



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORP

PLAYING WITH FIRE

THE ELECTRIC GUITAR WAS THE MOST ICONIC MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, DEFINING THE POST-WAR GENERATION'S THIRST FOR FREEDOM AND ESCAPE. BUT HOW DID THE GUITAR COME ABOUT, AND WHO DO WE HAVE TO THANK FOR THE WAILING OF ANGRY AXES? **CHRIS WRIGHT** KICKS OUT THE JAMS

Stop what you're doing and put on 'Voodoo Child' by Jimi Hendrix. Just listen to the noise that man made with a guitar. It's not just a tune. It's a howl, it's a sob, it's a seduction. It talks. It wokkas. It twacks. It threatens and assaults you just as it entrances you. This is what a guitar can do. And when Hendrix finally sings: "I'm standing next to a mountain, chop it down with the edge of my hand", it's that extraordinary sound that makes you believe he probably could. The mountain would have stood no chance.

More than 40 years after Hendrix (*pictured*) worked his magic, *Discovery Channel Magazine* is inside the Fender guitar factory in Corona, Los Angeles, in the US state of California, watching a woman called Abbie hand-winding the wire around a pickup for a Stratocaster, or Strat. She has been doing this since 1954, probably including some of Hendrix's own guitars. Abbie signs and dates every pickup, the devices which convert the vibration of the strings into an electrical signal that goes to the amplifier. Almost 60 years of hand-winding pickups in this dim little room in a windowless factory — she is the perfect embodiment of the devotion and craftsmanship that binds both the people who play guitars, and those who make them.

So what is so special about the guitar? There are hundreds of instruments in the world, but none have quite the same resonance as the revered six-string. Guitars represent not just art and talent, but also rebellion. When Bryan Adams, back when he was a poster boy for youthful rebellion (yes, really), opened 'Summer of '69' with the lines: "I got my first real six-string, bought it at the five and dime, played it 'til my fingers bled, it was the summer of '69", you couldn't imagine it working with any other instrument. Got my first real violin? Cello? Bassoon? Forget it.

Guitars have communicated that same romantic sense of being alternative and daring to every generation since they were launched. You might pick up the guitar to rebel against your father, but guess what, in another few decades your son will do exactly the same thing to rebel against you. It is timelessly antagonistic — as almost nothing else in life is.

"Few consumer products that were designed and marketed in the late 1940s are still on sale today in their original form," notes Michael Heatley, author of *Stars and Guitars*. "The one exception to this rule is the electric guitar. Whether a bass, six-string or 12-string guitar, the results of Leo Fender and Les Paul's pioneering efforts can still be bought in any guitar shop in the world."

David Brown has worked at the Fender factory in Corona since 2000, and today leads tours around the facility with an enormous sense of pride and enthusiasm. What does he think is so special about the guitar? "It's the connection the musician has with it," he says. "It's a very intimate relationship. It's fragile, it's dynamic, it changes over time." Like everyone, his relationship with the guitar started with an attraction to a particular musician or band — in his case AC/DC. "I was attracted

"I WAS ATTRACTED TO IT LIKE A MOTH TO A FLAME. I'VE BEEN BUILDING GUITARS FOR 33 YEARS NOW, AND I STILL LOVE IT"

to it like a moth to a flame. It is something that is nurtured over the years and it evolves. I've been building guitars for 33 years now, and I still love it."

BIRTH OF AN ICON

Acoustic guitars and their ancestors can trace their roots back centuries, to lutes, lyres and vihuelas. But the electric guitar is a far more recent invention. In the early 20th century, musicians began to try to find ways to use electronics to amplify the vibrations of string instruments — you can find patents linking telephone transmitters to banjos and violins dating back to about 1910 — but it is commonly held that the electric guitar was invented in the 1930s.

The man most frequently credited with creating the first electrically amplified guitar is George Beauchamp, who was the general manager at the National Guitar Corporation, in the United States. He designed his first electric guitar in 1931, with commercial production starting the following year.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

By 1934, the company had been renamed, to a brand name that will be a lot more familiar to musical aficionados: Rickenbacker. The Beatles would later become big users of Rickenbacker's products.

Alongside Adolph Rickenbacker, a machinist who teamed up with Beauchamp to help mass produce guitars, some of the most revered names in modern music were among the pioneers.

