

SONG OF THE DAY LXXXII

As I sit here at my computer looking through the vast catalog of Led Zeppelin, one thing that continually amazes me is how many classic songs they have. When I started this series some 15 years ago I had a plan in mind, an idea of how I wanted this thing to go and even how I wanted to end it all.

And as we near the conclusion of this series I catch myself doing double-takes when I see a song that I haven't covered yet. I go back through my notebook full of notes; search through the list of prior SOTD's and can't believe there are still so many great songs yet to write about. How is it possible that this one band could write and record so much amazing music? Sometimes... it just doesn't seem fair to all the other bands out there.

And today we are going to revisit one of their greatest songs; a piece of music that was akin to a roller-coaster ride and one that marked the beginning of Plant truly finding himself as a lyricist, as well as Page laying the seeds for his idea of the "guitar army." You might want to pull out your copy of J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" for today's song... and once you're ready, pull out your copy of "Led Zeppelin II," side two, track three, clocking in at 4:23; the majestic anthem, "Ramble On."

An ethereal Page acoustic guitar welcomes us as we step gently into an enchanting new world. The lush acoustics are backed by Bonham playing percussion and Jonsey's hypnotic bass work. There's been much debate as to what exactly Bonham is doing as he lays this percussive background, but of all the "ideas" bandied about, the one that most appeals to me and sounds closest to me, is that he is playing with his bare hands on a guitar case.

Page has said in numerous interviews over the years of his vision of writing songs that go from a whisper to a scream, and this is one of the finest representations of that vision. Light. And shade. The Page trademarks are in full bloom here.

When Robert enters, his voice is soft and contemplative, a perfect reflection of what is actually being said with the lyrics.

Leaves are falling all around
Time – I was on my way
Thanks to you – I'm much obliged
Such a pleasant stay
But now it's time for me to go
The Autumn Moon lights my way
But now I smell the rain; and with it pain
And it's heading my way...
Ah sometimes I grow so tired
But I know I've got one thing I've got to do...

Ramble on...
An' now the time, the time is now
Sing my song
I'm goin' 'round the world
I got to find my girl
On my way
I've been this way ten years to the day
Ramble on
Gotta find the queen of all my dreams...

Well... what can one say after that? It's pure magic; art at its absolute finest. The music lulls you into this false sense of serenity and then it just slams you upside the head with the full brunt of semi-truck. Page was on his "A" game when he wrote this one because not only do we get the stunningly beautiful

beginning, that will repeat several times throughout the song, but he then adds in an absolutely monster riff as Bonzo and Jonsey follow his lead.

And John Paul Jones... the one who never gets enough credit or enough recognition, is positively deific through this entire piece. His bass alone is such a pleasure to listen to and just adds to the perfect balance of musicianship and lyrical beauty. The connection that he and Bonham forged is never better than on this song and their contribution to this masterpiece must not be understated.

Got no time for spreading roots

The time has come to be gone...

And though our health we drank a thousand times...

It's time to ramble on...

Ramble on...

An' now the time, the time is now

Sing my song

I'm goin' 'round the world

I got to find my girl

On my way

I've been this way ten years to the day

I gotta ramble on

I gotta find the queen of all my dreams...

I ain't tell you no lies

At this point Jimmy plays a repeating phrase that is such a defining, signature lick that you could walk into any guitar store in the world, play this, and everyone would know what it is. And this lick only lasts :10 seconds. It just blows my mind that he can write this beautiful, melodic lick in the middle of

a song, and yet it becomes something that is so instantly recognizable the world over.

Mine's a tale that can't be told

My freedom I hold dear...

How years ago in days of old

When magic filled the air

T'was in the darkest depths of Mordor

I met a girl so fair

But Gollum, at the evil wall*

Crept up and slipped away with her-her

Her-her...

Her, yeah...

And there ain't nothing I can do, no

I guess I'll keep on

Ramblin'...

This is where one would typically expect a guitar solo, but Page allows Robert to free-form from here on out and the effect is quite incredible. Using multi-tracks for his vocals and massive stereo panning we see another instance where Jimmy chooses to use Plant's voice like an actual instrument.

The entire final minute of the song is Plant singing to himself and with himself, improvising in stunning fashion as the band settles into a killer groove that many overlook because of all the vocal work going on. Late in the song Plant sings the famous, and still somewhat quirky line; "Ooh I can't find my bluebird."

This great song was actually never performed in concert by Zeppelin in its entirety. Which just furthers my point about the excessively long solos... how could they not play this song? There are a couple of times where parts of the song were played and/or

sung in concert during other songs, but after 1970 it was never even hinted at on stage.

Fortunately when Page/Plant toured in 1995/96 and 1998, they did play this and the crowd was always very enthusiastic during its performance, most nights singing the chorus to Robert. On 10 December 2007, the reunited Led Zeppelin with Jason Bonham on drums, played a full version of the song and the following year, Page and Jones joined the Foo Fighters on stage at Wembley Stadium for an energetic run through of this number as well. Plant has also performed it on some of his solo tours.

As far as the * above on the lyric: "But Gollum... at the evil wall." Here's the deal with that. On "Zeppelin II," that is what I hear. I hear it as clear as can be. "At the evil wall" comes through so very clear to me. However, live, I've heard many different things sung by Plant, including, "Gollum... the evil one."

"One" and "Wall" can sound quite similar, especially when being sung by Robert Plant. But on the album, "at the evil wall" is what I hear. It is quite possible I am wrong because, as I stated, I've heard many different things from Robert live.

So don't hold me to that lyric, I am not 100% positive that that's what he sings, but that's what it sounds like to me and I've been listening to this song for over 30 years.

In the 2009 documentary titled, rather appropriately; "It Might Get Loud" Jimmy is seen playing a solo version of "Ramble On" using his famous Gibson Les Paul. Clad in black and looking extremely regal with his flowing grey hair, we see, close up, his hands as he works his way through the beginning of the song and into the hard-rocking riff. In a voice over, we also hear Pagey explaining not only this song, but many in the Zeppelin discography when he says: "Dynamics. Light and shade. Whisper to the... to the thunder. To invite you in... to intoxicating."

"Ramble On" is another classic Zeppelin track that is still as popular today as it ever was; maybe more-so. And it just shows, yet again, how special the band was and what they were capable of doing as a unit.

Until the next time,

Jeff