

ROCK ROYALTY
ISSUE
DRUMMING FOR FANATICS

WHY BONHAM STILL RULES!

DRUM!

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PLUGGED IN: HOW TO GET THAT '70s ROCK DRUM SOUND

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Bonham performing with Led Zeppelin in Los Angeles, June 1973.

STILL THE ONE

JOHN BONHAM DEFINED ROCK DRUMMING LIKE NO ONE BEFORE OR SINCE. ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS PASSING, BONZO'S FRIENDS AND FANS PAY TRIBUTE.

“Bonzo’s gone. Zeppelin is finished.” It’s been 30 years since the tragic news broke from Jimmy Page’s Mill House, in Pangbourne, Berkshire. The memory of John Bonham, fuelled by fact and fantasy, has since grown to become legend. But the reality is, Bonham was every bit as good as they say. He was the man with the golden groove, the sensational chops, and that great, big sound. Friends and fans remember the loud but loveable bloke from Birmingham with gratitude and respect.

BY WAYNE BLANCHARD

To them, he defined and dignified rock drumming. And all these years later he remains The One. Yes, there have been faster, louder, and more technical players, but in the end, they all bow to Bonham.

From the slam-down intro of “Good Times, Bad Times,” Led Zeppelin’s debut album kicked rock and roll square in the face. With funky fills, groove-pushing cowbell, triplet kick work, and sheer attitude, its drumming was stunningly fresh and devastatingly powerful. Thanks to Jimmy Page’s arrangements, the drums were showcased in spacious yet intense settings. So when that wide-open ride roared in “Communication Breakdown,” or those through-the-bar fills pulled you deeper into “Dazed And Confused,” there was a palpable sense of drama. It was no longer “rock and roll.” This was *rock*. Hard rock. Heavy metal, even.

And before Zeppelin’s debut even left the turntable, the hottest new band on the planet was back with *Led Zeppelin II*, featuring tunes that veered from the storming groove of “Whole Lotta Love” to the show-stopping drum solo of “Moby Dick,” and that raucous riff-o-rama “Ramble On.”

This wasn’t about redefining something old. Bonham was about defining something new. Rock drumming had never sounded so good. Some may argue, it never has again.

PUTTING IT ALL IN CONTEXT

Let’s first step back to the early ’60s to see how Bonham survived a decade of musical transition to become the right drummer in the right place at the right time. 1950s Britain saw traditional jazz and dance bands give way to American rock and roll and rhythm and blues, with skiffle and the instrumental hits of The Shadows setting the stage for Beatlemania and the Swinging ’60s.

Tony Meehan and Brian Bennett, both of The Shadows, were the British drum heroes, while Charlie Watts, Keef Hartley, Jon Hiseman, Tony Newman, Mickey Waller, Ginger Baker, Aynsley Dunbar, and Mitch Mitchell were young “jazzers” who would move into the blues and — in some cases — on to rock. Gene Krupa, Elvin Jones, Buddy

Rich, Joe Morello, Davey Tough — the American jazz greats — were their heroes, so the “ting-ting-a-ting” swing ride pattern ruled, drum tunings were high, and tone and touch were among the prerequisites.

By 1964, session king Bobby Graham and The Beatles’ Ringo Starr were two of the most rocking players on the radio, with Graham’s slamming beats on Dave Clark Five stompers “Glad All Over” and “Do You Love Me,” as well as The Kinks hits “You Really Got Me” and “All Day And All Of The Night,” signaling an increasingly aggressive approach. More importantly, these hits highlighted the shift from swing-style ride playing to straight eighths while also pushing aside the obligatory “boom-ta-ta-boom-ta” pop beat of the day. But Bonham? “I’m not sure John was a fan of British drummers, though he must have been influenced by Tony Meehan and Brian Bennett, and Clem Cattini’s session work,” says Bev Bevan, drummer with legendary ’60s chart toppers The Move, then ELO, and for a while, Black Sabbath. “John and I generally shared musical tastes, all of them American.” *Any jazz?* “I don’t recall him being a jazzer, though I’d do a 5/4 drum solo in an adaptation of Dave Brubeck’s ‘Take 5,’ and he liked that.”

According to Jon Hiseman — who replaced Ginger Baker when he quit the Graham Bond Organization for Cream, took Mitch Mitchell’s spot with Georgie Fame when Mitchell joined Hendrix, and then put jazz into John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers before launching his groundbreaking jazz-rock unit, Colosseum — many jazzers weren’t so generous with Zeppelin or Bonham. “The diehards just didn’t get it, and to a certain extent never did. But the blues-rock musos I knew were all great fans of Led Zeppelin and John’s big, open sound. As for me, I always felt the problem with the jazz beat was that it was bound up in a kind of convention, and jazz musicians judged you on how well you ‘re-created’ the feels of the established masters. As I began to explore the eighth-note feel, I felt free. I felt I was in unexplored territory.”

