

The History of Gibson Guitars: A Timeline of Important Events

1894 - The earliest documented instrument is made by Orville Gibson, a restaurant clerk in Kalamazoo, MI. Working in his home woodshop, Orville appropriates the carved, arched top design of the violin and applies it to mandolins and guitars. He designs two new mandolin shapes: the scroll-body F style and the teardrop-shaped A, both of which are the standard mandolin styles today. He is granted his one and only patent in 1898.

October 10, 1902 - The Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Mfg. Co., Ltd. is formed. Orville's mandolins are far superior to the bowlbacks or "taterbugs" of his day, and he is unable to meet the rising demand. Five Kalamazoo businessmen buy rights to his name and patent for \$2500 and hire him as a consultant. Orville is not one of the principals of the Gibson company, but he does own some stock. Within six months, however, he is at odds with the board of managers, and he sells his stock to his local saloon keeper. Orville continues to receive a royalty and later a pension until his death in 1918.

1903-World War I Gibson dominates the mandolin world in the golden age of the mandolin orchestra. Refinements such as a smaller size, rounded back and elevated pickguard, combined with aggressive marketing, make Gibson the leading mandolin maker. Gibson bypasses the conventional retail network by enlisting music teachers as "teacher agents." Gibson encourages and supports teacher-agents in forming mandolin orchestras and features photos of ensembles in ads and catalogs over the caption "Every One a Gibson-ite."

1921 Gibson employee Ted McHugh, a woodworker who had sung in a group with Orville Gibson, invents two of the most important innovations in guitar history: the adjustable truss rod and the height-adjustable bridge. All Gibson instruments are still equipped with McHugh's truss rod, and traditional jazz guitars still utilize the bridge he designed.

1922 Gibson introduces the F-5 mandolin and L-5 guitar. World War I killed off the mandolin orchestra and given rise to the tenor banjo, threatening Gibson's existence as a mandolin maker. In an effort to revive the mandolin, Gibson acoustic engineer Lloyd Loar designs the ultimate mandolin, the F-5. Its new features include f-holes, a longer neck and hand-tuned top, tone bars and f-holes. As a companion member of the Style 5 family, he designs the L-5 guitar. Loar and his creations will become legendary, but Gibson almost goes bankrupt, and Loar resigns late in 1924.

1934 The "Advanced" L-5 and Super 400 are introduced. Jazz bands are getting bigger, and Gibson responds to guitarists' need for more volume by advancing the size of the L-5 (and other archtops) from 16" to 17". To take the archtop guitar "over the top," Gibson introduces the 18"-wide Super 400, which is still regarded as the pinnacle of archtop design.

1935 The first Gibson electric guitar is introduced. Gibson enters the new electric market with the EH-150, a Hawaiian style guitar and follows in 1936 with its first "Spanish" standard style electric, the ES-150. "ES" stands for Electric Spanish; the price of the guitar and matching amp is \$150.

1937 The King of the Flat Tops, debuts when singing cowboy movie star Ray Whitley orders a super-large guitar. Gibson put the model into regular production in 1938 as the Super Jumbo. Under its more familiar name, the J-200 or SJ-200, it remains today a badge of identification for country entertainers.

1939 Gibson introduces the first cutaway models, the Super 400 Premier and L-5 Premier. The "cutaway" body gives players easier access to the upper range, and it becomes the preferred style.

World War II Just before switching over to wartime products, Gibson introduces the J-45 and Southerner Jumbo (SJ), which will become the workhorse flat top guitars for coming generations of acoustic players. Chicago Musical Instrument Co., one of the largest wholesale and distribution companies, purchases Gibson in 1944.

1946-51 Gibson perfects the P-90 single-coil pickup and leads the industry in the development of new electric archtops with such classic models as the ES-5 (the first triple-pickup guitar) and ES-175 in 1949, followed by the L-5CES and Super 400CES ("CES" for Cutaway Electric Spanish) in 1951.

1952 Gibson introduces its first solidbody electric guitar, the Les Paul Model. To launch its first solidbody electric, Gibson enlists Les Paul, the biggest recording star of the early '50s and an early proponent of the solidbody guitar. The Gibson Les Paul has gone on to become the most successful "artist" guitar in history and an icon for rock and roll music.

1954 Gibson president Ted McCarty, an engineer who does not know how to play guitar, invents the tune-o-matic bridge with individually adjustable saddles. It debuts on the Les Paul Custom in 1954 and is still today the standard bridge on Gibson electric guitars.

