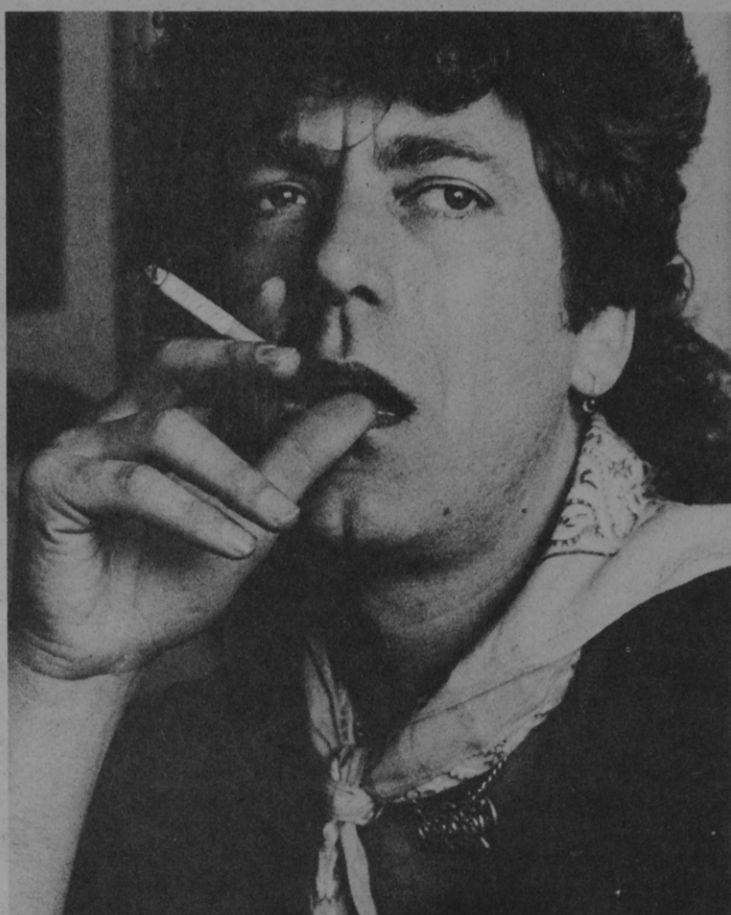




PHOTOS BY KERRY BROWN



# ROBERT PLANT

Indulging in a near-primal scream approach to vocalising, Robert Plant, with Led Zeppelin, belted out a series of heavy classics which made the band a household name in the 70s.

On the death of drummer John Bonham the band ceased to exist and Plant retreated into the clubs, playing blues-orientated material with a bunch of musicians called the Honeydrippers. With that band's guitarist, and long-time friend, Robbie Blunt, he opted for a more challenging venture and recorded the fine solo debut *Pictures at Eleven*. Out of that album came the nucleus of his new band and they recorded the highly successful *Principle of Moments* before taking to the road on an exhaustive tour through the UK and the States.

I spoke to a relaxed and cheerful Robert Plant at the new stop-off point for visiting artists, the Sheraton Hotel, prior to his only New Zealand concert at Mt Smart Stadium.

In contrast to your days with Led Zeppelin, have you found the transition to taking your new band on the road for the first time difficult?

"I'm far more conscious of what I'm doing now. Led Zeppelin was just a natural reaction to getting up in the morning. People in the equivalent position to myself, perhaps Townshend and McCartney, who go off and do something on their own may choose to carry the flag of the past directly into their new work, like Townshend using some of the better Who material he wrote, but I wanted to make it a virtually clean break."

So no Zeppelin material?

"I'm never gonna change that."

Have you run into problems with audiences wanting the Zeppelin standards?

"A little bit in England. All being well, within 10 minutes the show has a momentum of its own — whether they want to hear 'Whole Lotta Love' or 'Communication Breakdown' — this compensates because of its intensity and dynamics, which is the only thing that is akin to the past."

Your last album has a more mellow feel. Are we going to see a more mellow Robert Plant in future?

"I doubt it. It's pretty much a mirror of the emotions I felt at the time. There has to be change. I can't write 'Big Log' a thousand times."

'Other Arms', the opening track, seems like a hangover from the first album.

"It's a piss-take. It was written intentionally to take the piss. It was like having a sarcastic nudge at all that adult-oriented radio rock in the USA, where there's no style, no distinction at all — it could be Loverboy, it could be REO Speedwagon. We mean it when we play it, but at the same time the whole mental approach was yeah, let's get on that bandwagon and then we'll start the album."

Principle seems much more a group effort.

"That's pertinent because it means the band is becoming more and more a band. I have a good time with those fellas. It's more comfortable writing together, whereas before Robbie and I knew each other and the others were virtually strangers."

You've used a variety of drummers on your recordings and you started the tour with Phil Collins on drums and now Richard Hayworth is with you.

"Yeah, Richard's with us more or less permanently. Phil wanted to be a drummer in a rock 'n' roll band but we are not a rock 'n' roll band — the music never actually takes off. Besides, his Genesis commitments take up his time. Richard fitted in instantly, even with the Barriemore Barlow stuff, which is not easy to play. Barlow's contribution to the last record is probably the most imaginative drumming I've ever heard — it was like musical geometry."

