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[Lez Zeppelin treats Zeppelin as the Beethoven of its time](#)

Lez Zeppelin are four female musicians (bassist Megan Thomas, drummer Leesa Squyres, singer Shannon Conley and guitarist Steph Paynes) who recreate the [Led Zeppelin](#) musical experience. In fact, the band's latest album is a recreation of the classic album, Led Zeppelin I in painstaking detail.



“The band employed all of the same vintage equipment used by Led in 1968,” reads their bio, “from the ’50s era Les Paul and Telecaster, to the Supro amp, 60’s era compressor, Hammond organ and Fuzzbender stomp box — working fastidiously to recreate the incredibly complex layers of the album with a

dedication that has never before been demonstrated by any band of this type in the history of the rock world.”

Lez Zeppelin’s first album was actually released in 2007. The legendary producer Eddie Kramer was behind the helm. It was a combination of Zep tunes and originals (Kramer had a songwriting credit on Lez original “On the Rocks”). However, since then there have been a few lineup changes. But the one constant remains to be founding member, guitarist Steph Paynes. Paynes feels that this current lineup represents Lez the best. And the Lez continue to impress icons from Joe Perry to the actual members of Zeppelin.

This year, to support the recreation of Led Zeppelin I, the ladies have undertaken a full-year tour of both America and Europe. Seeing Lez live is just another way to expand the Zeppelin experience.



Why recreate the album Led Zeppelin I? Do you think this is the album that best represents Led Zeppelin?

Steph Paynes: Led Zeppelin’s first album might very well be the band’s greatest. But, even if one were to argue that this record is not wholly representative of all

the musical landscapes that would later become Zeppelin's legacy, then at the very least, Led Zeppelin I serves as the perfect introduction to their unique alchemy of light and shade. For this reason, the logical place to start for anyone who is serious about tracing the musical steps of Led would be to explore Led Zeppelin I. In order to capture the feel of it, though, we learned quickly that the music basically needs to be recorded live in the studio and requires deep immersion into the blues, British Celtic/folk music and some of the psychedelic rock of the period. We took great pains to retain authenticity of the sound and structure of the vinyl, and yet allow for that which happens between musicians in the moment. Spontaneous combustion is really what this album is all about.

Was it a lot to take on trying to recreate Led Zeppelin I to almost every last detail?

Paynes: Let's just say that the longer you look at a rainbow, the more colors you see. It was an amazing experience for both the producers and the band to try and deconstruct the sounds and textures — as well as the licks that aren't so apparent until you really arrive on the front line of Page's guitar army. Also, so many of these sounds and techniques are old school, and that, in itself, presented us with certain challenges. For example, you realize just how little distortion was used on all those guitar sounds. In other words, the guitar does not do you the favor of playing itself thanks to all that modern, permissive overdrive. Instead, all sorts of serious technique is required. Don't even ask about the pedal steel... I have seen the face of the devil, and he looks just like the pedal steel guitar!

Will there be more Zep album recreations?

Paynes: It might be hard to resist Led Zeppelin II simply because of the possibilities for the album cover.

Will there ever be an album of originals under Led Zeppelin?

Paynes: People and industry folk are asking us that all the time now. We might have to oblige one of these days.

All the band members who recorded the debut album are now gone — why did they leave? How hard was it to replace them? Was it a smooth transition?

Paynes: The last big line-up change was actually not the first. The group has gone through several incarnations since the band was hatched in 2004. Although each ensemble ran its natural course and had its myriad qualities, I have to say that it has consistently evolved. The present members, without doubt, come closest to my original vision for the project, both musically and charismatically. There is now a communication and depth of musicianship onstage that takes this thing to a whole other level.

What was it like to work with Eddie Kramer — and also have him involved in some of the band’s songwriting (“On the Rocks)?

Paynes: Eddie was very enthusiastic about our first record and was all for letting the band’s sound and personality come through to create something fresh. He was very excited about the two originals we brought to the table and had some excellent arrangement ideas for “On the Rocks.” Of course, he had a few Zep stories and pics he took of them at Headley Grange, which were amazing to see. It was also pretty special to go into Studio A at Electric Lady and record all our basic tracks there. A bit dreamlike all around.

