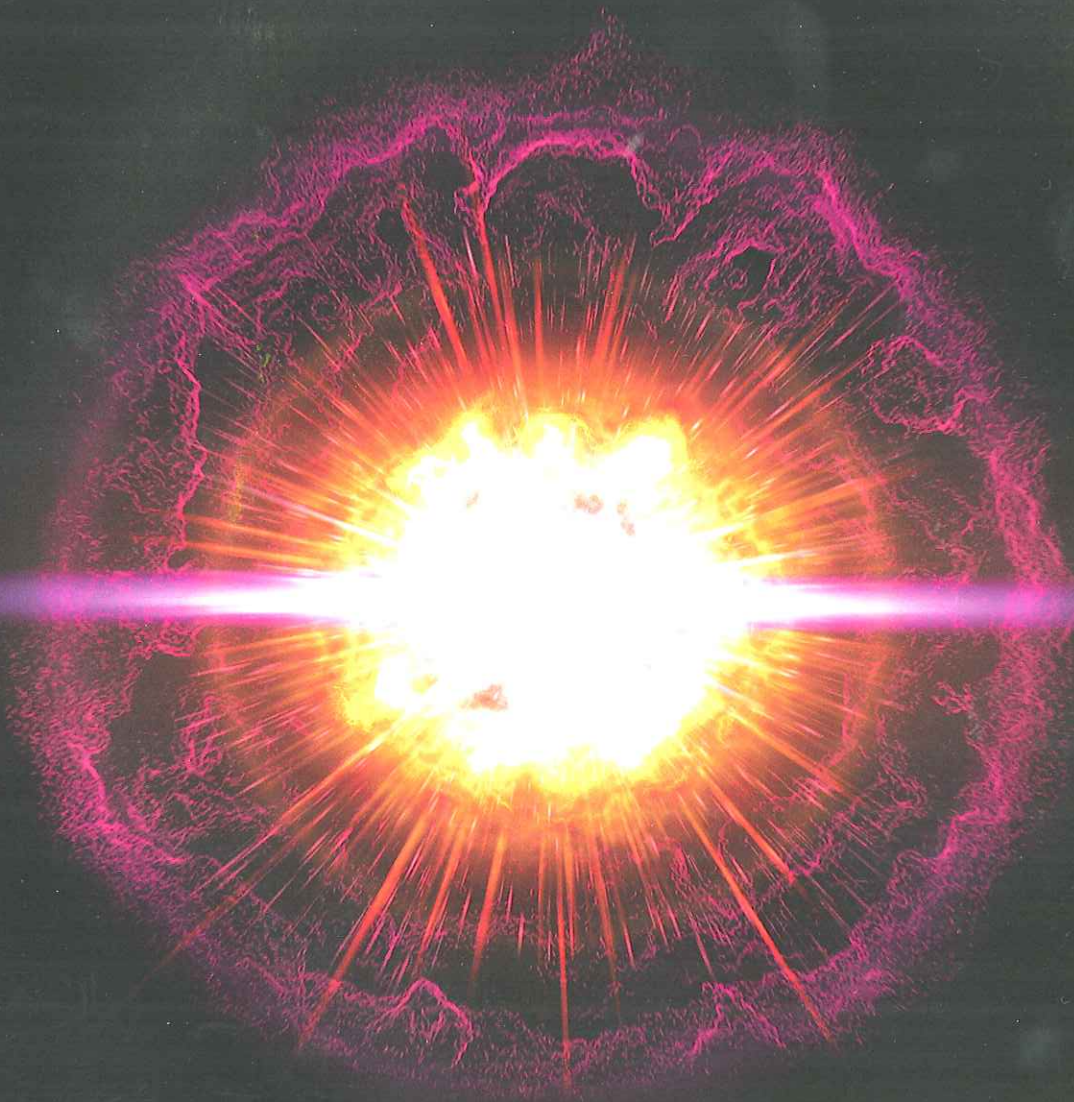


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THE 1959 EXPLOSION

ZOOM BACK TO THE GUITAR MARKET OF THE LATE 1950S AND YOU FIND A LES PAUL THAT IS BECOMING HARDER AND HARDER FOR GIBSON TO SELL, ALONGSIDE A POPULAR MUSIC SCENE THAT DOESNT APPEAR TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE MERITS OF THE SET-NECK SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC WITH DUAL HUMBUCKING PICKUPS. LURCH FORWARD LESS THAN A DECADE, HOWEVER, AND THE LES PAUL IS SETTING THE ROCK AND BLUES WORLDS ON FIRE. WHAT HAPPENED? IN TWO WORDS,

**ERIC CLAPTON.**



# HISTORY OF THE BURST AND ITS KEY PLAYERS

BY TONY BACON

Working on my new book, *Million Dollar Les Paul*, I made an intense study of the remarkable sunburst-finish 1958–60 Gibson Les Paul guitar. I considered in detail its mysterious history, its musical importance, and its outrageous value. And in doing so, I had to travel in time. I had to go back to the Gibson factory in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the 50s. It was an incredible journey.

Back then, Gibson's executives knew that the company's conservative professionalism attracted most of the major jazz guitarists of the day to play Gibson acoustic and electric archtop hollowbody guitars. But there was a new kid in town. An upstart firm from California was making solidbody electric guitars. The workers at Gibson were steeped in skilful craft and careful workmanship. To them, Fender's Telecaster looked like a plank of solid wood with pickups and controls bolted on.

Ted McCarty, the boss at Gibson back then, told me that their top engineers started work on Gibson's own solidbody guitar soon after the appearance of the Fender in the first years of the 50s. Gibson soon reached the point, said McCarty, where "we thought we had our guitar, and now we needed an excuse to make it. So I got to thinking. At that time Les Paul and Mary Ford were riding very high. They were probably the number one vocal team in the United States. They were earning a million dollars a year. And knowing Les and Mary, I decided maybe I ought to show this guitar to them."

Musicians had known about Les since his appearance on Bing Crosby's 1945 hit 'It's Been A Long Long Time'. Now, with singer Mary Ford, he was enjoying his new role as the most famous guitarist in America as they notched up smashes like 'The Tennessee Waltz' (1950) and 'How High The Moon' (1951). Les's early home-studio experiments with overdubbing allowed him to create vast magical orchestras of massed guitars.

Gibson launched the new Les Paul Model guitar in the summer of 1952, priced at \$210 (about \$20 more than Fender's Telecaster). Its gold finish has made it known to guitar fans ever since as the Goldtop. The new Goldtop's solid body cleverly combined a carved maple top bonded to a mahogany base, a sandwich uniting the darker tonality of mahogany with the brighter sonic edge of maple. It sold well in relation to Gibson's other guitars during these early years. Gibson, confident now that solidbody electrics could provide a profitable new line, introduced further Les Paul models alongside the Goldtop: the upscale Custom and the budget Junior in 1954 and, a year later, the Special and TV.

Meanwhile, in the Gibson electronics department, Seth Lover started work on a new humbucking pickup, which Gibson began to use in the early months of 1957. Gibson replaced the old P-90 single-coils on the Les Paul Goldtop and Custom with the new humbuckers during that year. Sales of these original Les Paul guitars reached an overall peak in 1956 and 1957. In 1958, after sales faltered, Gibson made a radical design change to three of the Les Paul models and a cosmetic alteration to another. Remarkably, it would be that small visual mod that provides the basis for the most desired and collectable Les Paul ever made.

"Guitarists the world over are familiar with Gibson's famous series of Les Paul Guitars," the company proclaimed in *The Gibson Gazette* at the end of 1958. "They include some of the finest solidbody instruments manufactured today – and lead the field in popularity. It is with great pride that Gibson announces exciting improvements." The budget Junior, Special, and TV were revamped with a new double-cutaway body shape and new finishes, but it was the Goldtop that fell victim to the small cosmetic alteration. Back to the *Gazette*, under the headline 'Les Paul Guitar In Cherry Red'. "A beautiful red cherry sunburst finish is the news here! This guitar now has a rich, rubbed appearance that cannot be equaled at any price, and the 'new look' that is tops with today's guitarists."

Gibson had made a simple marketing decision. They knew sales of the Les Paul Model, a.k.a. the Goldtop, had declined. They knew something had to be done to stimulate renewed interest in this relatively high-price model. The think-tank decided that it was the fault of the unusual gold finish, figuring that some players found it too unconventional. So they acted: they changed the look, applying the new sunburst finish to the maple top in a bid to attract new (and perhaps more conservative) customers.

It's likely Gibson had wind of Fender's new model for 1958: a sunburst-finish solidbody called the Jazzmaster. Were those damned west-coasters trying to coax Gibson's beloved jazz players over to a solid electric? Perhaps that helped Gibson to decide the new finish for the revised Les Paul, known to modern collectors as the Burst, short for Sunburst. The Gazette announcement in late 1958 pitched the price of the Burst at \$247.50, with the "plush lined" case adding \$42. (That \$247.50 would have the same buying power as about \$1,875 in today's money.)

Gibson's new cherry sunburst meant that the maple body top was now clearly visible through the finish. On Goldtops, that cap was hidden under the opaque gold paint. But now the maple showed through the virtually transparent sunburst finish. Some of the Bursts made between 1958 and 1960 feature gloriously striking patterned maple. The pattern is known technically as figure, but most guitar people call it flame. A great Les Paul of the period must have a flame top for today's collectors, who place higher values on the full-on look. The quality of the maple used for the tops was never advertised or promoted by Gibson, because it was simply down to the maple that happened to be available, whether figured or plain. If a good-looking Burst happened to come along now and again, that was a bonus. Some were remarkably attractive; some were extremely plain.

At Gibson in the late 50s, these Les Pauls continued to come off the line, but no priority at all was given to them. The new-look sunburst models were almost an afterthought. The March 1959 catalogue still showed a Goldtop, with P-90s, which nobody had bothered to change.

