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The Origin of the Species: Led Zeppelin (Sexy Intellectual)

A decent look at the launch years of Led Zeppelin, focusing largely on Jimmy Page and his stint in the Yardbirds (with tasty clips like "Happening Ten Years Time Ago"), and paying special attention to the songs that made the band famous that Page (a master pilferer of choice material) appropriated for their repertoire, such as "Whole Lotta Love" (ripped off from Small Faces) and "Dazed and Confused" (filched from folkie Jake Holmes). But Page wasn't the only borrower in the band. A few listens to Band of Joy, Robert Plant and John Bonham's pre-Zep group also reveals Plant as hugely influenced by Small Faces singer Steve Marriott. This DVD includes an adequate selection of early Zep footage that proves the band to be a formidable live entity, refuting critics who seemingly base their gripes of the group's lethargic stage skills on screenings of "The Song Remains the Same" when Page and company had clearly succumbed to rock-star excess, resulting in uneven, tepid performances. (For more salacious info on the band's inevitable decline into ensemble ponderousness check out the Zep bio "Hammer of the Gods.") During the late 1960s and early '70s, Zep was a holy terror on stage with Bonham and bassist John Paul Jones anchoring possibly the heaviest rhythm section of all time, with Page tossing off inventive solos and arrangements, and Robert Plant establishing himself as the prototype rock front man/golden god/sex symbol with the heroic pipes. It's become commonplace and hip to dis powerhouse '70s rock groups like Led Zeppelin, but given the lack of stadium-worthy bands currently on the circuit (Face it, indie rock is nothing if not a unanimous approval of diminished "rock stardom," for better or worse), it becomes increasingly necessary to reconsider the careers of our classic-rock forefathers. And anyone who cares a fig for rock drumming will be in hog heaven with this disc: Here, after all, is Bonzo, one of the slammingest mashers ever to maul a kit. Scant commentary from anyone strongly connected to the band is a bit annoying, though. Chris Welch and Alan Clayson again?! (John Chandler)