Les Paul, whose name today adorns one of the most famous guitar models in the world from Gibson, was an innovator who tried attaching guitars to microphones in the earliest days of the instrument's evolution. Another example is Dobro, which is associated with a type of guitar called the resonator. In fact, Dobro is a brand, short for "Dopyera brothers", who were also building some of the earliest electric guitars in the 1930s. Gibson put out its first electric guitar, the ES-150 (with ES standing for Electric Spanish and the 150 for its cost of US\$150) in 1936. But Orville Gibson, for whom the company is named, had started out making mandolins in Michigan. As a sad note, he did not live to see the first electric guitar to carry his name.

Perhaps the biggest guitar name of them all, Fender, was not far behind. Clarence Leonidas Fender, Leo to his friends, founded the Fender Electric Instrument Manufacturing Company in 1946. In a fabulous twist, Leo Fender could not play a single chord on a guitar.

In those days, innovation of guitars and amplifiers went hand in hand. Indeed, Fender was initially better known for amps, which is perhaps natural, considering neither could thrive without the other. Purists will tell you there is an equal degree of artistry in an old valve amp and an old guitar. Affordable amplifiers made the wider use of electric guitars possible.

At first, they tended to be used in big bands, as guitars were otherwise impossible to hear alongside a raucous brass section. History records the earliest documented performance as being in

1932 by Gage Brewer, a Kansas musician, with one of Beauchamp's guitars. The first electric guitar recordings came from Hawaiian-style jazz and

"SEVENTY PAIRS OF HANDS ARE INVOLVED IN MAKING THIS GUITAR, OR ANY GUITAR HERE. IT TAKES THREE WEEKS, FROM THE PARTS ARRIVING IN OUR DOCK, TO IT BEING BOXED UP"

swing players like Bob Dunn, Eddie Durham, Alvino Rey (who later developed the pedal steel guitar), Charlie Christian and George Barnes.

BREAKING IT DOWN

Today's electric guitars usually have a solid body, rather than a hollow one that happens to be amplified. As such, it's often said that the first solid-body electric guitar was produced in 1940, by a physics professor called Sidney Wilson. There is, after all, no need for anything hollow on an electric instrument, and Wilson argued that a hollow body actually contributed unwanted feedback. This is why solid bodies have become the practical norm. Les Paul was another early designer of a solid-body guitar, called The Log since it was a four-by-four wooden post with a neck on it, also created it around 1940. This is not the legendary Gibson Les Paul that carries his name.

By this point, manufacturing was becoming more sophisticated. Pickups, for example, were evolving to have separate pieces (pole pieces) for each string, to improve performance. But the truth is, all the building blocks of the



FOR THE COMMON MAN

Invented by Leo Fender, the Telecaster's forerunner, the Broadcaster, was launched around 1950. The name was later changed to avoid being confused with a popular drum kit of the time. A much-loved, for-the-people instrument, Michael Heatley, author of *Stars and Guitars*, wrote, "When Bruce Springsteen (pictured right) emerged from New Jersey in the early '70s, his blue-collar-hero persona needed a guitar that was as unostentatious as himself, a musical tool as down to earth as a flatbed truck. He found it in the Telecaster."

ABOVE: ABIGAIL "ABBIE" YBARRA, MASTER WINDER AT FENDER'S CUSTOM SHOP, HAS HAND-WOUND HER SIGNATURE PICKUPS FOR CLOSE TO 60 YEARS. CAN YOU BOAST A SIMILAR DEDICATION TO YOUR CRAFT, OR CONTRIBUTION TO AN INDUSTRY?

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORP. (MAIN); GETTY IMAGES (SPRINGSTEEN)



DIFFERENT AXES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

So the time has come to finally get your own guitar? These 12 electronic guitars stick their necks out for your inspection:

FENDER STRATOCASTER

AS THE WILD AND WEIRD HISTORY OF THE ELECTRIC GUITAR (BY GUITAR ONE AND GUITAR WORLD) PUTS IT, "WHERE THE TELECASTER WAS VERY MUCH A COUNTRY-AND-WESTERN GUITAR, THE STRAT WAS A ROCK AND ROLL MACHINE RIGHT FROM THE START." AND CONSIDERING IT HAS BEEN WIELDED BY BIG NAMES IN THE INDUSTRY SUCH AS THE EDGE, BUDDY HOLLY, JOHN LENNON, PETE TOWNSHEND AND RONNIE WOOD, YOU CAN SEE WHERE THEY ARE COMING FROM



