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Gibson Les Paul Models

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The 1940s and 1950s were the golden age of electric guitar design. During this era, the legendary Gibson Les Paul line of electric guitars made its debut. Like so many other innovative products throughout history, the development of the Les Paul line was prompted due to fierce competition â€“ in this case, between the Gibson Guitar Corporation and the Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. The first Gibson Les Pauls hit the market in 1952; new models are being released to this very day. The innovative and highly customizable nature of the Les Paul has made it a crucial component in the evolution of many musical genres; learn more about this fascinating line of guitars below.

How the Gibson Les Paul Came to Be

In the early 1950s, the Gibson Guitar Corporation was thrown for a loop when Fender released the exceedingly popular Telecaster electric guitar. Gibson had long held a reputation for producing high-end instruments â€“ especially electric guitars. Most historians agree that Gibson produced the first commercially successful electric guitar, the ES-150, which debuted in 1936. After enjoying such a successful reputation for so long, there's no question that the introduction of the trend-setting Telecaster put pressure on Gibson to come up with something new.

Around this same time, Ted McCarty became president of Gibson. Knowing that his company needed something spectacular to go up against Fender, McCarty enlisted the help of inventor, jazz guitarist and innovative musician Les Paul. Paul had been tinkering with guitar design for many years already â€“ in fact, one of his designs was rejected by Gibson between 1945 and 1946. McCarty felt that having such a legendary name on Gibson's newest line of guitars would help enhance its image. The collaboration between Les Paul, McCarty and Gibson resulted in the Gibson Les Paul line of guitars.

Characteristics of Gibson Les Paul Guitars

Right from the start, Gibson wanted its newest line of guitars to be well made, expensive and of the utmost quality. With Les Paul's name tacked on, the company was sure that it would have a winner on its hands. From the get-go, the Gibson Les Paul boasted a solid body design, a glued-in or set-in neck and a curved body shape that would become signature across the line. Unlike other electric guitars â€“ most notably Fender models â€“ the Les Paul's strings were mounted on top of the guitar body, instead of through it.

Customization and innovation were trademarks of the Gibson Les Paul line from the beginning. Each model came with many different decorative levels and finishes. A wide range of color options was always available; Les Paul himself favored a gold finish, but colors like Classic White, Ebony, Alpine White, Fire Burst and Wine Red were generally offered. A vast array of hardware options was always par for the course with Les Paul models, too. Most significantly, though, a dizzying selection of electric pick-up options was always available. This fact alone is a huge part of the reason for the Gibson Les Paul's enduring popularity â€“ new pick-up options were always being developed.

Many different Gibson Les Paul models have been released through the years; a brief overview of each one is outlined below.

Gibson Les Paul Goldtop

As the first Gibson Les Paul model to be released, the Goldtop is an important part of the history of

this electric guitar. The Les Paul Goldtop was produced between 1952 and 1958. It featured a one-piece tailpiece and bridge that featured a trapeze style and a maple top. Two P-90 single-coil pickups were also signature characteristics of the Goldtop. Furthermore, its strings were fitted under a steel stop-bar. When it was initially produced, the Les Paul Goldtop didn't use serial numbers; they were introduced by the end of 1952, though.

Gibson Les Paul Custom

The second issue of the Gibson Les Paul lineup, the Les Paul Custom, was produced from 1954 to 1960. Mahogany replaced maple with this model, which was all black â€“ in fact, it was popularly referred to as the "Black Beauty." A pickup with an alnico-5 magnet in the neck position was included, and the bridge featured the Tune-o-Matic design. Starting in 1957, humbucker pickups were included with the Les Paul Custom. Three pickups, with a three-way switch that limited the number of possible combinations, were also featured.

