

SONG OF THE DAY LXXVIII

Today we are going to go back to a song that was never officially released on any Led Zeppelin album, yet, despite this obstacle, it was one of their most popular songs, not only during their heyday, but also since the unexpected and untimely end of the band.

Today's song comes from the B-side of the "Immigrant Song" single, clocking in at 3:55, the catchy and melancholy "Hey Hey What Can I Do."

That this tune was so popular despite only being available as a request on rock radio in the 1970's or if you were lucky enough to find the "Immigrant Song" single, says a lot about Zeppelin's power and musicianship. Recorded during the sessions for "Led Zeppelin III," apparently the band felt the song was "too commercial" and since we all know how Zep despised singles and commerciality, the song was left off their majestic third album.

In the UK, Atlantic Records released a title called: "The New Age Of Atlantic" in 1972 which also featured the song. With all that said, let's dive into the song, as this is certainly a great representation of the creative genius that drove the band, even if they chose to sometimes hide that genius, as they did with this number.

A simple acoustic guitar starts this little gem off as Jimmy strums the chords just prior to Bonzo's entrance. You can also hear the mandolin and it adds such a nice touch in this particular piece. After a few bars everything comes to a stop... and then Robert enters with a dramatic and mournful vocal over the love of his life and how he hopes to tell her she's the only one for him.

Wanna tell you 'bout the girl I love

An' my she looks so fine

Now she's the only one that I've been dreaming of
Maybe someday she will be all mine
I want to tell her that I love her so
I thrill with her every touch
I need to tell her she's the only one I really love...

As Robert sings the word "really" in that last line, the band pauses, allowing his beautiful voice to sing the word "love" a cappella and this is one of my favorite vocal performances that Plant ever recorded. There is a wealth of emotions in that one word; hope, longing, desperation and... pure, unadulterated love. As he carries the note out his voice somehow slides easily from being smooth to gravelly and then back to smooth.

I am no singer... so perhaps this is something that is easily done for those gifted with great pipes, but the way he pulls this off and the emotion that just drips from his vocal chords is extraordinary to me.

As his voice fades out the band blasts back in with that very catchy, hook-laden chord progression and then the true essence of the song hits us right in the face. This woman that Robert is singing about, this girl he loves so mightily is just not able to stay true to him.

I got a woman, want to ball all day
I got a woman and she won't be true, no
I got a woman, stay drunk all the time
I said I got a little woman and she won't be true

Now it's kind of funny, with the Internet and the ability to read the thoughts of anyone in the world right at our fingertips, I have discovered quite a lot of people debating on what this song is about. Many are absolutely positive that the

girl in this song is a prostitute and many compare this to the song by The Police titled; "Roxanne."

I, on the other hand, don't believe that is the case here. The opening verse has our singer claiming his undying love for this girl, the fact that she's the only one he's been dreaming of and also that he thrills with her every touch. If the guy knew, going in, that she was a prostitute, I would find it difficult to believe that he would be lamenting on her infidelity.

On Sunday morning when we go down to church

See the men-folk standing in line

Don't say they come to pray to the Lord

Not when my little girl looks so fine

And in the evening when the sun is sinking low

An' everybody's with the one they love

I walk the town, keep a-searching all around

Looking for my street-corner girl

I read a great theory on the verse above where someone claimed that the line wasn't about going to church at all, that it was instead Robert using metaphors for how the girl acts all innocent in his presence but when he notices the way the other men are staring at her, he knows that innocence is not one of her virtues.

That is a very intriguing theory and it certainly caught my attention, though I don't necessarily agree with it. To me, it is what it says; they go to church and yet, the men are checking out his girl - perhaps they are fondly remembering an evening with her or - they are dreaming of an evening to come... hence the line - "Don't say they come to pray to the Lord."

As for the line - "looking for my street-corner girl" a lot of people use this, as well as a later lyric, as proof that the girl is indeed a lady of the evening. Again, I don't see it that

way. I think the singer is just frustrated with her and using slang terms to describe her and the position she has placed him in; walking around the town, searching for the love of his life, when he knows, deep down, that she has shackled up with someone else.

It's not that difficult to imagine the predicament that this would place anyone in. Particularly if they were in some small, isolated town somewhere, which, in this song, that's the feeling I am left with. The guy would feel foolish, like he was the joke of the town and this could lead to a number of actions on his behalf. Fortunately for us, the singer chooses to just leave. He doesn't act out in a moment of rage that he would regret for the remainder of his life, he simply realizes that no matter how much he loves her, she will not reciprocate that love nor will she ever be faithful and so he stands at the crossroads and decides the best thing to do, for his own sanity, is to simply walk away.

