



Frank Reddon

LED-ZEPPELIN'S MUSIC

TRUE BLUES & BEYOND

DIG DOWN DEEP INTO
ZEPPELIN'S ROOTS

Music examples from
their albums show you how
the band electrified the blues.
And audiences everywhere

Led Zeppelin's Music TRUE BLUES & BEYOND

Frank Reddon, Author

Lou Anne Reddon, Editor

Enzepplopedia Publishing, Inc.
www.enzepplopedia.com

Version 1.00
Updated 2009

The author and publisher of this e-book have used their best efforts in preparing it and its associated materials; however, they make no representations or warranties with respect to their accuracy, applicability, fitness or completeness.

They disclaim any warranties, express or implied, regarding merchantability or fitness for any particular purpose. In no event shall they be held liable for any loss or other damages including, but not limited to, those of data, profits, special, incidental, consequential or other damages.

This e-book is for personal use only. No part of this publication is to be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, recorded or otherwise.

Except for the inclusion of brief quotations (not exceeding 250 words each) solely for the purposes of review, it may not be reprinted without prior written consent from Enzepplopedia Publishing, Inc. and/or its duly appointed and authorized representatives.

Reasonable safeguards have been put in place to prevent unauthorized downloading, sharing and distribution of this material, details of which have been provided to the reader at point of purchase, although such safeguards are subject to review and change as necessary.

Enzepplopedia™ is a trademark of Enzepplopedia Publishing, Inc.
All trademarks, registered trademarks and brand names used throughout this e-book are the intellectual property of their respective owners. All rights reserved.

This e-book/publication has been registered with the Library of Canada. ISBN#: 978-0-9784446-4-8

Copyright © 2009. Enzepplopedia Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved.

Front cover design by www.killercovers.com
Front cover photo courtesy of The Howard Mylett Collection,
used with permission. Enzepplopedia Archives

Table of Contents

About the Author.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Blue Funk. Blue Devils. Here are Some Blues Worth Catching!.....	6
Digging Deeper into the Roots of the Blues.....	8
The Early Led Zeppelin: Inspired by True Blues.....	9
England and Electrified Blues.....	11
The Work Song: “Birthin’ the Blues”.....	13
The Great Debate.....	21
Led Zeppelin: Accused of Stealing the Blues. Guilty or Not Guilty?.....	22
British White Boys. Black American Bluesmen.....	25
Epilogue.....	28
Learning Resources.....	29
About <i>Sonic Boom: The Impact of Led Zeppelin. Volume 1 – Break & Enter</i>	30



About the Author

On September 7, 2008 (the 40th anniversary of Led Zeppelin's first-ever performance) author Frank Reddon and his editor/sister, Lou Anne Reddon, launched the first of three printed books about the legendary British rock band.

Sonic Boom: The Impact of Led Zeppelin. Volume 1 – Break & Enter has since been received with critical and popular acclaim worldwide.

Music has always been Frank's passion. He plays piano, cello, trombone and guitar. Since 1980, he has been an avid collector of Led Zeppelin's music. As a result of his collection, he contributed valuable research materials to Luis Rey's landmark book, *Led Zeppelin Live: An Exploration of the Underground Tapes* (Final Edition. The Hot Wacks Press, 1997).

An Exploration of the Underground Tapes (Final Edition. The Hot Wacks Press, 1997).

As an undergrad at the University of Guelph, Ontario, he took a course in popular music culture. He drew on his record collection to write a research paper entitled *The Musical Evolution of Led Zeppelin: 1968-1980*. His professor was so impressed with his revolutionary approach to music analysis, he urged him to write a book about it one day.

Frank still hopes to publish that book one day. But the *Sonic Boom* series of three books focuses on the first year of Led Zeppelin's existence, in celebration of that 40th anniversary milestone.

Sonic Boom Volume 1 is the first oral history ever written about Led Zeppelin. Frank interviewed more than fifty people – from deejays, concert promoters, musicians and audience members to published Led Zeppelin authors, educators and people involved with the group's ongoing legacy, to discover WHY and HOW the band's music has endured for over four decades.

His work encompasses more than just Led Zeppelin and the band's music; it provides an overview of the hippie subculture and the popular music scene of the late 1960s.

This e-publication is based on information that first appeared as a two-part series on the blues, featured in Enzyclopedia Publishing's online newsletter for subscribers, the "Enzeplozine" (Feb/Mar '08 issue).

Frank is employed as a Class A Gardener for the City of Welland Department of Parks and Cemeteries. He is a tournament-level tennis player and ultra-marathoner, having completed distances ranging from 5km to 106 miles. He has qualified and participated in the prestigious Boston Marathon several times.

Author photo ©Robert Nowell, used with permission

Introduction

Black American history is one of incredible injustice. Certain words and terms have rightfully become socially unacceptable over the past decades.

In writing about the blues, there's a delicate balance to maintain between proper historical context and current standards of "political correctness". I have done my best to walk that line.

Any missteps are either unintentional or purely in the interest of historical accuracy, for which I seek your understanding in both cases.

The blues have been called a lot of things, from "the Devil's music" to "the most heavenly music on Earth". For such a universally celebrated and performed musical genre, it's astonishing how their true origins remain shrouded in mystery.

Even the origin of the *name* "blues" is open to speculation. Here's just one of many possible explanations.

We've all experienced those days when we feel a bit "bummed out" or "down". Maybe there was a good reason, maybe there wasn't. That general – or specific – feeling of malaise, depression and/or despondency has always been part of the human condition.

In Elizabethan England (1558-1603), a name was coined for it: the "Blue Devils".

