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# Out with the Led ... in with the Lez!

*'The Song Remains the Same' with tribute act Lez Zeppelin by NickBRANDON*



Let it be known, over the hills and far away, to anyone who loves rock 'n' roll — Zeppelin's coming back to town.

If you go, be ready to experience all of its rock power and glory; those classic, loud riffs and epic songs, which will be performed by that famed foursome of names: McLellan, Paynes, Brigantino and Destroy.

Wait a minute.

Yep, this is a different Zeppelin — Lez Zeppelin, a tribute band like no other that's returning to take fans on a stairway



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"We can't all be heroes because somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as they go by."  
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to classic rock heaven.

Not Plant, Page, Jones and Bonham, but New York-based artists Sarah McLellan (vocals), Stephanie Paynes (guitar), Lisa Brigantino (bass and keyboards) and drummer Helen Destroy — yes, four female musicians, who are shooting a brand new spin into the Led Zeppelin catalog with their sizzling live act.

The idea is brilliant, and the reviews have been astounding — but how did it happen? A quartet of females that plays Led Zeppelin tunes? It's a story of, well, "Rock and Roll" that may leave you "Dazed and Confused," but you'll realize why these girls have such "Presence."

Oh, enough set up — let's "Ramble On."



McLellan on Plant: "Plant, to me, is just so wild — very flamboyant in a lot of ways. I feel sometimes like he's even more feminine than I am, and very sexual too. I'm inspired by his performance in a lot of ways."

*David Atlas*

### "What is and What Should Never Be"

Deep in the consciousness of NYC guitarist Stephanie Payne, the idea of Lez Zeppelin was years in the making — one as ambitious as it was creative.

"It was just this fantasy of wanting to play Led Zeppelin music, and figuring, 'Hey, why not do it?'" Payne said. "There was no question in my mind that it was a good idea. It just seemed so right — it was like an idea that's time had come."

Mulling over the idea for a while, Payne decided to start asking friends and confidants about it — a few dropped jaws later, Steph knew she was onto something.

"Every time I told someone about it, their reaction was the same, it was completely overwhelmingly positive," she said. "Once the name came, which was another revelation, there was no doubt the world needed it to be done."

Enter bassist Brigantino, who co-founded the group with Paynes for its first gig late in 2003 in their hometown.

The band developed its unique act, and in October 2005

•  
**Jessica Gilleran**  
 Advertising

changes were on the brink — vocalist McLellan, an Australian native, signed on, and drummer Destroy fulfilled a fantasy of her own by joining the quartet after seeing them play last summer.

"I was in the crowd, and I said, 'This is my dream gig. I want to be in this band more than anything,'" Destroy said. Two weeks later, the drum chair opened up, and Destroy happily filled it.



Paynes on Page: "He can attack like a machine gun, kind of like a train raging down the track, and there's an excitement and a sexual forcefulness about his playing that is inimitable. At the same time, it can be really delicate and very beautiful."

### **"Thank You"**

Like any tribute act, the music of Led Zeppelin holds a dear place in the hearts of Lez Zeppelin's members — to play it night after night, it would have to. But you quickly learn, both by seeing the group members live or hearing them speak, that there's no novelty here: It's totally about their passion and love for this music.

Paynes, a fan of all vintage rock 'n' roll, rediscovered Zep about five years ago; an obsession was born.

"I started listening to it endlessly, it's almost like I couldn't listen to anything else," she said. "I started to realize the breadth of the material. It was really as a more mature musician that I started to appreciate what it was."

Paynes' favorite track is "Dazed and Confused," and she leads the band's 12-minute version of the song with a guitar solo

featuring, yes, a violin bow.

"I think, personally, that one should encompass everything Zeppelin is — light and dark, like heaven and hell colliding all at once," she said. "It's a complete emotive journey.

"After we're done with it, it is like we need to lay down and have a cigarette; but, of course, we have the rest of the show to play."

"Everyone knows and agrees that it's one of the best bands that play rock in the world," McLellan said. "Joining the band, I definitely had to immerse myself in the music, and I've become a very big fan.

"We're all still blown away by the stuff they do. You'd think we'd get enough of it playing all the time, but we actually had to turn (Zeppelin) down to do the interview with you!"

That's dedication.

"The music is so moving and so dynamic, and it's so different and challenging to play," Brigantino said. "I think it's an integral part of rock history. They paved the way for so many bands to come after them, and it's great music."



Brigantino on Jones: "He was an integral part of that band, and because he was able to fill in for whatever they needed and his musicianship was just incredible."

