

## SONG OF THE DAY LXXXV

I remember being 15-years old and going with a good friend of mine to camp out for concert tickets to see an upcoming show. Showing my age here, but this was in the day before Ticketbastard, back when all tickets were purchased through music stores and it was first-come, first-served and those who were first nabbed the best seats.

The show that was coming to town was a very popular band and so it was that on the evening before the tickets were to go on sale, we were at the record store along with another couple hundred people. These camp-outs turned into huge parties with plenty of refreshments and music to keep us entertained throughout the long evenings.

One guy had an old Camaro and was blasting Led Zeppelin's 4<sup>th</sup> album for us all and everybody was rocking out to "Black Dog" and "Rock & Roll..." but when "The Battle Of Evermore" came on, everyone's attention waned and the guy went back to his car and forwarded the cassette tape to "Stairway."

I was enraged! How could he do this? How could he just skip past a Zeppelin song? There are no songs on Zeppelin albums that you just skip through. This isn't some crappy pop-metal band from the 1980's where an album would have maybe one or two good songs; this was Led Zeppelin dammit! Every song matters! And every song deserves our full attention.

It's funny - the memories we keep; those little fragments of time that remain with us over the years and through all of our experiences. Why do some stay at the forefront of our minds while others are completely forgotten? I can't provide an adequate answer for that, but I remember that night so vividly and with such intense detail that I still get mad thinking about it.

So, with that guy in the Camaro in mind, today we will journey back to the 4<sup>th</sup> album, side one, track three, clocking in

at 5:52, and a song that should never be skipped over; "The Battle Of Evermore."

This song came about when Jimmy decided to pick up a mandolin owned by John Paul and even though he hadn't played a mandolin or known any chords on the instrument, somehow Jimmy started finding the foundation for this masterpiece.

Robert had been reading about Scottish folklore and the Scottish wars, and this provided an impetus for the song, as well, he was again influenced by J.R.R. Tolkien and his own masterpiece, "The Lord Of The Rings."

The tune begins as Jimmy's mandolin fades in ever so quietly and subtly. Considering the context of the album and where this song was placed - just after the very raucous "Rock & Roll" - the stark contrast is quite dramatic. But this again shows why Led Zeppelin was so far ahead of their contemporaries - if you could even call them contemporaries - because there isn't any other band in rock during that time that I could even begin to fathom pulling off a number like this.

Joining Robert on this is Sandy Denny, formerly of Fairport Convention, and the one person who holds the distinction of being the only guest singer to be featured on a Led Zeppelin album alongside Robert. Her performance here is astounding. To make it easy, I will print out Robert's lyrics in regular print, and Sandy's will be in italics.

The queen of Light

Took her bow

And then she turned to go

The Prince of Peace

Embraced the gloom

And walked the night alone

*OH - DANCE IN THE DARK OF NIGHT - SING TO THE MORNING LIGHT*

The Dark Lord rides in force tonight  
And time will tell us all...

*OH – THROW DOWN YOUR PLOW AND HOE – REST NOT TO LOCK YOUR HOMES*

Side by side, we wait the might  
Of the darkest of them all...

*OHHH- OH-OH-OH*

I hear horses thunder  
Down in the valley below  
I'm waiting for the angels of Avalon  
Waiting for the Eastern glow

The apples of the valley hold  
The seeds of happiness  
The ground is rich from tender care  
Repay do not forget  
No – no

*OH – DANCE IN THE DARK OF NIGHT, SING TO THE MORNING LIGHT*

The apples turn to brown and black  
The tyrant's face is red

*OH – WAR IS THE COMMON CRY – PICK UP YOUR SWORDS AND FLY*

The sky is filled  
With good and bad  
That mortals never know

*OH – NOW*

Oh well, the night is long  
The beads of time pass slow  
Tired eyes on the sunrise  
Waiting for the Eastern glow

The pain of war, cannot exceed  
The woe of aftermath  
The drums will shake the castle wall  
The ring-wraiths ride in black  
Ride on – ride on

*SING AS YOU RAISE YOUR BOW – SHOOT STRAIGHTER THAN BEFORE*

No comfort has, the fire at night  
That lights the face so cold

*OH – DANCE IN THE DARK OF NIGHT – SING TO THE MORNING LIGHT*

The magic Runes are writ in gold  
To bring the balance back  
Bring it back!