These blue devils are universal. Everyone experiences them at some time or another. Lost love, dashed hopes, loneliness, lack of purpose, occupational evils, road-weariness – there are many circumstances and scenarios in everyday life that conjure up the blue devils within us! And those are among the main themes of the blues genre.

Today, we might call them "Blue Mondays" or simply "the blues". But we still identify with those blue devils from Elizabethan times.

Blue Funk. Blue Devils. Here are Some BLUES Worth Catching!

The Rolling Stones loved 'em. So did The Who. And Jimi Hendrix. Eric Clapton forsook The Yardbirds when they started fusing rock'n'roll into the pure blues he loved so much. And, of course, Led Zeppelin loved the blues and launched their career playing them.

So what exactly *are* the blues? Where'd they come from? How did Led Zeppelin and so many other bands in the 1960s get interested in the blues? Especially since Zeppelin was in England and the blues were in America. Or were they?

It's pretty amazing, actually, that so little is known about how the blues came to be. As a music genre, they have tremendous universal appeal. They're important, magical, influential – yet totally mysterious.

According to the esteemed ethnomusicologist, James Lincoln Collier, the precise origins (when, how, why, where) of when the blues came to be, well, widely known as “the blues”, is unknown to this day. He feels the best we can say is that the blues developed from variations of American Black folk forms, as a separate form of music.

Collier believes the blues are directly descended from work songs that were being created, sung and developed in the 1880s and 1890s in the fields by black slaves in the United States.

He says that the term “the blues” has replaced the proper name of “Black American folk music”. And what is that? A fusion or hybridization of two distinct music systems: “African” and “European”.

There's a common misconception that the blues arose purely from African roots transplanted in America. Collier dispels that idea with compelling historical evidence of a huge European influence.

A “music system” consists of musical traditions, conventions and techniques. The music system of traditional African music was introduced to North America in the 1700s and 1800s, by African slaves. The Europeans (mainly of British origin) who settled in America during the same time period brought their European music system along with them.

The two music systems began to merge and fuse in the United States. This fusion began in the mid to latter 1770s and continued into the 1880s and 1890s. It is vitally important to remember that the Blacks could not ignore white European music, either, which had existed since before the time when the United States became a country in 1776.

Still, the enslaved Blacks managed to preserve a vast amount of their African culture in song, over almost three centuries.

In his landmark work, *The Making of Jazz: A Comprehensive History*, Collier tells us that by 1910, the traditional black work songs had evolved into a complete music form that was dubbed “the blues”. That’s not to say they stopped evolving, though. Far from it!

He says no one really knows for certain when the blues came about. He states there are no written descriptions resembling the blues in the nineteenth century; a time period some musicologists have suggested the blues came into being, early on.

Collier duly notes that blues music appeared in written form for the very first time in 1912, when sheet music was published for *Memphis Blues* and *Dallas Blues*. By 1920, the looser country blues had evolved into the “classic blues”, which flourished throughout the 1930s.

During the ’30s and ’40s, the blues travelled up from the Mississippi Delta to Chicago, and spun off in exquisite new directions. Technological advances, including amplification, in the ’50s made the music truly “electrifying”.

That was when the blues got exported to England via the live performances of artists like Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters. But, as we’ve already seen, England had influenced the blues’ evolution from the very start.

Moving ahead in this blues retrospective, it was circa 1968, in London, England that Led Zeppelin began playing and experimenting with the blues. Coincidence? Lovers of Led are sure to think not!

Digging Deeper into the Roots of the Blues

Now let's backtrack a bit and look at these periods in greater detail.

After the blues became what Collier called a “complete” musical form about 1910, there were still some older singers performing it the way they always had before that. Many of these men were recorded into the 1920s and '30s.

The forms of these earlier, pre-1910 blues were “looser” than the more advanced musical form of the blues that had developed by 1910. They became known as “country blues” – an intermediary form between the “work song” that all blues arose from and the “classic blues” that began to emerge around 1920.

Such “classic blues” were created and typified by female singers like Ma Rainie and Bessie Smith. The classic blues were yet another outgrowth of the country blues. The classic blues performers kept some of the elements of country blues, but incorporated Vaudeville elements into their songs.

Ma Rainie came from a show business family. Like many classic blues artists, she travelled across the United States performing in minstrel shows.

Jimmy Page, Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin and many of their fellow British musicians were keenly interested in the country blues works of Robert Johnson and the classic blues works of singers like Bessie Smith, who was a protégée of Ma Rainie's.

Robert Plant often made reference to the influential appeal of Bessie Smith and her work when he was interviewed in the 1970s.

Throughout the 1930s and '40s, the blues continued to evolve. They were being preserved, too. Performers such as Leadbelly kept the tradition of the old work songs and blues songs intact, performing them in the South.

Leadbelly spent much of his life in a Louisiana prison. Lucky for us, a musicologist named John A. Lomax recorded Leadbelly's old work songs and black folk songs.

Eventually, in the 1940s, Leadbelly played guitar for front man, Blind Lemon Jefferson, who was another inspiration of Led Zeppelin's lead singer, Robert Plant.

Leadbelly starting playing in night clubs. In 1949, he toured Europe, introducing the continent to live blues. And they loved it!

Everything changed in the 1950s. Technological improvements and innovations set the stage for a new kind of blues music to be created and played.

The Early Led Zeppelin: Inspired by True Blues

Willie Dixon, one of Led Zeppelin's big inspirations in the early days, is considered "The Father of The Modern Chicago Blues". He arrived in Chicago in 1936 and made a career out of singing the blues.

Zeppelin was influenced by songs that Willie Dixon penned, performed or recorded, such as *You Shook Me*, *I Can't Quit You Baby* and *Whole Lotta Love*. Dixon became a superb producer and arranger; he also played bass on several records at Chess Records for many Chicago-blues-style artists in the 1950s.

