

**Review on Stratosphere Boogie: The Flaming Guitars of Speedy West and Jimmy Bryant**  
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Speedy West and Jimmy Bryant were two of the most sought-after session musicians during the 1950s and 60s salad days of country music, and *Stratosphere Boogie* rescues from obscurity the recordings the well-groomed and dapper West and Bryant did together between 1952 and 1956. When Bryant (lead guitar) and West (pedal steel) got together in a studio genuinely weird things happened. Freed from the stifling Nashville and Hollywood studio grind, and bursting with ideas that would not fit on any records but their own, the pair produced an unholy country-based hybrid of jazz, swing, and country boogie (e.g. later Delmore Brothers and Merle Travis) that took Bob Wills' western swing innovations into, well, the stratosphere. Nobody before or since has taken the pedal steel to the places Speedy West did. West's style was extremely aggressive and playful, and he favored long, swooping runs and banging the slide against the strings to make goofy, spacey sounds that have more in common with space-age bachelor pad music than traditional country. Bryant's jazz-based picking style was complex, clean and busy, his lines weaving dizzying circles around the rhythm section. If the idea of Merle Travis, Bob Wills, and Esquivel in a studio on Mars sounds intriguing to you, check out *Stratosphere Boogie*.