To an extent, Gibson's hunch about a different look for the guitar was proved right. Their shipping records showed that sales of the Goldtop declined from a high of 2,245 during 1953 to just a few hundred in 1958 before the new sunburst finish came in. After the look was revised, sales climbed to 643 in 1959, but they would dip again in 1960. Only about 1,500 sunburst Les Pauls were made in total.

As far as Gibson was concerned, late 1960 marked the end of the sunburst Les Paul experiment. They decided the change of finish had not been enough and that the only way to attract new customers was to completely redesign the entire Les Paul line. That would lead to what we now know as the SG models. (Confusingly, for a short while, some of the new-design models still had the Les Paul name on them, and these are usually known now as SG/Les Paul models.)

No one wanted a Burst back then. A Goldtop had a kitsch kind of bluesy charm, enough to add a sparkle to the frontline of any electric band. But a conservative sunburst, with a finish similar to those big boxes the jazz guys used? No thanks. That seemed to sum up the general response from the growing ranks of budding rock'n'rollers. Those single-cutaway old-style Les Pauls, in Goldtop, black Custom, or sunburst style, already seemed old-fashioned.

That was in the United States. But a number of young English boys wanted to play the electric guitar, and they would have a profound effect upon this instrument and the way it was perceived by its fans over the coming decades. What those boys wanted most was an American instrument. That is what their heroes played and, clearly, that is what they needed.

By the start of 1964, The Rolling Stones had notched up two Top 20 singles in Britain and in the summer scored their first Number One, 'It's All Over Now'. The group's lead guitarist, Keith Richards, wanted American electric guitars just like every other British axeman. But now he was in a much better position to indulge himself. By early '64 he had two: a Harmony Meteor and an Epiphone Casino. It was probably on the group's first US tour, in June, that he bought a sunburst Les Paul – a remarkably significant instrument. It marked the start of the Burst legend. It was the first time anywhere in the world that a significant and publicly visible player had chosen the model.

At the end of the following month, the Stones went to the States for a second tour, this time for three weeks. Right at the start, within days of arriving, they played CBS TV's Ed Sullivan Show, which had done so much to bring The Beatles to an American audience earlier in the year. Just as they had for The Beatles, hordes of budding guitarists in America were ready and waiting in front of their TVs – and here came Richards playing his Les Paul on 'Around And Around' and 'Time Is On My Side'. Cue those millions of guitar fans saying to themselves: "But what the hell is that guitar?" Had they flipped through the current Gibson catalogue, all they would have seen in the solidbody electric section was a bunch of SGs, Melody Makers, and Firebird models – and nobody was going to muddle any of those with a 50s Les Paul.

Maybe Keith showed his new guitar to his friend Eric Clapton. Whatever the circumstances, Eric acquired a sunburst Les Paul of his own, probably toward the end of May 1965. In the mythology of the Burst, this guitar would become the most worshipped of all instruments – not only because Eric played arguably his finest-ever recorded work with it, but also because he did not have the guitar for very long.

Eric was in John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. He'd joined the band in April 1965 after leaving The Yardbirds, so he'd only been with Mayall a very short time when he got the Les Paul. For the first weeks with Mayall he was playing a Telecaster. The 21-year-old guitarist was attracted to Mayall because Mayall played pure blues – and now Eric was in a real blues band, he wanted a real blues guitar.

Just about his favourite blues guitarist was Freddie King, and there on the front of King's 1962 album *Let's Hide Away And Dance Away* was the guitarist playing an old-style Les Paul Goldtop. Or was it? The colour picture of Freddie showed a guitar that didn't exactly look gold, more a sort of brown-ish colour. More like a sunburst finish than a gold one, perhaps.

With that image in his mind, Eric went shopping in London. He probably already had a suspicion that older guitars were somehow better, too. A few years later he told a journalist angling for advice for young guitarists: "When you're starting, always buy a secondhand guitar, because it will be 'broken in' and easier to play, apart from the fact that the older the guitar the better it seems to have been made." This is what became the vintage guitar argument – in one sentence.

Eric found his sunburst Les Paul. He said later that it was "almost brand new" and "just magnificent". He paid about £130 – around \$365 at the exchange rate back then, which would be about \$2,500 in today's money. Consider that a brand new Gibson SG Standard listed at \$305 in 1965, and it's clear that Eric was prepared to make a sizeable investment to capture his prize.

The key recording for fans of the Burst sound is the Blues Breakers John Mayall With Eric Clapton album, made in May 1966. It's a remarkable LP that still sounds phenomenal today, with Eric's inspired combination of controlled distortion, feedback, a fine vibrato style, and keen melodic ideas, all wrapped up in that beautiful tone and natural sustain. So, you ought to go right now and listen again to his blistering cover of Freddie King's 'Hideaway' – a great moment for Eric's new guitar, inspired by Freddie's album that includes that very track.

By the time the album was released in late July 1966, the restless Clapton was already rehearsing his next band, with bassist Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker. Eric was distraught when his beloved Les Paul was stolen during an early Cream rehearsal, before he'd had a chance to play it with the new group in public or in the studio. Since then, many, many Les Pauls have been hopefully offered as this famous ex-Clapton guitar, but no real proof has ever accompanied such instruments.

Eric managed to acquire another Burst to replace his first one, buying one from Andy Summers, then in Zoot Money's band but later to find fame with The Police. Eric used that one to record most of his new group's first album, *Fresh Cream*, including gems such as 'Spoonful', and the fantastic single 'I Feel Free'. That A-side alone, with its sweet, flowing 'woman tone' lead, turned the heads of many a guitar player who had not switched on to or perhaps even heard the Mayall album.



Peter Green was of the young guitarists who came under Eric's spell, first seeing him with Mayall's band in May 1965 and returning many times to drink from the well. Peter was in no doubt what it meant for him as an up-and-coming musician: he should move from playing bass to the guitar, and he should get a Gibson Les Paul.

Probably toward the end of 1965, he found a Burst just like Eric's. He remembered later paying £110 and had it in time to join his first proper band, Peter B's Looners, run by keyboardist Peter Bardens. Green was playing in the Bardens band by December 1965, Les Paul in hand, and then joined Mayall in summer 1966, replacing Eric. But he made his greatest music during his tenure at the helm of Fleetwood Mac, from 1967 to '70.

In Fleetwood Mac, Peter ventured into pastures new and was rarely dull or uninspired in his home territory of the blues, as on the impressive 'Black Magic Woman'. But when he conjured up a 'Man Of The World', his abilities shone through more brightly than ever. It was blues-inspired, for sure, but moving into a much more mature and individual direction. Sadly, in 1970 he left Fleetwood Mac in personal disarray and amid a good deal of confusion. A few years later, he passed his Les Paul on to Gary Moore.

Jeff Beck also saw Clapton early on playing a Les Paul with the Mayall band. He made a mental note. Clapton's guitar "sounded great" Beck remembers. "I already knew Les Pauls sounded good because Jimmy Page had a Custom. They had this deep sound, and I really needed that power in a three-piece, to help fill out the sound."

He kept his eyes and ears open for any Les Pauls for sale, and soon bought a 1959 model, with a non-standard black pickguard added, for about £175. "Hearing Pete Green and Eric use it, it just changed my opinion about it. I still stuck with a Tele – I was on a Tele at the time – but when you turn up the Les Paul to ridiculous beyond-all-belief distortion and make use of it to feed back ... well, that's when I was swayed away."

Beck began gigging with his new acquisition – and even managed to record with it before Clapton got to Decca in May 66 for the Beano sessions. "The Les Paul stuff I did on 'Over Under Sideways Down', that was the last stages of my involvement with The Yardbirds ... that was all Les Paul." The band recorded that single and The Yardbirds album, commonly known as Roger The Engineer, between mid April and early June, and Beck's Les Paul is all over the recordings.

Beck's first Les Paul was soon in the wars, smashed almost fatally during The Yardbirds' fourth US tour, in late 1966. Out of The Yardbirds by the end of 66, Beck put together The Jeff Beck Group the following year and continued to play his almost-good-as-new Les Paul. He removed the finish from the guitar early in 68 because, he told me, "I didn't want it to look shiny." He used it to great effect for the superb Truth album.

After more damage to his original Burst, Beck bought his second one, from Rick Nielsen, later of Cheap Trick and a noted guitar collector. It was a beautiful specimen, distinguished by an impressive flame top, but for some reason Beck hardly used it on record. Beck's third Les Paul came along in late 1972 when he formed the power trio Beck Bogert & Appice. He bought a converted mid-50s Goldtop, modified with two humbuckers replacing the original P-90s and a heavy dark-brown refinish to the body that Beck calls 'oxblood'. Despite a growing dependency on Strats, Beck used his oxblood Les Paul for some of Blow By Blow, the excellent jazz-rock album he recorded with producer George Martin toward the end of 1974, and he took it on the road when he toured the US and Japan in '75 to promote the record.

Michael Bloomfield first came to the attention of guitarists on The Paul Butterfield Blues Band album that had appeared in summer 1965, and the same group's East-West in August 66 had listeners dazed by the extended title track where Bloomfield and Elvin Bishop solo'd in a proto raga-rock saga. The Butterfield band came to Britain in October 65 playing a Les Paul Goldtop with P-90s, inspired by his beloved Chicago blues guitarists who also played Goldtops.

While in the UK, Bloomfield met Clapton when the two bands played in the northern English city of Leeds on the same night at different venues. After the Butterfield band played their second house, they rushed across to the University where Clapton was playing, in time for Bloomfield and Clapton to meet and play a little in the interval – Bloomfield with his Goldtop and Clapton with his Burst – and in time to watch Cream's second set.