Among them? Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf – two more of Led Zeppelin's early influences.

Muddy Waters used heavily amplified electric guitars to play his blues songs. They added a whole new dimension of sonority to their acoustic guitar beginnings in the Mississippi Delta and elsewhere.

The highly amplified electric guitar and bass, drums and piano gave musicians of this era a whole new sound and realm of expression, to convey the blues. People loved this new treatment of both old and new blues songs that made the scene in Chicago, in the 1950s.

Chicago became the place to be for exploring the use of heavily amplified electric guitars, bass and drums, for example. Instruments such as the harmonica were also featured and played by the likes of Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon. The latter, Dixon, also backed up another one of Led Zeppelin's influences: Memphis Minnie.

Chicago's Chess Records and Okey Records provided places for these artists to record. They would hone and perfect their craft in Chicago's smoky, boozy blues clubs. And so the Windy City became an important incubation bed for "modern blues".



Legendary Chicago bluesman, Willie Dixon,
on stage in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1992.

Courtesy of Bill Nagy, used with permission. Enzepplopedia Publishing, Inc.

England and Electrified Blues

Fast forward to the 1960s. In England, the younger crowd was keenly interested in the blues. In fact, Muddy Waters blew the English away when he toured there in 1958, with his heavily amplified electric guitar, driven by a throbbing bass guitar, pounding drums and rough, raspy lines of lyrics he sang to deliver soulful blues.

The English had never before heard amplified blues like that live, although many blues devotees had been collecting records for years. Among these fervent record collectors who actively traded with collectors in the United States was none other than a young English music lover, named Jimmy Page!

Everyone - from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones to the members of Led Zeppelin – was interested in the blues in some way, shape or form, in the 1960s.

As many other blues performers toured Britain in the 1950s and '60s, England awakened and embraced this new amplified sound that grew out of Black American Folk Music, now known as “the blues”.

Don't forget that, while this amplified version of the blues sounded so new to British ears in the 1960s, English settlers in America had actually helped create modern blues through the process of musical evolution, when both the European and African music systems blended and fused together.

The musical evolution of the blues genre is a vast and complicated one that's well beyond the scope of this introductory e-pub. However, this brief synopsis should have provided some helpful and interesting reference points for the next time you hear “the blues” mentioned in any musical context.

Now that we've touched on the history of the blues, let's look at examples and influences in Led Zeppelin's music; specifically, the group's first two albums, *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*, both released in 1969.

The Work Song: “Birthin’ the Blues”

The work song was the first “house of blues”...the primary musical structure that would evolve into what we now recognize as the blues.

When black Africans were brought to the United States as slaves in the 1700s and 1800s, their musical principles and culture naturally came with them.

They would sing while toiling in the fields, for diverse reasons. Perhaps it was to make the best of a bad situation or to dissociate themselves from their oppression.

The workers enjoyed singing these songs not only in the fields to pass the time, but after a hard day’s work, for the sheer pleasure of it.

This helped their songs evolve musically, from simple melodic structures based on African traditions to the more complicated structures of work songs.

Work songs were characterized by having a “song leader” out in the fields, working along with everyone else. The song leader would “call” out a vocal line that was usually an improvised melody of two or three notes. The other workers provided a “response”, with a tuneful offering of their own.

Frequently the lyrics of the work songs were delivered by song leaders between the cadence of a hammer hammering or an axe chopping, for instance. The work they were doing established the cadence.

The song leaders’ vocal lines contained more lyrics than the sung “responses” of the other workers. Essentially, the music was being built around the cadence and rhythm of whatever work was being done.

How amazing is that, when you think about it? Very, very creative and innovative actually!

In the process, a beautiful musical dialogue was created that continued to evolve over the years. One of the main purposes of the work song with its “call and response” format was to promote a feeling of unity and common experience among the labourers.

It was a way of feeling, saying it with music, that “we’re all in this together” which was good for morale while working long, hard hours in the fields. Singing helped pass the time and made the drudgery of their toils more bearable.

Blue Notes

Another characteristic of work songs is that they had “blue notes” and “blue melodies” in them. Blue notes originated in the old African music system.

The European music system consists of major and minor modes. If you think of a piano keyboard, there are black and white keys for the notes. Blue notes from the African music system would fit in between the two. Their pitches were less exact.

That’s why, when the African blue notes were played within a European composition, they sounded “wrong, but right”.

Jimmy Page’s guitar solo in *Living on a Prayer* from *Led Zeppelin II* is a fine example of how these blue notes catch your ear off-guard. They sound pleasantly out of place within the framework of a European music system song.

As a result, the vocals in blues songs seemed “off-pitch” to ears accustomed to the European music system. Blue notes are rather like blue devils, trying unsuccessfully to possess the soul of the song!

Melisma

Another important trait of the African music system was the slide from speech into song; for example, when euphoric feelings took over. Slurring of words, or “melisma”, was also common and accounted for the blue notes heard in between vocal lines.

For a great example of melisma, listen to Robert Plant singing at the end of the verses of *You Shook Me*. Plant’s voice sounds like a razor-edged siren, descending with great power and clarity as he hangs on to the last word of the phrase...falling downward with Page’s athletic guitar work.

Falsetto

The blues singers’ vocals were often very guttural and raspy, with frequent falsettos employed. Falsetto is a vocal technique that takes the singer’s voice higher than its usual vocal range.

Robert Plant is a master of falsetto in the blues songs contained on *Led Zeppelin*. Just as the field workers introduced hollers and shouts, so did he.

