

The 'lead balloon' that became



Led Zeppelin

During the late 1950's and early 60's popular music was in a state of flux. 'pop music', so called, was emerging in a Britain that had been following the trends in America. Previously, the most popular music style was the ballad, typically sung by artists like Bing Crosby, Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra with a full orchestra backing. In the UK the most popular male singers included Matt Munroe, Frank Ifield, Lonnie Donegan and Jess Conrad.

Suddenly a new genre of popular music was being performed by groups of musicians using as few as three instruments. Most of the songs told a story in 2.5 minutes and were played, not at 78rpm but at 45rpm.

In order to get more plays, promotion and advertising 'pirate radio' stations started broadcasting illegally and a younger generation became the audience to entertain. The change could not be ignored and the BBC launched Radio 1 and subsequently employed many of the 'pirate radio' DJ's.

Music was going through a revolution. Elvis had launched his career in America and many UK musicians were listening to sounds from other countries where Blues, Modern Jazz and Soul music were more indigenous and popular.

It was a dynamic time for young people, especially those with panache and a talent for expressing themselves in both music and style.

The 'Swinging 60's had arrived and the most difficult thing for a new generation of musicians was probably to decide the name of their group. 'pop music', launching the careers of groups like the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Hermans Hermits, Manfred Mann, Swinging Blue Jeans, the Animals, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Yardbirds and many more.

But little did anyone know that this music revolution was to continue beyond just the 'hit single' and the transition that came next created something so unique that it became a lifestyle for both performers and fans alike. This was the beginnings of 'Heavy Metal' and 'Hard Rock'.

Robert Plant was born in West Bromwich in 1948 and even at the age of 10 said he wanted to sing like Elvis. At this time the family had moved to Halesowen and he would go on to attend King Edward VI Grammar School for Boys in Stourbridge. He was interested in music and said that at the time his favourite sounds were performed by American blues artists like Robert Johnson, Bukka White, Skip James and Sleepy John Estes.

After leaving school, Robert gained employment in the Midlands and also joined and performed with groups like the Crawling Snakes. He made friends with John Bonham who as a skilful drummer knew many musicians and groups.

Bonham knew Jimmy Page who had been the lead guitarist of the 'Yardbirds'. During the 60's the Yardbirds had a number of hit singles including, 'Good morning little school girl' and 'For Your Love' but the musical differences within the group led to them going through many changes and eventually breaking up. Jimmy Page then started to make plans to form a new group with Terry Reid as the lead singer.

Reid, however turned him down but told Page to go to see a show at a teacher training college in Birmingham. The group performing that night were Hobbstweedle with Plant as lead singer. Page watched Plant's performance of Jefferson Airplane's "Somebody to Love" and immediately knew he had found his lead singer.

Page introduced Plant to John Paul Jones and with mutual friend Jon Bonham, agreeing to join, the group line-up was complete. The name came about as a reaction to another musicians' sarcasm of this musical combination, compared to the 'Yardbirds'. He said it would go down like a lead balloon.

So, 'Lead Zeppelin' was created and there is speculation that the spelling of the name may have been originally written with an 'a' until manager Peter Grant suggested dropping it because seeing it in written form it may have been pronounced 'leed'.

In 1968, the group were signed by Atlantic Records. The record company gave them considerable artistic freedom and they achieved significant commercial success with eight studio albums released over the next ten years.

Starting with Led Zeppelin (1969) to In Through the Out Door (1979). Their untitled fourth studio album, commonly known as Led Zeppelin IV (1971), and featuring the song "Stairway to Heaven", is among the most popular and influential works in rock music, and helped to secure the group's popularity.

The group had it all, two of the best guitarists in the World, a master percussionist and a new generation of lead singer extraordinaire. This influenced their heavy, guitar-driven sounds and they are regularly cited as progenitors of heavy metal.

Robert Plant had obviously got a powerful and wide vocal range (particularly evident in his high-registered vocals). Throughout the 1970s he also developed a compelling image as the charismatic rock-and-roll front man, similar to his contemporaries the Who's singer Roger Daltrey, Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, Freddie Mercury of Queen, and Jim Morrison of the Doors.

With his mane of long blond hair and powerful, bare-chested appearance, he was flamboyant on-stage, wearing more elaborate and colourful clothing and jewellery, all of which helped to create the "god of rock and roll" or "rock god" archetype.

Jimmy Page wrote most of Led Zeppelin's music, particularly early in their career, while Plant generally supplied the lyrics. The latter half of their career saw a series of record-breaking tours that earned the group a reputation for excess. Although they remained commercially and critically successful, their output and touring schedule

were limited during the late 1970s, and the group disbanded following John Bonham's death in 1980.

After the split, Plant occasionally collaborated with Jimmy Page on various projects, including forming a short-lived all-star group with Page and Jeff Beck in 1984, called the Honeydrippers. The pair again worked together in the studio on the 1988 Page album Outrider, and in the same year Page contributed to Plant's own album Now and Zen. On 15 May 1988 Led Zeppelin performed at the Atlantic Records 40th Anniversary with Plant and Page in the group. In 1992 Plant's took to the stage with Queen at Wembley Stadium, for 1992's "The Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert" for AIDS Awareness; where he sang Queen's "Innuendo" and "Crazy Little Thing Called Love", plus Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir" and "Thank You".