And the third verse, where all of this is revealed, is one of my favorite lyrics that Robert has ever written. It's nothing on a grand scale and part of it may just be the way the words work so beautifully together, but he paints an incredible picture in this final verse, proving once again his prowess as a lyric writer.

And in the bars with the men who play guitars

Singin', drinkin' and rememberin' the time

My little lover does the midnight shift

She ball around all of the time

I guess there's just one thing a-left for me to do

Gonna pack my bags and move on my way

Uh 'cause I got a worried mind, sharing what I thought was mine

Gonna leave her while the guitars play

That entire verse is so beautifully written and so eloquently sung by Robert that I simply cannot imagine anybody

doing it any better than he does here. It is simply perfection. The last line... the way the band stops again as he sings "Gonna leave her while the guitars play..." That! That is just priceless! You cannot listen to this song and not be moved by that final line in verse three.

The line about "My little lover does the midnight shift" is the other lyric that many point to as proof that she is a prostitute. However... just a few lines later he says he's going to move on his way because he has a worried mind... "Sharing what I thought was mine."

And again, I find it impossible to believe that this person entered into a relationship knowing that she was, in fact, a prostitute and yet has the audacity to complain about her not being true or sharing what he thought was his. That just makes no sense to me.

I have never heard or read an interview with Robert where he addresses this song, though I'm sure if he was ever asked about its meaning, he would give one of his typical, cryptic answers like; 'Well... it's about a relationship that wasn't meant to be' or 'There was a girl when I was 16 and she was a little older and, well, let's just say she enjoyed a lot of scenery.'

One of the great things about many of Zeppelin's songs is that they don't force a set idea upon us, we are left, quite often, with the opportunity to take whatever meaning from the song that we so choose. And there again, is one of the reasons their music has resonated with so many people over such a long period of time.

Robert runs through the chorus again and then the song gets into a lot of improvisation. This is another of the great things about this song. The chorus after verse three ends with 1:11 left in the song... which provides a great opportunity for Robert to just go off. And he does.

We get the great "Yeah - No - Yeah - No - Yeah - No - Yeah - No" section, the many "Keep on, keep on, keep on, keep on..." sections and we also have multi-tracked vocals as we hear a howling cry of longing underneath the "Keep on" section. He also

pays tribute to John Lee Hooker with the "Boogie... Boogie Chillen."

As the song nears the end, with just :14 left, we hear another great "Ohhhhhhhhh oh, oh-oh" from Robert and then everything seems to just collapse as Jimmy's lone guitar sort of meanders around during the fade-out. A rather unique ending to say the least, but it's another of the many charms of this track.

Sadly, Led Zeppelin never performed this song in concert. You can't blame them as this was never released on an actual Led Zeppelin album, but I wonder if they realized how big this song was, particularly in the States.

When Jimmy and Robert formed Page/Plant, they did dust off this classic and performed it during their 1995 tour, finally giving many fans the chance to hear this very classic song in a live setting. Page performed it with the Black Crowes on their 2000 tour and many bands have covered this song, though none have ever come close to the sheer brilliance that Zeppelin achieved.

It's almost humorous that they never released this song on an album during their career. One funny comment on You Tube I saw was when a person said that most bands would sell their souls to have a song this great and yet, Zeppelin just kept it in the vaults all those years. It's funny... and true!

I remember in 1981 venturing out to a record store... and for those of you too young to know what a true record store was like, all I can say is that with all the technology today, nothing compares to having an actual ALBUM in your hands... but anyway, I went into this record store and the guy working there knew me and knew of my love for Zeppelin and when I walked in he pulled me aside. He had secured a still-sealed copy of the original 45 of "Immigrant Song/Hey Hey What Can I Do" for me.

I was in awe and I believe I paid all of \$1.99 for it, which was a steal even in 1981. I also have the CD release... or rather, re-release of the single... that Zeppelin released in 1992 as part of the "Box Set I" and "Box Set II" releases. That one was inside a brown, sort of cardboard box type cover and has the

Atlantic Records logo and marking on it, just as the original 45 did. I still have that sealed as well!

So... another classic song from Zeppelin and one they decided to keep hidden away for many years. Fortunately we had radio back in the day and now, the song is widely available.

Until the next time,

Jeff