

Considering Zappa

A Personal View By Evil Bob - 1995-96

Frank Zappa was always a square peg in a round planet. Now that he's gone it seems that matters haven't changed much in that regard. There are probably millions of individuals who have "heard of" Zappa, and they usually tend to fervently believe that he was something which he most certainly was not. From the ones who think he was some sort of dangerous anarchist/hippie/wildman, to those who know nothing more than to relate in hushed tones of reverent incredulity the entirely fictional tale of "when he ate shit on stage" - they all basically don't know what the fuck they're talking about. Needless to say, he was neither an anarchist NOR did he ever eat shit anywhere (and no, "Mr Green Jeans" was not his dad, either). It's all part and parcel of the mostly imaginary aura surrounding a man who most folks would rather not have existed, much less have been the eternally hard-working genius of truly astounding proportions he actually was.

My love affair with the music of Zappa goes back to 1980 when I first heard "TITTIES AND BEER" in a dark and dope-smoke-filled dorm room on the campus of a small, private Florida University where I was attempting to secure for myself a BM in Music Composition (By the way, that's Bachelor of Music - not Bowel Movement). Prior to my College Exposure, I was not only unaware of his existence, but I also didn't much care for "rock-type" music. I was a "classical musician" and I was fully unmoved and unimpressed by most of the "rock-type" music I'd ever heard (I'd begun developing other ideas about what could be done in that genre - plus I was a SNOB).

True to form like the rest of the planet, I too misunderstood where Zappa was "coming from" at first - but I knew right away that I loved this music and I had to hear s'more. So, I bought myself a copy of "LIVE IN NEW YORK" and began my career as what Frank has referred to as a "hardcore maniac person". I don't yet have the COMPLETE collection, but that's only because since I am a student of the arts - I'm poor. Even now that the collection has been re-re-released on CD, some of it is STILL damn hard to find.

A large part of what so strongly attracted me to Zappa's music was the fact that here was somebody who was already in large part doing a lot of the stuff I had set out to accomplish in music myself. Long before I ever heard of Zappa, I had independently thought of the idea of attempting to fuse "serious" music with "really humorous stuff" (and not just lame shit like trombone glissandos either). I had also independently thought of (and had done a fair amount of work already towards) the idea of fusing the harmonic practice of the mid to late 20th Century with the Rock Idiom. At first, I was working in a vacuum of information and I had no idea that anybody else had ever thought of it also. Imagine my feelings when I found Frank Zappa not only doing this stuff already - but doing it with a vengeance and an unmatched genius. It was a mixed reaction to say the least. I'd call it a mix of envy, jealousy and despair with a liberal coating of pure joy. Over time I eventually came to the conclusion: What the fuck? I'll continue to write my own stuff and screw whatever superficial similarities others might

draw upon hearing it.

Part of what makes the music of Zappa such a joy for me is the fact that, like the music of the other more "elevated" (as they say) composers, his music can be approached and appreciated on so many levels. For those who don't know squat and couldn't care less about the technical hows and whys and ins and outs of music composition, there is the "plain old rock and roll" evident in such collections as "JOE'S GARAGE" and "SHEIK YERBOUTI". For those who CAN appreciate the more technical nuts 'n bolts aspects of music composition there are many examples of quintessential compositional skill in Zappa's works (such as "TEENAGE PROSTITUTE", "DROWNING WITCH", "MOGGIO", and "WHAT'S NEW IN BALTIMORE?"). For those who like to laugh there's just a shitload of truly hilarious things to be found in Zappa's music. Even those works which have no lyrics at all still manage to get a chuckle out of me just from the titles: "GET WHITEY" - "RETURN OF THE SON OF SHUT UP AND PLAY YER GUITAR" - "SINISTER FOOTWEAR" - "HEAVY DUTY JUDY".

Plus, as I get older and continue learning more about both music and the world around me, I see more sides of the music than I did when I was younger. Frank's music, if it appeals to you at all, tends to draw you into his own private little world. The catalog of Zappa's music can sort of be compared to Fractals in that a closer look reveals all sorts of stuff that you didn't notice upon first inspection, and that leads you to look even closer revealing even more marvelous secrets. Thanks to his unique style, he leaves trails of Conceptual Continuity Clues throughout all of his music and you end up wanting to get in on the joke - you want to hear more and more of his material in order to get The Big Picture. Besides, as I said, Zappa's music is DAMN FUNNY above and beyond its other more "artistic" merits.

To most folks, it's the humor that's the problem. You can't be "serious" AND write music which is funny - you gotta do one or the other. As if a synthesis of humor and music isn't really "art"; or as if anything humorous is "just a throwaway". Well, Frank himself dismissed all of that bullshit by refusing to call his music "art". He referred to his music as ENTERTAINMENT and nothing more. I can appreciate that, but I had approached the problem from the other direction - the "art" direction. Part of the reason I had wanted to create a synthesis of "serious" music and humor in the first place was the fact that, ever since I first sat down and had the decidedly humorous sensation of putting a cello between my legs (and watching girls do it too) I had wanted to find some way of imparting to the audience this uniquely "artistic" type of humor. Plus, I had always been an incurable wise-ass from day one so it was all over but the late-night scribbling.

Of course, as time has progressed and I've learned more about Zappa and I've been influenced more and more by his music, I've pretty much given up the idea of "art" as well. I never did like the extreme stuffiness radiated from almost every aspect of "art" music anyway. I had always felt that putting "art" music on a pedestal was probably the prime reason that MOST people didn't like it. As a species, we Americans are already suspicious of anything which resembles intellect and, in light of this as time goes on I'm surprised that the many fine orchestras we have in this country can continue to function. It also doesn't help matters any at all that there has always

been a definite Patrician veneer covering "art" music. Over the years that I have concertized and been "concerted" it seems to me that most people who show up to concerts of "art" music are there to be seen and not to hear. "Art" music has traditionally functioned primarily as an occasion for blue-blooded wanna-be aristocrat dickheads to get together and scorn each other (while they sip white wine with their pinkies out at intermission). In all of the years that I played professionally and gazed nightly out into the audience full of furs, power suits, ivory necklaces, and blue hair I constantly kept this thought in the back of my mind: Behind every great fortune there is a crime. But I digress....

