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# The Short-But-Sweet Interview: Lez Zeppelin

The group's guitarist answers the tough questions

By  [Greg Prato](#) May 3, 2011  
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One of the most celebrated and renowned US-based [Led Zeppelin](#) tribute bands is the all-female [Lez Zeppelin](#), who released their second album overall, *Lez Zeppelin I* (which is described as "an incredible replication of Led Zeppelin's 1969 debut") late last year.

With tour dates booked for the summer (check out a listing [here](#)), Lez Zep's guitarist/ [Jimmy Page](#) aficionado, Steph Paynes, agreed to a Short-But-Sweet Interview.

**UGO:** How heavy is *Lez Zeppelin I*?

**STEPH PAYNES:** As heavy as Le(a)d, of course! Although, I think when one is talking about the "heaviness" of Led Zeppelin as people often do, it is important to note that while they certainly may have laid some of the groundwork for what subsequently became known as "heavy metal," Led's music was equally light and airy as it was dark and heavy. In terms of *LZI*, take a number like "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" -- so beautifully delicate in the verses and then it hits you like an anvil in the choruses. "Black Mountain Side" and "Your Time is Gonna Come" don't even have electric guitars; while compositions like "Dazed and Confused" or "How Many More Times" are a complete symphony of sounds and moods moving from ethereal to explosive. In approaching *LZI*, we really tried to be sensitive to all of the nuance that made this record, and their music in general, so brilliant.

**UGO:** What is the funniest story of someone mistaking "Lez Zeppelin" for "Led Zeppelin" (re: concert promotion, etc.)?

**STEPH PAYNES:** Not sure if this would be considered funny or simply outrageous, but the craziest story of someone mistaking Lez for Led would have to be the poor journalist from the AP Wire, who after receiving a press release announcing that Lez Zeppelin was to be part of the 2008 line-up for Bonnaroo, then proceeded to write a story about how LED Zeppelin would be headlining the festival. Of course, this news was picked up by major media and newspapers across the world, who then had to correct the facts a few hours later. It became one of the stranger media snafus ever associated with a music festival, and serendipitously, served to bring Lez Zeppelin into the headlines and make us one of the most anticipated acts of Bonnaroo that year. We played opening night at midnight and drew a crowd of 20,000 -- all of whom were anxious to see how we might 'get the Led out,' as it were. It was truly one of the most incredible moments I've ever had on stage. The front page of the Bonnaroo daily paper the next morning was a full size pic of us along with the headline, "Might as well have been the real thing..." So, I suspect we did quite all right.

**UGO:** Have any of the surviving members of Led Zeppelin seen Lez Zeppelin play live or are aware of the band? If so, what were their thoughts?

**STEPH PAYNES:** Yes, the three surviving members are aware of and seemingly very positive about the group. We have communicated with Page through a close mutual friend over the last few years and he consistently sends his best



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wishes and has expressed his deep appreciation of our latest release, *LEZ ZEPPELIN I*. I actually met John Paul Jones at Zeppelin's 2007 Reunion at the O2 in London, which I was lucky enough to attend, and he expressed what can only be described as delight when I was introduced to him as a member of Lez Zeppelin. He told me that he'd heard great things about the band and was very anxious to hear us play. Then he asked, "Which one are you, then?" I said, "Jimmy" and we both laughed. Needless to say, this kinda blew my mind -- JPJ, the quintessential musician, telling me he'd like to see \*us\* play!

**UGO:** Who are some of the best rock tribute bands out there today, in your estimation?

**STEPH PAYNES:** This is a bit tough to answer because in all honesty I haven't really seen a lot of these bands. However, I have been to several gigs by our fellow New Yorkers, [The Fab Faux](#), and I would venture that in terms of performing with all of the required subtlety and grace the music of the Beatles, no one does it better than them.

**UGO:** Are tribute bands a valid form of musical expression...or mere malarky?

**STEPH PAYNES:** Hey, "mere malarky" can be fun... However, as far as tribute bands go, I've never really considered Lez Zeppelin to be a "tribute band" as we don't try to impersonate or fool the audience, as it were, into thinking that we are Led Zeppelin. This is what tribute bands do, primarily -- they want to create that illusion. To the contrary, our intention has always been to take what I consider to be the classical music of our time and bring our own musical selves to it with all the energy, passion and practice required to create a truly transcendent and 'in the moment' experience for an audience. When I see from the stage some of the smiles of joy on peoples' faces as this music takes them to another place in time and spirit, I have to say that it seems like a very valid form of musical expression, indeed.



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