

MUSIC REVIEW

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## A whole lotta love, musicianship in Zeppelin tribute

By Linda Laban, Globe Correspondent | February 20, 2006

### Lez Zeppelin

With Sirsy and Bling Kong  
At: the Middle East, Saturday night

CAMBRIDGE -- How ironic that four girls should form a tribute act honoring Led Zeppelin, the band that invented macho rock. Following its performance at the Middle East last September, New York City-based all-girl quartet Lez Zeppelin returned for a sold-out performance on Saturday night.

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Fortunately, the band didn't sell out the music of the mighty Zeppelin. Before a crowd of middle-age, well-fed couples, college students on the town, and a small lesbian contingent drawn by the band's name (Lez Zeppelin does not publicly offer any sexual preferences or politics), the girls put on a remarkable performance that was without pastiche, hammy posturing, or obvious mimicry.

The gender swap places Sarah McLellan on vocals, Steph Paynes on electric guitar, Lisa Brigantino on bass and keyboards, and Helen Destroy on drums. Their coolly delivered parts displayed musicianship beyond practiced: from Paynes's renditions of Jimmy Page's ballsy, blistering licks, including the bowed passage of "Dazed and Confused," to Destroy's considerable pounding. The legendary girth of the late John Bonham's strokes remains unequaled, but Destroy stood as a great drummer in her own right.

A tougher call was McLellan's role recalling Zeppelin's Robert Plant, with whom she shares no real vocal similarities. McLellan's strong voice neither reached Plant's feral banshee wail nor his quieter sensual purr, but she inhabited the part with kittenish, confident allure.

The girls stuck with well-chosen crowd pleasers: "The Immigrant Song," "Your Time Is Gonna Come," "What Is and What Should Never Be," "Kashmir," and a nigh perfect "Rock 'n' Roll," the last a tall order. While nailing the song's jittery powerhouse intro is one thing and upshifting the voice in register and power another, few (veterans Heart a notable exception) capture its sheer adrenalized

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abandon. Led Zeppelin pulled it off. A song about yearning for a lost past, how appropriate.

Support act Sirsy, from Albany, N.Y., added a set of rock raunch. And the fun, high-energy opener, Bling Kong -- a New York City group that includes a trio of cheerleaders (including a male in drag), two drummers, two guitarists, and a bass player -- added a spark of originality. If such a thing can exist in rock today. ■

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