

Out There

A street-smart guide to New York news and newsmakers

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Houses of the girly

Lez Zeppelin is—we think—an all-lesbian tribute band



THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME Paynes, second from left, channels Jimmy Page.

Photo: Courtesy of Steph Paynes

If you're literal-minded like us, you might think a band with a name like Lez Zeppelin would meet certain uniform criteria with regard to gender and sexual preference. But while this tribute to one of rock's most legendary acts is indeed all-girl, the predilections of its individual members are deliberately left to the imagination. "Our policy is, Don't ask don't tell," says guitarist Steph Paynes, the group's distaff Jimmy Page. "It's part of the fun—guessing, Are they, or aren't they?" That's one of the qualities that distinguishes Lez Zeppelin from other Zeppelin tribute outfits, most of which fall into either the parody or slavish-imitation category. "We're women, first of all," notes Paynes, "and while we don't take ourselves too seriously, we take the music very seriously—not to play it the same way note for note, but to play it with the same sound and intensity." The result, Paynes says, works a strange alchemy on their audiences, in which the women onstage somehow become the rock gods of yore. "Dedicated fans really want to be able to see Led Zeppelin," she says. "I'll often hear someone shout out, 'Jimmy!' Or they'll come backstage after the show and ask me about Alistair Crowley. And they're only half-joking." She mentions, too, an equally transformative effect on the band—"eerie similarities" as she calls them—between the four members and their Hall of Fame counterparts. Does she ever worry that the drummer will OD? "Oh no," Paynes laughs. "She's Bonham-esque. But not in that way." —Howard Halle

Lez Zeppelin plays Bowery Ballroom January 27. To buy tickets, call 866-468-7619.