European Influence on the Blues

How did the European music system influence the evolution of work songs into the blues? For one thing, it introduced into the mix instruments such as trumpets, trombones and pianos. These instruments had been played on plantations at least since the 1840s.

In the evening, when the black labourers weren't working, many of them had access to these brass and string instruments. They also played the banjo, an instrument native to Africa.

They would borrow and absorb ideas from the European music system, through the use of these European instruments, in what little leisure time they had.

Work Song Themes

Work songs weren't necessarily about the work itself, although in many cases, they were. Mostly, the themes dealt with the toils of working for the employer, love gone bad, the triumphs and tragedies of the travelling life.

Sexual innuendos were also a mainstay for many of these work songs. It has been suggested that the slaves had so little control over most of their lives that their fantasies and the few things they *could* control – like their women, families and love lives – became the major themes they explored in singing the blues.

Cross-rhythms

Cross-rhythms were another element of the African music system that melded and fused into the European one to create the blues genre.

To understand what a cross-rhythm is, try tapping your foot twice. At the same time, tap your hand three times. You'll get the idea – and it's not easy to do!

Central Characteristics of the Blues

There are many characteristics central to the various sub-genres within the larger family of blues. Led Zeppelin and other bands – both British and American – would incorporate them into their own music.

After we discuss some of these traits, we'll put this fascinating slice of blues history to use. We'll see how some of these age-old blues conventions are used in the music on Led Zeppelin's self-titled debut album and *Led Zeppelin II*, as we discuss them in the categories below.

Blues Song Form

Typical blues songs, whether “old” or “modern” blues, are divided into three equal parts. Each one contains three single lines of lyrics.

In many instances, but not always, there is variation in the blues forms. For example, the second line of lyrics may actually repeat the first. And, as was characteristic of the work song from which the blues form descended, the third line of lyrics provided an elaboration on, or completion of, the previous two lines of lyrics that were sung.

Of course, the blues song form has many more defining characteristics, but this is a very important one that pinpoints a central feature for identifying such songs.

Listen to the various verses of *You Shook Me* on *Led Zeppelin* and you'll appreciate this all-important compositional trait of the framework of a blues song.

For other great examples of what we've been discussing, listen to *I Can't Quit You Baby* and *How Many More Times*, also from that debut album or *The Lemon Song* from *Led Zeppelin II*.

At the Heart of the (Subject) Matter

Blues music is often paradoxically sad and joyous at the same time. Like the work songs from which all blues arose, the blues material on *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II* draws on common blues themes.

Here are a few examples from each of those albums, whose themes are the very essence of the blues.

Love gone wrong: *You Shook Me*, *I Can't Quit You Baby*, *How Many More Times* (from *Led Zeppelin*)

The Lemon Song (from *Led Zeppelin II*)

The carefree travellin' life of a hobo and the happy side of the blues: *Bring it on Home* (from *Led Zeppelin II*)

Magic and mystery (fantasy), thematically appropriate to the bluesy treatment *Led Zeppelin* gives it: *What Is and What Should Never Be* (from *Led Zeppelin II*)

Melodic Lines

Simple melodies, often consisting of two or three notes, are a key identifying feature of the blues. A good example of a rather simple blues melody, over top of the instrumental *Led Zeppelin*? Robert Plant's singing of the first two lines of the verses of *I Can't Quit You Baby*. Melody lines like that can be traced back to the blues scales employed in Black American folk music.

Vocal Lines of Lyrics, Answered by a Short Instrumental Fill

In blues songs, a vocal line is delivered and then answered by a short instrumental response, usually a guitar (acoustic or electric), harmonica, piano, drum or horn. This sets up the "call and response" feature of blues music, based on the African tradition of the work song. The singer may even answer him or herself with a harmonica or guitar "response".

In the case of Led Zeppelin's rendition of Willie Dixon's *You Shook Me*, Plant provides the lyrics or "call" and Page provides the answering "response" with a lumbering, metallic clangour of a guitar offering, in the authentic style of the blues genre.

Vocal Timbre and Techniques

Blues vocals are frequently guttural, raspy and will erupt into a bluster of slurred, acrobatically rising and falling lyrics, that are conveyed with great emotional conviction.

We spoke earlier of melisma and falsetto. Lyrics may also be shouted, hollered or, in the case of Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant – screeched, screamed or wailed – to authentic effect.

Narrative or "spoken" qualities can also be present in the delivery of blues lyrics. Blues singers have quite an arsenal of musical weapons at their disposal.

Right from Led Zeppelin's earliest days, Robert Plant was a master of many of these techniques. Listen to *Bring it on Home* from *Led Zeppelin II*. He sounds like an old Mississippi bluesman with his spoken intonations.

Also in the introduction of *Bring It On Home*, Plant uses the harmonica – an instrument that was pivotal in developing the blues.

Plant's mastery of blues techniques and his ability to create the unexampled sonic effect of a jet taking off with his voice, combine to extend the blues and pioneer a new style of rock'n'roll.

Combine that with Jimmy Page's unparalleled guitar work, John Paul Jones and John Bonham's talents and Led Zeppelin succeeded in transforming the blues into an electric slurry of sonority never before heard. To think the simple work song had evolved into this!

Bottleneck on Acoustic and Electric Guitar

Legendary bluesmen such as Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters used the "broken" bottleneck technique (also known as slide guitar). It created a raspy, almost "buzzing" sound, that often mimicked the raspy, husky voice of the blues singer.

Robert Johnson used the bottleneck technique on his acoustic guitar. Muddy Waters mastered it on an electric guitar, which meant that much more volume could be generated not only because of amplification, but the natural physics of an electric guitar. The bottleneck technique on an electric guitar creates a more metallic buzzing.

