



DVD: Led Zeppelin: The Origin of the Species - Roots and Branches (2005)

Review Rating: Good

Label/Studio: Music Video Distribution / Sexy Intellectual

Catalog #: DVD-SIDVD-505

Region: 0 (NTSC)

Released: August 8, 2006



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Genre: Documentary

Synopsis: Detailed documentary on the formation of supergroup and hard rock pioneers Led Zeppelin.

Directed by: (none credited)

Screenplay by: (none credited)

Music by: Led Zeppelin

Produced by: Thomas Walker

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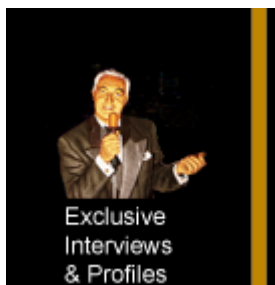
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Cast: Phil Sutcliffe, Chris Welch, Keith Altham, Chris Farlowe, Alan Clayson, Clem Cattini, Dave Berry, Barney Hoskyns, Chris Dreja, Paolo Hewitt, and Clancy Sharp (narration).

Film Length: 72 mins

Process/Ratio: 1.33:1

Colour

Anamorphic DVD: No

Languages: English Stereo

Subtitles:

Special Features :

Featurette: The Story of the Yardbirds (20:34) / Interactive gaming feature: The Hardest Led Zeppelin Quiz in the World Ever / Contributing Biographies / Media Links

Comments :

Most documentaries on rock bands tend to be safe productions designed as TV filler, giving little insight into the musicians that developed and merged into powerful creative components of super bands like Led Zeppelin, so it's a delight to see a solid doc crafted with a genuine respect for, and a critical eye, in **Led Zeppelin: The Origin of the Species**.

Produced with an openly proud regard for Britain's contributions to modern music, **Origins** follows a very simple template that starts with a prologue on the musical style of the era - the pop-rock Swinging Sixties, infused with elements of blues, big band, and rockabilly in songs running under three minutes - and moves to detailed bio sketches on the future band members that would assemble in 1968, introduce hard rock to popular music, and form a key transitional movement from the bubble-headed ditties of the sixties, to epic vocal and instrumental works that typified the early and mid-seventies.

What's most surprising is the tight circle of venues and musical influences that brought singer Robert Plant, guitarist Jimmy Page, bassist John Paul Jones, and drummer John Bonham together: both Page and Plant were influenced at a very young age by American blues, and traveled in similar musical circles as Bonham and Jones. Part of that microcosm included session work for major artists and one-hit wonders that filled an endless need for upbeat singles and cover versions of popular American songs, and through their associations with ephemeral bands, each musician developed a style and interest that organically melded into Led Zeppelin.

A big disclaimer on the rear of the box makes it clear this is an independently produced doc, done without any authorization from the band and such - a move that might unfairly give passing buyers the impression **Origins** is a tabloid-style production with sleazy details on indulgent lifestyles. Not so, because the interview segments give us marvelous insight from historians, musicologists, biographers, and old timers that once played with the pre-Zeppelin musicians in their lean years. Like any creative industry, the four worked in a tight community - so word naturally got around of who shared similar styles, interests, and a performance loudness that was sometimes too much for others, but became Zeppelin's signature on vinyl, and in person.

The best British docs have an innate quality of being concise and detailed within an organized structure, and **Origins** is extremely addictive watching; every chapter feels like a cliffhanger episode - of who came next in the band's gelling process, and the first two albums that ignited a meteoric ride in the band's first years.

In addition to great interviews, the doc uses rare excerpts from the songs and ditties from long-defunct bands and long-forgotten tunes that influenced Led Zeppelin; lots of archival stuff guaranteed to surprise even mid-level Zeppelinites, including material from rare concert and TV performances (including Page's well-known appearance on a talent show during his teenage years, sputtering some innocence about entering medicine later in life).

In the album sections that close the doc, we're treated to archival footage and samples of the actual songs that were adopted, appropriated, reworked, embellished, re-written, or crafted from scratch in song-by-song examinations that don't dwell on the band's controversial history of sole authorship (which they also used on traditional folk songs), but instead trace the major elements that would characterize the band's identity on album and, most particularly, in live performances: Plant's vocal stylings, Page's opportunity to indulge in extraordinary solos, Bonham's maniacal drumming, Jones' underrated bass work (labeled 'as solid as a 25 foot concrete floor' by Yardbird guitarist Chris Dreja), and the interplay between musicians.

The doc uses no soundalikes; just the actual Zeppelin songs, which will make one crave a revisit of the first albums after watching the doc, and perhaps some curiosity to examine some of the early influences, including the Yardbirds, some of the ephemeral groups that Plant worked in before Zeppelin, and some of the R&B artists that achieved their own modest success.

Because the Yardbirds were a major influence on Led Zeppelin (originally given the informal name, The New Yardbirds), the doc also includes an extended interview with Chris Dreja. Although a series of straight talking head segments, the information gives further importance to the Yardbirds, ex-members Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck, and sheds some light on the arts school experience that ignited friendships, formed bands, and produced some of Britain's best-known and gifted popular musicians. A trivia game and bio sketches fill up the disc, with the latter recapping the names of journalists and musicians viewers may have missed, and might want to check out in print and on CD.

Also released simultaneously is the label's other rock-doc, [The Rolling Stones Under Review 1962-1966](#).

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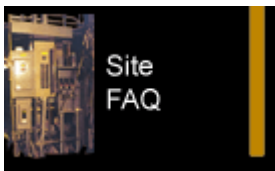
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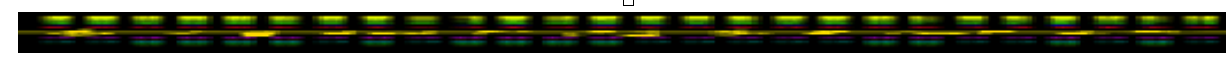
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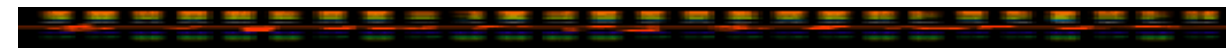


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