



Questions About the History of the Electric Guitar

Directions: Use the website “The Invention of the Electric Guitar,” provided by the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation at the Smithsonian Institution, to discuss and answer the questions below with your group. You should be able to answer all the questions using the website.

1. The website notes that “the electric guitar may be the most important and popular instrument of the last half-century in American music.” Why was it so important?
2. What are some of the reasons performers in the late 19th century and early 20th century might have wanted their guitars to make louder sounds?
3. What were some of the techniques used to make guitars louder in the years before the invention of the electric guitar?
4. How did the popularity of Big Band music in the 1920s impact the kinds of guitars musicians played?
5. What is a “hollow-body” electric guitar? What were some of the problems associated with these instruments?
6. The website notes that “during the early years of its existence, the electric guitar's viability as a ‘true’ instrument was frequently debated. The instrument's detractors often claimed it did not produce a pure, ‘authentic’ musical sound.” Why do you think they may have felt this way? Do you think their objections were justified? Why or why not?
7. How did the electric guitar pioneers of the 1930s and 1940s influence the kinds of sounds a musician could make with a guitar?
8. In what ways were electric guitars innovative? What could musicians do with them that they could not do with an acoustic guitar?
9. Why was the electric guitar so important to the development of Rock and Roll?
10. What are the differences between how acoustic, electric-acoustic, solid body and Hawaiian/steel guitars make sounds?
11. Which type of electric guitar has had the greatest impact on Rock and Roll? Why?
12. Compare and contrast the sounds made by an acoustic guitar with those of amplified hollow-body and solid-body electric guitars. (Use the links found under “How Guitars Work.”) How are these sounds different? How do they create different moods and different musical effects?