

# G U E R N S E Y • S

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## The ‘Holy Grail’ of Electric Guitars up for Auction

— *Guernsey’s to Sell Les Paul “Black Beauty” Guitar on February 19* —

NEW YORK, NY – On February 19, New York City-based auction house Guernsey’s will proudly present the very instrument that many credit for making rock and roll possible. Known as “Black Beauty,” this landmark guitar was designed by and belonged to guitarist-inventor Les Paul decades ago — it is the instrument from which Gibson’s enormously popular Les Paul models evolved. Museums, collectors, musicians, and fans alike will have the opportunity to own this pivotal piece of history when it is put up for auction at the Arader Galleries on Madison Avenue in New York City.

A pioneering musician as well as an avid inventor, Les was always looking to improve upon the guitars he was playing. Approached in the early 1950s by Gibson with the hopes of building a true electric model suited to his needs, the first two guitars constructed (known as “Gold Tops” because of their golden color) had multiple design flaws. In response, Les demanded that a much better instrument be made if it were to bear his name. Though initially referred to as the Les Paul Black Custom, this marvel eventually became known as “Black Beauty.”

The guitar’s storied history began when it left the Gibson factory in December of 1953 and was delivered to Les in early 1954. Modifications and experiments were constantly made on this instrument from its first use in 1954 until its last use in 1976 – all in pursuit of the ideal sound Les craved. He played this guitar for years on the *Les Paul and Mary Ford Show* (famously sponsored by Listerine), as well as during countless stage performances, and professional recordings. This forward-thinking instrument featured superior refinements: a new tune-o-matic bridge and stoptail piece system, finer inlays, and a fancy-looking binding around the entire guitar -- all in black with gold hardware -- reminiscent of a formal black tuxedo.



Many of today's most accomplished musicians keep multiple Les Paul models in their arsenal and play them extensively, including Jimmy Page, Slash, Eric Clapton, Paul McCartney, Bob Marley, Jeff Beck, Neil Young, Dave Grohl, Peter Frampton, Billy Gibbons, Joe Bonamassa, and many, many more. Some of the most famous names in modern rock and blues history proudly played on their own Les Pauls, such as Gary Moore and the legendary Peter Green just to name a few. Indeed, hundreds of thousands of these fine instruments are used around the globe as the guitar of choice for serious players and performers. So important to the history of the electric guitar, Black Beauty appears as the cover story of the February 2015 issue of *Guitar Player Magazine* where it is described simply as "The Grail!"

After more than 20 years of performing with and innovating on this guitar, Les gifted this iconic instrument in 1976 to his personal luthier, technician, and close friend, Tom Doyle, where it has remained in Tom's private collection to this day. Both Les and Tom knew that this instrument would be considered a bellwether, one of the most iconic pieces of Les Paul's career, and a very important and historically significant piece. Some 60 years after it was made for Les Paul, this guitar transcends its inherent importance as a collectable item, a historical musical instrument, and as an amazing piece of memorabilia for fans of the man who made rock and roll a reality.

In addition to this landmark instrument Guernsey's is proud to offer other select items from the collection of Tom Doyle, most notably Chet Atkins' legendary prototype Gretsch guitar known as "Dark Eyes." This one-off Black 6120 model was one of two prototypes Gretsch made for Atkins. (The other was the traditional orange). Chet used the instrument as his benchmark for the many experiments and innovations that would eventually develop the 6120 Model for the mass market; he can also be seen playing this guitar during numerous appearances from the late 1950s. It is by no means a coincidence that both of these black guitars have joined forces once again via this auction, for they each spawned the modern electric offerings of the Gibson and Gretsch guitar companies. *Guitar Player Magazine* called these instruments "Two of the most important guitars in music history," and their importance does not solely lie in the hands that played them, but because of what they represent within the confines of the luthiery arts and advancements in sound technology.

Other important pieces in this collection include Les Paul's Stage Stool from Fat Tuesday's in New York City, Original Ampex Recording Machine from Les Paul's Home Studio, Handwritten set lists, Live Les Paul Show Recordings (1984-1990), Mary Ford's Music Stand and more.

An auction catalogue will be available in January 2015. To order a catalogue, visit [www.guernseys.com](http://www.guernseys.com).

All lots scheduled for this auction will be available for preview at the Arader Galleries located at 1016 Madison Avenue on February 18, 2015 from 1 to 9. Interested bidders

may also preview the items on the day of the auction until 7pm when the bidding will promptly begin.

For additional information visit [www.guernseys.com](http://www.guernseys.com) or contact Guernsey's at 212-794-2280. For media inquiries or to request an interview, please contact Jaclyn Todisco at 646-695-7053 or [Jaclyn@rosengroupr.com](mailto:Jaclyn@rosengroupr.com).

### **About Guernsey's**

Approaching its 40th anniversary, Guernsey's has built a reputation as an auction house known for the presentation of the most extraordinary properties. From the largest auction in history (the contents of the ocean liner S.S. United States) to vintage racing cars on to artwork from the Soviet Union, pre-Castro Cuban cigars and the \$3 million McGwire baseball, the firm has few rivals when it comes to the presentation of wildly diverse art and artifacts. Guernsey's also has brought some of the most famous and intriguing personalities of the 20th Century to auction in events that captivated the world. The official Elvis Presley Auction featuring items from the Graceland Archives on to treasured items relating to the lives and careers of John F. Kennedy, Princess Diana, Jerry Garcia, John Coltrane, Dick Clark, Mickey Mantle and the Beatles were all Guernsey's events. High-quality, high-visibility projects continue to be Guernsey's forte. The Auction house is in the midst of its series of events devoted to the legendary, Holocaust-related poster collection of Dr. Hans Sachs and is currently offering one of America's finest, most historic carousels for sale. Record-setting events of exceptional collections have very much become a Guernsey's trademark.

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