

# HEART *Little Queen*

The passionate power **Michael Derosier** brought to the band's 1970s hits is as stunning today as it was all those years ago.

**R**ock 'n' roll's scrap heap is lousy with bands that tried to dumb down Led Zeppelin's sound to Hammer of the Gods backbeats, hack blues riffs, and lemon-squeezing wails. Sisters Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart understood there was light and shade to Zeppelin, as guitarist/producer Jimmy Page often said of his blueprint for the band. For every "When the Levee Breaks," there was a "Battle of Evermore"; for every "Immigrant Song," a "Tangerine." And that's why the earthy early incarnation of Heart in the '70s did Led Zeppelin better than anyone else who ever tried, especially on 1977's *Little Queen*.

Having a keen understanding of what really made Zeppelin *Zeppelin*, and infusing the band's sound with that spirit, is one thing. What enabled the Wilsons to blend acoustic and electric, ethereal and heavy, so effectively was having a beast of a drummer like Michael Derosier behind them—a deep groove player who covered a lot of ground.

Derosier rarely gets his due in discussions of the great rock drummers of the

'70s. Perhaps that's because he kept a pretty low profile after exiting Heart in the early '80s, serving brief stints with Boston offshoot Orion the Hunter, Richard Marx, and Alias. But based on his contribution to *Little Queen* alone—not to mention the other classic Heart albums he's featured on, like *Dreamboat Annie* (1976), *Dog and Butterfly* (1978), and *Bebe le Strange* (1980)—Derosier absolutely deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as players like Ian Paice, Cozy Powell, and, yes, John Bonham, whose style Michael emulated.

When we first hear from Derosier on *Little Queen* he's blasting his way into "Barracuda" via a quick fill ending with a four-stroke ruff down the toms. Without missing a beat he locks in with the chugging electric guitars, punctuating the song's galloping gait with halting stops and an extra beat in the verses. Throughout the tune he spills a succession of fills featuring memorable hand/foot combos—in fact, the drums play such an integral role in "Barracuda," it's no wonder Derosier receives a cowriting credit on the tune.

Derosier features prominently on "Barracuda," but ultimately he's working to keep a tight rein on the song. On the album-closing "Go On Cry," however, he's like a man who was given one simple instruction before the tape started rolling: Play your ass off. Derosier dominates the mostly instrumental jam. To start, he sets up a relaxed, wide-open groove, in which groups of measures are capped with grand fills. Then he turns on a dime, leading the band into a busy 12/8 feel that finds him accenting the upbeats on the hi-hat and eventually flipping the beat around. As the track winds down, Derosier falls back into the 4/4 groove, this time laying into the beat and fills with more might as Ann Wilson lets it fly like an air-raid siren.

Bonham's influence is felt the most in the hip-hugging funk of the title track, another song on which Derosier is credited as a cowriter. It almost sounds as though it's Bonzo himself laying down the fat



groove, as Derosier's tubs sport the same room-y "thwack" heard on Zeppelin recordings. And no matter how daredevil the fills, the pocket never suffers—an unmistakable Bonham trait.

But for all the fills and thrills Derosier delivers on *Little Queen*, one of his best performances is so subtle, you hardly even know he's there or what he's doing. On Nancy Wilson's tender ballad "Treat Me Well," Derosier plays spare waltz time in the verse with ride cymbal, kick, and rimclick, and then follows the vocal cue with a simple fill right into a straight 4/4 for the chorus. Before you even know what's happened, he gives a little cymbal swell and 4/4 morphs back into 3/4, tidily and sweetly.

From those nuances to the punchy lilt implied on "Say Hello" (accenting the "&" of 2 and 4 in the verses) to the chops flashed on "Barracuda" and "Go On Cry," *Little Queen* shows Derosier to be a multidimensional timekeeper, one of the greats of his era. With Heart's induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2013—during which Michael rejoined his ex-bandmates on their 1976 hit "Crazy on You"—perhaps the time has finally come when he gets his full due.

**Patrick Berkery**

## Hot Stuff

**QUICK CRASHES** Opener "Barracuda" is a thrill-a-second joyride; picking out hot moments is like shooting fish in a barrel. Examples of one of Derosier's favorite licks—a double crash over two quick bass drum hits—can be heard at 1:20, 2:16, and 3:51.

**INDEFINABLE INTENSITY** Often the difference between professionalism and greatness is a matter of how *intensely* a drummer plays, over and above precision. Take the lightning-fast 32nd-note snare-to-tom roll at 1:42 on the album's title track. This is what people mean when they say a drummer "grabs listeners by the throat."

**LIGHT-AND-SHADE THEORY IN ACTION** Similar to John Bonham's work on Led Zeppelin's "Ramble On," Derosier blends hand percussion and kit work on "Love Alive." He taps out a simple tabla part in the quiet beginning section, building a bridge to the full band entrance with heavy tom hits on 2 and 4, before falling into a rock-steady groove that anchors the song's soaring modulation.

### *Little Queen* (1977)

Barracuda • Love Alive • Sylvan Song  
• Dream of the Archer • Kick It Out •  
Little Queen • Treat Me Well • Say  
Hello • Cry to Me • Go On Cry

**Ann Wilson:** vocals, flute, guitar

**Nancy Wilson:** vocals, guitar

**Roger Fisher:** guitar

**Howard Leese:** guitar, keyboards

**Steve Fossen:** bass

**Michael Derosier:** drums, percussion

Produced by Mike Flicker