What are some of the particularly noteworthy elements of the music of Frank Zappa? In my observation they are as follows (in no particular order):

- * An extremely sophisticated and personal sense of Rhythm, which results in:
- * An extremely sophisticated and personal sense of Melody.
- * A very advanced Harmonic Palette.
- * Humor Humor Humor Humor Humor.
- U* Satire.
- * Bluntness.
- * A singular way with words, and a unique vocabulary of words with multiple meanings.
- * Relentless Invention.
- * One of the extremely few truly unique and interesting Guitar Styles. I ask you: Who else can hold your attention during a 12 minute guitar solo? Who else even plays 12 minute guitar solos?
- * An equally unique ability to utilize the Modern Sound Recording Studio to great effect.
- * A strong theatrical sense.
- * A broad usage and quotation of elements from (so-called) American Culture (such as Bad Monster Movies of the 50s and 60s and music from commercials and stuff like that) including elements of the Musical Traditions of the (so-called) Civilized World, and a noticeable synthesis of ethnic folk music.
- * Raw Absurdity at any given moment for any or no reason at all (just keep asking yourself: What The Fuck?).
- * Carrying everything to its furthest possible extreme.
- * A keen insight and mastery of the various styles of popular music - doo-wop - country and western - blues - Jazz - Fusion - ballads - Progressive Magnum Opuses - whatever.
- * Anthropological Field Study.
- * A Powerful and obvious Intellect.
- * An Honesty and sense of Integrity absolutely unmatched ANYWHERE.
- * The fearless and unparalleled ability to find, define, and lampoon Stupidity (or The Human Condition if you prefer) in its many forms and then serve it back out in musical form utilizing the above elements for humorous effect.

Musicologist and Composer Nicolas Slonimsky had this to add: [Image] .wav (213k) or IWave

Frank had stated words to the effect that everything he composed, whether it be a piece of music, or album cover artwork, or a video, or even an

interview, it was all part of a continuing Work In Progress known as the "PROJECT/OBJECT" for which he provides Conceptual Continuity Clues in his works. Here's a portion of text Frank wrote for the "200 MOTELS" press kit (circa 1971) explaining in part the concept of the "PROJECT/OBJECT":

"Imagine the head of a pin. On the head of this pin is an amazingly detailed illustration of some sort. It might be a little thought or a feeling or perhaps an obscure symbol. It might just be a picture of a sky or something with birds in it ... but it's on the head of this pin, remember, and it's infinitely detailed. Now, imagine this pin is not a pin. It's a musical note with a corresponding physical action, like the secret raising of an eyebrow to add special emphasis. Even in a recording studio where nobody can see you do it.

Now, imagine enough of these abstracted pins (with the needle part chopped off to save space) to fill an area as large as the North American Continent and most of Central Europe, piled to a depth of 80 feet. Now, imagine this area is not a geometric space. Imagine a collection of decades (the exact number to be disclosed eventually). Pause.

... The basic blueprints were executed in 1962-63. Preliminary experimentation in early and mid-1964. Construction of the PROJECT/OBJECT began in late 1964. Work is still in progress.

What we sound like is more than what we sound like. We are part of the PROJECT/OBJECT. The PROJECT/OBJECT (maybe you like EVENT/ORGANISM better) incorporates any available visual medium, consciousness of all participants (including audience), all perceptual deficiencies, God (as energy), The Big Note (as universal building material), and other things. We make a special art in an environment hostile to dreamers."

For further explanation of FZ's PROJECT/OBJECT, here's a quotation taken from Chapter 8 ("All About Music") of "THE REAL FRANK ZAPPA BOOK" (Copyright 1989 by Frank Zappa. ISBN 0-671-63870-X and available from the nice folks at Poseidon Press for a modest charge):

"Think of the connecting material in the PROJECT/OBJECT this way: A novelist invents a character. If the character is a good one, he takes on a life of his own. Why should he get to go to only one party? He could pop up anytime in a future novel.

Or: Rembrandt got his 'look' by mixing just a little brown into every other color - he didn't do 'red' unless it had brown in it. The brown itself wasn't especially fascinating, but the result of its obsessive inclusion was that 'look'.

In the case of the PROJECT/OBJECT, you might find a little POODLE over here, a little BLOW JOB over there, etc., etc. I am not obsessed by POODLES OR BLOW JOBS, however; these words (and others of equal insignificance), along with pictorial images and melodic themes, recur throughout the albums, interviews, films, videos (and this book) for no other reason than to unify the 'collection'."

I think that probably about sums it up.

If someone were to ask me, "What is Frank's Message?" - I would have to say that, as I currently understand it, it seems to be something like this:

1. People have an infinitely fascinating capacity to be stupid.
2. BE HONEST and TELL THE TRUTH and
3. Just keep asking yourself: "Is it possible to laugh while fucking?"

Actually, in the final analysis I could probably just give Frank's "message" as: "There IS NO MESSAGE - if you like what I do, Fine. If not, OH WELL".

I might be wrong but.... there again... What The Fuck? To all those who might continue failing to understand "Where Frank's Coming From" (or even try to), I might quote FZ again in "PACKARD GOOSE" from "JOE'S GARAGE":

Maybe you thought I was
the Packard Goose
Or the Ronald McDonald
of the Nouveau Abstreuse
Well fuck all them people
I don't need no excuse
for being what I am
Do you hear me then?

Naturally, I'm continuing to reassess and revise my opinion of Frank as time passes and I hear stuff I hadn't heard before and I finally begin liking some of the stuff I hadn't liked before. Also naturally, I revise my opinion upward because I seem to have the experience and technical capacity to grasp and appreciate a lot of the enormous body of excellent works Frank has written. I say "a lot of" because, as of this date there are still some works of Frank's that I just don't care for. But that doesn't mean that tomorrow I'll grow enough to figure them out. However, leaving that to one side, Frank was truly a workaholic par excellence. I know of nobody who has released such a wide range of material of such consistent quality AND DIVERSITY - or even had the skill and ambition to do so.