On the recordings of *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*, Jimmy Page exhibits his mastery of the bottleneck technique on electric guitar. For an excellent example, check out *You Shook Me*, on the debut *Led Zeppelin* album.

Instead of using a broken bottleneck, Page wears a metal, thimble-like apparatus on the fourth finger of his left fret hand, to depress the strings and cause this acrobatic, “buzzy” guitar sound. Listen especially to the end of the verses, to hear Page’s adroit playing in the bottleneck style.

Call and Response Taken to Extremes

The call and response exercise that Led Zeppelin used when performing early material on the first tours of 1968-69 quickly evolved (digressed?) into some of the most over-the-top, improvisational insanity ever to grace a stage.

It became the band’s trademark for the rest of its career.

In the true spirit of the blues and musical evolution, instead of using the “call and response exercise” in the fields, Zeppelin did it in psychedelic ballrooms, school gymnasias, theatres and arenas. As in the old blues songs, Plant would “call” with his vocals and Page would provide a “response” with his guitar.

Through their magical synergy on stage and in the recording studio, Page and Plant would reverse the call and response exercise sequence. That has made for some outrageously exciting musical moments, both live and on record for Led Zeppelin!

There are also examples of Zeppelin playing live on the First U.S. and Canadian Tour of 1968-69, where all four members of Led Zeppelin get into a four-way, instrumental call and response in certain blues-based numbers.

There are many celebrated call and response exercises not only on the blues songs of the *Led Zeppelin* album, but also on the LP’s folk ballads and rock songs.

A superb example of Led Zeppelin stretching, pioneering and infusing a very important blues technique into songs other than in their early blues numbers is the acoustic ballad, *Babe I’m Gonna Leave You*.

Its interesting call and response exercises are reiterated in *Dazed and Confused*, only that time the dialogue occurs between Plant’s voice and Page’s bowing of his Telecaster electric guitar!

This novel, mind-blowing call and response exercise reached anthemic proportions. Have a listen. You can hear how Led Zeppelin manages to transplant elements of the blues, such as this call and response technique, into other songs that weren’t really blues numbers, as such.

This is one major way that Led Zeppelin was able to blaze and explore new trails in rock’n’roll.

This favourite call and response exercise of theirs would be used in Led Zeppelin’s live performances, as well. It is one of the most important blues characteristics that the group used in its musical evolution.

Guitar/Vocal Unison Episodes

Sometimes a blues artist will play the guitar and the vocal will flow in unison, or “unite” with the vocal, to make guitar and voice sound as one. Obviously, this unity consists of two different musical sounds because of varying timbres of guitar and voice.

As many bluesmen did, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page use this technique to stunning advantage. Listen to the vocals of *You Shook Me* in the verses. The guitar/vocal unison episodes that Page and Plant create together are breathtaking.

Like the call and response exercise, the guitar/vocal unison episodes used early and throughout Led Zeppelin’s career would become one of the band’s most celebrated and enjoyable hallmarks.

These guitar/vocal unison episodes also provided improvisational opportunities that Zeppelin never failed to explore, in the true spirit of the blues.

Vocal and Instrumental Improvisation

One of the most important structural features of the blues, is its form. It’s wide open to improvisational wanderings: vocal and instrumental, in any combination.

The call and response exercise we have just examined, is one such vehicle that fits well into the improvisational framework of the blues.

Early on in Led Zeppelin’s touring and musical development, all four musicians were so competent that they were only limited by their imaginations when treating the blues material - and their own compositions, too.

Led Zeppelin heavily improvised all the band’s material; showcasing their “make it up on the spot” talents, so important to the blues, during the blues songs they played live.

Songs like *I Can’t Quit You Baby*, *How Many More Times*, *You Shook Me*, *Killing Floor* [aka *The Lemon Song from Led Zeppelin II*], were improvised and played differently every night - delighting their audiences and the musicians themselves, who obviously loved seeing what they could come up with by improvising!

Led Zeppelin took improvisation to new and unparalleled heights in rock’n’roll. They used blues songs early on to hone the improvising skills that would become such an important part of shaping their career.

Back to Blue Notes...

We talked about blue notes earlier but here are a few excellent examples of them.

Check out Jimmy Page's solo guitar work in *What Is and What Should Never Be*. And don't miss the killer, opening riff of *The Lemon Song* with Page meat-grinding it out on lead guitar, in an acidulous attack of the blues.

Blues Band Instrumentation

In Muddy Waters' day, during the 1950s, the typical instrumentation of blues bands consisted of a lead singer and/or harmonica, piano player, electric guitar, electric bass guitar and drums.

Led Zeppelin and a host of other bands followed this general format for contemporary blues bands in the 1960s, eventually evolving into rock'n'roll groups. The main vehicle of their musical expression was the heavily amplified music that artists such as Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters had brought into vogue in Chicago, in the 1950s.

John Paul Jones' electric bass playing and John Bonham's thunderous percussion playing interlocked to build a solid "blues brick wall" that's just as crucial as the efforts of Page and Plant in terms of the blues material performed on *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*.

Bonham's "shuffling" rhythms during the guitar solo of *I Can't Quit You Baby* and Jones' staunch, ever-present bass guitar playing anchored Page and Plant's hijinx during that same song. Their contributions prove the value of these instruments in the musical mix of performing blues songs.



Robert Plant and Jimmy Page engaging in a call and response format typical of the blues. On stage in early 1969.

Courtesy of The Howard Mylett Collection, used with permission.
Enzepplopedia Publishing, Inc.

Now that we have a better understanding of the blues, we can see firsthand how Led Zeppelin incorporated elements of the genre into *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*.

