

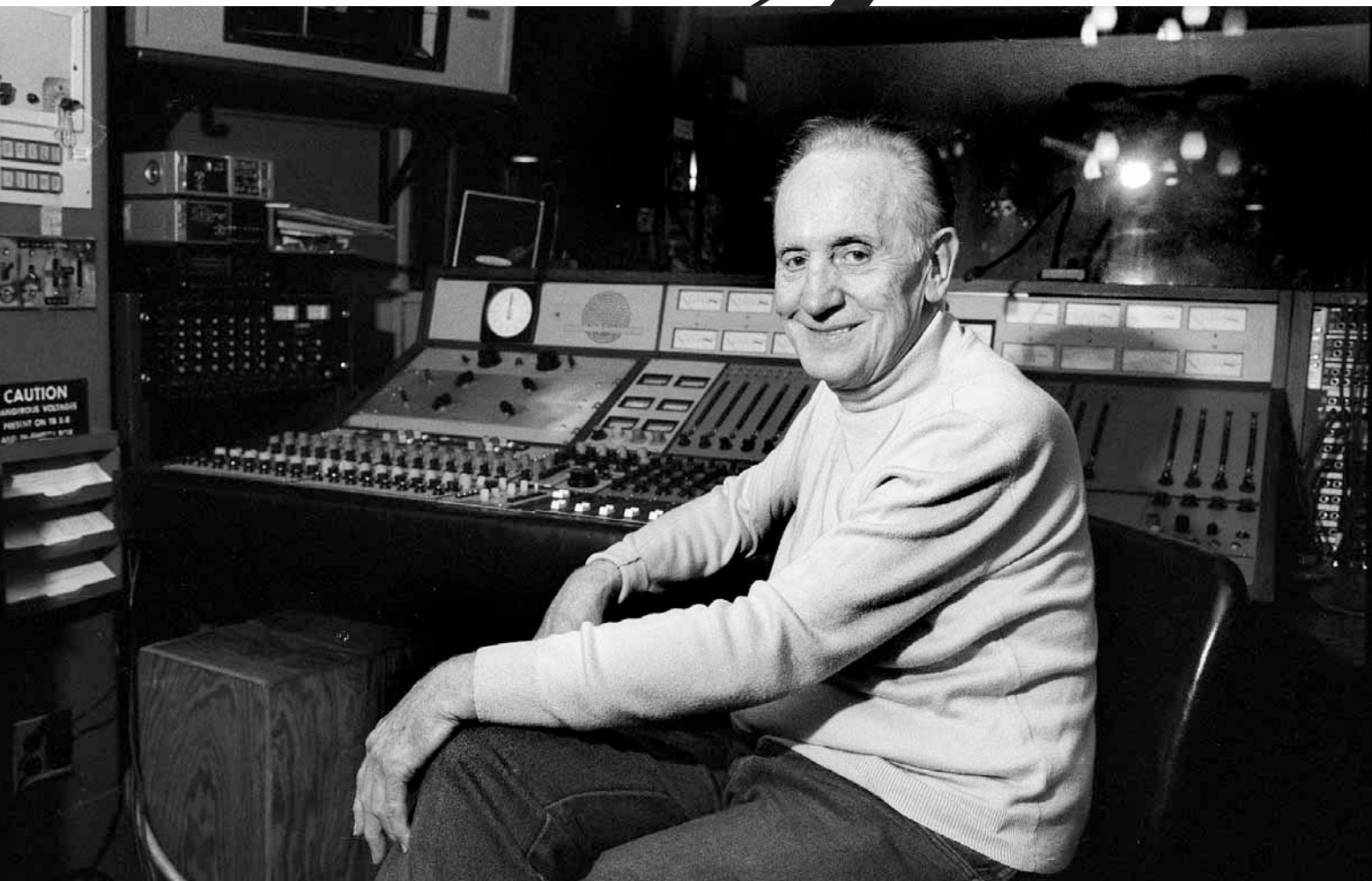
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Les Paul at the control board of his home recording studio in Mahwah, N.J. July, 1990. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.

REMEMBERING Les Paul 1915 - 2009

“The Empire State Building.
Rockefeller Center. Central Park.
The Statue of Liberty. Les Paul.”