It has been interesting to watch the growth of his skill as a composer through his albums from earliest to latest. Like Beethoven and Stravinsky, Zappa seems to have gone through several distinct "Stylistic Periods". In fact, each individual album seems to function as its own "Mini Stylistic Period". I won't bother to put names on these "Stylistic Periods", however one can definitely see that he exhibited a continued evolutionary growth in his ability to put together a coherent piece of music. He simply got better and better. I suspect that this has much to do with the high quality of musicians he employed after the demise of the original Mothers Of Invention. If he had access to a musician with a particularly unique ability, he had the equally unique ability to bring out the best in that musician and capture it on tape for posterity.

And that's another thing: Just look at some of the highly talented and/or

Name-brand musicians who have appeared on his albums or played in his band at one time or another. Here's a selected list:

Captain Beefheart
Adrian Belew
Pierre Boulez
Terry Bozzio
The Brecker Brothers
Vinnie Colaiuta
George Duke
Jack Bruce
Aynsley Dunbar
Eddie Jobson
Lowell George
Kent Nagano
Patrick O'Hearn
Jean-Luc Ponty
Sugar-Cane Harris
Chester Thompson
Ruth Underwood
Steve Vai
Mark Volman & Howard Kaylan (aka "Flo & Eddie")
Chad Wackerman
Johnny "Guitar" Watson
Allan Zavod

Yeah, real wim♏ps...NOT!

Years hence, when those guys who write Music History books finally get around to writing about what little truly "valuable" (as in non-disposable) music came out of the "Pop Culture" in the Latter Half Of The 20th Century, no truly informed individual can have any doubt that Frank Zappa's works will remain standing over the forgotten remnants of Nike-Sponsored, Highly-Danceable, Prefab, Test-Tube, Large-Haired, Anti-Perspirant, Stud-Encrusted, Minty-Fresh, Satan-Worshipping Ol' "What's Their Name Again?".

Yes, you might say I'm a fan. But I have a "normal" side too.

Somewhere.

THE ALBUM SEMI-OVERVIEW

For those who are unfamiliar with Zappa, you should be aware of the fact that he can and often does put together an album with both live and studio material, and the tunes rarely fade out (instead segue-ing one into the next). A lot of times, he'll create a tune from portions of the best live performances from different venues on different dates. As he said, "What's the difference? It's all live anyway." I have heard that some people regard this practise as somehow "cheating", but I've never understood that. Perhaps

this is due to the fact that I am a composer and musician myself and I understand that The Human Element often ruins a good piece of music, but only in sections. Rarely do you get a top-notch performance all the way through. Sometimes people made mistakes only during the solo, or the out-chorus, or whatever. I don't mind hearing compilations of the BEST parts as heard live and in the studio. After all, it's THE MUSIC that's important, not so much THE CONCERT EVENT. For "purists", Zappa released a 12-disk set of live performances with NO overdubs at all (well, one) under the title of "YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE (VOL 1-6)" (referred to elsewhere as "YCDTOSA").

By this late date, I currently own ONLY 47 of Frank's 67 released (!!) albums. Of course, if I had the cash and I lived somewhere else I'd own every last scrap of Zappa material I could get my hands on (if nothing else because I'm slightly anal retentive). What follows is the Complete Frank Zappa Album List (well, mostly) with my Current Overview Comments after the albums I actually own. I have also worked into this list the album review information sent to me by a FidoNet subscriber named Peter D. Dukes to cover some of the stuff I don't have (with some additional commentary by myself splashed within the body of his stuff). Those parts written by him will appear prefaced with the legend: PDD. Bill Camarata was kind enough to provide me with Original Release Dates, so I added these after the album titles (in the US format of MONTH.DAY.YEAR or, when the day was unknown, MONTH.YEAR).

In many cases, while I don't have the actual album, I have seen it and I know some of the tunes on them as they appear on other albums in different arrangements. These are all, of course, just subjective opinions but, since I have studied music for a good many years, I feel that I just might be at least somewhat qualified to make these statements. If nothing else, these reviews might serve as a guide for those who might be afraid to purchase some of this stuff without at least some kind of prior information from somewhere.

One last bit of information you might like to know: One of Frank's lesser-known philosophies was that, just because an album is "finished" and released doesn't necessarily mean it's REALLY "finished". There are some significant differences between the original LP releases and the subsequent CD re-releases (some notables: "LIVE IN NEW YORK" and "THE MAN FROM UTOPIA"). Many of the CDs have additional tunes not on the original LPs and have been significantly re-mixed and re-edited over the original releases. Unless otherwise specified, these reviews refer to the CD versions (since, where the hell can ya find LPs anymore? And who would want to? - I always hated those rumble-scratchitËy LPs myself).

Of course, now that RykoDisc owns all of Frank's masters, they have begun to RE-re-release the entire catalog as well as some new material lurking in the vaults. There are various differences between the original LPs, the 1st CD releases, and the newest CD releases - Ryko gives you the lo-down right here.

Oh yeah, I'm still in the process of adding new links (like lyrics & stuff)

to make this text more complete and interesting, so keep checking back.

So, anyway - THE LIST:

1. FREAK OUT! (2.7.66)

PDD: Originally this was a 2-disc set on vinyl, and contains 14 songs that were, in Frank's words, ". . . built around an overall satirical concept." (The Real Frank Zappa Book). This release contains the first recorded versions of songs like "I AIN'T GOT NO HEART" (which is great on "TINSELTOWN REBELLION"), "HOW COULD I BE SUCH A FOOL?" (also on "CRUISIN' WITH RUBEN AND THE JETS"), and "YOU DIDN'T TRY TO CALL ME" (a truly wonderful version of this tune appears on disc 2 of YCDTOSA Vol.1 and it also appears on "CRUISIN WITH RUBEN AND THE JETS"), as well as more bizarre material, such as "HELP, I'M A ROCK". The arrangements are neat and to the point. His penchant for writing for percussion instruments can be heard even here. However, I find the liner notes to be more cynical than satirical. A good (remixed) recording.

2. ABSOLUTELY FREE (4.67)

Presently, I like this album "ok". It doesn't strike me as being as particularly brilliant as some of his later material, but even at his "worst" Frank's music never SUCKS. I prefer the version of "BROWN SHOES DON'T MAKE IT" which appears on "TINSELTOWN REBELLION". One of the reasons why I tend to like FZ's material from after about 1971 or so more than the 1965-1971 period is because after about '71 or so, he started employing better musicians and wrote his music accordingly more difficult to play. Well, that's not exactly true - it would be more to the point to say that better musicians in the band allowed Frank to realize manifestations of his musical imagination which would not be possible to perform without absolutely top-notch musicians (prior to the Synclavier, anyway). Perhaps it's just my own subjective opinion, but I find everything after 1972 to be far more interesting and musically worthwhile than most of the "Old Mothers" material for this reason.