Bloomfield eventually got a Burst back in the States, trading his Goldtop for a Burst owned by Dan Erlewine, now a well-known guitar repairer but in 1966 a young guitarist in a Detroit blues band called The Prime Movers (which included one James Newell Osterberg Jr., later Iggy Pop). The trade probably took place around May 1967, when Bloomfield was leaving Butterfield and setting up his new band, The Electric Flag.

Quite what happened to Bloomfield's Burst after the guitarist's tragic death in 1981 (at just 37 years old) is another of those where-are-they-now stories that seem to crowd guitar history, and especially the story of the early Burst and its most famous players. Bloomfield's brother, Allen, is aware of the interest but is almost as baffled as the rest of us. "Lots of rumours have been flying around regarding the whereabouts today of the sunburst Les Paul, but most are just vacant conversation," says Bloomfield. "After his death, we went to Michael's house and someone had already stolen many of his guitars. I had no inventory of what he actually owned, so there was no way of determining what was taken. That Les Paul was allegedly shipped to a gig in Canada but Michael never showed and the promoter kept the guitar as compensation. Fact or fiction? Who knows."

If Eric Clapton is God, then to many Les Paul fanciers Jimmy Page is some higher kind of deity. Buddah, perhaps. For many years of his illustrious career with Led Zeppelin, Jimmy mostly played a sunburst Les Paul. He'd owned and played an original three-pickup Les Paul Custom in the early 60s, before most people even knew that such a guitar existed. He worked his way through The Yardbirds, arriving as a bass player to replace the outgoing Paul Samwell-Smith in June 1966 but soon switching to six-string – using a Fender Telecaster – to play in a dual-guitar frontline with Jeff Beck. He became the sole guitarist when Beck left in November.

Next, of course, he formed Led Zeppelin. You'll know the story about The Yardbirds disintegrating and Jimmy viewing the project as a sort of New Yardbirds, and how he then settled on a line-up with vocalist Robert Plant, keys and bass man John Paul Jones, and drummer John Bonham. Zeppelin played their first gigs in September 1968 and later that same month started recording their first album. Jimmy was still playing the Tele he'd used with The Yardbirds, but early the following year he acquired his first Burst.

Joe Walsh apparently took a sunburst Les Paul along to one of Led Zep's US dates in the first half of 1969, probably at the Fillmore West in San Francisco at the end of April, and Jimmy bought the guitar. It's said that he paid Walsh \$500. Crucially, Jimmy had his new axe ready to record Zep's second album starting in late May. It remained his favourite guitar throughout the Zeppelin period and eventually came to be referred to as Number 1 after he acquired few others.

In interviews, Jimmy was usually asked at some point about influences and would talk of rockabilly and blues, but often the subject would turn to Eric Clapton. "Eric was the first one to evolve the sound with the [Les Paul] and Marshall amps," he told Trouser Press in 1977. "He should have total credit for that."

Jimmy took that evolution further, putting his ex-Walsh Burst to remarkable use during Zeppelin's time at the very top of the rock tree in the 70s, on stage and in the studio. He used other instruments from time to time – most distinctively a black-and-white Danelectro Standard 3021, which he'd had since his session days, and a Gibson EDS-1275 12-string/six-string double-neck, acquired in the early 70s. But it's the Burst with which he'll always be most associated. And those early moments recording Led Zeppelin II, as he got to know the guitar's many strengths, are still among his best, whether it's the versatility he displays on 'What Is And What Should Never Be' or the sheer power of the intro and outro statements of 'Moby Dick'.

Not only did Jimmy and Burst create a revered and unforgettable on-stage image, but in the studio the Zep guitarist reminded a generation of guitarists and guitar fans just what a Les Paul sunburst model could do in talented, imaginative hands. For many, this would remain unsurpassed as the definitive combination of player and instrument, a 70s pairing to rival Eric and Burst in the 60s Mayall era.

Since the time when those pioneers – Richards, Clapton, Green, Beck, Bloomfield, Page – showed what could be done with the sunburst Gibson Les Paul, a model deemed uncommercial by its manufacturer, countless other musicians have rediscovered the sheer playability and awesome tone of this great instrument. Let's briefly consider just three supreme examples. Billy Gibbons found a magical example of the 59 Burst, named it Pearly Gates, and made it the foundation for the sizzling sound of ZZ Top. Duane Allman played a number of fine Les Pauls, including a brace of beautiful Bursts that he used to help shift Clapton's Layla and the Allmans' wonderful At Fillmore East to an even higher gear. And Paul Kossoff was rarely without his treasured Bursts to fire up the great band Free.

I recently talked to Joe Bonamassa, the new king of blues-rock guitar and a confirmed Les Paul fan, to help put the guitar into its context today. He's always been a Les Paul guy, he says, although he was known as a Strat guy for a while because photographers would snap away whenever he occasionally took out a particularly photogenic gold Fender. A lot of his favourite players – Peter Green, Paul Kossoff, early Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck – played Les Pauls too and got the kind of sound he loves, what he describes as "warm and dark" and "wrapping around your head, not punishing you with treble and that strident kind of sound". You pick up a Les Paul, he says, and it's hard not to be aware of the legacy behind you. Impossible, in fact.

Bonamassa has found that some younger guitarists – the kind he meets at festivals on mixed bills with local bands – might have an Epiphone Les Paul or something similar and not even realise what the name means. He tells them that the next time they're in New York City on a Monday night, they ought to treat themselves. "I say: go see Les while, god bless him, he's still kicking at 93. They say Les who? I go: the guy on your guitar! They don't even realise he's a person, let alone what I call a hillbilly-jazz guitarist. You have to go see The Man if you play his guitar!"

Now, Bonamassa is part of the ongoing history of the Gibson Les Paul, with a special-edition signature guitar in his name. He acquired the first of his Historic reissue Bursts around 2002, and the friend who sold it to him kindly left on a pair of early-60s humbuckers. These days that guitar remains a favourite, alongside his new signature model and a couple more Historics, a 59 and an aged 58.

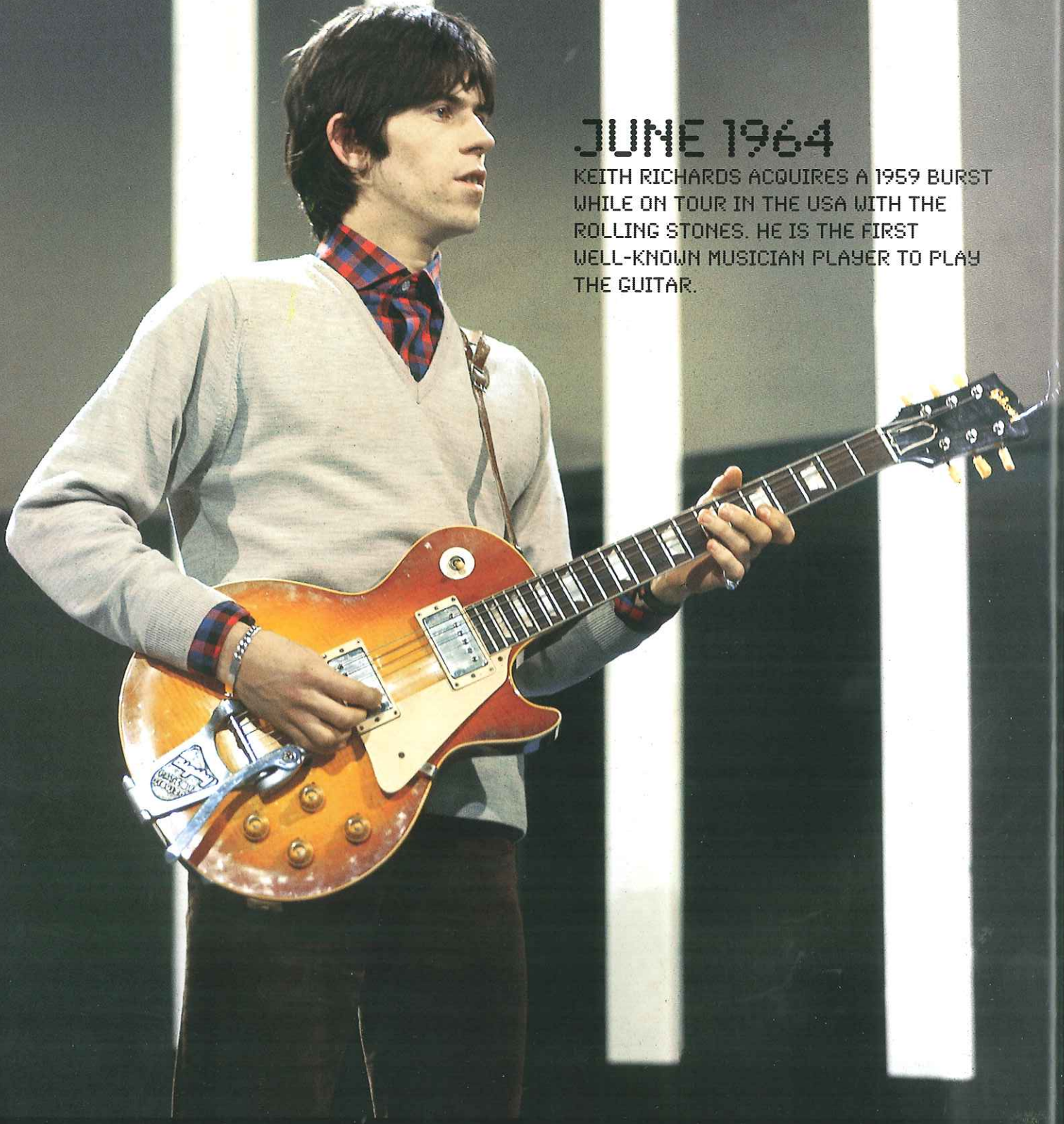
The original 1959 Les Pauls came from a very special place and time, says Bonamassa. It was a time when America was manufacturing great stuff. "If something was made in America, then that was a quality thing. We had our act together. All those factories that were cranking out, oh, pickguards, they could have been cranking out bullets. We were used to having things made to a high tolerance and quality. You could get a good piece of mahogany that was light. There was a readiness of availability of good things."

