

SONG OF THE DAY XCIII

When you hear the words Led Zeppelin, certain images and thoughts immediately spring to mind. I'm sure for every person that is a fan of the group, your ideals and beliefs are different; they are uniquely your own. And that is a great tribute to what the band accomplished during their career. They wrote many tremendous songs that have touched us all in vastly varying degrees of difference and they basically gave us the freedom to take from them what we needed to in order to relate to their music.

Every single one of us loves the band for many reasons and for me; one of the best parts about this group was the lyric writing of Robert Plant. Yes, I have said it many times and will continue to expound on this belief because I feel his words are so full of depth and subtlety that they often go unnoticed. And I find that a terrible shame.

Perhaps it's just who I am; someone who needs more than just a great beat or a great riff; I need something to connect with lyrically, spiritually, and without that, it's often difficult for me to get into a band. And with Led Zeppelin, and particularly Robert Plant, I find that connection and I embrace it for all it's worth.

And so it is today that we will examine one of Robert's greatest songs ever, from a lyrical standpoint and one that many people don't have any idea as to what he's singing about. Now I don't claim to have some insider information and I am not here to tell you that my feelings and thoughts on this song are the be-all, end-all of truth, it is quite possible that I am completely off base and wrong on every aspect. But, until Robert sits down and clarifies it for us, it is left to us to decide for ourselves.

So pull out your copy of "In Through The Outdoor" and turn to side two, track one, another lengthy piece, clocking in at 10:34, "Carouselambra."

Robert once gave an interview and when asked about "Carouselambra" he said it was about someone who would one day realize it was about them and they would be taken back by it and ask; 'My God, was it really like that?'

I have a theory as to who that 'someone' is and also what this song is about. I am not going to explain it all because it might anger some people and it may give the impression that I am claiming something that I am not. I will say this though, in hopefully a rather typical, cryptic Robert Plant manner, that if you consider certain events that took place in 1977, and what has happened every year, it seems, since the three surviving members of Led Zeppelin first reunited for Live Aid, I don't believe that I am off the mark here.

I will also say that I can relate to this song in a very direct way. To me, and this is based on my own experience with certain people in my life who claimed to be "friends" but later proved they were not friends at all, this song is full of resentment and sadness. The lyrics tell the tale. All you have to do is study them, look at 1977... particularly the mid-summer of that year and what transpired shortly after that, and I believe the picture will become clearer for you.

The song starts off with John Paul's synthesizer playing a repeating three note riff before Bonham and Page join in and the song is as energetic as anything in their history, only here the synth is the lead instrument whilst Page's guitar is lower in the mix. A furious pace pushes the song forward, as if racing towards an imaginary finish line while showing, yet again, that Zeppelin knew no boundaries.

It was a song that literally shook people up when it was first released because this wasn't the type of song most expected from the band that brought you "Whole Lotta Love." 'Ever onward' was a Zeppelin motto, and on this song, as the 1970's were drawing to an end, ever onward was indeed at the heart of this classic track.

When Robert enters, his vocals are really buried in the mix, making it extremely difficult to discern what he's saying. I would assume that this was Plant's idea, though I have no idea why he would want these great lyrics, and another phenomenal

vocal performance, to be hidden away behind a wash of keyboards and drums.

Sisters of the way-side bide their time in quiet peace

Await their place within the ring of calm;

Ah-ah

Still stand to turn in seconds of release

Await the call they know may never come

In times of lightness, no intruder dared upon

To jeopardize the course, upset the run;

Ah-ah

All was joy and hands were raised towards the sun

As love in halls of plenty overrun

Ah-ah Ah-ah Ah-ah Ah-ah

Once again John Bonham is simply superb here. I've heard stories that he wasn't in the best of shape while recording this album, but listening to this song, or any song from "Outdoor," leaves me questioning that thought process. He plays things that are so complex, so intricate, and yet he makes it all sound so easy. Not only is his timing impeccable, but the little fills he throws in throughout are just an absolute joy to listen to and would be another point of interest for any young aspiring drummers. Just check him out between 1:08-1:10.

Still in their bliss unchallenged mighty feast;

Unending dances shadowed on the day

Ah-ah

Within their walls, their daunting formless keep;
Preserved their joy and kept their doubts at bay
Faceless legions stood in readiness to weep
Just turn a coin, bring order to the fray;
Ah-ah
And everything is soon no sooner thought than deed
But no one seemed to question anyway

Ah-ah Ah-ah Ah-ah Ah-ah

Things change slightly just after this verse as the band keeps you guessing as per usual. Jimmy plays a cool riff as his guitar finally creeps up into the mix, but then suddenly we are back to the main synthesizer-driven theme.

