

## 'Becoming Led Zeppelin' Is One Wild Ride

By Kevin Dauray

Even if you knew nothing about the mighty Led Zeppelin before checking out “Becoming Led Zeppelin,” the new documentary from director Bernard MacMahon, it is clear from the start that the British quartet was a different band. The 2025 film, released in theaters in February for a short run in IMAX, tells a familiar story, but it has never before been this immersive and engaging.

For the first ten seconds or so as a few credits run over a black screen, there is no sound. Then all of a sudden, the drum pattern of “Good Times Bad Times” kicks in. It catches your attention. From that point on, I could not, nor did I want to, take my eyes off the screen.

The film features all-new interviews with the surviving band members – singer Robert Plant, guitarist Jimmy Page, and bassist and keyboardist John Paul Jones. Each discusses his respective childhood, which for many famous bands of the Sixties meant growing up in war-torn England. Influences are covered – Lonnie Donegan for Page, Little Richard for Plant. But what makes the early moments of this film so captivating is recently uncovered audio interviews from drummer John Bonham, who died in 1980 leading to the band’s breakup. For a man who played as if possessed, it’s quite captivating to hear his quiet, gentle speaking voice.

Zeppelin’s sound was not only something fresh following the popularity of psychedelic music. The way these four individuals came together was practically unheard of. John Paul Jones, at just 14, was making a living as an organist and choirmaster in a church. It was only after meeting Page in his twenties during studio sessions – including Shirley Bassey’s “Goldfinger” where they played in the rhythm section – that he decided to take a chance. Page, for his part, besides being a renowned session man, was also the lead guitarist of the Yardbirds, a group whose alumni also included Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck. Once the Yardbirds split, Page decided to take all that he had learned from his studio work and do something that excited him. The two had heard about Bonham, saw him at a gig, and asked him to join, despite reservations from his wife. Bonham was a family man, and he knew touring would take him away from what he cared about most. But with this band, they all felt something different was in the air. Peter Grant, Zeppelin’s manager, offered to help Page however he could since he too was out of work with the Yardbirds split. And once they saw Plant perform, there was no question he would join. At just 19, he already had full control of his voice. But he wasn’t the first choice. Terry Reid, like Pete Best, would go down in history as a guy who missed the chance to become immortal.

“Becoming Led Zeppelin” does make use of footage that’s been out for decades. A lot of it can be found on the fantastic “Led Zeppelin DVD” set released in 2003. But the story is so well told, and the footage used so expertly, that it doesn’t matter. I laughed again seeing the quartet perform before a French audience who had their hands over their ears. Strangely, Led Zeppelin couldn’t get booked in England. Their first tour was Scandinavia, and they played America before they were accepted at home. You could say they did the opposite of Jimi Hendrix, who made it in England and went back to the U.S.

The thing I was most fascinated by was learning that they recorded their classic debut album and then shopped for a label. The album was already mixed and finalized before they met Jerry Wexler, head of Atlantic Records, who signed them immediately. Keep in mind, this wasn’t a demo. It’s the vinyl record that is sitting near me as I write this review.

If you think you've heard and seen everything about Led Zeppelin, you're wrong. "Becoming Led Zeppelin" at 122 minutes is well worth your time and money. Considering it covers only 1968 to 1970, I was a little disappointed when it ended. There's much more to go. Maybe "Stairway to Heaven" and "Physical Graffiti" will be explored in another film. Zeppelin fans can only hope.

Rated PG-13. Find it on Prime Video, YouTube, AppleTV, and Fandango at Home for rental (\$19.99) or purchase (\$24.99).

### **Back In Theaters**

The documentary is back in theaters due to its massive popularity. It is being shown at AMC Hoffman Center 22 through May 15. Discounted tickets are available. I saw it yesterday (May 13) for only \$10 by using the Fandango app. I went to the theater for the surround sound experience, and it was just what I expected: good and loud. As the only person there, I had my very own personal Led Zeppelin concert. Whenever the band started another tune, I could feel the grin spread across my face as vibrations coarsed through my body. Catch it while you can.