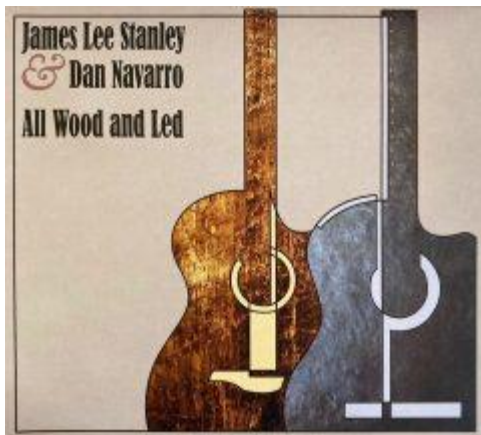


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JAMES LEE STANLEY & DAN NAVARRO: All Wood and Led

By Paul Homicz, September 2021



British pop bands have been mining American blues and R&B since the late fifties. The music of black Americans served as the backbone of the style and repertoire for the Animals, the Rolling Stones, and scores of other groups. Led Zeppelin took British blues based music and supercharged it. The amps were bigger, the drumming louder, and singer Robert Plant stretched his vocal range into the stratosphere to compete with the triple digit decibels. It was a winning formula, making Zep one of the most popular bands of the seventies.

Although the band harpooned themselves by appropriating music without crediting the original writers and musicians (Zeppelin and its members are one of the most sued bands for copyright infringement and have been forced repeatedly to give songwriting credit to others on later issues of their recordings.). Led Zeppelin could be one of the most creative bands of the era. They left dancers a kilter by slipping in two measures of 5/4 into the ballsy rocker “Black Dog.” And to this day, I can think of no other pop song as strange as “Kashmir.” The guitar and bass are in 3/4, while the drumming and singing are in 4/4. Mind remains blown even after all these years.

James Lee Stanley and Dan Navarro now give us *All Wood and Led*, a dozen renditions of Led Zeppelin tunes, the premise being, “What if Led Zeppelin had lived in Laurel Canyon instead of England?” In other words, Navarro and Stanley give a Byrds and Buffalo Springfield interpretation to the Zep crew. They replace the electric guitars with regular guitars and replace the drums with a cajon. Led Zeppelin unplugged.

Stanley has recorded other disks in which he interprets the songs of the Rolling Stones and Doors, and folks have reinterpreted the music of yesteryear for a long time. Rock and rollers have given Gershwin and Hoagy Carmichael a heavier beat, and young folks swooned when the Mamas and Papas or Donnie and Marie sang hits that had been popular in their parents’ day.

Reinterpreting old songs has become vogue in recent years. Scary Pockets, a truly remarkable musical project, funkify everyone from John Lennon to Coldplay. Post Modern Jukebox mixes everything up, performing swing, doo-wop, or Latin versions of old hits and sometimes very old hits. The PMJ folks can sometimes be a little cute or precious with what they do. I did not get that impression with *All Wood and Led*. It never seemed that Stanley and Navarro were ever calling attention to themselves or giving me the idea that they were thinking, “Aren’t we being clever?”

The interpretations are loose, and a lot of liberties are taken, harmonically as well as melodically. The steamrolling “Rock and Roll” is freed from its 12-bar blues base and given a pensive vibe. The lyrics wind up being less libido driven and become yearning, almost wistful. A hint of the original guitar riff is retained for “Whole Lotta Love,” helping to make this tune one of my favorites on the disk. Of course, Stanley and Navarro sing “Stairway to Heaven,” but I don’t know if I like it as much as when Brave Combo recorded the chestnut with Tiny Tim.

Veteran songsters, Stanley and Navarro sing well. The recording and engineering for this disk are exceptional.