3. WE'RE ONLY IN IT FOR THE MONEY (12.67)

I like this album a lot. Although I still haven't heard Freak Out!!, I think this disc is quite likely the best of the early Mothers Of Invention. It does provide an interesting look at what the Flower Power Era was probably REALLY all about. Fave Tunes: "MOTHER PEOPLE" and "THE CHROME PLATED MEGAPHONE OF DESTINY". According to Frank: the original masters of this album were stored so poorly (by MCA) that the oxide was practically falling off of the tape. Therefore, the 1st CD version contains newly-recorded bass and drum tracks. The 1st CD release of this album was evidently quite different from the LP as well. The newest Ryko release is a restoration of the old LP version.

4. LUMPY GRAVY (9.68)

A series of recorded conversations inside a piano on "dumb stuff" punctuated by some rather nice snippets of instrumental music (one of which grew to eventually become "KING KONG"). It is described in the liner notes as "A curiously inconsistent piece which started out to be a ballet but probably didn't make it". Various elements of the "dumb stuff" and the music went on to become recurring and unifying elements of the PROJECT/OBJECT. I also like this album a fair bit as well. It's actually pretty funny.

5. CRUISIN' WITH RUBEN & THE JETS (11.68)

This is an album of greasy doo-wop music, but due to the arrangements and harmonizations it's not like any real doo-wop music you might have ever heard. This is another album which so far strikes me as just "ok". Here again, I prefer later arrangements of some of the songs on this album. This is often the case for me with Frank's music; if I dislike one arrangement of a given tune, there's probably another arrangement I do like.

6. MOTHERMANIA (Release Date Unknown)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. I believe this album is currently out of print and unavailable in any format. From what I've been able to gather about it, this was a sort of "Best Of" album containing material from the first 5 albums.

7. UNCLE MEAT (3.69)

PDD: Contains lots of Conceptual Continuity Clues. There are 2 little booklets packaged with this release - one containing song titles, credits and lyrics, the other containing personnel photographs, hand drawn stills from the movie, and an interesting tale about how Uncle Meat and Bimbo prepare to rule the universe with an army of mutant monsters.

I recently viewed the movie video in order to glean more Conceptual Continuity Clues and, although it was entertaining, I found it quite a bit on the strange side. It is interesting in that it took 20 years to finally finish the movie - the tail end stars the same characters sporting 20 years of additional wrinkles and pounds. This movie is definitely for the hard-core believers. There is a little more audio information available on this subject elsewhere on this site.

8. HOT RATS (10.15.69)

This is one of Frank's most consistently liked albums; a collection of instrumentals (with one exception - "WILLIE THE PIMP"). I bought it almost 2 years ago and, try as I might - I still don't much care for it. I listen to it every few months in the hopes that I might have missed something - maybe someday I'll figure out what everybody likes so much. I do like later arrangements of "PEACHES EN REGALIA" and "WILLIE THE PIMP".

9. BURNT WEENY SANDWICH (2.9.70)

PDD: This album contains some poppy, danceable cover tunes, combined with

other material that has been called "low budget orchestra" music. The 'writing for percussion' that I mentioned in the FREAK OUT! review has now broadened into noisemaking effects and the description of action rather than just melodic lines. Frank's unique style of guitar is also evident on this release. It is probably one of the first recordings where the phrase: "Putting the eyebrows on it" becomes dramatically apparent.

Two particularly noteworthy selections on this disc are the two parts of "Igor's Boogie". These are brief instrumentals which sound amazingly like forgotten movements of "L'Histoire Du Soldat" (except they have funny and cool sound effects in 'em).

10. WEASELS RIPPED MY FLESH (8.70)

PDD: The cover art for this release gives one a good indication of the type of material contained therein. It depicts a man who is shaving, but his shaver is actually a weasel who is tearing at the skin of his face. This release represents different aspects of The Mothers from 1967 to 1969, and is a combination live/studio/cover/original album.

11. CHUNGA'S REVENGE (10.23.70)

PDD: This release is indeed well tied in with "TINSELTOWN REBELLION" and "200 MOTELS". However, there is some interesting live & studio material, such as "THE NANCY AND MARY MUSIC", which at one point has George Duke imitating Aynsley Dunbar's drums with his mouth, a la scat vocal. Also notable on this release is a rare moment when Frank plays drums (on a percussion solo called "THE CLAP").

"TELL ME YOU LOVE ME" is one notable tune on this album and is also on "TINSELTOWN REBELLION". Another one is a nice li'l 2-minute guitar solo called "Twenty Small Cigars". Actually, "Transylvania Boogie" is pretty good, too. Shit, just go buy one and see what you think of it.

12. FILLMORE EAST, JUNE 1971 (8.71)

An interesting live album. Includes a cover version of The Turtle's "HAPPY TOGETHER". My favorite on this one is: "DO YOU LIKE MY NEW CAR?" (incarnations of this concept on other FZ works are referenced as: "THE GROUPIE ROUTINE") which provides a number of Conceptual Continuity Clues for the underground world of girls who are fans of THE MEMBERS of Rock groups. In fact, Conceptual Continuity Clues are all over this album.

13. 200 MOTELS (1971)

I have the movie on video and I think it's CHAMPION. This movie/album goes a long way towards explaining many elements of the PROJECT/OBJECT. A recent video companion to this is "THE TRUE STORY OF 200 MOTELS" and this also is quite CHAMPION. Currently, this album is out of print and unavailable in any format, although RykoDisc is supposed to be remedying this any time now.

14. JUST ANOTHER BAND FROM L.A. (3.72)

PDD: In my opinion, this is classic Mothers material. This album contains material recorded live at the UCLA Pauley Pavilion and features "BILLY THE MOUNTAIN", which is a significant part of Conceptual Continuity.

Another live version of "BILLY THE MOUNTAIN" appears on "PLAYGROUND PSYCHOTICS" and I believe it is a better overall performance than the one featured here (though PDD disagrees with me on this).

