**Academic Essay Draft**

In this essay I will be talking about the journey and history of the first solid body electric guitar created and invented by Les Paul. In Paragraph one, I will talk a little about Les Paul’s childhood and the start of his musical career and get into the main section of the paragraph, the start of his invention. In paragraph two, I will talk about how he made the railroad tie and what it did and how it worked. In paragraph three, I will talk about how the invention of “The Log” started and how he made it and the reception it got at first by different people as well as the more detailed information about the guitar. Finally in paragraph four, I will talk about what came after the first sale in 1952 and what the Les Paul evolved into every decade and what other Gibson guitars it influenced. The reason I am talking about this topic is because it is one of the most important inventions in music history and also the inventor (Les Paul) also invented other important things in music like multi-track recording and even the harmonica neck holder. I’m also talking about it because I am very interested in it and how it has influenced technically every other electric guitar that has been created.

Lester William Polsfuss (famously known as Les Paul) was born on the 9th of June 1915 and was born in Waukesha, Wisconsin and was raised by a single mother as his parents divorced when he was just a child. At the age of eight Les began learning and playing the harmonica. He then learned and played the piano but later switched to the guitar. After starting the beginning of his music career, he started the beginning of his inventions by creating a neck-worn harmonica holder. The reasoning by inventing this was so he could play the harmonica hands free while playing guitar. The harmonica holder today still uses his basic design he created when he was a kid. By age thirteen, Les was performing semi-professionally as a country singer, guitarist and harmonica player and was playing in his hometown at drive-ins and roadhouses. While playing at these local venues he wanted to make his acoustic guitar be heard by more people so he put his inventing cap on and got to work. He started off by attaching and wiring his father’s phonograph needle of his record player and connected it to his father’s radio speaker but the problem with that was he got way too much feedback. When his first attempt failed, he took a great risk by filling the body of his acoustic guitar with plaster of paris to try and get rid of any feedback that was there but that didn’t work either. This resulted in him buying a new acoustic guitar because he totally wrecked it. (Scallon, 2020) (Wikipedia, 2019)

When his experiment of turning an acoustic guitar into a solid body electric guitar didn’t work, he wanted the densest material he could find so that way he would get only the strings to vibrate while amplifying it and as well as getting no feedback at all. In the 1920s railroad workers would physically cut out any flawed rail track and just leave it on the side which is what Les found and used. When he took the 2ft piece of rail home, he attached and wired the microphone from his mother’s telephone as well as using different parts of the rail to make it work and sound good. He then strung it up with one string and tested his third attempt of amplifying his guitar so it could be heard by more people at local venues but also get rid of the nasty feedback. He completed this in 1929 and Les Paul himself said “It sounded great” but creating this also helped him discover and experiment with sustain which didn’t really associate with acoustic guitars at the time. (Scallon, 2020) (Wikipedia, 2019)

After he made The Railroad Tie in 1929, he continued on with his hollowbody guitars for around 10 years until 1940 when he revived his solidbody guitar idea. He started to build the guitar on a 4x4 slab of pine wood and attached an already made Epiphone neck. He then put on a homemade tremolo system as a bridge and even homemade pickups. Due to his good relationship with Gibson and Epiphone, he was allowed to use the Epiphone factory during after hours by himself to create and build this guitar. When he did all the basics and completed the foundation of The Log, he played his first show with the soildbody electric guitar at the sheik in New York but for some reason nobody was reacting to it because it didn’t look like a guitar even though it worked perfectly and sounded great. So, Les Paul went back to the Epiphone factory and cut an Epiphone archtop body in half and added each half of the body (known as the wings) to each side of The Log to make it look more like a guitar. On a different night, Les went back to the exact same club as before but with the wings added on and when he played his second show with his soildbody electric guitar, everybody reacted and everybody loved it and thought it was really cool. In 1941, Paul approached Gibson with his invention with the intention of a collaboration and told them that the soildbody electric guitar is the wave of the future but the company balked, likening it to a “broomstick with pickups” and turned the offer down. By the end of 1941, he moved to California and started to hang out with other musicians and guitar company owners like Leo Fender and Paul Bigsby. One day in Les Paul’s back garden, he told and showed them all The Log. Leo and Paul were impressed and fascinated by The Log which is when Leo proposed an offer to make a soildbody electric guitar together called the Fender Paul but due to the great relationship Les had with Gibson, he turned it down because he knew that Gibson would eventually come around to the idea. For about 9 years, Les would continue on with The Log he made and his hollowbody guitars as well as recording music and building his own studio. In 1950 Leo Fender would use Les Paul’s invention to create a soildbody electric guitar known as the broadcaster but when Gibson and Les Paul caught wind about it, Les told Gibson that they had to make a move on this guitar straight away before Fender rules the world of guitars. Gibson finally accepts Les Paul’s offer which is when Gibson’s Ted McCarty quickly began working on a single cut, soildbody electric with Paul as a special consultant. Even though Gibson started to properly work on this guitar, they were still unsure about his guitar so they didn’t want their name on it so Les suggested to the that they should put his name on it. They agreed and the finished product (The 1952 Les Paul) would feature a mahogany body with a one-inch-thick maple cap, a mahogany neck fitted with a rosewood fretboard, two p-90 single coil pickups and a trapeze-style bridge with strings fitted over a steel stop bar went on sale in 1952. (Scallon, 2020) (Wikipedia, 2019) (Kies, 2021) (Calvosa)

After the first sale in 1952, Les would still suggest ideas and suggestions to Gibson for the Gibson Les Paul. After the Les Paul cemented its place in the guitar industry at the time. Gibson would use the original to influence and create different models and versions of the Gibson Les Paul. A second Les Paul model was introduced in 1953 known as the Les Paul Custom. In 1958, the Les Paul model saw its first major design change. A new model called the Standard. Paul continued to suggest technical improvements, although they were not always successful commercially. The original Les Paul shape was retired in 1961 and radically redesigned as the Gibson SG (which for the first several years was known as the Les Paul SG, before Les Paul’s endorsement deal ran out). In the mid to late 1960s, the unique tonal quality of the humbucker-equipped “Burst” models became a favourite among rock guitarists and this renewed interests caused Gibson to bring back the Standard and Custom models in 1968. From 1952 to 2022, The Log would influence and start the wave of many Les Paul guitars such as: The Goldtop; The Custom; The Standard; The Junior; The Special; The SG; The Deluxe; The Professional; The Recording; The Paul, The Studio; The Memphis ES; The HP; The Dark fire and even the affordable Epiphone versions of some of these models. Famous guitarists who have signature models of the Les Paul include: Billy Gibbons; Paul Kossoff; Slash; Jimmy Page; Eric Clapton; Zakk Wylde; Mick Ronson and Ace Frehley.

After completing this essay, I successfully talked about the journey and history of the first solid body electric guitar created and invented by Les Paul. In Paragraph one, I talked a little about Les Paul’s childhood and the start of his musical career and got into the main section of the paragraph, the start of his invention. In paragraph two, I talked about how he made the railroad tie and what it did and how it worked. In paragraph three, I talked about how the invention of “The Log” started and how he made it and the reception it got at first by different people as well as the more detailed information about the guitar. Finally in paragraph four, I talked about what came after the first sale in 1952 and what the Les Paul evolved into every decade and what other Gibson guitars it influenced. The reason I talked about this topic is because it is one of the most important inventions in music history and also the inventor (Les Paul) also invented other important things in music like multi-track recording and even the harmonica neck holder. I’m also talked about it because I am very interested in it and how it has influenced technically every other electric guitar that has been created. (Wikipedia, 2023) (Wikipedia, 2019)

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