And, he explains, it was a time when, for guitarists, louder and cleaner was the key. "Now, it's like I have to go through eight million gain stages to have it still sound like a vacuum cleaner. That's the new priority. But back then, it was loud and clean. Everything was on the edge of its tolerance, especially the amp. I think all that adds up after a while."

Bonamassa is still just in his early 30s. Why is he so taken with the players and with a sound that started way before he was even born? "I don't feel like I'm the only guy in my age group that appreciates that kind of guitar. There will always be an interest in them, because there will always be an interest in Led Zeppelin, those great Les Paul players, the Jeff Becks, the Claptons.

"Every kid loves Led Zeppelin. Unless there's something wrong with them," he laughs, adding: "You know, 'Whole Lotta Love' still resonates. Look at some of the real good footage of that band, and Jimmy Page with his Les Paul is just so front and centre. It has such a cool factor. I don't think it will ever be not cool to want a Les Paul and a Marshall and to want to play like Jimmy Page."

It's true. The best examples of the original Gibson Les Paul Bursts possess a magical combination of playability, tone, and style that for many players remains unbeatable. Gibson themselves recognize the true worth of the Burst and have a prestigious line of no-expense-spared high-end reissues. And upon the 50th anniversary of the revered 1959 model, in 2009, the company is marking the occasion with a remarkable series of signature models from some of the most famous Les Paul players ever. Here's to the next 50 years!



## JUNE 1964

KEITH RICHARDS ACQUIRES A 1959 BURST WHILE ON TOUR IN THE USA WITH THE ROLLING STONES. HE IS THE FIRST WELL-KNOWN MUSICIAN PLAYER TO PLAY THE GUITAR.

1940

\* GUITARIST LES PAUL SIGNS HIS FIRST ENDORSEMENT DEAL WITH GIBSON, APPEARING IN ADS WITH THE ELECTRIC ARCHTOP ES-300 MODEL.

1945

\* OCTOBER: LES PAUL'S FIRST NUMBER 1 RECORD, AS HE PLAYS ON 'ITS BEEN A LONG LONG TIME' BY BING CROSBY WITH THE LES PAUL TRIO.

1946

\* AROUND THIS TIME, LES PAUL TAKES TO GIBSON HIS EXPERIMENTAL HOMEMADE SEMI-SOLID GUITAR TO TRY TO CONVINCE THEM TO SELL THE INSTRUMENT COMMERCIALLY. GIBSON SAYS NO.

1948

\* FEBRUARY: 'LOVER' IS LES PAUL'S FIRST SOLO RECORD USING NEW OVERDUBBING TECHNIQUES TO CREATE AN ORCHESTRA OF GUITARS. IT REACHES NUMBER 21.

\* APRIL: TED MCCARTY JOINS GIBSON FROM THE WURLITZER ORGAN COMPANY.

1950

\* SUMMER: TED MCCARTY IS APPOINTED PRESIDENT AT GIBSON, REPLACING THE OUTGOING GUY HART.

\* OCTOBER: FENDER IN CALIFORNIA BEGINS TO SELL ITS BROADCASTER, THE WORLD'S FIRST COMMERCIAL SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITAR. NEXT YEAR IT IS RENAMED THE TELECASTER.

1951

\* APRIL: LES PAUL'S BIG SMASH WITH SINGING PARTNER MARY FORD IS 'HOW HIGH THE MOON', A NUMBER 1 SINGLE ACROSS AMERICA.

1952

\* SUMMER: GIBSON LAUNCHES THE GOLD-FINISH LES PAUL MODEL. THE COMPANY'S FIRST SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITAR, IT BECOMES KNOWN AS THE GOLDTOP.

\* SETH LOVER JOINS GIBSON FULL-TIME TO WORK IN THE ELECTRONICS DEPARTMENT. HIS TASKS INCLUDE PICKUP DEVELOPMENT.

1953

\* THE ORIGINAL 'TRAPEZE' TAILPIECE ON THE GOLDTOP IS CHANGED TO A NEW 'WRAPOVER' COMBINED BRIDGE-TAILPIECE.

1954

\* GIBSON INTRODUCES THREE NEW LES PAUL MODELS ALONGSIDE THE GOLDTOP: THE DELUXE BLACK CUSTOM AND THE BUDGET JUNIOR AND TV.

1955

\* GIBSON'S ADJUSTABLE TUNE-O-MATIC BRIDGE, INTRODUCED LAST YEAR ON THE CUSTOM, IS NOW STOCK ON THE GOLDTOP.

\* SETH LOVER BEGINS WORK IN THE ELECTRONICS DEPARTMENT ON A NEW HUMBUCKING PICKUP.

\* THE LES PAUL SPECIAL, A TWO-PICKUP JUNIOR, DEBUTS THIS YEAR.

1956

\* THE JUNIOR HITS A RECORD FOR ANNUAL PRODUCTION AMONG LES PAUL MODELS, SHIPPING 3,129 UNITS THIS YEAR, AND GIBSON INTRODUCES A VERSION OF THE JUNIOR WITH A SHORTER 'THREE-QUARTER SCALE' NECK.

1957

\* GIBSON INTRODUCES ITS NEW HUMBUCKING PICKUP, APPEARING THIS YEAR ON THE GOLDTOP AND CUSTOM LES PAUL MODELS.

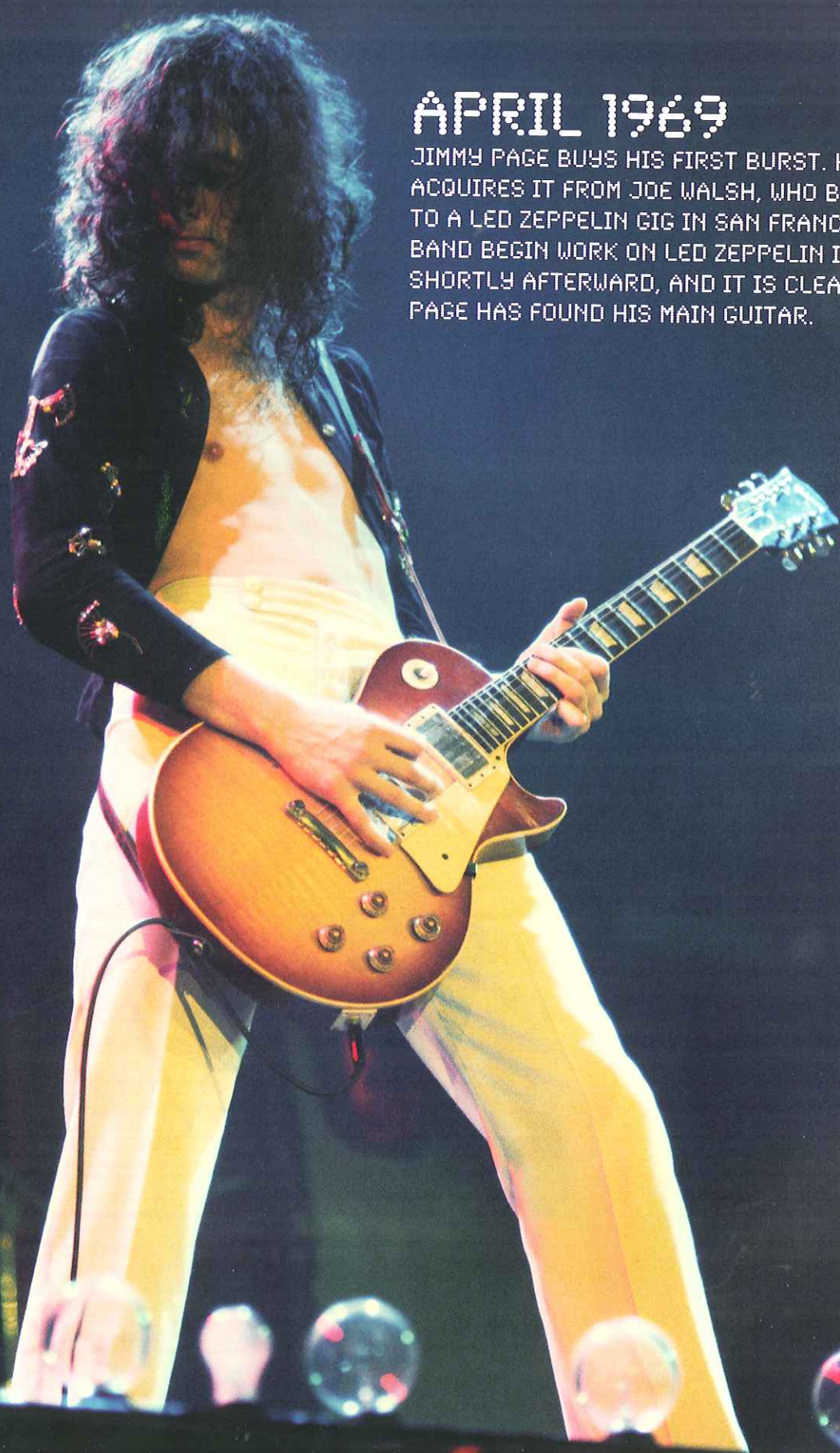
1958

\* SUMMER: THE GOLDTOP LOSES ITS OPAQUE GOLD PAINT AND GAINS A SUNBURST FINISH INSTEAD. IT WILL BECOME KNOWN LATER AS THE 'BURST' AND BE REVERED AS THE GREATEST LES PAUL GUITAR EVER MADE. MEANWHILE, THIS YEAR, GIBSON PRODUCES A COMBINED TOTAL OF 434 GOLDTOPS AND BURSTS.