15. WAKA/JAWAKA (7.5.72)

PDD: As far as I'm concerned, the YCDTOSA version of "BIG SWIFTY" is a little skeletal compared to the studio version (which clocks in at over 17 minutes) - but this is probably due to the extended soloing involved and might drag on interminably for the average listener. However, I still prefer the brass arrangements in the studio version. This release was also my first indication of music that leaned toward a country style. The title track itself is a killer piece.

16. THE GRAND WAZOO (11.72)

This is another collection of jazz-like instrumentals in the same vein as "HOT RATS". I completely LOVE this album. Frank's ability to write for a big band is quite good, and his viewpoint of jazz is highly personal as always. My favorite selection on this one is "Eat That Question".

17. OVER-NITE SENSATION (9.7.73)

Here begins what one might call the 'real meaty core' of the Zappa repertoire. From here on out there is little I can think of that I've heard that I don't thoroughly enjoy, except for some of the orchestral music. "OVER-NITE SENSATION" is one of the "Classic" FZ albums in that the forms and ideas dealt with are quite accessible to the average Rock Consumer. Each and every tune's a winner. Particularly praiseworthy are: "I'M THE SLIME", "DINAH-MOE HUM" and "MONTANA".

18. APOSTROPHE' (3.22.74)

Another Classic FZ album. Noteworthy: "DON'T EAT THE YELLOW SNOW", "NANOOK RUBS IT" and "ST. ALPHONSO'S PANCAKE BREAKFAST".

19. ROXY & ELSEWHERE (9.10.74)

This is quite an amazing album given the fact that it's mostly live. It contains some instrumentals which are totally excellent. "ECHIDNA'S ARF (OF YOU)" is a fascinating composition which to me is rather like some sort of Hybrid Stravinsky Funk. Another Classic tune from this album is "CHEEPNIS", which is one of a series of compositions wherein FZ exercises his penchant for using Bad Monster Movie Imagery to great effect. Other highly noteworthy examples from Zappa's repertoire in this vein are "SHIP ARRIVING TOO LATE TO SAVE A DROWNING WITCH" (from the album of the same name) and "THE RADIO IS BROKEN" (from "THE MAN FROM UTOPIA"). Thanks to the presence of the

incredibly talented George Duke, the albums from this period (17 through 20) seem to be driven by a fair amount of Funk as seen through FZ's particularly unique vision.

20. ONE SIZE FITS ALL (6.25.75)

A much under-rated and unfairly ignored album (well, actually - it seems to me that ALL of FZ's albums are under-rated and unfairly ignored - but I trust you know what I mean). "ANDY", One of the many excellent tunes on this album should rightfully have been as popular as "STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN" if not more so. Also on this album are 2 arrangements of "SOFA", which is a beautiful little waltz (yes, folks - a waltz in the Rock-like Idiom).

21. BONGO FURY (10.2.75)

Thanks to the bizarre literary imagery of Captain Beefheart, this album is "sort of out there" but still quite approachable by Today's Semi-intelligent Pop Consumer. Noteworthy on this album are "CAROLINA HARDCORE ECSTASY" and "MUFFIN MAN".

22. ZOOT ALLURES (10.29.76)

This is rather a "mellow" sort of album as FZ material goes. This album presents the first released version of "THE TORTURE NEVER STOPS", an excellent composition which was subsequently re-released several times in different arrangements on later albums (including "LIVE IN NEW YORK", "YCDTOSA VOLS. 1 and 4, and "THE BEST BAND YOU NEVER HEARD IN YOUR LIFE").

In my opinion, a much better version of "DISCO BOY" appears later on "BABY SNAKES". This album contains one of FZ's finest guitar solos - an intriguing little number called "BLACK NAPKÖINS".

23. ZAPPA IN NEW YORK (3.13.78)

Yet another album of High Worship. This album (and others) currently exists in 2 distinctly and differently mixed versions. The LP version is the one I first became familiar with (by memorization). The CD version contains a number of tunes from the same concert series which did not make it onto the original LP. The mixes are quite different between versions. While I appreciate the added information on Conceptual Continuity I got from the CD version I hope that the FZ office eventually gets around to releasing a CD version of the LP as originally released (as I HATE NOISY DAMN LPs and I always did).

24. STUDIO TAN (9.15.78)

An album of mostly instrumentally-oriented music. It contains an entertaining sort of fairy tale called "THE ADVENTURES OF GREGGERY PECCARY". My favorite tune on this is a little number called "LET ME TAKE YOU TO THE BEACH". An interesting historical side-note: This album and the next one were originally released without FZ's consent. This is why, when FZ appeared in a "Coneheads At Home" sketch on "Saturday Night Live" he referred to this

album as "An unauthorized recording of sound patteredns".

25. SLEEP DIRT (1.12.79)

Another instrumentally-oriented album. This contains a couple of good parodies of a type of Cosmopolitan Jazz (which I've never liked - which is why they are so funny) sung quite impressively by a woman named Thana Harris (who also appears later on the "THEM OR US" album). This album's title track features FZ and James "Bird-legs" Youman in a beautiful little acoustic guitar duet (so far, one of the few examples I know of where FZ played acoustic). It has been rumored that the original title for this release was "HOT RATS III".

26. SHEIK YERBOUTI (3.3.79)

If you don't have any FZ at all this is probably the album you should buy first. Each and every tune on this is most champion. Contains such greats Ôas "BROKEN HEARTS ARE FOR ASSHOLES", BOBBY BROWN GOES DOWN", DANCIN' FOOL", and "JEWISH PRINCESS". This is FZ's biggest-seller worldwide and rightfully so.

27. ORCHESTRAL FAVORITES (5.4.79)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. I'm assuming that it contains.... well....
Orchestral Favorites.

28. JOE'S GARAGE ACT I (9.17.79)

This album and the next one make up what I would call a kind of fictional rock opera about how the government made music illegal one day. I would absolutely LOVE to see this thing actually produced on stage someday (if anyone has the guts and the cash to do so). Shoot, I'd like to see it as a movie. JOE'S GARAGE is another classic album which MUST be heard in order to "understand" Zappa. These two albums contain some of FZ's best moments on guitar.

