"Rock and Roll" Led Zeppelin

By Dave Rubin

It takes cojones to name a song "Rock and Roll," as if it were the embodiment of the genre. But consider the source: Led Zeppelin ruled hard blues-rock in the 1970s with a macho, testosterone-drenched swagger both onstage and off—just ask Pamela Des Barres! Those androgynous-looking British chaps were no poseurs, however. Led by superstar guitarist Jimmy Page, the mighty Zep roared on record like a 20-ton locomotive, breathing fire and brimstone fueled by the hippest blues licks east of the Atlantic Ocean. "Rock and Roll," later the background music of more than one boomer TV commercial, girded the album that many believe to be Zep’s best—Led Zeppelin IV (1971), or "Zoso," as the band had original-ly titled it. As surely as "Stairway to Heaven" could have been dubbed "Power Ballad," "Rock and Roll" earned its props with a drum intro lifted from Little Richard’s "Keep a Knockin'" (1957)—a boogie groove that growled like a souped-up "Rocket 88"—and a fingers-flying, orgasmic solo, tone as brown as the Mississippi River. In short: rock ‘n’ roll at its finest.

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME

Except for the interlude and guitar solo, "Rock and Roll" has been streamlined down to one essential guitar part. Following the late Bonzo Bonham’s rim-cracking intro, "Pagey" serves up a 12-measure I–IV–V rhythm solo (Rhy. Figs 1 and 1A) to set the table. Dig how he takes the traditional elements of 5ths, 6ths and 7ths (A–E, A–F♯ and A–G in the key of A major, for example) found in boogie patterns and rearranges them into a memorable two-measure riff spiked with a nasty half-step bend of the low 3rd to the major 3rd (relative to each change). Fig. 1 contains a variation similar to Link Wray’s "Raw-Hide" (1959), which may indeed have influenced "Rock and Roll."

LET ME GET BACK

Page creates a new pattern for the verse with a spacious four-measure riff—over I (A7) and IV (D7) chords—that stands in dynamic contrast to the barely contained, compressed energy of the intro. Consisting simply of 5ths (preceded by a bass note, the bluesy 3rd) stated in measures 1–3, with a bit of propulsive syncopation in measure 4, the riff also recalls the glorious past and gives a nod to rockabilly. Fig. 2, a riff based on Elvis Presley’s 1955 version of Little Junior Parker’s classic number "Mystery Train," reveals how guitarist Scotty Moore incorporated a similar concept.

OOH YEAH, OOH YEAH

Following the 12-bar interlude, with its repeating A minor pentatonic motif, Page leaves his mark on rock ‘n’ roll history with an iconic 24-measure solo. His raucous romp through the A minor pentatonic scale, with a touch of A major pentatonic (A–B–C♯–E–F) thrown in for a little diatonic melody, is a masterpiece of dynamic tension and release. Repeating triplets are always a great way to create musical tension, and Page lashes his solo with them in measures 1–4, 8, and 19–20. Triplets also add flash—an appealing aspect of Page’s style, in addition to his bona fide blues chops. Fig. 3 shows a gaudy series of triplet pull-offs in the open position of the E blues scale (with grace notes from the major scale), favored by neo-rockabilly cats like Brian Setzer.

TONE ZONE

GUITARS 1 & 2: Solidbody
PICKUP/POSITION: Single-coil/bridge
GAIN: 8
EQ: Bass/Mid/Treble: 6/6/7

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ROCK AND ROLL
As Recorded by Led Zeppelin
(From the Atlantic Recording LED ZEPPELIN IV)

Music and Lyrics by Jimmy Page, Robert Plant,
John Paul Jones and John Bonham

Intro
Fast Rock \( \frac{j}{\text{bpm}} = 172 \)

Gtr. 1 (dist.)
A7
Rhy. Fig. 1

End Rhy. Fig. 1A Rhy. Fig. 1A

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132 GUITAR ONE © guitaronemag.com © AUGUST 2004
6e Verse
3rd time, Gtr. 2 tacet
A7

1. S'been a long time since I rock and rolled.
2. been a long time since "The Book of Love."
3. See additional lyrics

Rhy. Fig. 2

It's been a long time since I did the stroll.
I can't count... the tears of a life with no love...

Ooh, let me get it back, let me carry me back, let me
carry me back,
carry me back,

baby, where I come from.
It's been a long time, been a long time, been a long time.

To Coda

lonely, lonely, lonely, lonely, lonely, lonely

End Rhy. Fig. 2

1. Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1
   A7
   time.
   Yes it has.

2. It's

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1
A7
time.

Ah.
Rock and Roll
Rock and Roll

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1

A7

D.S. al Coda

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1

A7

Outro

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (2 times)

A9

picky 4 times

time.

Yeah, hey.

Gtr. 1

D7

P.M. | P.M. | P.M. | P.M. | P.M.

0000 0000 0000 0000 0000 0000 0000 2-4 | 2-4 | 2-4 | 2-4

Gtr. 1: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1

A7

Ooh, yeah, ooh, yeah.
Rock and Roll

Additional Lyrics

3. Seems so long since we walked in the moonlight,
   Making vows that just couldn’t work right.
   Open your arms, open your arms, open your arms,
   Baby, let my love come running in.
   It’s been a long time, been a long time,
   Been a long, lonely, lonely, lonely, lonely time.