We've also seen how Led Zeppelin retooled many of the blues conventions that originated from Black American folk music. And amped up the genre of rock'n'roll to a level of electricity never seen before 1968 when the group arrived on the scene.

Just as the African and European music systems fused and merged to create the blues, Led Zeppelin's greatest legacy is to have fused the blues with amplified rock'n'roll. As their song says, "*Thank You*"!

So that's a quick but, I hope, insightful overview of the historical development of the blues.

We started out at the very beginning and worked our way up to the formation of Led Zeppelin. We also took a look at some of the group's recordings that delve into the blues tradition as captured on their debut self-titled *Led Zeppelin* album, released in January 1969 in North America. Now it's time to take things one step further.

The Great Debate

When I was working on my interviews for *Sonic Boom: The Impact of Led Zeppelin. Volume I – Break & Enter*, there was one question I asked almost all of my subjects: Did Led Zeppelin rip off the blues?

The answers to this long and hotly-debated issue were totally fascinating! I'd like to share some of them with you here.

Ever since I can remember, I've heard rumblings and allegations of Led Zeppelin having ripped off the bluesmen's work. In particular, I'm talking about the material on *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*.

Some of the questions that arose in my mind: How did this "rip-off" allegation start? Who started it? What are some of the contentions and schools of thoughts surrounding it?

Is it a dead issue today and has it been for awhile? Are such "blues rip-off" allegations directed at Led Zeppelin economically, technologically precipitated in some way?

Most importantly – true or false? *Did* Led Zeppelin rip off the blues?

For the sake our discussion, I've compiled some of the thoughts that my interviewees for *Sonic Boom -Volume I* so kindly shared with me. You'll quickly discover that there's no easy answer to this question.

I think you'll be amazed at the various observations, schools of thought and perspectives they've put forth. I have paraphrased their responses below. Let's see how they weigh in.

How do *you* weigh in on this subject? Will their thoughts and perspectives entice you to change your mind, one way or another? Read on and find out!

Led Zeppelin: Accused of Stealing the Blues. Guilty or Not Guilty. What's *Your* Verdict?

Ever since I first started listening to Led Zeppelin, I've always been fascinated that so many people feel they "ripped-off" the blues and the early blues artists.

From a casual, superficial perspective, it's understandable. But I wanted to resolve it for myself, by finding out what people "in the know" thought about it. I mean, *really* in the know - like those who work in the music industry.

One of my interviewees told me, both jokingly and seriously, that I was the only person in the world who couldn't get over this debate! He said the whole thing started with a couple of writers in the late 1960s, but it was settled years ago and is now ancient history.

According to him, the blues rip-off controversy is a dead issue these days.

While that may be true, I still find that asking people's opinions about it prompts some incredible responses and provides a lot of food for thought.

Susan Fast is a published Led Zeppelin author (*In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music*), musicologist and professor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. According to her, it's only since technological advances have been made that this idea of one artist "ripping-off" another has come into prominence.

In the early days of the blues, assigning authorship to a song wasn't a big deal at all.

Since recordings have been made and now represent a permanent, material fixation of songs, the authorship - who owns what - has become important because of the lucrative nature of the music industry.

She feels the whole premise of doing "cover songs", which is what Led Zeppelin did when it put blues songs like *You Shook Me* and *I Can't Quit You Baby* on the debut album *Led Zeppelin*, is problematic.

What's wrong with doing a cover song in the first place? Why has a "rock ethos" developed that dictates everything performed or recorded must be "original"?

In her estimation, it takes away from the fact that, when a song is being performed or recorded, it's being interpreted and performed in what is actually "real time". Such a dynamic sets the circumstance for musical evolution and variation.

Furthermore, she thinks that was the case when Led Zeppelin put that blues material on *Led Zeppelin*. The group never played the blues, note for note, exactly as per the original.

And another point no one else ever raised during the course of the interviews concerning the topic is this. Why is it that some artists are singled out for using other people's material, while others are not?

For example, artists like Frank Sinatra and Aretha Franklin didn't get slammed for not composing the songs they performed.

It's a strange and discriminatory thing and the answer to that one is nowhere in sight.

Jeffrey Morgan is an award-winning newspaper columnist. Since 1975, he's been the Canadian Editor of America's rock'n'roll magazine, *CREEM*.

He playfully refers to an episode from the animated *Simpsons* series that parodied Jimmy Page as "one of the greatest thieves of American black music to ever walk the Earth".

And while he believes that it was a stretch to call some of Zeppelin's blues-inspired numbers "original", he feels that the band's interpretations of those songs have evolved so far from their roots that they could well be considered new.

Danny Marks is a professional musician whose band, Edward Bear, was on the scene and shared the bill with Led Zeppelin on a couple of occasions including the matinée and evening performances at Toronto's O'Keefe Centre on Sunday, November 2, 1969.

When Led Zeppelin first came on the pop music scene in 1968-69, Marks had some singular perspectives, regarding the whole Jimmy Page, Led Zeppelin "blues rip-off controversy".

In his opinion, the rip-offs are much more far-reaching than just the blues material. He cites Page for having ripped off his contemporaries, such as "borrowing" rock and blues ideas from Jeff Beck. Marks stated that he saw Beck live, and considered *him* the innovator, not Jimmy Page.

He felt Page lifted Jeff Beck's ideas for Led Zeppelin, from Beck's album *Truth*. (*Truth* actually was released before Led Zeppelin's debut album, *Led Zeppelin*. Beck had a version of *You Shook Me* on it).

And, he said he heard Zeppelin after seeing both Jeff Beck and Rod Stewart.

This interviewee thought the material on *Led Zeppelin* was very imitative.