29. JOE'S GARAGE ACTS II & III (11.19.79)

30. TINSELTOWN REBELLION (5.11.81)

I'm never sure, but I tend to think that this is possibly my all-time favorite FZ album. I absolutely LOVE the performances of "EASY MEAT", "LOVE OF MY LIFE", "THE BLUE LIGHT" and "BROWN SHOES DON'T MAKE IT". There's not a nanosecond of this album that I don't thoroughly enjoy.

31. SHUT UP 'N PLAY YER GUITAR (5.11.81)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. However, I am aware that this and the other 'guitar' albums are all instrumentals which feature FZ's amazing guitar soloing technique.

32. SHUT UP 'N PLAY YER GUITAR SOME MORE (5.11.81)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. See above.

33. RETURN OF THE SON OF SHUT UP 'N PLAY YER GUITAR (5.11.81)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. See above.

34. YOU ARE WHAT YOU IS (9.81)

I vacillate between this album and "TINSELTOWN REBELLION" as Ultimate Favorite Albums. I think it depends on the wind direction. This album contains a selection of tunes wherein FZ clearly spells out his opinions on such subjects as organized religion, suicide, and drug use and they are Óall true gems. One of these is a sort of almost-rap called "DUMB ALL OVER". Unfortunately, the guitar solo on the LP version of this tune was shortened on the CD version - it was one of my favorites.

35. SHIP ARRIVING TOO LATE TO SAVE A DROWNING WITCH (5.82)

Aside from the popular "VALLEY GIRL" this album contains 2 little-known (or at least NEVER heard) works which are in my opinion the finest examples of Zappa's skill as a composer. The title track is a masterpiece with a long and totally interesting guitar solo. Again: who else can keep your attention so riveted during a 20-minute guitar solo? Slash? NOT!!!! The other "finest kind" tune is called "TEENAGE PROSTITUTE" and is a real powerhouse.

Here - check out this li'l chunk from "Drowning Witch":
[Image] .wav (1.23M) or lwave (54k).

36. THE MAN FROM UTOPIA (3.83)

Of the CD re-releases I've heard so far, this one departs the farthest from the original LP version. In addition to including tracks not on the LP, many of the tunes have had entire parts re-recorded and re-mixed. As with "LIVE IN NEW YORK" I myself prefer the LP versions and I hope RykoDisc releases those mixes on CD someday. One of my all-time favorite FZ tunes is the totally hilarious "JAZZ DISCHARGE PARTY HATS" which features Steve Vai on guitar tracking Zappa's voice as he relates the tale of "Alternative Entertainment" sought out by some of the guys in the band (and one of the T-shirt guys too) in lieu of pussy while stuck in the wilderness of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

37. BABY SNAKES (3.83)

This one contains excellent performances but is best appreciated by seeing the movie of the same name (also currently available on video). This was performed by one of FZ's best bands (with Terry Bozzio, Adrian Belew, Patrick O'Hearn, Peter Wolf, Ed Mann and Tommy Mars). Of particular interest are "PUNKY'S WHIPS" and "DISCO BOY".

38. LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA VOL. ÚI (6.9.83)

A unique collection of orchestral works from the fabled Twickenham sessions. Probably not for the average rock consumer - but you should try anyway - ya never know. I like this music now more than I did some years ago - it grows on ya.

39. BOULEZ CONDUCTS ZAPPA, THE PERFECT STRANGER (8.23.84)

PDD: This is a recording that is roughly half performed by the Ensemble InterContemporain (conducted by Pierre Boulez) and half performed by The Barking Pumpkin Digital Gratification Consort - in other words, Frank on Synclavier. This is another "concept album" of a sort, in that each piece has a short "scene-setting" background, and it is this that makes up the bulk of the liner notes. Conceptual Continuity ties this release to "CHUNGA'S REVENGE", and perhaps to "JOE'S GARAGE".

40. THEM OR US (10.18.84)

This is a generous mix of instrumental and lyric tunes which have a lot to recommend them. "MARQUE-SON'S CHICKEN" is a great instrumental, "THE CLOSER YOU ÔARE" is a wonderful doo-wop cover tune. "IN FRANCE" and "BABY TAKE YOUR TEETH OUT" are two more totally hilarious tunes. "IN FRANCE" features none other than the Great Johnny "Guitar" Watson on vocals. Also on this album is a great cover of The Allman Brothers' "WHIPPIN' POST".

41. THING FISH (11.21.84)

Frank Zappa proves himself to be quite the Renaissance Man in this very entertaining album: He takes on Broadway - His Way. This "show" revolves around a plot involving Secret Evil Experiments to wipe out certain "undesirable tenants ob de tenement o' life" via the creation and introduction of a New Disease (guess which one). In creating the album, FZ put together a number of his already-released tunes with new lyrics suiting The Dramatic Situation and added a few new tunes to round out The Action. While I probably wouldn't recommend it for the average Christian, I think it's a great album. It's funny, it has a Requisite "Social Message", and it fills in more ConcepÔtual Continuity Clues as well.

42. FRANCESCO ZAPPA (11.21.84)

Not actually a "real" Frank Zappa album. This is a collection of Synclavier arrangements of some works by an actual Classical Period composer named Francesco Zappa (who flourished from 1763-1788). Definitely not for the average rock-n-roll consumer.

43. THE OLD MASTERS, BOX 1 (Release Date Unknown)

Don't Have It - As such. As I understand it, this and the other 2 Old Master boxes are digitally remixed LP versions of, well.... The Old Masters - as in the early albums up through about "ROXY & ELSEWHERE". These LPs were originally available by mail-order only from the FZ office. To my knowledge, these boxes exist only in LP form (since now you can just buy the individual re-mixed CDs), but are still available from InterContinental Absurdities (or

818-PUMPKIN).

44. FRANK ZAPPA MEETS THE MOTHERS OF PREVENTION (11.21.85)

This is mostly a fine collection of quite interesting Synclavier tunes interspersed with some "real human-generated" tunes. Among the wonderful material on this album is "YO CATS", which is a very funny parody of what jazz session music in the present era seems to have become. Also "WHAT'S NEW IN BALTIMORE?" is another great work. The disc culminates in "PORN WARS", Zappa's answer to the whole PMRC/Congress/Bullshit.

