

My Visit with Les Paul
By Don Hassler

It was January, 1948 and I was 18 years old, a sophomore in college, studying music and spending most of my time thinking about, listening to and playing music of all kinds: opera, classics, wind music and (most of all) swing/jazz/pops.

I opened the newspaper on a cold January morning and was shocked to read the news story about a famous jazz guitarist, Les Paul, who had been in a serious road accident and was hospitalized at St. Anthony Hospital right there in Oklahoma City, my hometown and where I was going to school.

It occurred to me that any musician who is on the road, injured and marooned (!) in a strange town, would be plenty bummed out and in serious need of friendly support. So I found out that he was able to have visitors and the next day went to the hospital for a visit and chat with the famous musician.

We had a really friendly visit. I discovered that his right arm and hand were badly injured and that there were questions about how well he would be able to play. But the injury was repaired and I have since learned that Les Paul after that always had to play with his right arm somewhat impaired. But that hardly seemed to matter and the world knows that his contributions to guitar design and to advanced, multiple recording techniques have been legendary.

In 1953, when I joined Capitol Records, Les Paul & Mary Ford's hits were booming nationwide. And after that, until his recent death, Les played on.

I'll always feel that a visit from me, an unknown kid, a striving musician from "off-the-beaten-path", gave encouragement and help to a wonderfully talented musician to further his career.

So bless you, Lester, up there in front of the Celestial Choir, just "a-pickin' and a-grinnin'!"