Benny recipients; Sir Howard Morrison, Gray Bartlett MBE, Susanne Prentice OBE and Kevin Greaves.

Eddie Edward McRoy was born blind in Rotorua on 14 May 1943. His 18-year-old Maori mother Rangitukua McRoy (b. Ratana) contracted German measles and TB during her pregnancy and died just weeks after Eddie was born; a double tragedy. His Scottish-born father Robert McRoy was unable to care for Eddie and his two-year old brother David so both boys were adopted by widow Maria Low who already had 4 children of her own and lived in Rotorua, across the road from *Hinemihī Marae*

where Guide Rangī entertained Gracie Fields in 1945 and introduced her to *Po Atarau* which became a worldwide hit for Grace as *Now is the Hour*. Eddie's uncle Joe Ratana had a hit with *Tania of the Reef*.



From the age of five, Eddie lived at the *New Zealand Foundation for the Blind* in Auckland, going home for school holidays. The Low family loved singing and whenever Uncle Joe Mutu organised talent quests at the *Rotorua Soundshell* they all lined up to compete. Eddie maintains that he is still waiting for his prize money.

When he was 12 he underwent a series of operations which gained him limited sight in his left eye but doctors could not correct his right. Over the years Eddie's eyesight has diminished

but he can still make out shapes, colours and large print with a magnifying lens.

At the *Foundation* he was taught menial assembly work. 'I would take 12 Agee jars, lids and seals and put them in a box on a conveyor belt. I could see myself doing that for the rest of my life!' Although receiving a school report saying that he had no musical ability, Eddie quickly became an accomplished instrumentalist as part of the institute band, playing; guitar, piano, flute, string bass, violin, piano, accordion and most of the brass instruments. When his voice matured it became a rich, lush baritone and at the age of thirteen he formed *The Three Blind Mice*, an instrumental trio.

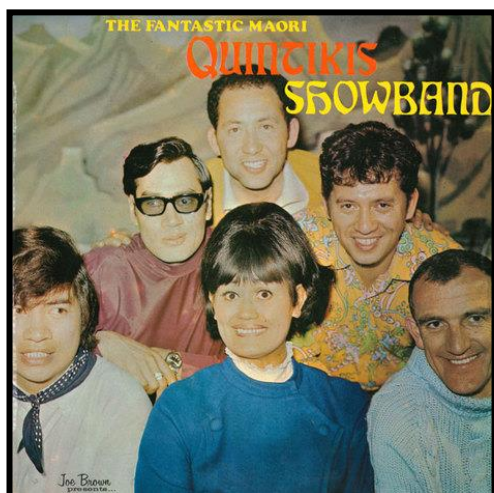


On leaving school Eddie joined *The Chevronaires* working the *Picasso Nightclub* in Auckland's Cook St. The band also comprised his brother David Low on guitar, singer/guitarist John Rowles and drummer Graham 'Trixie' Willoughby. In 1964 Eddie and John signed a six-month contract to appear at the *Riverside Inn* in Melbourne as the *New Zealand Beatles*.

They then moved to Sydney to join Willoughby in *The Dingdongers* for a residency at *The Civic Hotel*. They auditioned at the *Sundowner Hotel* for the

Miller's Brewery circuit, got the gig and renamed themselves *The Sundowners*, not to be confused with Sunny Day's band which had a residency at the *Jive Centre* in 1962 and interestingly included a 15 year old 'Trixie' Willoughby on drums. This group was named after the 1960 Australian movie which was nominated for 5 Academy Awards.

The group recorded a single on *Sunshine Records* although *The End (Of A Rainbow)* was credited to John Rowles under his new stage name *Jay-Ar*. John went solo and signed with Graham Dent, previously Johnny Devlin and Max Merritt's manager, and Dent arranged for appearances on Australian television's 1966 *New Faces*, Johnny O'Keefe's *Six O'clock Rock* and *Bandstand*.



Eddie became a member of the *Truetones* then joined the *Māori Quin Tikis* which at that time included; Sam Mateparae, Keri Summers, Wez Taiaroa, Fred Summers, Rufus Rehu and Gary Wahrlich. In 1966 they appeared in the musical comedy film *Don't Let It Get You* with Howard Morrison and a teenage Kiri Te Kanawa. Between 1965 and 1969 the band toured New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and entertained troops in Thailand and Vietnam.

