



Gretsch Electric Guitar Formerly Owned by Bo Diddley

Date

c. 1960

Primary Maker

Gretsch

Medium

maple; mahogany; ebony; chrome; plastic; mother of pearl

Description

Bo Diddley, born Elias McDaniel (1928-2008), played this rectangular, semi-hollowbody “Twang Machine” electric guitar—one of four custom-made by Gretsch Guitars for Diddley between 1958 and 1962. Diddley and Gretsch collaborated on the design, which was based on a homemade cigar box guitar Diddley built himself in 1945 as a teenager at Chicago's Foster Vocational School, where he was studying to become a carpenter and mechanic. When he was younger, Diddley played trombone and violin but after seeing Blues guitarist John Lee Hooker, he immediately switched to guitar. He tuned his instrument to open chords, fretting with one finger and driving his distinctive percussive beat with his strumming hand while he gyrated around the stage. Author of iconic songs such as the eponymous “Bo Diddley,” “I’m a Man,” and “Who Do You Love?,” Bo Diddley was instrumental in the transition of popular music from Blues to Rock’ n’Roll in the 1950s. Enormously influential, his “Bo Diddley Beat”—three beats, a rest, then two more beats—is revered in the popular music canon, incorporated into songs, and sampled by countless artists across the musical spectrum.

Dimensions

Overall (HWD) (overall): 7 7/8 × 40 1/8 × 24 3/8 in. (20.066 × 101.875 × 61.976 cm)