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By John Mendelsohn

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The popular formula in England in this, the aftermath era of such successful British bluesmen as Cream and John Mayall, seems to be: add, to an excellent guitarist who, since leaving the Yardbirds and/or Mayall, has become a minor musical deity, a competent rhythm section and pretty soul-belter who can do a good spade imitation. The latest of the British blues groups so conceived offers little that its twin, the Jeff Beck Group, didn't say as well or better three months ago, and the excesses of the Beck group's *Truth* album (most notably its self-indulgence and restrictedness), are fully in evidence on Led Zeppelin's debut album.

Jimmy Page, around whom the Zeppelin revolves, is, admittedly, an extraordinarily proficient blues guitarist and explorer of his instrument's electronic capabilities. Unfortunately, he is also a very limited producer and a writer of weak, unimaginative songs, and the Zeppelin album suffers from his having both produced it and written most of it (alone or in combination with his accomplices in the group).

The album opens with lots of guitar/rhythm section exchanges (in the fashion of Beck's "Shapes of Things" on "Good Times Bad Times," which might have been ideal for a Yardbirds' B-side. Here, as almost everywhere else on the album, it is Page's guitar that provides most of the excitement. "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" alternates between prissy Robert Plant's howled vocals fronting an acoustic guitar and driving choruses of the band running down a four-chord progression while John Bonham smashes his cymbals on every beat. The song is very dull in places (especially on the vocal passages), very redundant, and certainly not worth the six-and-a-half minutes the Zeppelin gives it.

Two much-overdone Willie Dixon blues standards fail to be revived by being turned into showcases for Page and Plant. "You Shook Me" is the more interesting of the two — at the

end of each line Plant's echo-chambered voice drops into a small explosion of fuzz-tone guitar, with which it matches shrieks at the end.

The album's most representative cut is "How Many More Times." Here a jazzy introduction gives way to a driving (albeit monotonous) guitar-dominated background for Plant's strained and unconvincing shouting (he may be as foppish as Rod Stewart, but he's nowhere near so exciting, especially in the higher registers). A fine Page solo then leads the band into what sounds like a backwards version of the Page-composed "Beck's Bolero," hence to a little snatch of Albert King's "The Hunter," and finally to an avalanche of drums and shouting.

In their willingness to waste their considerable talent on unworthy material the Zeppelin has produced an album which is sadly reminiscent of *Truth*. Like the Beck group they are also perfectly willing to make themselves a two- (or, more accurately, one-a-half) man show. It would seem that, if they're to help fill the void created by the demise of Cream, they will have to find a producer (and editor) and some material worthy of their collective attention.