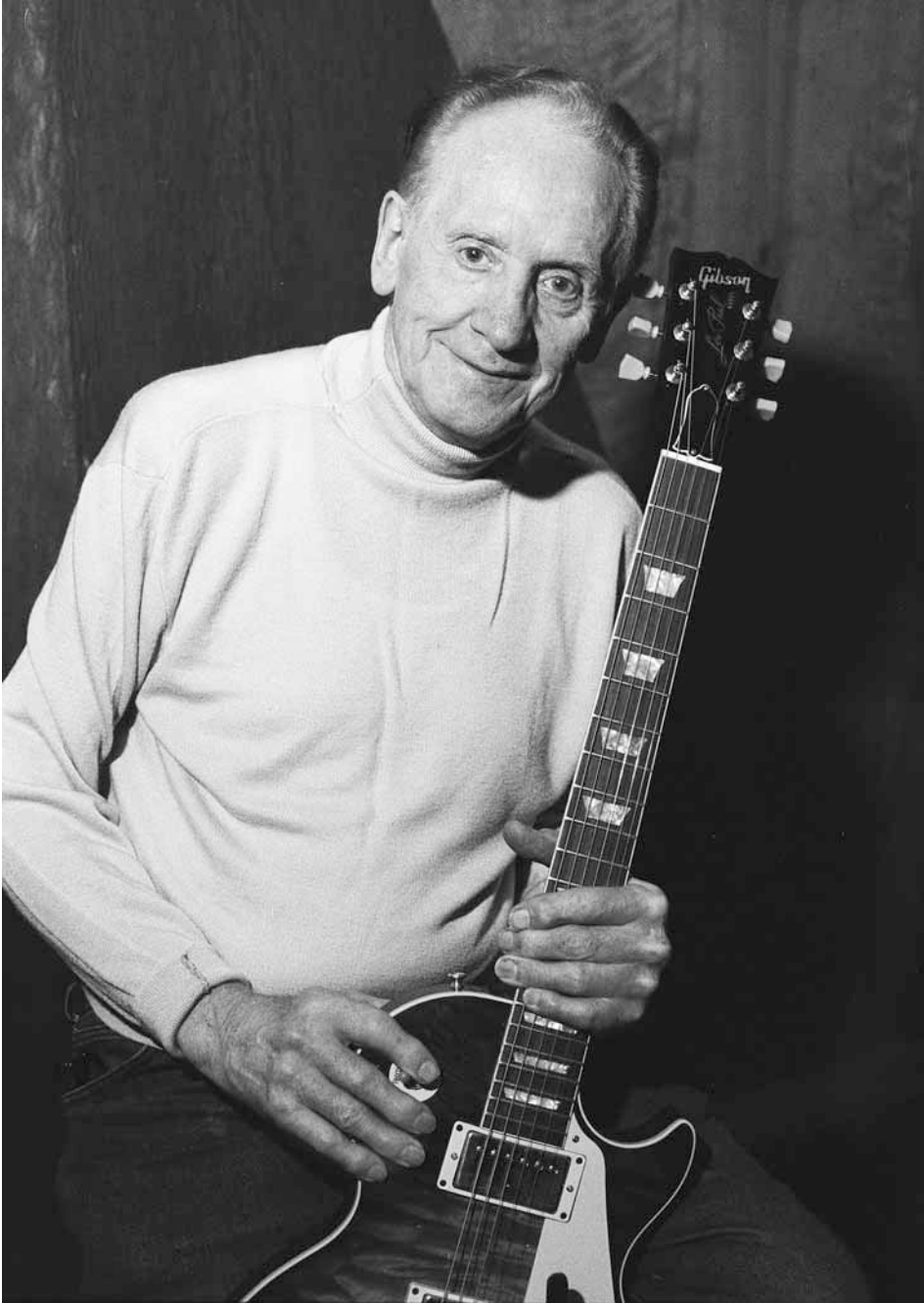
The Jeopardy Answer: “Name five well-known New York City landmarks.”

For more than a quarter century, the famous guitarist who redesigned the music business was as much of a stop on a sightseer’s baedeker as any of those more physically substantial landmarks named. Holding court Monday nights at Fat Tuesday’s and later at the Iridium, the guitarist charmed a new

generation of listeners in what were supposed to be his sunset years. The Wisconsin-born New Jersey resident died August 13 at 94.

