

SONG OF THE DAY XCVIII

So here we are, the final two SOTD's and I feel that I could write for hours about both of these tracks and *still* not say all that can be said for these epic moments in the Led Zeppelin catalog.

As the recent ones have been pretty long, I fully expect this one, and the next, to be massively long. Not only were the songs themselves quite lengthy, but their place in Zeppelin's history, rock history, and our very own consciousness dictates that they be given the utmost respect and in attempting to do that I am certain that I will be elaborating on these for quite a few pages.

I promised a wild journey for this particular song, and believe me, it is. So get your bags packed and let's head back to "Physical Graffiti," side two, track three, clocking in at 9:41 - oh wait, that's not right - clocking in at 8:32, the song that Robert has said is the one that best defines Led Zeppelin, the incredible and most epic, "Kashmir."

For those of you too young to know a time when LP's ruled the day, the original pressings of "Physical Graffiti" listed "Kashmir" incorrectly as being 9:41... and to clarify one thing to anyone who may get confused, when I mention the lengths of the songs in this series, I always go by the album length. For some odd reason, CD's tend to add a second to songs... so if you're thinking I am constantly getting the time wrong on the songs, I'm not. The CD's just add a second of silence to them.

Though not released until 24 February 1975, the origins of this particular track date back to 1973. Following the 1973 US tour, Robert was on holiday in South Morocco, and this is where the first inspiration for the lyrics was developed.

The guitar is tuned to the same tuning as "Black Mountain Side/White Summer" - D-A-D-G-A-D - and gives the song its strong Eastern quality. As noted prior, Jimmy had been using this tuning since The Yardbirds, and had been experimenting with it

quite a lot and the result was "Kashmir" as well as "Swan Song," which would later become "Midnight Moonlight" in The Firm.

Page's riff makes the song sound absolutely monstrous and there are a number of reasons for this. One, the tuning is not something any other rock guitarists were using at the time, so it just sounded like something beyond what anyone had ever heard; two, the low E note dropped down to D adds a heaviness to the song and three, Bonham's bass drum was treated with a phasing effect that helped give it that extra **THUMP** you hear, and more importantly - feel - as this song plays out.

This was also a very rare occurrence when Page brought in outside session musicians to add strings and horns to the track, which were written by John Paul Jones. In an interview, Jones explained the idea and thought process behind the arrangement: "The secret of successful keyboard string parts is to play only the parts that a real string section would play. That is, one line for the First Violins, one line for Second Violins, one for Violas, one for Cellos, one for Basses. Some divided parts [two or more notes to a line] are allowed, but keep them to a minimum. Think melodically."

Life for this song began as a Page/Bonham demo titled "Driving To Kashmir" and is featured on the fantastic bootleg "Oh My God!" In the distant background you can hear Plant singing along, though it's obvious that he is nowhere near a microphone. The demo lacks the strings, horns and Jonsey's keyboards, but it still packs quite a wallop and remains, to this day, one of my favorite bootleg tracks ever. {Special thanks to Dave for a copy of this}

Another thing that makes this song so amazing is the drumming of John Bonham. His input on this song was so monumental that he was listed as a co-writer in the song credits. That is very rare for a drummer, but it shows how much his input contributed to the overall quality of the piece. And listening to this track and what Bonham does - and, as Plant has said, "It was what he didn't do that made it work." - One can't help but be completely mesmerized by the drums in this song.

I could write a plethora of pages just about his drumming here, but it is very important for every musician to understand

the key part of Plant's comment, and that is; what you play is important, obviously, but what you leave out, the little gaps, the spaces between the notes, those are just as important if not more-so.

And, lastly, we have to look at Robert's lyrics in this song. Once again - and I have said it a thousand and one times by now - but once again he proves his tremendous gift with words. Eloquent would be the way I would describe these lyrics, and his delivery of them is fabulous as well.

Page's riff begins everything and the riff is a repeating, cyclical riff. It's not difficult by any means, as he frets only two strings and makes use of the open strings, but the cool part of the riff is the bass note stays the same as the higher notes change, and that creates a beautiful tension within the riff. This is called, in musical terms, a "pedal point." It is used to similar effect in the Whitesnake song "Still Of The Night" by guitarist John Sykes, a huge fan of Page. After this riff plays through a couple of times, Robert enters the picture with his beautiful lyrics.