BIRMINGHAM BEGINNINGS

Black Sabbath’s Bill Ward speaks fondly of his friend. “My earliest recollection of meeting John Bonham was at The Wharf Pub in Ombersley, Worcestershire, about 1964. He was with The Crawling King Snakes, playing popular songs of that era, plus blues and R&B. His rhythms were immaculate, making each song his own, turning it into something superb. A great example was “Morning Dew.” Of all the versions I heard, including the original, none compared to the King Snakes’, with John Bonham leading the pack.”

Ward recalls that, “Sometimes on trips to Drum City, the Birmingham city-center shop owned by BBC Light Jazz Orchestra drummer Mike Evans, I’d bump into Bonham, along with other fine drummers — offshoots of the cosmopolitan hordes who’d chosen Birmingham as home. Some visits turned into mini-clinics. I’d watch Mike do his ‘Purdie.’ I think he turned everyone on to Bernard Purdie, whose hi-hat work was incomparable. Bonham would sit in and funk out, his bass drum playing that language everyone seemed to be speaking but still not applying as well as he did. Many different drumming styles existed, and somehow they all ended up in Mike’s drum shop. We were rich in

rudiments and healthy in the music of the day.” But Ward has an admission. “In 1964/’65, I didn’t understand what John was doing. Often, on the many occasions I watched him play, I thought he was ruining the song, like maybe he’d lost his *I*. Uncannily, however, after several bars, he’d bring his beats into alignment with whomever he was play-

“HIS GROOVES WERE ALWAYS IN THE SWEET SPOT, AND HE FILLED THE EMPTINESS BETWEEN THE FOURS OF THE SNARE WITH TRIPLETS AND POLYRHYTHMS” —BILL WARD

ing with. At last, I realized what he’d done. He was always in his *I*, even when it sounded like he wasn’t.”

The recollections of Trapeze and Deep Purple bassist/vocalist Glenn Hughes, whose new project, Black Country Communion, has John’s son Jason Bonham drumming, are also heartfelt. “I first saw John play in 1968. He jumped on stage with my baby band, Finders Keepers, at the Rum Runner in Birmingham, and pretty much demolished the drum kit. I’d heard stories of the big bloke from Redditch with the big ’ands. A couple years later he joined me and Trapeze on many shows. He was the dog’s bollocks ... amazing!”

Ward recalls that while often loud, and at times seeming to almost maul his drums, Bonham’s talent lay in that he was a natural and a very learned student. “Behind his almost brutish and chaotic appearance he was an endearing man, studious, and a hopelessly caught-up-in-drums-and-drummers man. His knowledge of drumming was overflowing. This was the Bonham I knew.”

BLUESBUSTING

By ’66/’67, the Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page-driven psychedelia of The Yardbirds’ single “Happenings Ten Years Time Ago,” The Beatles’ mind-expanding *Revolver*, and the success of Cream and Hendrix highlighted the real potential for power in British pop and rock. But now Brit blues bands Chicken Shack, John Mayall’s Bluesbreakers, and Peter Green’s Fleetwood Mac were also part of the mix.

“Bonham was an inspiration when playing half-time blues,” remembers Ward. “His grooves were always in the sweet spot, and he filled the emptiness between the fours

BONZO’S VISTALITE KIT



DRUMS: Ludwig

- 1 26" x 14" Bass Drum
- 2 14" x 6.5" Supra-Phonic 402 Alloy Snare Drum
- 3 14" x 10" Tom
- 4 16" x 16" Floor Tom
- 5 18" x 16" Floor Tom
- 6 29" Machine Timpani
- 7 30" Universal Timpani

CYMBALS: Paiste

- A 15" Sound Edge Hi-Hat
- B 16" Medium Crash
- C 24" Ride (bass drum-mounted)
- D 18" Ride (played as a crash)

PERCUSSION

- E Ralph Kester Ching-Ring
- F Ludwig Gold Tone Cow Bell
- G Paiste 36" Symphonic Gong

*The configuration of Bonham’s Ludwig drum set remained remarkably consistent throughout Zeppelin’s 10-year recording career, with the exception of his shell finishes. Circa 1969–’70, the drummer sported a Natural Maple (Blonde) kit. In 1970–’73 he switched to Sparkle Green. Sometime in 1973 he unveiled the VistaLite Amber acrylic kit (shown) which remains the most iconic. In 1975 the kit wore a Sparkle Silver finish. From 1977 until his death in 1980 the drums were Stainless Steel.

