Electric Guitar As The Backbone Of Rock And Roll

Music wouldn't be the same as it is today without the electric guitar. I became interested in this topic since my father regularly plays 80's rock-and-roll songs with these extravagant electric guitar solos. Electric guitar advanced music to a technological era, giving musicians a new abstract way of playing music by creating their own unique sounds. Although it had some competition and many adults feared it in the past, no other electric instrument was able to beat the electric guitar's selling rate since the 1950's. Guitarists like Jimi Hendrix rose to stardom after being discovered for his insane tactics on stage which changed the whole tone of the rock-and-roll genre. From the "Frying Pan" to the current Fendercaster, electric guitar reigns as the best instrument of all time.In the early 1900's, respected musicians such as Charlie Christian and Django Reinhardt created distinctive jazz music from the acoustic guitar. When the electric guitar was created in the 1930s, Christian created the first ever electric guitar solo. As the electric guitar gained popularity in the 1950s, the Rickenbacker Company started to manufacture these instruments commercially. Following this trend, Leo Fender, a California native, created the first 'solid body' electric guitar and sold it commercially. This was called the Fender Stratocaster guitar, and it was favored by plenty of rock-and-roll performers from the mid-1950s (Kallen, Instruments of Music 79). Likewise, it is indisputable that electric guitar was a principal part of rock-and-roll. For instance, Kallen states, "Rock-and-roll can embrace so many sounds because it is a child of technology; indeed, its very sound through the decades has been determined by advances in musical and recording equipment (History of Rock and Roll 9). The advances in musical equipment Kallen mentioned in the previous quote is referring to the sound of electric guitars which influenced the era of rock-and-roll. In addition, the same author states, "The first Fender Stratocaster- a favorite of rock guitar players even today- was not commercially produced until 1954- around the same time that rock music first burst onto the scene" (History of Rock and Roll 9), which is clear evidence that electric guitars have a great impact on rock-and-roll. The electric guitar is what popularized rock music. Furthermore, Millard states, "Its ease of playing and low cost have made it an important consumer good of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (Millard 1). As the unprecedented appeal of rock-and-roll grew, more than half a million electric guitars were being sold in a year by 1960! Even acoustic guitar manufacturers started creating electric guitars since they were becoming such high demand in the market.

The electric guitar influenced the type of rock-and-roll we hear today with its iconic technological blares. According to Millard, "Although primarily identified with both the sound and the image of rock and roll, the electric guitar has made its mark on all genres of popular music, from country to world beat. Combined with an amplifier and armed with a large inventory of special effects, the electric guitar is an extremely versatile instrument that can produce an infinite variety of sounds" (Millard 1). Les Paul, a famous jazz guitarist, made successful country and pop songs using the electric guitar. However, to really showcase the versatility of this powerful instrument, he had to work with rock-and-roll. He is known to be one of the pioneers in the solid body electric guitar. Competition of other electronic devices which manipulated the electronic sound of rock-and-roll appeared, but never got close to passing the popularity of the electric guitar (Millard 1). Additionally, according to Millard, "Musicians began to experiment with this technological system in their continual attempts to find new sounds" (Millard 2). This impacted rock-and-roll greatly with this genre becoming the genre of experimentation. Any star playing the

electric guitar in the 70’s or 80’s universally became an icon of rock-and-roll. Because of this, the electric guitar became the top symbol for rock music as a whole. This gave electric guitar a whole new meaning. A meaning which empowered teenagers who longed to be just like their guitar hero. The electric guitar even stood for women empowerment with an abundant amount of women to become guitar icons, inspiring younger girls that they can be just like the outstanding heroines of the time (Millard 3).

