

For Immediate Release

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GUITARS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE LATE COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAMER MERLE TRAVIS TO BE FEATURED AT CHRISTIE'S SPRING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AUCTION

**Fine Musical Instruments
2 April 2007**

New York – Christie's is honored to announce that guitars from the collection of the late Merle Travis will be auctioned in the *Fine Musical Instruments* sale on April 2 in New York. Influential to many musicians, Travis was recognized for his unique finger-picking guitar style, called "Travis Picking." Because of his prolific writing and performing he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame as well as the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Martin and Gibson

Both the Gibson electric arch-top guitar, Style Super 400 (estimate: \$15,000-20,000) and the C.F. Martin D-28 (estimate: \$100,000-150,000) represent a unique partnership between the artist, Merle Travis and artisan Paul A Bigsby, which culminated in some of the most important design innovations in American guitar making in the years following World War II.

In 1946, Merle Travis commissioned an electric guitar to be made by the machinist and inventor Paul A. Bigsby and the result is often referred by some as the first solid-body electric guitar. Today the guitar resides in the Country Music Hall of Fame. Enamored by the feel and playability of the neck Travis returned to Bigsby requesting that a custom neck be fitted on his Martin D-28. This resulted in the first re-necking done by Bigsby on another manufacturer's guitar. It would be followed by countless other requests from performers including Lefty Frizzell, Zeke Clements and Hank Thompson. This guitar, which accompanied Travis through the majority of his career, was used to compose such hits as *Sixteen Tons*, and *Dark as a Dungeon*.

The Gibson Style Super 400 offered in for auction is an original production example made by Bigsby and was personally given to Travis by Bigsby. The original Gibson tailpiece was removed by Travis and replaced with the “Patent Pending” Bigsby tailpiece that it now carries. Also noteworthy is that this example from 1962 is custom fitted with two single coil P-90 pickups, rather than the Humbucking pickups, standard for many Gibson electrics by 1962.

Merle Travis

Born in 1917 in Rosewood, Kentucky, Merle Robert Travis was immersed in the rural music of western Kentucky and the finger-picking styles of Muhlenberg County guitarists including Kennedy Jones, Mose Rager, and Ike Everly. Rather than using a flat-pick, these players would pick the melody with the index finger of the right hand while the thumb supplied the rhythm on the bass strings. In the tradition of American colloquial music Merle Travis would mold and stylize this technique of playing. By adding a syncopated rhythm along with Blues and Jazz over-tones he made the style uniquely his own.

His first public performance would be on a local radio amateur hour in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1936. It lead to multiple job offers and then a permanent position on Cincinnati's WLW, which was then the Mid-West's foremost radio station for Country Music programming. A move to Hollywood, California in 1944 began his national exposure with work in film, live performance and a recording contract with Capital Records. In 1947, he wrote his first hit made by popular Tex Williams, *Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (that Cigarette)*. In 1953, his next break came when he won the role of the guitar picking GI in the film *From Here to Eternity* where he performed the movie's signature song *Re-Enlistment Blues*. In 1955, Tennessee Ernie Ford covered an earlier Travis composition, *Sixteen Tons* which quickly became a national cross-over hit furthering his recognition.

From 1944 to 1982, Travis appeared in 16 films and made countless recordings as both a solo musician and a session player. His unique style of finger-picking guitar would come to be known as Travis Picking and influence the likes of Hank Thompson, Scotty Moore, Doc Watson and the great Chet Atkins, all of whom acknowledged his contribution.

Auction: Fine Musical Instruments

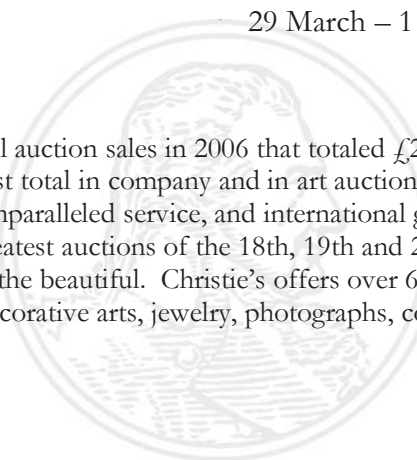
2 April

Viewing: Christie's Rockefeller Galleries

29 March – 1 April

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