IBANEZ

IF YOU WANT TO PLAY LIKE A BLISTERINGLY HARD-CORE ROCKER, YOU COULD DO WORSE THAN GOING APE ON AN IBANEZ. BANDS FROM SLIPKNOT TO MEGADETH SWEAR BY THEM. GUITARIST JAMES "MUNKY" SHAFFER FROM KORN USES AN IBANEZ APEX, WHICH, AS THE IBANEZ SITE PUTS IT, "REPRESENTS THE DARKNESS LURKING AT THE BOTTOM OF THE DEEPEST WELL AND HARNESSSES THE POWER OF THE LOWEST POINT OF THE PENDULUM." WHOA...



FENDER TELECASTER

THAT CLASSIC EXTRAVAGANZA SOLO AT THE END OF LED ZEPPELIN'S 'STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN'? THE ONE GUITAR WORLD AND DOZENS OF OTHER MUSIC MAGS HAVE RATED THE GREATEST SOLO OF ALL TIME? JIMMY PAGE USED A 1958 FENDER TELECASTER TO RECORD THE TRACK. IT WAS GIVEN TO HIM BY ANOTHER AXE VIRTUOSO AND SOMETIME-RIVAL, JEFF BECK. AND DID IT TAKE HOURS OF THOUGHT TO COMPOSE THIS PIECE OF MUSICAL HISTORY? NAH. "I WINGED IT," SAID PAGE



flashy and space-age guitars of subsequent years — from Hendrix's Flying Vs to Jimmy Page's double-neck monsters — were in place by the early 1940s. The joy of guitars is that, despite their immense variety, they are all anchored to the same roots. It's really the effects pedals, with their ability to distort sound, that have become more advanced.

Whether you use a guitar for jazz, blues, rock or heavy metal, the instrument will be fundamentally the same. So let's take a look at an electric guitar, end to end. There is the headstock, which contains the gears and heads used for tuning. Next is the neck, with a long line of metal frets, guiding the musician on what notes they are playing. Then there is the body, usually wooden, and painted and lacquered, with the pickups, a bridge (to raise the strings), control knobs for volume and tone, and sometimes a spring-loaded gizmo called a tremolo, which allows you to bend notes or add a bit of vibrato.

And now, back in Corona, DCM is watching it all come together in a long and complicated assembly line. David Brown picks up a '61 jazz bass with considerable reverence. "Seventy pairs of hands are involved in making this guitar, or any guitar here," he explains. "It takes three weeks from a spread, the parts, arriving in our dock, to it being boxed up." Along the path from pieces to shipping, they transform blocks of wood into recognisable necks and headstocks, then to exquisitely polished and tuned machines, with teams of engineers checking the feel, tone and build.

Despite the similarity of process, the real beauty of the guitar is that each model is subtly different, and each musician will express a different preference. "Every guitarist goes through a period of trying things out, and then lands up with a guitar and amp set-up with which he feels at home," writes legendary Queen guitarist Brian May, often considered by other guitarists to be one of the best in the world. "He has found his voice. The wonderful thing about guitars and guitarists, is that everyone is different and unique."

May talks about "the great guitar-guitarists partnerships", as if the inanimate object is as much a part of the relationship as the person playing it. Which, of course, it is.

PLAYING FAVOURITES

Consequently, name a famous musician, and you can usually name an instrument or two with which they are associated.

ONE REASON THAT BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN PLAYS A PLAIN OLD TELECASTER IS SUPPOSEDLY BECAUSE IT IS BASIC AND AFFORDABLE — A COMMON MAN'S GUITAR

May is a tricky one because he built his own (see page 86). But if you're talking about Pink Floyd's Dave Gilmour, or Eric Clapton any time after 1970, you're clearly talking about a Fender Strat. If it is Bruce Springsteen, it will be a Telecaster, and if you're watching Carlos Santana, you are probably looking at a Paul Reed Smith. If you're the sort of high-technique aficionado who listens to Steve Vai, you very likely know he is on an Ibanez JEM — indeed, it was invented with his involvement. And if you're singing along to an Oasis track, Noel Gallagher is almost certainly playing an Epiphone Sheraton or Riviera.

