Bonnie Raitt station #4

Playing electric guitar is something that Bonnie Raitt is known for. But compared to the acoustic guitar, electric guitars are still relatively new instruments. Who invented them and why? To find out the answer read and listen to the article for this station (courtesy of the Rock ‘n Roll Hall of Fame website).

The name Les Paul is synonymous with the electric guitar. As a player, inventor and recording artist, Paul has been an innovator his entire life. Born Lester William Polfuss in 1915 in Waukesha, Wisconsin, Paul built his first crystal radio at age nine - which was about the time he first picked up a guitar. By age 13 he was performing semi-professionally as a country-music guitarist and working diligently on sound-related inventions. In 1941, Paul built his first solid-body electric guitar, and he continued to make refinements to his prototype throughout the decade. It’s safe to say that rock and roll as we know it would not exist without his invention.

The guitar that bears his name – the Gibson Les Paul – is his crowning achievement. It grew out of his desire, as a musician and inventor, to create a stringed instrument that could make electronic sound without distorting. What he came up with, after almost a decade of work, was a solid bodied instrument – that is, one that didn’t have the deep, resonant chamber of an acoustic guitar.

As he told writer Jim O’Donnell, “What I wanted to do is not have two things vibrating. I wanted the string to vibrate and nothing else. I wanted the guitar to sustain longer than an acoustical box and have different sounds than an acoustical box.” The fact that the guitar’s body was solid allowed for the sound of a plucked string to sustain, as its vibrating energy was not dissipated in a reverberant acoustic chamber.

He experimented with different designs until he had his non-vibrating guitar body, which he called “The Log.” Gibson Guitars initially turned him down, calling his invention “a broomstick with pickups” and pointing out that this meant guitarists would now have to carry around two instruments – one electric and one acoustic – which they viewed as prohibitively inconvenient. As a result, Paul was beaten to the marketplace by Leo Fender, whose Fender Broadcaster – the first mass-produced solidbody electric guitar – was introduced in 1948.

Paul’s career as a musician nearly came to an end in 1948, when he suffered near-fatal car accident in Oklahoma, skidding off a bridge into a river during a snowstorm. The guitarist shattered his right arm and elbow, and he also broke his back, ribs, nose and collarbone. He managed to salvage his career as a musician by instructing surgeons to set his arm at an angle that would allow him to cradle and pick the guitar. It took him a year and a half to recover.

1952 finally saw the release of the the gold-top solid body electric guitar that bears Les Paul’s name. Gibson’s Les Paul Standard went on to become one of the most popular of all models of electric guitar. Built and marketed by Gibson, with continuous advances and refinements from Paul, the Les Paul is a staple instrument among many of rock’s greatest guitarists. He introduced the latest model in 2008.

- See more at: http://rockhall.com/inductees/les-paul/bio/#sthash.RDhOkC6T.dpuf