

Remembering Les Paul

Anybody who plays guitar or even Guitar Hero for that matter, knows what the Gibson Les Paul guitar is. The classic single cutaway guitar sported by guitar gods such as Jimmy Page, Zakk Wylde, & Slash has become the most popular guitar ever with the Fender Stratocaster at its side. Despite its popularity most people don't even know that Les Paul is an actual person, and those that do probably couldn't name a single fact about him including myself until now. I dub him the man behind the curtain. Les Paul is someone who has contributed so much to the music world, but yet his recognition for it has seemed to fade over the years. On August 13 of this year Les Paul departed from this world and into the next. This short article is dedicated to the remembrance of Mr. Paul and the effect of his existence.

Les Paul was born Lester William Polsfuss on June 9, 1915 in Waukesha, WI. By age thirteen, Paul was performing semi-professionally as a country-music singer, guitarist and harmonica player. To solve the problem of having nothing to hold the harmonica while his hands were busy on the guitar he invented the neck-worn harmonica holder. Wearing the device allowed him to play the harmonica hands-free while accompanying himself on the guitar. The harmonica holder is still manufactured using his basic design. Bet you didn't know that one! In the 1930's, Paul worked in Chicago, in radio, where he performed jazz. Jazz is what Les Paul is known for. It might seem strange that the Les Paul has become known as a rock guitar when its creator was a jazz player, but an important thing to remember is that jazz was the big thing in the 30's and 40's. This brings us to Paul's greatest and most influential invention ever... an electric guitar he called "The Log". Les built this electric guitar in 1939. The Log was one of the first solid-body electric guitars. It was simply a piece of 4x4 lumber with a bridge, guitar neck, and pickup attached it. To make it a bit more presentable he sawed an Epiphone hollow-body guitar in half lengthwise and placed the log in between the two pieces. Paul would soon after work with Gibson to create the "Les Paul Standard", marketed in 1951. This guitar is essentially the same "Les Paul Standard" you'll find today in most any guitar store. This is not the end of Paul's innovative inventions. Ever heard of multi-track recording? Well you have Les Paul to thank for that as well, and he did it all on acetate discs. When Les made the change from acetate discs to magnetic tape it enabled him to take his recording rig on tour with him. He later worked with Ross Snyder in the design of the first eight-track recording deck built by Ampex. Yes. Les Paul has had a great effect on the world of music and sound recording--more than most of us using his inventions even know, but he has also had many other accomplishments.

Paul never stopped bringing live jazz performances to eager listeners every Monday night at the Iridium Jazz Club in New York City. Did I mention he did this into his 90's? That's over 70 years of performing and guitar playing. Les Paul was Godfather of rocker Steve Miller. Yep, the front man of the Steve Miller Band himself, to whom Paul gave his first guitar lesson. In 2006 he won two Grammy's for his album *Les Paul & Friends: American Made World Played*. On August 13, 2009, Paul died of complications from pneumonia in White Plains New York. It is clear that Mr. Paul lived a full life and left more than a mark in his time. That mark is legendary, and it is etched in the past, present, and future. Les Paul remembered.