Sometimes, people go for something different, just to be unique. Johnny Ramone played a guitar called the Mosrite. "I wanted a guitar no one else was using, something to be identified with," said Ramone, who bought his first one for US\$50 and commented it was "made of really good cardboard".

Others do the reverse. One reason that Springsteen plays a plain old Telecaster is supposedly because it is basic and affordable, a common man's guitar, for a champion of the American common man.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORP. (MAIN AND RIGHT); GETTY IMAGES (JIMMY PAGE); CHARLES PETERSON (KURT COBAIN)



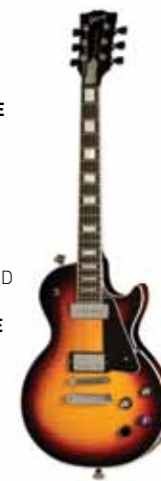
MAYBE THE FENDER JAZZ BASS (LEFT) WASN'T QUITE WHAT KURT COBAIN (ABOVE, INSET) WAS LOOKING FOR, BUT JOHN PAUL JONES OF LED ZEPPELIN HAS CERTAINLY WIELDED ONE — TO GREAT EFFECT. SPEAKING OF LED ZEP, JIMMY PAGE (RIGHT) HAS FAMOUSLY USED A DOUBLE-NECKED GUITAR TO PERFORM 'STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN' WITHOUT A MID-SONG GUITAR CHANGE ABOVE: FRETS ARE CAREFULLY HAMMERED INTO A ROSEWOOD FINGERBOARD IN FENDER'S CORONA-BASED FACTORY



DIFFERENT AXES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

GIBSON LES PAUL

LES PAUL'S FIRST SOLID-BODY GUITAR WAS SOLID, ALL RIGHT. "YOU COULD GO OUT AND EAT AND COME BACK AND THE NOTE WOULD STILL BE PLAYING," HE SAID OF HIS EARLIEST MODEL. HE WAS LATER INVITED TO COLLABORATE WITH GIBSON TO PRODUCE THE MODEL THAT WOULD CARRY HIS NAME (PICTURED). IT WASN'T RELEASED UNTIL 1952, BUT QUICKLY BECAME USED BY MANY OF THE BANDS THAT DEFINED THE '60s



FENDER JAGUAR

RELEASED IN 1962, THE JAGUAR WAS ONE OF THE SHORTEST FENDERS OF THE TIME, AT AN ECONOMICAL 61-CENTIMETRE SCALE LENGTH. THAT, COMBINED WITH AN EXTRA FRET (22 INSTEAD OF THE USUAL 21), MADE FOR WHAT FENDER TERMED "FASTER, MORE COMFORTABLE" PLAYING. BURSTING WITH SHINY CHROME AND ONBOARD CONTROLS, THE JAGUAR WAS A LOOKER. "GAZING AT IT ALMOST REQUIRED SUNGLASSES," SIGHS A FENDER RETROSPECTIVE OF THE INSTRUMENT



DOUBLE-NECK GIBSON

AH, THE DOUBLE-NECK GIBSON EDS-1275, PERHAPS THE MOST OBVIOUS SYMBOL OF ROCK AND ROLL EXCESS AND CRAZINESS. WITH 12 STRINGS ON THE TOP, SIX ON THE BOTTOM, THIS UNWIELDY MONSTER IS ALMOST THE SWISS ARMY KNIFE OF GUITARS. IT'S BEEN USED FOR LIVE PERFORMANCES OF 'STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN', AS WELL AS BY GUNS N' ROSES AXE-MASTER SLASH, AND MULTI-NECK GUITARS DO NOT STOP AT TWO. THERE'S AN OSTENSIBLY PLAYABLE SIX-NECKED ONE CALLED "THE BEAST"



DO IT YOURSELF

Many of the world's greatest guitarists have either built their own, or heavily modified existing ones. These days, manufacturers such as Fender and Gibson have dedicated workshops that can customise guitars to any specification you want. They also produce signature models based on the exact preferences of the stars. But back in Brian May's (pictured) day, you had to start at a more rudimentary level.

"I still have a small pile of guitar catalogues that I collected as a boy," writes May. "Looking at them now, I can still feel the excitement and yearning." He would look at the shiny new Fenders, Gibsons, Martins, Selmers and Burns, and dream of owning them like his heroes. "But there was no chance of any of these instruments being within my reach. So I set out to make my own guitar at home with my dad — a project that lasted about three years of evenings after school."

