

SONG OF THE DAY LXXIX

Today' song - actually, it will be two songs - is a bit difficult for me to articulate on. There are various reasons for this, which I will get into in a bit, but first, pull out your copy of "Led Zeppelin II", it's side two, track four, clocking in at 4:21; the John Bonham solo piece, "Moby Dick."

To any and all drummers out there who may read this, I must beg your forgiveness. I am not a drummer, I've been playing guitar since I was 12 and that is the instrument that I know inside out. I also play the mandolin and have played bass in studio sessions when one of my bands needed it. But drums... not my thing. I've tried to play them before... four limbs all doing different things and keeping everything in time... LOL Suffice to say there's a very good reason why I am a guitarist!

That said; I have never been a fan of long drum solos. I hate it when I attend a show and the band departs the stage save for the drummer who then proceeds to show off his chops - or in some cases, the lack thereof - for the next 10 minutes or so. I find it completely unnecessary and a waste of time when the band could be playing another song... or two!

Now, don't get me wrong, I do appreciate great drummers and it is my opinion that there has never been a better rock drummer than John Bonham. I understand that when Zeppelin released their second album, drum solos were in vogue. But the practice is still in place today as Heaven & Hell proved {formerly Black Sabbath Mach II} when they released "Live From Radio City Music Hall." At least Vinny Appice, the Heaven & Hell drummer, keeps his solo under five minutes or at least that's all that is on the disc, I guess it's possible it was longer live and then edited down. But... I digress...

I remember when I was first discovering Zeppelin all those years ago and hearing the solo on "II" and wondering; Why? Why would they include a drum solo on a record? Did they run out of

material? Surely there was something else they could have included on this album. And that's not to take anything at all away from Bonzo. The best thing about "Moby Dick" as it appeared on the album was that it was under five minutes, but live, it grew to be a monster in length.

You see, I didn't need to hear a John Bonham solo to understand that he was a phenomenal drummer; all I had to do was listen to the first :30 seconds of "Good Times Bad Times." And lest you drummers out there think I am piling on Bonzo, I'm not. To this day I cringe when I see some of my Zeppelin bootlegs that have 20+ minute versions of "Dazed & Confused" or 15+ minute versions of "No Quarter."

If you think back to those last US tours in 1975 and 1977 and think of how long those three songs were in concert, they often took up more than an hour of the show. Three songs showing off the skills of each musician in the band when they could have played another five or six songs that showed off the power and glory of the entire band!

And yes, I know that Zeppelin dropped "Dazed" from the set in 1977, but Page still played an overly long guitar solo which included the bowed guitar section from said song. One of the funniest moments ever recorded in bootleg history was on "Listen To This Eddie," the famous 21 June 1977 show in LA. During Page's solo a fan... and no, it wasn't me... yells out: "We've had the guitar lesson!" Or something similar to that. And I get what that guy is going off about.

Zeppelin had this incredible catalog of music they could have played, and instead of playing "The Rover" or "Four Sticks" or "Houses Of The Holy" or "Friends" or "For Your Life" or "In The Light" or any other number of tracks, they instead chose to play these ungodly long solos that took up a third of their shows.

Alright, now that I have gotten my rant out of the way, let's dive into this track, as well as the other track that will be featured in this particular Song Of The Day.

"Moby Dick" began life as "Pat's Delight..." or at least Bonham's drum solo was first titled that. "Pat's Delight" had a

different riff than "Moby Dick," so one could actually view that as a separate song, but "Pat's Delight," named after Bonzo's wife and Jason's mother, eventually became "Moby Dick."

The riff that kicks off "Moby Dick" is a killer riff but unfortunately, Page can't accept credit for this one. An artist named Bobby Parker released a song in 1961 titled "Watch Your Step" that is the seed for this riff. It's almost the exact same riff, with just a few minor changes. However, there is no denying that the riff that opens "Moby Dick" is a powerful and awesome riff.

Page first used the riff on a song titled "The Girl I Love {She Got Long Black Wavy Hair}" which was played once in 1969 during one of their BBC sessions. At some point, the band decided to drop "The Girl I Love" and use the riff as an intro for Bonzo's solo showpiece. And again, I find that a sad mistake. "The Girl I Love" is a good song and would have certainly fit into their early tours.

Once "Moby Dick" entered the set list it was a staple at all shows through the 1977 tour. On that final US tour, the song became aptly named "Over The Top." So it appears that the band, or at the very least Robert, knew the song was an excess that took excesses to the very limits.

Although I don't own a copy of the show, there is reportedly a bootleg that has a 44 minute version of "Moby Dick." What were Page, Plant and Jones doing all this time? They could have driven back to the hotel, taken a shower, grabbed some dinner and been back at the arena in time to wrap the show up.

In 1982, when Jimmy released "Coda," there was another Bonham solo piece included, this one titled "Bonzo's Montreux." This track was one that I just never got into, mainly, I think, because of Jimmy's "electronic treatments" that were added after the drums were originally recorded.

And when "Coda" was released, I remember thinking and wondering the same thing that I wondered about "II..." did they not have anything else they could have released? Why didn't they add "Hey Hey What Can I Do" to "Coda?" Or "Baby Come On Home?"

"Bonzo's Montreux" was recorded in 1976 in Montreux, Switzerland, which might provide some insight as to the title and was never played live, although Bonzo did include sections of it during "Over The Top" during the 1977 tour.

In 1990, when the three surviving members of Zeppelin released the first "Box Set," Jimmy had gone in and combined "Moby Dick" with "Bonzo's Montreux," which was sort of weird to me, as they sounded nothing alike. On "Box Set II," "Bonzo's Montreux" was then released as it had appeared on "Coda."

So... have I alienated all drummers and most Zeppelin fans by now? LOL It's just my taste and what I feel is appropriate and I wish that Zeppelin had played more SONGS during their touring years as opposed to these excessively narcissistic solos.

If not for Page/Plant, there are a number of songs - great songs - by Zeppelin that we would have never heard live. And that is what bothers me about this entire situation. Bonham was never better than when he was playing to one of Jimmy's riffs and supporting the band as only he could. He would lock into a groove with John Paul and they would just be so tight, so right-in-the-pocket that Page could then venture off into destinations unknown and they would be right there with him.

As great as Zeppelin were in live settings, I just believe they could have been even better if they had played more of their catalog and less of the extravagant soloing. Again... it's just my opinion.

And I want to stress, once again and for the record, that none of this takes away from how I view John Bonham. The man was simply the greatest drummer in rock history. Bar none. That's my opinion and I can back that up with "Good Times Bad Times" - "In My Time Of Dying" - "What Is And What Should Never Be" - "The Song Remains The Same" - "Kashmir" - "When The Levee Breaks" - "Immigrant Song" or any other number of songs. All I am saying is I would have loved to have heard more songs than solos when they played live.

Until the next time,

Jeff