

# FOREWORD - JOE BONAMASSA

The Gibson ES (Electric Spanish) series, which originally included the ES-330, ES-335, ES-345 and ES-355 models were a groundbreaking set of guitars designed by Gibson circa 1958 and 1959 by pioneering guitar executive/designer Ted McCarty. I believe they launched these as part of Gibson's modernization campaign which started in 1958 and included other iconic designs like the Flying V, Futura and Moderne.

Whenever I think of ES guitars, one historic example always pops to mind from the movie "Back to the Future." While some might point out that Michael J. Fox played a red 345 at a high school dance in 1955 - a full three years before they officially came out - most of us know better. I suppose Doc Brown may have truly caused a material change in the space-time continuum but it seems unlikely. However, if you believe what you see in the movies, it will remain one of the great mysteries of guitar history. For now, let's not argue about that and just agree to allow this isolated case of movie folklore to remain "unsolved."

So with that said, what is it that makes folks gravitate to the Electric Spanish series? In my opinion it is the guitars sonic versatility, playability, and frankly, its good looks that makes them so popular. Every time I saw someone playing an ES guitar I knew this must be a real serious musician. From iconic jazz players to hard rock superheroes the ES series has produced a wide variety of guitar tones that upon first hearing might be credited to its blood relatives within the Gibson brand like the Les Paul Standard and Custom. I wanted a walnut-colored 355 because of BB in Zaire and I wanted a red one cause of Freddie at the Cotton Bowl. I wanted a '64 cherry 335 because of Eric at the The Albert Hall in 1968 and wanted a red 345 because of Elvin Bishop. This was the music of my youth and the guitars these gentlemen played were sexy and demanded attention. These are the tones I grew up idolizing and longing to achieve.

When you stop long enough to think about it, the ES series guitars are responsible for some of the greatest electric guitar tones Gibson has ever produced. Whether it be "Cliffs of Dover" by Eric Johnson (yes you heard me right), "Live at the Regal" B.B. King, Cream's "Crossroads" at Winterland, or Larry Carlton on "Kid Charlemagne," that warm human voice sound permeates regardless of the player or style. I remember playing Alvin Lee's 1960 dot-neck 335 at the Royal Albert Hall in London. It was a magical experience. I can see why a player like Alvin loved that guitar so much. It gave back what you gave it. It is a wonderful iconic instrument that I feel blessed to have used once...especially in that setting. Bottom line is that you can get a big sound at a big volume all the while retaining that signature f-hole based hollow body sound. The feeling of the body vibrating against your chest when you're playing at feedback volume is unlike any other electric guitar. I know why these have come to be known as the "Stradavarius of Gibson electrics."

Now, the word on the street is that late '50s dot necks are Sunburst Les Paul killers. I agree...and the reality is that as prices steadily increase that you might wake up one morning and see a \$200,000 dollar blonde Dot from 1959 with a sold sign on it. The days of ES guitars being "gateway drugs" for players and collectors until they can afford a vintage PAF gold top or sunburst are (in my opinion) coming to an end. The word is out.

When my friends show up at a gig, they always compliment the sound of my vintage Les Pauls but invariably point out that my red 1963 ES-335 or the 1964 ES-355 mono steal the show. A good ES will always be a star in anyone's studio and gig arsenals. One of the best pieces of advice I could give anyone is not to listen with your eyes and don't listen to the internet chatter saying the only magic was contained in the earliest PAF-equipped examples. A late 60s early 70s ES guitar is a truly wonderful instrument. Good enough for Larry and good enough for me. Nobody should be afraid of a slim-taper nut. It is also the opinion of this writer that the ES line of modern day Gibson is the finest that company has produced since the golden era of the late 50's. Their construction and playability are wonderful at a fraction of the price of a vintage model. There are many options at all price points and I whole-heartedly advise that you venture into this territory.

To sum it up, this book showcases the beauty and wonder of the vintage ES guitars and I hope you enjoy exploring its pages as I have.

Thank you Vic for honoring me with this task and for your friendship over these past 20 years. I am sure this will be another winner in a long standing series of great books for true "Believers."

Cheers

Joe Bonamassa