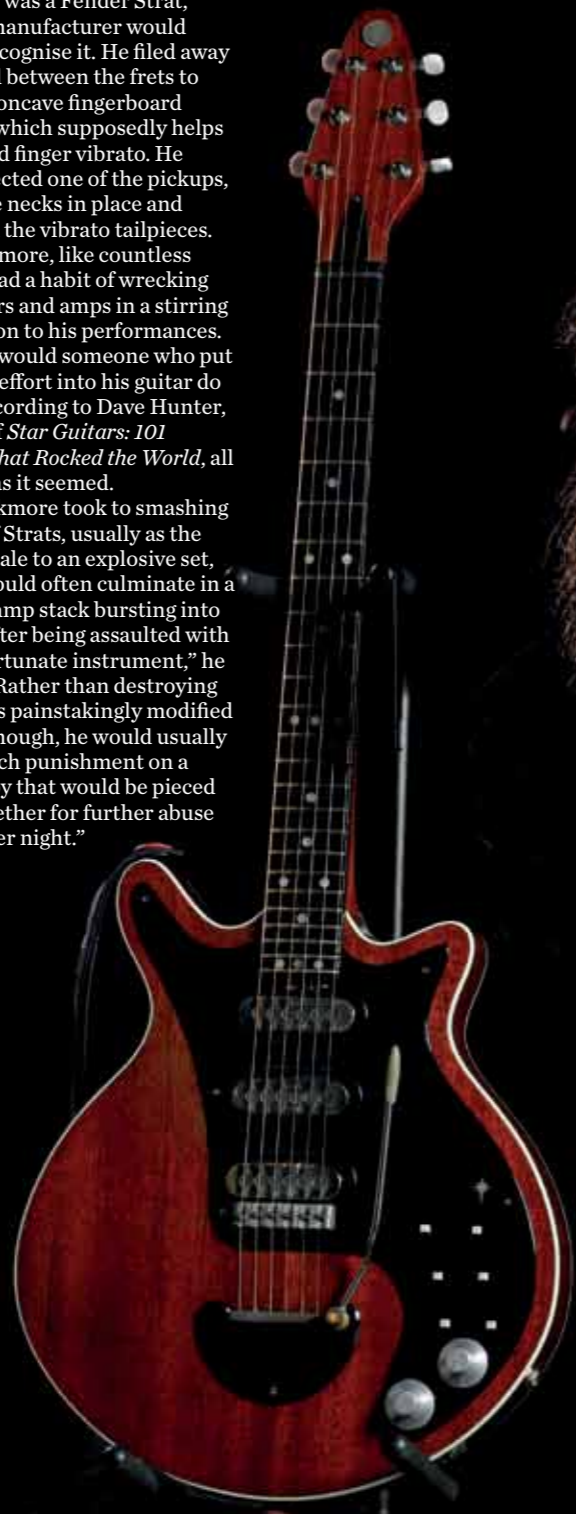
May and his father began work on what would become the Red Special guitar in 1963. They started with wood from an 18th century fireplace mantel that was fashioned into a neck, finishing it with a 24-fret oak fingerboard that had each position inlay made from a mother-of-pearl button. The neck was then connected to an oak body with two mahogany sheets glued onto the side. He built a tremolo with a knife-edge shaped into a V-shape and two motorbike valve springs. The tremolo arm was made from a bicycle saddlebag holder with a tip from a plastic knitting needle. And thus, the guitar that has produced some of the most distinctive sounds in rock came to be. Today, May owns a company that custom-makes Red Special replicas.

While few have gone to such lengths, plenty have added a personal touch to guitars. Eddie Van Halen started out with a home-made guitar dubbed Frankenstein or Frankenstrat, made from US\$130 worth of parts, combining bits of a Gibson and a Fender Stratocaster. Later, Charvel Guitars would build their own "Frankensteins", modelled after Van Halen's. Another

meddler was Ritchie Blackmore of Deep Purple. His instrument of choice was a Fender Strat, but the manufacturer would barely recognise it. He filed away the wood between the frets to make a concave fingerboard surface, which supposedly helps speed and finger vibrato. He disconnected one of the pickups, glued the necks in place and modified the vibrato tailpieces.

Blackmore, like countless others, had a habit of wrecking his guitars and amps in a stirring conclusion to his performances. But why would someone who put so much effort into his guitar do that? According to Dave Hunter, author of *Star Guitars: 101 Guitars that Rocked the World*, all was not as it seemed.

