

Written by Jeff Ignatius  
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It would be easy to accuse Brent Havens of exploiting two things: the fondness people have for some seminal rock bands, and symphonies' need to diversity their audiences.

But his "The Music of" series - which matches a community symphony orchestra, a live traveling rock band, and classic songs - comes from a place of knowledge. Havens, who arranged the songs for orchestra and conducts, began with Led Zeppelin in 1996 and has expanded the repertoire to include Pink Floyd, The Doors, The Eagles, and Queen. The project has included more than 150 shows, two-thirds of which have been Led Zeppelin, Havens said.

When he presents the Music of Led Zeppelin for the Quad City Symphony Orchestra's Spring Pops concert on May 30, it will be readily apparent that he *knows* the band.

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"One thing that really surprised me was the complexity of the music," he said last week about breaking down the tunes. On "The Ocean," for example, "every bar for the first 16 bars is in a different meter. ... When you're listening to it, you just feel it; it just feels right. You're not sitting there counting it ... ."

Featuring vocalist Randy Jackson of the band Zebra (Jackson also sings with the Pink Floyd, Doors, and Eagles shows), the Music of Led Zeppelin takes listeners through album versions of famous songs augmented by the orchestra. Like Metallica's *S&M*, The Music of Led Zeppelin doesn't replace a rock band with a symphony; it puts the two together.

"These tunes were always very rich," Havens said. "But this adds yet that other dimension, that other sense of color there."

When he was first approached about the project by the Virginia Symphony, though, the concept was that the orchestra alone would re-create the music. Havens said he was skeptical: "I didn't feel that there would be much of an audience for that, because Zeppelin fans really know this music cold - all the guitar solos, all the drum solos, the lyrics, everything. And people who would normally go to a classical concert or even some of the pops concerts wouldn't necessarily know who Led Zeppelin was."

So Havens suggested doing it with a band. The first singer, he said, didn't have the chops to pull off Robert Plant, but Jackson turned out to be a good fit.

Based on a handful of songs, Jackson does an excellent job matching Plant's phrasings, although both his voice and the arrangements seem slightly neutered. Not surprisingly, "Kashmir" works well because it has the orchestration built-in. With the strings matching the lead guitar, "Black Dog" is a strong approximation. In recorded form, though, "Heartbreaker" and "Stairway to Heaven" suffer mostly from not quite being the originals - which will almost surely be rectified by hearing them in a live setting.

As for matching studio versions in concert, Havens said there are practical reasons he doesn't trot out a 29-minute "Dazed & Confused" or a 14-minute "Whole Lotta Love." Audiences aren't as familiar with live versions of the songs, he said, and "we only have two and a half hours with the orchestra. We want to try to get in as many tunes as we can ... ." The Music of Led Zeppelin

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catalog has almost 30 songs in it, and the program varies from show to show.

Although Havens said that "I really tried to stay as close to the originals as possible," he does think the orchestral treatments change the songs in some cases. "Since I've Been Lovin' You" starts with the cellos performing a counter-melody to the guitar and vocal line, with sections of the orchestra entering until it's "this soaring piece of music," he said. "I really feel that the orchestration transformed that piece."

Havens conceded that some orchestra members are less than enthusiastic about performing the works of Page and Plant instead of the more conventional classical canon. But they inevitably come around, he said: "One thing that really goes a long way in soothing that is the orchestra gets six, seven standing ovations a night. And the crowds are not your polite everyday classical crowd ... . The audiences are so enthusiastic that the orchestra can't help but enjoy ... how excited they are."

*The Quad City Symphony Orchestra's Spring Pops concert will be held at the Adler Theatre (136 East Third Street in Davenport) on Saturday, May 30. The show starts at 7:30 p.m., and tickets range from \$16 to \$50. For more information or tickets, visit [QCSymphony.com](http://QCSymphony.com) .*

*For more information on The Music of Led Zeppelin, visit [TheMusicOfLedZeppelin.com](http://TheMusicOfLedZeppelin.com) .*