

Class of 1956 – James Mack “J.M.” VanEaton.



He saved his pocket money to buy his first set of drums as a teenager. He formed his first band, the Jivin' Five, initially playing Dixieland jazz, before forming his first rock-and-roll band, the Echoes. They recorded a demo at Sun Studio with the engineer Jack Clement, who was impressed and recommended VanEaton and the band's bass player, Marvin Pepper, to

the singer Billy Lee Riley, who was forming a touring band, the Little Green Men.

VanEaton remained a member of Billy Lee Riley's band, performing mainly on weekends. He also toured with Conway Twitty. During the week he worked as a session musician at Sun, becoming the studio's in-house drummer from 1956 to 1959 and performing on most of the label's rock-and-roll recordings. He notably contributed to records by Jerry Lee Lewis, such as "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On," on which he regularly played with the guitarist Roland Janes. In addition to recordings by Lewis and Riley, VanEaton performed on recordings by other Sun musicians, including Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Charlie Rich, Charlie Feathers, Bill Justis, and Ray Smith.