"Blackmore took to smashing plenty of Strats, usually as the grand finale to an explosive set, which would often culminate in a dummy amp stack bursting into flames after being assaulted with the unfortunate instrument," he writes. "Rather than destroying one of his painstakingly modified guitars though, he would usually inflict such punishment on a Strat copy that would be pieced back together for further abuse night after night."



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (BRIAN MAY, B. B. KING AND RICKENBACKER)

Others formed a bond with their instrument that became almost romantic. If you've ever heard a record by B. B. King (pictured below), you have been listening to his beloved guitar, Lucille, which is a Gibson 355. "When I found that little Gibson with the long neck, that did it," King once said. "That's like finding your wife forever." He added: "Lucille has taken me a long way, even brought me some fame. Most of all, she's kept me alive, being able to eat. Lucille has practically saved my life two or three times." This was once literally true. As King describes in the song 'Lucille', during a car crash, the car rolled and fell over upside down, but was held up by his guitar — which propped the vehicle up in such a way that King avoided being crushed.

But what, really, is the difference between all these guitar types? There are some technical, practical reasons for musician selections. It is thought that Santana favours the Paul Reed Smith, having previously been a disciple of the Gibson Les Paul, because it has a long neck with 24 frets, making it possible to play high E without bending — on other guitars, the body of the instrument gets in the way. It so happens that many of Santana's songs are in E or A keys (as are many guitar-based blues and rock songs), and his solos tend to play very high up the scales.

Another example is Jack Bruce, the bass player from Cream. While most bass players of the era opted for the Fender Precision Bass (and still do), Bruce wanted to



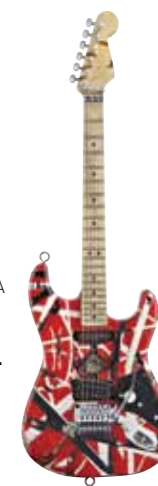
develop a style that was similar to the guitar, bending notes as one would in a six-string. On a Fender, it and its strings are too heavy; so instead he used a lighter, short-scale Gibson EB-3 with La Bella light-gauge strings, because he could bend them — or so the story goes. And how about Hendrix? He's most commonly associated with a Fender Strat, but is also often pictured with the Gibson Flying V — whose unique (at the time) shape was useful because, as a left-hander, it gave him easier access to the fretboard than other guitars reversed from a right-hand orientation.

It is not even that musicians require the cutting edge in technology. Indeed, sometimes it is the exact opposite. Jack White of the White Stripes has a 1965 JB Hutto Airline Guitar that is not only old, but in unimpressive condition. "Playing that guitar makes me feel like I have to take something that's broken and make it work," he has said. "It's hollow, it's made of plastic, and it feels like it's going to fall apart. The front pickup is broken, but the treble pickup has an amazing bite. I've never had it re-fretted or anything. It's pretty much the way I found it."

DIFFERENT AXES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

HOME-MADE

WHILE GUITARS COBBLED TOGETHER FROM PARTS OF SEVERAL EXISTING AXES, LIKE THE ORIGINAL FRANKENSTRAT (REPLICA PICTURED), ARE POPULAR, MANY HOME-MADE INSTRUMENTS ARE FAR MORE UTILITARIAN. **CIGAR BOX GUITARS**, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE EXACTLY WHAT THEY SOUND LIKE. THE BODY IS MADE FROM A HOLLOW CIGAR BOX, CREATING **A UNIQUE, LOW-FI SOUND MUCH FAVOURED BY INDIE BLUESMEN**. CHECK OUT A BRITISH ARTIST BY THE NAME OF HOLLOWBELL FOR A GOOD EXAMPLE OF ITS SOULFUL SOUND



GIBSON 355 (LUCILLE)

THE MODIFIED ES-355 WAS OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE B. B. KING LUCILLE (THE BLUESMAN NAMED ALL HIS GUITARS LUCILLE). **ALTERATIONS INCLUDED REMOVING THE F-HOLES**, THOSE ODDLY SHAPED HOLES IN THE BODY OF VIOLINS AND SOME GUITARS, THROUGH WHICH SOUND FLOWS. **TO ELIMINATE ANNOYING FEEDBACK**, THE TAILPIECE OF THE GUITAR WAS ALSO REJIGGED TO STOP THE SLEEVE-WEARING MUSICIAN FROM SNAGGING HIS CLOTHES ON THE INSTRUMENT



