

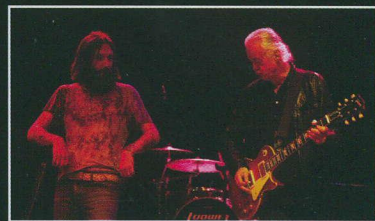
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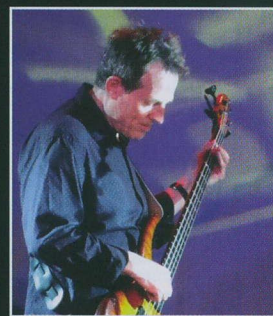
## Jimmy Page: Back on stage with Donovan & The Black Crowes

*plus official web site launched*

## Led Zeppelin Fresh Horizons in '71:

**The Mike Tremaglio Logs**  
*from Montreux to Honolulu...*

**John Paul Jones'  
Summer:**  
Seasick Steve,  
Jack White, Foo Fighters,  
Spin Marvel *and all that jazz...*



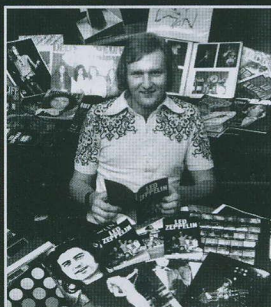
## Robert Plant & The Band Of Joy:

**Stomping across Europe**  
*plus Blue Note DVD Reviewed*

## Black Country Communion

**at High Voltage**  
*The voice of rock triumphs*

**Howard Mylett  
1947-2011**  
A Tribute



30





Robert  
Plant's

## How The West Bromwich Blues Were Won...

**A new DVD release offers fresh context to Robert Plant's journey of musical discovery. Stephen Humphries is suitably impressed...**

**Robert Plant's Blue Note**  
(MVD Entertainment Group)

On the closing track of *Now & Zen*, Robert Plant bemoaned the dismal state of mainstream popular music during his 1950's youth. Hit songs by the likes of Pat Boone and Debbie Reynolds were, as Plant put it, "white, clean and neat." No wonder, then, that the young Robert Plant was attracted to a form of music that was black, dirty and messy: the blues.

*Robert Plant's Blue Note*, a lengthy new DVD documentary, explores how the singer has repeatedly been drawn to styles of music that have "the blue note" at their core. This is no rote musical biography. To tell the story of Plant's epic musical journey, which has traversed a wide array of exotic influences, the filmmakers use the chronological narrative of Plant's career as a jumping off point to explore the histories of various forms of roots music. In doing so, the documentary offers fresh context to each chapter in the singer's delightfully idiosyncratic discography.

For starters, *Robert Plant's Blue Note* not only explains how the vocalist got the "West Bromwich blues" that he sang about during Led Zeppelin's BBC sessions, but it also reveals how the blues came to West Bromwich. This hefty portion of the documentary thrillingly captures the giddy impact of the 1960s British blues boom via archival television footage of Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Son House, and Sonny Boy Williamson. (Music journalist Nigel Williamson recounts how a young Robert Plant cheekily stole Sonny Boy Williamson's harmonica, only to make amends decades later.) The likes of Tom McGuinness of

Manfred Mann and Chris Dreja of The Yardbirds also share vivid anecdotes about how these black musicians, largely ignored in their home country, were astonished to find English audiences clamoring for their music.

Speaking of flashbacks...the next portion of the film sketches out the history of the LSD-laced West Coast psychedelic-rock scene. Back then, a teenage Robert Plant (pictured in rare photographs from the days when he still visited a barber) was incorporating the influences of Love, Moby Grape, Buffalo Springfield, and Jefferson Airplane into the original Band Of Joy. (Those paisley influences reappeared much later on solo albums such as *Fate of Nations* and *Dreamland*).

From here, the documentary segues into the Led Zeppelin story courtesy of Dreja, who offers his recollection of the evening that he accompanied Jimmy Page and Peter Grant to check out Robert Plant's last-ditch band, Obs-tweedle.

"There was a question mark over Robert, funny, enough," says Dreja. "He was a bit of a screamer." *Robert Plant's Blue Note* describes Led Zeppelin's music as the last great iteration of the blues. Employing concert footage from Led Zeppelin's DVD, the documentary explores how the band injected newfangled electricity and tectonic-shift dynamics into traditional folk-blues songs such as Memphis Minnie's *When the Levee Breaks* and Leadbelly's *Gallow's Pole*. The documentary also revisits Page and Plant's journeys to India and Morocco, which effectively sowed seeds for their enduring love of the east - and cast an influence on much of their work from Kashmir right through to the *Unledded* project.

Led Zeppelin may well have been Jimmy Page's band, but commentators such as veteran music

journalist Barney Hoskyns make a compelling case for Plant's burgeoning role in shaping the band's musical direction. When it came to establishing his own solo career, Plant was finally able to captain his own ship and venture into uncharted waters. Each port of call would be vastly different from the one before it.

Drawing on interviews with Robbie Blunt (guitarist on Plant's first three solo albums), keyboardist Phil Johnstone (*Now & Zen* through *Fate of Nations*) and percussionist Hossam Ramzy (*No Quarter: Unledded*), the documentary delves into the creation of each of the post-Zeppelin albums. It's fascinating stuff. The affable interviewees recall fond memories of their collaborations with the singer, but also allow for candid admissions of strained recording sessions. Robbie Blunt certainly lives up to his last name with a frank appraisal of 1985's *Shaken 'n' Stirred*, and Johnstone admits that he struggled to execute Plant's vision for a more organic sound on *Fate of Nations*.

Along the way, the documentary takes some interesting detours. It examines how Egyptian singer Oum Kalthoum inspired tracks such as *Slow Dancer* and *Calling to You*, explores how the stimulus of African Desert Blues carried over into *Mighty Rearranger*, and, finally, probes how *Raising Sand* and *Band Of Joy* drew from the deep well of the burgeoning Americana roots movement. As the film observes, all those disparate musical genres have one thing in common: the blue note in the human voice.

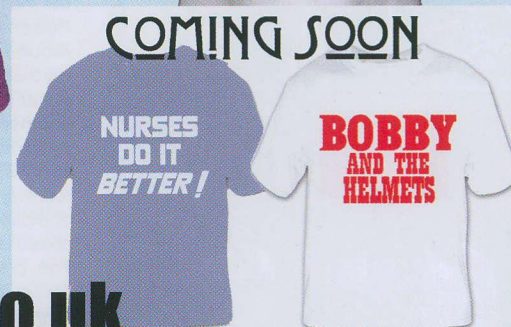
*Robert Plant's Blue Note* wasn't authorized by Plant, his management, or record company, though it does draw on a wide variety of licensed source material, including the interview Plant conducted for his *Nine Lives* box set DVD (as well as his excellent interview with Jian Ghomeshi on Canada's CBC radio). The production values are excellent throughout. But what makes *Robert Plant's Blue Note* arguably better than the recent BBC documentary about the singer is its unique lens on how Plant found his own voice by assimilating sounds from his encyclopedic record collection. Unlike so many biographies and articles, *Robert Plant's Blue Note* doesn't reduce Plant's solo career to a mere footnote or afterthought after Led Zeppelin. It views Plant's work as a progressive continuum that, ultimately, was too ambitious and too broad-minded to be contained within any one band or lineup. Highly recommended.

Stephen Humphries - August 17th, 2011

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