Before he started his long-running series on Monday nights in the early 1980s, Paul had all but retired from the music scene for some 20 years, content to stay a living legend in his rustic Mahwah home. Interestingly, in a 1990 interview at 75 years old, he said it was concern for his health that prompted him to get active again in 1984.

“I felt in 1965 that I was overdue to hang it



Les Paul holds one of his Les Pauls in his Mahwah, N.J. home. July 1990. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.

LES PAUL *continued from page 1*

“They didn’t pay to
and look at t
They came down

up,” said Paul, whose performing career spanned the worlds of pop, jazz and country and produced hit recordings with his then-wife, Mary Ford. The pair divorced in 1964.

He was equally renowned in the electronic world for either modifying existing equipment to suit his musical needs or inventing something new outright. In fact, the summer day we talked 19 years ago he was in the midst of renovating his home studio for a new series of recordings while also getting ready to ship the original eight-track recorder he invented off to the Smithsonian Institution.

Open heart surgery 15 years after his “retirement” had led Paul to reassess his life yet again, he explained. The doctor’s prescription was “hard work” and Paul said he figured out what he really wanted to do most. Keep in mind that Paul’s career had already spanned the early days of radio and television, as well such landmark performances as Jazz at the Philharmonic.

“I did an analysis and I came up with an answer. And the answer is I want to play in a club. I want to go back and play the guitar,” he said.

“I went to every nightclub that I could find in New York. And when I found a nightclub that I liked, I went to the manager,” he recalled. “I said, ‘I’ve got the idea of playing one night a week, on Monday night.’” He says, ‘we’re not open on Mondays.’ But he says, ‘Maybe you’ll be interested in coming in for a week or something.’ I said: ‘No, no. I’m interested in Monday nights. One night a week. He says: ‘sorry, we’re not interested.’ And I said, ‘But I’m willing to work here for nothing.’ He says: ‘We’re open on Monday nights.’ And the following week we open.”

The agreement to work gratis was short-lived, since Paul was packing the place every week. Les Paul on Monday night became the

Les Paul, 1915 – 2009

Born in Waukesha, Wisconsin on June 9, 1915, Les Paul was an acclaimed guitarist and entertainer whose innovations in the art of sound engineering revolutionized the way music is recorded. The indomitable Mr. Paul, who enjoyed an extraordinary 79-year career in music, had continued to entertain and play his guitar weekly for large and enthusiastic audiences at New York’s Iridium Jazz Club until earlier this year. He died from complications of severe pneumonia at White Plains Hospital in White Plain, New York, surrounded by family and loved ones on August 13.

Les Paul is the only individual to share membership into the Grammy Hall of Fame, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the National Inventors Hall of Fame, and the National Broadcasters Hall of Fame. —TM

come down there
the wallpaper.
to be entertained.”

place to go for amateur guitar fanatics and working pros alike. It wasn't unusual to see jazz legend George Benson or rock icon Jimmy Page sitting at the great man's feet.