\* THE LES PAUL JUNIOR, JUNIOR THREE-QUARTER, AND TV MODELS ARE REDESIGNED WITH A NEW DOUBLE-CUTAWAY BODY.

## APRIL 1969

JIMMY PAGE BUYS HIS FIRST BURST. HE ACQUIRES IT FROM JOE WALSH, WHO BRINGS IT TO A LED ZEPPELIN GIG IN SAN FRANCISCO. THE BAND BEGIN WORK ON LED ZEPPELIN II ALBUM SHORTLY AFTERWARD, AND IT IS CLEAR THAT PAGE HAS FOUND HIS MAIN GUITAR.



1959

\* GIBSON SHIPS 643 BURSTS THIS YEAR.

1960

\* GIBSON SHIPS 635 BURSTS THIS YEAR BEFORE CEASING PRODUCTION OF THE MODEL. THE MODEL IS NAMED IN THIS YEAR'S CATALOGUE AS THE STANDARD.

1961

\* A NEW LES PAUL STANDARD IS PRODUCED BY GIBSON, IN A DOUBLE-CUTAWAY DESIGN THAT WILL SOON BE RENAMED AS THE SG STYLE.

1965

\* MAY/JUNE: IN LONDON, ENGLAND, ERIC CLAPTON BUYS HIS FIRST BURST, PLAYING IT LIVE WITH JOHN MAYALL'S BLUESBREAKERS.

\* TOWARD THE END OF THIS YEAR, A YOUNG PETER GREEN GETS A SUNBURST LES PAUL TOO AFTER SEEING CLAPTON WITH HIS. GREEN SOON JOINS HIS FIRST PROPER BAND, PETER B'S LOONERS.

1966

\* FEBRUARY: YARDBIRDS GUITARIST JEFF BECK ACQUIRES HIS FIRST BURST, A 1959 MODEL. HE USES IT TO RECORD THE SINGLE 'OVER UNDER SIDWAYS DOWN' AND THE YARDBIRDS ALBUM IN APRIL, MAY, AND JUNE.

\* MAY: ERIC CLAPTON RECORDS BLUES BREAKERS JOHN MAYALL WITH ERIC CLAPTON, WIDELY KNOWN AS THE BEANO ALBUM FOR THE COMIC ERIC IS READING IN THE JACKET PHOTO. CLAPTON PLAYS HIS BURST ON THE RECORD, WHICH WILL BECOME A BLUES CLASSIC.

\* JULY: CLAPTON'S BURST IS STOLEN DURING REHEARSALS FOR HIS NEW GROUP, CREAM. HE BORROWS A SIMILAR GUITAR FOR CREAM'S EARLY GIGS.

\* JULY: PETER GREEN, PLAYING HIS BURST, JOINS MAYALL'S BLUESBREAKERS AS CLAPTON'S REPLACEMENT.

\* AUGUST: EAST-WEST ALBUM BY THE PAUL BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND IS RELEASED, FEATURING MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD ON A GOLDTOP.

\* SEPTEMBER: BY NOW, CLAPTON HAS ACQUIRED HIS SECOND BURST, BOUGHT FROM GUITARIST ANDY SUMMERS (LATER OF THE POLICE). HE USES IT TO RECORD THE FRESH CREAM ALBUM IN OCTOBER AND 'I FEEL FREE' SINGLE IN NOVEMBER.

\* SEPTEMBER: IN THE YARDBIRDS, SECOND GUITARIST JIMMY PAGE PLAYS JEFF BECK'S SUNBURST LES PAUL WHILE BECK IS ABSENT FROM THE GROUP FOR A WEEK.

\* OCTOBER: BLOOMFIELD TOURS THE UK WITH THE BUTTERFIELD BAND, STILL PLAYING HIS GOLDTOP. HE MEETS CLAPTON AND VOWS TO GET THE SAME EQUIPMENT AS THE ENGLISHMAN.

1967

\* EARLY THIS YEAR, ERIC CLAPTON'S SECOND BURST IS STOLEN. THE CREAM GUITARIST MOVES TO AN SG STANDARD AS HIS MAIN AXE.

\* MAY: PROBABLY THIS MONTH MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD TRADES HIS GOLDTOP FOR A BURST WITH PRIME MOVERS GUITARIST DAN ERLEWINE.

\* AUGUST: PETER GREEN'S NEW GROUP FLEETWOOD MAC DEBUTS AT WINDSOR FESTIVAL IN ENGLAND. HE STILL FAVOURS HIS BURST, NOW WITH 'REVERSED' NECK PICKUP.

\* SEPTEMBER: KEITH RICHARDS SELLS HIS BURST TO MICK TAYLOR, WHO IMMEDIATELY BEGINS USING IT IN JOHN MAYALL'S BLUESBREAKERS.

1968

\* FEBRUARY: PETER GREEN'S FLEETWOOD MAC IS THE DEBUT ALBUM FROM THE GROUP, WITH GREEN GROWING EVER MORE CONFIDENT ON HIS BURST.

\* APRIL: JEFF BECK BEGINS RECORDING TRUTH ALBUM, STILL USING HIS BURST, FROM WHICH HE HAS BY NOW STRIPPED THE PAINT.

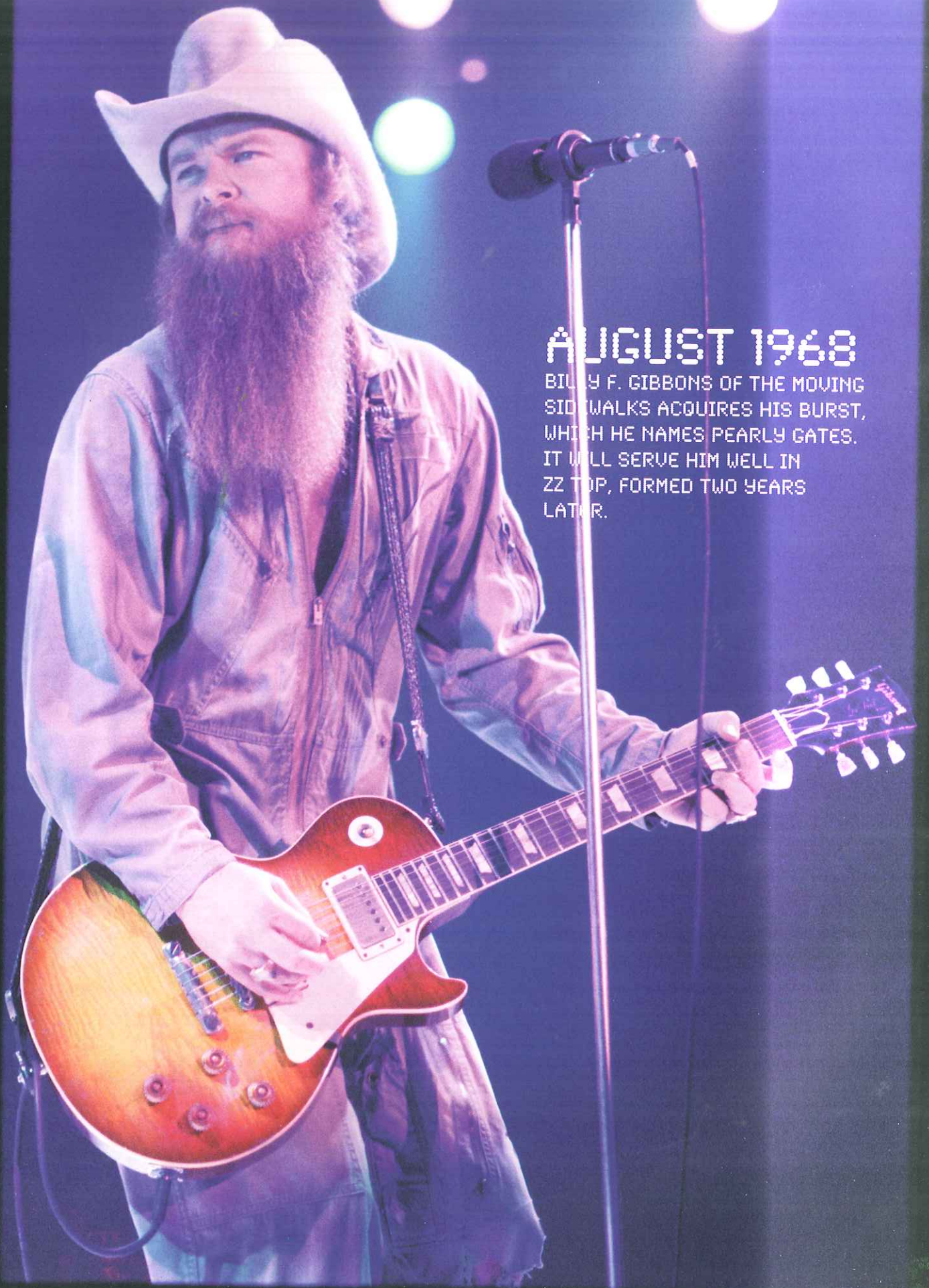
\* MAY: MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD RECORDS SUPER SESSION WITH AL KOOPER. THE MILLION-SELLING ALBUM FEATURES BLOOMFIELD RIPPING INTO HIS BURST.

\* JUNE: GIBSON LAUNCHES TWO REISSUE 'ORIGINAL STYLE' LES PAUL MODELS: A BLACK CUSTOM AND A GOLDTOP WITH P-90S. NO SIGN OF THE BURST WITH HUMBUCKERS THAT EVERYONE WANTS.

\* AUGUST: PROBABLY THIS MONTH, BILLY F. GIBBONS OF THE MOVING SIDEWALKS ACQUIRES HIS BURST, WHICH HE NAMES PEARLY GATES. IT WILL SERVE HIM WELL IN ZZ TOP, FORMED TWO YEARS LATER.