In 1969, Bonham experimented with two congas to the left of his hats but these were replaced permanently by two timpani shortly after 1970. Sometime between 1970 and 1973 he used both Ludwig and Remo heads instead of just Ludwig heads. Another small but significant change in 1973 was the switch from Paiste Giant Beat to Paiste 2002 series cymbals, in addition to a Ching-Ring on his hats and narrowing his head selection to Ludwig Clear Silver Dots and Remo Clear CS batter heads. Throughout his career, Bonham used Ludwig and Rogers hardware, Ludwig Speed King pedal, and Promuco sticks, among others.

Infographic by JOSH SUKOV

of the snare with triplets and polyrhythms, astonishing the listener and gathering delighted applause for each splendid execution of what seemed the impossible." As Hiseman notes, musicianship in the '60s mattered. "Musicians were seen as worthy of attention in their own right. Media interest was not in lifestyle, but in the playing skills that produced the music. I just bought a *Melody Maker* [music paper] from 1970, with three items on the front page: Jimi Hendrix Dead; Colosseum (my band) Sign Chris Farlowe

As Vocalist; Harry James And Big Band Arrive In Britain." That's not to say things were perfect, but with The Beatles obliterating virtually everything that came before, the music was serious stuff. Meanwhile, in studios around London, Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones were first-call session players on records with everyone from The Kinks and The Who to Donovan and Dusty Springfield before Page joined The Yardbirds. While that group flourished with Beck, with Page they floundered, though onstage the

guitarist took a heavier approach, with songs like "Dazed And Confused" taking shape. When he needed a new singer and drummer, Page went to Birmingham, where dull skies shrouded a once-glorious industrial past and the gigging world was the hundreds of smoky pubs and clubs across the rough-and-tumble city and surrounding Black Country of England's Midlands. He chose the hippy-blues-wailing Robert Plant as his singer, and Plant recommended the raucous Bonham. Page was hooked.

contemporary players of '67/'68." One contemporary was Rob Henrit, of pre-British Invasion popsters Adam Faith & The Roulettes, '70s prog rockers Argent, the 1980s incarnation of The Kinks, and is now back on stage with Argent in 2010. "I was on TV a lot with Adam Faith, and was a flamboyant player as the mu-

THE ZEPPELIN CORE CATALOG

Relaxed in January of 1969, **Led Zeppelin** was a lesson to the rock set in blending power with subtlety and sophistication. Even the hardest songs contained a level of emotional punch beyond anything that had come before. From the opening few bars of "Good Times Bad Times," the world was introduced to the fluttering agility of Bonham's now-infamous right foot, while the operatic drama of "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" set up what would become a dominant Zeppelin aesthetic: delicate, bluesy acoustic segments — punctuated by Robert Plant's hypnotic, tortured wailing — suddenly rocketed to dizzying heights by massive, electrified choruses. And while the '60s psychedelia-inspired "Dazed And Confused" seemed to nod in the direction of Cream and Hendrix, the straight-ahead, blistering energy of "Communication Breakdown" made it clear Zeppelin intended to take this style into a new and heavier direction.



songs that drew lawsuits from Sonny Boy Williamson and Willie Dixon over artistic infringements), **Led Zeppelin II** remains the most strictly bluesy of all the band's offerings.

If *II* is the soundtrack of a band grinding out nonstop rock on a busy touring schedule, then **Led Zeppelin III** is the sound of a band in repose. Recorded at an estate cottage in Wales known as Bron-Yr-Aur, *III* saw the band balancing heavier tendencies with earthier, contemplative sounds pulled from the pastoral surroundings of Bron-Yr-Aur. Even the album artwork is more playful and whimsical. Gone is the flaming Hindenburg motif that graced the other two albums. In its place, a colorful butterfly theme. The estate's namesake anthem, the Celtic and bluegrass-inspired "Bron-Yr-Aur Stomp," is actually a remake of Bert Jansch's "The Waggoner's Lad." But this, as well as the mandolin-driven "Gallows Pole," showcases Bonham's ability to adapt his heavy-hitting technique to different styles. The dynamic snare rolls and bouncing, four-on-the-floor kick patterns in these two songs still come across as intensely powerful, while the drumming in the elegant "Tangerine," though commanding, melts into the melody until it's more felt than heard.



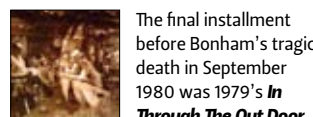
in the sweeping "Battle For Evermore," the strongest acoustic contribution yet with "Going To California," and the instant classic "Stairway To Heaven," which, despite its debut on this "stealth" album, becomes arguably the most recognizable song in the Zeppelin repertoire. *IV* has since become one of the top four best-selling albums in U.S. history.