The history of electric guitar- although it is short, it is compact. This resulted in the product of numerous different kinds of electric guitars to create specific blows and blares. The first ever made Rickenbacker electric guitar was known as the “Frying Pan” because of the round, small aluminum body which resembled something to cook eggs on. After the initial development of a pickup, the device which behaves as a microphone to create a louder sound with unique tones, Gibson and other companies began making the “Electric Spanish” guitar in the mid-1930s. (Kallen, Instruments of Music 79). The Fender Broadcaster, renamed as the “Telecaster” guitar, was made for mass production with its bolt-on neck. It had added implements to choose combinations between treble and bass pickup. It still is in production today alongside with the extremely popular Fender Stratocaster with a three-pickup implement, which was first made in 1954. The “Strato” features what guitarists call “whammies”, which is a vibrato bar built into the bride. This lets guitarists change the pitch of the strings. With the advent of rock-and-roll in the mid-1950s, a ton of young people bought guitars to recreate their favorite music or to make their own. Guitar sales kept rising and rising, so by 1965, the number which was once 288,000 guitars selling per year soared to 1.5 million. (Kallen, Instruments of Music 80).

Musicians' recurring obsession with technology and the centrality of sound amplification and distortion in sixties rock was illustrated by the brief years of marvelous stardom from Jimi Hendrix (Peretti 2). He proved that the electric guitar could transcend almost any musical boundary using his infinite range of sounds, and his performances were unworldly. For instance, Woog states, “The most influential sixties guitarist of all also first found fame in England, though he came from America. Jimi Hendrix was instantly, flamboyantly recognizable: he played with his teeth and behind his back, he ripped incredibly powerful licks out of the air, and he exploited feedback like no one else” (Woog 62). One of the true originals of rock music, Hendrix, created new possibilities and constantly transcended expectations. Born and raised in Seattle, Hendrix went solo after backing numerous R&B tracks. In 1966, he was leading a blues band based in New York City until Chas Chandler of the Animals advised him to go to England to be a star. In London, Chandler consulted Jimi Hendrix to fellow rock musicians, Noel Redding and Mitch Mitchell. They created a band called, “The Jimi Hendrix Experience”, who played a crazy, shockingly booming version of blues-influenced rock, with a stage style favoring grand gestures and mock-Edwardian clothes as elaborate as their music. This is ironic, since offstage, Hendrix was notably shy and withdrawn. The band was a sensation in Europe with their hits, “Hey Joe” and “Purple Haze”, but Hendrix remained a rumor and part of gossip in America. However, that changed in the summer on 1967. He performed in Monterey International Pop Festival and at the peak of his show, he burned his guitar in flames. The Los Angeles Times mentioned, “When Jimi left the stage, he had graduated from rumor to legend. Hendrix’s flame burned brightly but quickly”. Unfortunately, after three years of fame in America, he became the victim of a drug overdose. His legacy of outrageous tactics and influential music continues to inspire musicians all over the world. He will continue to reign as the most incredible guitarist of all time (Woog 62).

In 1956, The New York Daily News ran a series slamming electric guitar as an “inciter of juvenile delinquency” for being heavily associated with rock. The two-part series was attempting

to predict the end of rock mainly because “disgusted adults were battling the music of delinquent”. According to the writer, Jess Stearn, the electric guitar started “riots and bloodshed, slurs on the national anthem, and slowly gathering public disgust at a barrage of primitive jungle-beat rhythms, which when set to lyrics at all, frequently sound off with double meaning lyrics few adults would care to hear” (Kallen, History of Rock and Roll 23). For this reason, parents at the time of the rise of rock-and-roll prohibited their children from hearing rock music or buying electric guitars. The editors of Music Journal were much more discourteous. Kallen states, “The magazine considered it to be its ‘duty’ to comment on ‘the most disgraceful blasphemy ever committed in the name of music’” (History of Rock and Roll 23). According to this article, the music was illiterate, savage, and vicious and the relationship between the music and juvenile delinquency was overwhelming clear. However, these adults were proven wrong after rock musicians supported and assisted in the awareness of multiple causes. Such as, the popular rock band, Queen, hosting a fundraising concert in 1985, Live Aid, for awareness of Ethiopian famine.

The electric guitar has dominated the production of popular music since its invention in the 1930s. I’m thankful my father introduced me to rock-and-roll; it helped me learn the valuable history and importance of the electric guitar. The electric guitar really helped me understand the craze over rock music as well, and why it is precious to today’s music culture. Even though the electric guitar has went through a few dilemmas with competition and discredit from mainstream media, it has proven that the this special guitar, indeed, will always prevail.