45. DOES HUMOR BELONG IN MUSIC? (1.86)

Another album which accompanies a video. This album contains strictly live material recorded hither and yon. It contains a few sections from a concert which I was fortunate enough to attend in 1984 at the Bayfront Center in St. Petersburg. The newly-released RykoDisc version has been re-mixed and is FAR superior to the first CD release as a result of (among other things), increasing the prominence in the mix of Scott Thunes and his kick-ass bass work.

46. THE OLD MASTERS, BOX 2 (Release Date Unknown)

Don't Have It - As such. See above.

47. JAZZ FROM HELL (11.15.86)

Unlike many people, I like Zappa's Synclavier material and this is what this album is (except for one live "human-generated" tune called "ST. ETIENNE" featuring FZ on guitar). My favorite cut is "NITE SCHOOL".

48. LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA VOL. II (9.17.87)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. I do know that it is more orchestral music from the ill-fated Twickenham Studio Recording. See "THE REAL FRANK ZAPPA BOOK" for more on the story of the LSO recordings.

49. THE OLD MASTERS, BOX 3 (Release Date Unknown)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. See above.

50. GUITAR (4.26.86)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. See above.

51. YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE, VOL. 1 (5.9.88)

This and the other 5 volumes of YCDTOSA are a sort of chronological Time Machine collection of Great Performances without overdubs by various incarnations of FZ's bands over the years from 1967 through the 1988 road band. Each volume is a 2-disc set. In the liner notes FZ hints that there might be a forthcoming video companion to this series in that part of the

criteria for selection is "Is there a video of it?" Needless to say, I SURE HOPE SO. I'd especially like to see some video footage from the infamous Palermo Riot concert (a selection from which is heard on YCDTOSA Vol.3 complete with some nicely recorded tear-gas grenade launchers).

52. BROADWAY THE HARD WAY (10.25.88)

A set of live recordings from the 1988 tour. This has some great political material on it like "DICKIE'S SUCH AN ASSHOLE", "RHYMIN' MAN", and "WHEN THE LIE'S SO BIG". Also includes a version of the Police's "MURDER BY NUMBERS" sung by MR. STING HIMSELF. Of particular hilarity is an amazing tune called "JEZEBEL BOY".

53. YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE, VOL. 2 (10.25.88)

Don't Have It - Never Heard It. However, I do know that it presents a series of performances in Helsinki by the 1973-74 band and covers the material which is found on "ROXY & ELSEWHERE".

54. YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE, VOL. 3 (11.13.89)

Among others, this volume contains live versions of tunes from "YOU ARE WHAT YOU IS" and "SHIP ARRIVING TOO LATE TO SAVE A DROWNING WITCH". Dweezil Zappa also appears playing a guitar solo in "SHARLEENA". Great stuff.

55. THE BEST BAND YOU NEVER HEARD IN YOUR LIFE (4.16.91)

A 2-disc set of performances by the 1988 band which regrettably self-destructed before making it to the southern US. Has some interesting cover versions of such tunes as "STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN", "PURPLE HAZE", "SUNSHINE OF YOUR LOVE" and a way-cool sorta "Reggae/Mariachi" version of Ravel's "BOLERO". Also includes yet another tune I find completely hilarious: The Jimmy Swaggart Version of "LONESOME COWBOY BURT" (originally from "200 MOTELS").

56. MAKE A JAZZ NOISE HERE (6.4.91)

2 more discs from the 1988 tour. Mostly instrumentals. The band is quite good. Wish I could have seen it!

57. YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE, VOL. 4 (6.14.91)

This is my favorite of the YCDTOSA series. Each and every tune on this is simply excellent. You must buy this.

58. YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE, VOL. 5 (9.16.92)

PDD: This (of course) follows the same format as the other volumes in the series. The first disc contains unreleased material from The Mothers, and is stuffed full of humor. The second disc is part of a concert given by the 1982 road band in Geneva, and is part of the extremely bad year that ended

in the Palermo riot. This set of music was very well executed, despite these problems. (Total # of locations: Geneva, Munich, Balzano & Frankfurt).

There's some GREAT stuff on this disc - "MOGGIO", "SHALL WE TAKE OURSELVES SERIOUSLY?" - and like that.

59. YOU CAN'T DO THAT ON STAGE ANYMORE, VOL. 6 (11.10.92)

While this disc has great material on it, it is my least-liked volume from YCDTOSA. This set contains some of the material also found on "ZOOT ALLURES". Of particular interest is a great violin solo on disc 2 by L Shankar on an instrumental called "THIRTEEN" and a bit of "semi-enforced audience participation" on St. Patty's day on disc 1 called "MAKE A SEX NOISE".

60. PLAYGROUND PSYCHOTICS (10.27.92)

Sort of like a Time Machine look at the 1970-71 band (the 200 Motels period). Much of this 2-CD set consists of recordings of conversations between members of The Mothers, which serves both to fill in Conceptual Continuity Clues and, as stated in the liner notes, to give the young musician a feel for what it was like to tour in the early 70s.

In addition there are a number of previously unreleased recordings of performances from The Pauley Pavilion, The Rainbow, and Fillmore East. Included in this is a number of recordings from the night that John Lennon and Yoko Ono showed up at the Fillmore East and sort of sat in.

61 - 62. BEAT THE BOOTS (Series 1 and 2)

Albums #61 and #62 are actually collections of albums. For many years, unscrupulous assholes in attendance at FZ concerts had the disturbing habit of sneaking in cassette decks for the purpose of producing illegal bootleg recordings. Over the years, a staggering number of these bootlegs were made into records and sold covertly. The "Beat The Boots" series was introduced so that Frank could get back at least a little of the large amount of money he was cheated out of. You should be aware that these albums are BELOW NORMAL FZ SOUND QUALITY, however, as Bill Camarata pointed out: "A recording of Frank is a recording of Frank". Although originally released in 2 large chunks (Series 1 and 2), these albums are all available individually as well.

