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DISC STATS

- ↳ Video: 1.77:1
- ↳ Anamorphic: Yes
- ↳ Audio: Stereo Surround
- ↳ Subtitles: None
- ↳ Runtime: 70 minutes
- ↳ Rating: NR
- ↳ Released: August 8, 2006
- ↳ Production Year: 2006
- ↳ Director: None
- ↳ Released by: Chrome Dreams / Music Video Distributors
- ↳ Region: 0 NTSC

DISC EXTRAS

- ↳ The Story Of The Yardbirds
- ↳ The Hardest Led Zeppelin Quiz In The World Ever
- ↳ Contributor biographies
- ↳ Beyond DVD section

REVIEWS

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Led Zeppelin: The Origin Of The Species

By Larry Phillips

Led Zeppelin is one of the greatest rock bands in the history of music. Their impact on the scene is felt far and wide, and the sheer volume of bands that they've inspired reads like a who's-who of modern music. Their legacy will continue to be felt for generations, as will their influences on sub-genres like heavy metal, hard rock, and punk.

It's easy for fans of music to look backwards and see all that Led Zeppelin has wrought, but what sometimes gets lost in history is where the band came from and what sounds inspired them.

Sure, their music definitely shows its inspiration quite clearly... some even quibble that the "inspiration" is downright theft. Even the most basic musical knowledge is enough to hear the heavy influence of blues, R&B, and folk music in their sound, but it takes a keener ear and a deeper knowledge to know exactly what those influences are and how they took root in the four men who made up the band Led Zeppelin.

Unlike the [Queen series](#) from the same DVD distributor, **The Origin Of The Species** is much more of a proper documentary. The thesis of the piece is an exploration of each member of Led Zeppelin (Jimmy Page, Robert Plant, John Bonham, and John Paul Jones), where they came from and how the band got together. This exploration is extremely thorough and literally packed to the brim with information. Done at a brisk pace, the entire runtime is only seventy minutes, yet it isn't until the forty minute mark that the band forms and releases their first album.

The structure of the piece is framed up by a series of talking head interviews and given context, texture, and life by performance footage, rare clips, photographs, and songs. While this approach can sometimes be very dry, **Origin Of The Species** is anything but.



One of my biggest complaints as I reviewed the Queen titles was that the interview subjects seemed picked at random. While they were quite knowledgeable, and obviously fans of Queen, most had little connection to the band or its history. In **Origin Of The Species**, that is definitely not the case. While we get no participation from any of the living members of Led Zeppelin, they aren't missed. Many bands at this stage in the remaining years of their career can be overtaken by self-aggrandizement and a certain coloring of their history. For something that is a somewhat scholarly take on the band and their place in music as a whole, such moments can be distracting. What we do get are former band mates, colleagues, and journalists who've followed their career from the beginning. Not only are we treated to direct, eye-witness accounts, we are given these details with very little distortion of the truth.



I said earlier that this was a scholarly approach to the band and its formation. Don't let that scare you off, I also said that this film was anything but dry. Throughout its runtime, it seems like each new moment delivered another new anecdote and fact about the band. I learned new details, such as how the original incarnation of Led Zeppelin was to be Jimmy Page and Jeff Beck, who were members of The Yardbirds at the time, and John Entwistle and Keith Moon of [The Who](#), who were fed up with the nonsense from Pete Townshend. The only thing that survived from that secret

meeting was the name, inspired by Keith Moon and coined by John Entwistle. Another cool fact I learned was that the tune *Dazed And Confused* from *Led Zeppelin I* originated as a song that The Yardbirds would end their show with. They never recorded it, and Jimmy Page brought the song with him to Led Zeppelin. While I am no great historian of the band, I am a huge fan, and these and about a dozen other new and interesting facts kept me glued to the screen.

Something that **Origin Of The Species** does far better than any other title I've seen by this company is their use of performance footage, clips, photos and songs to illustrate and illuminate the narrative. The producers did an amazing job of actually procuring the material that the interview subjects make reference to. This was no small feat. They've gathered everything from footage of a teenage Jimmy Page interviewed on British television in 1958, to rare and obscure songs from the members of Led Zeppelin's previous bands, to even rarer blues and folk songs that inspired the band. There is even a clip of Antonioni's **Blow Up**, which features a performance with Jimmy Page as a member of The Yardbirds. While the set design and equipment used to shoot the interviews certainly look dated and artless, it seems that no expense was spared in doing the research and obtaining all of the wonderful b-roll for this film.

