

Music

November 04, 2005

Whaddya mean groupies? We're the group

BY BOB STANLEY

They're hairy, loud and love to rock — but these tribute bands are strictly for the chicks

David Bowie's use of mascara made a generation of young boys feel that someone understood them — Alice Cooper's did not. Watching a rerun of Bowie's *Cracked Actor* it struck me that America's fan reaction to him was more "I'm a spaceship and he's the pilot" goofiness than anything approaching life-changing. Boys *will* be boys. Keep your cross-dressing in London, bub.

A few weeks before, I'd found myself high up in the Hamptons, in Amagansett, the kind of amiable nowhere town that provided the setting for *Groundhog Day*. At its cultural centre — a log cabin-cum-bar called the Stephen Talkhouse — there's Blue Öyster Cult on the jukebox and smiling families feasting on crab suppers. Squaresville. Only the odd Wilco or Weezer T-shirt in the crowd suggests anything other than a cosy bar band are about to perform.

When four girls take the stage, the singer in a hoody, no one stops talking, nobody pays much attention to anything other than their beer.

The band simply explode. Tough and tight, incredibly loud. The singer is extraordinary. Three songs in, she takes her hood down to reveal long black tresses — all energy, she tugs at her hair, sexual as hell. "Wanna give you my love," she wails, and I can feel myself blush. This is like watching Tina Turner in 1966 fronting Led Zeppelin at their hot and heavy peak. Amagansett is not used to such behaviour — everybody goes nuts. They are the best new band I've seen all year, no question.

So what's the catch? All of the songs are covers. The group are called Lez Zeppelin. Not being a Zep fan, I wasn't too familiar with the set but up here in log-cabin country they know every single line. Still, this doesn't detract from the group being more heart-pumping than anything I've seen since the early Datsuns shows. Spin magazine has already (to its horror) suggested that they could be "the most powerful all-female band in rock history".

There's something beautiful and deeply subversive in taking one of the most masculine, straight, heavy groups of all time and turning them into girls. Chuck in the "Lez" reference and we're talking about a revolution. The beer-drinking hairies of Amagansett are starstruck but definitely a little confused — clearly,

they were all set to be less than impressed.

“It makes sense to me,” says the Lez Zep guitarist Steph Paynes. “Plant and Page were beautiful, and they looked like girls with their long hair. Guys wanted to kiss them back then, they just didn’t know it. They were turned on by them. Let’s face it, the band were wearing girls’ clothes.” A peek at the guestbook on Lez Zep’s website seems to bear this out, with men in their mid-thirties lost in a world of gender confusion.

“One guy wrote to say ‘the ancient prophecy of the runes has been fulfilled and it’s an awesome spectacle.’ It’s way beyond what we even imagined,” laughs Paynes. “He’s saying Led Zeppelin should have been women. I’m not sure how many people would agree with that.”

www.lezzeppelin.com

(Article excerpted for promotional use)