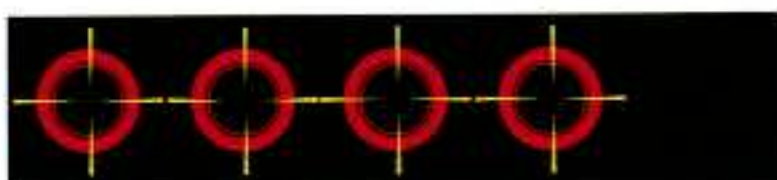


by Nick A. Zaino III

www.CalicoArts.com

Rock Fresh: A Film by Danny Lee

DIR: DANNY LEE
CALICO ARTS



When *Style Wars* was released in 1982, a full-fledged graffiti war was being waged in New York City. City officials, led by then-mayor Ed Koch, railed against it as a sign of the decline of civilization. That's where the film, now on DVD, starts: with a narration that sounds ripped from a public service film calling graffiti "a plague that never ends."

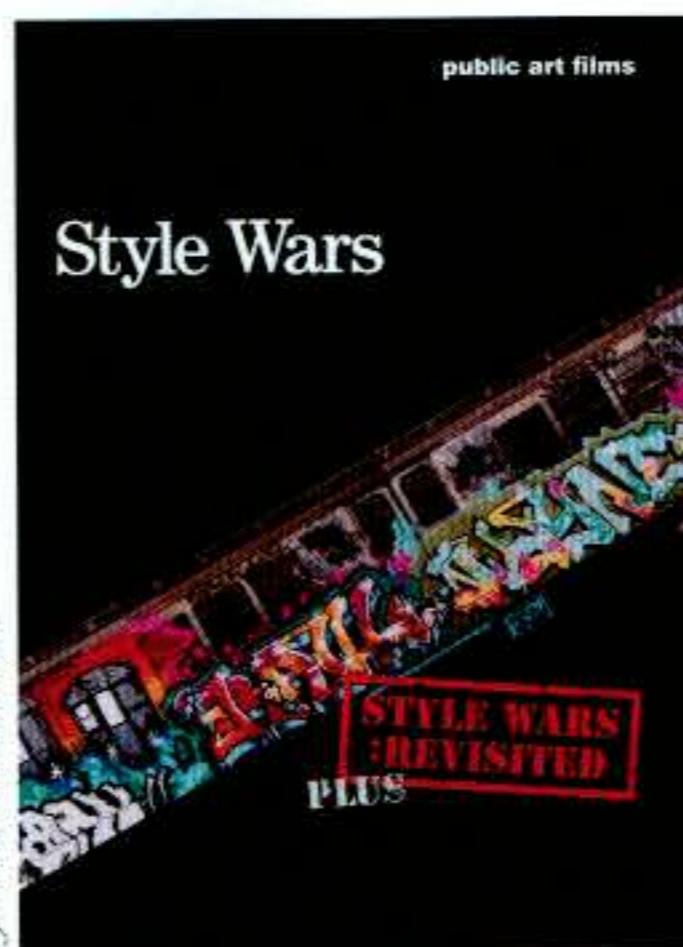
The first interviewee is Bernie Jacobs, a crime prevention officer for the New York City transportation department. "Graffiti, as the name itself, is not an art; graffiti is the application of a medium to a surface," he says, and then points to a group of letters clumsily painted on a subway car. "Is that an art form? I don't know. I'm not an art critic. But I can sure as hell tell you that that's a crime."

Flash forward to 2004 and *Rock Fresh*, another documentary about graffiti, also now on DVD. Another public official, identified only as "Valerie," goes on record, this time in Los Angeles. While she admits she thinks graffiti is art, the basic institutional attitude hasn't

changed. "What happens, it's the quality of life issue," she says. "To me, with the graffiti brings the crime element that brings the murder. Therefore if I take it away, I don't see it. I feel my safety is there."

Viewed together, *Style Wars* and *Rock Fresh* show graffiti as a medium that has been in constant transition for nearly thirty years. There are the same old arguments about street cred and selling out, whether the absorption of graffiti into the mainstream and the money that came chasing some of the more prominent taggers was a positive development or the absolute destruction of the art. Both documentaries feature graffiti on canvas being shown at galleries, contrasted with the commentary of some graffiti artists who find the idea abominable.