Zeppelin's concerts were always dominated by a standard — like 'Stairway to Heaven'. Has a new standard emerged from the current repertoire?

"I think 'In the Mood' is actually doing that, because it has a kind of hypnotic quality. None of the stuff is lightweight, straightforward pop. I'm noting reactions — 'Horizontal Departure' seems popular, 'Slow Dancer' is probably the most popular."

Are you presenting new material in the current show?

"No. We've got lots on the shelf but it has a different feel again. I mean, I might as well be back at that place we played 11 years ago because I've some stuff that would make people's

hair curl. Those who like the thunder and lightning approach. I want to draw on a whole new crowd of people."

How about your stint with the Honeydrippers?

"It was just a fun thing. I was in a position where in the imagination of the public I was locked in my ivory tower, which is where I've never been. I've seen it and I've seen people waving from windows of ivory towers but I've only waved back and walked off. The only place I could start again was in bars and clubs, to go out and play without any bullshit and advertising. Lots of people do it, but if you're Mick or Keith you can only do it one night in one town and then you've got to scarpers again. But I did it because I had to, from the time we lost Bonzo, I had to free myself. I couldn't hang on with Jimmy waiting to find the right drummer and trying to write songs that were a bit different."

"People said you're mad and I said 'yeah, but I'm playing and having a good time and getting paid 25 quid for it'. I had to start shaping and getting to know people without the kind of massive psychological disadvantage that I had, coming from such a gargantuan beast. 'Sons of thunder', it said in your newspapers the last time we left. I've danced with the sisters of mercy."

In Led Zeppelin you were writing with Jimmy Page. Is it the singer-guitarist collaboration again?

"No, it's not. In fact, it never really was like that. In the latter days, it was me and Page, because I used to be at the rehearsals and he would still be in bed. And it would be me and Jonesy and Page would come along and say, 'Oh why don't you do that?'"

"When we did *In Through the Out Door* it was Jonesy and I and Bonzo in the main. Now we get in a room and just play and if anybody comes up with anything at home it's always embellished by the team. Everybody's really keen, it's not a closed shop."

Would you describe yourself as a traditionalist?

"No. The one thing I can't be is a traditionalist, otherwise I might as well just go off and play with Ten Years After or something, but I'm not of that ilk. I come from the corner of the room and the side of the dish, if you like."

You haven't dabbled much with synthesisers?

"The keyboards are far more prominent on the present album but you can't use keyboards too much without becoming unemotional. You have to have the guitar to give it some feel. I suppose when Big Country brought guitar back into modern music we were all saved, although we hadn't been anywhere."

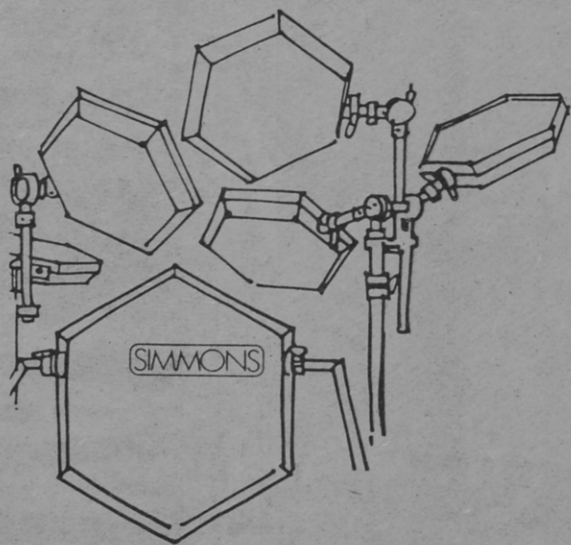
How about the rise in recent years of bands that are clinical in sound and depend on flashy videos?

"Absolutely, yeah. A lot of bands must have broken up because they got bored stiff with it, a lot of it was so uninspiring. As far as video goes, I agree that flashy videos, or state of the art, as they call them in America, have become the order of the day. I think 'Big Log' was among all that."

"Our current video for 'In the Mood' takes the piss out of the whole thing. I thought well fuck all this big cars and emotive women dripping all over the screen. You can only go so far with three minutes of video. So long as I can feel comfortable with how I'm representing myself on video then I'll play the game. If I don't lose so much potential exposure for my songs."

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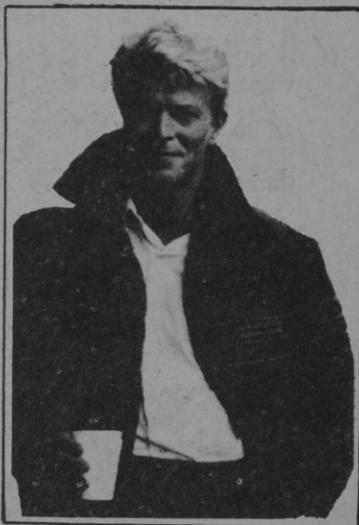
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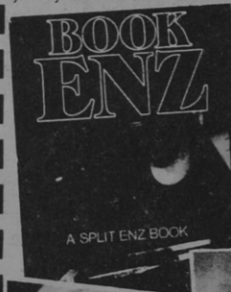
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