

The World's Only Global Musical Instrument Museum

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From Earliest Imagination to Musical Revolution, the Story of the Electric Guitar Comes to Life at MIM

Take a glimpse into the untold history of the electric guitar

PHOENIX (September 24, 2018) – Opening on November 9, the Musical Instrument Museum's (MIM) newest exhibition, *The Electric Guitar: Inventing an American Icon*, shares the untold story of the invention of the electric guitar, an instrument that revolutionized music and popular culture forever.

This exclusive exhibition showcases more than eighty of the rarest electric guitars and amplifiers in the world—from some of the first ever heard to those played by the most famous electric guitarists known today. *The Electric Guitar: Inventing an American Icon* encompasses the history of the electric guitar from the very beginning, including its most experimental period of the 1930s and 1940s, its impact on music and culture, and its current iconic status. Decades before rock and roll, these instruments jolted, energized, and even confused the eardrums of the nation. This exhibition gives a glimpse into the electric guitar's influence on genres that defined American music, including Hawaiian music, dance orchestras, western swing, jazz, and rock and roll itself.

This early history of electric amplification celebrates the bold inventors, adventurous performers, and radical instruments responsible for making sounds that, literally, had never been heard before. Even though these early electric instruments and amplifiers were developed nearly ninety years ago, many of them remain technologically, aesthetically, and musically sophisticated today. The exhibition's remarkable collection features the personal instruments of groundbreaking artists who were among the first to play and popularize the electric guitar, such as Alvin Rey, Charlie Christian, Les Paul, Bo Diddley, and Eldon Shamblin. Guests will also see authentic guitars played by next generations of influential musicians, including Pete Townshend of the Who and Ron Wood and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones, who continued to transform the sound of the electric guitar while cementing its international reputation.

Highlights of the exhibition include:

- **Alvin Rey's Electro A-25 (1932)** – This instrument was likely the first electric guitar ever played on a national radio broadcast. Its new sound shocked the world, igniting a music revolution. Considered the "Father of the Electric Guitar," Alvin Rey was not only a talented performer but also a direct contributor to the research and development of amplified instruments for brands such as Rickenbacker, Gibson, and Fender.
- **Audiovox model 336 Duo double-neck (c. 1936)** – Possibly the only known original example of its kind by Paul Tutmarc's Audiovox company, the guitar had two necks that accommodated specialized tunings for the popular Hawaiian-style of steel guitar playing. No longer operating today, Audiovox is one of the lesser-known pioneering manufacturers from the first years of the electric guitar.
- **Charlie Christian's Gibson ES-250 (1940)** – Charlie Christian, the acknowledged pioneer of the electric jazz guitar, played this remarkable instrument while a member of Benny Goodman's sextet. An early adopter of the electric guitar, Christian was already performing captivating solos and thrilling audiences with the new sound by 1937, earning his status as the first modern electric guitar hero.

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- **Paul Bigsby “Standard” guitar (1949)** – Paul Bigsby was one of the earliest champions of the solid-body electric guitar, even before Fender and Gibson helped bring the concept into mass production and popularity. Played by Tommy “Butterball” Paige with country star Ernest Tubb, this guitar is the third “Standard” solid body by Bigsby and the first to feature two pickups with a selector switch.
- **Pete Townshend’s Gibson Les Paul Deluxe (1976)** – Pete Townshend elevated both the volume and the drama of rock and roll as legendary guitarist for the Who. Featuring modified electronics and marked with a large number “5” for quick identification on stage, this Les Paul was a staple of live performances in the late 1970s.
- **Bo Diddley’s “The Bad Dude” (1998)** – Personally designed and played by rock-and-roll originator Bo Diddley late in his life, this electric guitar features the artist’s signature rectangular body as well as onboard electronic effects and a synthesizer pickup. Diddley considered it the best guitar he had ever owned.

The electric guitar plays an integral role in American music and culture and inspired emulation worldwide. Original video production featuring on-camera demonstrations of some of these historic instruments and interviews with Grammy Award–winning jazz guitarist George Benson, guitar historians and collectors, friends and family of the pioneers of the electric guitar, and more will help bring this innovative period of music to life as guests become immersed in this story.

“This will be a memorable exhibition, revealing the deep history of the electric guitar and its impact over the years,” says Richard Walter, PhD, MIM’s curator for United States / Canada and Europe. “Some of these guitars launched entirely new genres of music!”

Based on the private collection of guitar historian Lynn Wheelwright, *The Electric Guitar: Inventing an American Icon* will be on display from November 9, 2018, through September 15, 2019. For information about opening weekend and other supplemental programming, visit MIM.org.

Admission

\$10 for special exhibition only

\$7 when purchased with general museum admission

Presenting sponsor: *The Kemper and Ethel Marley Foundation*

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The Musical Instrument Museum is located at 4725 E. Mayo Boulevard in Phoenix (corner of Tatum and Mayo Boulevards, just south of Loop 101). For general museum information and a full schedule of events, visit MIM.org or call 480.478.6000.

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About MIM

The Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) enriches our world by collecting, preserving, and making accessible an astonishing variety of musical instruments and performance videos from every country in the world. MIM offers guests a welcoming and fun experience, incomparable interactive technology, dynamic programming, and exceptional musical performances. MIM fosters appreciation of the world's diverse cultures by showing how we innovate, adapt, and learn from each other to create music—the language of the soul. To learn more about MIM, visit MIM.org.

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About Lynn Wheelwright and Other Partners

Guitar builder, collector, and historian Lynn Wheelwright has been tirelessly exploring the story of the guitar for decades. Wheelwright's specialization in early electric stringed instruments distinguishes him as a rare expert in a relatively unknown field, whose knowledge is based on hands-on experience with an incomparable range of instruments and artifacts from the fascinating early days of electric amplification. MIM is proud to display a selection of highlights from his private collection, as well as extraordinary instruments from other generous collectors, musicians, luthiers, and family members whose lives have been changed by the electric guitar and its players.

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