Having pumped out four wildly successful albums in just under three years, the band took some time recording **Houses Of The Holy**, finally releasing it in 1973. The album makes it clear Zeppelin was both maturing as a band and reflecting elements of the changing musical landscape, with "D'Yer Mak'er" and "Over The Hills And Far Away" hinting at a funkier, more swing-oriented feel. The album was also referential for the band down the road. "The Song Remains The Same," would pop up three years later to become the title track on the psychedelic film of the same name, while "The Ocean" features a guitar riff in the middle that's a clear precursor to the weirder and more completely realized "Kashmir," which shows up on the next album.

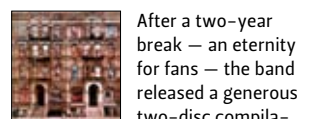


wanted to go, and **Physical Graffiti**'s 90-minute running time surely had something for everyone.

1976's **Presence** sees the band returning to a straight-ahead rock sensibility, albeit with a looser, funkier feel, as exemplified by "Royal Orleans" and "Hots On For Nowhere." A slew of interesting drum breaks in "Nobody's Fault But Mine" establishes Bonham's evolving musicianship, even as the rest of the bandmembers appear to be settling down into what they know best. All told, **Presence** lacks the creative focus of the other albums, and the result is that it's arguably the least memorable offering in the Zeppelin catalog. The only song that made a real impact from the standpoint of posterity is the epic opener, "Achilles Last Stand," a reference to the broken ankle Plant suffered in a car accident and nursed throughout the album's recording.



The final installment before Bonham's tragic death in September 1980 was 1979's **In Through The Out Door**. The album is not without its strong points, most notably the "Kashmir"-esque "All My Love," and the brilliantly funky "Fool In The Rain." But as much as any album could, it signaled the end of an era, both for Bonham and for the organic '70s rock sound that Zeppelin had pioneered. Ironically, this is the only album on which Bonham received no writing credits, as he was unhappy with the band's softer, more pop-oriented direction. Indeed, "In The Evening" feels like a precursor to the early '80s contributions of David Bowie or The Cars, while the jarring synthesizer experiment in "Carouselambra" suggests what might have been had Zeppelin been forced to weather the soul-wrenching transition into the '80s that laid so many other great rock bands to waste.



After a two-year break — an eternity for fans — the band released a generous two-disc compilation in 1975 titled **Physical Graffiti**. In retrospect, the album stands as a perfect stylistic bridge at the center of the band's career, referencing earlier offerings, as on the acoustic folk ballad "Bron-Yr-Aur" and the aforementioned "Kashmir," while throwing out some evocative experimental pieces like "In The Light," with its long, haunting intro, and the epic "In My Time Of Dying" that reveal a distinct maturation of the Zeppelin sound. But by this time Zeppelin fans would follow the band wherever they

By DAVE CONSTANTIN

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING

In the October 12, 1968 issue of *Melody Maker*, a headline stated "Only Jimmy Left To Form The New Yardbirds." Of his new band, the young guitarist commented, "It's blues, basically, but not Fleetwood Mac-style. [That band at the time, with guitarist Peter Green, was strictly a blues band.] I hate the term 'progressive blues,' but it's more or less what The Yardbirds were playing at the end. It's great to know that today you can form a group to play music you like and people will listen."

Earlier in the year, the Jeff Beck Group, with the late, great Mickey Waller drumming, laid the template for heavy blues-rock with its debut, *Truth*, on which Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones, and The Who's Keith Moon guested. The raucously heavy follow-up, *Beck-Ola*, saw Tony Newman introduce a fearsome funkiness, with Led-heavy renditions of Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock" and "All Shook Up." Ever astute, Page was onto the concept. "When the 'New Yardbirds' came back from their first dates in Europe," Newman says, "there was a real buzz around London. It put a shiver up your spine, because we knew something radical was happening." [Beck and Zep manager] Peter Grant brought the Zeppelin guys along to see the Beck Group on many occasions, saying, "Come look at this lot, because this is a band that isn't going to last." [laughs] But our group — three players and a singer doing heavy blues rock — was a concept Peter knew could be expanded on."

One of Zep's earliest performances was on a bill with Buddy Miles, Buddy Guy, Jack Bruce, and Jon Hiseman's Colosseum. "For me," says Hiseman, "Led Zeppelin was another band who I perceived would be more successful than Colosseum because it had showmanship and relatively simple songs. Colosseum came from a different planet, but that meant I was able to appreciate John and the band all the more — I was a fan. I bought the records. But I never saw it as anything I would want to do."