RICKENBACKER

WHEN THE BEATLES "INVADED" THE UNITED STATES AND DROVE HORDES OF TEENAGE GIRLS INSANE ON *THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW*, THE HAPLESS FANS WERE PROBABLY SWOONING MORE AT JOHN LENNON'S EASY SMILE THAN HIS **RICKENBACKER 325 CAPRI**. BUT THE GUITAR, PURCHASED IN HAMBURG, GERMANY, PROBABLY HELPED TOO. AT THE TIME, **ITS EXOTIC-LOOKING, CURVY BODY WAS DEEMED VERY INNOVATIVE**, AND RATHER GROOVY, BABY



THE REAL ROCK STARS

Among hundreds of guitars, three stand out for their constant selection among the greats of rock and roll: the Fender Telecaster, Fender Stratocaster, and Gibson Les Paul.

The first of the three was the Telecaster. "The Telecaster would become a staple of the country musician's armoury before spreading to pop and rock," writes Michael Heatley, author of *Stars and Guitars*. "The guitar was basic but fit its purpose, and it tended to be adopted by players in fields where sound, not image, was paramount." It has drawn musicians who aspire to represent the common man, such as Bruce Springsteen, Joe Strummer and Keith Richards. Bandsawed from blocks of wood, affordable and durable, Heatley says it was the Ford Model T of electric guitars. "It has never gone out of production or fashion and there seems no likelihood it ever will."

The Les Paul, launched in 1952, came about as a response to the Telecaster. It had a dense body made of mahogany with a maple top, which helped make a distinctive resonant sound. Purists tend to prefer the so-called Standard, best from 1958 to 1960, ideally with a sunburst finish. This, writes Heatley, "represents the Holy Grail for rock guitar players". A man who played one of these Standards is Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac, whose 1959 Les Paul supposedly sounded so unusual partly because one of its pickups was accidentally reinstalled upside down after being rewound. As the story goes, hearing the results, he never changed it back. The same model would later be used by Gary Moore, while Slash from Guns N' Roses gave the instrument a new lease of life in the late 1980s. Others who have favoured a Les Paul include Billy Gibbons from ZZ Top, and Joe Perry from Aerosmith.

Then, in 1954, came the Fender Stratocaster, dubbed the Strat. In direct competition with the Les Paul, it had a slimmer body, and had the neck bolted onto the body, unlike the Les Paul style of gluing the two. Also, it had a vibrato unit that neither the Les Paul nor Telecaster could offer. Even today, it stands out for the tonal variation created by its three pickups — the ones that have been wound, for 60 years, by Abbie from our main story.

With Strats, it is said that older is better. The ones that carry the greatest value date between 1959 and 1965, and Fender often launches vintage reissues from that period, to enormous acclaim from enthusiasts. "The Fender Stratocaster rivals Gibson's Les Paul as the most iconic guitar in rock," writes Heatley. "It is certainly the most imitated by other makers." For a few converts to the Strat cause, try this bunch for size: Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, Dave Gilmour, Mark Knopfler, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Hank Marvin and Steve Miller.

RIGHT: MAYBE JACK WHITE (RIGHT, INSET) OF THE WHITE STRIPES ISN'T A FAN OF FENDER GUITARS — EVEN IF THEY ARE PUT TOGETHER LIKE WORKS OF ART BY A MASTER BUILDER — BUT HE HAS BEEN KNOWN TO USE A FENDER TWIN AMPLIFIER TO PRODUCE THE BAND'S DISTINCTIVE SOUND

THREE BECOME ONE

Even different guitars of the same model behave in a different way. Eric Clapton's arguably most famous guitar (now retired) is a Fender Strat, but it is actually made up of pieces from several of them. Clapton had been to see Steve Winwood playing a white Strat and, suitably inspired, bought a stack of six of them. He took the pickups from one, the scratchplate off another, and the neck off yet another — then put them together. The result would become known as Blackie. "What makes Blackie unique is that I made it," he once said. "Therefore it felt like it was invested with some kind of soul."

ELECTRIC WONDERLAND

On a rainy August day in London, *Discovery Channel Magazine* is on a guided walking tour of "Rock and Roll London", where an enthused guide — who turns out to be a Labour Councillor for the constituency of Wandsworth at his day job — is recalling the pivotal role that the English capital has played in the development of rock.

