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Lez Zeppelin, an all-female Led Zeppelin tribute band, will perform at the Middle East.

Livin', lovin' -- and they're women *The Boston Globe*

August 3, 2007

Page 2 of 2 -- "Everyone talks about them being bombastic, and they're missing half the picture," Paynes says. "I don't really understand how it's happened. Half their songs were about old Celtic fairies dancing through the hedgerows!"

Lez Zeppelin's determination to move past cover-band caricature has paid off. The tribute band has drawn praise from publications such as Spin magazine (which mused that Lez Zeppelin might be "the most powerful all-female band in rock history") to [CNN.com](http://www.cnn.com) (which called them "electrifying") — not the kind of praise usually accorded tribute bands. The group has also toured Europe twice and was invited to perform at England's annual Download Festival in June.

Cover bands also tend not to release albums, or get legendary producer Eddie Kramer, the original engineer for Led Zeppelin and Hendrix, on board to supervise. Yet that's exactly what Lez Zeppelin did. Its self-titled debut, which came out last month,

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consists of six Led Zep covers and two strong original instrumentals, all of it recorded, mixed, and produced by Kramer.

For Paynes, it was both a dream come true and, during a brief moment of panic, a nightmare.

"It was absolutely daunting, yes," she says, laughing at the understatement. "I remember one morning, I was almost weeping because I thought, 'What guitar player in the world goes into a studio with Eddie Kramer and tries to play Jimmy Page's solos?' I'm completely out of my mind!"

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And yet, not. The disc offers a faithful but remarkably fresh perspective on some of rock's most hallowed anthems, including "Whole Lotta Love" and "Rock and Roll." Meanwhile, the pair of originals — "On the Rocks" and "Winter Sun" — demonstrates that not only can the women play like Zeppelin, but they can write like them, too.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the level of musicianship, which was tremendous, and I think that's what swayed me: the fact that they were very good and very serious," says Kramer. "There are a lot of terrific female musicians around, but finding four girls that could actually play all the intricate parts that Zeppelin put down, and play with the kind of fervor and intensity that Zeppelin are known for, you've really got to have your [expletive] together. And they did."


Kramer says he was initially wary about revisiting such an iconic catalog. "You're working on stuff that's become part of the language of rock 'n' roll — it's stuff that I worked on many years ago, and feel quite fatherly toward," says Kramer. "I would not have done it had they not been capable of pulling it off."

"If you're going to do Zeppelin, and you're going to be girls and do it, you'd better be prepared," Paynes says. "Being women, of course, is met with immediate skepticism. Everyone assumes we can't do this because we're women, so they're kind of drawn in and curious. And while they're doubting us, when we really do pull it off, they're kind of stunned by it. This stunned feeling is, at its root, very sexist because why should they be stunned?"

Then there's the name. Fans and interviewers alike continually question whether Lez Zeppelin is a lesbian band. While its members have always been cagey about the answer, what is clear is that gender and sexual identities play a significant, if sometimes subconscious, role in the appeal of both Zeppelins.

Paynes believes the attraction male fans might feel watching the female version on stage may, in fact, be similar to what they felt growing up with posters of Robert Plant and Jimmy Page plastered in their bedrooms.

"You had masses of young guys in puberty looking at these beautiful guys on stage and feeling — I don't know, maybe they didn't want to sleep with them consciously — but they were definitely turned on," Paynes says. "Their music was extremely sexual, there's no getting

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around that. All of that is part of the alchemy that's going on with this band as well.

"As for the name, and people's suppositions, we don't care what they think," she adds. "If they want to think we're all lesbians, that's fine with us. If they want to try to figure out who is and who isn't, it's all in good fun. It's all part of the mystery." ■

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