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Hey Hey Mamas groove to Zep

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The song remains the same, but you may not recognize the singers.

Steph Paynes, the lead guitarist of Lez Zeppelin, an all-female Led Zeppelin-tribute band, has struck a chord playing, well, Jimmy Page's chords.

When a stint as a guitarist and singer for Ronnie Spector came to an end, Paynes tried to imagine the "most fun thing for any guitar player to do," and came up with the concept of an all-girl Zeppelin act. They'll appear at Mercury Lounge tonight.

"It's a good thing I didn't think about it too much," the Manhattanite says. "If I had, I probably would have run away screaming, thinking it was



From l., Lez Zeppelin's Steph Paynes, Wendy Kidd and Brooke Gengras

impossible. I never thought it was impossible being girls or anything, it's just that, as you tackle the music and there's so much to it, you're really getting into something that's very rich."

But despite the pressure of interpreting the tunes of the band that many consider to be the greatest rockers of all time, Paynes and her bandmates - Brooke Gengras (vocals), Lisa Brigantino (bass, mandolin, keyboards) and Wendy Kidd (drums) - are thrilled with the results, and have managed to put their own unique spin on the classic material.

In August, Lez Zeppelin will play a special show alongside the all-male Zep cover band Black Dog at B.B. King's Blues Club and Grill. They played a similar show last year and, Paynes admits, things got a little hairy when the time came to compare set lists. Naturally, the major debate revolved around the dramatic rock anthem "Stairway to Heaven."

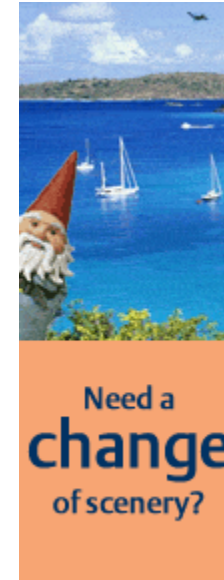
As they reinterpret Led Zeppelin's classic songs, Lez Zeppelin and other all-girl tribute acts like them are inadvertently making a statement about women in rock.

"I've always wondered why there weren't more all-female power groups," says Paynes. "Groups like Cream, groups where women are playing the lead guitar. I'm not sure if what we're doing is political - maybe it is - but it's definitely empowering."

"For a long time, there weren't [female guitarists]," says Jason Fine, assistant managing editor at Rolling Stone. "Dudes were at home in the garage jamming and a lot of girls weren't doing that. Now you're seeing it way more than you would have even 10 years ago. Being in a Led Zeppelin band is the ultimate tribute band for a guitarist - one where you can actually be a little bit cool."

Despite their name and feminine pride, the women of Lez Zeppelin won't answer questions of their sexual preference.

"We have a strict Clintonian 'Don't ask, don't tell' policy," Paynes says coyly. "Whatever people would like to think about it is fine with us. It's more interesting that way."



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