So there you have it. A fascinating perspective from the other end of the spectrum, regarding the “Led Zeppelin blues rip-off” controversy. Finding such completely opposite points of view is what makes this research so compelling and fascinating!

While the great “blues rip-off” debate may never be answered definitively one way or another, being able to see both sides of it provides us with a great chance to learn even more about the blues and Led Zeppelin. What follows is an example of that.

British White Boys. Black American Bluesmen. What Could They Possibly Have in Common?

At the beginning of this discussion, we looked at the early development of the blues as a fusion of African and European music systems within the context of slavery in North America.

After all these years spent on research for my books, I had never made the connection between the similar plights of the “Brit” and the “Bluesman”.

It was up to one of my interviewees (the same one who said I should get over the blues rip-off debate!), to “bring it on home” for me. That was Redbeard, a broadcast veteran who produces and hosts *In the Studio*, a nationally syndicated rock star interview program.

Paupers play, racers rally at Tufts event
An evening with the Paupers and an afternoon-long road rally — both open to the public — are offered this weekend by the Phi Epsilon Pi fraternity of Tufts University.
The Paupers, backed by the Ill Wind, will play at a dance Friday night (\$5.50 per couple). The Paupers (“Magic People”), according to *Boston After Dark’s* David DeTurk, provide a “breathtaking display of hard-driving, moving, disciplined rock: unmatched by most of the present crop of bands.”
On Saturday, 120 couples will be able to join in a road rally. Driver and navigator will set out on a carefully designed course somewhere in the Boston area, competing with one another for the best touring time. It’s a race, but a race that depends on careful driving, attention to directions as much as speed. Participants can sign up for the rally by calling David Sugg, 391-5731 or writing him at 8 Winthrop St., Medford. A dance and trophy follow (Ill Wind playing.) Cost for the entire day is \$6.

Introspective Sun Ra muses in stately form
Avant-garde jazz musicians today come in two molds — those who are followers of the

sports Crowds
by Richard B
The National Basketball Association and National League seasons has the one-month stage the familiar pattern since for the two te
dent.
For several years, Bruins of the N.H.L. doormats in possib competitive big-t league. The team, make the playoffs in team league for se nevertheless drew c crowds to Boston i Celtics, on the othe ners of the longer major league titles tory and respected outside Boston as sports team in h never matched the records of their G mates.
Bruins imp
This season, the make a quick start good chance for a table finish, especia N.H.L. has doubled ship to 12 since last the addition of the Kings, the Pittsbur the California Seal sota North Stars, Louis Blues.
The Celtics also and showed a muc sistent offense and anced starting fi

Muddy Waters is at the Club 47, where he will perform through Sunday night.

jazz Mann’s talent, Maria’s appeal make good music
The Mongo Santamaria group starts a five-day stint at Lennie’s tonight, November 8, following closely on the heels of the Herbie Mann ensemble who opened at the Jazz Workshop Monday.
Both leaders use Latin rhythm sections out there the resemblance ends. Mongo’s Cuban drumming lays the foundation for a structure which provides “swing” and “rock type” arrangements interspersed and interlaced with brief rock, blues, and wild hono solo. The

Redbeard asserts that Led Zeppelin’s Robert Plant and John Bonham had much more in common with legendary bluesman, Muddy Waters, than just the blues.

Courtesy of Boston After Dark/Phoenix Publishing, used with permission. Enzepplopedia Archives.

Redbeard’s response was much broader than the blues; it had to do with two distinct societies, geographically distant yet historically close.

This “parallel British/American Society” analysis floored me after I hung up the phone from our interview and digested what he had said, which I’ve paraphrased below.

From an historical perspective, many of the early blues songs were performed by black men, in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s in America. These were Black Americans who were not allowed to vote, own land or businesses. Essentially, had no standing whatsoever in American society.

Their self-esteem became very low, since they were so poorly perceived by American society. So, what to do about it to compensate and feel at least a little bit better about oneself, regarding one's own masculinity? Write and sing songs about the things in their lives they *could* control.

They could do it in the context of their relationships with the women in their lives and their lovemaking, for example. In these fantasies, they were in control, writing and singing songs about relationships that were important to them.

Performers like Muddy Waters, for instance would sing songs, with messages like: "I can do this", "I can do that", "I can love all these little women", themes of that nature.

Such topics and content are common in these Black American songs, that now comprise a goodly amount of what has become the blues, and the blues tradition in the United States.

And then comes along a brash, nineteen year old white boy from the Midlands of England. Even today, English society is based on a rigid caste system.

According to Redbeard, if you were to strike it rich today, you still couldn't move into the "social circles" you want to because of your newfound wealth or move into any neighborhood you choose. He says it doesn't happen that way in English society.

In contrast? You can be born "dirt poor" in the United States, strike it rich today, and be living in Beverly Hills by tomorrow. It happens that quickly and easily because that's the way American Society is structured...the American Dream if you like. You are fully mobile.

You can do whatever you want to in this country, if you have or get the means, to do so. And it can literally happen overnight here. You have unlimited upward mobility and it's one of the amazing phenomena of our American society.

However in England, if you don't have "the right blue-blood" or the right pedigree, all the money in the world won't allow you such upward mobility in English society.

So what about a teenaged singer like Robert Plant? He knows this from the beginning...and so does a guy like John Bonham. They were born into the trades of English society and they knew that's where they were destined to stay.

That's just the way it worked. They knew this, practically from birth.

After saying all of this, is it possible guys like Robert Plant and John Bonham can relate to this concept, to be able to fantasize about similar musical and life themes, in a way not unlike the American bluesman? They certainly can and they did!