One thing that I noted, but I stop short of calling it a fault, was that the focus of the piece seemed to be very heavy on Jimmy Page. Arguments spring up all the time around Led Zeppelin fans as to who was the most influential member of the band. My take is that each one was integral to their sound and what they became. This band didn't just pop up out of some garage or basement. They were all working and recording musicians, professionals, before they became Led Zeppelin. Their talents and strengths were invaluable as were their contributions to the sound. Like a chair,



when you remove a leg, the rest will come tumbling down. They may have broken up after John Bonham died, but I suspect they would've done the same had they lost any other member. They knew intrinsically what I state now. Nevertheless, as I said, the producers of this film seem to have subtly taken a side, and they side with Page. They never once minimize the other members, nor are they given short-shrift. Perhaps the Page-heavy feeling is due to the fact that A: He formed the band; and B: They had such wonderful access to Chris Dreja, the guitarist and bassist for The Yardbirds from the band's inception with Eric Clapton, to the addition of Jeff Beck, to Clapton's leaving and Page's joining of the band. With such an amazing interview subject at hand, I won't fault the producers for allowing this to get more stuff about Page than the rest of the band.

Origin Of The Species begins with each member of Led Zeppelin, separate and finding their way through music, to the forming of the band, ending after the release of *Led Zeppelin II*. Not only is this perfect viewing for fans of the band, I wouldn't hesitate in recommending this to *any* fan of music history, rock & roll, or popular culture. While this film isn't flashy and pretty, it is fascinating and interesting from beginning to end.

Presentation

The presentation is a bit dicey. The original interviews aren't exactly artfully shot, and it looks like the equipment used wasn't state of the art. The video looks both a wee bit soft, yet '80s video crisp. The set design has a certain late '80s/early '90s feel as well. Although everything I've found says that this is a product of 2006, the interviews look like they have a bit more age to them. The b-roll footage can look a little beat up, but then again we are viewing it in a historical context, not as something to be marveled over on an HD display. For the most part, it all looks fine... some of it is simply amazing that it exists at all.

The same can be said for the sound as well. While it is here in stereo surround, it's not meant to be something to jam out to. When we get music, there is an awful lot of it here and the bulk of it isn't even Led Zeppelin, we only get clips.

There was a noticeable transfer issue on the copy that I viewed. While there were zero instances of pixilation or haloing, there was an interlacing problem at the top of the picture as it hit against the black bar.

Extras

Included on this disc is a piece called *The Story Of The Yardbirds*. At nearly twenty minutes long, it is obvious that to include it within **The Origin Of The Species** would be to take it way off topic. Yet, since the filmmakers had access to Chris Dreja of The Yardbirds, they certainly had a fantastic opportunity to get a history of the band from him. I'm definitely glad that they did. The interview appears to be from the same session as his moments in **The Origin Of The Species**, but here he goes into detail on his band The Yardbirds. Unfortunately, the segment wasn't produced like the main feature, and there is no b-roll sound or picture to fill things out. It's not as stimulating as the main feature, but definitely worth your time to view.



The *Contributor Biographies* are text bios of each interview subjects. A lot of info can be gleaned from these, and I recommend checking them out before tackling the main feature.

The Hardest Led Zeppelin Quiz In The World Ever was another exercise in futility for me, just as the Queen quizzes were. I scored an 8 out of 25, which means I thankfully have memorized very little minutiae in the world of Led Zeppelin.

Something that would've blown the scales for me on this title would've been the inclusion of all the musical performances shown in **Origin** in their entirety. I understand not putting full performances in the main feature, but had they included them in the extras, I'd be buying this title for every person I know. That is something that these disc producers need to look into. I have no idea how the rights issues change when you move from clips to full performances, but it sure would have been awesome to have.

Wrap-up

There is something about an oral history of rock music, complete with pictures, songs, and performance that is so much more illuminating than just plain text. For me, **Origin Of The Species** is far better than any book covering the same topic could be. I can't recommend this enough.

We're currently discussing the greatest Led Zeppelin albums in [our forums](#). It's hard to believe a band with the sort of legacy that they have only recorded eight studio albums. One thing is for sure, although I voted on the double LP

Physical Graffiti as my favorite, watching **Origin Of The Species** definitely reawakened my appreciation of *Led Zeppelin I* and *Led Zeppelin II* – records that I tend to take for granted.



Led Zeppelin: The Origin Of The Species

4

Feature - One of the best rock documentaries using this structure that I've seen.

2.5

Video - Imperfections in both source materials and transfer edged this slightly below average.

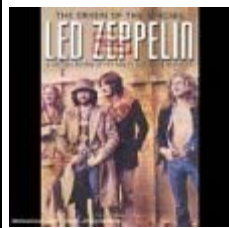
3

Audio - Average and acceptable.

2

Extras - A few good moments, but missed opportunities and a time waster

kept this one well below average.



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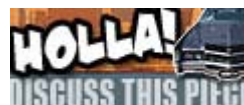
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4



OVERALL



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