

All-female Zeppelin is the ultimate tribute band

Rock gods and the women who pay musical tribute to them—that was my Halloween weekend.

Lez Zeppelin played the Lifestyle Communities Pavilion Friday. At Whiskey Dick's on Saturday night was Black Diamond, an all-women Kiss tribute band.

Here are their stories, unoriginal though they may be.

Though **Lez Zeppelin** trades on the fact that the band members are gay, they talked about their breasts much less than Black Diamond. In the end, their homosexuality had zero to do with anything else in their performance.

Musically, the band acquitted itself quite handsily. In fact, *Lez Zeppelin* was great.

Sure, the group played Zep songs note-for-note, but it had moxie, heart, chutzpah—you name it. Its blend of amateur enthusiasm and decent professionalism made this Zep fan dig 'em.

Guitarist Steph Paynes won me over when she played the most lovingly perfect rendition of Jimmy Page's gorgeous slide solo during "What Is and What Should Never Be," one of the most unheralded gems from *Led Zeppelin II*. The metal slide on her ring finger made the notes sing sharp and bluesy but melodically sweet.

She earned even more points for playing her guitar slung extremely low, like how the great Page does, and for being dressed in a tailored two-piece white silk suit with a dragon embroidered on the leg. Kudos for both the musical and fashion chops.

On drums was Helen Destroy, who matched the legendary late John Bonham in physical girth and powerhouse time-keeping. She might be the strongest female drummer I've ever seen—you'd have to be to do Bonzo justice.

Bassist Lisa Brigantino did an extremely proper imitation of the silent yet utterly important John Paul Jones, her bass playing supplying the bottom to Zep's thermonuclear dinosaur stomp as re-created by the Lezzies.

Lead singer Sarah McLellan, a lass who sashayed her bottom onstage in an exaggerated manner as often as possible, was a pretty good Robert Plant imitator. In the end, though, as adequate as she was, nobody is as girly as Plant. But she was plenty OK.

As *Lez Zep* plowed through its highly enjoyable set—including an epic "Dazed and Confused" complete with violin bow solo, "Misty Mountain Hop" and "Black Dog"—the band would occasionally go tentative before snapping back into the maelstrom with confidence. Even the band's innocent unsureness was endearing.

Not only was the show a hell of a good time, but it blew away the Columbus Symphony Orchestra's Zep tribute. Mercifully, the band had the chops, and, also quite mercifully, it didn't play "Stairway to Heaven."

While both *Lez Zeppelin* and Black Diamond were taunted by the pigs in the crowd to "show your tits," neither did. That was about all either band had in common.

Black Diamond was almost everything *Lez Zep* wasn't: untalented, unprofessional, gross and straight. The first two matter—even if it was just a tribute band.

Standing onstage for 30 minutes staring at faulty equipment while roadies scramble to fix it is a bad way to start a night of musical flattery. Black Diamond probably doesn't do that for every show, but that's how its Whiskey Dick's performance started—or didn't, rather.

But were the women in makeup? Yes, and they were good makeup jobs, although the woman playing Gene Simmons didn't spit fire.

Now if Black Diamond had only been consistent in its performance, it might've made all the crazy Halloween biker bar



Better than the Columbus Symphony Orchestra's Led Zeppelin tribute: Sarah McLellan of Lez Zeppelin

behavior in Dick's tolerable. As it was, the band had only two strengths—Gene and Ace Frehley. The fake Peter Dinklage drummed as poorly as the real one, and Paul Stanley was re-created by a chunky soccer-mom type.

The songs were at first pretty well done, maybe because they were most of the good songs Kiss actually has: "Strutter," "Calling Dr. Love" and "Do Ya Love Me." Then, as the more tuneless Kiss crap emanated off the stage, Black Diamond began breaking down. "Cold Gin" totally fell apart halfway through, the band staring at each other blankly for almost 20 seconds of dead air before resuming the song.

Then Ace played a *long* guitar solo sans Gene, Paul and Peter. Who is Ace Frehley in the pantheon of great guitar players? He's Gomer Pyle without his banjo.

As the night painfully dragged itself into the wee hours—and the crowd was reduced to 23 people standing directly in front of Black Diamond while it played the execrable "Lick It Up" with way too much gusto, I found myself thinking even if Kiss was to magically show up and guest on "Rock and Roll All Nite," I'd be fondly remembering *Lez Zeppelin*.

—John Petric

Disappointing Leppard

Def Leppard's show last Thursday at Nationwide Arena should have been awesome.