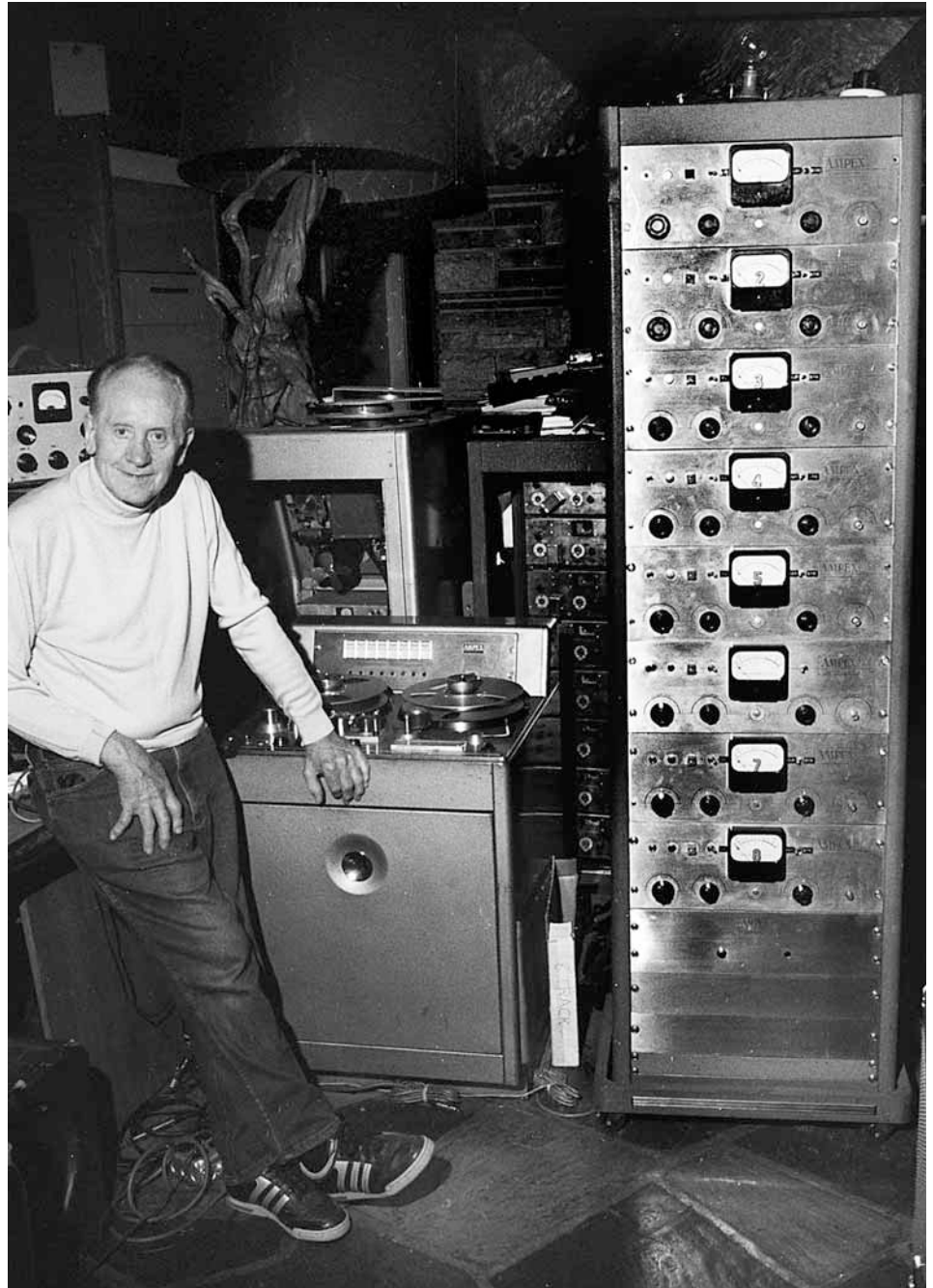
When Fat Tuesday's on Third Avenue finally closed, Paul simply shifted his base of operations uptown to Iridium near Lincoln Center, and eventually to the club's current home on Broadway in Midtown.

Over the years, you could always expect a Les Paul evening to be lightly eclectic, thanks to Paul's long experience as an entertainer. Whether joking with the band, schmoozing with the audience or just playing the guitar, any night listening to Les Paul was always entertaining.

“Sometimes it's jazz. Sometimes it's country. Sometimes I talk,” he said, describing the folksy pace of a typical set that he said was reactive to the mood of the audience. The average customer, he explained, “either likes it or he dislikes it. That's why they've got a knob on the radio.” People listening in a club, though, “don't have a knob on the radio, and so I have chosen to have a knob. And I adjust to them. They don't adjust to me. They didn't pay to come down there and look at the wallpaper. They came down to be entertained.”

If Paul's attitude towards entertaining an audience was old school, so was his approach to making a record: “It takes me three hours to do an album. One afternoon — the album is done. As fast as you can press 'record,' we can make it. I want to do it where there's no fooling around.” While not that simple, Paul did manage to win a Grammy in 2006 for *Les Paul and Friends: American Made, World Played*.

Modern 128-track recordings that sometimes take more than a year to complete are the direct descendents of Les



Les Paul with the original eight track recording machine in his Mahwah, N.J. home. He was preparing to send it off to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. July 1990. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.

Paul and Mary Ford's home-made 12-track overdubbed hits from nearly 60 years ago. Even as he saw his basic recording principals ever expanding to take over the music business, Paul was cautious.

“Beware that a tape machine is a storage (device),” he said. “It's not to create. What you're creating is done in your head, before you go over and turn that machine on. A lot of people turn the machine on, figuring it's going to turn their head on.

“The electronic recording world is so complicated today, so involved. And I'm probably one of the instigators,” he said with a smile.