\* OCTOBER: JEFF BECK RETIRES HIS FIRST BURST, AFTER ILL-CONCEIVED RESTORATION, AND BUYS HIS SECOND, FROM RICK NIELSEN (LATER OF CHEAP TRICK).

\* NOVEMBER: FREE'S DEBUT ALBUM TONS OF SOBS RELEASED. GUITARIST PAUL KOSOFF IS A CONFIRMED BURST FAN AND WILL PLAY SEVERAL EXAMPLES OVER THE COMING YEARS.



## AUGUST 1968

BILLY F. GIBBONS OF THE MOVING SID WALKS ACQUIRES HIS BURST, WHICH HE NAMES PEARLY GATES. IT WILL SERVE HIM WELL IN ZZ TOP, FORMED TWO YEARS LATER.



1969

- \* ORIGINAL USED 1958-60 SUNBURST LES PAULS ARE SELLING FOR AROUND \$80-500.
- \* GIBSON HAS A NEW OWNER, NORLIN. CHANGES TO LES PAUL MODELS UNDER THE NEW REGIME INCLUDE A 'PANCAKE' BODY AND A HEADSTOCK 'VOLUTE'.
- \* GIBSON DROPS GOLDTOP REISSUE AND REPLACES IT WITH LES PAUL DELUXE, FITTED WITH MINI-HUMBUCKERS.
- \* APRIL: PROBABLY THIS MONTH, JIMMY PAGE BUYS HIS FIRST BURST. HE ACQUIRES IT FROM JOE WALSH, WHO BRINGS IT TO A LED ZEPPELIN GIG IN SAN FRANCISCO. THE BAND BEGIN WORK ON LED ZEPPELIN II ALBUM SHORTLY AFTERWARD, AND IT IS CLEAR THAT PAGE HAS FOUND HIS MAIN GUITAR.

1970

- \* SUMMER: DUANE ALLMAN ACQUIRES HIS FIRST BURST, TRADING IT FOR A GOLDTOP AND SOME CASH. HE WILL USE IT WHEN HE GUESTS ON ERIC CLAPTON'S LAYLA ALBUM, RECORDED IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER.
- \* SEPTEMBER: FREE'S SINGLE 'ALL RIGHT NOW' PEAKS AT NUMBER 4 ON THE US CHART, WITH PAUL KOSSOFF'S BURST SOARING THROUGHOUT.

1971

- \* DUANE ALLMAN ACQUIRES HIS SECOND BURST, A TOBACCO-SUNBURST GUITAR HE NICKNAMES HOT 'LANTA. HE PLAYS IT ON THE CLASSIC ALLMAN BROTHERS ALBUMS AT FILLMORE EAST AND EAT A PEACH. DUANE IS TRAGICALLY KILLED IN OCTOBER.

1972

- \* TOWARD THE END OF THE YEAR, JEFF BECK BUYS HIS THIRD LES PAUL, AFTER FORMING POWER TRIO BECK BOGERT & APPICE. BY NOW HE IS ALSO PLAYING FENDER STRATOCASTERS, BUT BECK LIKES HIS CONVERTED GOLDTOP (WITH ADDED HUMBUCKERS AND UNUSUAL 'OXBLOOD' FINISH). HE WILL USE THE GUITAR TO RECORD SOME OF THE BLOW BY BLOW ALBUM OF 1974.

1991

- \* GIBSON REVISES ITS BURST REISSUES INTO TWO MODELS, EFFECTIVELY THE 59 FLAMETOP REISSUE AND THE STANDARD 60 FLAMETOP REISSUE. THIS MARKS THE START OF THE PROPER, MODERN HISTORIC REISSUES.
- \* ORIGINAL USED 1958-60 BURSTS ARE SELLING FOR AROUND \$15,000-40,000.

1993

- \* GIBSON PRESENTS REVISED AND IMPROVED REISSUE BURSTS AT NAMM TRADE SHOW.

1995

- \* FIRST SIGNATURE LES PAUL MODEL IS A BURST RELEASED THIS YEAR FOR JIMMY PAGE.

1999

- \* FIRST 'RELIC' LES PAUL ISSUED BY GIBSON, THE STANDARD 59 REISSUE AGED MODEL, MADE TO LOOK LIKE AN OLD, PLAYED-IN GUITAR BY TOM MURPHY. THE SCHEME IS LATER KNOWN AS CUSTOM AUTHENTIC AND VINTAGE ORIGINAL SPEC (U.O.S.).

2004

- \* SECOND SIGNATURE LES PAUL FOR JIMMY PAGE IS ISSUED BY GIBSON, ALONG WITH A SLASH SIGNATURE MODEL.
- \* ORIGINAL USED 1958-60 SUNBURST LES PAULS ARE SELLING FOR ANYTHING FROM ABOUT \$45,000 TO AROUND \$250,000.

2006

- \* GIBSON ISSUES SIGNATURE MODEL FOR DUANE ALLMAN.

2009

- \* GIBSON MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HALLOWED 1959 BURST, NOW CONSIDERED BY PLAYERS AND COLLECTORS AS MARKING THE PEAK OF THE 58-60 MODEL. THE CELEBRATIONS INCLUDE THE RELEASE OF SPECIAL LIMITED RUNS OF SEVERAL SIGNATURE GUITARS.

## 1959 LES PAUL

The 1959 Les Paul guitar represents the pinnacle of imaginative design and masterful craftsmanship. This guitar has become the Holy Grail of guitars in the minds of professionals and collectors the world over.

The Les Paul guitar was born more than 50 years ago, in 1952, when the Gibson company of Kalamazoo, Michigan, put on sale its first solid body electric 'Spanish' guitar. Today, we don't think twice about such an instrument. To most people, that's what 'electric guitar' means: a six-string with a solid wooden body, a long fretted neck, pickups and controls. It's the kind of guitar on which almost every kind of music is made now: pop music, rock music, country music, any flavor you like. But back in the early 50s it was a shocking new idea.

In 1958, Gibson made a radical design change to three of the Les Paul models and a cosmetic alteration to another. Remarkably, that small visual alteration provides the basis for the most desired and collectable Les Paul guitar ever made, and the basis for the story in Tony Bacon's book, *Million Dollar Les Paul*. Gibson's new cherry sunburst meant that the maple body top was now clearly visible through the finish. The quality of the maple used for the tops was never advertised or promoted by Gibson, because it was simply down to the maple that happened to be available, whether figured or plain. If a good-looking Burst happened to come along now and again that was a bonus. Some were remarkably attractive; some were extremely plain.

"Guitarists the world over are familiar with Gibson's famous series of Les Paul Guitars," the company proclaimed in *The Gibson Gazette* at the end of 1958. "They include some of the finest solid body instruments manufactured today – and lead the field in popularity.

Among guitar fans, the sunburst Les Paul has since become the most highly prized solid body electric guitar ever. Today, they regularly fetch huge sums, far in excess of almost all other collectable electric guitars.

Tony Bacon 2008/2009

HERITAGE CHERRY SUNBURST



Body & Hardware:

Carved figured maple top  
Solid, non-weight relieved mahogany back  
Single-ply cream binding on top  
Nickel hardware  
ABR-1 Bridge & lightweight stop-bar tailpiece  
Thin toggle switch washer & jackplate  
Vintage tulip tuners

Neck & Headstock:

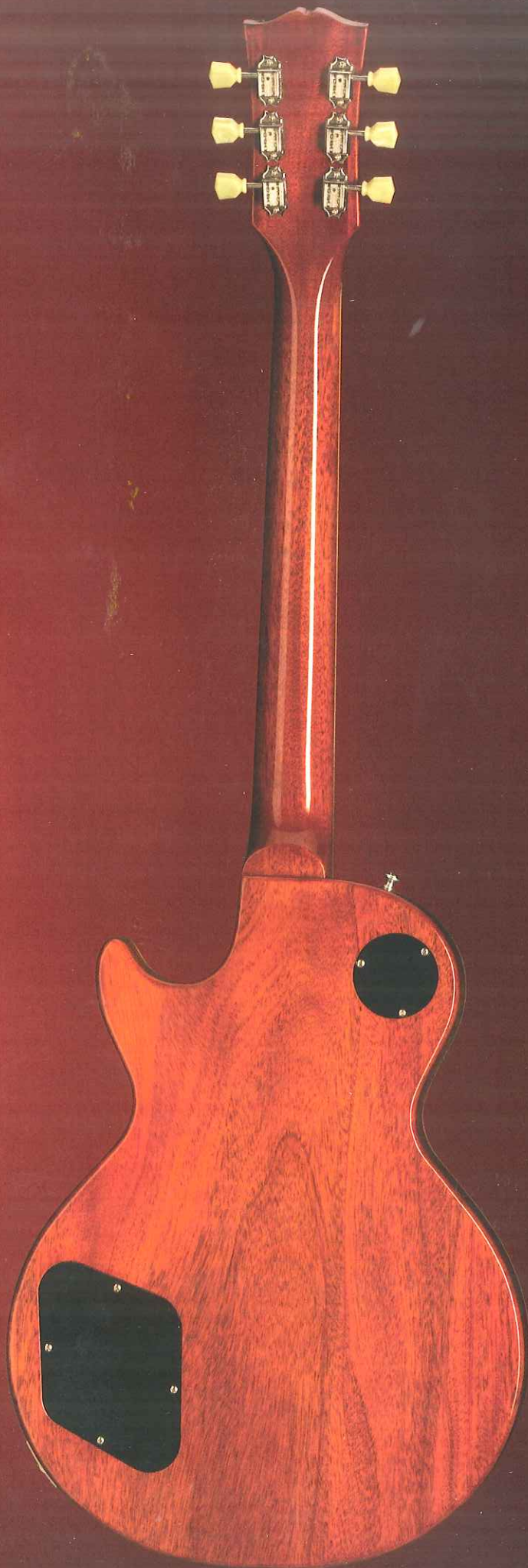
1-piece mahogany neck w/long neck tenon  
22 fret rosewood fingerboard  
Acrylic trapezoid inlays  
Single-ply cream binding  
1959 rounded neck profile  
24 3/4" scale length, 1 11/16" nut width  
Holly headstock veneer