BONHAM'S INFLUENCES

Recalling their times on tour together, Vanilla Fudge's Carmine Appice was impressed: "John was new and fresh, with plenty of aggression and energy. I was blown away by his sixteenth-note right-foot triplet. He said he got that from the first Vanilla Fudge album, which confused me, as I didn't remember doing it. So he showed me where I played it — *once!* He took that lick and created his trademark triplet thing. He had great hands, feet, and feel, and said his idols were the same as mine. But he also listened to

"BONZO'S SOUND CAME FROM A COMBINATION OF BRUTE POWER, SUBTLE FINESSE, AND IMPECCABLE GROOVE. JOHN BONHAM IS THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD EVER TRULY SOUND LIKE JOHN BONHAM." —MIKE PORTNOY

sic allowed me to show off. I heard Bonham liked that and said he'd learned a great deal from me."

Liberty DeVitto, whose drumming propelled Billy Joel's many hits, feels "John Bonham was an R&B drummer in a heavy metal band. He had the heavy sound and attack of Carmine with 'D'yer Maker,' the R&B fills and feel of Roger Hawkins on 'What Is And What Should Never Be,' and as he developed he added jazz feels or more swing, like the Purdie-style shuffle for 'Fool In The Rain.'"

Appice says, "John liked the great Motown, Atlantic, and Stax artists, and rock and roll like Little Richard, Bo Diddley." Both Bonham and Bevan loved American rock and roll. "I remember John and I agreeing that the two best rock and roll drummers were Earl Palmer and Hal Blaine," says Bevan. "Palmer's drumming on Eddie Cochran's 'Somethin' Else' obviously inspired Bonzo's intro to Zep's 'Rock And Roll' [even if Charles Connor did establish the beat two years earlier. See pg. 53]." But even more revealing, "We loved that huge drum sound Phil Spector achieved on his productions." *So is that where the idea for Zeppelin's big drum sound came from?* "My guess," says Hiseman, "is that Bonham had a natural ear for what was going on around him. I learned a long time ago not to play the drums but to play the band. I think that's what John did."

But Bonham also had the power of the straight eighth-note. And Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith makes the point that, "As far as the dotted ride pattern to the straight-eighth note, that would be the late, great Earl Palmer. He was the first." So Bonham got more than the "Rock And Roll" intro from the American session king.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE DRUMS?

A lot has been made of his gear, but Bonham could make any drum set sound huge. “It’s attitude,” says Henrit. “As Lance Armstrong said, ‘It’s not about the bike!’” Dream Theater’s Mike Portnoy says, “Bonzo’s sound came from a combination of brute power, subtle finesse, and impeccable groove. John Bonham is the only one who could ever truly sound like John Bonham. That sound was him — not necessarily his drums.”

Bill Ward sees it differently. “Bonham was light of foot and light in his wrists. It was his dexterity, his touch that seemed to intuitively know how to find the power points on each drum.” Page certainly recognized that. After all, he’d played with some of the very best session drummers, and they sure knew the when, where, and how to hit a drum. Obviously, so did Bonham.

Ward recalls Bonham’s drums back in the day. “They were the same as everyone else’s in the ‘60s. He had several kits before Zeppelin, mostly Ludwig, I think.” When Zeppelin landed in America for the first of two tours with Vanilla Fudge, Bonham’s kit was diminutive next to the mighty blonde Ludwigs of the headliner. According to Ap-pice, “He had a 22” x 14”, 13” x 9” on the kick, and maybe two 16” x 16” floor toms with a 14” x 5” Ludwig chrome snare, a ride, two crashes, and 14” hats. When he saw my two 26” maple bass drums, oversized toms, and deep snare, he wanted the same. I called Ludwig: ‘I think this band is going to be really big.’ How’s that for an understatement! They gave him the same setup as mine, complete with gong. He loved it.”

Though the second kick — at the insistence of Page and Jones — was soon gone, that didn’t hinder his ability to deliver the blistering triplets and offbeat bass shots that personified his audacious — yet always musical — approach. A few years later Ward saw Bonham on a different setup. “I watched him play his son Jason’s kit in the ‘70s. It was small in comparison to a regular kit, but John sounded incredible. Whatever drums he had, he could make them sound huge and very tonal.”

IT’S ABOUT THE “AIR”

Page was quick to integrate Bonham’s sounds and style into Zep’s compositions: He and Jones often locked in on the meter and let the drummer float the time. Today, click tracks and a dependence on the drummer to keep the time inhibit the ability for the music to breathe the way it did with Zeppelin. One of Smith’s favorite Bonham tracks is “Wanton Song.” “The use of space in the verse is breathtaking. I also love ‘Since I’ve Been Loving You,’ live at Albert Hall, with its awesome use of dynamics and that famous footwork on full display.”

