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Les Paul 90th Birthday Salute

(Carnegie Hall, New York; 2,804 seats; \$95 top)

Presented by Festival Prods. and Gibson Guitar. Reviewed June 19, 2005.

Performers: Les Paul, Steve Miller, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Stanley Jordan, Edgar Winter, Neal Schon, Joe Perry, Peter Frampton, Pat Martino, Bucky Pizzarelli, Derek Trucks, Steve Lukather, Jose Feliciano, Tommy Emmanuel, Eumir Deodato, Will Lee, Omar Hakim.

By [DAVID SPRAGUE](#)

The term "renaissance man" gets tossed around with a regularity that threatens to cheapen it for those who actually fit the bill. It's hard to imagine anyone in the music realm with a better claim to the title than Les Paul -- a man whose innovations in the electronics lab and in the studio were indispensable in the very creation of rock 'n' roll.

While his efforts as a songwriter and performer are impressive enough, the Wisconsin-bred Paul is best known for his behind-the-scenes advances -- in multitrack recording and, most important, introducing the electric guitar. That instrument, particularly the model that bears his name, was the focus of this 90th-birthday celebration.

Steve Miller kicked the program off in fine style with a version of "Fly Like an Eagle" that owed more to his blues roots than the mellow rock groove with which he's come to be associated. The fiery solo he injected into that tune was echoed by Steve Lukather, who followed with a spare but smoldering rendition of Jimi Hendrix's "Little Wing."

Not everyone took the unrestrained route. Peter Frampton's "So Into You" was the very model of refinement. Edgar Winter -- one of several participants who also appear on the upcoming tribute album "American Made, World Played" -- dispensed with the six-string altogether for a poignant "Dying to Live." The guest of honor didn't simply rest on his laurels: Using the backing band he

employs for his weekly stand at Gotham's Iridium Jazz Club, he ran through a mini-set of chipper standards designed to elicit warm smiles.

In keeping with time-honored tradition of such events, the "All for Paul" evening culminated in an all-star jam session that proved far less than the sum of its parts. Paul himself was the exception to that rule, however, cutting through the murk with a passel of solos -- notably on "Caravan" -- that attested to both his physical resilience and his continued capacity for sonic invention.