

Les Paul- The Wizard of Waukesha

Use the following pivotal moments from Les Paul's life to tell his story. Act it out, create a frozen picture or draw the scene!

When Les was just thirteen, the kid with fire-engine-red hair started raking in money with his one-man band. He played and sang outside the busiest drive-in restaurant in town. They served barbecued ribs and chicken. Les served up great country music. One driver who rolled by yelled that the guitar had to be louder. Les listened. The young inventor went back to work. He took one radio from his mother and one from his father to use as loudspeakers. He took apart a telephone to get its microphone. He hooked the whole thing right into the guitar – placing the microphone under his guitar strings and hooking the wire into the radio speakers. Then he plugged his invention into electricity from the restaurant. Les created the first amplifier – his guitar was loud and tips poured in.

Iris Colleen Summers had a great voice, played the guitar well, and was wonderful with audiences – Les wanted to play with her! Les changed her name to Mary Ford and the two went on to make history. Les and Mary raced wildly from city to city by car entertaining cheering audiences. One day, on their way back to California after playing a concert in Waukesha, their high-powered car smashed off the highway. Six of Les' ribs were broken. His playing arm was shattered. After six months with his arm in a plaster cast, Les had to learn how to play the guitar all over again.

In 1984, Les formed the Les Paul Trio. He got back to work. The Trio took over Monday nights at clubs in New York City. Ever since, fans pile into an underground club called the Iridium Jazz Club, which is near the bright lights of Times Square. Lots of them come carrying guitars that Les will sign for them. Great musicians come to see Les because he jazzed up jazz, he put sparkle into country music, and he rocked long before there was rock and roll.