In 1970 the *Quin Tikis* toured New Zealand on two Joe Brown promotions; *Miss New Zealand* and *Joe Brown's Country and Western Stage Show*. Joe invited Eddie to join his stable of solo artists which included Howard Morrison and John Hore. His first overseas gig was a week at the *Isa Lei Hotel* in Suva, Fiji. Joe toured him throughout Australasia, Fiji, Tahiti, Papua New Guinea, Canada and the USA, where he performed at Nashville's *Grand Ol' Opry* three times.



Eddie recorded on two *Quinn Tiki* albums; *Make Friends with The Quin Tikis* and *The Fantastic Maori Quin Tikis Showband*, and on a *Festival 1967* single of *You're The One*. Between 1970 and 1976 *Joe Brown Records (JBR)* released twelve 45 rpm discs, including the hit songs; *Help Me Make it Through the Night*, *Lonely Women Make Good Lovers* and a novelty duo with his daughter Marie; *Daddy What If*. *JBR* also released 2 Eps and 5 LPs. Eddie paired with John Hore for two albums; a 1967 EP called *Eddie Low and John Hore Live* and a 1968 LP named *We Should Be Together*. Eddie became known as 'The Voice in a Million' after the title of his 1970 LP and he won the 1971 *Studio One* competition with *The Old Man* penned by Alan Galbraith.



In Canada Eddie is known as 'Arugra Hug Ataga' (Indian from down under) through his fund raising for an Inuit children's hospital. While touring there Eddie wrote *Songs of Home* recalling the days when he and his friends gathered in someones home to socialize and sing their favourites. The song lists well known Māori place names and famous Māori songs. *Songs of Home* has since been covered dozens of times by local and international artists. In 1972 *JBR* released *Po Kare Kare Ana*, a duet with Eddie and his Canadian producer Gary Buck. *JBR* released *The Best of Eddie Low* in 1974 and in 1976 two albums reflecting his international status were produced, one of which was *Eddie Low in USA and Canada*.

Christchurch.

In 1975 Rob Muldoon doubled the sales tax on New Zealand recordings to 40% and effectively killing the market for local music. Eddie moved to Australia where his career took off with a busy schedule of live cabaret and club performances. Between 1980 – 84 he appeared on *TVNZ's That's Country*, recorded in the *James Hay Theatre* in

In 1980 Eddie signed with *RCA Records* (which was acquired by *BMG* in 1987 which in turn merged with *Sony* in 2004). *Eddie Low Sings* and *Easy Temptations* were pressed in 1981 and over the next 3 years he released *Blue Smoke*, *Country Greats* and *Heart and Soul*. *Eddie Low* came out in 1992 followed by a 1996 re-release of *Heart and Soul*.

In 1986 *MAL Records* released his composition *I Am Me*, a song sharing his feelings about being considered handicapped. This was Eddie's own label, named after his 1st daughter **Maria Ann Low**. One of the largest independent record labels in Australia, *Rajon Music*, released a three-CD set in 2004; *Land Of My Mother*, *Land Of My Father* and *Turning Back the Clock*. *Rajon* was sold to *Destra* in 2005 which collapsed in 2008.



In 2003 Eddie toured New Zealand with his *Roy Orbison Tribute Show*. Five years later, after the *Highway of Legends* tour with Gray Bartlett, Brendan Dugan and John Grenell, Eddie moved to Christchurch 'because my wife is from Christchurch and you can't get a decent feed of fish and chips in Australia.'

In 2012 Eddie founded another record company *EdRab* and released an album named *This Could Be the Last Time*. The name is a pairing of 'Eddie' and 'Rabbit', a nickname for his wife Kathleen 'Bunny' Low. Sadly Bunny suffered a massive heart attack in February 2019 while on tour with Eddie in Australia, leaving Eddie without his rock of support. 'I began to show the physical symptoms of grief and lost a lot of weight until my youngest daughter Tania, who is a cancer nurse, pushed me to see a doctor who found that I had colonic cancer. After a series of operations I began to feel better. The surgeon reckoned I had a tumour the size of a fist!'

