

SONG OF THE DAY LXXXVIII

When I first started this series so many years ago, I had a plan laid out, and as we are nearing the end of this I realized that I had two slots open to talk about something other than Led Zeppelin songs. I did a rather in-depth look at the Coverdale/Page album and their partnership, have written about three post-Zeppelin Page/Plant songs and have covered three songs off of Robert's first solo album, "Pictures At Eleven."

So the question I had to ask myself was: What next? What could I elaborate on for two SOTD's? The answer came to me quickly; I would simply write about my favorite post-Zeppelin solo album. I give you fair warning, this one and the next one will be long. Because this album means a lot to me and I still listen to it faithfully some 18 years on.

And to shock any of you who know me, it is not a Jimmy Page solo album or collaboration with anyone else. It is Robert's fantastic and amazing "Fate Of Nations" album. Now my "Fate Of Nations" probably differs from yours, because I have all of the tracks Robert recorded with Rainer Ptacek included in my "version" of this classic album.

For those of you who aren't familiar with Rainer, he was a guitarist who played mostly a National Steel guitar with a slide. He was brilliant! His album "Worried Spirits" is another classic album that is a must-have! I was lucky enough to get to know Rainer in 1996, just shortly before he passed away from a brain tumor.

He was an extremely sweet guy, very nice, very humble. When a friend of his contacted me to tell of his passing, I felt as though a life-long friend had been lost. He had the kind of impact on me.

So while I have all of the normal songs on "Fate Of Nations," I also have the following that Rainer and Robert recorded, both as B-side singles for songs from "Nations" as well as for "The Inner Flame," the tribute album for Rainer that

Robert helped put together. Together they recorded these songs: Whole Lotta Love - 21 Years - Great Spirit - Dark Moon. All of these are Robert singing and Rainer playing acoustic slide guitar. No other people perform on the tracks. And each one is incredible. It's Robert going back to his roots and paying homage to guys like Robert Johnson and Blind Willie Johnson. The re-working of Whole Lotta Love is really great and so too is the acoustic Great Spirit.

And so... dig out your copy of "Fate Of Nations" and dive into track 4, clocking in at 4:32; the hauntingly beautiful ode to Robert's son Karac, "I Believe."

The music starts out with a very pop oriented feel, a sort of light and airy quality to it that masks the depth of the lyrics that are soon to follow. And those lyrics are intense. As I have stated numerous times, Robert is so under-appreciated as a lyricist that it boggles my mind. Perhaps his voice has always over-shadowed his great lyrics; perhaps it was because he was in Led Zeppelin, I don't really know the answer to this. But I would rank him up there amongst the giants when it comes to lyric writing.

While there is some debate about "All My Love" being about Karac or, as I feel, directed to his wife at the time, Maureen, there is no denying what "I Believe" is about. It is a father pouring his heart out about the loss of his son. And as I stated prior, that is a pain that I cannot begin to comprehend.

There's a line in the song that has always made me wonder... when Robert sings: 'Neighbor, neighbor, don't be so cold...' I just wonder what that's about? Did he actually have neighbors who were being mean? Talking behind his back? Saying how the "rock-star" got what he deserved? It's a line that mystifies me to this day, but if it is as I take it, I find that so terribly sad.

Tears, tears at the water's edge

Hey little sister, give us laughter instead

Tears for the teacher, from the eyes, from the soul

This restless spirit takes the long way back home

Like the wind
You are free
Just a whisper – I hear you
So talk to me
Ohh-oh-ohh
I believe
Eye to eye
Say brother, sister
See your brother's in the sky
Neighbor, neighbor
Don't be so cold
It's only glory from the story untold
Ah – oooooohhhhhh

Oh-whoa-ohh
I believe
Eye to eye
Say brother, sister
See your brother's in the sky
Oh-oh-oh
Neighbor, neighbor
Don't be so cold
There's so much glory in the story untold
Ah-ooooohhhhhh-ooohhh
Mmmm – yeah!

A nice interlude takes place as a semi-guitar solo takes over. I say "semi" because it's not your typical lead guitar solo. It's a very beautiful and melodic break, ending with chords and perfectly executed whammy bar dives that just add to the building tension. And then... everything calms down just a bit...