The city is a place rich in stories. Here's a venue where Hendrix played and, having learned that John Lennon and Paul McCartney of The Beatles were watching, decided to play 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' as the opening number, giving his fellow musicians absolutely no notice before doing so. True session professionals, they nailed it anyway. Here is the café where a young Paul Simon met The Seekers, inspiring 'Scarborough Fair'. Here is where the Sex Pistols borrowed instruments for their debut gig, and destroyed them. Here's where Bowie got the inspiration for Ziggy Stardust.

And, as our guide relates, there is the location where Lennon and McCartney bumped into Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones, who were being nagged by their label to stop doing cover versions, and write some of their own material. "Have you got anything we can record?" Jagger asked the Liverpudlians. Lennon pulled a magazine from his pocket and said he had been thinking about it but hadn't yet written a song around it. "Give us 20 minutes," he said, and he and McCartney went off and composed 'I Want to Be Your Man', the headline on the magazine Lennon was holding. It became a hit for The Rolling Stones, and an experience that convinced them they could write their own material.

Stories like these, places and landmarks and memories, are all part of the legacy of the electric guitar. The great thing is, it will just keep on giving. Sure, all instruments have their fans — some keyboard players swear by Yamaha, others by Korg — but none show quite the same variety and attachment as guitars. The differences are everything, and the guitar remains uniquely expressive and emotive. As Billy Gibbons, the preposterously-bearded main man of ZZ Top, put it: "Each and every example remains dramatic, enigmatic, and always magnetic — calling for strings to be struck." ●

"LUCILLE HAS TAKEN ME A LONG WAY, EVEN BROUGHT ME SOME FAME. MOST OF ALL, SHE'S KEPT ME ALIVE, BEING ABLE TO EAT. LUCILLE HAS PRACTICALLY SAVED MY LIFE TWO OR THREE TIMES"

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF FENDER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CORP (MAIN); GETTY IMAGES (JACK WHITE)



DIFFERENT AXES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

AIRLINE

IT TURNS OUT THE BASSLINE OF THE WHITE STRIPES' HIT 'SEVEN NATION ARMY' IS NOT BASS AT ALL. JACK WHITE'S AIRLINE GUITAR WAS ELECTRONICALLY ALTERED, **PITCHED AN OCTAVE LOWER TO SOUND LIKE A BASS.** SNEAKY, BUT IT IS HARD TO STAY MAD AT A MAN WHO CAN COME UP WITH WHAT *DCM* LIKES TO THINK OF AS THE MOST ADDICTIVE SONG OF ALL TIME. ONCE A CHEAP GUITAR, **THE AIRLINE NOW SELLS FOR THOUSANDS** THANKS TO ITS ASSOCIATION WITH MR WHITE



GIBSON FLYING V

INTRODUCED IN THE '50S, THIS FUTURISTIC-LOOKING GUITAR DIDN'T REALLY TAKE OFF UNTIL A DECADE LATER. JIMI HENDRIX, A LEFT-HANDED PLAYER, WAS A FAN, AS IT **ALLOWED FOR EASY ACCESS TO THE FRETBOARD, EVEN WHEN THE STRINGS WERE REVERSED FOR LEFTIES.** CLEARLY CLOSE TO HIS V, HENDRIX DECORATED IT WITH **PSYCHEDELIC SWIRLS OF COLOUR** THAT REINFORCED HIS "FOXY" SOUND AND IMAGE



FENDER MUSTANG

KURT COBAIN OF GRUNGE GODS NIRVANA WAS A COMPLICATED FELLOW, AND HE SEEMED BEWILDERINGLY AMBIVALENT ABOUT THE FENDER MUSTANG. "THEY'RE CHEAP AND TOTALLY INEFFICIENT," HE GRUMBLED IN AN INTERVIEW, ADDING, **"WHOEVER INVENTED THAT GUITAR WAS A DORK."** THIS FROM THE MAN WHO 10 SECONDS BEFORE SAID, **"OUT OF ALL THE GUITARS IN THE WHOLE WORLD, THE FENDER MUSTANG IS MY FAVOURITE."** STILL, IF IT LEADS TO CLASSICS LIKE 'HEART-SHAPED BOX', WE SHOULDN'T REALLY NITPICK

