Led Zeppelin - O2 Arena London 10-12-07



01. Intro (newsreel footage from 1973, Tampa, Florida)
02. Good Times Bad Times
03. Ramble On
04. Black Dog
05. In My Time Of Dying
06. For Your Life
07. Trampled Under Foot
08. Nobody's Fault But Mine
09. No Quarter
10. Since I've Been Loving Sou
11. Dazed And Confused
12. Stairway To Heaven
13. The Song Remains The Same
14. Misty Mountain Hop
15. Kaszmir
16. (crown)
17. Whole Lotta Love
18. (crown)
19. Rock and Roll

Some rock bands accelerate their tempos when they play their old songs decades after the fact. Playing fast is a kind of armor: a refutation of the plain fact of aging, all that unregainable enthusiasm and lost muscle mass, and a hard block against an old band’s lessened cultural importance.

But Led Zeppelin slowed its down a little. At the O2 arena here on Monday night, in its first full concert since 1980 — without John Bonham, who died that year, but with Bonham’s son Jason

as a natural substitute — the band found much of its old power in tempos that were more graceful than those on the old live recordings. The speed of the songs ran closer to those on the group's old studio records, or slower yet. "Good Times Bad Times," "Misty Mountain Hop," and "Whole Lotta Love" were confident, easy cruises; "Dazed and Confused" was a glorious doom-crawl.

It all goes back to the blues, in which oozing gracefully is a virtue, and from which Led Zeppelin initially got half its ideas. Its singer, Robert Plant, doesn't want you to forget that fact: he introduced "Trampled Underfoot" by explaining its connection to Robert Johnson's "Terraplane Blues," and mentioned Blind Willie Johnson as the inspiration for "Nobody's Fault But Mine." (Beyond that, the band spent 10 luxuriant minutes each in two other blues songs from its back catalog — "Since I Been Loving You" and "In My Time of Dying").

Ahmet Ertegun, the dedicatee of the concert, would have been satisfied, sure as he was of the centrality of southern black music to American culture. Ertegun, who died last year, signed Led Zeppelin to Atlantic Records; the show was a one-off benefit for the Ahmet Ertegun Education Fund, which will offer music students scholarships to universities in the United States, England, and Turkey, his homeland.

By the end of Zeppelin's two-hour-plus show, it was already hard to remember that anyone else had been on the bill. But the band was preceded by Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings—a good-timey rhythm-and-blues show with revolving singers including Paolo Nutini and Albert Lee, as well as a few songs each by Paul Rodgers (of Free and Bad Company) and Foreigner — all of whom had recorded for Atlantic under Ertegun. Continue reading the main story

There was a kind of loud serenity about Led Zeppelin's set. It was well-rehearsed, for one thing: planning and rehearsals have been underway since May. The band wore mostly black clothes, instead of its old candy-colored wardrobe. Unlike Mick Jagger, Mr. Plant — the youngest of the original members, at 59 — doesn't walk and gesture like an excited woman anymore. Some of the top of his voice has gone, but except for one attempted and failed high note in "Stairway to Heaven" ("there walks a la-dy we all know{hellip}"), he found other melodic routes to suit him. He was authoritative; he was dignified.

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As for Mr. Page, his guitar solos weren't as frenetic and articulated as they used to be, but that only drove home the point that they were always secondary to the riffs, which on Monday were enormous, nasty, glorious. (He did produce a violin bow for his solo on "Dazed and Confused," during that song's great, spooky middle section.)

John Paul Jones's bass lines got a little lost in the hall's acoustics — like all such places, the 22,000-seat O2 Arena is rough on low frequencies — but he was thoroughly in the pocket with Mr. Bonham; when he sat down to play keyboards on "Kashmir" and "No Quarter" and a few others, he simultaneously operated bass pedals with his feet, keeping to that same far-behind-the-beat groove.

And what of Jason Bonham, the big question mark of what has been — there's no way to prove this scientifically, but let's just round it off — the most anticipated rock reunion in an era full of them? He is an expert in his father's beats, an encyclopedia of all their variations on all the existing recordings. And apart from a few small places where he added a few strokes, he stuck to the sound and feel of the original. The smacks of the snare drum didn't have exactly the same timbre, that barbarous, reverberant sound. But as the show got into its second hour and a few of the sound problems were gradually corrected, you found yourself not worrying about it anymore. It was all working.

Led Zeppelin has semi-reunited a few times in the past, with not much success: short, problematic sets at Live Aid in 1985, and at Atlantic Records' 40th Anniversary concert in 1988. But this was a reunion that the band had invested in, despite the fact that there are no plans yet for a future tour; among its 16 songs was one the band had never played live before: "For Your Life," from the album "Presence."

The excitement in the hall felt extreme, and genuine; the crowd roars between encores were ravenous. At the end of it all, as the three original members took a bow, Mr. Bonham knelt before them and genuflected. ---Ben Ratliff, nytimes.com

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