

SONG OF THE DAY XCIV

Today we will look at a song that just about every human being will be able to relate to. It's probably safe to say that anyone reading this has, at one time or another, been in love, and when you are in love you are extremely vulnerable. It takes a considerable amount of faith to open yourself completely and let all of your walls down, and there are times when, despite doing everything you can to make it work, it just doesn't. Today's song takes a look at a situation that is about this very topic and since everyone can relate to it, that's just one of the many reasons it has long been a favorite of Zeppelin fans the world over.

It is a song of love and what might have been and I'm certain that all of us have at least one person in our past that we look back on and wonder... what happened to them; where are they? Why did it not work out? Are they happy now? Am I happy now? Would we be happy had we stayed together?

That's a lot of questions and the answers are different for us all. But to see how Robert dealt with this emotional issue, pull out your copy of "Physical Graffiti" and turn to side three, track four, clocking in at 6:33, the melancholy and beautiful "Ten Years Gone."

There are so many superlatives that I could use to describe this song and how each of the members in the band did something great, but the first thing that should be talked about is the music that Jimmy wrote, and then played, to make this song happen.

Initially it was intended to be an instrumental piece, just as "The Song Remains The Same" was, but just as that song transpired and evolved over time, here Plant came up with a melody and lyrics as well and the result is a staggering success. Jimmy's guitar work in this song is absolutely celestial. The opening A chord and the following picked notes are so beautifully played that we are instantly pulled into this piece within the first few seconds.

There's an extreme dependency to the entire sound of the guitar and long before Plant utters a single word, we know this is a song ruminating on the sense of loss. As Jimmy plays through the intro he concludes it with a beautiful chord progression that leads us into a massive riff. The guitar in this song is tuned to Drop D - which just means tuning the low E down a step to D. That low D note adds a certain heaviness to the song and helps create a tension that fits the reflective mood.

After the entrance of the riff, Jimmy treats us to another beautifully orchestrated chord progression and we also get the full effect of his "Guitar Army" as many overdubbed tracks are being used. It's been reported that he employed as many as 14 guitar tracks on this song and listening to this section of the song, with only Jimmy's guitar(s) playing, we get a glimpse of what this might have been like as a purely instrumental piece.

Nearly a full minute into the song, Jimmy returns to the opening again as Robert opens his heart for all to see. When questioned about "Ten Years Gone" Robert stated that it was about a girl he was madly in love with who gave him the ultimatum: Me... or your music. Robert was adamant that he could not stop and so ended the relationship. And fate is sometimes quite funny. What if Robert had chosen her and walked away from a career as a singer? And I also wonder... what does she think now of Robert and the choice he made?

Then, as it was
Then again it will be
You know the course may change sometimes
Rivers always reach the sea...

Blind stars of fortune
Each have separate ways
On the wings of 'maybe'
Downing birds of prey
Kind of makes me feel sometime
We didn't have to go
But as the eagle leaves the nest

We've got so far to go...

Those are some very heavy lyrics and as is typical of Robert, he uses a lot of metaphors within them. He also pulls the curtain back just a bit here as we get a slight glimpse into what must have transpired between this girl and him, particularly in the line: "On the wings of 'maybe'." I always get this vision of a girl - whoever this girl was, I don't know - but I see a girl telling him; 'Yeah... maybe it will work out, but what if it doesn't? Then what?'

As funny as it may sound, I can understand where the girl was coming from. At the time, Robert was nothing. He was singing in local bands, probably barely scraping by, and nobody could have predicted the massive success that would soon follow. The line: "Downing birds of prey" is, to me, symbolism for every person who has ever put another in the position that this girl was putting Robert in. It's the killing of someone's spirit; taking their very life-blood from them by forcing them to give up on their dream in order to make the other person happy.

I also find it very telling that he returns to the "bird" theme with the line about an eagle leaving the nest. Robert was being forced into a fork in the road and when one is backed into a corner like that there are only two choices... you either give in or you have enough faith in yourself and your abilities and you move on. It's so much easier said than done, because when one factors in the bond of love, that caring for another person so much and yet that feeling in the pit of your gut that tells you that you must not give up on what you were born to do... to have that internal struggle going on and not knowing how things will turn out, but living on blind faith in yourself knowing that doing so will cause you to lose someone you love... that's a very difficult and painful place to be.

Changes fill my time

But baby that's alright with me

In the midst I think of you

And how it used to be...

Jimmy takes us out of the quiet section and lifts the mood with a beautifully constructed solo. Here, his guitar says the things that Robert can't; we hear it whisper, we hear it cry, we hear it beg, we hear it scream, and we hear it soar. We all know that Jimmy has recorded tons of great guitar tracks, but what he plays here and the emotional level with which he plays, is simply superb. It's the painting at the Sistine Chapel, it's the Mona Lisa, and it helps elevate this song to an entirely new level.

Did you ever really need somebody?
And really need 'em bad?
Did you ever really want somebody?
The best love you ever had
Do you ever remember me baby?
And did it feel so good?
'Cause it was just the first time
And you knew you would...

More beautiful playing from Jimmy and this part has always seemed to me to represent the girl answering Robert. Was that his intention? I don't know. But I know it works and it sounds amazingly sweet when I hear it. And then... suddenly we're back to the heavy riff and the massive guitar army as Robert presides over it with more eloquent words.

Do your eyes not sparkle?
Senses growing keen
Tasting love along the way
See your feathers preen
Kind of makes me feel sometime
Didn't have to go
We are eagles of one nest
The rest is in our soul...

Jimmy brings us back again to the beginning section; that sad and forlorn guitar - alone - perfect symbolism for what one feels when going through a situation such as is described in this song.

Vixen in my dreams
With great surprise to me
Never thought I'd see your face
The way it used to be...
Oh darling – Oh darling...

As the band kicks back in, Jimmy's guitars ringing out in beautiful harmony, we hear Robert lamenting about the time passed and how he still is holding on.

This is such a deeply emotional tune and one that must not have been easy for Robert to write about. Whenever someone close to you departs there is always a range of emotions; perhaps sadness one minute, anger the next... and occasionally, perhaps you think back to those times when it was just the two of you and you were madly and deeply in love and all was right in the world... and then you realize... ten years gone...

Jimmy created a masterpiece of a song and Robert delivers a top notch, heartfelt, emotional statement of lost love and yet, they also painted themselves into a bit of a corner. Trying to take this song to the stage, with only Jimmy on guitar, would be an almost impossible task.

They did play it live, with John Paul Jones using a triple-neck instrument that included mandolin, six and twelve string guitars {acoustic} as well as playing bass pedals, with Jimmy on the Brown Bomber; his Brown, B-Bender Telecaster. That they actually pulled it off decently well speaks highly of them, but they really needed at least one other electric guitar to fill out the soundscape of the song on the stage.

They debuted this on the 1977 US tour and played it again in 1979 at the Copenhagen warm-up shows as well as the first night at Knebworth on 4 August. Then they never played it again.

During the long Page/Plant tour of 1995/96, Jimmy and Robert did play it once; treating the audience in Osaka to a very special moment, and then Jimmy played it again during his brief time with The Black Crowes. The versions with the Crowes were the first time the song was played live with multiple guitars and the sound was pretty special as Page's "Guitar Army" was finally brought to life.

It amazes me that "Physical Graffiti" had so many incredible songs and, as I feel and I'm sure others do as well; so many **EPIC** songs. We've already covered two of those epics from this album and there's still one more to go..

In the midst I think of you..

Jeff