Series 1

'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JELLY
THE ARK
FREAKS & MOTHERF*%!!@#
PICANTIQUE
UNMIIÉTIGATED AUDACITY
SAARBRUCKEN 1978
ANYWAY THE WIND BLOWS
AS AN AM

Series 2

DISCONNECTED SYNAPSES
TENGO NA MINCHIA TANTA
ELECTRIC AUNT JEMIMA
AT THE CIRCUS
SWISS CHEESE/FIRE!
OUR MAN IN NIRVANA
CONCEPTUAL CONTINUITY

63. AHEAD OF THEIR TIME (4.6.93)

This is a recording of performances by the Mothers from 1968 and contains some very interesting music for chamber orchestra. It has a strong theatrical element and also fills in some information on Conceptual Continuity. There is some video documentation of the concert which this recording came from featured on "THE TRUE STORY OF 200 MOTELS".

64. THE YELLOW SHARK (11.2.93)

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When you purchase a Frank Zappa album, you can always be sure of two things: You will get solid entertainment value for the money and it will be of superior quality (with the notable exception of the afore-mentioned "Beat The Boots"). This can easily be said for THE YELLOW SHARK. This is a single CD which contains 72 minutes of excellent chamber music recorded at the concert series in Germany in September of 1992. It contains extensive liner notes on the history and techniques of the given compositions (which are performed quite well by the Ensemble Modern). This would probably not be for your average rock consumer - but you never know, do ya? I am SEVERELY indebted to Georg Deppe who was kind enough to send me an NTSC video recording of the Yellow Shark concert.

65. CIVILIZATION PHAZE III

The first of the "Post-FZ" recordings. I haven't had the chance to hear this one yet, but here's a review and some other related stuff I found on the web in case yer interelsted.

66. STRICTLY COMMERCIAL

This is a collection of "Biggest Hits" - a strange enough term for FZ. If you're new to Zappa, this album might be a good place to start since it contains the most "popular" stuff.

67. THE LOST EPISODES

This was released only a few weeks ago - and IT'S MARVELOUS! It contains over an hour of unreleased studio (and other) material which goes all the way back to the very start of Zappa's musical career in the '50s and continues through about 1974 (with a few side-tracks from beyond that date). Among the most bitchen tracks of this recording are some small chunklets of the soundtrack FZ composed for "RUN HOME SLOW" and the original recordings

of INCA ROADS and SHARLEENA. The album also comes with a 52-page booklet containing scads of cool info.

But don't take my word for it. The Maestro (from Nick's Music page) has just submitted a neat-keen review of "THE LOST EPISODES", and youse can read it right herle.

I have also just received another submission from The Great Out There. This is information on another "unofficial" FZ release sent to me by CADDYO@aol.com:

[Image]

Frank Zappa- Rare Meat - The Early Works of Frank Zappa
Del-Fi Records #70010-2
Released 1994

This is an unofficial release recorded circa 1962-63. It contains #1 "How's Your Bird?" written by FZ, Recorded by Baby Ray and the Ferns (FZ + Ray Collins) #2 "The World's Greatest Sinner" written by FZ, Recorded by Baby Ray and the Ferns. #3 "Everytime I See You" written by FZ + Ray Collins, Recorded by The Heartbreakers (FZ + Ray Collins) #4 "Letter From Jeepers" written by FZ, Recorded by Bob Guy. #5 "Dear Jeepers" written by FZ, Recorded by Bob Guy. #6 "Cradle Rock" written by Galleges, Recorded by The Heartbreakers. All songs produced by FZ

I find this a very interesting record. Hard-core FZ fans will really enjoy this, especially musicians who are interested in hearing FZ's musical development prior to the Mothers. FZ plays really bluesy solos throughout this (ala Johnny "Guitar" Watson), and "Dear Jeepers/ Letter From Jeepers" is a 50's monster-movie-musical (ala "Dinner With Dracula") It also lets the listener hear the first collaborations between FZ and Ray Collins. This is currently in print on (I believe) CD only. This is not too hard to find in Lexington, so I imagine it should be relatively easy find for other FZ fans not living in socially-retarded areas, as well. As far as my mourning FZ song, my personal favorite at the time of his death was also "Watermelon in Easter Hay" I also listened to "Uncle Remus", "Black Napkins", "Flakes", "The Deathless Horsie", and "While You Were Out" to name a few.

Thanks again to Bill Camarata, who sent me a Japanese recording (not an "official" release, but not a bootleg) of OLD (1962-1964) Zappa material:

CUCAMON¿GA YEARS

These are ancient doo-wop and surf music recordings from the 1962-64 Paul Buff / Ray Collins period in Cucamonga. For all I know, it's probably the same recording as that reviewed previously by CADDYO@aol.com. Nevertheless, It's interesting as a historical sidelight. The tunes exhibit certain aspects of the later FZ Humor Persona, and the aroma of experimentation is definitely very much in the air.

(If Anyone has something to add to this list please LEMME KNOW!)

FINALLY

As you might by now suspect, the music of Frank Zappa is as dear to me as Stravinsky, Beethoven, Bach, Shostakovich, or any of the other "traditional and respected" composers. The fact that was able to go on performing and recording his music HIS WAY in the Shitty World Of Rock is in itself a tribute to his genius. Although one rarely if ever hears any of his music on the radio, this never seemed to matter as to whether or not he would continue. He refused to be stopped by anything less than death - and with the continued releases of material by RykoDisc, death doesn't seem to have done much in that respect but slow him down somewhat.

Were it not for our unique Multi-faceted American Puritanical Power Structure Hypocrisy, Zappa would surely have gotten more of his music on the radio - but he said EXACTLY what he meant using "dirty" language as he pleased (as I have in this article about him - BUT DON'T WORRY: "DIRTY" WORDS CANNOT HARM YOU). Not that I've ever heard anything in his music that I haven't heard piled several layers deep in the private speech patterns of the average third grader (including myself and my contemporaries) - but as I said, we Americans have a unique kind of stupidity and hypocrisy. There's NO "REAL" REASON that FZ isn't on the radio aside from this. Well, then again, over the years FZ has made many truthful observations of the American Condition which have probably been seen as "dangerous" to those in government, business and organized religion (and we all know what kind of power THOSE folks wield around here) and they in concert no doubt exerted all possible pressure to keep him off the radio.

In the end, Frank Zappa remains America's Best Kept Musical Secret. A man worthy of the respect and admiration we freely give to many far less talented or worthy individuals. But Frank never gave a shit about any of that stuff - he just kept writing - and that's good enough for me. I can in no way ever completely tell of the way my life has been enhanced and enriched by exposure to the works of this Giant Of Music.

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