Electronics & Strings:

BurstBucker 1 (R) and 2 (T) pickups  
CTS pots and bumble bee capacitors  
2 volume, 2 tone, 3-way selector switch  
String gauge set .010

HERITAGE DARKBURST

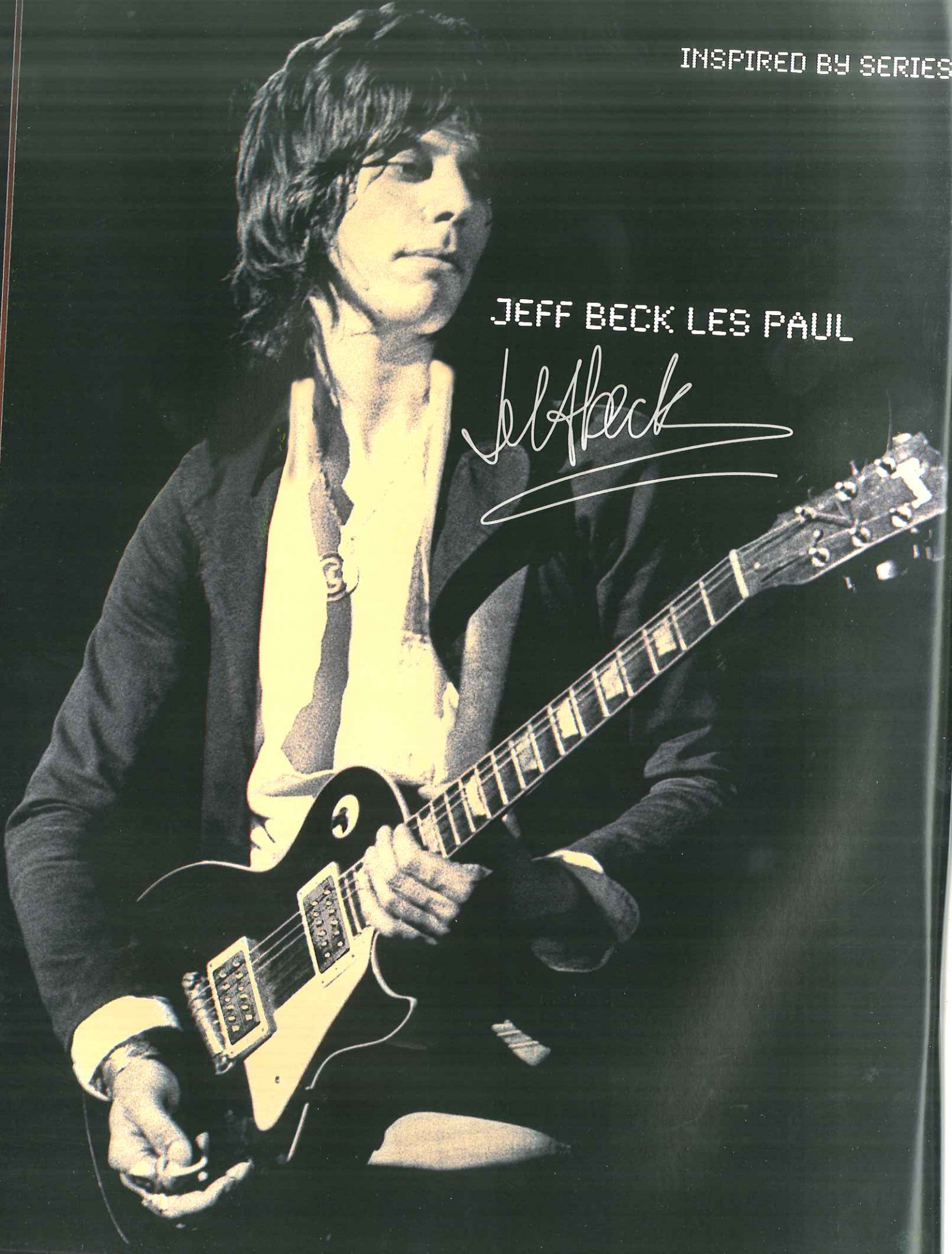




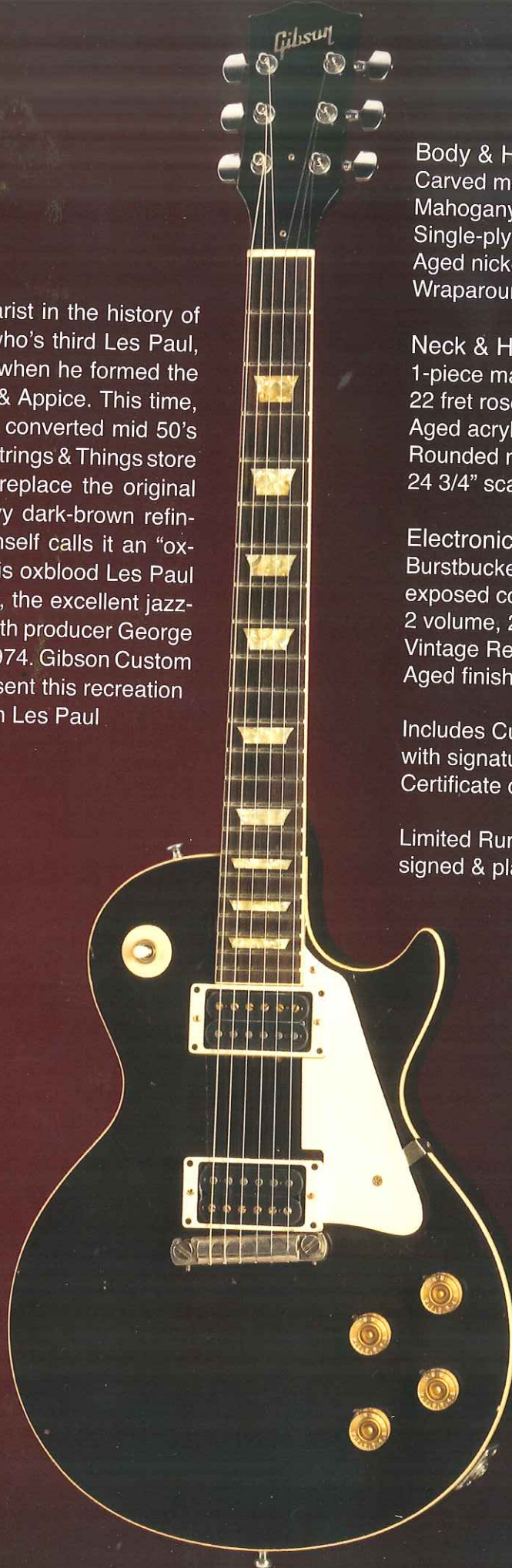
INSPIRED BY SERIES

JEFF BECK LES PAUL

*Jeff Beck*



The most influential guitarist in the history of Rock Music, Jeff Beck, who's third Les Paul, came along in late 1972 when he formed the power trio Beck, Bogert, & Appice. This time, in Memphis, he bought a converted mid 50's Goldtop, modified by the Strings & Things store with two humbuckers to replace the original P-90 pickups and a heavy dark-brown refinish to the body. Beck himself calls it an "ox-blood" color. Beck used his oxblood Les Paul on some of *Blow by Blow*, the excellent jazz-rock album he recorded with producer George Martin toward the end of 1974. Gibson Custom Division is honored to present this recreation of Jeff Beck's 1954 Gibson Les Paul Standard Oxblood.



**Body & Hardware:**  
Carved maple top  
Mahogany back  
Single-ply cream binding on top  
Aged nickel hardware  
Wraparound tailpiece

**Neck & Headstock:**  
1-piece mahogany neck  
22 fret rosewood fingerboard  
Aged acrylic trapezoid inlays  
Rounded neck profile  
24 3/4" scale length, 1 11/16" nut width

**Electronics & Strings:**  
Burstbucker 2 (R) & Burstbucker 3 (T)  
exposed coil pickups  
2 volume, 2 tone, 3-way selector switch  
Vintage Reissue .010 strings  
Aged finish

Includes Custom Shop case silkscreened with signature, custom care kit & Certificate of Authenticity.

