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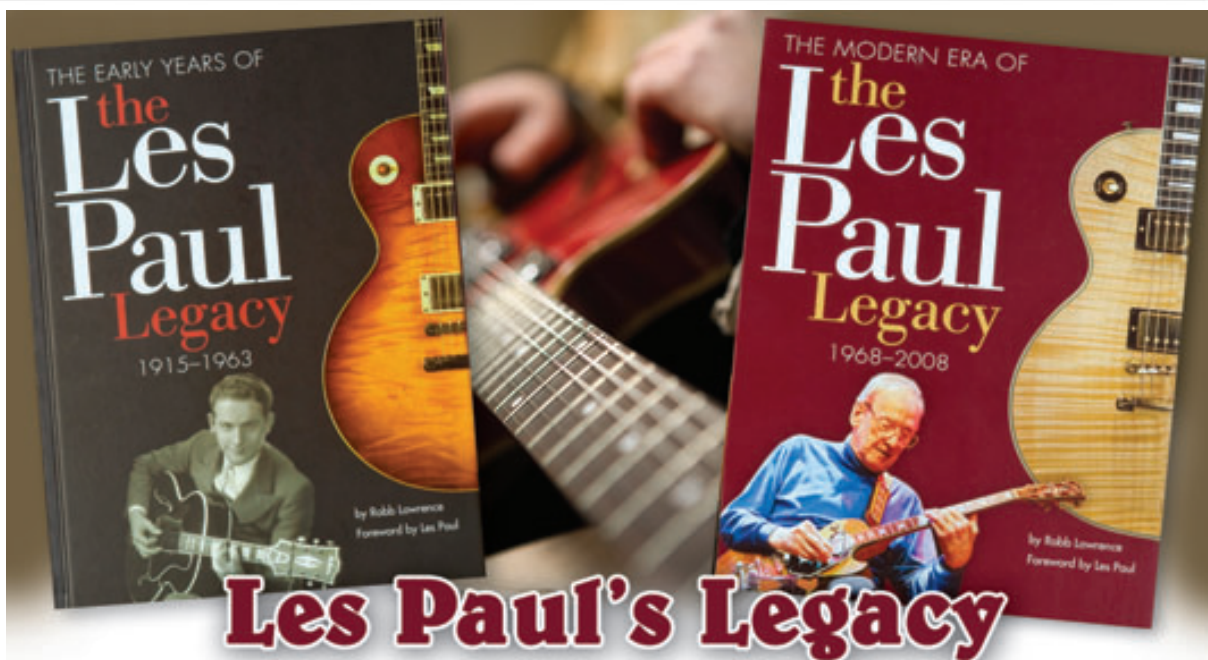
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Les Paul's Legacy

By Helen Marketti

On Thursday, August 13, 2009 Les Paul passed away of complications from pneumonia at a hospital in White Plains, NY. He was 94 years old. Les Paul was a mastermind genius whose contributions to the music industry have influenced the rock

and roll music we hear today. We often think of Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page and countless others when we think of the roots of rock and roll. Les Paul needs to be on our minds too when we hear a favorite song, memorable guitar riff or while we are walking out of a concert hall.

Les Paul was born Lester William Polsfuss on June 9, 1915 in Waukesha, Wisconsin. He was known as the "Wizard of Waukesha" for obvious riffin' reasons. He also had used the nickname Red Hot Red. His mother, Evelyn used to call him that because of his red hair and freckles.

Guitar innovator, the magic man created the solid body electric guitar, invented multitrack recording and tape delay. His guitar creations combined with the Gibson Guitar Corporation became the sound that many of rock's greatest hits are made of. He had a weekly Monday night gig at the Iridium Club in New York City which he had kept doing even as recently as June of 2009.

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.

On November 15, 2008, the Rock & Roll of Fame and Museum honored Les Paul for their annual

American Music Masters Series. I spent the afternoon listening to

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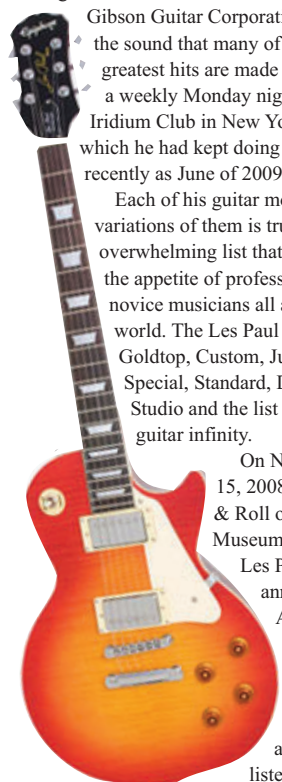
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lectures, interviews, performances and discussions at Case Western Reserve University. I saw original members of The Ventures who talked about their career and played their signature hit *Walk, Don't Run* which had audience members clapping and toe tapping.

After the performance from The Ventures, the audience was treated to a special "Q and A" time with Les Paul himself. He was the last "scheduled event" for the afternoon and indeed the best was saved for last. He did some guitar playing and answered questions with humor and grace. It was difficult for him to stand and walk without assistance but once the guitar was in his hands he was "home again". He had a completely captivated audience. I was witnessing a piece of rock and roll history live and in person. When the event was over, he received a standing ovation. I kept my eyes fixated on him because I had a feeling that I may never get another opportunity to see him again.

