

All About Guitars

Jimmy Hendrix, Eddie VanHalen, B. B. King, Angus Young, Brian "Head" Welch, Fletcher Dragge. What do all of these people have in common? They are all guitar heroes in they're own styles of music. However, because of the different styles of music they play, each guitarist mentioned above uses a different style of guitar. The guitars different body styles and shape help mold the perfect sound for the style you play. From sweet and warm, to loud and thrashing, the guitar is one of the most versatile instruments and can be used for any style of music.

Most styles of music (and the legends who made that style famous) have a specific guitar that embodies each genres sound. Jimmy Hendrix, a virtuoso of the 60' era, played a Fender Stratocaster. Eddie VanHalen, know for his innovative "tapping" style solos, Plays a custom peavey guitar called a Wolfgang. B. B. King, a blues guitar legend, plays a signature model Gibson Hollow body. Angus young, lead guitarist for AC/DC, plays a solid body Gibson SG. Head, one of two guitar players for the band Korn, plays an Ibanez 7-string model. Fletcher Dragge, a pioneer in the field of punk, plays a standard series RG Ibanez. To those who don't play guitar these names may be unfamiliar, but to those who play, these guitars cover most of the different sounds you can get out of a guitar.

One way a guitar sounds different than other models is the way it is built. Depending on what kind of wood is used the sound can completely change. Some examples of woods used for guitars are ash, pine, sandalwood, rosewood, and maple. The more dense the wood is, the longer the sustain it has (sustain is a term for how long the sound will carry from one attack). Also, the lighter the wood, the brighter tone it has. The wood used for the fret board is also important. Usually it is made of maple or rosewood. Each of these woods has a different feel to it (it is more of a preference for one or the other as opposed to it being a mater of how they sound). When a guitar is manufactured, there are three ways of attaching the fretboard (or neck) of the guitar to the body. The first style is a bolt-on neck. The fret board is literally bolted and glued to the body of the guitar. This is the cheapest and quickest way to attach the neck. Although it is the fastest and cheapest, guitars with a bolt-on neck still get a great sound; even though you sacrifice some sustain. The second way to attach the neck is called a set-neck style. The body has a slot that is the same size as the end of the neck. They attach the neck using only glue. This creates more contact between the neck and the body for a long sustain and a fat, warm tone. The third style is not even a way to connect the neck to the body (technically, it is a way to attach the body to the neck). It is called neck-through body style. The neck of the guitar and the center section of the body are one piece of wood. They then glue a "wing" to each side of the center part of the body half of the guitar,

creating a huge sustain, and an amazing tone. This last process cost much more than the other two styles.

The body shape of a guitar is as important to the sound as is the way it is made. If there are slight imperfections in the fretboard or the body, it can cause problems with intonation. There are many different body styles that all accommodate a different style of music. A hollow body or acoustic guitar has the perfect sound for classical or folk music. A semi-hollow body guitar is used mostly for blues or rockabilly. All other electric guitars sounds can be changed to fit the style of music you wish to play. Most solid body guitars have the same base tone. The difference in sound comes from the many kinds of pick-ups used in the guitar, and how they are arranged. A pick-up is a set of magnets that are used to read the vibrations of the strings. They then send the notes you play through the cable to the amplifier.

There are many different kinds of pick-ups used in guitars. There are two main versions of a pick-up: a single rail, and a humbucker. There are many versions of each kind. A single rail pick-up has six bar magnets used to read the sound. They have a very bright sound. The Humbucker pick-up was invented by Seymour Duncan to eliminate the fuzz that was prominent in older Single rail pick-ups. They are twice as wide as single rails. They contain a single wire that is wrapped around two sets of six magnets. The wire is used to stop the buzzing (or "buck the hum" as Seymour said it). The different combinations of single and humbucker pickups are endless. The use of one and the other can result in some really different tone qualities. Each style of music has it's own average pick-up combination. Alternative rock usually sides with the humbucker/ two single setup because it is so versatile. Harder rock players usually use two humbuckers for the fat and warm tone. Punk and ska players tend to lean towards the single coil pick-ups because of their bright tone. Another kind of pick-up is an active pickup. Most pick-ups are passive, meaning that they take the power they need from the amp. Active pick-ups use an internal battery. This allows for a fast response and a hotter sound.

The main reason people choose to use different models and pick-up configuration is to mold and shape their own individual guitar sound. Finding the perfect sound for your style of music is not tough, but putting your personal touches on it can be frustrating. Many newer players are resorting to "stomp boxes" (a.k.a. foot pedals or effects generators) to alter the sound of their guitar. A good example of a guitarist that is breaking out of the traditional way of using pedals is Wes Borland. He uses strings of pedals to create new sounds that compliment his playing style. He has a sound that no other guitar player can copy. He also plays on a seven-string guitar. He has found the perfect sound for his style of music, a feat that takes many people an entire career to accomplish.