Yes, it was really all about the “air” — that space that made such a difference. “I think his feel was a product of his wide-open sound,” says Henrit. “He was arguably the first drummer to have his own room to record in, so there was never a problem with leakage, meaning each offbeat could be larger than life. I suspect he was the first to have echo on the drums in his cans and that let him play more sparsely.”

BIRMINGHAM GETS HEAVIER

Another thing Bonham had going for him was volume. Bevan thinks he may have influenced that. “He’d come see me play circa ‘63, ‘64, but I don’t know if he was influenced by my playing or my volume! I was the first of the noisy drummers from the Birmingham area — Bevan, Bonham, Bill Ward, Cozy Powell: all loud!” But why were Birmingham bands getting so loud? “Black Sabbath,” says Bevan, “were the first really heavy band to come out of our area.”

For sure, Sabbath turned up to make their doom-laden, angst-ridden point, but according to Ward, “The biggest challenge was to be heard. When Marshall stacks showed up, as a drummer, I had to triple my energy output. However, playing louder wasn’t always accurate at first. I had to learn how to be accurate and forceful. And when P.A. systems and mikes showed up I had to relearn all over again.” And therein lies another Bonham quality: the ability to groove as deep as he did and pull out the chops, all while playing at a high volume.

FANSPEAK

As others influenced Bonham, so did he influence others. “Hot rock drummers of the ‘60s?” laughs Smith. “Ginger, Ringo, Charlie, Bonzo, Mitch, Moonie, and Paice-y. Only the bloody British for me!” UK session great Geoff Dugmore, who has recorded with Jones and Page, recalls: “As a kid, I spent days with *Houses Of The Holy*, figuring out the groove on ‘The Crunge.’”

Jones once told Dugmore that the second part of the “Black Dog” riff was modified so the drums could play straight through and come out in the same pocket at the other end. “He and Bonham worked parts so the bass drum and bass guitar didn’t fall together, so each instrument sounded even bigger.” With Page, Dugmore found himself at Olympic Studios, set up the same way Zeppelin recorded.

“I’m on a riser with Jimmy’s amps at the other end of the studio. He’s also on the riser, right between my ride cymbal and rack tom, grooving with me. I knew I wasn’t Bonham, so I had to be aware of his expectations. Both Jimmy and John Paul just wanted me to be me and to feel the groove with them. That brought home to me how special the Zep unit was. It can only happen when everyone is on the same wavelength.”

Any stipulations? “Yes. No headphones. No click track. And no count-in. We just felt the moment to start, and it was amazing how instinctively that came. Jones has the most massive fat, round sound and is calm, relaxed, and totally in control of his instrument. I’m sure that assuredness let Bonham have the creativeness and fire he had.”

Portnoy, whose Hammer Of The Gods, a Zep tribute band, saw him in a white boiler suit and black bowler hat behind an amber acrylic Bonzo kit, has a unique perspective. “My biggest drum heroes are John Bonham, Keith Moon, Ringo Starr, and Neil Peart, but I think Bonham is the most universally loved. Perhaps Moon was too reckless for some, Ringo too simple for some,

and Peart too technical for some. Yet Bonham’s style was something everyone appreciated, so yes, perhaps he truly was the ultimate rock drummer.”

Is there anyone Portnoy feels embraces that Bonham aesthetic? “Dave Grohl comes to mind. Although Jason Bonham really was the only person for the ‘08 Zeppelin reunion. He did an unbelievable job, capturing his dad’s spirit, fire, and style. It was the ultimate tribute. Nobody else should be drumming with Plant, Page, and Jones other than a Bonham!”

GETTING AWAY

Until the end, Bonham continued, almost workman-like, to be Led Zeppelin’s drummer. He escaped the rigors of stardom with his family and friends back home, where he seldom touched drums, but did enjoy listening to everything from Elvis Presley and James Brown to the Stylistics and Supertramp on his jukebox. Open-minded, he evolved with Zeppelin, from a busy basher to the groove-oriented, soul-inspired player heard on *Presence* and *In Through The Out Door*.

Though enamored by the technical audacity of fusion pioneers Billy Cobham, (Narada) Michael Walden, and Alphonse Mouzon, he knew their influence had no place in Zeppelin. All this was a long way from his earliest rehearsals with The New Yardbirds, when his overly busy and extra-loud drumming prompted words of warning. Of course, in those early times Bonham was likely trying to ensure he didn’t get overlooked. He needn’t have worried about that!


