

Music

# Chip off the old rock

With his own band, Jason Bonham preserves Led Zeppelin's — and his dad's — heavy legacies

By Mallory Abreu  
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After years of yearning for Led Zeppelin to reunite, Jason Bonham has finally found solace in honoring his father.

"I started it as therapy, I think," says Bonham by phone of his tribute band, Jason Bonham's Led Zeppelin Experience, which performs at the House of Blues on Saturday. "In my life, there's always been talk of a Led Zeppelin reunion... I was just so disappointed for years that it never happened. As soon as I would let the possibility go, next thing you know there's a phone call, and then it was on again."

The son of late Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham, Jason was exposed to stardom at an early age. Before he founded JBLZE in 2010, Bonham played and off again with Led Zeppelin's remaining members — Robert Plant, Jimmy Page, and John Paul Jones — most memorably in their 2007 reunion concert at London's O2 Arena.

"When you're involved with those guys, you're being involved in one of the biggest bands in the world," Bonham says. "You can kind of get lost in the hype." As a child, he remembers staring in disbelief when told that 84,000 people crowded into a stadium were waiting for his father's band to play — the same father who, at home, would put on the jukebox and watch as his son played along on his drum kit.

Over the years, Bonham has worked tirelessly to perfect his drumming, citing his father as his hero. He remembers how Plant and Page especially would see bits of his father in his mannerisms, his tendency toward recklessness, and his ability to maintain the steady pulsing rhythm integral to Zeppelin's sound.

Although working with Plant,



JEFF DALY/INVISION/AP

Page, and Jones was largely successful, Bonham came to realize that re-creating the organic chemistry between the founding four would never be possible. "It was once, eight years ago yesterday, that [Plant] said to me, 'Without a shadow of a doubt, there is no one who can play it like you, other than your father — [but] you're not your father, and to me, Led Zeppelin was with your dad,'" Bonham says. "And I get it. I'm OK with that."

Letting go of his father's musical career and moving on with his own has allowed Bonham to perpetuate Zeppelin's legacy, through what he calls his "fun gig," while also pursuing

**JASON BONHAM'S LED ZEPPELIN EXPERIENCE**  
At House of Blues, Saturday at 6 p.m. Tickets \$35. 800-653-8000, www.livenation.com

"The musicianship of the band was so big that they could just follow each other... They could take it as the mood went," says Jason Bonham (above), about Led Zeppelin.

his own interests — drumming in Sammy Hagar's band the Circle, to name just one. He plays around 30 shows a year with JBLZE — each night a different combination of set list and improvisation, true to Led Zeppelin's jam-oriented vibe.

"Some of their best songs were 25 minutes long, where they would go off on a whole other tangent," recalls Bonham. "The musicianship of the band was so big that they could just follow each other... They could take it as the mood went. The one thing I try to capture when I do the shows is this spirit of what Led Zeppelin always had to offer — the element of a 'jam.' Bon-

ham also sets out to create a multi-dimensional experience, combining Zeppelin music with home videos and other footage. With his father playing on screen, the Bonhams are able to drum together: something the two were never able to do while Bonzo was alive.

"There was only ever one drum kit, so we never got to play together at the same time," explains Bonham. "[My dad] played to say his dream was to have him play side by side with me at Madison Square Garden, and we never got a chance to do that. So I've been kind of fulfilling these dreams, for the last five years, doing this."

And essentially, Bonham's Led Zeppelin Experience is exactly that: a way for him to share his father's life and music with a crowd that wants the experience to survive as much as he does. "I've grown up around [Led Zeppelin], I've played with them, have a slight different insight than some of the other [cover bands]," he says. "So this is very heartfelt to me. That's why it's my experience, my Led Zeppelin Experience — for me, it's the different stories I tell the audience."

In return, he receives heartfelt responses from the audience. Reflecting on one man who told him about leading in line for two days to see a Led Zeppelin concert in 1980, only to find out that the show was canceled because John Bonham had died that day, Bonham explains his project's transformation.

"I suddenly thought to myself, this is more than just about how I'm missing him," he explains. "I'd forgotten that there's a whole audience here, and they lost their drummer. They lost their favorite band." Perhaps, with Bonzo living on through his son, they don't have to mourn just yet.

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