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Your Time Is Gonna Come

Livin' and lovin' maybe, but don't call them maids

By **JONANNA WIDNER**

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You don't notice them at first, but at a certain point, you become aware of the **hands**. They are simultaneously delicate and strong, nimble and dexterous, their power coming in quick flashes like lightning, but also dense with strength, the kind that builds deliberately, like a river's current. The hands belong to **Steph Paynes**, the guitar player for the all-female **Led Zeppelin** cover band called **Lez Zeppelin**, and her hands are working a Gibson Les Paul guitar, pumping out Jimmy Page's famous riffs. They are not easy to play, and no doubt Paynes is battling **heavy-gauge strings**, appropriate as they are for the sustained hardness Zep songs require, and as she thrusts and pushes the strings around, having her way with them, the force of her efforts pushes her veins closer and closer to the skin, and soon from wrist to fingertip there is a web of engorged vascular ropes.



Michael Goldberg

Lez Zeppelin proves you can look like Stevie Nicks and rock like Jimmy Page.

Subject(s): [Led Zeppelin](#), [Jimmy Page](#), [Lez Zeppelin](#)

And that's only by the end of the **first song**.

Lez Zeppelin was Paynes' brainchild. The group began, she says, as "one of those moments of fantasy indulgence after being in this mood to play just really exciting harder music. I thought, 'What is my dream?' And my dream would be to play in Led

Zeppelin, but I couldn't quite have that."

Paynes immediately set about recruiting her respective Plants, Bonhams and Joneses, but with a different set of **chromosomes**. A female lineup, she thought, would be "a lot more interesting and a lot more powerful too." Interesting, she says, because, "people expect a certain thing with girls, **still, in 2007**, and this is not one of the things they expect. So right there you have an entirely revelatory possibility."

This particular night, kicking off with "The Immigrant Song," the ladies dispense with the trouble of proving their metal

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mettle in, oh, about three seconds. Paynes' Page-like guitar races with the deep resonance of the sound of a **cattle stampede**; Lisa Brigantino's bass **thunders** along; Sarah McLellen's vocals, while not particularly reminiscent of Robert Plant's, prove strong and on the mark; and the drums—my God, the drums! Mouth involuntarily open wide, biceps working like twin **pumpjacks**, Helen Destroy summons the manic banshee energy of **John Bonham** in a way that transcends gender and the laws of logic—a floor tom hit that hard should dismantle, and a cymbal being beaten like a stepchild should disintegrate, but her kit stays intact, and she simply nails it all. At this point, there's just no way to dismiss the band as a novelty. "I think that if anybody arrives expecting a circus act," Paynes says, "those ideas are eradicated [with] the first song."

Not that the crowd at the **House of Blues** appears particularly surprised. They had come in droves, these Dallasites, to see the band, sold out the Cambridge Room (dozens of folks were turned away at the **ticket office**, visibly disappointed), and arrived ready to rock. It was one of those weird, rare moments when the Texan sexist instinct is trumped by another instinct that courses through our blood—the need to *rock*. You'd think something as frankly feminist—intentionally or not—as chicks taking on the oeuvre of the hardest rockin', bulgin'-est pants-wearing, most **guitar-as-phallus** symbolizin' band in the world would turn off the type of folks who were in the audience. These were not radical punks or a giant group of dykes (by the way, sistahs—where were you?), nor gender theory scholars. These were folks wearing Bermuda shorts and ball caps, mom jeans and mullets, blasé bifocals and **Old Navy T-shirts**.

And they were having a *blast*. *Lez Zeppelin* could have been made up of 4-year-old toddlers or space aliens for all they cared, as long as they kept up the Zoso mojo. The ladies really hit their stride by about the third song, "The Ocean." Paynes hit the famous stuttering riff perfectly, and the entire group shifted into that weird break at the end without skipping any beats, as the crowd shot devil's horns skyward, spilling beers on their flip-flopped feet.

Fine, you might say, that sounds like fun. But what's the big deal? Chicks can play guitar if they want. It's not like there are laws against it. Plenty of ladies have been known to rock a crowd.

The **answer** is something that some people rarely notice, but it's an important fact, and it's shaped rock 'n' roll as much as any cultural more, so let's be very explicit here: *For years, to this very day, women have never enjoyed the entitlement to rock star fantasy that men have.*

That's why the ultimate expression of rock—pounding out **hard, hard riffs** on a big heavy Les Paul—has remained a man's domain almost exclusively for decades, because the thought of being able to do so rarely even enters into the consciousness of a young girl.

That's why *Lez Zep*, finally allowing themselves even to dream of doing this, is nothing short of a shift in consciousness.

That's why it's such a grand instant when the regular-minded folks in the crowd plead for an **encore**.

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