THE LAST WORD

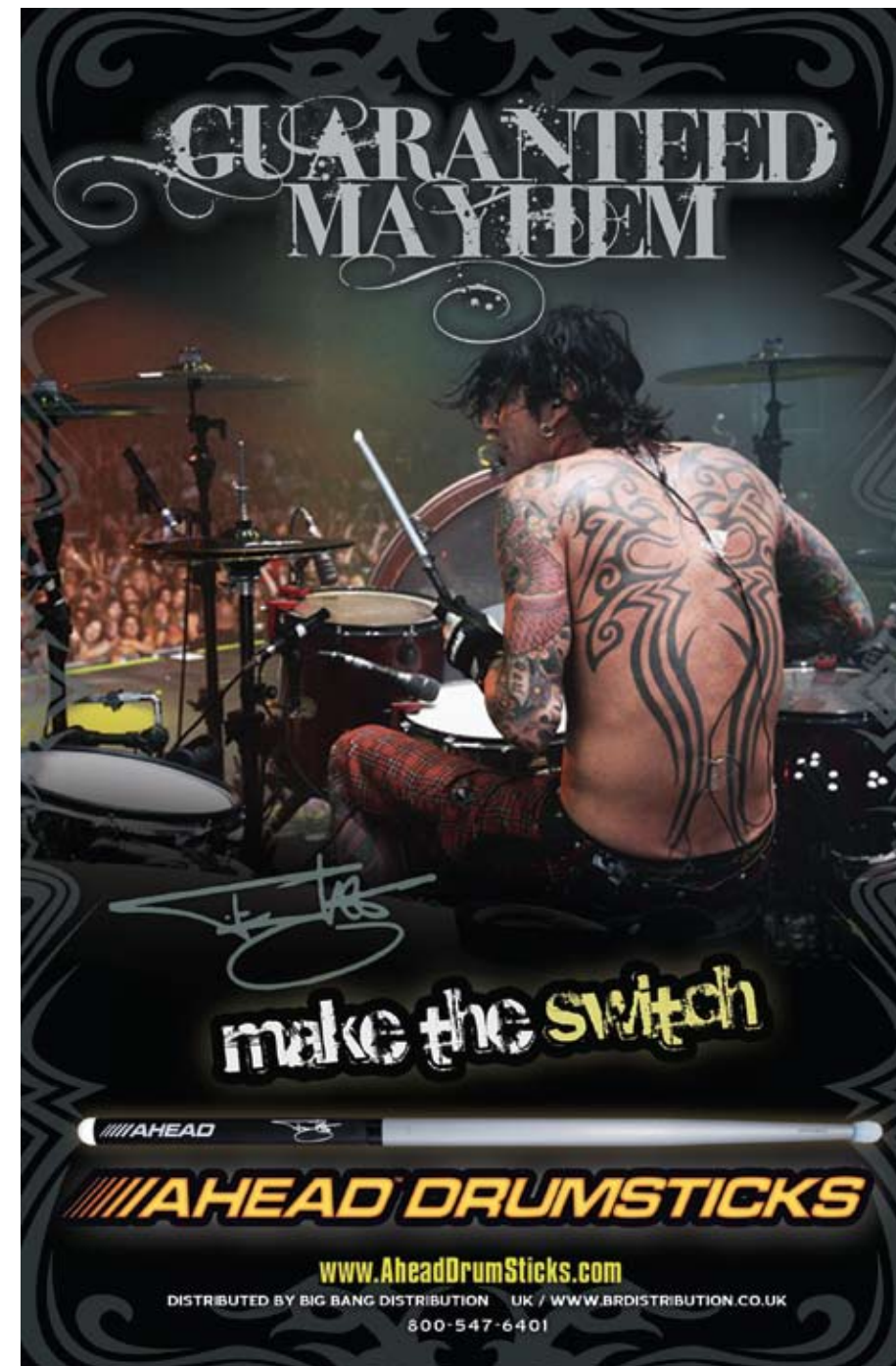
Forty-two years on from those first rehearsals, and exactly 30 years from his demise, how is Bonham remembered? “John Henry Bonham, in my humble opinion,” says Smith emphatically, “is hands down the greatest rock drummer of all time. His sound, technique, musicianship, groove, and feel have never been duplicated. No one comes close today and probably nobody ever will.”

Hughes agrees: “Everyone, from rock stars to milkmen, loves Bonham.”

Hiseman considers the lost potential: “Bonham’s reputation was built in one band, and because of his untimely death we never heard later developments.”

DeVitto considers the options: “If I said he was the best, I would be putting him above Keith Moon, Mick Avory, Bobby Elliott, Micky Waller — but I will say John Bonham was in there with the best of them.”

Without hesitation, Ward fondly remembers Bonham as The One. “Absolutely! I admired him. I respected him. He was the groove master. He wrote the bible on rock drumming. To learn the primal basis that will bring a drummer up to the current era of rock or metal drumming, one has to listen to John Bonham. He was an institution unto himself. He was his own guy. Thank you, Mr. Bonham.” 