Gibson Les Paul Special

From 1955 to 1960, the Les Paul Special was produced. It boasted a TV Yellow finish, whose name came from the Les Paul TV guitars from the same era. Two soapbar P-90 single-coil pickups were included with the Les Paul Special. A flaw in its original design, though, caused its neck to break off easily. Starting in 1959, Gibson changed the Special to include a double-cutaway body style. This change weakened the neck-to-body joint. To address the problem, Gibson moved the neck pickup further down the Special's body, which produced a stronger joint.

Gibson Les Paul Standard

The most significant thing about the Les Paul Standard, which was originally produced between 1958 and 1960, was that it used the Sunburst top finish instead of the gold one. Tweaks in its design prompted a model name change, to SG, in 1960. Like the Goldtop, the Les Paul Standard boasted PAF humbucker pickups. Some models included a Kahler Tremolo system, a Tune-o-Matic bridge or a Bigsby Vibrato tailpiece. The model was brought back in 1968 and is still produced to this day; BurstBucker and BurstBucker Pro pickups are included in modern-day Standard models.

Gibson Les Paul SG

In 1961, the introduction of the wildly popular â€“ significantly lighter â€“ Fender Stratocaster once again prompted Gibson to modify the design of its Les Paul line. The resulting changes produced a thinner, lighter solid body guitar that was dubbed the Les Paul SG, for solid guitar. A vibrato system and two cut-aways were included in the design. Unhappy with the redesign, Les Paul asked that his name be removed. That didn't happen until 1963, after the surplus of logos that Gibson owned was used up.

Gibson Les Paul Deluxe

The Les Paul Deluxe didn't prove to be a popular model when it debuted in 1968. Mini-humbuckers, or New York humbuckers, were fitted into the guitar's pre-carved P-90 pickup cavity with adapter rings. The Les Paul deluxe initially boasted a one-piece body, three-piece neck with a pancake design â€“ a thin layer of maple over two layers of mahogany. 1969 versions of the Deluxe also had Gibson logos with dots missing from the letter "i." The "Made in the USA" stamp debuted in 1970; in 1975, the neck was changed to maple. The year after that, the body design was changed to solid mahogany. Flagging popularity prompted the discontinuation of the Deluxe in 1985, but it was brought back in 2005.

Gibson Les Paul Studio

Beginning in 1983, Gibson produced the Les Paul Studio guitar. As its name implies, this guitar was geared toward studio musicians. Therefore, its features revolved around top-quality sound

production; many unnecessary cosmetic touches were left out of the design of the Les Paul Studio as a result. The carved maple top that was ubiquitous with other Les Pauls was included, but no binding was featured on the body or neck. The Studio is still in production today.

Gibson Epiphone Les Pauls

In an effort to appeal to cost-conscious consumers, Gibson started its subsidiary, Epiphone, to produce less expensive copies of Les Paul guitars in 1988. Epiphone Les Pauls are made outside of the United States and use more commonly available woods than the originals. Approximately twenty different Epiphone Les Paul models are available, and they have helped open up a whole new customer base to Gibson. With models that cost between $150 and $700, Epiphone Les Pauls are significantly less expensive than originals are.

Gibson Robot Guitar

Since computer technology has become much more affordable and accessible, it's not surprising that Gibson decided to incorporate it into one of its Les Paul models. On December 7, 2007, the Gibson Robot Guitar made its debut. The guitar features a built-in computer that can be controlled using a master knob that's positioned next to the volume knobs. When pressed, turned or pulled out, the knob delivers various commands to the internal computer. For instance, the Gibson Robot Guitar can be tuned to standard tuning by pulling out the master control knob and strumming the guitar; alternative tunings can also be automatically made, as well.

Les Paul Guitars into the Future

Considering the fact that Gibson Les Paul models have already been around for decades, there's little doubt that they will continue to have a strong presence in the world of music. Every day, budding guitar players purchase their very first guitars; many times, they're lucky enough to invest in top-quality Les Pauls. Even those who don't have a lot of cash at their disposal can enjoy the innovation that's made the Les Paul name so popular through the Epiphone line of guitars. In that way, professional studio musicians and beginners alike can share the joy of Gibson Les Pauls.

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