Oh let the sun beat down upon my face

Stars to fill my dreams

I am a traveler of both time and space

To be where I have been

To sit with elders of a gentle race

This world has seldom seen

Talk of days for which they sit and wait

When all will be revealed

Page changes things up here with a very cool descending riff. It's played quickly as each chord is only played once as he makes his way down the neck and it is the opposite of the pedal point of the main riff in that here, the high note stays the same for each two chords he plays as he moves down the neck. The first chord of this sequence has him fretting the 12th fret

on the high E string {now tuned to D remember} and the 12th fret on the G string. He plays that once, then frets the G string on the 11th fret while the 12th fret on the high E {D} remains the same. Then he slides down to the tenth fret and plays the same pattern, then the seventh fret, then the fifth fret, then the third fret and then he finishes the riff with a descending 3 note riff on the D string {4th string} playing the 3rd fret, 2nd fret and then the open D, allowing him time to get back down to the 12th fret to start the entire riff all over again.

While he's doing this, the original riff is still being played under this riff, and Page said in a Guitar World interview in 1998 that: "You do get a dissonance in there, but there's nothing wrong with that. At the time I was very proud of that." Page is also a noted fan of dissonance and often listens to music that employs this.

Talk and song from tongues of liling grace

Sounds caress my ear

Not a word I heard could I relate

Story was quite clear

Whoa –oh

Whoa – whoa

As Page runs through the descending riff again Bonham signals a change in things, his playing from 2:11-2:15 is stunning, and the musical landscape is altered as Page plays a chordal riff that gives the effect of stabbing the guitar. The chords are short, quick shouts from the Danelectro as Plant reaches for the Heavens with his voice.

Ooohhh

Baby, I've been flying

Lo-ord – yeahhh

Mama there - ain't no denying

Oh...
Ooohhh yes
I've been flying
Ma-ma-ma
Ain't no denying
No denying...

After another run through the descending riff, Page changes things up again with a beautiful G chord as the strings really kick in, adding a celestial quality to the track.

Oh...
All I see – turns to brown
As the sun
Burns the ground
And my eyes – fill with sand
As I scan – this wasted land

Trying to find
Trying to find
Where I've been – ahhh...

As Robert extends the final word in that line as only he can, Jimmy returns to the original riff and Bonham settles back into the steady groove following his amazing playing in the previous verse.

Oh, pilot of the storm who leaves no trace
Like thoughts inside a dream

Heed the path that led me to that place
Yellow desert screen
My Shangri-La beneath the summer moon
I will return again
Sure as the dust that floats high in June
We're moving through Kashmir

Oh, father of the four winds
Fill my sails
Across the sea of years
With no provision but an open face
Along the straits of fear
Whoa-oh – Whoa-oh
Whoa-oh-ohhh
Ohhh...
Ohhh...

After Page runs through the descending riff two more times the whole song climbs to yet another wonderful height and what Bonham plays through this section is some of the most amazing stuff he's ever done. He's such a pleasure to listen to on this song and all the subtleties that he brings to the table truly take this song to a place that, quite simply, nobody else could have imagined. He is, in a word; brilliant!

Oh!
When I want – when I'm on my way, yeah
When I see – when I see the way you stare
Yeah...

Ooh-ooh, yeah-yeah
Ooh-ooh, yeah-yeah
When I'm down

Ooh-ooh, yeah-yeah
Ooh-ooh, yeah-yeah
When I'm down
So down...

Ooh my baby
Ooh my baby
Let me take you there
Oh – come on, come on
Oh, let me take you there
Let me take you there
Ooh-Ooh, yeah-yeah
Ooh-Ooh, yeah-yeah

Now to highlight certain areas of Bonham's amazing skill; check him out at these parts: 6:46-6:48 {sounds simple, but what touch!} 7:08-7:11 - 7:19-7:22 - 7:32-7:34 - 7:42-7:46 {amazing!} 7:55-7:57 {reiterating that what you leave out is so important} 8:06-8:09 and finally, crank your stereo up to hear him from 8:18-8:21. And of all those amazing things he does, that's only the final minute and forty-six of the song... I didn't even fully point out many of the cool things he does in the first six plus minutes.

People have been clamoring for years for Led Zeppelin to reunite and Page/Plant/Jones have been offered upwards of \$200,000,000.00 dollars to tour. That's 200 million with a

capital **M**. And I know I am in the very small minority, but I am glad they never did and never will; because John Bonham is simply irreplaceable. I know that Jason is good - heck, he's extremely good - I've seen him live and heard all his albums, but he's not his dad and his dad was the best. "Kashmir" is all the proof anyone needs and is further proof that Zeppelin not reuniting was the right decision.

I know that Page loves the music and wants, dearly, to get the band back and tour. But in this instance, I fully agree with, and support, Robert's decision to decline all the offers. We are all born with gifts, and when John Henry Bonham was born, he was born to be a drummer and he took that gift and made himself the best rock drummer ever. I know there are a lot of great drummers out there - I don't need to list them all here - but none of them have Bonham's touch, power, control or feel. The man sits alone atop the throne when it comes to drummers and nowhere is that fact more evident than in this song.