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THE BONHAMISMS THAT SHAPED ROCK DRUMMING



FEW DRUMMERS LEAVE THEIR MARK on a style of music as definitively as John Bonham did on rock. It's impossible to imagine where rock drumming would be without him. That's not to say many of us play like him, just that his style of drumming has made an impression on every drummer who's ever heard him. How often have we identified a drum sound; a groove or fill; or even a laid-back, slightly swung feel as a Bonhamism? His massive sound, incredible feel, and innovative drum parts are the benchmark against which other rock drummers are invariably measured. In fact, the only thing we might selfishly hold against him is that he died so prematurely, even foolishly, denying us many more years of brilliant drumming. Fortunately, he and Led Zeppelin left us a lot of great music to enjoy.

"Achilles Last Stand" Presence (1976)

Choosing songs that showcase Bonham's abilities is easy: Just pick any Zeppelin song. "Achilles Last Stand" is a particularly good example, though. In this song, he plays a driving groove that served as the inspiration for Michael DeRosier's groove on Heart's "Barracuda." No wonder why, it just feels great. This song is about ten-and-a-half minutes long, and proves Bonham had one hell of a right foot, with endurance that makes him hard to follow. The interesting part of this song happens during Jimmy Page's great guitar solo. The band executes a metric modulation to a slower tempo, and changes to 5/4 meter, at which point the eighth-note shifts to the value of a quarter-note triplet. Bonham plays a series of triplets in 5/4 at the new tempo. In the transcription of the pattern's variation, I've indicated where the original tempo lies in relation to the new one to help you understand the complexity of this modulation.

"When The Levee Breaks" Led Zeppelin IV (1971)

This simple groove has it all: great feel and an absolutely massive sound captured with just two microphones. At 5:22 or so we find a classic "Bonhamism," single-footed bass drum triplets played between hi-hat notes.

"The Immigrant Song" Led Zeppelin III (1970)

This song is fairly repetitive, which makes learning the drum part easier. However, there is a downside to this. The tempo is just bright enough that the repetitive bass drum pattern can begin to feel like you're running a one-legged marathon

"Achilles Last Stand"

♩ = 137
Intro / Verse

Guitar Solo

Metric Modulation

Variation

Repeat 4 Times

Original eighth note is a quarter triplet in the new tempo

"When The Levee Breaks"

♩ = 70
Intro

1:04

5:22

"The Immigrant Song"

♩ = 109
Intro

about midway through it. Maintaining the tempo, then, can become a challenge, especially if your band counts the song off a little too fast. No double pedals allowed! Using a double pedal on a Zeppelin song would be like farting in the presence of the Pope. You could die from the shame of it! The only subtleties to this punishing groove are the ghosted snare notes on the *ah* of 2 and 4.

"Rock And Roll" Led Zeppelin IV (1971)

This is one of the most recognizable drum intros ever recorded. From the first sloshy hi-hat note to the last, this drum part is instantly recognizable to drummers and non-drummers alike. It has been featured in movies, commercials, and is the choice of thousands of bands for the last song of the night. So let's give credit where credit is long overdue, to the great Charles Connor. Er, what? That's right, Bonham didn't create the intro to this song; he borrowed it, note for note and almost accent for accent, from Connor's drum intro to Little Richard's 1958 hit song "Keep A Knockin'." Don't be shocked. Led Zeppelin got most of their inspiration from early rock and roll and blues artists.

Despite this intro's popularity, most drummers still don't play it right. Here are two tricks to playing it correctly: The first is to recognize that it begins on the & of beat 3. Second, both Connor and Bonham used both hands simultaneously throughout, making it very powerful, and that much more challenging.

"Fool In The Rain" In Through The Out Door (1979)

This tune is one of the best examples of Bonham's impeccable sense of groove. Here he plays a funky half-time shuffle for the intro and verses that just feels great. He opens the hi-hat on the *ah* of beat 1 and uses ghost notes to perfectly set up the accented snare hit on beat 3. He plays a great fill that sets up the change into and out of the chorus, where he moves to quarter-note triplets on his ride, making the groove feel faster than the verse.

This beat is a variation on the infamous "Purdie Shuffle," which the great Bernard Purdie first laid to tape on the song "Home At Last" from Steely Dan's 1977 album, *Aja*. Both grooves are half-time shuffles and use ghost notes for added motion. Incidentally, Jeff Porcaro pulled inspiration from Bonham's "Fool In The Rain" beat (and, by implication, Purdie's shuffle), as well as the Bo Diddley beat, when he created his great groove for the Toto song "Rosanna."

"Rock And Roll"

♩ = 162
Intro

Outro *freely*

"Fool In The Rain"

♩ = 133
Intro

1:12

1:24

"Purdie Shuffle" (By Bernard Purdie)

♩ = 124
2:27