

In Memoriam



Clarence Leo Fender

Electric guitar pioneer **Clarence Leo Fender**, whose revolutionary "Stratocaster" models have been extensions of the musical hearts and minds of rock and roll giants

like Buddy Holly, Eric Clapton, and Jimi Hendrix, died of natural causes on March 23rd at the age of 81.

Fender began tinkering with guitars as a radio repairman in the late 40s. In 1954 he created the "Stratocaster," a revolutionary instrument hailed as a near-perfect fusion of electronics, ergonomics and technology on one side and design and aes-

thetics on the other. Richard Smith, a columnist for *Guitar Player Magazine* said, "He left a usable, affordable electric guitar that sounded great and was accessible to musicians of little means. He did the same thing for the guitar that Henry Ford did for the automobile." In 1965 Fender sold his company to CBS Inc. for \$13 million.

The "Strat," which also had a vibrato, broke musical barriers with its variety of tones. Besides its distinctive new look—fluid curves, sparkling colors and longer neck—the "Strat," whose neck was simply bolted on, was designed to be easily manufactured on an assembly line. One innovation that is practically universal today is an arm that can be

pushed to change the pitch of the strings. For his work, Fender was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Rock Walk of Fame.

Eager acceptance of Fender's design was also attributable to its being more comfortable to use than existing instruments, but as time went on, it was the Strat's fluency with radically different musical styles, ranging from country-western to blues to heavy metal, that assured its now legendary place in musical history. "The Stratocaster is like the Rolls Royce," said Dick Dale, 53, who pioneered the surf rock sound in Southern California in the late 1950s and early 60s. "It can never be surpassed."