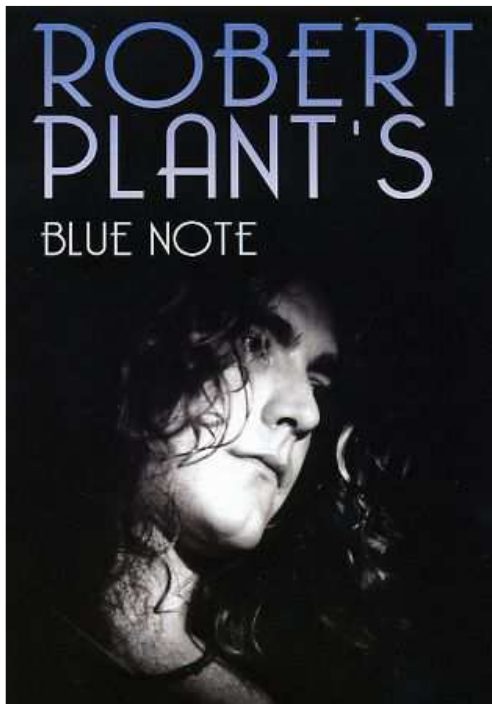


FAME Review: Robert Plant - Robert Plant's Blue Note (DVD)

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Robert Plant's Blue Note

[Robert Plant](#)

Sexy Intellectual - SIDVD567 (DVD)

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A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
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Robert Plant occupies a unique position not just in the rock pantheon as a member of the gargantuanly esteemed Led Zeppelin but also as a vocalist on the order of, say, guitarist Jimi Hendrix; that is, he's unique and may easily be looked upon, as I do, as the #1 rock vocalist of all time. Even more singular is that in effect that honor could be said to rest primarily upon one LP, *Led Zeppelin* (also known as *Led Zeppelin 1*), the #1 rock LP, more than any of his other releases, in group or solo, pre-Zep or post. This neither pre-empt nor vitiates other claims but instead stands as witness to an almost singular feat. It wouldn't be too strong a statement to say that *Led Zeppelin* will never be equaled, as much in Plant's unbelievable vocals as in any other aspect—and with that very strong opinion, we begin our inspection of this latest Sexy Intellectual documentary.

Nigel Williamson, a commonplace in the S.I. rock series, renders his usual revealing commentary along with other critics, but we're also treated to such personalities as Tom McGuinness (Manfred Mann, McGuinness-Flint, etc.), Chris Dreja (Yardbirds), and Dave Kelley (The Blues Band), gents who were there in the welter of things when Plant and everyone in the British scene were coming up. Ah, but then there's the extensive coverage of all the black blues masters who influenced the break from mod and Merseybeat pop structures, gents like Howling Wolf, shown in full power in a number of period clips. And indeed the proliferation of segments from old 60s and 70s performances by blues acts and rockers forms a fascinating collage tracing what would become Led Zeppelin all the way up to the warbler's collaborations with Alison Krauss. Very brief footage of Robert's and John Bonham's first home, Band of Joy, appears, but, sadly, nothing palpable of the vocalist's dynamic days with Alexis Korner, when Plant could literally sing over the band to the back of the hall whenever the PA went out. A clip inferentially purporting to be a number of seconds of such a gig appears, but I'm unconvinced it's of a Korner/Plant date. Likely no such footage exists, but what a treat that would be if it did.

One thing soon made clear is that Plant almost didn't survive that marvelous first Zep release. Jimmy Page was the undisputed leader of the ensemble, the member of the band whose star was most on the rise due to his Yardbird days, and had wanted the incredible Terry Reid (one of the only two vocalists who could ever rival Plant, the other being Jon Flak) and a mountain of doubt existed as to Robert's fitness for the ensemble. Nonetheless, stay he did, and a legendary band evolved. The film then skips over most of the rest of the L.Z. catalogue (this is not, after all, an homage to the band) in order to head straight to *Kashmir* to prep for an extremely good impending coverage of Plant's mid-East and African affinities.

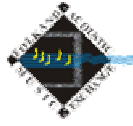
First, however, come the Honeydrippers and the start-point solo days. Makes sense: a full hour is spent up to that point, and there's so much more in this luxurious 2-1/2 hour presentation. The turning point providentially leads directly into the explanation for the title of this documentary and for a musical sound that would become as huge an influence as the black blues that started Robert: Oum Kalthoum (birth name: Umm Kulthum and widely regarded as the greatest singer in Arab music history) and her famous Blue Note style, a kind of blend of trad Arabic, Carnatic, ghazal, and other musics modernized.

Be prepared for a lot of way-the-hell cool Arabic and northern African music interludes, with enlightening insights by Hossam Ramzy, because these are the modes Plant has been reverting to in his continual quest to synthesize a love for those genres into Western ways. The latter, however, is likewise defaulted to in this film, as we watch Plant revivifying his love of such old 60s bands as Moby Grape and Buffalo Springfield. For many, this will be a revelation among many new insights.

The DVD's editing, voice-overs, interviewing, and pacing are superb, taking, as I've noted several times previously of S.I. and MVD, the great old Eagle Vision tradition well into its proper next step, here much more like a true feature film than an entertaining educative effort, even perhaps akin to those great Michael Moore political docu-efforts. Beyond that, pay attention to Chris Ingham's original fill music all through the DVD; very nice. And if you mistake Robert Plant's visage and speaking voice as now accidentally revealing him as Jon Anderson's long-lost brother, well, ya aren't alone, amigo.

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