1957 The humbucking pickup, a double-coil design, is perfected by Gibson engineer Seth Lover and installed on Gibson's top-line models. It quickly becomes an industry standard.

1957 Gibson acquires Epiphone. Gibson's foremost rival in the 1930s has fallen on hard times, and Gibson's parent company, CMI, sees an opportunity to increase Gibson's dealer base while still protecting the exclusivity of the Gibson brand. A completely new Epiphone guitar line debuts in 1958. In 1970 Epiphone production is moved overseas, giving Gibson a competitive import brand.

1958 Ted McCarty's three new "modernistic" models the Explorer, Flying V and Moderne cause a stir at the annual NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) trade show. Though commercial failures, they are today among the most valuable of any Gibson production models. McCarty's other great idea of 1958, the ES-335, combines modern solidbody construction with a traditional hollowbody look. The semi-hollow design will become one of the most successful concepts of the electric guitar era.

1965 Gibson hits record production, shipping over 100,000 U.S.-made Gibson and Epiphone instruments for the only year in Gibson history.

1969 ECL, an Ecuadorian company with interests in concrete and beer manufacturing, takes over Gibson and its parent company CMI. The new entity is named Norlin, a combination of the name of ECL's Norton Stevens and CMI's M.H. Berlin.

1974 The Nashville plant opens and production is split between Nashville and Kalamazoo. In 1984, after 65 years as the home of Gibson, the plant at 225 Parsons St. in Kalamazoo is closed and headquarters are moved to Nashville.

1978-82 Norlin is falling fast, but the creative spark remains at Gibson. Gibson recognizes a growing demand for vintage guitars and introduces the first real reissues: the F-SL in 1978, the Les Paul Heritage 80 in 1980, Heritage Korinas in 1982 and the Earl Scruggs Granada-style banjo in 1984. Market demands for innovations are also met with the first B.B. King models in 1980 and the first Chet Atkins solidbody acoustics in 1982.

January 1986 In dire financial trouble, Gibson is rescued by current owners Henry Juszkiewicz and David Berryman. The Flatiron mandolin company of Bozeman, MT, is acquired in 1987 and a new plant in Bozeman is built for Gibson acoustics in 1989. With renewed consumer confidence in the Gibson brand, Gibson Guitar Corp. begins a period of growth characterized by increasing sales and the acquisition of other instrument companies, including Steinberger and Tobias basses, Slingerland drums, Kramer guitars and OMI (the company that makes Dobro resonator guitars).

1993-94 Gibson demonstrates the combination of tradition and innovation that has been synonymous with the Gibson name since 1894. Growing interest in the vintage market prompts a detailed replica of the '59 and '60 flame-top Les Paul. And as Gibson celebrates its Centennial, a new model, the Nighthawk, wins an award for Most Innovative Guitar at the January NAMM show from Music and Sound Retailer for designer J.T. Riboloff.

1994 Gibson Guitar Acquires Slingerland Drums and joins the stable of product lines under the well known family of brands at Gibson guitar

2001 Gibson Guitar Corporation announces acquisition of the Baldwin Piano & Organ Company. Baldwin Piano, America's Favorite Piano, becomes a member of the prestigious Gibson Family of Brands

2002 Gibson celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Les Paul Model and introduces the world's first digital guitar. Utilizing proprietary MaGIC transport protocol developed by Gibson Labs, the Gibson Digital Guitar represents the greatest advance in guitar technology since the invention of the electric guitar 70 years earlier.

2003 The Gibson Digital Guitar is named one of the Coolest Inventions of 2003 by Time magazine.

- Gibson opens its own guitar manufacturing plant in China, dedicated to making Epiphones.
- The Gibson Foundation, the official charitable arm of Gibson Guitar Corp. is formed.
- Gibson Europe, a centralized sales, distribution and marketing office for all of Europe, is launched.

2004 The newly formed Gibson Audio division introduces the Wurlitzer Digital Jukebox, the world's most comprehensive home music system, at the Consumer Electronics Show and wins the CES Innovations Award. The Digital Ready Guitar, a conventional Les Paul model designed to be easily upgradeable to digital, is introduced.

2005 GIBSON GUITAR CORP. has acquired Deutsche Wurlitzer from Nelson Group Overseas, part of the Nelson Group of Companies based in Sydney, Australia. The deal brings the Wurlitzer Jukebox and Vending Electronics brand wholly under the Gibson banner..

2007 Gibson Guitar changes the world of the electric guitar with its introduction of the world's first guitar with robotic technology, the Gibson Robot Guitar. The guitar which was produced in a very limited edition sold out in only 2 days worldwide