

Classic Albums Live featuring...

Led Zeppelin II. By Paul Wiggins

When I was a lot younger, in around 1977 and '78, tribute bands were a big thing in Canada. If there was a band with a couple of hit albums, you could be sure that there was a tribute band somewhere, just waiting to masticate some of your favourite songs. One of the best of the bunch was a Beatles tribute band called Revolver; there was a Styx cover, a Queen cover, and a ZZ Top cover. These guys were all pretty good and did the Ontario bar circuit forever – the playing was good and the production values were pretty tight for bar bands.

A tribute band is a musical group created in order to specifically play the music of a well-known band, often one which has disbanded or ceased touring. A tribute band rarely includes any members of the original band whose music is being honoured.

The typical tribute band differs from a cover band that simply plays songs by other artists by striving to capture every nuance of the imitated artist's actions and appearance for a perfect imitation. The first tribute bands to emerge may have been Beatles tribute bands, who attempted to look and sound like The Beatles while playing their songs. Personally, I would argue that Elvis imitators were the first tribute acts. Original bands that have a fervent, cult-like following tend to have tribute bands with the same kind of fan base. For the tribute bands, it's kinda like sloppy seconds, but hey, it pays the rent.

One of the best-known members of a tribute band is Tim "Ripper" Owens, who went from singing in a Judas Priest tribute band to becoming the group's actual lead singer in 1996. This story was used as the basis for the 2001 movie *Rock Star* starring Mark Wahlberg, although neither Owens nor Judas Priest assisted in the film's production. Owens recorded two studio

albums and a live album with Judas Priest before leaving in 2003 to make way for the band's reunion with former frontman Rob Halford. Owens would later become the singer for the band Iced Earth.

In 2002, the first biography of a tribute band was published by SAF in London. Entitled *Being John Lennon*, the book is an humorous account of life on the road in The Beatles' tribute Sgt. Pepper's Only Dart Board Band, written by the group's founder - Martin Dimery. In 2004, tribute band Beatallica received attention when they were sued over their unique interpretation of Beatles songs done in a Metallica style. They won their legal battle, and still record and tour today.

Last year "Classic Albums Live Featuring... Pink Floyd Dark Side of the Moon" just about sold out the Moncton Coliseum. Personally, I gave up on tribute bands when I gave up taking acid (if it wasn't for the flashbacks I'd have no memory at all!), but apparently it was a spectacular show. And now they're back, this time doing *Led Zeppelin II*, otherwise known as the Brown Bomber album. Now, anyone who knows me knows how I feel about Led Zeppelin – since that first album in 1968 I have genuflected at the altar of Zep. I am so sure of their quality, stature and influence as a rock band that I don't even bother arguing with anyone about it because, quite simply, I'm right.

Led Zeppelin II, as an album, was the blueprint for all hard rock that followed. It was largely written and recorded on the road, no small feat considering the band toured the U.S. three times that year. It was released in 1969, and from the first grinding notes of that famous vamp which introduces *Whole Lotta Love*, Led Zeppelin proclaimed themselves the definitive hard rock band of their generation, and genera-

tions to follow. Hell, the first Led Zep CD box set is still the best selling box set in history.


The Classic Albums Live format works like this: they choose a truly classic multi – million selling album, research said album and pick just the right musicians and singers to perform it, sometimes up to 20 performers to get the absolute best performance possible. The focus of each performance is on the music, performed note for note, cut for cut. They are not at all interested in impersonating a band or an artist. The show is like a symphony, not unlike a Philharmonic Orchestra presenting Bach. Some of the albums they have performed reads like a classic rock fan's wet dream: *Who's Next*; *A Night At The Opera*; *Are You Experienced*; *L.A. Woman*; *The White Album*; *Back In Black*, *Led Zeppelin I*; *Born To Run*...and the list goes on.

One of the most interesting things about this act...the entire ensemble is based out of Toronto!! And, it's all in the details for this amazing ensemble of musicians – every song is played with such precision that even die-hard fans are hard pressed to tell the difference (maybe we'll see about that). Every track from each album they perform is played in sequence which has helped the show become a resounding success. Most tribute bands are lucky to draw a couple hundred people to a performance. Classic Albums Live routinely plays venues of 2000 -3000 or more people!

The Zeppelin II show is coming to the Imperial Theatre in Saint John on October 21; the

Capitol Theatre in Moncton on October 22; and, The Playhouse in Fredericton on October 23.

On a personal note, I find it somewhat difficult philosophically to go see a tribute band; I can't help feel that it is being unfaithful to your favourite band. It's kind of like cheating on your wife with someone who's nearly as hot, but not quite. I might go see a Doors tribute, or an AC/DC tribute, or a Supertramp tribute (OK, maybe not Supertramp!), but those artists don't mean anything to me compared to Led Zeppelin.

I must admit though, that my interest is piqued, and it could be an illicit pleasure listening to such great music live. So, I may actually sneak out of the house to take this show in, but if you see me there, please...don't tell my wife! 

Paul Wiggins wishes he possessed The Hammer of the Gods, and was allowed to play his Zeppelin records just a little bit louder at home. He can be contacted at www.thelazyfolksinger.com.

