

Talking My Generation Blues

Madison was the girl who got me to quit listening to Led Zeppelin. I'm not sure why I put so much stock in her opinion—I guess I just wanted to get with her. Anyways, relationships are all about compromise, isn't that right? Give and take. *I'll curb this annoying habit if you curb that.* That kind of thing. I'm still not sure why she was especially offended by Led Zeppelin though. Maybe it was Robert Plant's voice. I can get that. I still remember all my liberal arts professors swooning over Leadbelly like he was at the vanguard of 20th century music—and I'd always thought if I had to listen to him everyday for the rest of my life I'd go insane—not to mention the poor woman who had to wake up every morning next to that face. As if the cheerful subject matter of his songs wasn't enough. Oh well. No accounting for taste. I was saying Led Zeppelin—Maggie said they were too “acid rock.” She was speaking about *Houses of the Holy* since that was the only CD I routinely played back then. I'd listened to *Led Zeppelin IV* all through high school to the point where I'd scratched and damaged the original CD and in the

process—even after I bought a replacement—I’d lost interest, I couldn’t listen to it anymore, I’d had enough. So I decided losing *Houses of the Holy* wasn’t that big a deal either as far as concessions went. Maybe Madison was doing me a favor—helping me outgrow some vestige of my boyhood or something. Like maybe adult men are supposed to outgrow Led Zeppelin the same way I’d outgrown Pearl Jam, Ernest Hemingway’s novels, Burger King, Big League Chew, Fruit by the Foot, and video games. Sure, not everyone outgrows video games, but by age 18 or 19 I couldn’t get into them anymore. I just wasn’t interested enough—and so I theorized that everything peaks in your life—all your hobbies and enjoyments—and sometimes the peak is more like a plateau so it becomes a lifelong interest and other times the peak is sharp and jagged and afterwards your interest just dips and bottoms out. I didn’t listen to *Houses of the Holy* and I even erased all my Led Zeppelin albums from my computer—this from back in the day when we burned CDs onto computers and made due with scuffs on the original CD. I didn’t miss those albums the first few years we were together. I never one time had any regrets like *Gee, everything’s swell, only I wish Madison hadn’t outlawed me listening to Led Zeppelin*. And “outlaw” is really an exaggeration—all she did was criticize *Houses of the Holy* at face value when she heard it playing in the background. She’d just said, “What is this... acid rock? Psychedelia?” The thing is, I hadn’t really considered Led Zeppelin to be acid rock at all—and I was on the point of explaining how I’d classify the band as more of blues rock but I didn’t. I didn’t think it was worth the time or effort to explain. Besides, I’d been itching to get with Madison since we’d graduated college and ended up in the big city. Yeah, she’d known I was crazy about her and had been for years—waiting out her doomed relationship with this arrogant soccer-playing upperclassman—biding my time but always on friendly terms with her without any weird romantic overtures or bashful come-ons. I was pretty much upfront about how I felt

and I left it at that. Otherwise, I was just someone to lend an ear and I don't know, I'm assuming she appreciated it since we remained friends all during college. Then when we graduated and moved that's when our relationship started—we were always hanging out, to the extent that I'd often have to cancel plans with people from work and with my roommates so I could see her. But I didn't mind, seeing her was much better. And we had all of New York for the beginning of our relationship—it was like the city existed in all its complex, impersonal busyness just as a backdrop for our free-spirited life. The dad of one of my exes used to tell me, “Live in New York when you're young. It's the best place for a young person to be.” That dad—bless his heart—I'd pray every night to have him as a father-in-law but it didn't work out—not that it should have, I was sixteen at the time, barely with a driver's license and his daughter was the first girl who ever let me take off her bra. I learned a lot about bras from her in fact; for that, I will be forever grateful—though clumsiness at taking off bras is another mark of youth—when you get to your late 20s, in my experience, women just take off their own bras. I think men and women reach that point mutually where naked bodies just aren't that interesting anymore. Anyways, Madison never waited for me to take off her bra, except one time after a romantic dinner but then on Valentine's Day or anniversaries you pull out all the stops. Anyhow, the point of all that was that Madison and I were together and we were happy—we were a good team—and I put up with her Bjork and Radiohead even though it struck me that *Houses of the Holy* wasn't much more psychedelic than some of what she listened to. Then after further conversation I learned that a major part of why she'd criticized *Houses of the Holy* on a general level was she believed that people of a given generation should listen to and appreciate the artists, writers, painters etc. of their own generation like somehow that was the appropriate thing to do—and if I needed more convincing just consider all the artists, writers, painters etc. who hadn't received any

