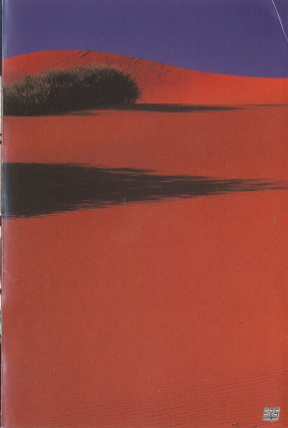


LIVE AT THE
ROYAL ALBERT HALL



LED ZEPPELIN

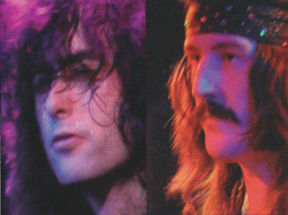
ONE of the most fascinating aspects of this DVD collection is that it captures, intimately for the first time, a band that famously fought shy of the cameras throughout its career. Despite the record-breaking tours and millions of albums sold, Led Zeppelin at their height maintained an inaccessible relationship with the media. Few press photos, even fewer press interviews, and an almost allergic reaction to the idea of appearing on TV; they refused even to release singles in the UK.



Until now, the only official document of the live Led Zeppelin experience was the 1976 movie *The Song Remains The Same*, which featured clips of the band performing in New York in 1973. The idea for this DVD collection – the first official new Led Zeppelin visual material of any kind for over 25 years – was to try and rectify that: bequeathing something of real value to fans from that period, as well as allowing a whole new generation of people who weren't there first time around to get a chance to see what Led Zeppelin was really all about.

With a combined running time of over five hours, the shows that the bulk of the material comes from – Albert Hall 1970, Madison Square Garden 1973, Earls Court 1975, and Knebworth 1979 – were all, in their different ways, landmark occasions for Zeppelin: decisive moments in time that, sewn together like this, provide a compelling snapshot portrait of their career as a live band.

To see such scenes as the acoustic section of the show at Earls Court brought back to life with such vivid clarity is an astonishing experience; one made possible only recently with the arrival of modern digital technology. The Albert Hall footage, which was originally shot by Stanley Dorfman over 30 years ago using two 16mm film cameras, looks and sounds like it was recorded yesterday. It's the same with all the material, with the cumulative effect that the close-up footage from Knebworth, for example, is almost too real.



Starting with 132 cans of film negatives, two sets of two-inch video tape from the Earls Court and Knebworth shows, a small amount of bootleg material, plus a few clips of some of their earliest TV appearances, the resulting footage has turned up some incredible hidden gems. "It's been an epic project," says Jimmy Page, "and not without its frustrations. We really went through the vaults. People thought we had lots of different stuff to choose from but we didn't. The main thing was to make the best of what we did have, with the added benefit now of technology way in advance of anything they thought of back in the seventies."

Another interesting device is the occasional, fluttering use of existing bootleg footage, juxtaposed against the vivid clarity of the new footage; specifically in the footage from Madison Square Garden in '73 and the Knebworth shows six years later. While not advocating bootlegs, the band felt it important not to limit themselves in what they could do. This broader view includes other incidental material on the menus giving the collection an almost documentary feel.

The Knebworth footage, for example, far exceeds what might have been possible had it ever been released as a straightforward concert film. Apart from the video recordings from the giant stage-screen that appeared behind them on the Knebworth stage, there is also

some great stuff shot on isolated cameras from the audience interwoven into the official footage. The idea, as with all the concert footage is to try and give some feeling for what it was like to actually be at those shows from as many different perspectives – literally, as many angles – as possible.

The whole process took almost a year to complete. Inevitably, there were some glitches along the way: there was only one version of 'Achilles Last Stand' from Knebworth, for example. And the biting version of 'Heartbreaker' from the Albert Hall was missing the final reel, which is why only a snatch of the audio version is used as a backdrop on one of the sidebars.

Director Dick Carruthers – whose previous credits include working with The Who, the Rolling Stones and Oasis – describes the process as "like building a cathedral out of matchsticks." In order just to view the original two-inch video tapes from Earl's Court and Knebworth, he says, "first we had to find a machine that could actually play them. Two-inch video tape is now an obsolete medium." Having finally located an old two-inch video-recorder that still played without chewing everything up after a search that would take them as far as Singapore and back, the 25-year-old tapes were then put through a restoration process that included, bizarrely, baking them at 55 degrees for three weeks in a specially made 'oven'. The concern was that the tapes were so worn that if they didn't get it right they might actually finish up with no images at all.

Fortunately, the images they got back were "pretty astounding" although still not perfect, in places pockmarked by 'microphony' (those shaky lines that appear whenever the sound suddenly becomes louder), and 'chromableed' (where the colours appear to smudge). Digitally removing those faults alone became a painstaking process that would take over two months to complete.

Most difficult and time-consuming of all, however, was the process of transposing the original film from Madison Square Garden onto a digital format. Although they were able to locate all the original 1973 footage, including several thousand feet of film that was edited out of the final cut of 'The Song Remains The Same', when they came to look at the original film again they found it had worn so badly that most of it was now in ribbons. Working through it 20 cans at a time, roll by roll, it would eventually take six weeks just to put the four songs featured back together in the right sequence, let alone begin work on restoring them and synchronising the live soundtrack.

Ultimately, the aim was to try and stay as faithful to the original presentation as possible; and while a great deal of time and effort has gone into bringing this material back to life, nothing has been done to try and make the actual performances look or sound better than they did back then.

"We wanted something that would trace the journey of Led Zeppelin as a live band," says Page. "In that context, it's a truly historical document, that's the thing; something that's never been seen before."