Limited Run of 150 with the first 50 signed & played by Jeff Beck

INSPIRED BY SERIES

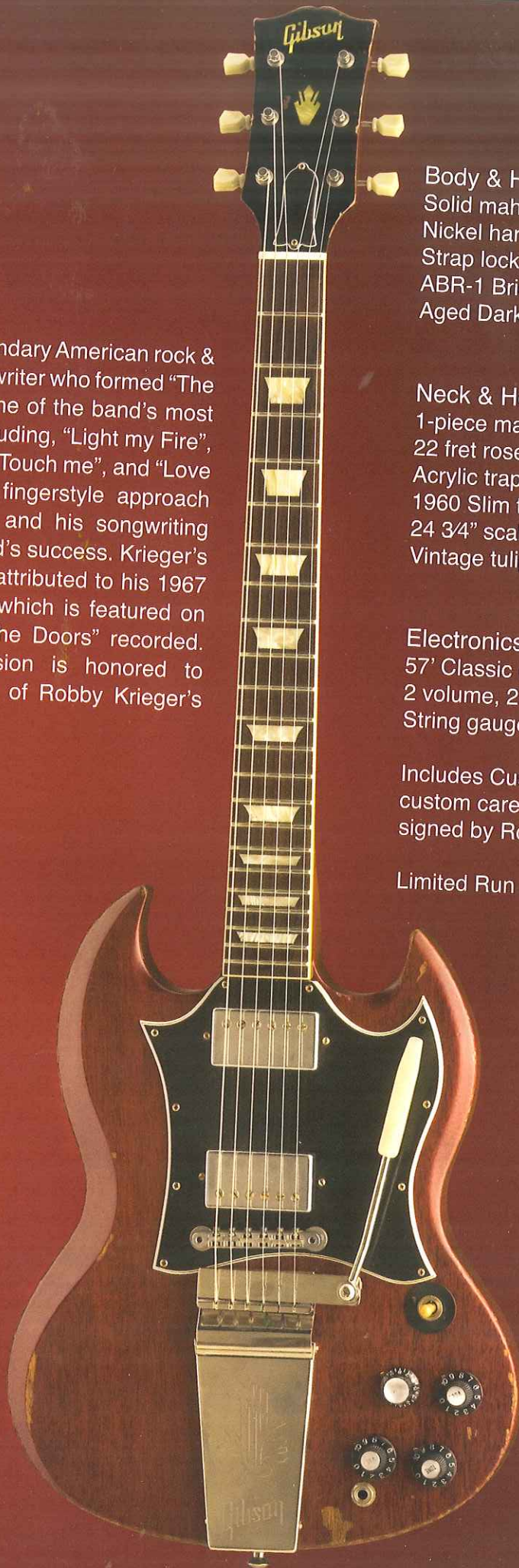
ROBBY KRIEGER SG

*Robby Krieger*





Robby Krieger, a legendary American rock & roll guitarist and songwriter who formed "The Doors" and wrote some of the band's most well known songs including, "Light my Fire", "Love me two times", "Touch me", and "Love her madly". Robby's fingerstyle approach to the electric guitar and his songwriting contributed to the band's success. Krieger's unique sound can be attributed to his 1967 Gibson SG Standard which is featured on almost every song "The Doors" recorded. Gibson Custom Division is honored to present the recreation of Robby Krieger's 1967 SG Standard.



**Body & Hardware:**  
Solid mahogany body  
Nickel hardware  
Strap locks  
ABR-1 Bridge , Maestro tailpiece  
Aged Dark Heritage Cherry finish

**Neck & Headstock:**  
1-piece mahogany neck  
22 fret rosewood fingerboard  
Acrylic trapezoid inlays  
1960 Slim taper neck profile  
24 3/4" scale length, 1 11/16" nut width  
Vintage tulip tuners

**Electronics & Strings:**  
57' Classic (R) and 57' Classic (T) pickups  
2 volume, 2 tone, 3-way selector switch  
String gauge set .010

Includes Custom Shop case,  
custom care kit & Certificate of Authenticity  
signed by Robby

Limited Run of 100

# EPIPHONE WILSHIRE

## Body & Hardware:

1-piece mahogany body  
Nickel hardware  
ABR-1 Bridge  
Stop bar tailpiece

## Neck & Headstock:

1-piece mahogany neck  
22 fret rosewood fingerboard  
Pearloid dot inlays  
Wilshire neck profile  
24  $\frac{3}{4}$ " scale length, 1  $\frac{11}{16}$ " nut width  
Kluson tuners

## Electronics & Strings:

P90 (R) & P90 (T) pickups  
2 volume, 2 tones, & 3-way selector switch  
Vintage .010 strings

Available in Dark Faded Cherry finish

Includes Custom Shop case, & certificate of authenticity



# 1959 ES-335 DOT

## Body & Hardware:

Plain laminated maple top, back, & rims  
Single-ply cream binding on top and back  
Nickel hardware  
ABR-1 Bridge, stop-bar tailpiece

## Neck & Headstock:

1-piece mahogany neck with long tenon  
22 fret rosewood fingerboard  
Pearloid dot inlays  
Single-ply cream fingerboard binding  
1959 rounded neck profile  
24 3/4" scale length, 1 11/16" nut width  
Holly headstock veneer  
Vintage tulip tuners

## Electronics & Strings:

'57 Classic humbucking pickups  
CTS pots and bumble bee capacitors  
2 volume, 2 tone, 3-way selector switch  
String gauge set .010

Limited Run

Available in Antique Vintage Sunburst & Antique Natural: Gloss & V.O.S.

Includes Custom Shop case, certificate of authenticity,  
& custom care kit



# TRINI LOPEZ WITH TRAPEZE

## Body & Hardware:

Plain laminated maple top, back, & rims  
Diamond shaped f-holes  
Single-ply white binding on top and back  
Chrome hardware  
ABR-1 Bridge, trapeze tailpiece

## Neck & Headstock:

1-piece mahogany neck  
Non-reverse Firebird headstock  
22 fret rosewood fingerboard  
Acrylic split diamond inlays  
Single-ply white fingerboard binding  
Rounded neck profile  
24 3/4" scale length, 1 11/16" nut width  
Kidney Mini-Grover tuners

## Electronics & Strings:

'57 Classic humbucking pickups  
2 volume, 2 tone, 3-way selector switch  
String gauge set .010

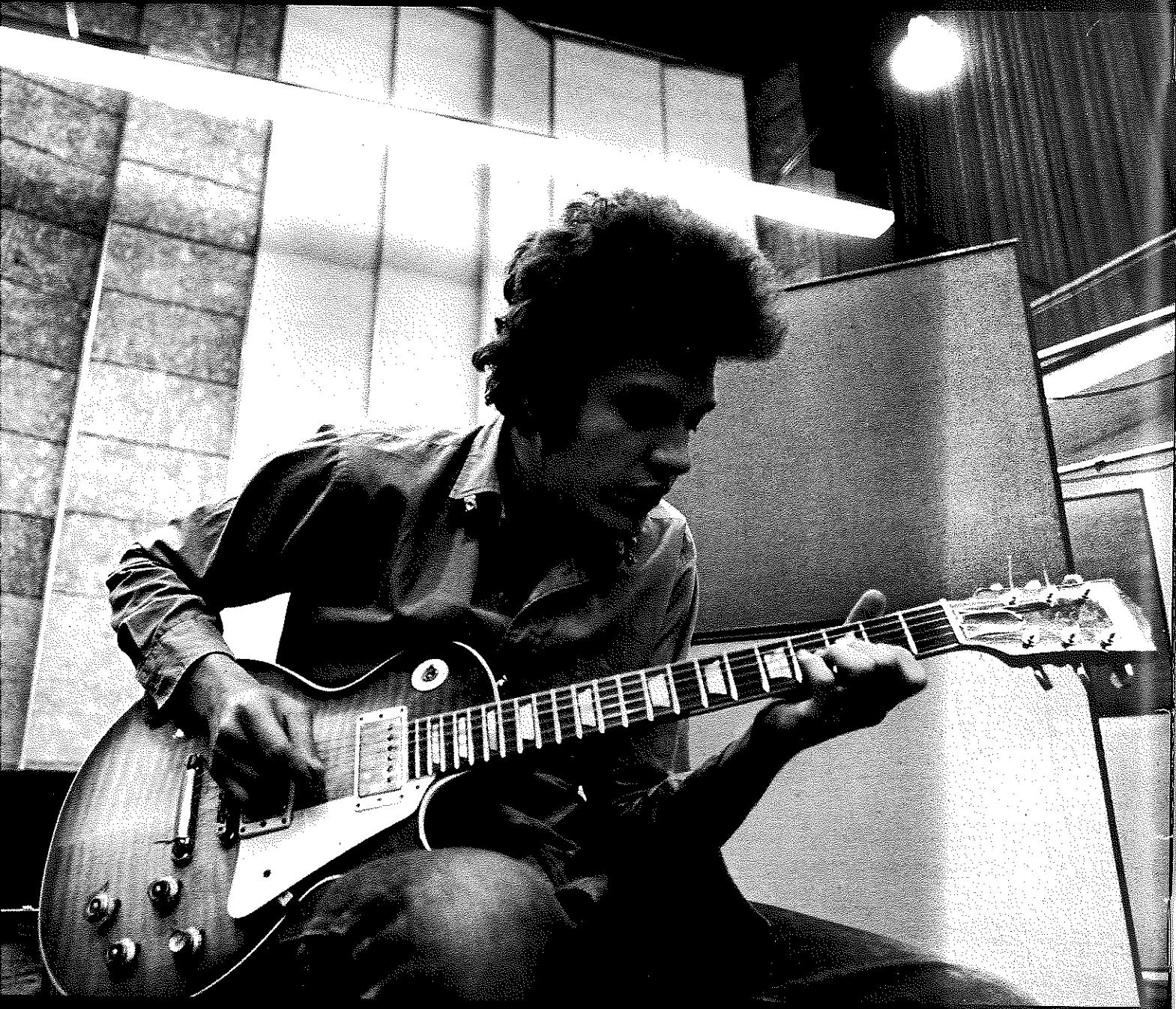
Limited Run

Available in Antique Faded Red finish

Includes Custom Shop case, certificate of authenticity,  
& custom care kit



## MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD 1959 LES PAUL



THE LEGENDARY BIG-CITY BLUES GUITARIST AND SESSION PLAYER, MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD, PERFORMED WITH SOME OF THE MOST RENOWNED BLUES PLAYERS IN THE WORLD. THAT ICONIC BLOOMFIELD SOUND THAT WAS CREATED ON HIS INCREDIBLE 1959 GIBSON LES PAUL STANDARD GUITAR CAN BE HEARD ON MUSIC FROM THE BUTTERFIELD BLUES BAND, THE ELECTRIC FLAG, BOB DYLAN (MORE NOTABLY ON HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED), AND SUPER SESSIONS WITH AL KOOPER AND STEPHEN STILLS (WHICH IS PROBABLY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL RECORDING OF BLOOMFIELD'S CAREER). GIBSON CUSTOM DIVISION IS HONORED TO PRESENT THE RECREATION OF MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD'S 1959 LES PAUL STANDARD.