Some things have changed. Communities aren't putting up razor wire and double fences with guard dogs, as Mayor Koch helped push in his New York. You can buy graffiti-inspired clothing at Target and the Gap now, and, as one artist

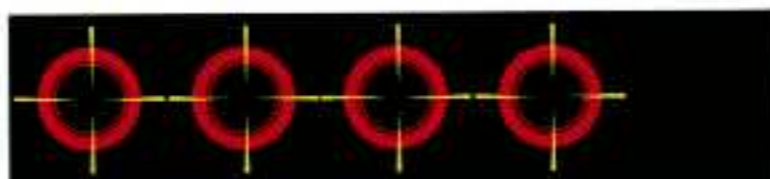


by Nick A. Zaino III

www.StyleWars.com

Style Wars

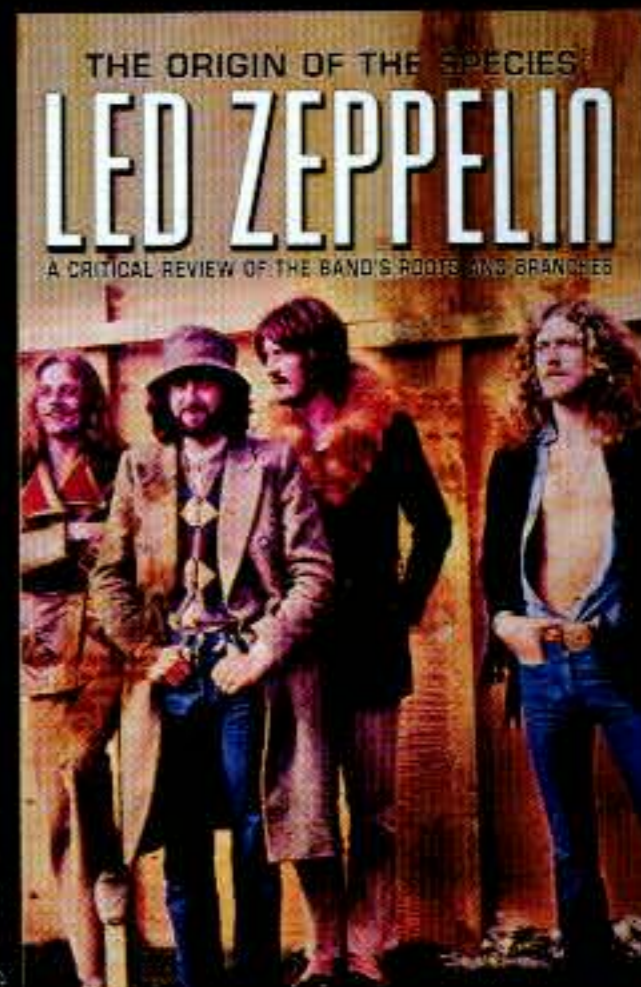
DIR: HENRY CHALFANT,
TONY SILVER
PLEXIFILM



points out in *Rock Fresh*, some paint manufacturers have even developed products with the graffiti artist in mind, with bolder colors and less drippy applicators.

Graffiti has been institutionalized enough to have developed its own generation gap. One old school artist featured in *Rock Fresh*, Clae, complains how the new crop of graffiti artists don't know their history, how they don't apprentice with another neighborhood artist, but draw inspiration for their tags from the Internet and disrespect existing work by spraying over it.

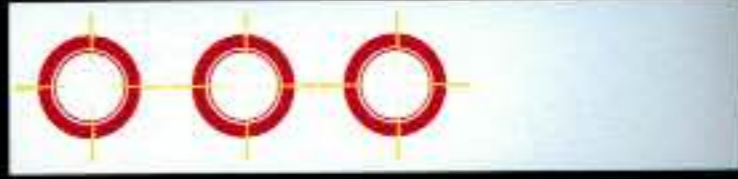
What has remained consistent is the base motivation of a graffiti artist to create a specific identity without separating themselves from their environment, a public declaration of their talent and how it reflects the world directly within their vision. What that means from artist to artist causes some friction while graffiti continues to progress as an art. While it may never lose its association with criminal activity, what shouldn't get lost is the fact that some amazing, inspiring work is being created that wouldn't



by Todd Siskowski

Led Zeppelin

*The Origin
of the Species*



If there is any band in the world that requires a Beatles-like multi-series *Anthology* treatment, it is Led Zeppelin. Whether or not you like hard rock or heavy metal, the band is one of the most influential in all of modern music.

The DVD *The Origin Of The Species* attempts to tackle the band's highly regarded success by focusing on its formation and first two albums. Plenty of time is focused early on discussing Jimmy Page and Robert Plant's pre-Zeppelin days, and that is a treat. The former's time in the Yardbirds is especially handled with care as that legendary band's bassist Chris Dreja gives a fine interview on Page's influence.

The Origin Of the Species' discussion of Zep's first two albums is also first rate as it praises the songs on the recordings and also tackles allegations of plagiarism. And yes, the DVD gives ample proof of instances where the band was guilty of "stealing" others' music. Still, it comes to the rightful conclusion that the band's early work was passionate and historic because it melded all of the members' past experiences and influences perfectly.

The DVD goes have its shortcomings. At 70 minutes, it is far too brief, and the majority of the interviews feature music journalists and lesser-known musicians. You will not find Page or Plant reminiscing here. Rare photos and concert performances along with a DVD extra on the pre-Page Yardbirds almost make up for that, but not quite. Instead, they only demand for someone to start making a lengthy Zeppelin *Anthology* right now.