LIVE AT THE
ROYAL ALBERT HALL
(1970)

WE'RE GONNA GROOVE
I CAN'T QUIT YOU BABY
DAZED AND CONFUSED
WHITE SUMMER
WHAT IS AND WHAT SHOULD NEVER BE
HOW MANY MORE TIMES
MOBY DICK
WHOLE LOTTA LOVE
COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN
C'MON EVERYBODY
SOMETHING ELSE
BRING IT ON HOME

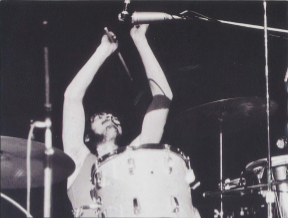


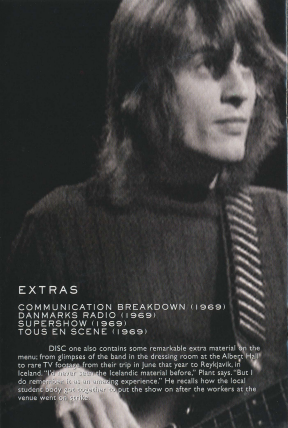
BY the time they walked on stage at The Royal Albert Hall on January 9, 1970, Led Zeppelin was barely a year old and already a full-blown phenomenon. The second Zeppelin album, released just three months before, had been No. 1 in both Britain and America and this was the third night of a seven-city British tour which marked their first live performances in two months.

Originally pro-shot on 16mm film for a BBC TV documentary, the Albert Hall performance is weighty, detailed and not a single note is thrown away. Zeppelin had played there the previous June, headlining a "Pop Proms" night and they were "England's hottest new band", according to "Disc" magazine. Now they were something else again. Fame may have overtaken them but the band themselves don't appear to have fully caught up yet and what's most striking is the intimacy of the interaction between them on stage.

As Robert Plant observes, "People talk now about the bombast and the dexterity, and while they were key ingredients some of the most crucial elements in the performances were those indefinable moments inside the actual music. There was a feeling of reaching and stretching for something that wasn't quite so evident on the records. Playing live was the real jewel in our existence."

One of the most interesting sequences is watching the 21-year-old John Bonham perform his famous drum solo, 'Moby Dick'. There were other clips of Bonzo doing his solo, of course, but the Albert Hall performance is perhaps the most resonant: beautifully shot, the two cameras zooming in from various angles so that you feel you're practically standing there next to him on stage. It's an exhilarating and unexpectedly poignant moment in an otherwise relentlessly powerhouse performance.





EXTRAS

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN (1969)
DANMARKS RADIO (1969)
SUPERSHOW (1969)
TOUS EN SCENE (1969)

DISC one also contains some remarkable extra material in the menu; from glimpses of the band in the dressing room at the Albert Hall to rare TV footage from their trip in June that year to Reykjavik, in Iceland. "I've never seen the Icelandic material before," Plant says. "But I do remember it as an amazing experience." He recalls how the local student body got together to put the show on after the workers at the venue went on strike.

Another charming oddity is a 1969 black-and-white promo film, for 'Communication Breakdown', recently discovered footage featuring a very young Zeppelin proving they could make it with the best of them, Bonham stick-twirling to impressive effect while Jimmy gives it all he's got on the backing vocals.

Most fascinating of all, of course, are the handful of clips taken from various TV shows the band appeared on in their very earliest days.

"We always felt very ambivalent about our appearances on TV," recalls Plant. "No matter how well you performed, you were always at the mercy of the aloof studio engineers, most of whom had no idea how to record a live band like us."

The version of 'Communication Breakdown' / 'Dazed And Confused', recorded for the French TV show 'Tous En Scene', in Paris, in June 1969, is a typically incongruous example. Beginning with a backstage shot of the band getting ready to go on, while they do well to battle against an alluring monitor system – Bonzo, in particular, putting up a tremendous fight – this French variety show was a bizarre setting for a group like Zeppelin, as evidenced by the straitlaced, middle-aged crowd.

"It's strange, yes," says Page, "but we wanted to show it because that's the reason we decided not to do any more TV after becoming disenchanted by the audio-video presentation that TV provided – so that suddenly makes it an important part of the story that shows why we went off in the direction we did."

The March 1969 footage of the band performing live on Danish TV show 'TV-Byen' is the exception that proves the rule, however: shot in black-and-white, the band working their way with ease through a bristling four-song set in front of a small studio audience of mainly teenagers seated cross-legged on the floor; this is vintage stuff from a young band out to prove themselves.

As John Paul Jones observes, "Other big name groups released singles, therefore they did a lot of television, but we didn't. In Denmark the radio wasn't very good and that TV show was about the only outlet they had. It was probably the one TV show we ever did that we really enjoyed."

The colour footage of 'Dazed And Confused' also featured in this section was originally recorded live the same month for a British TV show called 'Supershow'. Again, while it demonstrates the difficulties inherent in trying to convey the live Zeppelin experience in the ill-equipped TV studios of the day, the fact that the band still managed to make such a good fist of it makes fascinating viewing. After that though, it was decided: no more TV shows.

From now on Led Zeppelin would only be seen performing together live on stage – or not at all.

Robert Plant:
Vocals and Harmonica
Jimmy Page:
Electric and Acoustic Guitars
John Paul Jones:
Bass Guitar, Keyboards and Mandolin
John Bonham:
Drums and Percussion

'Communication Breakdown' promo appears courtesy of
Route 66 - The Years Productions LLC on behalf of SVT
'Communication Breakdown' Baby, I'm Going To Leave You / How Many More Times'
- DR TV - Danish Broadcasting Corporation

'Communication Breakdown' - INA - Institut National de l'Audiovisuel
Archive material supplied by Icelandic National Broadcasting Service
Royal Albert Hall film sequences filmed by Stanley Darkin