From 1994 to 1998 Plant and Page became a full-fledged performing act, releasing the No Quarter: Jimmy Page and Robert Plant Unledded album in 1994. Following an enormously successful tour in 1995, they returned to the limelight at Glastonbury.

They recorded their only post-Zeppelin album of original material on the 1998 album Walking into Clarksdale. A song from this album, "Please Read the Letter", was re-recorded by Plant with Alison Krauss, and was featured on their 2007 album which won the Grammy Award for Record of the Year.

From mid-1999 to 2000, Plant performed at several small venues with his folk-rock band, named Priory of Brion.

By 2002, Plant had formed the band Strange Sensation and released a widely acclaimed collection of mostly blues and folk remakes, Dreamland.

On 23 June 2006, Plant was the headliner at the Benefit For Arthur Lee concert at New York's Beacon Theatre, a show which raised money for Lee's medical expenses from his bout with leukaemia.

In 2007, Plant contributed two tracks to the Fats Domino tribute album Goin' Home: A Tribute to Fats Domino, "It Keeps Rainin'" with the Lil' Band o' Gold and "Valley of Tears" with the Soweto Gospel Choir.

As mentioned, from 2007 to 2008, Plant recorded and performed with bluegrass star Alison Krauss. A duet album, Raising Sand, was released on 23 October 2007 on Rounder Records. The album, recorded in Nashville and Los Angeles and produced by T-Bone Burnett, includes performances of lesser-known material from R&B, blues, folk and country songwriters. Raising Sand won a Grammy for Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals in 2008. Raising Sand also won Album of the Year at the 51st Grammy Awards. The album was certified platinum on 4 March 2008.

Robert Plant is interested in Welsh history. He donated money to the creation of a bronze statue of the Welsh prince Owain Glyndŵr at Pennal Church, near Machynlleth, in Wales. He is also believed to have contributed to a slate carving of Glyndŵr's coat of arms at the Celtica museum in Machynlleth.

In the New Year Honours List 2009, Robert Plant was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire "for services to music"^[86] and on 10 July 2009 invested by the Prince of Wales.^[87]

In the same year, on 14 August 2009, football club Wolverhampton Wanderers announced that Plant was to become the club's third Vice-President. Plant officially received the honour before kick-off at the club's first match of the season against West Ham United. Plant was five years old when he first visited Molineux Stadium. He recalled in an interview with his local paper, the Express & Star, in August 2010: "I was five when my dad took me down for the first time and Billy Wright waved at me. Honest, he did. And that was it – I was hooked from that moment."

In July 2010, Robert Plant embarked on a twelve-date summer tour in the United States with a new group called Band of Joy

In late 2010, BBC Two aired a documentary titled Robert Plant: By Myself. It features Robert Plant discussing his journey with Led Zeppelin and various projects since.

In 2013, back home from touring America with Band of Joy, Plant contributed to a community buyout scheme to save the Bath music venue, the Bell Inn. In 2020, Plant donated towards frontline medical supplies during the Covid-19 pandemic.

He currently resides near Bewdley in the Wyre Forest District of Worcestershire.

LEGACY

Plant has influenced the style of many of his contemporaries, including Freddie Mercury of Queen, and Axl Rose of Guns N' Roses. Encyclopædia Britannica notes that "Exaggerating the vocal style and expressive palette of blues singers such as Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters, Plant created the sound that has defined much hard rock and heavy metal singing: a high range, an abundance of distortion, loud volume and emotional excess"

In 2006, hard rock/heavy metal magazine Hit Parader named Plant as No. 1 on its list of the 100 Greatest Metal Vocalists of All Time, a list that included Rob Halford of Judas Priest (No. 2), Steven Tyler (No. 3), Freddie Mercury (No. 6), Geddy Lee (No. 13) and Paul Stanley (No. 18).

In 2009, he was voted the "greatest voice in rock" in a poll conducted by Planet Rock. He was included in the Q magazine's 2009 list of "Artists of the Century" and was ranked at number 8 in their list of "100 Greatest Singers" and won the Outstanding Contribution to Music prize at the Q Awards. Plant received the Knebworth Silver Clef Award in 1990.

He was placed at No. 3 on SPIN's list of "The 50 Greatest Rock Frontmen of All Time". On 20 September 2010, National Public Radio (NPR) named Plant as one of the "50 Great Voices" in the world.

2011, Rolling Stone readers ranked Plant the greatest of all lead singers.

Many critics consider Led Zeppelin one of the most successful, innovative, and influential rock groups in history. They are one of the best-selling music artists in the history of audio recording; various sources estimate the group's record sales at 200 to 300 million units worldwide. Each of their nine studio albums placed in the top 10 of the Billboard album chart and six reached the number-one spot. They achieved eight consecutive UK number-one albums.

Rolling Stone magazine described them as "the heaviest band of all time", "the biggest band of the Seventies", and "unquestionably one of the most enduring bands in rock history". They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995; the museum's biography of the band states that they were "as influential" during the 1970s as the Beatles were during the 1960s.

Robert Plant, the Black Countryman from West Bromwich with a voice that rocked the World – not a bad claim to fame 'Owr kid!