At last the sun is shining  
The clouds of blue roll by  
With flames from the dragon of darkness  
The sunlight blinds his eyes...

Bring it back!  
Bring it back!

Oh now – oh now – oh now – oh!

Seriously... how can anyone ever possibly imagine skipping over this track? You have more fantastic lyrics from Robert... my personal favorite line being: *Tired eyes on the sunrise, waiting for the Eastern glow...* you also have two amazingly beautiful voices in a call and response, playing off each other, and the musicianship between Jimmy on mandolin and Jonsey on guitar is transcendent.

It is one of those rarest of songs because it reveals a side of Led Zeppelin that many couldn't comprehend. This was the same band that had delivered "Whole Lotta Love" and "Immigrant Song" and yet they are able to write such a lovely folk ballad and perform it in a way that just sends a chill down the spine. And I mean that in the best way possible!

Obviously, performing this in concert proved to be a rather difficult task as Zeppelin never toured with any side musicians in their heyday. I'm sure nobody wanted to embark on a tour just to come out and sing on one song and it's doubtful that such a small contribution would have paid very well. So, Zeppelin only played this live during their 1977 US tour, with the difficult task of singing Sandy Denny's part falling on John Paul Jones.

Not to put JPJ down, but his voice isn't of the same quality as Ms. Denny and live, the song suffered a bit. Fortunately, when Jimmy and Robert reunited in 1994 for "Unleaded," they dusted this masterpiece off and introduced the world to the vocal prowess of Najma Akhtar.

The version that aired on MTV was absolutely incredible. The Egyptian Orchestra, Nigel Eaton and his Hurdy-Gurdy, combined with Najma, transformed the song while Page and Plant kept it grounded in the roots that we have all come to know and love. This new version was a bit longer, clocking in at 6:42 and Najma didn't sing all of Sandy's lines... sometimes choosing to extend notes instead of singing the second line in a particular lyric. It mattered little though, because the 1994 version of this song was, in a word, mesmerizing.

Nancy and Ann Wilson, noted sisters of the famous rock group Heart, have performed this song a number of times, including in their side project called The Lovemongers. Their live versions of "The Battle Of Evermore" are terrific, even if

they don't seem to know the correct lyrics. One notable error is in the line: *I hear horses thunder, down in the valley below.* For some reason Ann sings: *I hear the voice of thunder, down in the valley below.* And Nancy sometimes sings certain lines out of order, but aside from that they really do this number quite well.

Robert performed the song with Fairport Convention in 2008 as well as with Alison Krauss on their tour together for "Raising Sand." The versions I have heard with Alison are the closest I've heard to Sandy Denny and they are at a slightly slower pace than Zeppelin or Page/Plant performed it at.

Speaking of Sandy Denny... she died tragically in 1978 at the tender age of 31. Considering her voice and talent, I find it terribly sad that her life ended so abruptly.

In closing, I see "The Battle Of Evermore" as one of the essential Zeppelin songs since it showed the band in a way that so few could have imagined, even after "III" had been released. That many consider their 4<sup>th</sup> album to be their quintessential album; I believe that this song is one of the reasons for that, even if some people don't realize it.

In the 2009 movie "It Might Get Loud," the image of Jimmy sitting outside Headley Grange playing the mandolin - playing this amazing song by himself - is one of my favorite, lasting images of the man. That brief 45 seconds or so on film is just priceless and so too is this song.

Until the next time,

Jeff