



THE DEFINITIVE RANKING

TOP 10

Metal Guitarists of All Time

10

DEATH

Chuck Schuldiner

TECHNIQUE

Pioneered progressive death metal riffing with complex time signatures and melodic solos

INFLUENCE

Single-handedly invented death metal guitar; influenced every extreme metal guitarist since

LEGACY

The "Godfather of Death Metal" — genre-defining albums from *Scream Bloody Gore* to *Sound of Perseverance*

09

OZZY OSBOURNE / BLACK LABEL SOCIETY

Zakk Wylde

TECHNIQUE

Master of pinch harmonics and aggressive vibrato; combines southern rock feel with brutal metal power

INFLUENCE

Carried Ozzy's legacy post-Rhoads; inspired a generation of high-gain shredders

LEGACY

Built Black Label Society into a metal institution; signature bullseye Les Paul is iconic

08

SLAYER

Kerry King

TECHNIQUE

Chaotic dive-bomb solos and relentless tremolo picking; wrote some of thrash's most brutal riffs

INFLUENCE

Co-architect of extreme thrash; Slayer's speed and aggression set the template for countless bands

LEGACY

Reign in Blood remains the gold standard; four decades of uncompromising heaviness

07

MEGADETH

Dave Mustaine

TECHNIQUE

Technical thrash precision with jazz-influenced chord voicings; spider-chord technique pioneer

INFLUENCE

Co-founded Metallica before creating Megadeth; pushed thrash toward progressive complexity

LEGACY

Rust in Peace is a masterclass in technical metal; over 50 million records sold worldwide

06

METALLICA

Kirk Hammett

TECHNIQUE

Melodic wah-driven solos with blues sensibility; studied under Joe Satriani before joining Metallica

INFLUENCE

Made lead guitar accessible in thrash; his solos on Master of Puppets taught a generation to shred

LEGACY

Solos on "One" and "Fade to Black" are all-time classics; Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee

05

METALLICA

James Hetfield

TECHNIQUE

The greatest rhythm guitarist in metal history; aggressive downpicking precision at impossible tempos

INFLUENCE

Defined the thrash rhythm sound; every metal rhythm guitarist measures themselves against Hetfield

LEGACY

Co-wrote metal's most iconic riffs; 125+ million records sold with Metallica

04

GUNS N' ROSES

Slash

TECHNIQUE

Blues-rooted melodic phrasing with searing tone; instantly recognizable Les Paul through Marshall sound

INFLUENCE

Brought hard rock guitar back to the mainstream; revived interest in classic rock soloing in the MTV era

LEGACY

"Sweet Child O' Mine" intro is rock's most recognized riff; Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with GNR

03

OZZY OSBOURNE / QUIET RIOT

Randy Rhoads

TECHNIQUE

Fused classical composition with heavy metal; neoclassical shred pioneer with impeccable theory knowledge

INFLUENCE

Opened the door for Yngwie, Vai, and every neoclassical player; changed what metal guitar could be

LEGACY

Blizzard of Ozz and Diary of a Madman are essential; tragically lost at 25, legacy burns eternal

02

PANTERA / DAMAGEPLAN

Dimebag Darrell

Groove metal's most innovative guitarist. His crushing tone on "Cowboys From Hell" and "Vulgar Display of Power" redefined heaviness for the 90s. Master of squeals, dive bombs, and face-melting solos that balanced technicality with raw emotion.

THE RIFF MASTER

01

BLACK SABBATH

Tony Iommi

The man who invented heavy metal guitar. His downtuned, doom-laden riffs created an entire genre. From "Iron Man" to "Paranoid" to "War Pigs" — Iommi wrote the blueprint every metal guitarist still follows. The undisputed architect of heavy.