Do you play originals live? If not, why?

Paynes: Yes, we actually play “Winter Sun” from our first album quite a bit as part of our acoustic set and it always goes over extremely well.

Do you like the tag ‘tribute band’?

Paynes: We never have and never will use that “tag” to describe Lez Zeppelin. Unlike most “tribute bands,” we do not impersonate or try to convince anyone that they are actually seeing/hearing Led Zeppelin. Instead, our aim is to reinterpret the classical music of our time. Just as an orchestra would play Beethoven, we bring ourselves to this music in order to resurrect the full concert experience. It’s hard to find a word to describe exactly what we do, but you might call it a “She-incarnation.”

Do you think there are too many tribute bands out there nowadays?

Paynes: It has definitely become much more crowded out there since we landed on the scene. Not so much with female bands per say, but there are many, many more groups in all sorts of genres. Some are more serious in their attention to the music than others, obviously.

How do you compare your band to other Zeppelin tribute bands?

Paynes: We don’t.

What did you think of Jason Bonham’s Led Zeppelin tribute tour?

Paynes: It was very touching to see Jason pay homage to his father. I was most impressed with his performance and his spoken interactions with the audience. They struck me as sincere and clearly this project provided him with a creative way to share his memories and admiration for his dad.

What about a farcical tribute like Dread Zeppelin?

Paynes: Hilarious! And, creatively done.

Have any members of Zeppelin given feedback on the band?

Paynes: We have received communications from Page over the last few years through a close mutual friend and he is very supportive of the group. He was also helpful with and very much appreciated LEZ ZEPPELIN I. Plant would be hard-pressed not to know who we are, especially after the 2008 Bonnaroo Festival,

when we were both on the bill and everyone was speculating publicly as to whether Plant would get on stage with us and do a few numbers! But, we have also gotten his best wishes from members of his touring crew that we know. I actually met John Paul Jones at Zeppelin's 2007 Reunion in London. He expressed what can only be described as delight when I was introduced to him as a member of Lez Zeppelin, and told me he'd heard only great things and was very anxious to hear us play. Needless to say, this kinda' blew my mind.

What was it like to get such a rave review from an icon like Joe Perry of Aerosmith?

Paynes: It was "priceless," as they say! What was even more amazing was the way he was able to so succinctly express what we are doing in terms of re-interpreting this "classical" music and looking to follow in the footsteps of our classic rock heroes — such as Aerosmith and their colleagues — who were inspired by the blues and early British invasion bands, etc. Playing this particular kind of music requires a lot of work and determination, and Joe really seems to understand and appreciate this on a very personal level.

What are the immediate plans of the band?

Paynes: You might say the band is built for festivals, so we are very excited to be back on a major festival stage. We have some US touring planned for the summer and are looking to possibly visit Australia and return to Europe and hopefully Japan once things settle down there later in the year. We are also the subject of a full-length documentary, which should be finished soon and hopefully will go to some of the film festivals next year. And, we have a few other crazy things up our sleeves, including some more recording.

And, finally, do you think Led Zeppelin should ever get back together and do a world tour? (And could you imagine opening up for that tour?)

Paynes: Well, since I did have the honor of attending the 02 reunion in London, I can vouch for the fact that if the remaining members of Led wished to go out there again, there is no doubt in my mind that they could deliver an amazing concert experience. I witnessed it. However, it appears clear that they are not all on board with such an endeavor. People seem very upset about this, but you have to remember that when Bonham died in 1980, the group decided then to disband. I think that decision portrayed incredible integrity. Whether or not they agree at some point to do more shows, their legacy remains intact and I can see from our own shows, that it continues to inspire and turn-on new generations. But, I admit that I would love to see Jimmy come back into the bustle of things. Whether he produces, writes a symphony or just plays his guitar by the fire and puts it on YouTube, he is missed. Of course, he is ever and always invited to come and play his music with us. You know, there are plenty of guitar parts to go around...