

Here Comes the Sunburst: George Harrison's 'Ransom' 1958 Les Paul Headlines Heritage Auctions' September Guitar Auction

*Beatles guitarist bought this guitar so he could get back the
legendary Lucy, which was a gift from Eric Clapton*

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DALLAS, Texas (Aug. 31, 2022) – On online message boards frequented by guitar players, there remains some lively disagreement about the ethics of ransoming one stolen guitar by demanding another. It's an argument that, like most things rock and roll, begins with the Beatles – George Harrison, specifically, whose beloved red Gibson Les Paul nicknamed Lucy was returned to Harrison only after he offered the guitar's new owner another vintage Les Paul.

Lucy is so famous she has her own Wikipedia page; after all, it was gifted to the Beatle by Eric Clapton in 1967. Six years later, it was stolen in Los Angeles, and the story of what it took to get her back has become part of rock-and-roll lore.



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Now, nearly 50 years later, guitar-lovers will have the opportunity to own a piece of music history when [the 1958 Sunburst Les Paul that Harrison used to secure Lucy's release](#) crosses the block at Heritage Auctions on Sept. 24.

It will be offered as part of [The Cahuenga Collection Guitars and Musical Instruments Signature® Auction](#) filled with more than 70 historic gems. But this Sunburst in particular, known as the "ransom" guitar, still plays, and sounds, like a dream. Even if Harrison bought it to end a nightmare.

"Vintage guitar collectors and Beatles collectors alike will have to fight over this guitar," says Aaron Piscopo, director of Vintage Guitars & Musical Instruments at Heritage. "It's beautiful, with action like butter: a real-deal '58 'Burst with one of the more incredible stories in rock history."

The question about how ethical this ransom situation was stems from the fact that the man who demanded one guitar for another was not Lucy's thief. In fact he was its unwitting buyer from a guitar shop that had purchased Lucy from a fence. Lucy's new owner, Michael Ochoa, was a bona fide musician visiting L.A. from Mexico and in the market for a late '50s Les Paul. He was determined to get what he paid for.

He bought Lucy at Whalin's Sound City on Sunset Boulevard. Days later, the shop realized its unwitting mistake and helped Harrison track down Ochoa. When Ochoa heard directly from Harrison, who demanded back his guitar, he thought the phone call was a prank.

When Harrison offered what Ochoa had paid for Lucy, Ochoa mulled it over before returning to Guadalajara with the guitar. A very determined Harrison stayed on him, and Ochoa eventually agreed to return Lucy, a 1957 model that was originally a Goldtop that can be heard on "The End" and seen in Let It Be, in exchange for another Les Paul, specifically a '58 (plus a Fender Precision bass). Harrison bought the "ransom" Les Paul from Norman Harris, namesake of Norman's Rare Guitars in LA.

So Ochoa got his '58 Les Paul, and Harrison got his Lucy back.

The musicians who haunt the message boards go back and forth on Ochoa's integrity. Many think his demands were unreasonable, while others say that he made the trip all the way to Los Angeles for a vintage Les Paul, paid a fair market price for one and deserved to have Lucy replaced with what he'd set out to find. "Ochoa could have been a lot cooler about it," writes one poster. Another answers: "Can't knock the guy for trying... I mean he did purchase Lucy fair and square."

Regardless, the ransom guitar itself was and is a gem; the message board writers know it ("Vintage 50s thru 60s guitars were preferred [then] just as much as they are now..."). And, its role in this story makes it especially intriguing. "I can't believe Harrison wouldn't have preferred the '58 over the refin 'Lucy'..." one poster writes, as Lucy had been refinished by Rick Derringer before Clapton bought her. The ransom guitar is indeed a rare '58 Sunburst with original electronics and early no-line Klusons.

Ochoa kept the Les Paul until 1983, when he wanted cash to buy a house; he sold it to his boss Robert Truman, the co-owner of Nadine's Music in Hollywood. Nadine's, a shop for dedicated gearheads, was a favorite haunt of guitarists, especially in the 1980s and '90s. Along with the ransom guitar, Truman is working with Heritage to offer a number of other extremely choice guitars in his esteemed collection. Together, these instruments make up Truman's "Cahuenga Collection," so named after the boulevard in Los Angeles.



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"The Cahuenga Collection offers a little something for everyone," Piscopo says. "It ranges from high-end vintage guitars like a 1952 all-gold Les Paul and a 1966 ES-355 to more modern instruments such as the 50th Anniversary Fender Jazz bass and restoration projects such as the Harmony Buck Owens acoustic and a Danelectro Longhorn."

The Cahuenga Collection Guitars and Musical Instruments Signature® Auction offers 71 musicians' gems, including some choice vintage amps and keyboards, but the guitars are inarguably spectacular. Among them is that 1952 Gold Top Gibson Les Paul – the first year of the model's production – with original electronics and frets and its original case. Another highlight is a 1962 Les Paul/SG in cherry with untampered-with P.A.F. pickups, original wiring and a sideways vibrola. It is in true collectors' condition. There's also a National Style 4 Resonator circa 1930s with chrysanthemum engraving, a square neck tri-cone resonator and its original case; plus a Gibson Firebird III from 1964 in cherry with original pickups and jack and a reverse headstock.

While the entire auction is a guitar collector's dream come true, in the end the cream of this crop remains the so-called ransom guitar. "The 1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard 'Burst is one of the most sought-after guitars in existence," Piscopo says, "and the fact that this one played a major role in rock history makes it very special indeed."

Images and information about all lots in this auction can be found at [HA.com/7296](https://www.heritageauctions.com/7296).

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