

Les Paul Legacy

By Helen Marketti



Rare twin-humbucking pickup equipped 1959 Les Paul Custom "Black Beauty" with Bigsby vibrola. Photo credit: Robb Lawrence

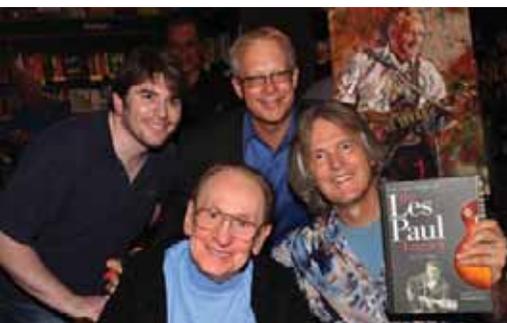
"I view the guitar as singing through my heart using my fingers. A lot of the great guitar players sing through their instruments." Guitarist, author and photographer Robb Lawrence explains his ongoing music journey which first took its foothold in 1963. "The guitar seemed to be cool, quite compact and very expressive. At the time I had my eyes set on a Fender guitar. I was anxious to get home from school and learn to play more tunes."

Spending a day with Robb Lawrence at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland was a crash course in Guitar 101. Robb's passion for music and guitars is infectious as he is able to identify the make, model and year of each guitar on display and also the artist who had played it.

"I was also into photographing guitars as a hobby. To my friends and I they were "used" guitars but in reality they were "vintage" guitars. I had heard about Les Paul. I was teaching guitar lessons and a guy sold me a Les Paul guitar for \$250. It was a really cool guitar. It had an amazing neck on it. I left the Fender guitar behind for awhile. I became more interested in Les Paul and wondered who this person was."

Guitar innovator, inventor and incredible legend Les Paul was born Lester William Polsfuss on June 9, 1915 in Waukesha, Wisconsin. He is known as the Wizard of Waukesha for obvious riffin' reasons. He also had used the nickname Red Hot Red which his mother Evelyn called him because of his red hair and freckles.

He is the magic man that created the solid body electric guitar which combined with the Gibson Guitar Corporation became the sound that many of rock and roll's greatest hits are



(front: l to r) Les Paul & Robb Lawrence (holding book)

made of. Having a career spanning several decades Les Paul still performs a weekly gig every Monday night at the Iridium Club in New York City at the age of 93.

Each of his guitar models and variations of them is truly an overwhelming list that has whet the appetite of professional and novice musicians all around the world. The Les Paul SG, Goldtop, Custom, Junior, Special, Standard, Deluxe, Studio and the list continues to guitar infinity. Les Paul's ingenuity and sharp ear contributed to countless guitar lines for rock and roll squires.

The Early Years of the Les Paul Legacy (1915-1963) (Hal Leonard Publishing) follows the life of Les Paul from his early childhood beginnings, musical interests, his marriage to musical partner Mary Ford and his experimentation for creating a new way for guitars to look and sound.

"I met Les Paul through contacts and friends," remembers Robb. "This is a human interest story. He was the one who was there when the electric guitar was getting started. I looked to him as a mentor and a friend. I lived with Les for a few months in 1975. It was so much fun getting to know him and learning from him. The decision to write the book was actually made several years ago but it takes time to do research and interview people. I wanted to make sure things were right."

Robb continues, "I had a steady column for Guitar Player Magazine in the early 70s called "Rarebird." There was so much that I wanted to say about each guitar but there wasn't enough space for it in the magazine. Les suggested to me that I wait and hold on to all of my information. We would sit down together and discuss what might be good to put in the book. I went out on a guitar safari across the country to meet people in the guitar world who would share their stories. I introduced Jeff Beck to Les backstage at a concert. Its a rich experience to be around these people."

The names of rockers of the past and present who have played Les Paul guitars is a "Rock"-lopedia of who respected and admired his work. Here are "a few" Les Paul players of today: Duane Allman, Sheryl Crow, Bob Dylan, The Edge (U2), Ace Frehley, Lenny Kravitz and Robby Krieger.

A few of the late and great who had played Les Paul guitars: Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, Roy Orbison, Bob Marley, Randy Rhoads, Marc Bolan, John Entwistle and Frank Zappa.



Beautiful natural flame maple Les Paul Custom built in 2003 for Music Machine with special chambered body. Photo credit: Robb Lawrence

Reading Les Paul's heart felt thoughts in the front of the book (the forward) leaves no doubt that the timing of its release and the carefully collected information on its pages were a labor of love and genuine respect for Les Paul and for the guitar.

Beginning the week of November 10, 2008 the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame will honor Les Paul as part of its American Music Masters program with a series of events at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Robb Lawrence is going to give a presentation on Saturday, November 15th at the university. "I will be talking about my book and also giving a slide show presentation."

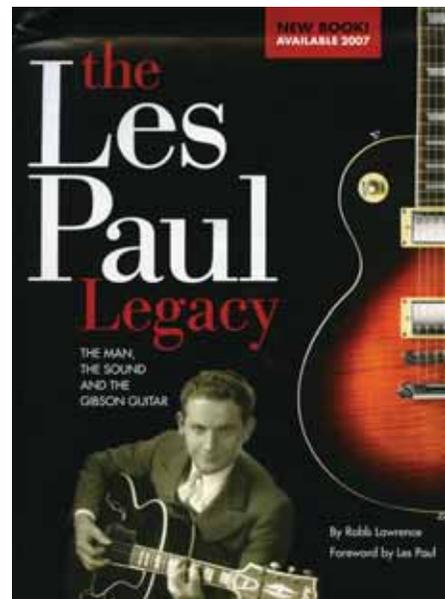
A tribute concert for Les Paul is planned for the evening of Saturday, November 15th at Playhouse Square State Theatre in downtown Cleveland. Scheduled to appear are Billy

Gibbons (ZZ Top), original members of The Ventures, Slash (Guns N' Roses, Velvet Revolution) and Richie Sambora (Bon Jovi) plus more. It is said that Les Paul hopes to make the trip and jam with the performers onstage.

In addition to his studio

guitarist work with various artists Robb has many other projects in the works as well. Volume II of the Les Paul Legacy is due for release in 2009. He is also putting together books on Gibson Guitars, Fender Guitar Legends and Rickenbacker Guitars.

When asked if there is a common thread among guitar players Robb had this to say, "Its a combined love of music and spirit for the instrument no matter what genre. Its



good to find a mentor along the way to help you dance between the notes because every note is like a person. Play with soulful eloquence."

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