They could really relate at an authentic level, to this kind of blues music...just like the American bluesmen. It has nothing to do with the colour of one's skin; it has everything to do with their experiences as young men, in the rather iron-clad, caste system of English society.

So at the time *Led Zeppelin* was recorded, this is the type of mindset Robert Plant and John Bonham had. And this is why these white guys from the English Midlands could so readily identify with Black American blues music.

(End of Redbeard's paraphrased commentary).

After all these years of thinking about Led Zeppelin and the blues, I had never made some of these connections. It just goes to show you that the researcher's work is never done. There's always something new to learn, no matter how much time passes.

Epilogue

I hope you'll take some time now to listen to Led Zeppelin's early albums; in particular, the debut *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*, both released in 1969. You're sure to have a new-found appreciation for the music's roots and especially for the way that Zeppelin was able to electrify the blues to create rock'n'roll.

Perhaps listeners who have always considered Robert Plant's hollers and wails to be reaching the pain threshold or who have felt scandalized at the sometimes raunchy lyrics, will now understand that those elements are merely being true to the blues genre.

Led Zeppelin is largely recognized for having been the absolute best at fusing diverse styles of music: blues with rock, rock with folk, East with West, and more. Throughout the band's legendary career, this fusion would serve to push the boundaries of creativity and musicianship. But it all started with the blues. True blues. And went 'way beyond.

Many thanks to those whose photos, text and talent contributed to this e-book:

Clif Garboden (Phoenix Newspaper Group), Howard Mylett,
Bill Nagy, Robert Nowell, Lou Anne Reddon,
Matt Pramschufer and Megan Shanholtz of eMoxie Data Solutions,
Vanessa and the designers at www.KillerCovers.com,

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collier, James Lincoln. *The Making Of Jazz: A Comprehensive History*, Dell Publishing Company: New York, New York, 1978.

Reddon, Frank. *Sonic Boom: The Impact of Led Zeppelin. Volume 1: Break & Enter*. Enzepplopedia Publishing, Inc.: Fort Erie, Ontario, 2008.

REFERENCES

<http://www.howlinwolf.com>

<http://www.rockhall.com/inductee/howlin-wolf>

<http://www.muddywaters.com/bio.html>

<http://www.rockhall.com/inductee/muddy-waters>

<http://www.rockhall.com/inductee/willie-dixon>

Learning Resources

The following CDs feature recording artists who inspired Led Zeppelin's interpretation of the blues and folk music on the band's debut album, *Led Zeppelin* and *Led Zeppelin II*. In the list below, the debut album will be referred to as *Led Zeppelin I* in order to differentiate it clearly from *Led Zeppelin II*.

Under each entry, in blue and parentheses, appear the Led Zeppelin song and album inspired by the cited recording.

- 1) Jake Holmes, **The Underground Sounds of Jake Holmes**, (Tower Records 1967), Disc #1, Track #6: *Dazed and Confused*
(*Dazed and Confused. Led Zeppelin I*)
- 2) Howlin' Wolf, **The Chess Box**, (Chess Records 1991), Disc #1, Track #2: *How Many More Years*
(*How Many More Times. Led Zeppelin I*)
- 3) Howlin' Wolf, **The Chess Box**, (Chess Records 1991), Disc #3, Track #2: *Killing Floor*
(*Killing Floor. Led Zeppelin II*)
- 4) Otis Rush, **Otis Rush 1956-1958**, (Cobra Recordings), Disc #1, Track # 18: *I Can't Quit You Baby*
(*I Can't Quit You Baby. Led Zeppelin I*)
- 5) Willie Dixon, **The Chess Box**, (Chess Records 1990), Disc #2, Track #2: *You Need Love*
(*Whole Lotta Love. Led Zeppelin II*)
- 6) Sonny Boy Williamson, **The Chess Box: Sonny Boy Williamson: The Chess 50th Anniversary Collection**, (Chess Records 1997), Disc #1, Track #18, *Bring it on Home*
(*Bring it on Home. Led Zeppelin II*)
- 7) Muddy Waters, **Muddy Waters: The Definitive Collection**, (Chess Records 2006), Disc #1, Track #20: *You Shook Me*
(*You Shook Me. Led Zeppelin I*)
- 8) Joan Baez, **Joan Baez in Concert Part I** (Vanguard 1963), Disc #1, Track #1: *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You*
(*Babe I'm Gonna Leave You. Led Zeppelin I*)

About *Sonic Boom: The Impact of Led Zeppelin.* *Volume 1 – Break & Enter*

There's a lot more to discover about the blues and how Led Zeppelin turned them into rock'n'roll classics in *Sonic Boom: The Impact of Led Zeppelin. Volume 1 – Break & Enter.*

This stunning hardcover first edition boasts more than 700 pages and includes hundreds of photos and illustrations, some of them published here for the first time ever.

Please visit www.enzepplopedia.com for details or to order online or by mail.

As a special bonus with purchase, you'll get an e-book of 80+ pages called *J.J. Jackson Remembers Led Zeppelin: The Music and the Guys Who Made It*. It contains six interviews I conducted with the late J.J. Jackson. Four of them have never been published anywhere before.

J.J. was a deejay in Boston who was instrumental to the band's success. He attended all four concerts Zeppelin played at The Boston Tea Party, January 23-26, 1969. J.J. not only provides a detailed analysis of the music on the band's debut album, *Led Zeppelin*, he also compares live concert recordings to the gigs he himself attended.

You'll have an unprecedented, "eye and ear" witness account of how Led Zeppelin's amazing improvisation skills caused the music to change with every performance.

Noted Led Zeppelin author, Dave Lewis, graciously wrote the Foreword which details J.J. Jackson's affiliation with and importance to the members of Led Zeppelin.

