

SONG OF THE DAY LXXXVII

I remember back in the early days of Digital Graffiti, the original Led Zeppelin mailing list that I first joined, someone posted a piece on which songs by Zep were "filler." I sat horrified as I read some of the comments... it seemed a lot of people didn't care for "Fool In The Rain," which I found unbelievable. But then, one guy drew a line in the sand when he mentioned "The Rover."

That was it for me... I couldn't bite my tongue anymore; I had to enter this debate and I did so with a fervent position! How could anyone consider "The Rover" filler? This was simply absurd. That was in early 1997 if memory serves, and now in 2011, I am going to put to rest once and for all any silly notion that this great song is merely filler.

So pull out your copy of "Physical Graffiti," LP one, side one, track two, clocking in at 5:37 of pure awesomeness and get ready to be schooled in the ways of Led Zeppelin!

Bonzo is the first to enter and he does so with all the force and authority of the hammer of the Gods. This intro is such a signature staple, so instantly recognizable when you hear it, that there is absolutely no denying who is behind the kit or that this song is going to smack you right upside the head.. in a good way, of course!

Then Jimmy enters with a resounding low E note and allows that note to wash over you, reverberating through your head for a couple of seconds before he brings out the first of his great riffs in this piece.

At :24 seconds in we get the second great riff, and one of the heaviest Jimmy has ever written. Working bent notes into the riff and using a Phase Shifter to give it its own particular sound, the riff works in a very hypnotic way as it repeats through the series of notes until Bonzo leads us into a third section that has a very upbeat, melodic quality to it with Jimmy playing sliding power chords and then Bonzo, in a beautiful and

perfectly placed pattern on the kit, brings us to the first appearance of Robert.

I've been to London

Seen seven wonders

I know to trip is just to fall

And right here, Jimmy's riff is so powerful and righteous that it is most easily described as being perfection personified.

I used to rock it

Sometimes I'd roll it

I always knew what it was for

And again, Bonham is absolutely brilliant here. His drumming in this song is one that I would direct any young, aspiring drummers to listen to if they wanted a crash course in rock drumming. Not only what he plays is brilliant, but the little fragments of time where he pauses - the "what-you-don't-play-is-as-important-as-what-you-do-play" - is exhibited with the touch of a master on this piece.

There can be no denyin'

That the wind'll shake 'em down

And the flat world's flying

In the new flag on the land

If we could just join hands

If we could just join hands

If we could just join

In fields of plenty
When Heaven sent me
I saw the kings who ruled them all
Still by the firelight
And purple moonlight
I hear the rusted rivers call...

And the wind is cryin'
Of a love that won't grow cold
My lover she is lyin'
On the dark side of the globe...

If we could just join hands
If we could just join hands
If we could just join hands...

Yeah – yeah – yeah – yeah...

And now we reach another section of the song, Page, Bonham and Jonsey locked into a tight groove that gives the impression of Jimmy just pounding on his Les Paul. The music here is like a caged lion, just chomping at the bit to be let loose.

You got me rockin' when I ought-a be a –rollin' darling
Tell me darlin' which way to go
Hear me rockin' baby then you keep me stallin'
Won't you tell me darlin' which way to go
That's right!

And then, as if this song has not given us enough already, we are treated to one of the best solos Jimmy has ever laid down on tape. In just under :30 seconds Jimmy puts on a clinic when it comes to soloing within the context of a rock song. The solo never takes away from the song; instead, it only enhances it, taking the music to new heights as he starts out playing some very fluid and melodic notes, allowing the music to breathe, before finishing with a mini flurry that brings us right back to Plant and his lyrics of hope.

Oh how I wonder

Oh how I worry

And I would dearly like to know

I've all this wonder

Of earthly plunder

Will it leave us anything to show?

And our time is flyin'

See the candle burnin' low

Is the new world risin'

From the shambles of the old?

If we just join hands

If we could just join hands...

That's all it takes

That's all it takes...

And from that point on the song burns with a slow groove that sees Bonzo and Jonsey locked in tight as Jimmy plays some

more heavy riffs and then some funky soloing, the second solo section the same as the first, but an octave higher.

This is one of THE defining songs in the Zeppelin catalog. It literally has everything and it's all accomplished in less than six minutes. Filler? Are you kidding me?

"The Rover" began life in 1970 as it was originally intended to be an acoustic blues song, presumably to be included on "Led Zeppelin III." Then it was recorded during the sessions for "Houses Of The Holy" and after it was left off that album, Jimmy revisited it, adding overdubbed guitars and remixing it for "Physical Graffiti." The end result is, to say the least, quite stunning.

And this just furthers the point that this song is NOT filler. Not by any means. You don't spend five years working on a song that is just filler. A "filler" song is one that is written at the last minute to "fill" out an album. Well, I have news for that guy who said this was filler - "Physical Graffiti" had plenty of material! This song was included because it kicks serious butt and because Jimmy and the group thought highly enough of it to keep working on it until it was perfect.

It's one of the rare occasions where Robert writes lyrics that don't deal with love or loss and instead focuses on the world and the need for everyone to join together. Although it began life over 41 years ago and was released over 36 years ago, the message is still as pertinent today as it was when it was first released. That's actually a sad statement... not about the song... but about how our world has failed to progress over that span of time.

Zeppelin rehearsed this song for the stage, but ultimately it was only used as an introduction for "Sick Again" on the 1977 US tour. The opening riff is played for roughly :45 seconds before segueing into the closing track from "Graffiti." I will never forget the first bootleg I found of Zep's '77 tour and when I heard the intro to "The Rover" I freaked out. This was long before the Internet and news traveled slowly. We didn't have set lists within an hour of a show being played, it often took months - and bootlegs - for us to find out what was played on a tour if the band didn't hit our city. The other thing about

the old days was that many times the bootlegs would list songs incorrectly. So seeing "Sick Again" and hearing "The Rover" was not surprising. It was, however, rather deflating when they stopped and then went into "Sick Again," proving, yet again, that had they not played songs with such long solos in them, they could have played more of their catalog and "The Rover" certainly would have been a great song to hear live in its entirety.

In this song you have Plant singing as beautifully as ever, with insightful and thought-provoking lyrics, Jonsey holding the bottom end down and locked into a constant groove with Bonzo, and Page puts on a clinic of the highest order when it comes to riffing, soloing, song construction and melody.

This song personifies that old cliché about Zeppelin being the Hammer Of The Gods! Think what you want about this song; just don't ever tell me to my face that this is a "filler" song... lest the Hammer Of The Gods will unleash its furious rage all over your head!

Until the next time,

Jeff