

Led Zeppelin's first gig as told by the club's teen photographer

by Cathy Bernardy

The 2000 Cameron Crowe movie *Almost Famous* played out many a teenaged music geek's ultimate fantasy — meet and go on tour with a famous rock band. Similarly, many fans of local bands have dreamed about the day *their* faves make the charts and appear on TV — just for the opportunity to revel in the afterglow. “Yeah, I knew them back when they used to play gigs at our high school.”

Rare is the person who has actually lived either of those fan fantasies, let alone both of them. Lucky enough to have access to his mom's camera, Copenhagen, Denmark, photographer Jørgen Angel as a teen took concert pictures for a local hangout's magazine — and just happened to be there the first night that Led Zeppelin played together as a group. Bragging rights don't come much bigger than that.

He had seen The Yardbirds before. Naturally, when they were slated to come back, he was looking forward to the show at Gladaxe Teen Club, which was actually the gymnasium of a school on the outskirts of Copenhagen. Then word started getting around that it wasn't really going to be The Yardbirds, just some fellows calling themselves The New Yardbirds. Disappointment set in.

“It was quite common in those days that a band after splitting up would re-form with only one or two of the original members and calling the band the old name with ‘New’ attached,” he told *Goldmine*. “Imagine if John Lennon without the other three had formed a band called The New Beatles — it wouldn't have been the same, would it?”

After the teen club stint, his career progressed to working for magazines, from being an editor to a freelance photographer, taking photos of bands around Scandinavia, the U.K. and occasionally the U.S., with some of his work ending up in bands' albums and in books. After photographing bands for more than 20 years, though, he decided to put away his 50,000 negatives or so and move on to something that was less of a hassle. The camaraderie of the late-60s underground music scene had dissipated as it all became big business by the mid-80s, and there wasn't a big demand for his old photos.

“One of the last concerts I [shot] was an Electric Light Orchestra show in the early '80s,” he told the United States Led Zeppelin fanzine *Proximity* in 2000. “The management said that there could only be three photographers there and that they could only take photos of the first number on stage, the first song. I was supposed to supply two competing magazines with seven individual super shots. And these 14 sort of ‘hits’ were to be taken within the first song! I was also told

that if I tried to take photos after the first song they would confiscate my equipment.”

He continued, “Then I had to rush back to the darkroom and get everything processed, and the shots went off with a plane around three in the morning, I think, and that was sort of the culmination of things [for me], because these were intolerable conditions. There was absolutely no logical explanation why I should not be allowed to take photos during the whole concert. In my opinion, it was just a matter of the bands and the managers wanting to see how difficult they could make people's lives and still get away with it. Because the more difficult they could be without people saying, ‘Enough is enough,’ the bigger star they were. It's a ridiculous way of measuring it, but I can't think of any other explanation.”

Fast-forward to the mid-90s and the advent of the Internet, and Angel discovered how much interest remained in the bands of his era. He put up a site to sell prints of his vintage photos — many of which have never been seen in publications outside of Denmark — to fans. He has also begun licensing them to magazines again, such as *Goldmine*.

The idea for the Led Zeppelin lithograph developed after he met Robert Plant again in 2001, after three decades.

“There has been great interest for my old photos of the band since I put them on my web site, as they are historical photos,” Angel said. “Not all people can afford hand-made prints, so I thought I would make the best shots from that first performance available at a price of only a few dollars per photo.... I wanted the product to be something for the true Zeppelin fan, a high-quality memorabilia or collectors item, if you like.”

The actual process of cleaning negatives, fixing scratches, printing photos, designing the lithograph and finding a printer (one that specializes in art books) took about six months. “The First Performance” is available for sale on his Web site at www.angel.dk.

Here, he talks with *Goldmine* about that amazing gig.

Goldmine: How did you start taking pictures for the teen club magazine?

Jørgen Angel: When I joined Gladsaxe Teen Club (late 1966 I think it was) taking photos of rock bands had been my interest for a year or so. My sister knew one of the guys who was in charge of the club, so she introduced me to him. They needed someone to take photos for the in-house club magazine, *Teen Club Nyt* (*Teen Club News*) so I was welcomed. All work was done on a voluntary basis — I had to pay for materials myself.



“The First Performance” lithograph by Jørgen Angel of images taken at Led Zeppelin's first-ever gig, at a school gymnasium in Denmark. As a teen armed with his mother's camera, he was even able to get on stage for some angles. Some of the pictures on the lithograph had never even been printed from their negatives before.

“The First Performance”

lithograph by Jørgen Angel

The photographs were taken at the first performance of Led Zeppelin, then performing as The New Yardbirds. “The First Performance” is limited to 750 copies, signed and numbered. It is printed in high-resolution offset lithography in duotone on acid-free paper (200 gsm) with acid-free ink and is protected by acid-free varnish. The printer specializes in art prints. Duotone (or duplex) is a second ink used to give the black-and-white photos more depth and better details in the highlight areas. The lithograph measures 23.5 by 33 inches (60 by 84 cm). For ordering information: www.angel.dk.



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John Bonham, as part of The New Yardbirds — a.k.a. Led Zeppelin's first gig.

At this point in your life did you think that you wanted to be a photographer?

No, not at this point. My father had some shops with men's clothes, so I thought my destiny was selling men's clothes — just like David Coverdale before he became a singer.

Have you always been a big music fan?
Oh yes! I remember when my older sisters got "Rock Around The Clock" by Bill Haley. I wore that poor record down so you could almost hear both sides at the same time.

So how many bands per night? How many months of the year?

Normally three bands per night and only on Saturdays, eight months a year.

Led Zeppelin playing at someone's high school gym! The thought just blows the mind.