The band is certainly comfortable playing arenas since it's been performing in the venues since 1983's *Pyromania*. And it definitely has enough anthems—"Pour Some Sugar on Me," "Hysteria," "Armed and Dangerous" and "Bringin' on the Heartbreak"—to satisfy an audience.

The crowd was into the show, singing and dancing along to all the hits. During slower songs such as "Foolin'," people were alternately holding up lighters and the shining ends of their cell phones.

Regardless, Def Leppard failed to deliver a concert to match its fans' enthusiasm.

Maybe it was because of some definite filler material such as the horrible "Let's Get Rocked" and "Love Bites." The band's

ill-conceived attempt to stay relevant in the grunge era, "Slang," fell particularly flat.

But the show was probably underwhelming because Def Leppard simply seemed to be going through the motions. It played hit after hit, but, for the most part, it didn't deviate from the recorded versions except to throw in a wanking guitar solo.

That's not to say that the show was without its highlights.

Def Leppard's cover of Badfinger's "No Matter What" was not only spot-on, it actually rocked a little harder than the original. And the band did amp itself up during the three-song finale of "Photograph," "Animal" and "Rock of Ages."

But you should be able to count on more than four good songs for a band as legendary—and as expensive—as Def Leppard.

Opener **Cheap Trick** was a lot more energetic. The band relies heavily on gimmicks such as Rick Nielsen's ever-changing assortment of guitars and the opening-closing bookends of "Hello There" and "Goodnight," but it has enough good songs that it actually doesn't have to.

While it never reached Def Leppard-style fame, Cheap Trick did have quite a few hits. The band largely jettisoned newer material to play classics such as "I Want You to Want Me," "Dream Police" and "If You Want My Love."



Brought the hits but not the energy: Joe Elliott of Def Leppard

The power-pop classic "Surrender" was a particular highlight. It had to be with an arena full of people pumping their fists and singing "We're all alright" during the climax. While Robin Zander sang "Got my



Kiss records out," Nielson threw an old Kiss record into the crowd. Sure it was corny, but it's always nice to see a band trying to put on a show.

Maybe Def Leppard could take notes. —Chad Painter

Buddy Guy knows he's good

Some nights, **Buddy Guy** is the mess-around kid, doing little more than teasing you with his bag of tricks. Other nights, he is so on he blows your mind. At the Lifestyle Communities Pavilion last Wednesday, he was lightning.

And not entirely on his guitar—which was electrifying enough.

Back at Stache's in the '90s, Guy would get onstage and just dick around for what seemed like hours. I eventually quit going to see him because it felt like Buddy was cheating his audiences. They ate him up, anyway.

The other night, he came out moments after his band launched into Freddie King's "Going Down" and proceeded to rip raw riff after raw riff out of his guitar like I haven't heard him do in years. He just played rough, rugged six-string blues from the hip, with the bluest of blue notes in all the right places.

I was instantly reborn as a Guy fan. In the bad old days, he would let his band warm up for 20 minutes before he made his entrance.

But there he was, striding out quickly, his solos striking up as if from hell and he was a man living his last night on Earth. It felt gut-grippingly good. Something about blues guitar drives people crazy—especially in the hands of a master who knows how to read a crowd, which, among his many strengths, is something Guy is very, very good at.

He came out, banged out a couple of good strong blues songs and knocked wig off with his guitar power. Then he laid back in the groove, letting the band quietly but powerfully chug along, and he spoke with the audience, talking a little trash, paying a compliment or two. And then he was back into tearing the roof off with his hot-wired soloing. He was playing to and with the audience, but he wasn't playing them for fools like the Stache's days.

Keeping his jive to a minimum, Guy eventually unleashed his other extremely valuable asset: his voice. This man is a fine blues singer—one of the best—and, even though he's getting up there in years, he simply has near-total command of his considerable husky vocal chops.

He really blew my mind when he sang an unexpectedly tender rendition of the late great Otis Redding's beautiful soul ballad "Dreams to Remember," complete with excellent backing vocals by his band. It was so good that it was practically doo-wop.

After that terrific surprise, he went on to play some fine blues, doing a dead-on imitation of John Lee Hooker and then a woodoo man's version of Cream's "Strange Brew."

So Guy has cleaned up his act. He's delivering the goods: grindingly sexy blues, hotter-than-July guitar playing, his legendary "crowd walk," excellent vocals and a damned good time.

One thing he hasn't changed, thankfully, is that pearly, mouse-eating grin of his. This cat knows he's bad.

—J.P.