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Led Zeppelin Bonnaroo Controversy Might Be Lez Zeppelin's 'Stairway' To Success

The all-female tribute band's guitarist comments on the hubbub surrounding the festival's recent press release.

By Chris Harris

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It was perhaps one of the bigger music-press snafus in recent memory, and it began at midnight Wednesday, when the press release for this year's Bonnaroo festival was distributed via e-mail to various members of the media. Along with news that Kanye West, Pearl Jam and Metallica would be [headlining the event](#), the announcement further boasted that New York's all-femme Zep tribute band, Lez Zeppelin, had also been confirmed for the bill.

Months before the lineup went public, though, several unsubstantiated rumors had spread like wildfire, suggesting that *other* band, Led Zeppelin — who had recently reunited to [play a gig in London](#) — would be anchoring the festival's bill, performing their first Stateside concert in well over two decades. As a result, a number of prominent publications — including the esteemed *Associated Press* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* — erroneously reported Wednesday morning that it would be Led Zeppelin, not Lez Zeppelin, topping Bonnaroo's roster. Embarrassing corrections followed within hours, some defending the mistake: "The press release was misleading, to say the least," read the *Sun-Times'* retraction.

According to guitarist Steph Paynes, who actually crossed the ocean to catch the reunited band's O2 arena gig, Lez Zep doesn't mind all the free publicity they've been attracting in the wake of Wednesday's press release. She also says that while they're not the real thing, the girls plan to bring it to the people at Bonnaroo.

"It was quite extraordinary," Paynes, who helped found the cover band in 2004, said. "We were told by Bonnaroo that the lineup would be announced at midnight, and I happened to be surfing the Web at that point, and I was going to put the lineup on [our MySpace page](#). Then, these stories started coming in. At first, it was really quite nice, because the first stories listed the lineup correctly, and listed us on there because of that expectation that Led Zeppelin might be playing.

"But then, I got a Google Alert to this AP story, and I read it..... it was incredulous," she continued. "I wondered, 'Is it April Fools' Day or something?' And then everything started happening, and it's been this whirlwind ever since. We've gotten so many calls and so many messages. People want to know, 'Who are these girls?' In fact, some people still think it's Led Zeppelin, masquerading as us, and that they're going to make some sort of announcement somewhere down the line. I just think it's amusing."

Still, Paynes said she doesn't see how such an error could have been made. For starters, if Led Zep had been booked for Bonnaroo, she suspects the press release would have led with that information — not Kanye, Pearl Jam and Metallica.

"It's an extraordinary case of wishful thinking on behalf of some young writer at *The Associated Press*," "How could somebody conjure, from a single sentence that is not even at the beginning of a press release, that Led Zeppelin was playing Bonnaroo? I don't think they would have 'Led Zeppelin Confirmed' three paragraphs in. I think this is just what people are hungry for, and what they really desire. I hope the avid music lovers who come to Bonnaroo will come with their minds and ears open. I think we're going to surprise a lot of people."



Lez Zeppelin
Photo: <http://www.myspace.com/lezzeppelin>

"Some people still think it's Led Zeppelin, masquerading as us." — Lez Zeppelin's Steph Paynes

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Led Zeppelin have been playing club gigs for years, and even released a self-titled LP that was recorded by Led Zep producer/engineer Eddie Kramer. Paynes said she started the band, obviously, because of her love for Led Zeppelin's music.

"The fact that women are doing this, I think there's a shock value to that," she said. "We're not kitsch — we take it seriously, and we're all professional musicians. And at first, people were just blown away by us. I think we do it in the right spirit."

Paynes doesn't believe Bonnaroo's organizers tried to pull the wool over anybody's eyes but does think her group was asked to play the festival for a reason.

"I don't think they tried to trick people — I think they're probably stunned," she said. "I can only imagine that they're stunned that some major, major news organizations could piece *that* together from what they'd been given. Do I think they were being a little cheeky? I think they had heard about us and were interested in us for a while, but certainly, I think they decided it would be great to have some sort of Zeppelin spirit at the festival, in light of the speculation."

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