That same evening there was an all-star lineup at Playhouse Square State theatre to participate in a tribute concert for Les Paul. The outstanding lineup included Billy Gibbons (ZZ Top), original members of The Ventures, Slash (Guns N' Roses), Riche Sambora (Bon Jovi), Duane Eddy, James Burton (Ricky Nelson and Elvis Presley bands), Jennifer Batten, Eric Carmen, Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, Lonnie Mack plus many more. The last part of the concert was entertainment by Les Paul and his band known as The Les Paul Trio. Les was spot on with his playing, his wit sharp. He accepted the accolades with appreciation and a dose of sarcasm. He said he felt like a condemned building with a new flagpole and the audience erupted with laughter and applause. He had a big grin on his face knowing that he had entertained us. The grand finale was all of the musicians on stage jamming together with Les. It was an amazing evening and it brought me to tears a little to see how much love and admiration these artists had for Les Paul.



- Photo Courtesy of Patrick Joreski

One of the guests for the Les Paul symposium was Robb Lawrence. His book, *The Les Paul Legacy 1915-1963* (Hal Leonard Publishing) was the topic of discussion for his lecture. The book covers 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. Robb is currently finishing

Volume II of his Les Paul series, *The Modern Era of The Les Paul Legacy* that is due for release in November of this year.

Having spent time with Robb for an afternoon at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame was a crash course in Guitar 101. He had never been there before and was very enthusiastic about checking it out. I am a member of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame also has a permanent collection of Les Paul artifacts and memorabilia, which always draws a crowd. Robb was granted permission from the Rock Hall staff to photograph the Les Paul exhibit to add to his book. He knows the history and had a story for nearly every Les Paul item on display. I was amazed at his encyclopedia knowledge of guitars.

Guitarist, author and photographer Robb Lawrence explains his ongoing journey, which first took its foothold in 1963. He also remembers his friend and mentor Les Paul.

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

I met Les through Bud Eastman who was the founder of *Guitar Player Magazine*,"



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recalls Robb. "This is a human interest story. Les was the one who was there when the electric guitar was getting started. I looked to him as a mentor and 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."

He continues, "It's virtually immeasurable to explain the impact Les has made. He made quite a stir of excitement. He had fortitude to carry him through. He always had lots of energy, enjoyed interacting with people and had such a great following. He was like a second father to me. I am honored to have been part of his entourage."

The finishing touches on *The Modern Era of The Les Paul Legacy* will include a memorial tribute for Les Paul. It is due for release in November of this year. Please check your local booksellers for copies of Robb's books about Les Paul.

(Volume I, *The Les Paul Legacy* and Volume II, *The Modern Era of The Les Paul Legacy*)

The books are also available at Barnes & Noble,

Borders, Amazon.com and Hal Leonard Publishing web site: www.halleonard.com

Robb is also writing books on Gibson Guitars, Fender Guitar Legends and Rickenbacker Guitars.

Additional web sites of interest:

www.lespaulonline.com

www.rockhall.com



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A Glimpse Into the Beginnings of Multitracking

Les Paul had been experimenting with overdubbing in the late 1940s and in 1947, Capitol Records released a record featuring Paul playing eight different parts on electric guitar. These recordings were made with shellac discs; Paul would record a track onto a disc, and then record himself playing another part with the first. Then in 1948, Les's friend Bing Crosby gave him one of the first production units of the new Ampex Model 200 reel-to-reel tape recorder from which Bing invested \$50,000 in. Within hours, Paul had the idea of modifying the machine by the addition of extra recording and playback heads which could allow him to simultaneously record a new track while monitoring the playback of previously recorded tracks. Paul's multitrack experiments progressed rapidly and in 1953 he commissioned Ampex to build the world's first eight-track reel to reel tape recorder, at his own expense. This was beginning of what was to change the recording world forever.

Who Plays the Les Paul Guitar

Les Paul's guitars are by far the most popular guitars. This list of guitar greats who use(d) his creation gives lends evidence to the statement: Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, The Edge, Chuck Berry, the Everly Brothers, BB King, Pete Townsend, Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana, Duane Allman, Keith Richards, Keith Urban, Jack White, Slash, Bruce Springsteen, Lenny Kravitz, Paul McCartney, Eddie Van Halen, Neil Young, Joan Jett, Billie Joe Armstrong (Green Day) and Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top.

Below are excerpts from various quotes found throughout the recent media coverage reflecting upon Les Paul's life

Paul McCartney: "There would have been no Beatles had it not been for Les Paul"

Slash, Guns 'n' Roses: "Les Paul was a shining example of how full one's life can be. He accomplished so much, & was so vibrant & full of positive energy. I'm honored & humbled to have known & played with him over the years, he was an exceptionally brilliant man, musician, inventor, mentor & friend."

Warren Haynes, Government Mule:

"This is a huge loss, not just for guitar players, but for the recording industry. He was kind of like the Hendrix of his day."

Richie Sambora, Bon Jovi: "Les came over on my birthday and we sat on the dock behind my house for hours and talked. At the end, he gave me a guitar and said 'Son, here's the sword, now go out and cut the shit.'"

Brad Paisley: "What a legacy, what a life. Somewhere there's music...how high the moon..." Because of Les, everywhere there's music."

Joe Satriani: "Les Paul set a standard for musicianship and innovation that remains unsurpassed."

Billy Gibbons, ZZ Top: "Les Paul brought six strings to electricity and electricity to six strings. Try to imagine what we'd be doing if he hadn't come along and changed the world."

Joan Jett: "He was a genius inventor, musical innovator and a wonderful person. Without the advances he pioneered, the recording sciences and the electric guitar would have been left years behind. I will miss him so much."

Ace Frehley, KISS: "He forever changed the way we listen to music."



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