*David Atlas*

### **"Physical Graffiti"**

They say imitation is the best form of flattery — if that's true, Lez Zeppelin are the queens of rock 'n' roll adulation.

When the lights go down and the first note hits, the foursome has a couple hours to not just play legendary sounds, but to actually adopt personas from one of the best bands ever.

It may be the best form of flattery, but, for this project, it's not as easy as it seems — and their performance is well researched, and as true to the original as possible.

For Paynes, she hopes to exude Jimmy Page's multiplicity.

"I think the thing about his playing is he's such a broad

musician," she said. "I really like that he can do all of these different things. But his main genius, probably, is his producing; the way he used the guitar in his producing as a complete orchestra.

"He referred to it as a 'guitar army,' but that's really what it was. It's just fabulous."

Along with her strong, shrieking pipes, McLellan also contains one of Plant's signature physical aspects.

"My hair is pretty big like his," she said. "It's not quite blond and permed, but I've got that mane of hair going, so that's a nice thing."

None of the members had a chance to see Led Zeppelin live before its disbanding in 1980, but they've all spent countless hours listening and watching what little footage exists of the band live.

"I've watched that DVD about 60,000 times," said Destroy, who performs a Bonham-esque drum solo every night. "I know that I've adopted a lot of the physical characteristics of (Bonham) when he's performing, like facial expressions.

"I'm not trying to be him, but I want to give the people watching the show that have never seen Zeppelin before ... what they were hoping to see."

The women hope to balance respect for the music's authenticity with adding their own, modern touch to the versions.

"We're not trying to copy Zeppelin, though there are things we try and do that intimate the different people in the band," Brigantino added. "But we're really bringing our own flair to what we're doing."

And do the surviving members of Led Zeppelin know about Lez Zeppelin?

"We don't know for sure," Paynes said. "We've heard that people have told Robert Plant about us; we think Jimmy may have heard about the band. By now, we figure they might have heard of us because we've got a lot of press in England.

"We think it's probably only a matter of time before some of them show up — hopefully happily."



Destroy on Bonzo: "There's a magic in it because he's so original — you just have to admire that. He spawned a whole generation of drummers."

### **"Whole Lotta Love"**

People are certainly touchy about the bands they love — especially era-defining artists like Led Zeppelin, making it a difficult task for the brave who choose to cover its songs.

You'd think Lez Zeppelin would receive some harsh criticism from the legions, but, according to its members, that has been far from the case.

"The reactions from people are absolutely positive," McLellan said. "We've not really had anyone who said, 'You girls shouldn't be doing what you're doing.' The best thing about what we're doing is it really is about the music for us; it's not about anything else.

"It's about making sure we keep the integrity of what they were trying to do because it's very special and sacred to a lot of people."

"I think people are floored," Destroy added. "They've heard girl bands before, and they think we're going to give it a good try and it will be an interesting novelty night. Then we explode into our first song and their jaws drop to the floor."

Other members say young people are a constant in its audiences — something the group cherishes.

"We get a lot of really young kids that come to see us, and that's awesome when they're just completely blown away; you can see it in their eyes," Paynes said. "We've had some people come up and say crazy things to us, like it's the best show they've ever seen, and they want us to sign all sorts of parts of their bodies.

"People are really moved by the performance."

For Brigantino, carrying on this music to inspire youth is especially satisfying — especially young women.

"We're four women getting on stage and rocking the hell out of this music," she said. "I certainly didn't have a role model like that growing up a female musician, and I think we're providing that for young girls. It's a very healthy thing. If we

can be role models and mentors to young women playing any kind of music, for me that's a success."

What's the secret to their genuine success? McLellen says it's simple.

"We're not trying to be a gimmick."

### **"Celebration Day"**

Lez Zeppelin is set to rock The Magic Bag in Ferndale Friday, March 3. The band is excited about returning to the Rock City.

"Detroit is high on our list, man, we love Detroit," Paynes said. "We played there once before, and it was one of the best gigs.

"We had such love coming at us from the audience; people went nuts."

Destroy added, "It's Detroit Rock City, so I'm expecting the show to go really well and I know we're going to have a great time while we're there."

The band knows about 30 Zep tunes currently, and mixes up its sets with different phases of the band's catalog. Down the road, McLellan said, if the band can learn all of its songs, it will.

"People have come up and said to us who have seen Zeppelin live in concert, 'I have not experienced anything like that until we saw you tonight,'" McLellan said. "To get those kind of compliments is absolutely incredible.

"What more can you ask for?"

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