appreciation at all from their contemporaries only to be applauded later on as the geniuses they were. I was going to deconstruct her argument by the very fact that it was later generations who appreciated the ones who came earlier but she must have anticipated my critique because she said that her standards of appreciation didn't apply to bands like Led Zeppelin or The Rolling Stones since they were appreciated right away by their own generation—and in the end what I took from her argument was that artists deserved a certain quota of appreciation and once that quota was reached (in the early 1970s in the case of Led Zeppelin) it was incumbent upon the next generation to find their own artists on whom to exhaust their appreciation until their own quota was met and so and so forth. I couldn't quite get behind her logic 100% especially when it came to writers and painters and sculptors but I supposed it was an easier argument to make with regard to musicians. I would have brought up Destiny's Child or some group like that and asked her if you'd really want to listen to that crap all day instead of The Marvelettes or Carole King but I didn't want to belittle her argument with the most outrageous comparisons I could think of. Besides, I knew what she meant had nothing to do with Destiny's Child—for her there would be much better examples of musicians who actually wrote their own songs in the 1990s and early 2000s—bands I'd never heard of or cared to know like Veruca Salt and The Pixies and The Meat Puppets who are obvious examples of groups no one will appreciate in 10, 20 or 100 years except for the hardcore punk fanbase of Kurt Cobain. And the sad truth is even Nirvana hasn't aged too well over the years probably because they weren't around long enough to develop and give themselves more variety other than their one angry jangle that was so much better than anyone else for 2-3 years circa 1992. I could say the same for Soundgarden only "Fell on Black Days" sounds better now than it ever did. But I can't listen to anything else they ever played. And Madison's moved on from the 1990s too. When we were first together she liked to go to

small clubs and venues and make discoveries—and I went with her—but I always thought it was silly to try so hard to be on the cutting edge. Of course, in the types of clubs and places where we hung out, Madison's friends would drop band names like they were the true banner bearers of music, the more obscure and uncommercial the better—though to me most of these punk, alt-rock, anti-folk, grunge acts sounded the same like they hadn't even mastered the whole breadth of Rancid's sound or Nirvana's chord progressions which made them even more limited in scope and consequently even more forgettable. Afterwards, Madison would ask me if I liked the Cocteau Twins or Kiera Lynn Cain or Trespasser William or Seamonkey and I'd lie and go with one of the four and pray I could tell the difference and she'd take me so seriously I felt compelled to expand on my lie and develop it and I'd get myself caught in a myriad of nonsense observations and comparisons. From Madison's serious, sleepy face I couldn't tell if I was impressing her or embarrassing myself. That's pretty much how things went for a while. Finally, one afternoon, I told her I'd been meditating on this whole music issue for a while and I'd had a heartfelt debate within myself and other than Santigold and The Brazilian Girls I hadn't enjoyed a single concert I'd been to in the last year. I especially hated Seamonkey. I detested Brothers Past. Bilge Vomit made me want to punch the lead singer. I'd never liked Billy Corgan and his Nordic doppelganger in Bilge Vomit was equally repulsive. I'd rather listen to Belinda Carlisle than inflectionless female vocalists who sounded like monks. And I wouldn't trade *Houses of the Holy* for any of them. Madison nodded. Her face was super serious. I think she must have expected my rebellion one of these days. I told her I didn't mind her listening to all that crap but I'd be trying out Led Zeppelin one last time and I'd prefer if she kept her opinions to herself as I would from that time on. *Houses of the Holy* sounded better than ever. "The Song Remains the Same" was almost brand-new. I tried *Led Zeppelin III* and liked all the acoustic songs too. I even

unearthed the overplayed *IV*. Just as good—especially “Going to California.” I didn’t feel like I’d wasted anything holding onto these albums and I liked the opportunity to rediscover them. I was happy—maybe I’d been right all along. If you’re thinking Madison and I broke up after that, think again—well, you can see for yourself we’re still together. She did take offense to my comparing the bass player of Bilge Vomit to Billy Corgan. She admitted later that she’d had an intense crush on the guy but I shouldn’t worry—it would’ve never worked out.