"Kashmir" was first played live on 11 January 1975 and was played at every gig after that save for the 1977 Tampa show that was cut short due to rain and the 1980 show in Nuremburg that was cut short due to Bonzo falling ill.

The 7 July 1980 show in Berlin would be the final time this song was performed live until the 1988 Atlantic Records Anniversary show. Though the show itself was a disaster - the television broadcast failed to pick up John Paul's keyboards, rendering a key component of this song completely useless - and Robert even flubbed the lyrics, however his keen sense of humor showed through when he repeated the verse: "Oh father of the four winds, fill my sails... again!"

On Robert's first solo tour for "Pictures At Eleven" and "The Principle Of Moments" he would add "I can take you there, I can take you there" during the epic song "Slow Dancer," giving an ever so slight nod to his past.

On the 1993 Coverdale/Page tour of Japan, Jimmy played this and Coverdale sang it well, though he did make a few slight changes in the lyrics, most notably "My Shangri-La beneath the summer moon" became "My Shangri-La beneath the winter moon."

Then, in 1994 when Page/Plant reunited for the "Unledded" project, they added this to the repertoire and this version is also quite exemplary. Including an Egyptian Orchestra, the shape of the song changed slightly, as the intro was the orchestra and Plant singing the first verse, the full band not kicking in until 1:11 into the song.

This reworked version had an extended middle section and the length of the song grew to an astounding 12:27, but everyone agreed that this version was stunning and proved that Page and Plant could still bring it!

In live versions Robert would change verses around, he would add certain vocalizations in, like the famous: "Woman, talking to ya!" He would often replace the word 'flying' for 'crying' and on the "Unledded" performance and resulting tour, he always rose to the occasion, delivering all of his trademarks as well as his usual phenomenal performance of the song he has called his favorite Zeppelin tune.

Beginning with the Coverdale/Page tour, Jimmy stopped using his Danelectro guitar and instead chose to use the Transperformance Les Paul. He employed this on the Coverdale/Page tour to quickly switch from the standard tuning used on "Over Now" to the D-A-D-G-A-D tuning used on "Kashmir." He continued using the Transperformance Les Paul on the "Unledded" show and resulting tour.

In the 2007 02 reunion show Jimmy used his wine-red Les Paul on this song and Robert's introduction was quite cool: "Out here, there are people from fifty countries. And uh, there's a gentleman there, holding up a sign that says 'Hammer Of The Gods' which I cannot imagine if people from fifty countries would come to see that... so late in life. This is the fifty-first country."

Jason then counted the song in and they were off, once again, the Hammer Of The Gods were older, and the true Hammer - Bonzo - wasn't present, but the result was still pretty darn captivating.

Over the 36 years since its release, "Kashmir" has been held in high regard by even the staunchest of Zeppelin critics.

The song has been covered so many times in so many ways that I won't even begin to list them all, though there are two I will mention.

In 1998 a movie titled "Godzilla" was released and on the soundtrack for that movie was rap singer Puff Daddy using the "Kashmir" riff for a song titled "Come With Me." Jimmy actually played on this, both on the soundtrack as well as on Saturday Night Live. Not that I have anything against rap, as a musician for over 30 years and as one who has studied Classical Guitar, I find myself pretty open to all music, as long as it's good. But the Page/Puff Daddy union is one I just didn't understand.

That Jimmy took one of Zeppelin's biggest and most endearing songs and not only allowed it to be used in this context, but chose to be part of it, was mind-boggling to me. It's probably best that I say no more on the subject of this version except that thankfully, it faded from the public conscious quite soon.

One version that I do enjoy though is by Corner Stone Cues, who redid the song as well as "Ten Years Gone" and called it "Ten Years Kashmir Mvt. I & II." {The "Mvt" stands for Movement.} Their versions, employing a full orchestra, are simply stunning and extremely powerful.

In the 2009 movie "It Might Get Loud" Jimmy pulls out the Danelectro and shows Jack White and The Edge how he plays this and again, this is one of the highlights of the film, for me anyway. You also get a great close-up of Jimmy playing the descending riff that I described earlier, so any of you guitarists out there can see exactly how it's done by the master himself. And one final thought on "It Might Get Loud..." Jimmy, obviously, is the highlight of the film for me. And I think he looks so cool in that movie. The grey hair, the dark suit, the journey back to Headley Grange, the moments in his home sharing his extensive record collection and the total awe in seeing how much music the guy has, plus all the times when he's playing his guitar or the mandolin on "The Battle Of Evermore." It was a great film and one I am so happy they made and included the man himself in.

"Kashmir" has endured the test of time because it has a classic Page riff, absolutely eloquent and positive lyrics from Robert, John Paul's keyboards and string arrangement and of course, the mighty touch of John Bonham. It is a song that will still be popular 100 years from now, and as a band or a musician, there isn't anything more than one could hope to achieve.

Until the next time,

Jeff