How keen the storied hunter's eye prevails upon the land
To seek the unsuspecting and the weak;
Ah-ah
And powerless the fabled sat, too smug to lift a hand
Toward the foe that threatened from the deep
Who cares to dry the cheeks of those who saddened stand?
Adrift upon a sea of futile speech
Ah-ah
And to fall to fate and make the 'status plan'
And the Lord there in Heaven would never preach

I'm singin'

Ah-ah Ah-ah Ah-ah Ah-ah

Oh-oh... oh-oh... oh-oh... ohhh

Oh... Oh... Oh...

During the "Oh-oh" sections the music shifts around a bit, alternating between Jimmy's riffing and mellower sections before finally, at 4:06, settling into a nice arpeggiated section from Jimmy and then, yet again, the song shifts down, turning the mood of the piece into one of reflection and mourning.

Where was your word, where did you go?

Where was your helping, where was your bow?

Bow...

Page shines through this section, using the Gibson Double-neck and playing some very fluid and hypnotic chords. Jimmy employed the use of a Gizmotron on this song, causing a deeper drone-like sound and adding sustain to the notes. Though the Gizmotron was extremely temperamental, making it a bit of a pain to work with, it does show here that it had its uses and could create some cool sound effects.

Just as quickly as the song slows down, it picks right back up again with more arpeggiated notes from Page before it once again resumes it slower, melancholy section.

Dull is the armor, cold is the day

Hard was the journey, dark was the way

Way...

And again the song picks up and once again I would be remiss to not mention the playing of John Bonham. No matter the style or genre of song, he could play it to perfection and the things he does during this song are simply more proof of his prowess as a drummer. When this section kicks back in, his drums

are just amazing and he plays a very cool pattern at the 6:18-6:19 mark. It's some of the little things he did; the subtle things, that separated him from any other rock drummer.

As the next verse comes in Plant sounds defiant; almost angry! And it is Bonham's drums that reflect that and pound that point home.

I heard the word; I couldn't stay

Oh...

I couldn't stand it another day, another day

Hey- ey another day... another day...

John Paul takes over again as he drives the song forward, pulsating notes charging from his synthesizer and Bonham furiously following him.

Touched by the timely coming

Roused from the keeper's sleep

Release the grip; throw down the key

Held now within the knowing

Rest now within the peace

Take of the fruit, but guard the seed

Page enters with a forceful guitar, switching from a rousing riff to stabbing chords out in rhythm as the song keeps building behind Bonham's manic drumming and Jonsey's ever present synth.

They had to stay!

Held now within the knowing

Rest now within the beat

Take of the fruit, but guard the seed

Oh, take of the fruit, but guard the seed

As the song winds down we get treated to some wild sounding synth notes from Jonsey as Page and Bonham keep things going before the song just slowly fades out.

Sadly, Led Zeppelin never had the opportunity to perform this piece live, as Bonham passed during rehearsals for what would have been the 1980 US tour. "Carouselambra" was ear-marked as a piece for the new decade and would have certainly been an enthralling piece in a live setting.

During the Page/Plant tour in 1995/96, Robert would add a few lines from "Carouselambra" in the middle of "In The Evening," often times mixing the lyrics around, sometimes changing them slightly, but that's as close as this track ever was to being played live.

For reasons that I cannot fathom, there are a number of Led Zeppelin fans who don't find favor with "In Through The Outdoor" and that is something that completely mystifies me. Some call it the "John Paul Jones album" and while Jonsey certainly has a lead role in the music, both the playing and writing, what he brings to the table with this album is simply stellar material.

I never have and never will understand people who criticize a band for expanding their horizons or reaching out and trying new things. And Zeppelin did this throughout their entire career; from the hard rock/blues of "Zep II" to the mellow, acoustic sounds on "Zep III," from the many genres flirted with on "Physical Graffiti" to the back-against-the-wall angst of "Presence" and on through to the "John Paul Jones album." This is what made Led Zeppelin so great and so unique. They never released the same album, not even close.

"In Through The Outdoor" is filled with many great songs and triumphant moments and it's a shame that some fans choose to turn a blind eye to the brilliance that encompasses this material.

Take of the fruit... but guard the seed... Indeed!

Jeff