

Leo Fender, R.I.P.

Antonio Stradivari didn't invent the violin, nor did Leo Fender invent the electric guitar; however, both perfected their respective instruments and left a lasting mark on the world of music. Like Stradivari, Fender's instrument designs were characterized by simplicity, performance, and elegance.

Today, the electric guitar is so commonplace that it is difficult to appreciate the magnitude of Leo Fender's groundbreaking design work. There are no longer any real secrets to making a playable electric guitar; factories around the world churn out thousands of fine instruments each day. In the early '40s, though, basic questions like what type of magnets to use, how much wire to wrap on the pickup coil, and how to position the pickups remained unanswered. Leo Fender was the first to provide definitive answers to these and many other basic questions about electric guitar design.

During his career Leo accumulated some 75 patents for guitar design. He is credited with developing the individual pole-piece pickup magnet, one of the first workable tremolo systems, the guitar amplifier as we know it today, and scores of other innovations; however, his contributions to the world of music transcend a mere list of inventions.

Born with an innate gift for design, an intuitive understanding of musicians' needs, and a passion for experimentation, Leo was able to create the first electric guitar that thrilled guitar players. As far back as 1928, various inventors had experimented with the concept of

electro-magnetic pickups mounted on a solid-body guitar. In the Telecaster, Leo devised the first electric instrument that combined the sound and playability that guitarists wanted. In doing so, he exposed an entire generation of guitarists to the potential of amplified music and forever changed the status of the guitar. Pre-Fender, the guitar was primarily a rhythm instrument. Post-Fender, it emerged as the preeminent solo instrument in contemporary music.

In 1954 Fender unveiled his greatest masterpiece: the Stratocaster. Despite the passing of 36 years, the fluid curves of the Strat continue to look contemporary. Musical styles and tastes have come and gone, but the Stratocaster, the Telecaster, and the Precision bass have endured as the world's most widely played and widely copied guitars.

During the past 300 years a handful of instrument makers with vision and creativity have dramatically changed the direction of music—individuals like Stradivari, who perfected the violin; Cristofori, who invented the piano; Boehm, who created the modern family of woodwinds; and Laurens Hammond, who built the first electric keyboard instrument. Leo Fender takes a rightful place alongside of these rare and inspired talents. The world of music and the music industry owe him a debt of gratitude for his immense contributions. May he rest in peace.

Brian T. Majeski
Editor

Tell The FTC To Get Lost!

The Federal Trade Commission, the same insightful government agency that spent nearly ten years trying to break up IBM for monopoly at a time when the company was rapidly losing market share, recently decided to turn its attention to the nationally insignificant piano industry. While the thousands of dealers who sell pianos and the hundreds of thousands of customers who buy them each year seem to have no problem with the warranty coverage provided by manufacturers, the FTC is out to administer justice (whether we like it or not).

With things apparently a bit slow in the FTC's Boston office, a zealous staff member has decided to devote herself to determining whether or not piano manufacturers are providing adequate warranty coverage for soundboards. All manufacturers recently received a lengthy questionnaire asking for information on their warranty procedures. Some comfort was provided by Attorney Sara V. Greenberg's covering letter which read, "Under Section 21(f) of the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. 57B-2(f), all documents and in-

formation provided voluntarily in view of compulsory process in a law enforcement investigation, such as those provided in response to this letter, are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act 5 U.S.C. 552 (b)(3)(B)." In other words, the documents would remain confidential.

On learning of this investigation, our first response was, "Doesn't the government have anything better to do?" Current manufacturing methods and quality standards have rendered most warranties redundant: Excluding shipping damage, the number of warranty claims any manufacturer has to address each year is minute. A random poll of dealers across the country reveals that warranty coverage is simply not a problem.

We conclude that this FTC investigation is an unnecessary waste of taxpayer's money. All dealers and manufacturers should write their elected officials to protest this unfounded investigation.

Paul A. Majeski
Publisher