He continues to record and tour; his 2011 career compilation album *Voice in a Million* went platinum in 2012 and that same year *Sony* released his *Icons* album. In 2015 *Frenzy Music* produced a compilation CD of the *Quin Tikis*.

Eddie opened the inaugural *Rotorua Lakeside Festival* in 2014 with Frankie Stevens and John Rowles; together calling themselves; *The Bald, The Blind and The Beautiful*.

Eddie has a great love of sport and enjoys playing Cricket, Vision Impaired Golf and Pool. He enjoys telling the sorry about the time that Stevie Wonder challenged Tiger Woods to a game. When Tiger felt sorry for Stevie and offered to give him a handicap. Stevie refused but said that he would like the game played at night!





Eddie is a member of the *New Zealand Highwaymen*. On Friday 16 June this year, he collapsed backstage 5 minutes before showtime at the *Hokitika Regent Theatre*. While medics attended to him the remaining members of the group — Dennis Marsh, Gray Bartlett and Brendan Dugan — opened the show. Tour manager Aly Cook later said, 'Eddie was begging the ambulance officers to let him walk on stage for the first number before taking him to hospital but that didn't happen. The three band members were totally professional and turned on an amazing performance

while initially not knowing how Eddie was.'

He was transferred to *Christchurch Hospital* the next morning by the *Flying Doctors* service. That night the other three *Highwaymen* played the final of their 20-show national tour in Nelson. Eddie was released from hospital 9 days later to attend his 80th birthday party.

Eddie has three children with his first wife Mira; Maria (born in 1967 and named after the *West Side Story* hit song), Dayne (a special needs son) and Tania who is now a nurse. Mira and Eddie divorced in 1978.

Over the years Eddie has received many awards and accolades including:

- 1980 *New Zealand Entertainer and Songwriter of the Year*
- 1983 *Country Hands of Fame* in Tamworth, Australia
- 1984: *Variety Artists Club Scroll of Honour*
- 1993 *Country Hands of Fame* in Gore, New Zealand
- 2006 *NZ Order of Merit (MNZM)* for services to music
- 2009 *New Zealand Country Legend Award in Hamilton*
- 2009 *Variety Artists Club Benny Award*
- 2010: *Rockonz International Star Award*
- 2011: *Arts Access Aotearoa Attitude Artistic Achievement Award*



Marian Burns, Eddie Low, Dennis Marsh and Kylie Austin



New Zealand has a long history of vision impaired musicians (we don't call them 'blind' anymore). The *Parnell Institute for the Blind* had a strong music department, taught the pupils to read braille sheet music and encouraged them to perform. Some names you may recall:

- **Claude Papisch** played piano and saxophone in Johnny Devlin's band *Johnny Devlin & the Devils* before heading to Australia where he worked with Bruno Lawrence and Ricky May at the *Latin Quarter*.
- **Toni Savage BEM QSM** was a member of the *VAC* until her death in 2011. Her forte was accordion.

- **The Radars** was formed by Niuean born drummer Feau Halatau and four fellow students from the *Parnell Institute for the Blind* in 1962. They were the resident band at a dance hall in Otahuhu and held a residency at the *Picasso Club* backing Ricky May and John Rowles. In December 2000 the band appeared on stage at the *Auckland Blind Musicians Festival*.
- **Julian Lee** attended the Parnell Institute from the age of 5, returning 10 years later to his hometown of Dunedin to play organ at the *Empire Cinema*. His career included; Musical Director at *Stebbing's Recording Studios*, writing arrangements for *ABC Radio* and *Channel 7* in Australia, and playing and arranging for many jazz musicians and vocalists in Los Angeles.
- **Kawana Pohe** joined the *Maori Hi-Five Showband* to tour Europe and America. His sax work was electrifying, he played any instrument that was available; saxophone, clarinet, piano, bass and guitar, and he could write sophisticated musical arrangements.
- **Harry McGough**, Neil McGough's partially blind father, was an excellent accordionist.
- **Joe De Nave**, blind father of film maker Catherina De Nave ONZM, played the accordion and was a great dancer

