

## SONG OF THE DAY LXXXIII

Today, like in SOTD LXXIX, we are going to examine two songs, and, just like that previous SOTD, I'm certain this one will rankle some feathers as well. Today's song originally was released on Led Zeppelin's debut album, side two, track two, clocking in at just 2:12; the beautiful and eerie "Black Mountain Side." It was also issued on "Box Set I" as "White Summer/Black Mountain Side," and that one clocked in at 8:01. So, either grab your copy of "Zep I," or disc one of "Box Set" one, as we take a look inside Jimmy's instrumental showpiece for much of his touring career.

Before we dive into these two numbers, one thing must be addressed; Jimmy did not write either of these songs. Despite what the credits say on "Led Zeppelin I" or "Box Set" one, both of these songs were traditional Irish folk songs. "Black Mountain Side" was originally known as "Down By Blackwaterside" and later became known simply as "Black Waterside" when guitar legend Bert Jansch recorded it on his 1966 album, "Jack Orion." On that album, Jansch listed the credit as "traditional."

"White Summer" was recorded and released in 1962 by Davey Graham, another great British guitarist, under the title that it had long been known as; "She Moved Through The Fair." In fact, not only did Graham record a version that mirrors "White Summer" almost to a T, but it was Graham who invented the tuning that both of these songs are in; D-A-D-G-A-D.

If you're a longtime fan of Zeppelin then you already know about the numerous times they "borrowed" other artist's songs and/or lyrics. Plant borrowed heavily from Robert Johnson, Blind Willie Johnson, Howlin' Wolf and other various blues singers. Page is also guilty of "borrowing" music - sometimes just a phrase or two - other times entire songs.

No matter how big of a fan you are, you simply cannot condone that type of behavior. That would be akin to me releasing an album with a Zeppelin song on it and claiming that I wrote it. Jimmy would have my butt in court so fast my head

would be spinning. So, on that hand, I completely fail to understand how, or why, they chose to do these things, particularly when there were plenty of people who knew some of "their" music wasn't theirs.

On the other hand, every time Zeppelin did this, theirs has been better than the original. Now that doesn't excuse what they did, it just further proves their prowess as musicians. I don't believe that their legacy would have been any less renowned than it is now had they properly credited the artists they were so obviously influenced by.

I enjoy Davey Graham as a guitarist and Bert Jansch as well. I have a CD titled "The Art Of Fingerstyle Guitar" and on that CD there are a plethora of artists and Graham has five songs included and Jansch has a beautiful track titled "Bridge" that must be heard to be believed.

However, despite my love for their music, I do favor Jimmy's version of these two songs over Graham and Jansch's versions. Perhaps it was because I heard Jimmy's first, perhaps it's because Jimmy tends to play them with more of a rock feel; I don't really know. But I do believe in giving proper credit when it's due, and in the case of "White Summer/Black Mountain Side," that was not the case with Jimmy.

"White Summer" begins with some harmonics and then a simple picking pattern, a few sparse notes with Jimmy adding vibrato and bent notes for added effect. After he repeats this a couple of times the track takes off with some very fast picking, usually accompanied by Bonham keeping a steady beat behind him, but mostly staying out of the way.

The tuning on these songs gives the guitar a Dsus4 open sound, creating, as Page called it; 'A very modal tuning, a sitar tuning, in fact!'

"Black Mountain Side" is a fun piece, not only to listen to, but also to play. If you're a guitarist just starting out, it can be a bit tricky at first, but once you get it down it's just a total blast to play and to hear those special sounds emanating from your guitar.

On the first Zeppelin album Page used a Gibson J-200 acoustic guitar for the recording, but live he used the Danelectro guitar he's so well known for, with one exception being the Julie Felix show that he appeared on in 1970. For that performance he used a Gibson J-200 as well, and his playing was in really excellent form. It's a shame that Page never found, or doesn't own the rights to, the master tape of that performance, because that version would have been a very welcome addition to the Zeppelin "Box Set" or "Coda."

Jimmy began performing "White Summer" in The Yardbirds and the song even appeared on two Yardbirds albums; "Little Games" and "Live Yardbirds: Featuring Jimmy Page." During Zeppelin's career he played the combination of "White Summer/Black Mountain Side" from the very beginning up to their fifth US tour in 1970. On the Led Zeppelin DVD, recorded at The Royal Albert Hall on Jimmy's birthday, you can hear traces of what would eventually become two sections of "Midnight Moonlight." The song{s} then re-emerged for the 1977 US tour as well as the 1979 Copenhagen Warm-Up shows and Knebworth as well as their 1980 "Over Europe" tour.

Once Jimmy teamed up with Paul Rodgers for The Firm, this became a staple during the middle section of "Midnight Moonlight" during their 1984/85/86 tours and in 1988 on the Outrider Tour he again played this during "Midnight Moonlight." In 1993, on the Coverdale/Page tour of Japan, he brought it back out as "White Summer/Black Mountain Side" and threw in pieces of other songs within the context of the piece, including "Over The Hills And Far Away" as well as "Kashmir" and "Midnight Moonlight."

I have a theory that "Over The Hills," which is in standard tuning, began life in this D-A-D-G-A-D tuning. The first picked notes in "White Summer" are the G string open, followed with a hammer on/ pull off on the second fret of the G string {3<sup>rd</sup> string} and then he plays the note on the 4<sup>th</sup> fret on the 4<sup>th</sup> string {D string}. "Over The Hills" begins the same way except he pulls off of that note on the 4<sup>th</sup> string, 4<sup>th</sup> fret {F#}.

It wasn't until the Coverdale/Page tour and hearing "Over The Hills" in this tuning mixed in with "White Summer/Black Mountain Side," that I first realized that this was probably

where he began writing that song. I don't have any concrete evidence to confirm this, but I do believe that Jimmy was playing around in this tuning one day and stumbled upon the seed for "Over The Hills."

Even though Jimmy didn't write either "White Summer" or "Black Mountain Side," he did write some pretty amazing songs utilizing this tuning. At the end of 1973 he began writing what we now know as "Kashmir" and during the sessions for Physical Graffiti he came out with "Swan Song," later to be released as "Midnight Moonlight" with The Firm.

Personally, I love "White Summer/Black Mountain Side" as well as the songs that came after it that also employed this uniquely odd tuning. It was because of Page that I was introduced to the music of Davey Graham and Bert Jansch, and as a guitarist, I am eternally thankful for that. It was also through Jimmy and his use of the D-A-D-G-A-D tuning that I became aware of this way of tuning and playing the guitar. I have written a number of songs in this tuning and even all these years later, I still find it a very hypnotic tuning for the instrument that I love so much.

Until the next time,

Jeff