Gladsaxe is the name of the municipality. The school was called Egegaard Skole. Yes it blows your mind — now. But then it was just another great band. We had Deep Purple (before Gillan and Glover was in the band) and Ten Years After when Alvin Lee had his curly hair. We had The Nice and John Mayall to name some. Great bands but people expected that for the \$1-1.50 they paid to get in.

So you were a big fan of The Yardbirds and other British bands? American bands? Local bands?

I think it was mostly British bands. I liked The Pretty Things, The Kinks, The Animals — and The Beatles, of course. Never cared much for The [Rolling] Stones.

How did word get around that it really wasn't The Yardbirds, that it was just Jimmy Page and three other blokes?

Good question. Many have asked me. I am not sure. I wish I remembered because among Zepologists this is an issue. But I didn't know it was Jimmy Page and three other blokes. All I knew was that something wasn't right — I was not going to see 'the real thing,' The Yardbirds that I had seen 18 months earlier. That's why I was disappointed before they hit the stage.

So the first gig of this British band isn't even in the U.K. Were these their gigs to gel as a unit, to have some gigs together and get their show down?

Before The Yardbirds split up a Scandinavian tour had been arranged. So Page put the band together to honor this commitment, I understand. I didn't know that at the time but learned it a few years ago. People kept sending me e-mails that I had shots of the first performance on my site. At first I thought that was unlikely, but then I got it verified.

You could get from U.K. to the west coast of Denmark by boat overnight. Six hours later you would be in Copenhagen.

How long did it take for your disappointment to subside?

Not very long, I can assure you.

Was Robert Plant amazing even then? Were they real rough around the edges, or did they look well-rehearsed?

Indeed he was — just take a look at the shots of him on my lithograph — pretty amazing. They did not strike me as a band that needed rehearsing. Actually they had rehearsed. They turned up at the school in the afternoon when the people from the club was hanging up the decoration — colored light bulbs and so on — to make the gymnasium

look a little less like a gymnasium. The band asked if they could rehearse while the decoration was put up. So they rehearsed.

Did you have any idea when you saw them that they'd be one of the biggest bands in the world?

I had no idea that they would be that big — neither did I when I saw Deep Purple the first time. I don't think the band knew either. I was really lucky getting those shots — even more lucky that they are still around. When I stopped shooting rock stars my negatives were first kept in my parents' basement and later in the attic where I live. This is a 100-year-old building, and one of the tiles on the roof could have blown off in a storm and the rain would have destroyed all my negatives. But for more than 10 years I didn't know that anybody cared about my old shots. Over the last three to four years I have learned differently.

Any idea how long their set was?

Yes, usually about 45 minutes or so. The band had to do another gig in a similar club, also at a school, in the other part of Copenhagen. Teen Club was one of the places I got to meet many bands, but also other places. It was different times back then. Maybe it was a bit like the story about the bumble bee. You know, it can't fly, but it doesn't know that so it flies. I didn't know I was not supposed to walk in to Eric Clapton's dressing room after a Cream concert, so I just walked in and said, "Hi, can I take a photo?" In no way did I look professional — I was a schoolboy with my mother's holiday camera.

At a Yardbirds concert, in a local hall for handball, I walked on the stage — just some chip board elevated over the floor — to take some photos closer up. Nobody tried to

stop me. All the roadie said was, 'Mind the gear!' when I was about to step on one of Jimmy's guitars in an open case on the floor.

In the year 2000 some of my photos were exhibited in an art gallery in New York. I went to New York for the opening of the show. It was just as the movie *Almost Famous* had opened, and people kept telling me about this movie that could have been about me.

When the Led Zeppelin albums came out did you rush right down to the store and get them?

You bet! I remember standing in the record store when the second album came out. I heard about 10 seconds of the first track and bought the record straight away.

You must make some exciting discoveries in that attic if the negatives have been packed away for so long. Music fans in general enjoy seeing photos they've never seen before, and these are your own!

So far only a tiny fraction of my shots have ever been seen in print outside of Denmark. As a matter of fact a lot of my photos have never been seen. Some not even by me. When I was making the lithograph "The First Performance" I decided to make prints of all the negatives. Some of them even I had never seen as I had not made prints of them before. Often I would take pictures of bands but never got around to make prints of them, as I knew the magazines wouldn't buy them. I could sell bundles of photos of Bay City Rollers, Sweet, Slade and so on. But I could not sell photos of Jack Bruce or Frank Zappa — at least not many, maybe one to cover the cost of materials. The interesting thing is, now I am getting a bit philosophical, that the artists who were not of interest to the masses are the artists who stand out today. With exceptions, of course, but it's interesting to think that.

There is also another angle to it. Back then, and maybe today, you had three categories of bands — it's a generalization, I know — those who sold magazines, like Bay City Rollers; those who sold concert tickets, like Frank Zappa; and those who sold albums, like Leonard Cohen. I mean, try to sell a picture of Leonard Cohen to a pop magazine — forget it. Nevertheless I went and took some photos of Cohen — stiff as a board he was. He returned the favor by inviting me to a dinner party that evening. Nice man but not very entertaining.

Did you keep selling to magazines during the '80s/90s or did you not even touch your negatives for that period of time?

For more than 10 years I didn't sell any photos and I only touched the negatives when I moved them around in the attic to make room for more rubbish up there. Every time I moved the negatives around, I got a sting in my heart and thought, "All those great shots and nobody cares!" I could have done something about it but didn't know what to do. Besides, I didn't have a darkroom anymore. But I could not bring myself to sell the archive. They are an important part of me and my life, and I kept thinking "Maybe one day..." That day is now happening.