

## CONTENTS

Preface .....	VII
How to Listen .....	VIII
Advanced Listening Technique .....	IX
Characteristics of the Average Hit Song .....	XI
The Five Elements of a Great Arrangement .....	XII
The Hit Song Secret .....	XIII

## THE HITS

The Jimi Hendrix Experience All Along the Watchtower .....	3
Cream Sunshine of Your Love .....	9
The Rolling Stones Gimme Shelter .....	15
Frank Zappa Peaches en Regalia .....	21
Led Zeppelin Stairway to Heaven .....	27
Rod Stewart Maggie May .....	33
The Who Won't Get Fooled Again .....	39
Joe Walsh and Barnstorm Rocky Mountain Way .....	45
Aerosmith Dream On .....	51
Stevie Wonder Living for the City .....	57
Bruce Springsteen Born to Run .....	63

Boston	
More than a Feeling.....	69
KISS	
Detroit Rock City.....	75
David Bowie	
Suffragette City .....	81
The Eagles	
Hotel California .....	87
Dire Straits	
Sultans of Swing.....	95
Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers	
Refugee.....	101
Rush	
Tom Sawyer.....	107
AC/DC	
Back in Black .....	113
Phil Collins	
In the Air Tonight.....	119
Glossary.....	125
Bobby Owsinski Bibliography.....	131

# Led Zeppelin

## *Stairway to Heaven*

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### SONG FACTS

**Album:** *Led Zeppelin IV*

**Writers:** Robert Plant, Jimmy Page

**Producer:** Jimmy Page

**Studios:** Basing Street Studios (London), Headley Grange (Hampshire), Island Studios (London)

**Release Date:** November 8, 1971

**Length:** 8:02

**Sales:** 32+ million worldwide (album)

**Highest Chart Position:** Not released as a single, #2 U.S. Billboard Album Chart, #1 U.K. Albums Chart

“Stairway to Heaven” was perhaps the centerpiece of Led Zeppelin’s *Led Zeppelin IV* album, which has long been one of the best-selling albums of all time. Sometimes touted as one of the greatest rock songs of the 1970s, “Stairway to Heaven” managed to break all the rules for a hit song—first, by clocking in at slightly over eight minutes in length, and then, by utilizing different song sections with different tempos.

According to several interviews with cowriter and guitarist Jimmy Page, the song was a conscious effort to recreate a similar epic to “Dazed And Confused” from the band’s first album. Page actually wrote “Stairway” in several sections and only weaved them together into a song as he taught them to the band at Headley Grange. As the band was rehearsing, singer Robert Plant leaned silently against the wall listening until he suddenly jumped into a run-through with most of the lyrics and melody in place.

## Maggie May



was played on the intro. There's also a high organ pedal note that's doubled with an electric piano playing eighth notes. This continues for 20 measures (which is an odd number), and then the drums return as everything plays the same as in the section prior to the outro.

### **THE SOUND**

The sound of "Maggie May" is fairly thin, especially the bass and kick drum, which have virtually no bottom end to them. Although not all of Stewart's band The Faces played on the album, this was generally the sound of the band throughout its life.

The panning is odd, with the drums panned hard to the left and the bass hard to the right. The intro and interlude have two mandolins that are spread slightly left and right, while everything else is panned to the center.

### Arrangement Elements

**The Foundation:** Bass and drums

**The Rhythm:** Acoustic guitar strumming in the verse, eighth-note piano in the chorus

**The Pad:** Synth and power chord guitars in the B section

**The Lead:** Lead vocal, guitar solo, synthesizer line in intros

**The Fills:** Background vocals, synthesizer

Although the popular conception is that Bowie played baritone sax on the intros, outros, and choruses, the sound is actually an ARP 2500 synthesizer, programmed by Scott and played by Ronson. Bowie has taken credit for the “saxes” in a number of interviews, but it’s unknown if he just didn’t remember or was being coy about the part on purpose.

## THE SOUND

There are a lot of interesting sonic elements in “Suffragette City.” First is Ronson’s guitar sound, which came as a result of a Les Paul into a wah-wah pedal set at about halfway, into a Marshall Major. That’s the classic Ronson sound.

The panning of the drums are fascinating as the snare is panned half-right and the kick half-left. This is because the song was recorded on 16-track, and the drum kit was frequently recorded either in stereo on two tracks, or with the kick or snare on one track and the rest of the drums on another, or some other similar combination. Regardless, the drums were recorded far differently from the way we do it today with each drum on its own track, hence the odd panning.

One thing that’s frequently overlooked is how prominent the acoustic guitar is on the track, pushing the song along rhythmically and almost serving in place of the cymbals. According to Scott, “I wasn’t too into cymbals back then so I mixed them low.”

Bowie’s lead vocals are doubled throughout the song, going to a single vocal on the hook of the chorus.