

How Guitar Hero made everybody a rock star

“Sharp Dressed Man,” by ZZ Top. Hard on a good day, Medium when my friends were over, Expert once and then never ever again. That was my *Guitar Hero* sweet spot. And for years, it seemed like everybody had one. The plastic guitar controllers became a staple of living rooms everywhere, and the songs – from big bands, small bands, and bands that didn’t even actually exist – became huge hits. Long before TikTok was the most important thing in music, getting your track on a *Guitar Hero* setlist could change your life forever.

For this episode of *Version History*, we go through the whole history of *Guitar Hero*. The story begins in arcades in Japan, travels to an unlikely pair of companies in the US, and nearly falls apart entirely before becoming an enormous hit. For a few years, *Guitar Hero* was as big as any game you could find, before it began to slowly fade into the background. The game may not be around anymore, but you can still find its legacy in some pretty big-name videogames.

Hosts David Pierce, Ash Parrish, and Chris Grant all lived through various parts of the *Guitar Hero* story. They gather at the *Version History* roundtable to talk about the franchise’s many precursors and influences, the E3 conference that became the franchise’s breakout hit, the eventual rise of Rock Band, and how *Guitar Hero* eventually lost most of its luster. We also bust out the axe for the first time in a long time, to see who’s still got it.

This is the fourth episode of *Version History*. (The first three were about hoverboards, BBM, and the Sony Watchman). If you want to find the show, there are three good places to go:

Thanks to everyone who has already watched or listened to the show, and has sent feedback! We're already hard at work on the next bunch of episodes, and want to hear everything you think we should be doing or not doing or doing differently. We're rewriting the eight Version History Questions as we speak, and we'd love to hear what you'd include in the list. In the meantime, if you want to relive Guitar Hero as we did, here are some links to get you started:

<https://www.theverge.com/podcast/806168/guitar-hero-game-version-history>