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CINEMA » Led Zeppelin: Origin Of The Species - With sample-based music coming to the forefront of the industry this documentary is an interesting, entertaining and particularly relevant look at the influences of one of rock music's most influential bands. [08.28.2006]



LITERATURE » Johnny Cash: The Biography - Because he was such an iconic figure as the chronicler of the human condition, Johnny Cash's fans believe his stoic and chiseled likeness is the only thing missing on Mount Rushmore. It is a point well made in the introduction of a new 320-page hardcover book by Michael Streissguth. [08.25.2006]



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Rating: 7/10

I make no apologies for my youthful passion for all things Zep. My friends and I celebrated everything from John Bonham's 20-minute drum solos to John Paul Jones' cheesy production on *In Through The Out Door*. Whether you like it or not, Led Zeppelin changed the face of music – that is indisputable fact. Punks hate the idea of Jimmy Page's egomaniacal guitar solos, Zeppelin's inflatable stage props and songs that, on average, cross the six-minute mark. Though I must confess that, never having been a punk myself and having an open mind about what constitutes good music, the sexy swagger of Robert Plant and the violent swerve of Iggy Pop are not dissimilar. One thing I definitely take issue with however is the notorious way that Page and Plant, in particular, took credit for the work of other musicians, a subject that is directly confronted in this probing documentary.

Origin Of The Species focuses on the musical influences that shaped Led Zeppelin's sound. The amazing thing about the film is that it clinically examines some of the specific artists and songs that were borrowed from or outright stolen for the creation of *Led Zeppelin I* and *Led Zeppelin II*. The film focuses most heavily on Jimmy Page as his career in The Yardbirds came to a close and he began to assemble the members of what he then could scarcely imagine would become the biggest rock band in the world. Due to budgetary constraints, those interviewed here are not members of the band. Chris Dreja, one of Page's bandmates in the Yardbirds, discusses Page, while writers, critics and other session musicians discuss the rest of Zeppelin's lineup. Dreja is really the only interesting interviewee, which ends up being an acceptable admission since the interviews, in large part, take a backseat to the live Zeppelin performances, including a TV performance by a teenage Jimmy Page playing with his Skiffle band. The Zeppelin performances are also juxtaposed with performances of the music and musicians that they so heavily borrowed from.

The film begins with a discussion of the band members, footage and archival photos showing Page, Plant, Bonham and Jones before they assembled as a solid unit. The focus remains mostly with Page and discusses his studio work, his stint with The Yardbirds and his eventual formation of Led Zeppelin. Snippets of Robert Plant's work for CBS Records are also featured here. Peter Grant, Zep's notorious road manager, worked with Page to assemble the group which, despite varied musical backgrounds, had a common obsession: The Blues.

In spite of that common ground and the significance it held for what would come to bear, the members of Zeppelin felt little compulsion to give their blues

heroes any credit. On the song "Bring It On Home," for instance, Robert Plant spends the first few minutes rather poorly imitating the voice of Sonny Boy Williamson. "Whole Lotta Love," stolen from blues bass player Willie Dixon, was subsequently attacked for outright plagiarism. One of the most interesting elements of *Origin Of The Species* is its examination of Zep's sphere of influences beyond the blues. Anne Briggs' interpretation of the classic folk tune "Blackwater Side" seems to be an almost blatant source for the *Led Zeppelin I* track "Black Mountain Side." Another Folk tune that bore a direct influence was Jake Holmes' "Dazed and Confused," which was credited to Jimmy Page despite being an overt cover tune. One of *Origin Of The Species'* most striking themes is the portrayal of Page as an exceptionally talented and eager student who rarely gave his teachers due credit. It should be said, however, that the film gives Page no recourse in the face of such attacks on his credibility, considering his lack of participation in the project. Indeed, the film contains nary an interview with him.

The lack of better interviews notwithstanding, *Origin Of The Species* is worth watching. The historical context in which the film presents Zeppelin's songs is crucial to the perspective of any sincere lover of music. In today's music industry, where bands regularly utilize direct sampling while simultaneously trying to avoid copyright infringement, this documentary is particularly relevant. *Origin Of The Species* is an interesting and entertaining look at the influences of one of rock music's most influential bands.

SEE ALSO: www.led-zeppelin.com

SEE ALSO: www.mvdb2b.com

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Jon Burke - A contributing writer and a Chicago resident who will not be goaded by LAS's editor into revealing any more details about his potentially sordid affairs.

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