Big fire on top of the hill

A hopeless gesture and last farewell

Tears from your mother

From the pits of her soul

Look at your father see his blood run cold

Like the wind

You are free

Just a whisper, I hear you

So talk to me

Ohh talk to me

Ah talk to me

Ohhh talk to me

Oww... come on now, come on now

I believe

Eye to eye

Say brother, sister

See your brother in the sky

Neighbor, neighbor

Don't be so cold

There's so much glory in the story untold

Ah-ooohhh-ooohhh

I believe, I believe, I believe...

And that, my friends, is a masterpiece. Robert singing about the loss of Karac, pouring his heart out, and yet, he remains hopeful. The final - 'I believe, I believe, I believe' is simply a perfect ending to this song.

Robert performed this song on his "Fate Of Nations" tour and there's also a clip on You Tube of him performing it acoustically in Italy.

As far as the rest of "Fate Of Nations," I will dive into one more song in the next SOTD, but this album really needs to be addressed in further detail because it has held up so well after so many years.

The opening number, "Calling To You" has a Zep-ish riff and even has Robert, at the end, saying: 'Oh... Jimmy.' It is a powerful way to kick off an album and that leads us right into "Down To The Sea," which is one of my favorite songs on the disc. There are times when it is reminiscent of "Wreckless Love" from "The Principle Of Moments" album, but it is another great track filled with a lot of various influences and more great lyrics from Robert.

"Come Into My Life" is yet another favorite of mine and has a very hypnotic beat with some very mellow guitar lines throughout. Plant's singing is exquisite here and this song also contains one of my all-time favorite lines of his when he sings: 'Pour the hope back in my eyes; I thought I lost so long ago...'

"29 Palms" was a big hit on the album and the single from this was where the acoustic version of "Whole Lotta Love" with Rainer was found. "Memory Song" has a cool groove and features a very intense guitar and drum battle behind Robert's singing. When the acoustic guitars enter and take the tune down a slightly different path it is unexpected and yet it fits so nicely. Robert, as he does throughout this album, sings this one

with a great deal of passion as evidenced by the line: 'You touched my soul!'

The first time I saw the CD and saw that "If I Were A Carpenter" was on here I was left scratching my head. Robert Plant covering The Carpenters??? I think shock would be a vast understatement as to my initial reaction. But then... I listened to the song and Robert pulls it off so beautifully and so compassionately that I found myself hitting the repeat button a lot just to hear it again and again.

"Promised Land" is one of the few out right rockers on the album but man, does it rock! Robert's vocals are an absolute delight to listen to on this song as he shifts from soft whispers to full on rock star shouts and the lyrics are rather humorous as well. To say the song is very sexual would be another gross understatement.

"The Greatest Gift" is one of the absolute gems on this disc and personally, I feel it's one of his best solo songs period. His vocals are filled with passion and a hint of melancholy ache lies underneath the surface. The music sways and Robert feeds off of it with such grace that it leaves me in awe every time I hear it.

"Network News" closes the album and works decently well, though it isn't as good, in my opinion, as the songs mentioned above.

On the UK version a song titled "Colour Of A Shade" was released - why they didn't initially release that here in the States is beyond me - and this song is absolutely chilling. A beautiful acoustic guitar opens things up as Robert revisits his roots yet again and the result is fantastic. A dramatic moment happens just before the chorus when he sings: 'But out beyond the tears somewhere; someone I need to know...' The music is hauntingly good and creates a very compelling vibe throughout the entire piece.

"8:05" is a quirky little acoustic ditty that seems to harken back to the 1950's. It's one of the extra tracks that is thankfully, included in the "Nine Lives" box set and shows a side of Robert that I am glad he allows us to see.

"Dark Moon" is one of the songs Robert recorded with Rainer and for me, is an absolute treat. Personally speaking, I would have loved an entire album of just Robert and Rainer playing acoustic blues like this. When he starts going off at the end with the 'I want your soul - I want your soul' part, it just sends chills down the spine as you hear the cry of a tormented individual begging for sovereignty.

If you know "Fate Of Nations" well, then you've surely noticed I left one song out. We'll be getting to that song in the next SOTD and we'll take a look at both versions; the one on the album and the one recorded with Rainer in the stark, acoustic blues setting.

Until the next time,

Jeff