

Taking the Led Out

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SPEARHEADED by The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and The Who in the 60's, the British rock n roll invasion (and subsequent unequivocal domination) across the Atlantic to the US lasted well into the '80s without any serious threats from American bands. After the deluge of the '60s, the '70s saw the following three bands: Led Zeppelin, Genesis and Pink Floyd taking over the helms of rock music. Representing three very different forms of rock music, they were the quintessential bands of the time and at the vanguard of rock music of the '70s decade--the post Woodstock, post Vietnam era that introduced the word "inflation" to the common person.

To begin with, Led Zeppelin sold more albums than any of their rivals (Uriah Heep, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, Rainbow, Whitesnake) and broke concert attendance records throughout the '70s (their attendance record at the Madison Square Garden in 1976/77 remained unbroken for many years). Though heavily influenced by blues music, Led Zeppelin had seminal influence on the genre of music known as heavy metal or hard rock.

As a band, Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Paul Jones, and John Bonham--were all brilliant musicians; as a unit, Led Zep was synergy par excellence. Jimmy Page, in particular, was the lead guitarist, co-songwriter, co-composer and most amazingly, the producer of ALL the Led Zeppelin albums. From their debut album in 1968, Led Zep stoked the heavy metal fire that became an inferno. To be fair, Led Zeppelin did not single handedly "create" or "invent" heavy metal/hard rock music, but was undoubtedly an intrinsic part during its embryonic stage.

Led Zeppelin's music had depth and diversity--from the highly rhythmic "Whole Lotta Love", the raw guitars of "Black Dog", the haunting nine minute "Kashmir", and lest we forget the classic ballad "Stairway To Heaven", LZ greatly enriched rock music.



The album cover: Physical Graffiti.



Their first album, the eponymous Led Zeppelin I (one) became one of the top 5 selling albums of the year in the US. This is no easy feat considering the stellar competition at that time: The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, Doors, Crosby Stills-Nash-Young etc.

In the late '60s, Jimmy Page, already a veteran guitarist who had made his mark with The Yardbirds (Yardbirds alumni also included Eric Clapton, and Jeff Beck--two great guitarists), and bassist John Paul Jones, set out to form a new band. As the story goes, Jimmy Page saw Robert Plant singing for a local band at a club, and when approached, Robert Plant insisted on bringing his hitherto unknown drummer John Bonham on board. Up until that point, Ginger Baker (who went to join Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce to form Cream) was tipped to be the drummer of this new band. Reluctantly, Page agreed to take John Bonham and the four thus formed The New Yardbirds. Then when the late Keith Moon (legendary Who drummer) commented that this band "will go up like a lead balloon" the name was changed to Led Zeppelin. LZ's second album (simply titled Led Zeppelin II) was also a top 5 seller. Their third album received lukewarm reviews but then in 1971 they came up with Led Zeppelin IV (also known as "four symbols") containing such tunes as "Black Dog", "Rock'n'roll", Battle Of